

[Diaspora](#)

Category : [June 1999](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jun. 02, 1999

Diaspora

INTER-CULTURAL

Chicago Rama

Blending three diverse dance styles in one performance may seem a jumble, but the South Asian artists of Chicago have pulled it off. Ninety-five Chicago dancers and musicians from three international communities--Thai, Indonesian and Indian--joined in an unprecedented celebration of their common heritage: the story of Lord Rama, told and retold in each country's unique style even centuries after Hindu influence waned. The synergy is spectacular, especially enhanced by the unique costumes of each tradition. This year's performance was scheduled for April 3, 1999 at the Chicago Cultural Center.

SINGAPORE

Yoga Goes to the Temple

Yogi Balakrishnan has a complaint, but he also has a solution. "Yoga was lost from our temple practice 2,500 years ago." He says it's essential for temples to cultivate all four steps to perfection, known as charya, kriya, yoga and jnana--service, worship, self-inquiry and transcendental knowledge, and he has convinced four of Singapore's major temples to incorporate his programs. Balakrishnan, 50, attracted wide attention in 1996 when he had a car drive over his stomach while he lay on a bed of nails. "It hurt," he privately admitted to Hinduism Today, but he was uninjured. He asks, "Do I have

to set up a separate ashram to teach yoga when there are 17,000 temples in Malaysia and Singapore? What are the temples for? Many of us think yoga is only for a saint or that it is just exercise--neither are true. In the 20th century, yoga is compulsory in an environment where people live in unhealthy offices while eating unhealthy food and living an unhealthy lifestyle." Balakrishnan has thousands of students, including hundreds in Singapore. They include children, housewives, executives and athletes. A determined man with limited resources, Balakrishnan is an example of how one man can make a difference. He teaches: "A yoga practitioner does not cringe and crawl through life. Yoga makes one lean on one's own spine and self. His lustrous form enjoys the vitality of youth."

GENETICS

Indian Caste

The Indian caste system, specifically its tradition of marrying within one's social strata, has been around so long, genetic analysis can identify its impact. An international team of researchers led by Michael J. Bamshad of the University of Utah recorded the genetic patterns of 300 Hindus of different castes living in South India. By careful tracking, the study showed that women are "upwardly mobile" in the caste system. That is, they sometimes marry into castes just above theirs--a pattern approved in the ancient shastras (Hindu law texts). But men traditionally do not marry above their caste, and their genetic makeup shows they have remained within their respective castes for centuries. The researchers also stated that the upper castes were genetically closer to European caucasian gene patterns than those of the lower castes.

FLORIDA

Youth Power

The Hindu Students Council, US, didn't spend winter break hanging out on the streets of Fort Lauderdale with their party-minded fellow students. No. They devoted part of the vacation to their "most successful coordination council meeting yet," according to the HSC's Chandan Bandopadhyay. The late December meeting dealt with acceptance of non-Indian Hindus, a new women's forum, law scholarships for students pledged to combat discrimination against Hindus and much more. A related conference, "Feel the Shakti, 1999," covered the "Top 10 Misconceptions of Hinduism," marriage and being a Hindu in America.

THAILAND

Meat Rules?

Vegetarianism, long practiced in Asia, is now under threat as never before, with traditional staples like lentils and rice rapidly being replaced by fatty fast food. The result is a sight on the streets of Thailand not even imagined a generation ago: overweight youngsters stuffing themselves with hamburgers and chicken legs from American fast-food franchises. Even in veggie superpower, India, "Young Indians are taking their cue from Western media--not real Western people. So they've come to think that to smoke, drink and eat non-veg is modern and fashionable," said Jashu Shah of The Vegetarian Society in Bombay during the recent congress of the 110-year-old International Vegetarian Union. While Indian gurus once went West to convert carnivores, Shah and others say committed vegetarians should now come East to set examples. Other places in Asia are having the same problem. In China, where bean curd was first produced some 2,000 years ago, McDonald's outlets now outnumber vegetarian restaurants in

Beijing. In Japan, meat generally went untouched a century ago. Now, meat is steadily being chosen over the traditional diet of vegetables, rice and fish, according to the Japanese Vegetarian Society.

ENGLAND

Kepler Did Horoscopes

One of the greatest astronomers who ever lived, Johannes Kepler, was also an astrologer--to the chagrin of modern scientists who count Kepler among the first of the great rationalists. But Kepler, a practical man, wrote, "God provides for every animal his means of sustenance--for an astronomer, he has provided astrology." Kepler, with his laws of planetary motion, laid the foundation for modern astronomy. In ancient times, astrology and astronomy were a one science. They had yet to part company in Kepler's time, as shown by his chart prepared in 1586 for an Austrian nobleman. The six-by-eight-inch framed paper was found in the archives of the University of California at Santa Cruz by Anthony Misch, an astronomer at Lick Observatory.

USA

Vedic Astrology in Paradise

It wasn't your normal opening speech, but then again, this wasn't your normal conference either. In the main ballroom of the Kauai Coconut Beach Resort the hundred attendees sat in meditative silence as six Hindu monks led by Acharya Ceyonswami opened the Third Annual Vedic Astrology conference with a planetary puja and Sanskrit chanting. The early March conference took place on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, just a few miles from Hinduism Today's offices. Those attending ranged from curious amateurs in the ancient art of

Hindu astrology to full-time professionals. They listened to lectures from experts including Nalini Kantha Das, Dennis Harness, David Frawley, Edith Hathaway and Christina Collins Hill. Hinduism Today publisher Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami spoke on "Mitigating Wrongs Through Vedic Rights," showing the value of jyotisha in dealing with karma. Indian aficionados of astrology would be delighted with the knowledge and dedication of their Western kin. Wait for a good nakshatra to visit them on the Web at www.vedicastrology.org.

COLORADO

High Puja

From the foothills of the Himalayas to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains comes Acharya Kailash Chandra Upadhyay Ji, priest of the new Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of the Rockies. A converted Christian church, the temple was consecrated in October, 1998, to serve the greater Denver community.

Hindu Temple, PO Box 621202,
Littleton, Colorado 80162 USA

BANGLADESH

Kumari Puja

Once a year in Khaka, a virgin girl is worshiped in a sacred Kumari Puja. Kumari, which means

"virgin," is one name for the Goddess. Six-year-old Barsha Chakraborty was selected for the honor this time. She, like other recent kumaris, is a brahmin, though ancient scripture says a girl from any caste may be chosen, explains Hinduism Today correspondent Bashudeb Dhar. The Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, organizes the worship in conjunction with the annual Durga Puja, one of the country's most popular festivals. Thousands gathered for the puja as the maiden was worshiped with deep reverence, devotion and beautiful offerings normally reserved for the Goddess. During the puja, the girl is Kumari, the Divine Mother. In this way, people renew their respect and reverence for women. Similar puja on a grander scale is performed by the RK Mission in Calcutta, India.

MAURITIUS

Desecration

It's been over two years since D.V. Beeharry, pujari of the small Kaliyamen Kovil in Albion Mauritius, woke to find more than a dozen of his temple's Deities smashed and scattered around the open courtyard. The Kalimaye Shrine in Phoenix was similarly desecrated. Neither crime

has been solved by the police. The Deities in these family temples are often nothing more than a few crude images, handcrafted by ancestors and worshiped devoutly for generations. Shortly after the September 9, 1997, destruction, Mr. Christian Bertrand came forward to the police and named fellow Christian Jean-Claude Raimbert, a Pentecostal, as the perpetrator. Since then a running debate between the men has aired in the local French newspaper, 5-Plus. Raimbert said, "I deny everything. My friend didn't do it, either. I forgive my accusers. The devil is behind all of this. I only remove statues when someone asks me to." The last public admission is significant. Christian ministers are known in Mauritius for converting one or two members of a household, then assisting them in destroying all the Deities in the home. Dismayed relatives have watched their shrines burn in the street.

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages' Voices

Beyond the senses is the mind, beyond the mind, pure intellect, beyond the intellect, the great Atman, beyond the great, the Unmanifest.

Krishna Yajur Veda, katha upanishad 6.7

Now the teaching concerning the Atman: the Atman is below, it is above, it is behind, it is before, it is in the South, it is in the North. The Atman indeed is all that is. He who sees, reflects and knows this--he has joy in the Atman.

Sama Veda, chandogya Upanishad 7.25.2

Verily, he is pure, steadfast and unswerving, stainless, unagitated, desireless, fixed like a spectator, and self-abiding. As an enjoyer of righteousness, he covers himself (atmanam) with a veil made of qualities; but he remains fixed--yea, he remains fixed!

Krishna Yajur Veda, maitri upanishad 2.7

The Inspired Self is not born, nor does He die; He springs from nothing and becomes nothing. Unborn, permanent, unchanging, primordial, He is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.

Krishna Yajur Veda, katha upanishad 2.18

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100

ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.

Who Is a Hindu?

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion." B.G. Tilak's definition of what makes one a basic Hindu, as quoted by India's Supreme Court. On July 2, 1995, the Court referred to it as an "adequate and satisfactory formula."