

## [Diaspora](#)

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# Diaspora

## GUADELOUPE

### Roving Pandit

As a symbol of Guadeloupe's nascent Hindu renaissance, visiting Pandit Dwivedi Shastri presented a Ganesha statue to Jean-Claude Petapermal, president of the Caribbean island nation's Institute of the Indian World. The French-speaking brahmin pandit and astrologer expressed his hope that the statue would one day grace a traditional Hindu temple built for the 30,000 Guadeloupe citizens of Indian descent. The pandit performed satsangs and pujas across the island. He called for proper education of the community to counter the dominant French acculturation and recommended creation of a well-trained group of local priests.

## ROYALTY

### Queen Visits Arts School

Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain visited the famous Kalakshetra Foundation music and dance performing arts school in Chennai as part of her two-week state tour of India and Pakistan last year. R. Venkataraman, the former president of India, accompanied her as she walked through the seaside campus on the grounds of the Theosophical Society, visiting classrooms where students demonstrated their skills, and watching a performance in the main auditorium. The school had been abuzz with excitement for weeks prior to the short royal visit. It was a pleasant respite for the queen from a visit

marred even before her arrival in India by gaffs in diplomacy and protocol.

## INTERFAITH

### The Perfect Stranger

You've been invited to the naming ceremony for your Jewish neighbor's newborn child. In the middle of the service when the Torah scripture is being taken from its place on the altar, your beeper sounds with an important message from the hospital. Can you get up and leave without offending your friend or earning the icy stares of his entire congregation? It's not a question you're likely to get answered in the middle of the service, but if you had already read Arthur J. Magida's new book, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*, you'd know just what to do (stay put, in this case), not only in your neighbor's synagogue, but at weddings, funerals and holidays of nearly two dozen faiths including Christians of various denominations, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews. Each chapter systematically covers what to wear, what to bring and what to do at each kind of ceremony or gathering. We can't vouch for the accuracy of the sections for other faiths, but the one on Hinduism has just a few mistakes--the name-giving ceremony, *namakarana*, for example, is confused with the first giving of solid food, *annaprasana*. Technical errors aside, this is a very useful manual for navigating America's pluralistic religious landscape.

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## INTERFAITH

### Kamakoti Head Visits Delhi

His Holiness Jayendra Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in South India, accompanied by his designated successor, Vijayendra Saraswati, received a near-royal welcome in Delhi in November, orchestrated by the ruling BJP party. Large, official "Government of Delhi" newspaper ads announced his honoring not at one but several events. He was felicitated by the former president of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, by Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BJP's proposed prime-minister (should they win the next elections), Delhi's chief minister, Sahib Singh, and BJP party vice-president Murli Manohar Joshi. The pontiff's message during the visit was that the Vedas contain the basic principles of right living. He urged people to "come off our lethargic attitude," remove differences and work for society. He dedicated a newly completed Adi Sankara temple and attended an All-India Vedic Conference. The two swamis arrived in New Delhi after touring Maharashtra, Uttara Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Nepal, Bihar and Kashmir.

## ECOLOGY

### Another Kind of Swan Song

Huge crowds greeted the swan-bedecked motor launch of the Sri Ganga Conservation Awareness Trip at every stop from Calcutta to Allahabad. Swami Chidananda Saraswati, president of the Divine Life Society of Swami Sivananda, traveled most of the journey on the boat. Dozens of other saints, politicians and ecological activists joined for all or part of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad program. Reports Rakesh K. Jaiswal of Eco-friends in Kanpur, "Millions of people were made aware of the pathetic condition of Ganga, and hundreds of thousands took a pledge to protect Her." The program's next stage is to educate the millions coming to the Haridwar Khumba Mela in February-April.

## NEW ZEALAND

### Kiwi's Return to India

"Henna on my hands" is a TV-documentary produced for Asia Dynamic on the real-life arranged marriage of a New Zealand girl of Indian origin, Nalini Chhima, to Prakash Kansara, a boy from her father's ancestral village in India. The producer, Robin Kingsley-Smith, called it a "labor of love," but some Hindus complained that it "painted a very negative image of our customs." The show explored the considerable cultural challenge faced by the New Zealand-raised girl adjusting to arranged marriage.

## EGYPT

### Sri Chakra

Indian researcher R.K.S. Muthukrishnan believes Egyptian pyramid triangles are based on the same angles as the Sri Chakra and that the Egyptians may have followed a geometric cosmology similar to the Hindus.' He says the base angles,  $51\frac{1}{4}$  and  $52\frac{1}{4}$ , of the great pyramid of Giza match the central triangle of the Hindu mystic diagram.