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Diaspora

CROSS-CULTURAL

Asian Roots

The US Adoption Network called "Spice" conducts South Asian Culture Camps organized by US parents to expose adopted South-Asian children to the culture and religion of their birth parents of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. Judy Thorp, with three Bangladeshi and Indian daughters, told Hinduism Today, "My children are baptized as Catholics, but we believe all religions lead to the same God. There is only one God. Many Hindus help us. We take children to Hindu temples, hold festivals at home and try to use Hindu scriptures." To help, or for help:

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INDIA

Bringing Hindus Back Home

New Delhi's Asian Age reported that in a December speech Vishwa Hindu Parishad president Ashok Singhal told party workers, "52,000 Muslims returned to Hinduism recently in the Gyawar area of Ajmer district in Rajasthan as a result of the Parishad's new policy to vehemently counter the conversion mission of Islamic and Christian missionaries." He was addressing VHP workers at a gathering after visiting the party's new 200-acre development complex outside Mumbai. After reconversion the VHP "have not left them high and dry,"

he said, but were busy "acclimatizing" the converts by organizing rituals, discourses by Hindu saints, celebration of festivals and providing health and educational services. In Bansawada district another 5,000 had converted from Christianity back to Hinduism, and 275 VHP service projects there had "wiped out" the Christian missionary impact. In West Bengal, 250 service centers are countering conversion to Islam. VHP has set a goal to float 10,000 Hindu missionaries by the year 2,000. Singhal lamented that before the 1947 partition, Hindus constituted 75 percent of India's population, but now form only 61 percent of the combined population of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

USA TEMPLES

For the Next Generation

A beautiful new temple plan was recently released after ten years of work by the Delaware, USA, Hindu Temple Association. Noteworthy is the broad, integrated community agenda that centers on a place of worship but encompasses youth education, positive community relations and services such as "helping needy local families, opening the downstairs hall to the community for meetings on local issues." Past president Bharat Gajjar hopes the temple will stem the youth drain: "In Delaware, 90 percent of Hindu girls have married outside the Hindu fold. Now the temple can offer them a Hindu wedding and sufficient education so at least they will raise their children as Hindus."

INTERFAITH

Archbishop Visits UK Shrine

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the most reverend George Carey, made an historic first visit to a British Hindu temple on

December 13--the Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London. He was given a tour by the mahant of the temple, Sadhu Atmaswarupdas. Rev. Carey spoke eloquently on interreligious understanding and cooperation. "We need to express generosity and genuine tolerance in listening to the experiences of those from traditions different to our own. Interfaith dialogue is not an option but a necessity. Building on a foundation of our common humanity, our shared spiritual quest and our common longings for peace, acceptance and love, we can speak and act together in a number of ways. For instance, we can together stand against the evils of racism, and challenge the materialism that threatens to become all-enveloping. We can together work for the protection and enhancement of our environment; we can together bring practical help and support to those who suffer, both in this country and around the world."

SOCIETY

Snowland's Ethnic Harmony

Maybe it's just too cold outside to remain coolly aloof and socially withdrawn. Whatever the reason, the Alaskan Cultural Association of India brings together Indian Hindus, Bangladesh Muslims, Parsis and even American converts to Hinduism. True, most immigrant communities accept light "on the job" cross-ethnic socialization. But in Anchorage they have taken down all community barriers often found in UK, Malaysia, Canada and USA, where Tamils, Gujaratis, Pakistani Muslims, Kerala brahmins and Caribbean Hindus, though neighbors, are worlds apart. An Anchorage Daily News report by Eric Burkett (a Buddhist) says Alaska's small 200-strong, isolated Asian community has little choice but to stick together. Niraj Chandra told him that a high level of education helped the mostly professional group push beyond barriers. ACAI's new

president, Anil Roy, held his first board meeting over lunch at his home, hosting a Muslim, Pakistani and an American Hindu. It was warm inside, if not out.

ROME

In God's Name?

Last October in Rome the Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio, held a gathering called "Peace is the Name of God." Inside the Vatican reported that "400 representatives of different religions, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Shintos, as well as more obscure Japanese and Indian cults," gathered for three days of prayer and dialogue. Sant'Egidio's members work for understanding and leadership for peace "with each religion maintaining its own faith and characteristics." Some Catholics worry Sant'Egidio may end up "syncretistic," ignoring religions' differences. But I.V. says the Vatican supports them and "hopes their work may have a real evangelical and peacemaking role in the years ahead." Om shanti!

CHURCH AND STATE

Myanmar's Two Faces

Myanmar's government, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council, faces international sanctions for human rights violations. Still, the nation supports the Buddhist priesthood and allows Hindu groups to thrive. The Organizer reports that in October a Hindu Raksha Bandhan festival was held by the Sanatana Dhamma Palaka Association at a SLOCR office and the Minister for Religious Affairs, Lt. Gen. Myo Nyunt, spoke on the importance of the mettha, loving kindness, invoked by this important Hindu festival. Hindus also organized a formal presentation of robes and alms to Buddhist

monks of the State Sangha.

MUSIC MODEL

Soul Man's Soul

Virtuoso violinist and fusionist, L. Subramaniam, is a family man and a role model. In an interview for Life Positive he says, "I tend to treat Gods and Goddesses as my friends. Ganesha is dearest to me, for He symbolizes the triumph against all odds. My personal religion is to speak my truth gently, not to hurt anyone and to try to be a good human being. It may sound like a cliché, but it is so difficult in today's world. There is so much strife and competition."

ENVIRONMENT

Pasupati's Polluted River

Nepal's Kathmandu Valley, with its sacred Bagmati River and powerful Pashupatinath Temple, is fast joining the ranks of environmental disaster areas. This mystical cleft of beauty nestled below Earth's highest peaks occupies only .4 percent of Nepal's land but carries 66 percent of its vehicles. Here, over 80,000 vehicles run on just 200 miles of roads. Pilgrims are disillusioned to find the Bagmati water unusable for worship. Even the temple has stopped using the water for ritual ablution and has resorted to pure well water. A public outcry is growing that, hopefully, will soon lead to needed changes.