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Letters

Dealing with Ideals and the Real

In your article on home sanctuaries ("A Hindu Home Is More than a House," V. Ganapati Sthapati, insight, August '97), it says that about 60 percent of Indian homes still follow this paradisiacal design. That just isn't true . Not even ten percent of the homes in India are in this design. Probably even less than five percent, maybe even less than two percent. To try to talk about the ideal of what should be followed for a home and the actual practice are widely divergent. I've been in few homes out of tens of thousands of Hindu homes, over the last 25 years, that would follow this, but very, very, very few. Maybe that's okay in an article, but you are trying to open yourself to really express what Hinduism truly is today. And it is not its ideal. Practical Hinduism and ideal Hinduism are two different things. To say that 60 percent of Hindu homes follow this design is misleading.

Stephen P. Huyler, Camden, Massachusetts USA

Author Responds

India is a land of villages, not a land of cities. The cities are not as many as one finds in other countries. After independence, no spectacular growth of cities is noticeable in India. Here and there, one would see some expansions (called satellites) to existing old cities. This impact is responsible for the absence of the time honored Vaasthu patterns, particularly the "open courtyard" system house pattern in cities. There are minor

patterns of house design as noticed in and based on Vaasthu shastras. Hence, 60 percent is not an exaggeration.

Hindu culture lives more in villages than in cities. The pattern of house indicated is to be seen in villages or semi-urban areas. This is, indeed, a national phenomenon. In the far south of India, in the district of Madurai, Karaikudi, Devakottai, etc., where the traditional merchant community lives--called Chettiars--one would find the traditional pattern of Vaasthu houses in large numbers. The palatial buildings owned by the Chettiars are typical examples for "open courtyard" system of ideal homes.

The Hindu community in India is realizing the efficacy of the concept and design according to Vaasthu, and new houses are being modified to ward off ills emerging out of defective configuration of spaces in a built environment.

V. Ganapati Sthapati, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Error Regarding Muruga Deity

I was reading through this wonderful article on this beautiful and powerful temple ("Murugan's New Home," malaysia, August '97). One error I saw in the article is the statement that the Deities are made of granite. This is not true of the main Deity, which is a Vel made of silver and shaped differently than most. I only write this because the main sanctum is so beautiful and different than any I have seen.

Chellappa Deva, Scottsdale, Arizona, USA cdeva@aol.com

Fasting to Death Is Suicide!

Your article on swami nirmalananda's death by fasting has somewhat intrigued me ("A Saint's Self-Willed Death," controversy, September '97). Is the apparent approval of fasting to death by Shastras due to the fact that many elevated souls have taken this route to end lives? Death by fasting can be said to take place because of the accumulation of poisonous materials in the body. Fasting to death is really death by poisoning. It is, in fact, suicide. I do not know if there have been studies on the physical or mental states of the people who take this route for dying. The reasons for "normal" suicide deaths are well known. The reason for suicide by fasting should also be understood.

Hari P. Dhar, College Station, Texas, USA

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Preparation Before Writing

Your article on the swastika controversy was read with a great deal of interest ("The Twist of Faith," media, August '97) I, too, have seen the sick cover of a recent Time magazine--whose misguided editors have manifestly displayed their ignorance and offended many, many people in doing so. The attitude of Time magazine editors is also a sad display of the misuse of the swastika, caused by ignorance. Time magazine editors need to do some more homework... because they do not appear to know the difference between wrong and right. Your readers' objections are correct.

Robert R. Weger, Lafayette, California, USA

Local Issue Over the Swastika

To update, since last July 97, there were few letters in the Toronto Star (Aug. 4th and 9th). They mostly referred to the details about the Canadian town named Swastika, and its

related history. On Aug. 9, there were five letters with headings: "Hitler be damned, Swastika says;" "Another bit of Nazi plunder;" "Honorable reminder, Swastika symbol pre-dates Hitler" and "Home of tranquility." I am happy that with your help and cooperation, awareness is created and history made known to people in North America. I have sent copies of Hinduism Today and Toronto Star articles to India Today and two Gujarati dailies Janmabhumi and Bombay Samachar of Mumbai (India). India Abroad showed interest, too.

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The Search Is Within

I took exception to Dr. Rambachan's article "Replacing the Awful Word Idol," my turn, September '97. I couldn't disagree with you more regarding your article. The terms murti (through which holy communion to Devaloka is possible) to the true devotee or even idol are fine enough. This should be the least of our concerns. We are Hindus. Our rich philosophical tradition is the most ancient, insightful and beautiful on the planet. Despite the work of selfish politicians, adharmic followers and many tumultuous years of history, devotees of the divine Sanatana Dharma must be proud and clear in their own understandings of the great Veda. It is not for us to fear external ridicule or verbal antagonism anywhere. If they truly are ready to understand our beliefs (which are the core of all humanity's spiritual path), they must earnestly inquire. Their ignorance is theirs alone. The Vedas teach man to search inwardly. "Tat Tvam Asi" (thou art That) states the Upanishad. Let us be true to ourselves and to our dear children and in so doing lead the world into a much needed enlightened, spiritual age.

A.K. Nataraja, Los Angeles, California, USA

In response to Dr. Rambachan, I would like to add that murti can be mispronounced as ma-ur-tai. We should adopt the word as "moorthi" as such in English like guru, curry, etc., In Sanskrit, idol is given as vigraha, sila, prathima. Although sila denotes immovable stone, moorthi and prathima name a replica of an image in sandalwood or such material. But what is the difference between vigraha and moorthi? Vigraha, although a tongue twister, is more appealing than moorthi

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