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Global Dharma

Russia

Hinduism in Early Russia

Though this is five-year-old news, this exciting story has gone viral on the Internet. In 2007, after seven years of excavation in an old Volga region village, Professor Alexander Kozhevin of the Ulyanovsk State University's archaeology department announced that every single square metre of the 1,700-year-old town of Sarya Maina is studded with antiques, among them an ancient statue of Vishnu. While that discovery was verified, subsequently an elaborate hoax was spread on the Internet, building on Kozhevin's find, in the form of contrived correlations between Vedic India and Russia by one fictitious Dr. Acharya Pandey. You will find dozens of pages citing his specious analyses. Hoaxes aside, the finds at Sarya Maina have led to speculation that, millennia ago, Vedic culture reached from India all the way to the Baltic sea.

India

Another Modern Mega Site

Yet another example of a modern trend that is transforming India's religious landscape is Murudeshwar on the coast of Karnataka. The resuscitation and expansion of this ancient holy site has been the sacrifice of Sri R. N. Shetty. Starting in 1977, he put his wealth to work renovating the crumbling temple, building a giant rajagopuram and adding awesome sculptures to the site. With schools, a hospital, modern landscaping and lodgings, Murudeshwar has become a dynamic center benefitting the local community and a destination for devotees from all over the world. See:

www.murudeshwar.org

USA

Hindu Family Spearheads Interfaith in US Bible Belt

In Midland Texas, on february, 28, 2012, an unusual interfaith event was held for the second year running. Sitting together deep in America's Christian Bible Belt, the Rev. Randel Everett of Midland's First Baptist Church, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami of Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii, the Rev. James Bridges of St. Stephen's Catholic Church in Midland, Rabbi Holly Cohn of Temple Beth-El in Odessa and Imam Wazir Ali of Masjid Al-Islam and Masjid Al-Qur'an in Houston shared their views on five subjects with an audience of 500 guests. Video of the event was streamed live to the Internet.

Such a conclave would be unlikely in this area of the US but for the initiative of Drs. Mrunal and Padmaja Patel. Feeling that better interfaith understanding was needed, they had proposed the debut event last year, to their hospital colleagues. Everyone was receptive, though eyebrows were raised when the venue, St. Stephens Catholic Church in Midland, was chosen. A conservative Christian church hosting an interfaith gathering in Texas? Padmaja's diligent 2011 outreach was compelling, leaders agreed to come, and it was a great success. So much so that getting this year's event together was simply a matter of sending out emails and announcements.

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylan-swami advised Padmaja on the format. Each leader brought one key question about religion, which was then answered by each leader from their faith's perspective. The result was a fascinating two-hour window into the mindset of five different traditions. Watch the event online at:

bit.ly/MidlandInterfaith

India

Cambodians Upset Over India's Angkor Wat Plan

In March, 2012, the Mahavir Mandir Trust, a wealthy, private religious institution in North India, held the ground breaking ceremony in Patna, Bihar, to initiate building of a replica of Angkor Wat. SiliconIndia.com reported that the plan is for the new temple to be even taller than the original. That would make it the world's largest Hindu temple. The replica of the 12th century Cambodian temple will be called Virat Angkor Wat Ram Mandir.

Cambodia's Minister of Culture and Fine Arts, Him Chhem, told reporters in Phnom Penh that the plan is a "shameful act....There is only one Angkor Wat in the world. It is Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple, which was listed as one of the world heritage sites in 1992." Angkor Wat attracts over two million visitors annually and the tourist trade is a key source of revenue for the small Buddhist nation, which is reportedly talking to the Indian government to resolve the issue.

Human Rights

Ground-Breaking Handbook on Religion and Corporal Punishment of Children

In May 2011 the global initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children--in cooperation with Save the Children-Sweden, and The Churches' Network for Non-violence--released a remarkably thorough handbook on the relationships between religion and violence against children. The authors are not shy to expose how religion is implicated. Garnering hard statistics, they show how the beliefs held by some of those belonging to the Abrahamic religions justify corporal punishment. The Christian right in the US, for example, has countered legal efforts to restrict or outlaw the practice on the basis that it was endorsed by the Bible. Other Christians do not agree.

The handbook covers the more humane beliefs of all religious traditions that can serve as a platform for action. "It is vitally important to work with religious leaders and faith-based groups in prohibiting and eliminating corporal punishment."

Despite a few old verses from our shastras on discipline that have been misconstrued as justification for physical punishment of children, ahimsa--nonviolence--is a core principle of Hindu faith, and we are in a particularly good position to stand strong to make corporal punishment illegal. See:

bit.ly/save-children

Australia

Best Healthcare Handbook for Hindu Patients

Major kudos is due to Australia's Queensland Government Health Multicultural Services for their outstanding work in providing healthcare providers with a

well-researched, accurate, thorough guide for treating Hindus. Section One describes the different Indian language groups and gives an overview of Hindu philosophical and cultural views on religious practice, bathing and cleanliness, dietary needs, decision making, administration of medicines, clinical examinations, hygiene, the ceremonies Hindus expect to be able to perform shortly after childbirth, community services, care for the elderly, end-of-life issues and attitudes toward autopsy (unacceptable if not required by law).

Converging the above would have been adequate, but the handbook goes the extra mile with a section on beliefs that healthcare providers should be aware of when treating Hindu patients--beliefs about food, karma, holy days, fasting, dress, mental illness, organ transplant, pain management and death and dying--all sensitively covered.

The handbook is licensed for noncommercial copying and adaptation. You may replace the contact pages for local hospitals and Hindu organizations to customize the handbook for service in your area. To download the book, go to:

bit.ly/hindu-health

Famous Vegetarians

Jane Goodall Prefers Plants

The world's foremost expert on chimpanzees, Jane Goodall, 78, a primatologist, ethologist and anthropologist, is also a vegetarian. She is famous for her 1960 discovery that chimps can make and use tools, a trait that was, until then, thought to be a defining trait of mankind. Further, she claims her research proves that not only humans but animals "have personality, and are capable of rational thought and emotions like joy and sorrow."

Ms. Goodall describes her overnight decision to stop eating meat, "In the early 1970s, I learned about the horrors of intensive animal production from Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*. I had never heard of a factory farm before and as I turned the pages I became increasingly incredulous, horrified and angry. I can still remember how I felt when I closed Singer's book. I thought that when I saw meat on my plate, from that moment on, I should think of pain-fear-death. How horrible. So it was clear. I would eat no more meat."

With a powerful vision and purpose, Jane Goodall travels 300 days a year, despite her age, lecturing on conservation, not only to save the chimpanzees, but for the whole planet. She has won numerous international awards for her work (see: janegoodall.ca/goodall-awards.php)

She has a special talent for connecting with youth and one of her greatest achievements has been the Roots & Shoots movement, a program of the Jane Goodall Institute that is mobilizing youth action groups in 114 countries across the globe. To learn more, go to:

www.janegoodall.org www.rootsandshoots.org

Environment

In Vitro Meat to Reduce Animal Farming in 25 Years?

Living mammalian tissue culture has been around for over thirty years, as has the idea of test-tube meat. But the 2006 discovery of non-embryonic adult stem cells has changed the landscape. The ethical issues surrounding use of embryos are out of the way. Now it is possible for scientists to go forward, making useful bio gadgets, such as new arteries from your own muscle tissue. And, another race is on: to make in vitro meat.

The global awareness that animal farming is a key cause of climate change and environmental degradation, along with animal welfare issues combined with the projected non-stop growth in human consumption of animal flesh, has launched the science of in vitro meat onto the world stage. You may see such products in supermarkets as early as 2014. While most vegetarians look disgustedly at flesh from any source, even hard-core animal rights advocates are saying test-tube meat could result in ending much animal abuse. Learn all about stem cells here: stemcells.nih.gov and search "in vitro meat" on the web.

Briefly

Nineteen-year-old Rinkel Kumari, a Hindu girl who was kidnapped in Pakistan by a local Muslim mafia group and forced to marry a wealthy Muslim scholar, pleaded in court, in March, 2012, that she be executed rather than be forced to return to him. Her father who accused the perpetrators had to flee to the Punjab. Every year over

300 Hindu and some Christian girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted and married.

accusing the administration of irregularities on April 13, 2012, the government of Karnataka took over the administration of Bengaluru's Veeranjaneyaswamy Temple. The temple management protested, saying that the administration had been conducted in a transparent manner. Note that the government will never touch Muslim or Christian places of worship, only Hindus have their places of worship taken over by what is supposed to be a secular state.

darshan for the daily crush of 65,000 pilgrims at Tirupati has dropped to .8 to 1.5 seconds seconds. The fleeting glimpse comes after waiting in the queue for up to 21 hours.