Investing Hindu Money In the Next Generation
Category : March 1989
Published by Anonymous on Mar. 01, 1989

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Giant, glistening Heidelberg color presses from Germany, a high-tech, networked Bertold typesetter system built into a control tower-like room, an imported Muller Martini book sewing machine and gang stitchers, small mountains of large paper sheets stacked on rolling dollies, the pervasive, pungent smell of ink and platemaking chemicals, piles of books, pamphlets and flyers in all stages of production, and everything meticulously neat and spotlessly clean-that's the interior of South Africa Divine Life Society's Sivananda Press in Durban. Into this two-story, concrete block building flow hefty sums of South African Rands (dollars) each year and out comes thousands of exquisitely designed and printed Hindu texts that then migrate the world-over.

Helping the Black Africans

But, a prodigious publications operation is only the start of Divine Life Society's (DLS) unusual story. They also build schools for African children and homes for African aged. They additionally manage clinics and feeding programs. This is all patterned after the personal life of Swami Sivananda, an ardent Hindu, who taught, gave to, helped and served all people-regardless their race or religion. Once a doctor himself, Sivananda's passion for serving the poor and needy stayed with him his whole life.

Divine Life Society's commitment to helping the native black population is clear expression of their teacher's life, and their drive to emulate it. Recently, they completed their 70th educational facility for Africans. Several Sivananda Clinics have been built and serve the indigenous people. "A 20-acre site close to the V.N. Naik School for the Deaf has been allocated for a school for deaf African children," reports the January 1989 DLS news bulletin. A million-dollar Sivananda Technical College and High School at Kwamashu for Africans is now under construction. Their feeding program serves 4,500 meals a day to poor children of the country's Blacks, Indians, Whites and Coloreds (mixed).

A Lot of Money, Well-Used

DLS's income is primarily private, individual donations. The society has been around for a long time. Wealthy and generous Indians are attracted by their steady track record of service and with their uncanny ability to turn money they receive into concrete projects, do it quickly and not be wasteful in the process. A strict policy governs their handling of donations: "Our society feels-just like our Master-that whatever funds the Divine Mother provides should be immediately utilized for the good of mankind and not invested."

Empowering the Children

Social service aside, DLS of SA figures that instructing their own Hindu children in spiritual matters is their most important responsibility. In 1987, a project called "spiritual hampers" enrolled 8,000 families, each paying $10 to receive six mailings of DLS literature. But the envelopes were addressed to the children, not the parents! (Typically, that mailing alone will cost them $50 per home, five times what they are charging.) Thirty-thousand Bhagavad Gita and Tirukurral Compendiums, (a joint effort of the DLS and the Hindu Maha Sabha) were recently printed, and are being distributed to Indian schoolchildren. It was partially funded by the South African government, but the DLS will pay the $75,000 balance. DLS's central and monumental gift to the youth is a 52-lesson, 416-page Hindu course adapted from Swami Sivananda's teachings (13,000 full sets were printed by 1985).

But even books are not enough. An imposing cultural center, now being completed, includes a children's auditorium and a children's library and resource center. In 1988, 500 boys and girls attended four, four-day yoga camps which again proved successful in bringing God, soul and world together in a joyous way. Clearly, no one can accuse the Divine Life Society of South Africa of failing to pass the religion and culture on to the next generation.

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