

The On-Going Loot of Hindu Temples by the Indian Government

INDIA, January 2011: (by M.V. Kamath)
The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act of 1951 allows State Governments and politicians to take over thousands of Hindu Temples and maintain complete control over them and their properties. It is claimed that they can sell the temple assets and properties and use the money in any way they choose.

A charge has been made by a foreign writer, Stephen Knapp in a book (Crimes Against India and the Need to Protect Ancient Vedic Tradition) published in the United States that makes shocking reading. Hundreds of temples in centuries past have been built in India by devout rulers and the donations given to them by devotees have been used for the benefit of the people. If, presently, money collected has ever been misused (and that word needs to be defined), it is for the devotees to protest and not for any government to interfere. This letter is what has been happening currently under an intrusive law. It would seem, for instance, that under a Temple Empowerment Act, about 43,000 temples in Andhra Pradesh have come under government control and only 18 per cent of the revenue of these temples have been returned for temple purposes, the remaining 82 per cent being used for purposes unstated.

Apparently even the world famous Tirumala Tirupati Temple has not been spared. According to Knapp, the temple collects over

US\$683 million every year 'and the State Government has not denied the charge that as much as 85 per cent of this is transferred to the State Exchequer, much of which goes to causes that are not connected with the Hindu community'.

Knapp writes, '25 per cent of the 200,000 temples or about 50,000 temples in Karnataka will be closed down for lack of resources.' Knapp then refers to Kerala where, he says, 'funds from the Guruvayur Temple are diverted to other government projects denying improvement to 45 Hindu temples'. Land belonging to the Ayyappa Temple, apparently has been grabbed and 'Church encroaches are occupying huge areas of forest land, running into thousands of acres, near Sabarimala'.

Hindu Spiritual and Service Fair 2011

CHENNAI, INDIA, January 2011: A total of 150 stalls had been put up by various organizations at the Hindu Spiritual and Service Fair 2011, held at the Sri Ramachandra University ground, Thiruvanmiyur. The fair was sponsored by Global Foundation for Civilizational Harmony, Chennai chapter. Nearly 250,000 people were expected to visit the fair before its closing date of January 30.

The stall of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams was one of the attractions at the fair. Photographs of the temple, deity processions and various places in Tirupati were featured. Magazines and books brought out by the TTD were also available at the fair.

Representatives of various organizations said it is an opportunity for the participants to reach out to the visitors about their services. At some stalls, the visitors are briefed about the training courses in traditional values, yoga and Hindu rituals. Educational institutions and hospitals run by various trusts also put up stalls

Scientist Study Vedic Rites In Kerala Village

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NEW DELHI, INDIA, January 14, 2011: Can ancient mantras induce rains? Do Vedic chants impact the surrounding environment? A team of scientists will attempt to find out the answers when they descend on the ancient village of Panjal in Kerala to study the 3,100-year-old Vedic ritual called Athirathram to be held from April 4 to 14. The ritual to invoke Agni, the God of fire, will be conducted by 18 priests in the precincts of a Lakshmi Narayana shrine.

A team of scientists led by V.P.M. Nampoori, former director of the International School of Photonics, Cochin University, will conduct research into the impact of Vedic chants and the fire ritual on the atmosphere. The 12-day ritual will present the opportunity to explore the 'scientific implications on nature, mankind and all other living creatures', the scientist said in a statement. Nampoori said the 'chanting of mantras and the worshipping of Agni with medicinal herbs energize and protect the environment'.

The scientist said he would conduct 'elaborate experiments in the areas of atmospheric changes in temperature,

humidity and pressure level during the ritual'. 'Studies will be conducted on the implications on micro-organisms in the soil and variation in the yield from plants and animals,' he said. The research will also include the 'physiological and psychological effects on human beings, especially on those who are under meditation.'

Sivakaran Namboodiri, a trustee of the Varthathe Trust and a Vedic scholar and healer, said: 'The three previous editions of Athirathram had brought rain to Panjal 35 years ago, to Kundoor where it was held in 1990 and to Kizhakkencherry in 2006'. 'We want to find out whether it brings rain and increases the yield of the soil and milch cattle, which will be exposed to chanting,' Sivakaran said.

Sanskrit Course a Hit With Students From India and Abroad

NEW DELHI, INDIA, January 31, 2011: James Madaio, a PhD candidate at Deccan College, Pune, considered Sanskrit a dead language until last year. His opinion changed shortly after he saw his college teachers converse with their students in Sanskrit. Later, he landed up in Delhi and joined Samvadshala, where a 14-day Sanskrit speaking course draws students from all parts of country and abroad, such as US, Russia, China, Germany, Canada and others.

The residential course follows a unique methodology to teach the ancient language through songs, jokes, lectures and by offering the right environment. 'Students are mandated to interact only in Sanskrit. Not even informally are they allowed to speak in Hindi,' says Manju Shree, who teaches at Samvadshala.

'At the outset, they make you hear Sanskrit, then you are encouraged to start using it in daily conversations and eventually, you learn grammar. Every evening, we listen to a lecture in simple Sanskrit by an eminent scholar,' says Ghanshyam Shukla, a postgraduate in physics from Delhi University. 'A lot of words are common to Hindi and Sanskrit. Even the script (Devnagari) is the same. On top of it, when you get an environment where you have to communicate only in the same language from five in the morning to 10 at night, learning takes place faster,' Manju Shree adds.

Science Studies How Meditation Changes The Brain

NEW YORK, January 28, 2011: Scientists say that meditators may be benefiting from changes in their brains. The researchers report that those who meditated for about 30 minutes a day for eight weeks had measurable changes in gray-matter density in parts of the brain associated with memory, sense of self, empathy and stress. The findings will appear in the January 30 issue of Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging.

M.R.I. brain scans taken before and after the participants' meditation regimen found increased gray matter in the hippocampus, an area important for learning and memory. The images also showed a reduction of gray matter in the amygdala, a region connected to anxiety and stress. A control group that did not practice meditation showed no such changes.

Britta Hoelzel, a psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School and the study's lead author, said the participants practiced mindfulness meditation, a form of meditation that was introduced in the United States in the late 1970s. It's about bringing the mind back to the here and now, as opposed to letting the mind drift.

It has been hard to pinpoint the benefits of meditation, but a 2009 study suggests that meditation may reduce blood pressure in patients with coronary heart disease. And a 2007 study found that meditators have longer attention spans. Previous studies have also shown that there are structural differences between the brains of meditators and those who don't meditate, although this new study is the first to document changes in gray matter over time through meditation.

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