

INDIA TEACHER RESOURCES

RELIGION

Holy Matrimony: Indian Politician Converts, Takes Second Wife, vanishes

Chander Mohan, now known as Chand Muhammad, held a position equivalent to a US governor in the northern Indian state of Haryana. He converted from Hinduism to Islam. His second wife and a Haryana government attorney, Mrs. Anuradha Bali, got married after meeting at a juice stall. The couple was fired from their positions, in their opinions, because of their Religion preference. Many Muslims accused Mr. Mohan of converting because he had not yet divorced his wife and India's law does not allow bigamy. Muslims, however, follow *sharia* law, which states that men may have up to 4 wives; others accuse Mr. Mohan of taking advantage of Islam. About 3 days after marriage, Mr. Mohan disappeared and is believed to be somewhere in Britain. After Mr. Mohan's disappearance, Ms. Bali filed a police report stating that he might have been kidnapped by his family. She also claimed false pretenses of marriage on his part and therefore rape. The police received a two-page letter signed by Mr. Mohan refuting the statements. He claimed he was still Muslim and married to Ms. Bali. He also stated that he was deeply hurt by her actions.

Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Holy Matrimony: Indian Politician Converts, Takes Second Wife, vanishes" The Wall Street Journal. 25 February 2009.

Hindu Threat to Christians: Convert or Flee

The eastern Orissa state has experienced several Hindu-Christian conversion attacks. Behind the clashes are ancient tensions caused by the dispute between the Kandhas and Panas, the two original settling groups. The two groups worshipped the same gods at first, but they deviated from one another over time as influences on India increased. Mainly, missionaries converted Panas to Christianity and Hindu priests converted the Kandhas to Hinduism. Hate has been fueled even farther through economic troubles as the government has given both groups different opportunities and privileges. Kandhdas (Hindus) argue that Panas (Christians) cheated to obtain government jobs. The Christians have responded to Hindu radicals by arguing that Hindus are jealous because the Christian groups have attained an education and become successful. Christians make up about 2% of India's population, whereas Hindus are the majority with 1.1 billion people. These recent killings are the worst the country has ever experienced. Kandhamal, the district with the highest violence rate, had more than 30 people killed, 3,000 homes burned and over 130 churches destroyed. The attacks were said to be ignited by the killing of a famous Hindu preacher. Police blamed guerrillas for the attack, but Hindu radicals refused to accept the verdict and continue to blame

Christians for the murder. Several Christians were forced to choose to either convert or leave their homes and villages' some were even threatened with death if they didn't surrender their beliefs.

Sengupta, Somini. "Hindu Threat to Christians: Convert or Flee," 13 October 2008.

Jews of Calcutta Have Few Left to Nurture Legacy

The Jews of Calcutta, India have decreased to about 35 people in the entire city. There are believed to be about 5,000 Jews in all of India, a number not even big enough for its own category in India's census. Calcutta's first Jews are thought to have migrated from Syria, Iran, and Iraq and had built five synagogues and two schools; the schools are still in use today, but the synagogues, unfortunately, hardly have any visitors others than maybe one person a day. There are also several streets named after famous Jews. Today, the streets and schools are still used. Many of the Jews left India for the newly established Jewish state, Israel, and for Europe and the United States for more business opportunities.

Dolnick, Sam. "Jews of Calcutta Have Few Left to Nurture Legacy," 22 September 2008.

Living Far Apart

The 400-year old Jewish community in the port-village of India's southern state of Kerala is on the brink of extinction. Mattancheri is the most famous Jewish settlement in Kerala, India. It is home to the last 12 sari- and sarong-wearing, white-skinned Indian Jews. Mattancheri's Jews are not Kerala's last Jewish Community. Eranakulam hold about 40 Malabari Jews, of dark Keralite complexion. The Malabaris were the privilege stewards of Kerala's ancient kings, but the white Jews, who arrived from Europe, usurped them. White Jews set cruel apartheid in place in the mid-20th century. Now there is still a dislike between the two communities, however whites now depend on Malabaris to make a quorum in their synagogue and for kosher meats.

Fernandes, Edna. "The Last Jews of Kerala: The 2,000 Year History of India's Forgotten Jewish Community" 14 August 2008. The Economist – print Edition
<http://www.economist.com/books/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=11919293>.

Land Transfer to Hindu Site Inflames Kashmir's Muslims

After five days of protests, tens of thousands of Muslims gathered on Friday in Srinagar, Kashmir to protest the transfer of land to a Hindu shrine. The police met the protestors in Srinagar, the main city of Kashmir containing a Muslim majority, and used tear gas to try and control the riot. The dispute over the 99 acres given to the Hindu shrine has left 3 killed, and several, including police officers, wounded. Protestors accuse the Indian government of trying to sway the population majority from Muslim to Hindu. Many people in Kashmir want to become a part of Muslim-majority Pakistan, instead of Hindu-controlled India. The recent riots are the worst since the past two decades. The disputed Amarnath shrine is a cave that houses a stalagmite believed to be the embodiment of Siva. (Siva is the Hindu God of reproduction and destruction). Hundreds

of thousands of Hindus perform a pilgrimage to this holy site while guarded by police. Muslims of the area blame the Indian government for moving the shrine in hopes of reemphasizing its control over Kashmir.

“Land Transfer to Hindu Site Inflames Kashmir’s Muslims” The Associated Press. 28 June, 2008.

In The Holy Caves of India

John Smith, British captain of the Madras Army, etched his name and date, April 1819, into the cave he discovered. 29 caves in a cliff combine to form the site known as Ajanta Caves, due to its location outside the town of Ajanta. The caves are popular among Indians because they grant a sense of pride in India’s preserved history. The most amazing thing about the Ajanta Caves is the numerous 2,000 year-old images and mural paintings engraved on the walls of the caves; they are thought to be made in the second century B.C. These structures led to the conclusion that the caves were not natural, but carved by man. The caves had statues of Buddha, and tall cathedral-like ceilings. By the 19th century, a conclusion was made that these were Buddhist caves, parts of which were viharas, or monasteries, whereas other parts were chaityas, or cathedral-like halls of worship. Today, thanks to the Maharashtra state government, there is “a forceful attempt to preserve and protect the caves.”

Winchester, Simon. “In The Holy Caves of India” The New York Times. 5 November 2006.

Hindu Beginnings: Assessing the Period 1000 BCE to 300 CE

Hinduism is considered one of the world’s oldest religions. Although that is a common association with the religion, Hinduism’s actual beginnings are unknown; no definite era can be determined in which the religion began to spread. Some literate civilizations existed in the area before the already discovered texts. Unfortunately, much of that civilization’s scriptures have not been found, and the discovered documents are few. Despite the uncertainties of exactly how old the religion is and its history, Hinduism can still safely be considered an old religion. Hinduism is generally thought to be comprised of those who believe in the Veda, caste system, and Goddess as principal deity or among the deities. Today, many Hindus look to the Veda, “knowledge,” for “values, practices, and institutions.” The Veda was a script based on the ancient Indian religion, Vedism. This religion is arguably the basis for Hinduism’s founding. This religion, similar to Hinduism, acknowledged the gods, their power, and humans driven by understood obligations. Although slightly similar, Vedism is different as well. Vedism does not stress or even mention several of the Hindu teachings such as, the caste system, temples, Yoga, vegetarianism, or the holiness of cows. The Gita was composed sometime between 300 BCE to 200 CE, and is the oldest known Hindu manuscript. It is a combination of Vedic and Brahmanic beliefs on action, obligation, and order. Hinduism has never been, nor will be, a stagnant religion. It changes and adapts to the people’s beliefs and attitudes.

Welbon, Guy (Compiled by). "Hindu Beginnings: Assessing the Period 1000 BCE to 300 CE" Teaching Asia in Early World History. Volume 9, No. 2. Fall 2004, Education About Asia.

Temples Where Gods Come to Life

This particular article speaks to the importance of temples within Indian society and the Hindu way of life. The author speaks of Indian culture, the temples and their intricacies as well as widespread devotion of the Hindu peoples to their religious beliefs. Within the Hindu faith, many followers believe that the gods are alive and exist within our world, experiencing the same emotions and experiences as humans. The gods of the pantheon are deeply integrated into the daily lives of most Hindus with huge crowds flocking to the temple each night to witness the rituals surrounding these gods. The temple is the focal point of life and society in many Indian cities. Due to the large temples and sandy beaches existing in Mahabalipuram, much tourism exists in the area. Furthermore, much of India is an integration of classically ancient traditions and customs combined with modern objects, ideals, and beliefs. A manifestation of this blending of the past with modern society includes statues of the Hindu god Ganesh typing on a laptop. India's culture, though exposed to modernity, lives on in the temple carvings and ruins of temples from past centuries. Lastly, the article provides information concerning personal travel within the country.

Wong, Edward. "Temples Where Gods Come to Life" The New York Times.