

[Historic Solidarity Festival in Mauritius](#)

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The Mauritius international airport was nearly dead still at 3:00 in the morning. But at the gate for a late incoming flight from Malaysia, some three hundred Hindus, fighting off sleepiness, were waiting for H.H. Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniaswami. Everybody jumped up as the plane touched down, and with waves and a beaming smile out strode the American-born 6'3" swami, head of Saiva Siddhanta Church, on his third Hindu solidarity mission since 1980 to this 50%-Hindu Indian Ocean island.

He was escorted into the VIP lounge for customs processing, accompanied by two of his swamis (he has an order of ten swamis of the Natha Sampradaya). After a three-year hiatus - his last visit in 1988 - Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniaswami, 64, was delighted to return, at the official invitation of the Minister of Education, Art and Culture. The occasion: a historic 11-day Festival of Hindu Solidarity, orchestrated for Gurudeva (as he is affectionately known) to celebrate and guide the island's merger of its North and South-Indian origin Hindus. The minister, Armoogum Parsuramen, and his advisor, Soorash Ramburn, spent long hours planning the Festival. "Festival of Hindu Solidarity" banners were strung up over highways and town streets across the island. Temples and Hindu institutions flew them proudly in the wind. The national TV network featured seven of Sivaya Subramuniaswami's solidarity symposiums at prime time. For the Hindus, the whole island caught solidarity fever.

The tall, white-haired and bearded swami - who is often mistaken for a Kashmiri Indian - stayed overnight at his monastery dharmasala for four days, traveling out from 6 in the morning to 12 midnight for meetings in the northern part of the island. He then moved to other regions of Mauritius, lecturing at the university, at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Indira Gandhi Center for Indian Culture, holding seminars and discussions with influential Hindu leaders, businessmen and government leaders. Over the past decade Sivaya Subramuniaswami developed 11 teaching centers crisscrossing the island, and opened the doors for an Indian Ocean edition of HINDUISM TODAY (he is the founder/publisher) to be published. "At that time two groups of Hindus were divided, those whose ancestors were from

the North and the South of India," he explained in an interview.

On several occasions Sivaya Subramuniaswami met privately with Aneerood Jugnauth, the Prime minister of Mauritius, and Sir Rengadoo, the Governor-General. He congratulated them on bringing the country to a new level of prosperity and harmony. He remarked later, "Mauritius is a country with a difference in today's world, one in which there is neither terrorism or violence, nor even unemployment."

At the university, along with the Minister of Environment, Sivaya Subramuniaswami spoke on the Hindu view of the ecological predicament, offering that because the problem is global, global thinking among religious and political leaders is required. He suggested these meet regularly to exchange ideas and support mutual efforts. "The populace of the world nations need to learn to give good moral support to their religious and political leaders," he advised.

Exemplifying this religious leader-politician dialogue, he met with government leaders on a daily basis, and arranged an informal reception for inter-faith leaders of Mauritius. Invitees were representatives from diverse Hindu societies and sects, Buddhist societies, the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Seventh-Day Adventists, Presbyterian Church and four different Muslim organizations. The only Hindu institution that refused to attend was ISKCON, the Hare Krishna organization. Underscoring the need for such high-level meetings was the fact that so many groups did not come. Though the Muslims invitees showed enthusiasm at the idea, their two representatives could not attend due to illness. Similarly, the Protestants demurred.

Cardinal Marg[?]ot and the Bishop-coadjutor, Piat, represented the Catholic Church, and enjoyed the rare encounter with the Hindu leaders. The Cardinal expressed later to the press his admiration for the sincere religious devotion he found in his swami hosts. "They can be an example to us," he remarked. Sivaya Subramuniaswami commented, "I personally enjoyed meeting with the heads of other religions and with those leading other Hindu institutions. Though conversion is a problem still, the consensus is to fight conversion through religious education."

The meeting was featured on the national evening news. Hindus were impressed with the meeting's success. "It is the first time Hindus have done something like this, and we are proud," exclaimed one man.

The largest audiences for the Festival were at eight Hindu solidarity evenings, where sometimes over one thousand people came. At each gathering, all the various Hindu sects and institutions in the surrounding area were invited. Gurudeva explained that in this age of information, it is not sufficient to identify oneself as a Hindu simply because one is born of Hindu parents. "It is like saying I am a doctor because my parents were doctors."

In preaching solidarity, the swami distinguished between two kinds of divisions among Hindus. One is natural and harmless, the other unnatural and destructive. The natural division is of sampradaya, or school, or sect which reflect the differing beliefs that Hindus hold on God, soul and world. Those who think and worship the same way will tend to congregate together, teach and work as a one entity. This is to be respected as it allows each person to find a spiritual niche and develop according to his or her overall soul evolution. But the unnatural division, Gurudeva emphasized, is the one based upon linguistic distinctions. In virtually all countries he has visited, he found Hindus identifying with the language they speak, or their ancestors spoke. Its senselessness is very apparent when youth of Indian descent in various parts of the world have totally forgotten the language of their ancestors, but still identify themselves by it. He related a conversation with a youth in Taiwan. Youth: "I am Hindi-speaking." Gurudeva, "Ah, you speak Hindi." Youth: "No, I don't..."

In his farewell talk Sivaya Subramuniaswami confessed that when he saw how positively the Mauritian Hindus were responding, he became more and more frank. By his last talks he was asking audiences pointblank to quit thinking of themselves as Tamil, Hindi-speaking, Telegu, etc., and simply think of themselves as Hindus.

The following day, His Holiness departed Mauritius, continuing his Hindu Renaissance Tour to northern India. On the future of Hinduism in Mauritius, he related, "It is strong indeed, because of the uniting of the various communities who share a deep interest and wish to promote the intricacies of Hinduism of all sects." He added that in 1992 an island-wide celebration of Ganesha Visarjana will coalesce the Hindu institutions and temples into an annual focus of solidarity. Plans are in motion to cordon off an entire highway for the procession, which would

involve about 30,000 people.

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