Tiruchiswami Attains Mahasamadhi
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TRANSITION

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Sri Jayendra Puri Swami succeeds great saint who passes away at age 75

Choodie Shivaram, Bangalore

The temple of Rajarajeshwari at Rajarajeshwarinagar in Bangalore is known for its spiritual prowess "When you pray at this temple, your prayers are answered, your troubles are alleviated " is the total belief of devotees. What a great devotee and what godly powers Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Shivarathnapuri Bhagavat, popularly known as Tiruchi Mahaswamigal, must have possessed to bring Goddess Rajarajeshwari to this place.

By evening on January 14, 2005, this ashram-temple complex had swelled into a sea of devotees. The atmosphere at the temple and ashram was unusually serious and solemn. The architect of this spiritual sanctuary and pontiff of Sri Kailash Ashrama Mahasamsthana, Sri Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal had at age 75 attained Mahasamadhi, as is termed the dropping off of the physical body of a great soul. In failing health for some years, Swami suffered an apparent stroke on the morning of the 14th and died soon afterwards, at 1:30 pm. His body was transported to the ashram from Mallya Hospital and prepared for internment beneath the massive Sri Chakra (see photo below) in a chamber built for this purpose at his direction a few years ago. Prominent swamis, including Sri Balagangadharanathaswami and Koviloor Swami, and political leaders, including former Indian prime minister, Deve Gowda, and Karnataka state chief minister Dharam Singh, rushed to the ashram for the ceremonies.

The body was placed in the chamber and covered first with vibhuti (holy ash), lotus

flowers and herbs, then the chamber was filled with sand and the floor stone replaced. Sri Jayendra Puri performed worship with lights, and the ceremonies ended around midnight.

By mid-morning of the next day, the temple craftsmen had replaced the Sri Chakra's pedestal. Gold and gems were placed on the pedestal top by the swamis, then the craftsmen replaced the heavy panchalogam (five metal) Sri Chakra, a three-dimensional form of the famous mystical diagram. Final worship followed and then the traditional feeding of all devotees.

Nine days later, on January 23, Sri Jayendra Puri Swami was officially installed as head of the ashram as part of the Moksha Deepa Aradhana ritual (photos next page).

Devotees adjust: It is true that the passing away of a yogi is not to be mourned, because he continues to live he attains Mahasamadhi and merges with God. But with the physical absence of Mahaswamigal hundreds of devotees felt orphaned. "Appa " (father), who had guided them through thick and thin, was no longer going to hear them, talk to them and soothe their tormented minds or give them solace. That endearing, comforting presence of Appa would be absent forever.

When I visited the ashram on the 15th, devotees were sobbing uncontrollably. The seat from where Swamiji gave darshan (literally, "sight, " in this case being in the presence of the guru) was adorned by a photograph instead of the person. Never was there a time when Swamiji did not give darshan to his devotees despite his ill health. I never heard Swamiji speaking of his health or uneasiness.

Legacy continues: The Rajarajeshwari temple, sculptured in typical Dravidian style, is immaculately built, with every stone placed to perfection. The greenery around, the young energetic children of the veda patasala school in their dhotis and neatly tucked tufted hair, the well-maintained cow shed--everything bears the stamp of the Tiruchi Mahaswamigal's eye for detail, perfection and planning. No devotee leaves without receiving the hospitality at the ashram.

In attaining Mahasamadhi, Tiruchi Mahaswamigal was not just leaving behind a great institution but a perfectly groomed successor in Sri Sri Jayendra Puri Swamiji. Already on the 15th, everything was in routine at the ashram. Pujas at the temple, administrative activities, and hospitality to every visitor, everything was taken care of. Swami Jayendra Puri, besides giving darshan to devotees, was continuously receiving and attending to pontiffs of other monasteries who came to offer their respects and devotees who came from far off places on hearing of the great passage. Conducting himself with poise, Jayendra Puri Swami was seen consoling devotees while resolutely fighting back tears from his own welling eyes.

Tiruchi Mahaswamigal was a stickler for principles. His advice to his successor was dharma prachara (propagation of righteous living). "This was the word he always used. 'Follow Vedas and be immersed in Bhagavanthana chintana (thought of God) do not deviate from the dharma' was his advice, " recounted Jayendra Puri Swamiji. "His way of looking at things was philosophical--he'd say, 'What is the use of discourses? Have you attended to the personal need of the tormented devotee who is seeking your darshan?' Swamiji took personal interest in the well being of the devotees. He knew every devotee's family tree at least three generations upwards and down to present. There was a personal touch he lent. He knew the sampradaya (tradition) to which the devotee belonged and spoke to each devotee in his own language, " says Jayendra Puri. Swamiji was a linguist, and was proficient in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi and Hindi. Jayendra Puri himself is fluent also in several languages and speaks immaculate English.

In fact, Tiruchi Mahaswamigal surprised me in my very first meeting, by guessing my sub-sect. He spoke glowingly about a prominent spiritual savant (Holenarsipur Swamiji) from our sub-sect who had deeply influenced Tiruchi Swamiji. We were spellbound.

From my frequent interactions and visits to the ashram and temple I have seen people of immense faith and belief. They vouch that the powers of this place are responsible for their well-being. "We were in doldrums after suffering huge losses in business. We sought the blessings of Devi (Goddess) and Swamiji here. We came out of it, and God has kept us well ever since. There is great power in this Goddess, and that is because of Swamiji, " said Chaitanya Kumar, an old neighbor and friend of mine.

"Swamiji disliked indulging in worldly affairs and refused to comment on matters of

current developments. Yet politicians, bureaucrats, professionals, and layman alike had immense faith in him. He was the benign reliever of their troubles. His spiritual powers lay hidden deep inside and only a devotee could feel the vibration, " says Mr. Krishnan, a regular visitor to the ashram.

Since his early days, Swamiji has worked methodically for the revival of Hinduism. He's improved temples by raising money for construction and renovation. Kailash Ashrama has spawned a number of subsidiary spiritual centers in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. But more importantly, and a reflection of his far-sightedness, his ashram's patasala schoot has graduated a steady stream of proficient priests since its founding in 1976. Some of the patasal boys, after thorough religious training at the ashram, opted to become monks. They joined Kailash or another ashram, greatly improving the religious teaching and leadership. Prominent among these are Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami of Adi Chunchanagiri Mutt in Bellur, Swami Sivananda Bharati, head of Siddharudanatha Math and Kumaraswamy, head of the Thiruchi Swami Math.

Early life: Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal was destined to be a monk. While traveling at Kanya Kumari, a place of great religious significance in South India, his parents were informed by a stranger near the Devi temple, "By the grace of the Divine Mother and Lord Subramanya, a glorious son will be born to you. He will be a teacher and benefactor for all mankind." Born in 1929, young Palaniswami was drawn to religious life right from his childhood. While in his 20s, he traveled to Nepal and was initiated as Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Shivarathnapuri Bhagavat.

Tiruchi Swami was instructed by his guru, Shivapuri Baba, to return to India, propagate dharma and build a temple. Before returning, Swamiji went to Mount Kailash. There he had a vision of Goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, who told him, "Proceed south, and establish an ashram there." Swamiji had a divine inspiration to start the ashram and temple near Bangalore.

Unlike other renunciates, Swamiji was always attired in white and not in saffron. "He was given permission by his guru not to change the color of his attire. Earlier, an elderly lady who nurtured Swamiji as a young boy and wielded tremendous spiritual influence over him had advised Swamiji to be a true sadhu. She had advised him to refrain from wearing saffron just for outwardly opulence of a sannyasi, " explained Jayendra Puri. "True to this, Swamiji never wore saffron or rudraksha, never wore stitched or ironed cloth, never used a telephone, never took

coffee or tea."

A yogi passing away from the material world never leaves a void. But for the multitude of monks, devotees, staffers at the temple and ashram, young students at Gurukula, and particularly for his ardent student-successor Sri Jayendra Puri, it will be a long while before they reconcile to the absence of the silent stalwart who was their beacon of light."