Master Subramuniya Returns From World Pilgrimage
Category : May 1979
Published by Anonymous on May. 01, 1979

Master Subramuniya Returns From World Pilgrimage

Four Week Mission to New York, London, India & Sri Lanka Stresses Diverse Issues

Master Subramuniya, founder and Guru of the Saiva Siddhanta Church, returned to Sivashram on Kauai Sunday, May 6th, after an eventful journey to the centers of Saivism in the East and West. Traveling with a monastic disciple, Master emphasized during the mission a number of issues pertinent to the growth of Saivite Hinduism throughout the world, among them: 1. that Hindus living in the East, especially in India and Sri Lanka, should support and assist the efforts being made in the West, 2. that Hindus the world over must set aside petty philosophical differences and stand together in defense of their faith and not allow alien faiths to "infiltrate, dilute and destroy" the world's oldest spiritual heritage, 3. that in the West Hinduism will benefit from using what he terms "the American Church system" which includes incorporating an active ministry, lectures, classes, counseling services and community, social and humanitarian services, 4. the presentation in Madras of the first book of a ten-volume English translation of the Saivite scripture, Tirumantiram and 5. the announcement of a pilot project to establish a mission for Brahmacharinis, women devotees, at the Church's mission in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka.

On April 8th Gurudeva gave his parting talk to students of the Himalayan Academy who had come to Kauai to participate in graduation activities. He then flew to San Francisco where that evening he addressed about thirty close California devotees gathered in the Ganesha Shrine. The presence of Mr. Muthuraman Iyer, the distinguished chairman of the Hindu Community and Cultural Center, inspired Master to devote much of his talk to the efforts and the problems faced recently by this organization in its attempts to build a Hindu temple in Pleasanton, California. Gurudeva called forth all Hindus in the area to fulfill their duty to provide temples for their children and their children's children and toward that end to lend their efforts and financial support to the temple building project, especially now that it is experiencing serious obstacles - primarily by way of a petition from a Pleasanton resident who objects to the potential additional traffic posed by the temple which would be near her home. He explained the need for the group to follow the traditional pattern in choosing a spiritual leader, a guru or swami, under whose direction all questions could be arbitrated and whose considered advice all

members would be willing to follow. In his address Gurudeva pointed out that all of the major religions have immigrated to the United States over the last 200 years, and that Hinduism is the last of the world's great faiths to do so. Within a generation or two the adjustments will have been made by those who pioneer this effort, and Hindu temples will be as common here as the great synagogues, mosques and churches of other religions that have found their place in America. However, a period of adjustment must be anticipated and faced with courage and the assurance that it is an adjustment and not a permanent condition. This assimilation of Hinduism into the American culture, he asserted, requires a bold backing of Hinduism by Hindus take on an "undefined ecumenical approach to religion."

"The general American public," Master explained, "must come to know that Hindus deeply value their religion and are willing to support it even against opposition. The public has yet to understand Hinduism for it has had little or no close association with the day-to-day practices. When that happens, it will be recognized as a bona fide religion just like all the others that have migrated here from their native lands. As they begin to understand the sacraments of the Hindu temple - the weddings, the baptisms, the name-givings, the funerals and more - and as they come to know of the great tolerance and non-proselytizing nature of the world's oldest religion, they will open their hearts to us just as they have to all other genuine spiritual communities. It is going to be a constant battle for a while. All religions have experienced this conflict as the members of society are gradually educated as to the beliefs and practices and protocol of the immigrating religion. It is imperative that the groundwork be done in any community for many years long before the temple itself comes up. We can look at it as an educational process, a duty to fully inform the community in which the temple will be built."

On April 10th Gurudeva flew to New York, there to meet with Dr. A. Alagappan, trustee and secretary of the Hindu Temple Society of North America. They discussed together the application of the American church system to the unique requirements of Hinduism in the West and the establishment of a viable Hindu ministry. The following evening Gurudeva addressed a small and altogether distinguished assembly of the elders of the New York Ganesha Temple. Seated before the shrine of Lord Muruga and holding the sacred solid silver Jothi Vel, he spoke of the Hindu Church in America as reported in another article in this issue.

The following day he flew with his disciple to London where a major part of the mission awaited him. They were greeted at the airport by Mr. and Mrs. Maheswari Sabapathipillai and several friends. The Sabapathipillai are leading members of the

Brittania Hindu Temple Society, founded seven years ago to build a Lord Muruga temple in London, England. Some background about the recent experiences of this fine association is needed to understand the mission that took Gurudeva there.

On April 11th, in the midst of Academy graduation proceedings, Master came to know that the 350-member association was divided as to its future direction and service. Though originally founded as a Saivite association, a powerful faction had recently proposed the admission of a Christian priest to the Advisory Council, and other non-Hindus to the main body. Many members were sympathetic to the proposal, feeling that the Hindu religion must express its historical tolerance, its openness to those of all beliefs. The trouble was that the men under consideration had openly denounced Hinduism and Lord Siva, and had further derided the traditions of the faith. Clearly, Gurudeva asserted, their admission to the group would not enhance but eventually destroy the objectives of the association. There was to be an election among the general membership on April 15th at which time it would be decided whether to take in the non-Hindu members or not. This was a serious problem, one that could easily determine the future of Saivism in England, where literally hundreds of thousands of Indian immigrants have lived for generations without the benefit of a sanctified temple. As one might expect the matter stirred Gurudeva deeply. The very mission of the Yogaswami Guruparamparai was often to mitigate the negative influences of alien religions which sent armies of missionaries to India to convert them and raze their sacred temple to the ground. Here was a threat more subtle but no less real. Master gave a potent inspired talk to the group of forty Academy students just an hour after receiving this letter. He spoke of the need for all Hindus to be strong in their faith, strong enough to resist all efforts by those of alien beliefs to "infiltrate, dilute and destroy Hinduism." The following morning, after much reflection on the most effective response to the problems set before him, he determined to fly to London. With this background we may now return to London where Gurudeva has just arrived.

The first night was spent in a London hotel, but the next two days were passed as a guests of the Sabapathipillai family. They took their American guests through London the next afternoon. In the evening Gurudeva gave the first of two addressed to the 350 members of the London association who had gathered in a large hall with a Deity of Lord Muruga. Gurudeva presented a small granite Ganesha deity to the group explaining that Ganesha is always worshipped first. At a later time, Gurudeva performed with his shishya the first puja to be held on the actual site of the future Muruga temple. Gurudeva's talk that night was a potent one. It had to be for this was a puissant threat to Hinduism in England where there are said to be nearly 200,000 Hindus.

In his address Master spoke of the many Hindu temples being built in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world, stressing the real presence of the Deity, the God of the temple, not merely as a symbol of inner realities, but as a reality itself which can and does affect the lives of devotees, make changes and direct the awareness of mankind. He spoke of the special place held by Lord Ganesha as the common Deity for all Hindus regardless of their sectarian beliefs, and of the special attributes of Lord Muruga. It is Lord Ganesha who brings devotees together, harmonizes their minds and lives so that they may serve their religion productively, and it is Lord Muruga who then puts them to work, said Master, adding that it is Lord Siva, God, who illumines the mind of man. "A Saivite worships Lord Ganesha. He worships Lord Muruga. And he looks to Lord Siva as God. Lord Siva is God. From God all souls have come. Back into God all souls will go. But while experiencing life Lord Siva has provided his son, Lord Ganesha, to quiet the mind, to harmonize the instinctive mind, to harmonize the intellectual mind. He is mind itself. And Siva has provided his son, Lord Muruga, to be the essence of religion, of the spirit or spirituality...It is important that not a single generation of Hindus miss this worship of the Deities of our religion, and therefore the work that you all are doing in planning and building a Muruga temple here in England is of the utmost importance. That cannot be overstated. Without this temple an entire generation will become worldly, externalized. Its inner strength will be destroyed. A home must be built for the Mahadevas - a temple. A temple is not a social hall, not a place to sing and dance. Those things come later, once worship is established in the traditional manner. A temple is a home for the Deity, for the Gods that actually live and exist on inner planes of existence." Master then blessed all of the selfless efforts of the members of the Saiva Manram who have given much to the temple construction efforts.

The next day, April 14th, Gurudeva noted it was Pongal and took a long walk through London with his disciple. Mr. Sabapathipillai celebrated Pongal in the traditional way. Pongal is the Tamil New Year and a large group had gathered for the festivities and to hear Gurudeva's second address. On this night Master told members of the London Saiva Manram that the world is looking to them, depending on the essential work they have undertaken, and praying for the successful outcome of their years of work together. "Your tireless efforts will not go unrewarded. The Saivite Hindu religion is the oldest religion in the world. Symbols of Lord Siva have been unearthed in the ruins of the Indus Valley that are five and ten thousand years old. That makes the Saiva Samyam, the Saiva religion, the oldest on the planet. It is the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Path. All other religions on the earth have sprung from this original one. In that sense we may say and believe that all religions are one, all leading to the same ultimate goal. It is true that there is one God, and all religions look to and worship that one God and He is called by countless names in hundreds of languages. But there is another level at which all religions are not the same - and that is belief. Each religion requires its adherents to believe in a certain way. If you do not believe in that way,

you are not of that religion. We have spent several years comparing the beliefs of Saivite Hinduism with all the other major religions and found some beliefs are held in common and others are very, very different. Many of the beliefs of one religion contradict those of another. On the level of belief religions are not at all the same, and it is only wisdom that we realize this. It is the beliefs within the memory patterns of the minds of people which create their attitudes and determine their actions. On the people level, the day-to-day level of our lives, all religions are not the same...My recommendation is that you build a small Ganesha shrine on the property that you now own and that you begin worship there. Once the worship has begun the obstacles will be removed, the funds will flow in and the objectives will be realized more fully than your highest hopes. The Gods themselves will see to the financing of the temple. Place your problems before Lord Ganesha and leave them there."

Gurudeva a left for the Far East the following morning, having advised the Advisory Council that it would be wise to maintain their long-standing policy of admitting only Hindus to the Hindu association. He then flew to Israel and then on through Athens, Greece, to New Delhi. In Jerusalem Master received a phone call from Mr. and Mrs. Sabapathipillai, in which they conveyed the joyous news that the Advisory Council had met and, with the encouragement of a group of youthful Hindus, voted to keep the present policy. Thus, many potential problems were averted for the Hindu Temple Society of Brittania and the progress on the Muruga Temple may continue.

While in London Gurudeva visited the home shrines of many families and gave out as prasadam free copies of the newly published Inspired Talk, Holy Kural: Scripture of Saivite Hinduism.

After a pilgrimage to the sacred sites of Hardwar and Rishikesh and a bath in the River Ganges, Gurudeva and his disciple spent a day in New Delhi, purchasing for the Church a large bronze Arthanaraswara which stands four feet tall. They attended the very ancient Kalkaji Temple about 12 miles from Delhi, a Shakti temple which dates back many thousands of years and which holds a virtually never-ending puja in its crowded sanctum. Upon leaving the temple a red thread is tied to the devotee's wrist signifying that the is now bound to the Mother, Goddess Shakti.

On April 25th Master traveled south and arrived in Madras, received there by Mr.

Krishna Murthi, the airport manager for Madras, and by Prof. Ahmed and Mr. Nachiappan. Many, many guests came to visit Master at the Taj Coromandel in Madras. Mr. C.N. Singaravelu, the man behind the publishing of a fine Saiva Siddhanta magazine, was among the first. That evening was to prove most rewarding. It was a most special day, the Jayanthi of Sri La Sri Padrimalaiswami who is among the great spiritual lights of India today and responsible for much of the temple-building here in the West. Over 1,000 devotees attended the celebration of the Guru's birthday at his Om Namasivaya Ashram in Madras. The occasion was auspicious and plans had been made to present the first book of the ten-volume Tirumantiram recently published by Dr. B. Natarajan in association with the Saiva Siddhanta Church. The Church had worked closely with Dr. Natarajan for many months and now, at last, the first issue was completed. Many important South Indians were to attend the function and it was to be televised. Master was asked to make the opening address. That morning he had a press conference with the five major newspapers of Tamil Nadu. In the large hall at Om Nama Sivaya Ashram that evening, Gurudeva spoke of the three kinds of Hindus in the West - those who have recently immigrated from India and Sri Lanka, those who have formally converted, and the new generation of Hindu children now being born in the West of immigrant and converted Hindu families. He laid great stress on the dependence of the success of Hinduism in the West on the orthodox Hindu leaders of the East. Master said to the august assembly, "this is a very important event in the life of the world. We are here to honor Sri La Sri Padrimalai Swamigal on his Jayanthi. 'A Guru is like a knife,' he once said. 'You have to pick it up and use it.' I can see that you are making good use of this sat guru and know you all join me in wishing him many, many more profound years...It is a wonderful day also because the final conclusions for all mankind have been unlocked for the Western world by way of the remarkable translation of Saint Tirumular's Tirumantiram. This is the first time that the complete scripture which is considered the fundamental scripture of Saiva Siddhanta Hinduism has been available in English. The Western world is coming rapidly into the consciousness of the Hindu religion as one of the greatest on the planet. The Tirumantiram will aid in the Western man's understanding of Hinduism as a distinct religion with its venerable traditions. Having the Tirumantiram in English will give Hindus all over the world a better idea of the clear, precise step-by-step approach to Self-realization known in Siddhanta, to the deeper aspects of yoga, to moral values and to mystical revelations of this great saint of our faith...Dr. Natarajan deserves our deepest appreciation for what he has accomplished here it is a most difficult task, and he has done it flawlessly. Through the Grace of His Holiness and the untiring efforts of Dr. Natarajan we now have this volume, printed in Madras, and bound in Madras. It is a beautiful work, setting the standard for other scriptures of the future. We release it now with great joy to the world, knowing it will help all of mankind in its search for understanding for within it, and within the nine other volumes to follow, are the final conclusions for all mankind."

The Jayanthi festivities continued through the evening with devotional bhajan, singing and dancing, and addresses by prominent Tamil Nadu figures. The following day began at five in the morning as Master and his disciple were driven to Chidambaram, the foremost Siva temple in South India. On the way they stopped briefly at the coastal town of Mahabalipuram, famed through history for its skillful stone carvers. There is in Mahabalipuram a small temple which has intricate pillars and corridors, ascending stairs, an elaborate roof and beautiful inner sanctum - all carved from a single monolithic stone! For several years the carvers of Mahabalipuram have been deeply involved in projects for the Saiva Siddhanta Church. Master reviewed the work already completed, including a six foot high stone Nandi (Siva's bull) which is identical to the famed Mysore Nandi. He also commissioned new carvings for the Saivite temples in the West and made arrangements for a Kodimaram and Palipeedam for the Kadavul Hindu Temple in Hawaii.

At Chidambaram Gurudeva was greeted and hosted by the temple managers who took the two pilgrims directly to the Siva Nataraja within the sanctum for special archanai. A lovely puja was enjoyed for which a priceless ruby, standing ten inches high and carved in the form of Siva Nataraja is used as the deity. Brief discussions were held appraising Master of the progress being made at Chidambaram in their current and extensive renovation projects. Master presented a donation for the work to the temple before continuing on to nearby Annamalai University where lunch was served. Master returned to Madras that evening.

The next day was Sunday and proved one of the busiest days of the journey, with many meetings with the wonderful Saivites of Madras. Through the morning hours Gurudeva received Mr. Nillaiappan, Mr. Natarajan, Nilamecha Sthapathi, Swami Virabhagu and others. They discussed together the Siva temple being constructed in Hawaii, and the traditional placement of the Kodimaram, Palipeedam and Nandi were carefully determined according to Agamic injunction. Later Mr. Arunachalam arrived. He is the author of several books on Saiva Siddhanta. At ten Master met with the publishers of the Saiva Siddhanta magazine which is published in Madras and arrangements were made for its use in the West. Lunch was enjoyed at the home of Mr. Kandaswami, editor of one of the leading Tamil newspapers. Dr. B. Natarajan and Mr. Ahmed also attended the luncheon, and during the course of the discussions Dr. Natarajan proposed to Mr. Kandaswami that the begin a column in his paper for religious matters. Just before his departure Master was given a tablet on which he wrote a message to be used in the inauguration of the column. After visiting the homes of several devout Saivites, Gurudeva went to the Yogasama Alayan, there to enjoy a spirited bhajan and to offer a brief talk. Iddli and curries were served afterwards. At seven in the evening Master was taken to an ancient Siva temple right in the heart of Madras, in the Mylapur district where Saint

Tiruvalluvar once lived. It was at the site of this temple that Saint Sambhandar revived to life a young girl who had died. On the way back from the temple the pilgrims visited the home of T.V. Ananta Rama Seshan, newspaper editor responsible for the building of a fine Guru Ayappan Temple in Madras. That was the end of a very busy day in South India.

The following morning Master went early to the Kalakshetra Press, which means the "House of Arts" in Tamil. It was this press, reputed to be the finest in South India, that the Tirumantiram was recently printed and bound. The owner, Mr. Nachiappan, is a remarkable man. Besides managing a very successful business, he takes young orphans into his shop, trains them for several years, even helps them to find employment or marriage opportunities. Mr. Nachiappan will be visiting Sivashram in Hawaii in July. From the printer's Master went to the home of Dr. B. Natarajan. He was advised of the diligent Doctor's next undertaking - translation into English of the sacred writings of our dear Saint Thayumanivar. Shortly afterwards Master left Madras and flew to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.

In Colombo Dr. S. Sanmugasundaran and Lak Das received Master at the airport. At the Oberoi Dr. Shan's family came to visit Master. The following day was Tuesday, May 1st. Master visited the home of Dayananda just outside of Colombo, sharing lunch with them before starting a long drive to Annuradhapura, a famous Buddhist capital in the north-central section of Sri Lanka. The pilgrims overnighted here among the sprawling ruins of Buddhist shrines that Buddha himself once visited. The next morning they drove to Alaveddy on the Northern Penninsula where Master founded a small ashram in 1947 with the blessings of his Guru, Saint Yogaswami. After a puja at the Ganesha Temple across the street, Master visited the present Alaveddy mission which is a walled-in compound containing a small shrine. The shrine houses a Siva Lingam and two pujas are performed daily by local Brahmins. There is a second property in Alaveddy, a few hundred yards from the shrine, which is the building originally dedicated by Master and blessed by Yogaswami in 1949. The Church has proposed purchasing the two-story building as the center of its work in Sri Lanka, and this purchase is being worked out by Master's devotees in Sri Lanka. It will be a wonderful asset to the continuation of Saint Yogaswami's work and our Gurudeva's mission. Yogaswami told Master when the building was blessed that "One day it will be three stories high." Perhaps he was speaking not only of the physical structure but of the important function it would serve in the community as well.

After a puja at the Lingam, Master went to the home of one of the Brahmin pujaris and then enjoyed a wonderful lunch at the home of Sivayogam, our beloved Amma.

It was here that it was decided that Gayatri Ananta Devi would come to Alaveddy. After lunch Gurudeva went to Yogaswami's Samadhi and then to the home of Tiru and Ratna Ma Navaratnam who are among the most devout of Swami's devotees. In the shrine room of their home, Master was asked to sit under the umbrella which belonged to Saint Yogaswami and now hangs from the shrine ceiling, open and protective. In Sri Lanka umbrellas are used more to shield out the sun than to keep one dry in the rain. Mrs. Navaratnam explained that Swami had given the umbrella to her one day, saying, "Take this, spread it out and live under its shade."

Mrs. Navaratnam spoke with Master about a wonderful plan she has to have a few Western Hindu women come to Sri Lanka in January of 1980 to join her on pilgrimage into India and to be personally trained in the customs and traditions of the religion. Gurudeva was inspired with Mrs. Navaratnam's selfless proposal. Some wonderful discussions ensured over a cool, ripe watermelon brought by Mr. Navaratnam, and at three o'clock Master began the journey back to Annuradhapura for the evening and then to Colombo the following day.

On Friday morning Gurudeva was visited by Dr. Shanmuganathan, an accomplished Ayurvedic physician. Dinner was taken in the hospitable home of Dr. Sanmugasundaran. Swami Jothi was there and led bhajan for the fifteen guests and members of the family. Master was delighted to meet the mother of our Dr. Shan. She is over 90 years old. Dr. Shan's family invited Gayatri Ananta Devi to stay with them a few days when she arrives in Sri Lanka and before going to Alaveddy in the North.

Master and Dr. Shan discussed the Alaveddy Mission, noting that it has been more or less dormant since the unfortunate death of C. Vinayagamoorthi who had managed the mission so well for years before his untimely death as a result of throat cancer. Political conditions in the country are not altogether stable, and this too has severely limited the work of the mission. An Executive Committee, composed of Master, Dr. Sanmugasundaran and Dr. Sanmuganathan, will seek to purchase the new property and initiate activities once again - all in an effort to fulfill Gurudeva's original plans of thirty years ago, to keep the traditions of Yogaswami and of Saivism dynamically alive in Sri Lanka and to provide for Western Saivites personal and meaningful association with this most orthodox of Saivite communities.

On Saturday morning Master flew to Singapore, then Tokyo and arrived in Honolulu

on Sunday, May 6th Vannakam, Gurudeva!

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.