

[A New Generation Of Leadership Installed at Madurai Aadheenam](#)

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Young Spiritual Leader is 292nd Successor at Venerable South Indian Spiritual Center

His Holiness Sri-La-Sri Arunagirinatha Sri Gnanasambanda Desikar was recently installed as the 292nd Guru Maha Sannidhanam (a deferential title for an ashram's head) of the renowned and ancient Madurai Aadheenam (ashram/monastery). A ceremonious function, well-attended by numerous Saivite religious leaders and dignitaries, was held on an auspicious day in late April placing a younger generation of dynamic and vigorous leadership at the Aadheenam's head. This position has been passed down through the centuries in unbroken continuity since the Aadheenam's establishment in the Eighth Century A.D. by Saint Tirujnana Sambandar, the youthful religious prodigy whose holy presence and melodious hymns sung to Lord Siva with intense devotion were able to reconvert great numbers of Buddhist and Jain followers back into Saivism, including a mass reconversion of the entire kingdom of Madura which had been lured away from its native religion. This Aadheenam is regarded as one of the oldest in India, and each successor inherits great responsibility in carrying forward the traditions of Tirujnana Sambandar's holy work. The newly appointed Sri Gnanasambanda Desikar has spent over four years closely training under the late 291st Guru Maha who passed away at the venerable age of seventy-eight in mid-March of this year after a distinguished incumbency of nearly three decades as the Aadheenam's spiritual light. In receiving his position and duties during the traditional inaugural ceremony, the thirty-five year old Sri Gnanasambanda Desikar stated with determination and dignity, "Realistic to this sacred and holy work, we will take necessary steps to preserve our religious traditions and the much famed temple structures in the best interest of the coming generations."

Madurai Aadheenam, whose religious work is known throughout South India, is located near the outer walls of the monumental Meenakshi Temple around which the holy town of Madurai arose. It has several branches in Tamil Nadu including a fine facility in Madras. The Aadheenam is hereditary trustee for four South Indian temples in the Thanjavur District: Sri Agneeswara Swami Temple in Kanjajur, Sri Sakshinatha Swami Temple in Tiruppurambayam, Sri Kachaneswara Swami Temple

in Kachanam and Sri Pannagaparameswara Swami Temple in Pannatheru. The Madurai Aadheenam faithfully follows the heritage of its Saiva Saint founder, and one of its most energetic and successful fields of service is in educating people in that heritage and reconverting Hindus who have been enticed away from the religion of their ancestors and into Christianity. The reconversions, of which more than seven thousand were effect in 1979 alone, are preceded by careful study of Hinduism and ultimately sealed by a formal name change, if the convert to Christianity was given a Christian name as they frequently are. For example, John is changed to Murugan and Joseph to Nadesan. This change is then published in the local newspaper. Other programs conducted by the Aadheenam include radio programs elucidating the Saiva scriptures, weekly classes held at the Aadheenam, and the publishing of many fine books devoted to the propogation of Saivism.

A recent letter was received from Mr. M. Subramaniam, Manager of the Aadheenam, in response to a special puja held at Kadavul Hindu Temple blessing the transition of the senior Gnanasambandar Desikar and the investiture of his able successor. In that letter he states: "Today is what is indeed a momentous day for us that your holy prasad, sailing abroad, has reached here. With reverence we all put the vibuthi and kumkum on our foreheads. We are too awed to point out that we have never before obtained Siva's prasad carefully prepared by American sadhus along with the sacred honey and photos and blessings passed on us at an auspicious date. "It is a mixture of awe, reverence and surprise,' His Holiness rejoices over this occasion, 'that we think along the same lines, at the same time and for the same purpose. God chooses the right house for the right person and Saivism is spreading.' His Holiness is touched in his immense bosom by the sanctity of the pictures taken during the pujas. May all our prayers to the Lord then be granted to us."

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