

[Rev. Dr. S. Sanmugasundaran Ordained First Missionary Minister Before Chidambaram's Nataraja](#)

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Visibly moved, and in a voice hesitant with devotion, Dr. Somsundram Sanmugasundaran of Nugegoda, Sri Lanka, accepted his appointment from Kauai Aadheenakartha, Sivaya Subramuniaswami, as a Saiva missionary minister of Saiva Siddhanta Church - the Church's first holder of this recently created religious office. Surrounded by the time-worn granite pillars of Chidambaram Koyil - interpreted by one witness present as symbolic of his commitment to Saivism's three metaphoric pillars - the temples, scriptures and Sat Gurus - Dr. Sanmugasundaran pledged and committed himself to fulfill the responsibilities of this appointment with all resolve. The now Reverend Dr. Sanmugasundaran, with his wife seated beside him during the ceremony, was garlanded and blessed by Sivaya Subramuniaswami. Congratulations were offered from the small assembly of church members in attendance.

The profound brief ceremony was held on February 4th as part of a series of Saiva Siddhanta Church Confirmation ceremonies while the Church's India Odyssey was in Chidambaram. Just minutes before he had received his Confirmation within the Church.

In an impromptu acceptance speech, his first as a missionary minister, Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundaran confided, "I can remember from the age of five years, it has been my great ambition, my desire, my love to be a servant of God, to be a servant of the servants of God, and to spend my entire life in service as a Sivathondan." That ambition has been made a reality through dedicated service to Saivism in Sri Lanka, a service which found many avenues of expression over several decades. But the life-changing impetus that gave his aspirations real productive power was the direct presence of the Sat Guru, Siva Yogaswami. "I had been struggling, but I was unsuccessful until I came under the influence and guidance of Paramaguru Siva Yogaswami in the year 1956." Under the guidance of that most illustrious of Sat Gurus, the embers of spiritual life were fanned into flames. It would be close to two decades before Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundaran would meet the next Sat Guru in

the Siva Yogaswami Guru Paramparai, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. But his missionary activities were already springing to life.

In 1964 Siva Yogaswami attained Maha Samadhi, leaving many devotees, including Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundaran, inconsolable. As Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundaran, explained, "During those years I knew that finally I was in safe hands, but Siva Yogaswami attained Maha Samadhi in March of 1964, and I was once again alone." The set-back didn't defeat him but actually strengthened and honed his inner convictions. Over the next decade he founded and published Meikandar Neri, a widely read journal devoted to disseminating knowledge of Saivism. This was the long-lived precursor of his current publication, Siva-Neri. Several years later he began producing his own regularly scheduled radio program which discussed various facets of Saivism and offered selections from its vast body of scripture. Broadcast out of Colombo, it was and still is a successful and acclaimed radio ministry. Intentionally forgetting these notable accomplishments, Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundran with his customary humility summed these years prior to meeting Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, "The years went by and, as Siva Yogaswami would have had it, I came under this great sage, this Maha yogi, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. I was nowhere, I was nothing...and today I have been given this great and honored responsibility which it shall be my desire to fulfill to the best of my ability."

After coming under the guidance of Sivaya Subramuniyaswami several years of further study and service ensued. Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundran traveled to America in 1978, spending some time at Kauai Aadheenam as well as the other monasteries of Saiva Siddhanta Church. His ministerial and teaching abilities became readily apparent, and the Church conferred upon him an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity. In 1979, he was appointed as the Church's business representative for Sri Lanka, handling such diverse projects as helping to engineer the Church's purchase of its present Sri Subramuniya Ashram property and building, and organizing and coordinating the Sri Lanka portions of the Church's India Odyssey pilgrimages. The qualifications and credentials are all there. The appointment as a missionary minister was a direct outgrowth of his prior abilities and missionary enterprises. This is the nature of the Missionary Ministry program as defined by Saiva Siddhanta Church - to recognize an existing pattern of service to Saivism and help to strengthen it.

Now at the age of 65, having raised a wonderful family of five children and long since retired from a successful career as a building contractor, Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundran's appointment continues his work among Saivites in Sri Lanka

and extends it into new areas of service in the future. This ministry is specifically performed by the lay members of the Church. As a staunch family man, with his wife by his side, Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundran will serve the devotees of God Siva.

Within many other world religions this office has been an integral and vital profession for centuries. For instance, in Protestant Christianity, the lay minister is a well-established and religiously well-schooled family member of the religious community who actively teaches and offers guidance, counsel and solace within that community. The minister's wife is at his side silently supporting him in his efforts. Together they serve as exemplars of family life - the fulfillment of its filial and spiritual values.

As is recognized in other religions, the Saiva minister is not a renunciate monk or priest. The missionary minister is not a sannyasin. He does not in any way renounce his associations with family, friends, missionary ministry or the world in general. Rather, he makes stronger commitments to his family, the institution of the family within his religion and to the practical needs of the religion. This ministry does nothing more than define and direct his already-existing ministerial efforts.

As defined in the document signed by the new appointee on that auspicious day at Chidambaram, a missionary minister of Saiva Siddhanta Church is charged with disseminating the fundamentals of Saivism as outlined in the Church's Catechism and Creed, lessons one and two of the San Marga Master Course. Working both within and outside of the general constituency of the Church memberships and friends, the missionary minister serves all Saivites, adding his individual talents to fostering a unification of outlook and reflective concern for Saivism's welfare. On the practical, down-to-earth side, he serves as a Saiva family counselor, someone to turn to with domestic problems or just to talk with about religious matter. He may be consulted on community and religion-related issues. Additionally, he meets with the leaders of other religions on an equal basis, working with them to resolve issues that may arise and to inform them of the unique merits of the Saiva samayam, especially where misunderstandings arise. He may, if he so chooses, give lectures and be available at public speaking forums to represent and promote Saivism. As a teacher, he is fully authorized to conduct classes for other devout Sivathondus who wish to become teachers of the Saiva Dharma. An accomplished missionary minister is available to guide and advise other budding missionaries with their programs.

In addition to the above, Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundran has been inspired to initiate several important programs in Sri Lanka, including:

1. A prison program in which Saivites who are incarcerated have access to spiritual counseling which can ameliorate the physical and psychological difficulties of prison life.

2. Translation of lessons and scripture, undertaking in conjunction with senior members of the Saiva Swami Sangam in Hawaii.

3. Publication of bhajans and Thevaram hymns for the purpose of teaching only the most orthodox forms of religious singing among the youth.

4. Serving as patron and advisor in cooperating with the members of the Sri Subramuniya Ashram committee in Alaveddy.

5. Supporting the newly formed Sri Subramuniya Kottam in Kopay through its natural stages of growth and development and guiding its youthful president, Ramesh Kumar.

6. Meeting with President Jayawardene of Sri Lanka to discuss the fair use of national television, recently introduced in the country, as related to religious programming.

The certificate received by the new missionary minister further amplifies the objectives of the work envisioned:

1. To be a friend to the friendless, caring for Saivites in need and calling into action Associate Members of the Saiva Siddhanta Church who will serve as 'fieldworkers' in loving attendance to the needs of others.

2. To work among established Saivites to enhance and strengthen their beliefs in accord with the Saiva Dharma: A Creed for Saivite Hindus, but not necessarily to change any convictions contrary to this creed, rather to seek to promote fellowship, cooperation, understanding, agreement and support among all Saivite Hindus the world over.

3. To teach the ancient truths and traditions of Saivism in the spirit of Gurudeva's declaration: "The Saiva Dharma - it is now as it always was."

As an insignia of his new office, Rev. Dr. Sanmugasundaram received from Sivaya Subramuniaswami a new uniform, consisting of white verthi, shirt and shawl, with a maroon stripe along the edge. He was asked to grow a full beard and to no longer cut his hair, but tie it in a traditional kondu. He was given a solid gold chain which holds a rare two-faceted rudraksha bead.

As one of the Church's World Outreach Mission office staff said, "Saivism has and always will need its inspired souls who are living, teaching and spreading Saivism. St. Tirumular from the Himalayas was a missionary. Thirujnana Sambhandar was a missionary. Appaya Dikshitar was a missionary. Arumugam Navaler of Sri Lanka gave his entire life and being to missionary work. Contemporary Saivism, too, needs a standing army of missionaries and missionary ministers. It needs dedicated and intelligent people to implement large-scale programs utilizing the latest media tools and it needs teachers to educate the local community." Observations like these are characteristic of an emerging worldwide awareness among Saivites that like-minded efforts are needed to keep the religion vibrant in a technological world, meeting the problems that inevitably arise within our own religious community. The next step is for the observations to become a reality - and that reality has become a little more concrete with the appointment of Saiva Siddhanta Church's very first missionary minister.

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