Saiva Siddhanta Church Celebrating Silver Jubilee
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1982 Marks Twenty-five Years of Service to the Saiva Dharma for American Hindus

Supporting the great arching beams of Saivite wisdom, knowledge and practice which reach over every one of the world's 300 million Saivites are the three central metaphorical pillars of Saivism: the temples, the scriptures and the Sat Gurus. The multi-leveled structure of Saivism rests upon them. All religious work within Saivism is built upon the triad they form. Entering its 25th year of existence & celebrating its Silver Jubilee Anniversary, Saiva Siddhanta Church's own mission stands squarely on each pillar. Looking back and gleaning forward from this 25th year, the Church's foremost mission could be capsulated as perpetuating the science of temple worship and its fruits of culture and knowledge, preserving and bringing forward into contemporary understanding Saivism's most treasured scriptures, and disseminating the enlightened teachings of the inimitable Sat Gurus. From this hub the Church reaches out to serve world-wide Saivism, and draws within to nurture the immediate religious lives of its Associate, Preparatory and Confirmed memberships.

To facilitate the ongoing accomplishment of this mission, the Church nurtures family life in accord with Saivite culture, and monasticism as the green-house for God Realization and tireless service to Saivites. Additionally, the Church fosters Saivism in the technological age through a dynamic World Outreach Mission to spread the teachings and traditions of the Saiva Dharma around the world.

The following article, reviewing the Church's 25-year history, is dedicated to Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, that great soul who has with an indomitable will carried forward the mission of Saint Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, just as Yogaswami carried it forward from his Guru, Chellapaswami. Our prostrations to his holy feet.

A great, full moon lit up Jaffna Town, the twilight hour had come. The streets

around the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple were empty and quiet. Oil lamps flickered in the windows of the houses. Two white bulls yoked to a cart were waiting with their driver near the temple portico. Their owner was inside. Three men came out after the evening puja and climbed into the cart. Two were Tamils, a young Chettiar and a well known Jaffna lawyer; the third was a young American, a tall man with a graceful easy stride.

He looked a different sort - as well he might. After practicing sadhana, meditation and occult science in America from early childhood, he had come to Sri Lanka in his twentieth year, 15 months before, to find his Sat Guru. On the island, he passed months of meditation and difficult inner training at and near Colombo, months of meditation at places in the south of the island and retired finally to the jungle Caves of Jalani where his yoga blossomed at last into God-Realization. Yes, he was a different sort.

The cart rumbled off, creaking and swaying, in the direction of the Jaffna lagoon. The pilgrims were silent, looking to themselves and their destination. The young American was thinking about the temple and the puja they had just left. At the height of the ceremony he suddenly saw an elderly Tamil man appear in the sanctum, dressed in white, with silvery white hair and beard, radiant and smiling, looking like a sage from heaven. He wasn't there, of course, except he was. No one else had seen him, only the young American, and he thought about it now, turning it over in his mind as the cart rolled along.

In an hour they reached Columbuturai village and stopped at a compound gate. Across the road was a temple with a well where they washed their hands and feet. The compound was large, with several homes further back. To the right was a smaller hut. In the open doorway stood a robust figure draped in white, a stout silhouette against the lamplight glowing inside. "Swami is expecting us," the lawyer smiled.

As they walked closer, his voice rang out, "Have you seen me before?"

"Yes," the American called right back, "I saw you just now at Nallur."

They could see his face as he smiled at the American and spoke again, "I am in you."

"I am in you," came the reply.

"You are in me."

"You are in me."

As they reached the verandah, Yogaswami hurried them inside. "Come in, come in, you are welcome here!" He was in a jolly mood, like a little boy. He made the American sit beside him on his cot, he wouldn't let him prostrate or anything like that, and he asked several devotees to press some grape juice for their visitor. A half dozen others were seated across the room, watching this unusual turn of events.

Yogaswami asked his guest how old he was: "Twenty-two." He then asked him a long series of personal and philosophical questions - about his training and sadhana and his grasp of Hinduism. The questions were of the impossible type, subtle and profoundly simple, but the American answered right back every time, speaking out from intuition. Finally, Yogaswami was satisfied, and a moment later the grape juice arrived. He offered it to his guest saying, "You are white. Subramuniya is white. You are Subramunia." Having accepted his disciple into the Saivite religion by giving him his Hindu name, he then bestowed a mission - to return to America and bring Saiva Dharma fully into the mainstream of western culture. He promised him all aid and assistance in fulfilling it, and gave specific instructions on how to proceed.

The evening was advancing by the time he finished, so he sent the three on their way without further ado. The three men walked across the compound, two of them quite mystified by what they had seen. No one had ever spoken to Yogaswami like the American, nor had they ever seen Swami so open and at home with anyone, ever.

Suddenly, Yogaswami was upon them. The trio had just reached the gate when he caught them and before they knew he was there he raised his open palm high above his head and delivered a tremendous slap on the back to Sri Subramuniya, almost knocking him over. The sound was heard even in the hut, "This will be heard in America!" Swami roared. And so it came to pass.

That was in May of 1949, 33 years ago. In that powerful initiation from the venerable Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna were the seeds of all the work being done by Saiva Siddhanta Church today. Gurudeva, then still a young man, returned to America a few months later, and there continued the performance of his sadhana and yogic disciplines, maturing under the power of his Diksha. Then, in 1957, eight years later he founded the Saiva Siddhanta Church. The 25 years since have seen a tremendous growth and expansion of services provided by the Church, which now works year around on an international basis through a worldwide membership. Uniquely, though, the changes have been in size and ability to serve, not in the service itself. Saiva Siddhanta Church is doing today what it did in its founding years, only more of it, and more profoundly Saivite. America in 1957 was a thoroughly Christian society. Few people had even heard of Hinduism, much less met someone who practiced it, when Sri Subramuniyaswami commenced his mission to the West by opening a public temple/school complex on Sutter Street in San Francisco. Three months later, the temple and school moved into permanent quarter at 3575 Sacramento Street, which is still used for that purpose today.

In 1957, students received their Hindu education through several weekly classes conducted personally by Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, at the Church on Sacramento Street, and through his weekly Sunday sermon delivered from the altar of the Church. These Inspired Talks, as they are still called today, were transcribed and printed on a small press owned by the Church. Hundreds were mailed out each month to students living around the world. From these talks was compiled the first edition of the San Marge Master Course, which is in its eighth edition in 1982. To administrate and encourage so many students, Gurudeva founded the Yoga Institute, with offices in the Church building. It offers the same services today under the name Himalayan Academy.

In 1959, the first Annual Summer Retreat was held, a two-week study retreat in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. This program continued yearly from that time, though after 1967 the destinations included Western Europe, Polynesia, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Tahiti, Hawaii, Russia, Greece and North Africa, to name a few. Called the Innersearch Travel-Study Program, it has been a mainstay of Himalayan Academy's effort to instill the spirit of Hinduism in the lives of hundreds

of sincere seekers through the years. The boons from these recurring religious pilgrimages have been many. For the Church they have included the establishing of new centers in America, the founding of Kauai Aadheenam as a permanent world headquarters and the strengthening of the Sri Subramuniya Ashram in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka, originally dedicated by Gurudeva in 1949 and admirably serving the needs of hundreds of Saivite children and adults in Jaffna today.

Printing and publications of every variety have issued forth from the several press shops owned and operated by the Church through the years. The first press was a little Multilith 1250, one of the classic workhorses of the printing trade, which was purchased, in 1957, right along with the first buildings the Church set out to buy. Indeed, the Church owned a press, ink and paper before it owned a building outright, which sums its commitment to spreading Saivism around the world through the printed word.

On a half dozen other printing machines, large and small, in California, Nevada and Hawaii, the work has continued down through the years. Today the printing is housed in its own building on Kauai, does its own camerawork, typesetting and binding, and operates 12 months of the year due to the generous support of the Siddhanta Press Club.

The current publications, like all current activities of the Church, had their beginnings in the very early years. There are the Inspired Talks, the quarterly Church newspaper, the Master Course lessons, various small tracts and pamphlets, Church stationery - all dating from 1959 or earlier. Later additions to this lit were the Action Card program, brochures introducing Saivism and Saiva Siddhanta Church, several posters and several books published at outside shops, such as Raja Yoga and Gems of Wisdom. Later editions of all of these publications kept up with the success of the Church and Academy in bringing out a deeper and more complete presentation of Saivism.

Temple worship is fundamental to the Saivite religion, and a keynote in the history of the Church. The establishing of the present stone altar in the San Francisco Ganesha Temple took place in late 1957. The rocks for the masonry edifice were brought or shipped by devotees from every corner of the world, every continent. Gurudeva stressed bhakti, or devotion, to the congregation from the start, not only within the Church but in the family shrine room and in daily life as well. He taught them japa and a simple form of puja to begin with and gradually extended their

understanding of the process through the years. By learning to lean on God and the Gods the congregation flourished and the Church grew strong from within its own number. Today, flowers, food and incense grace the altar as they did then. Lamplights, camphor, bhajan songs, bells and happy faces fill that little San Francisco temple now as they did that very first year. And in April of this year Gurudeva installed a Palani Deity and yantra there and moved the Ganesha Deity to a secondary shrine to the side.

On March 12, 1973, Kadavul Hindu Temple was founded by Gurudeva at Kauai Aadheenam on Kauai. The founding was inspired by a vision of Lord Muruga, who chose the site for the huge Nataraja deity in the main sanctum. Worship commenced from the following day, and the temple has literally been built up around the deity. Gurudeva established, with temple, an around-the-clock vigil sadhana for the monastics of Kauai Aadheenam, who take three to six hour shifts within the temple every day of the year. Every three hours in the respected Siva temple a puja is performed either to Lord Ganesha, Lord Muruga or one of three traditional murthis of Lord Siva-Nataraja, Ardhanarisvara and the Siva Lingam. All major Saivite festival days are observed through the year.

In 1976, following the purchase of 40 acres of jungle-covered land adjacent to the five acres of Kauai Aadheenam, Gurudeva founded San Marga, an immense outdoor temple/garden complex that illustrates Saivism, the ancient San Margo, through landscaping and architecture. The plans feature a straight, wide path, nearly a half mile in length, for pilgrims to walk along with shrines and meditation groves along the way. At the end of the straight path an authentic and traditional Agamic Siva Temple will be constructed of stone, every piece of it carved and then shipped from South India. This temple will be known as Iraivan Temple. As a pilgrimage center in future years, San Marga will be unequaled. Since 1976, the basic layout of the land and the planting of meadows has been completed. Following the 1982 India Odyssey, detailed plans for the Iraivan Temple are being prepared in India and America both.

In the founding years of the Church, monastic vows were given for three months at a time, renewed four times every year. The monastics were single men in the congregation who wanted to live a life of religious service and meditation. These first sadhakas lived in apartments nearby the Church on Sacramento Street in San Francisco and were self-sufficient. Later, in 1962, property in Virginia City, Nevada, was purchased as a year round retreat center for the Church families and staffed by resident monastics. At this time, vows could be taken for a period of two years at a time, allowing a more penetrating study and cloistered training. Later still, in

1969, a large building adjoining the Church property in San Francisco was purchased for the monastic order. In 1970 lifetime vows, or Holy Orders, were first given at a ceremony at the Sri Subramuniya Ashram in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka, when the first sanyasin of the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order received his Sannyas Diksha from Gurudeva. A Siva Lingam shrine marks the spot today. The Saiva Swamis, in 1982, are nine in number.

From Kauai Aadheenam the Saiva Swami Sangam manages the mission of the Church under Gurudeva's guidance, serving Saivites around the world through correspondence, pilgrimage and publications. The Sangam has published in recent years a partial translation in American English of Saint Tiruvalluvar's Tirukural, a book on Lord Ganesha in response to requests from devotees in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a progressive four-part series of pre-monastic and monastic vows concluding with sannyasin vows, and A Catechism and Creed for Saivite Hindus, these being Lessons One and Two of the San Marga Master Course.

In the West the Church families in the early years lived largely in and around the city of San Francisco, but spread increasingly to far off points through the Inspired Talks program and the correspondence lessons. Church members today live in much the same way around the San Francisco Bay area, but have also localized in Honolulu as well, in Kona, Hawaii; in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; and in Flushing, New York. The New York families, living in the vicinity of the Hindu Temple of flushing, New York, formed a school for their own children, a highly successful affair that is serving as a model for other Hindu communities around the United States. As of 1980, two Dharmasalas, formally organized groups of Church families, were in existence - one in Flushing, New York, and the other in San Francisco, California. Following the patterns of the American church structure, members of the Dharmasala work together to strengthen their lives; educationally, socially, religiously, culturally and economically. Working closely with Gurudeva and the Saiva Swamis, a Senior Group of Elders and a Council on Ministries work in unanimity in administration and planting of activities.

In the East, a core group of members of the Church naturally formed in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka, of those who met Gurudeva during his early visits or his subsequent pilgrimages through the years. Since those early days, membership in Alaveddy has grown considerably. The Sri Subramuniya Ashram is the ashram of that community, serving through its thriving children's school of religion, spoken English and Saivite culture, as well as a full-fledged religious and cultural center for adults. In 1982, this year, a beautiful stage was completed for performances of plays and talks by the school children and orations by invited speakers. Other renovations of

the building itself have brought it up to a very high standard. Also initiated this year was a plan to build a series of simple huts for the men of the community to perform Sadhana in, in a compound which will be known as Sadhana Bhoomi. With its dedicated members of born Saivites the Sri Subramuniya Ashram is the heartbeat of the Church, nestled in the homeland of the great Siva Yogaswami.

Spreading out from the Eastern and Western core groups the Church's membership has gradually - slowly but surely - grown in numbers, primarily through the teachings which flow from the Siddhanta Press, the voice of the Church. Presently the Church has Associate members in countries all over the world - England, Mauritius, Canada, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, South Africa, Australia, and other countries as well. The entire Church membership now is made up of approximately 70% born Saivites and 30% adoptive and converts.

Certainly, twenty-five years of growth and service contains far more than this short overview can hope to describe. Still, these brief notes tell a great deal in themselves, and perhaps they tell enough. From its inception, the Church has enjoyed consistent progress in its mission, the very mission bestowed on its founder, Sivaya Subramuniayaswami, by Paramaguru Siva Yogaswami 33 years ago this May. That its goals have remained the same, that its services have grown to span the globe, that the teachings have reached many thousands - here, there and everywhere - these things we celebrate in the Silver Jubilee year.