Hinduism Keeping Pace With Technology In Singapore's Thriving Metropolis
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Singapore, a city-state of over 2.5 million people, on an island only 25 miles across and 15 miles wide, largest port in Southeast Asia, fourth largest port in the world, center of trade and oriental civilization for three millenia; the upbeat, prosperous, technologically advanced hub of Asia, also has what may be the most progressive Hindu community in the East. With about 180,000 Indians, nearly 80,000 of whom are Hindus, Singapore supports over 25 well-maintained well-attended temples. Of the Indian population, about 48,000 are Tamil, and most of the temples are Saivite.

Hinduism in Singapore is blossoming with religious, educational cultural and humanitarian activity. A major proponent of Saivism in the country, R. Rajathurai, Singapore Secretary for the World Hindu Organization, Secretary of the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple (and Chairman of its religious education sub- committee), wrote of the recent blooming of some of Singapore's finest temples: "The people of this tiny island state were fortunate to witness three Kumbabhishekams within a short span of four months." One kumbabishekam ceremony on November 12 blessed the Sri Ruthra Kaliamman Temple, Singapore's first new Hindu temple in more than 50 years, built over a 3- year period at a cost of U.S. $1.2 million dollars. A second ceremony (attended by the President of Singapore, Dr. C.V. Devan Nair) blessed a massive reconstruction of the "Chettiar Temple," a 124-year old Sri Thandayuthapani (Muruga) wooden temple, owned and managed by the Nattukkottai Chettiars (a community known for their business acumen and for building temples). Acclaimed by the Chettiars as the grandest temple in Southeast Asia, "the new temple, entirely reconstructed on the old site at a cost of 3.3 million Singapore dollars, took four years to build," writes Mr. Rajathurai. "It is by far the best, and the pride of the Hindus in Singapore." A unique feature of the temple is its 48 glass panels of the Hindu pantheon, which are placed in such a way that when sunlight strikes them, the images become bright silhouettes.

Most recently, the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple was consecrated on Dec. 11. This temple is more than 85 years old and belongs to the Jaffna Tamils. "The

priests, ritual and mode of worship are akin to those found in Jaffna, Sri Lanka," Mr. Rajathurai notes.

A wise Singapore government maintains advisory boards for religions of the country and at this time Hindu leaders are working with the board to include Hindu studies as an elective course in the public schools. Efforts to accomplish this in 1982 and 1983 were unsuccessful. Singapore radio and TV offer programs in Chinese, Malay, English and Tamil - all four official languages of the country. Saivite Tamil culture is flourishing vigorously.

Functioning from the 13th floor of the Golden Mile tower building is Singapore's strong Pan- Hindu religious organization, The Hindu Center. Its high-class, bi-monthly journal, Omkara, uses a logo of composite design, the Vaishnavite Namam merged in the Saivite Tripundra. In one issue one reads that Vaishnavism is the living religion of Hinduism, in the next issue, that Lord Siva is the source of all the other Gods; and throughout, one finds the modern genre of eclectic, liberal Hindu writings drawn from various Indian religions.

The Hindu Center, with its strong Youth Wings, is a model of the progressive mobilization of Hindu devotion, energy and brain-power. Seminars on such topics as "The Status of the Hindu Woman in a Changing Society" are heavily crowded, even in Singapore's pouring equatorial rains. The Youth Wing is active in religious education, holding classes using the Bhagavad Gita and Saiva Siddhanta Church's lessons from The San Marga Master Course, and promoting leadership training, cultural and social service activities.

This ancient city, once ruled by Hindu monarchs is also the home of such strong, clearly Saivite organizations as the 85-year old Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple. Its Kumbabhishekam souvenir publication is clearly a work by Saivites, for Saivites, full of information on traditional Saivism - useful, cogent, well-organized data for modern Hindus. Since 1940, the temple's education committee has taught Tamil religious classes. The ancient saying from Tamil Nadu: 'Saivamum Tamilum' (that Saivism and the Tamil language are inseparable) finds full expression here, where the focus is Saiva Siddhanta, Tirumurai, and temple worship - a refreshing traditionalism in a modern world where the Bhagavad Gita is often touted as the beginning and end of Hinduism's scripture and wisdom. Under the auspices of the temple, Tamil, Religion, Moral Education and Devotional Songs are presently taught in eight classes, from the kindergarten to secondary levels. Five buses transport

children from the various parts of Singapore, Admission is open to all, and tuition is free.

Singapore, a major center in the heart of the Orient, may well prove a bellwether microcosm for Hinduism's growth amidst high-tech Asian development.

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