

[Largest Temple in Fiji Opens](#)

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Fijian Hindus Celebrate A New National Temple

School children officially had the day off-and everyone else seemed to take it anyway-as most of the Hindus of Nadi and the surrounding towns gathered at the Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami temple on Friday, July 15th to witness the Maha Kumbhabhishekam of their new national temple. The high point came at 8:30am as a helicopter first slowly circled the temple, then showered flowers upon the temple, priests and devotees while the sacred water was poured over the very top of the three-story main sanctum by chief guest Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami and temple priest Sadasivan Gurukkal. A few minutes later the exquisite life-size deity of Lord Muruga (Kartikkeya) as a sannyasin monk (Dandayutapaniswami, as enshrined at Palani Hills temple in Tamil Nadu) was brought to life with more sanctified water. Shouts of "Haro Hara" and "Vel Vel, Shakti Vel" rose from the assembled devotees. The entire event was broadcast live on all-Fiji radio.

This US\$1.2 million temple, Fiji's largest, represents a decided resurgence of Hinduism in Fiji, and a regaining of confidence in the island's future by the Hindus. That confidence was shaken by the coups of a few years ago, the imposition of a constitution guaranteeing Fijian dominance in the political system, arson attacks against five Hindu temples and the beating of a priest. Native Fijians (who are Christians) and the ethnic Indians are approximately equal in population at 350,000 each.

Five priests and a nagasvaram troupe were flown from India. Jayalukshimy Kandiah's Natanalaya dance troupe of eight were brought from Australia. The head priest of the dedication, 72-year-old Sivachariya Thiyagaraj of Tirukalikundram [see sidebar], told Hinduism Today that this was his 1,118th kumbhabhishekam! It is an indication of the worldwide enlivening of Hinduism that this last year has been his busiest, with a total of 60 temple dedications in India, Malaysia, Fiji and other countries.

The original Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami Temple of Nadi was founded by Ramaswami Pillai in 1913 on land leased from the native Fijians. That lease expired recently, and it was decided to move the temple to a more secure location at the other end of town on leased government land. After 20 years of on-again, off-again efforts, ground was broken on September 12th, 1991.

The renowned architect, V. Ganapati Sthapati of Madras, India, was commissioned to create the largest Hindu temple not only in Fiji, but in the southern hemisphere. It is also the largest between India and Texas. Ganapati has designed many temples in the USA, Canada, England, Australia and India. In 1992 he sent Sri Palaniswami to be resident architect and to supervise seven Indian silpis (traditional temple craftsmen) and one painter working on the concrete and mortar building. The temple follows all of the traditional agamic scriptures of South India, one of a handful of orthodox temples outside of India to do so.

Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami Temple is owned by the Then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam of Fiji, the largest Hindu organization on the islands, operating 26 schools and a number of temples. Sri Y.P. Reddy, the Sangam's national president, called the temple "Our gift to the nation." Many people worked hard to make the temple a reality, including Sri N.R. Reddy, chairman of the reconstruction committee, Dr. R. Ponnu Swamy Goundar, reconstruction committee secretary, Sangam general secretary Thiru N.K. Naidu, and the other members of the reconstruction committee-Gopalan Khanna, Vidya Subramani, Vishwanathan Goundar and Navaneeta Goundar. One of the priests brought from India, Thiru Ravi Gurukkal, chief priest of the famed Tiruttani Murugan temple, congratulated the entire Indian community. He said, "Though you migrated so far so many years ago, you have remained very religious minded."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, Hinduism Today's publisher, was chief guest at the event. When the temple project seemed a distant possibility a few years ago, Subramuniaswami advised the management to install and worship Lord Ganesha at the new site. It was done, and Ganesha's grace opened doors and removed the decades-old logjam. Dr. Goundar said, "After the installation of Ganesha, there has never been a moment of looking back." Similar advice by Swami to first establish Ganesha worship has proved successful with temples in the USA, Canada and England.

In his speech to the assembled devotees, Swami said, "Lord Muruga's duty is to

clear the minds and provide wisdom to His devotees. Whoever visits this magnificent temple will be blessed by Him." Swami also advised the community to curb violence in the home such as wife and child beating. "Because of violence everywhere people suffer. Young people should be trained to listen to the elders who could provide them with religious guidance." He said the temple is not a tourist attraction but the home of God built for His devotees. He advised that non-Hindus be allowed into the temple only at certain hours, between the normal worship times.

The temple committee is expecting that many expatriate Fijian Indians in Canada and the USA will contribute generously to the temple through sponsoring annual pujas, feedings and specific projects of the on-going construction, such as the construction of the priest's quarters and gurukulam priest training school, marriage hall, temple gardens, administration office, quarters for visiting religious leaders, a traditional river ghat (steps and landing) along the adjoining river, a mass feeding hall with kitchen and several subsidiary shrines. Interested persons may receive the temple's monthly mailings by writing to: P.O. Box 9, Nadi, Fiji.

"This temple is our gift to the nation." Sri Y.P. Reddy, National President, Then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam

Creating the Temple

Before Hinduism Today left Fiji, we toured the new temple with Manikam Achari Palaniswami, the resident architect, and C. Gopalakrishnan, the painter. They proudly showed off the temple's picturesque artwork. Palaniswami confided that while this is the biggest temple in Fiji, it was more or less a routine job for him. He supervised the Highgate Murugan temple in London.

The concrete, brick and mortar building has been carefully decorated from top to bottom, and all the sculpted images on the building's towers are lovingly rendered in brilliant colors. Most notable are the ceiling scenes [top], painted Michelangelo style from a scaffold. It is just outside the sanctum, showing Muruga with six faces riding on his peacock. In the middle left photo is a ceiling lotus made of plaster and painted. And below is an elephant on the side of the staircase leading to the inner sanctum.

With loving devotion, Palaniswami told us of the secret ceremony in which he "opened" the eyes of the new image of Muruga. Working with a gold and silver chisel dipped in honey, he completed the iris of the eye. Then Lord Muruga was allowed to see four things in succession: Himself in a mirror, a cow, a young girl and a married couple.

The results of all this effort was rewarded during the dedication ceremonies-the living presence of Lord Muruga could be felt the moment the blessed water of the Khumba was poured upon the statue that sunny, auspicious Friday morning.

1,118 Temple Dedications In 52 Years!

T.C. Thiyagaraja Sivachariar, 72, first conducted the complex rituals of temple dedication at age 25, under the close tutoring of his father, Chandrasekhara Sivachariya. The Fiji event was his 1,118th Mahakumbhabhishekam. Really! He is the chief priest of the Tirukalikundram Temple in Tamil Nadu near Madras, famed for the two eagles which have appeared daily for centuries to receive the temple offerings.

Asked about himself, he told Hinduism Today that he is currently training seven or eight children as priests, though he expects only one or two to take up the profession. In his lifetime he has trained 10 or 15 who have taken to it full time. He explained, "Now people are not interested in being priests, they are interested in office jobs. This is hard to change with the existing generation, but maybe the next will change." "How?" we inquired. "I don't know," he replied with a laugh.

The marathon liturgist performed the ritual in accord with the Kumara Tantra. Though there was a previous temple, it was decided to treat this dedication as that of a brand new temple, rather than the shifting of an existing one. The complex rituals extended over 50 days. The head priest was paid US\$1,300 plus expenses for his services, and the assistant priests \$350 each, plus expenses.

Historically, Hindu priests have never crossed the ocean to go to another country, for fearing of losing caste. Even Swami Vivekananda, a kshatriya, was considered an outcaste for going to Europe and America. Upon his return he was actually denied entry into the temple in which Ramakrishna served. We asked these very orthodox priests why they had ventured outside Bharat. "It is only in Dharma

Shastras," they replied, "not in the Agamas [which are of higher authority]. Further, the prohibition is against sailing and going to meleccha [non-Hindu] countries, not places with large Hindu populations." Thiyagaraj pointed out that one of the traditional 64 kalas, or sacred arts, is flying. Ravana, for example, flew by aerial chariot from India to Sri Lanka in kidnapping Sita, and he was a brahmin. Whatever the reasoning, it is a great blessing to the tens of millions of Hindus who have migrated outside India to have these competent priests travel and perform their sacred services wherever Hindus are found.