

[Swami Premananda](#)

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Lanka's "Little Sai Baba" Moves Ashram to India, Expands Training, Service Programs

The popular Swami Premananda, known as the "Sai Baba of Sri Lanka," has closed his three ashrams and orphanage in Sri Lanka and opened a new 150-acre sanctuary named "Poobalakrishna Ashram" near Trichinopoly in Tamil Nadu, South India. Born November 17th, 1951, in Matale near the tea country of central Sri Lanka and educated at St. Agnes Convent, he was dubbed "Kutti Sai Baba" (small Sai Baba) at the age of 18 by virtue of his thickset curly hair which made him resemble to the famous Satya Sai Baba of India. His fame of performing miracles, curing illness and predicting coming events spread far and wide, gaining him followers not only in Sri Lanka and India but in Thailand, France, Germany, England, America and Australia.

The traditional Sri Lanka Hindu community, who are mostly Saivites, are not particularly impressed with the Swami's "miracles" (which many consider sleight-of-hand), nor with his crowd-pleasing catering to the masses. He is certainly not accepted as a Self-Realized Guru with the stature of Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna or as a religious leader of the Saivite community. The Swami's particular religious affinity is Vaishnavite while his followers cut across Sri Lanka's traditional ethnic boundaries of Tamil and Sinhalese and religious division of Hindus, Buddhists and Christians.

In spite of his popularity with the Buddhists, the Swami was one of the unfortunate victims of the July, 1983, riots when a Sinhalese Buddhist mob attacked and burned to the ground both his Ashram at Matale and his 35 acre meditation centre at Munduna. His ashrams at Puliyankulam and Chunnakam were untouched, however, worsening conditions in the island nation led him to close both by May of this year. A Buddhist has since entered the ruined Matala Ashram and laid a foundation stone for "Vijaya Maha Vihare" but he was compelled to leave the place by government authorities. In the meantime, Prime Minister R. Premadesa of Sri Lanka has reportedly promised Swami Premananda a block of land in Colombo. Our correspondent in Sri Lanka, Mrs. R. Kandasamy, filed this report:

Poorbalakrishna Ashram, built according to ancient Hindu tradition, "following the line of Viswamitra Munivar's Ashram," with ola roofs, is developing fast. Living quarters for Swami's sannyasin disciples are under construction on one section of the land and the rest will be converted into a lovely Vrindawanam, scattered with meditation huts. The religious activities include daily Om Karam, meditation, Krishna puja and Nagarasankirtan, Saturday bhajans, interviews and religious discourses, full-moon day special abishekam, trance interviews and religious discourses. Classical music, religious plays, Bharata Natyam, kumnu, kolattam and speech on religious topics are held for religious celebrations. Social activities include maintaining an orphanage, elder's get-together monthly and serving the necessities of poor villagers around.

Membership of the Sangam is limited to unmarried girls and boys who should live as sisters and brothers. Swami does the over-all supervision of Ashram work. "What the Ashram offers me is a challenge to Western comforts. Material effects do not count much, and humility is felt slowly," remarks 29-year old Lou Maxwell, daughter of Justice A.V. Maxwell of Sydney, Australia.

The Sannyasins observe celibacy, humility, obedience to guru, renunciation, vegetarianism and non-involvement in politics and do selfless service. They are given major responsibilities in Ashram activities. The male sannyasin is addressed as "Swami" and the female, "Mataji." They mingle freely but keep a dignified distance, according to Hindu custom.

There are 3 levels of future activities in Swami's plan for the spiritual development of man, starting with the have-nots and exploited families of society for whom the basic needs of life - food, clothing, shelter, education and health facilities and employment are found. These would help them to have equal status with the others in society. Those who have these will be introduced into spiritual awareness. From here, they will be guided along the path to self-realization. The ashram will be the unit of expansion from where these activities will be extended to neighboring villages, towns, country-wide and throughout the world.

There are devotees who regard Swami Premananda as an Avatar of Lord Krishna. They say that they see Krishna characteristics in him, his complexion gives a tinge of blue at times, he shouts "Krishna" at the end of a trance, Krishna puja is a daily feature in his Ashram activities, and his practical jokes and teasings remind them of "Krishna Leelai" (play of Krishna). "I am a messenger of God. I have come to take

Man along the Bhakti Path for self-realization," states Swami.

In India, people call him "Ceylon Swami." In Sri Lanka, he is "Ravi Swami" or "Matale Swami." But in his home town, he is "Sai Baba." This may be because he started with Sai bhajans as a schoolboy, carried Sai Baba pictures and books and performed miracles just like Sai Baba. He could keep himself in one place and appear in other places, effect change in weather or cure incurable diseases. Swami says that by performing these "miracles" or "siddhis" or "wonders" he could "elevate man to a higher (spiritual) level. The blood that is flowing through the veins of this hand is highly energized with the Holy Power to perform any task...but I do not use such Divine Powers for wrong purposes."

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