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Ganesha in the Hospital?

Swami Lingaya Pasupati, a 49-year-old, multi-lingual sannyasin, wheelchair-bound with multiple sclerosis, is making a mark in Western New York. In this conservative, almost provincial, corner of the United States, swami Pasupati has dedicated his life to the ethical treatment of animals and the service of 500 local Hindu families. Recently, he accepted a position as the Hindu Chaplain for the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB) where he founded the Saivite Hindu Campus Ministry, an organizational member of the inter-faith Campus Ministries Association.

One of the swami's 1990 spring semester campus projects is to place Hindu sacred symbols in the inter-faith chapels of the eight large hospitals affiliated with UB. Since the hospital chapels are nonsectarian, they are available for use by followers of all faiths. Yet, they have been completely devoid of Hindu representation.

On January 25th, Swami Pasupati presented the first such religious symbol, a picture of Lord Ganesha, to Children's Hospital of Buffalo with the cooperation of Rev. Father Franklin Tuchols, a Roman Catholic priest in charge of the hospital's chaplaincy. Since then, additional Hindu pictures and objects have been gifted to other UB hospitals.

So far, swami has only been refused once. On this occasion the voice of rejection came allegedly laced with protest from the Roman Catholic priest in charge of the chaplaincy at Veteran's Administration Medical Center. Swami Pasupati asserts that Rev. Kozlowski called him vile names and denigrated Hinduism in gutter language, although Rev. Kozlowski denied this charge when questioned about it by HINDUISM TODAY. In the end the swami received great public support and sympathy in reaction to the avowed denunciation. This eventually brought about the hospital's acceptance of the religious gift.

As an outspoken defendant of Hinduism, Swami Pasupati is no stranger to opposition. Following a recent skirmish with detractors, he cheerily shared his positive mystical attitude with some students: "Lord Ganesha provides us with these little obstacles to allow a greater good to take place. We must now show our strength and determination in a nonviolent manner. Always remember that the most fragrant flowers are nourished by manure. Without little obstacles to conquer now and then, we cannot grow strong and become better human beings."

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