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Three-hundred and sixty-five days a year the multi-faith community of Skanda Vale resounds with the choral sound of "Om Shakti, Brahma Shakti, Vishnu Shakti, Siva Shakti, Om." Its popular spiritual leader Guru Subramaniam (62), was born in the central Sri Lanka tea country to a Singhalese Buddhist father and a Tamil Hindu mother. His mother, Asarappa, was a well-known spiritual light in her own right. She was a renowned seer and had an unusual ability to annual evil spells. Sri Lanka's ambassador to England built a temple for her in Colombo where she would meet frequently with devotees. It was an unusual eight-sided structure with symbols of the world's major religions on each wall. Mother would face toward the particular religion's wall during its holy days.

Subramaniam - a name he gave himself at the age of seven-attributes his religious nature partly to his mother. But, according to his chief disciple, 37-year-old Swami Shanmukhananda, "His main teaching came from Lord Krishna. He remembers quite clearly playing as a child [in a previous birth] all those centuries ago with the baby Krishna."

Guruji does not consider himself exclusively a Hindu. He told HINDUISM TODAY that he "follows Sanatana Dharma and would pursue it no matter which religion it could be found in." If a Christian comes to him, he will talk about the teachings of Christ as given by Christ himself. If a Muslim comes, he'll speak of the Prophet and what he taught, and if a Jew comes, he will speak from the Torah, which he knows well.

Skanda Vale is a multi-faith community that began as a temple in London 35 years

ago. Drawing inspiration from the world's major religions, the temple became known as "The Community of the Many Names of God." In the early 70's, they moved to rural Wales, where mystical Druid priests still hold their ancient ceremonies in the countryside. Wales is a division of the United Kingdom, adjacent to England on the west, comprising 8,000 square miles with a population of 2.8 million. Like the Irish, the Welsh are descendants of the original Celtic inhabitants of the Isles.

The temple was established there as a monastic order and registered charity serving a large multi-faith congregation from all over Britain. Puja is conducted four times a day, with a full program of religious festivals throughout the year. A mammoth Ganesha festival is planned between May 25th and June 9th; thousands of devotees are expected. For two weeks prior to the Guru Purnima celebration on July 7th, Siva puja will be conducted with the continuous bathing of the Sivalingam with milk. For those visiting the monastery either for the day or for longer, food and accommodation in chalets are provided free of charge. Most of the participants are Britishers of European origin.

Worship focused for years on Lord Muruga, (Kartikkeya). Recently the Divine Mother in the form of Kali was given to the temple, and Her worship has produced trances and other spontaneous religious experience in the devotees, according to Swami Shanmukhananda.

When not in prayer or serving the public, the eight monks (of English, Australian and Polish origin) and the two nuns (both Swiss) spend a good part of their day in agricultural labor around the hundred-acre farm, growing crops and tending to the needs of Jersey cattle, goats, ponies and a saddleback pig named Eloise. In the woods around the temple, one can find deer, a family of llamas and a young elephant called Valli. She was a rare gift from President Jayawardene of Sri Lanka presented in recognition of the ashram's good service.

In the conservatory of the temple, there is a sapling of the banyan tree under which Lord Buddha attained Nirvana. The original tree was in Gaya, Bihar, India, whence the saplings were taken to Sri Lanka and now one of them has been brought to Wales.

The local villagers remain a bit puzzled at the religious side of their work, says Swami Shanmukhananda, but they relate very easily to the monastery's large farming enterprise. Consequently, there have never been any community public relations problems.

His Way of Teaching

Guru Subramaniam assists sincere seekers through a shakti he gives with his thumb, placed on the third eye. He then encourages whatever experience the individual had as a result of that and allows him to develop in his own personal way. He does not initiate followers into Hinduism. His basic message is that we should make an effort to change out self-centered ways: "Effort is always crowned with success and inner satisfaction."

Asked if he ever felt there was justification for Hindus to use violence in religious matters, he said quite categorically, "Never."

The environment is a major interest of Skanda Vale. Subramaniam explains that in following Sanatana Dharma he recognizes the existence of consciousness in every life form and treats it all as a precious manifestation of divinity. He is "very keen on protection of the environment."

Pilgrimages to Sri Lanka have often been organized by the temple, and Guruji made plans a few years ago to build an orphanage there. Those plans were shelved due to Lanka's civil war, but to Lanka's civil war, but he intends to revive them when peace returns. He told HINDUISM TODAY that he feels a tremendous paternal sense towards the island and would like to give back something to his roots where he was born. A complete biography of Guruji is being written at the moment, which promises to have many startling revelations.

The Hospice Project

One of the most remarkable projects at Skanda Vale is the planned hospice, a kind of home-like clinic where people with terminal illnesses may die peacefully. The Vale Hospice project was formulated in 1987 in recognition of the urgent need for proper facilities, continuous care and compassion for the very ill in Wales.

According to the Guruji, "Due to ever increasing demands upon the financial resources available to our hospitals, it has fallen upon fewer members of the nursing staff to cope with the growing number of incurable cases.

"Most people who are terminally ill would prefer to be looked after at home. Where this is not possible, the friendly atmosphere of a hospice - with qualified medical staff working alongside a team of dedicated and competent care givers - would provide the answer."

Nine acres of gently undulating land surrounded by trees ten miles from Carmarthen have been allocated. Over the next five years, members have set the target of providing a "hospice in the home" service as well as beginning a daycare center. The daycare facility will expand to incorporate an in - patient unit for the very sick during the final phase of life.

A sum of US \$1.6 million is required to meet the initial building costs. A major fund - raising campaign has started in Britain and Europe.

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