Radha Comes To America
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Texas Temple to Enshrine Her as Supreme Deity

On the auspicious full-moon day of Sharad Purnima (October 11th) H.D. Swami Prakashanand Saraswati, founder of the International Society of Divine Love, placed a unique temple's first stone. The Shree Raseshwari temple in Austin, Texas, will be the first temple in the West and only the third in the world in which Radha - Lord Krishna's consort - is worshipped as the supreme form of the Divine. After a traditional Vedic bhoomi puja and havan. six-hundred-fifty guests prayed together as Swamiji poured into the foundation holy water from India's sacred rivers and lakes, and the holy dust of Vrindaban and Barsana (Radha's birthplace). A seven-foot tall, white marble image of Radha Rani, consort of Lord Krishna, will eventually grace the sanctum sanctorum.

The temple's uniqueness lies in the separation of Radha from Krishna and Her elevation to the "sole and exclusive Personality of the Divine" according to the tradition of Braj. Swami Prakashanand explained, "People know about Krishna and Radha, but very few know the actual form and personality and the greatness of Radha and Krishna. This temple will serve as a guiding light, a center, a nucleus of divine energy in the United States." The particular day chosen for the ceremony, Swami added, was an especially magical time of year at the temple site, which was sacred to the American Indians.

Four Hindu spiritual leaders blessed the occasion: Swami Vishva Hiteshiji Maharaj of Vishva Seva Ashram, New York, Pandit Ramesh Tiwari of the Edinburgh Dharmic Sabha, Trinidad, Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji) of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh and Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, spiritual head of Saiva Siddhanta Church and publisher of HINDUISM TODAY. This remarkable collection of spiritual souls heartily endorsed the new temple. They also created an impromptu mini-summit to discuss various important issues [see sidebar below].

Swami chose the Texas site because it reminded him so strongly of Barsana in India, where Radha was born. It is truly an unusual place. Once held as hallowed by the American Indians, certain areas retain a palpable spiritual power from their ancient rites. Nature also has given her blessings. For example, every spring the 200-acre temple property is carpeted with millions of wild flowers. Nature too occasionally reveals some of her more destructive sides in this area - a recent tornado (whirlwind) completely demolished a large barn, scattering its constituent parts across several acres.

The Austin center has experienced considerable opposition from local residents of this conservative part of America. They are concerned because both single men and women live at the property (there are also five families). This public relations challenge has yet to be solved.

Swami plans to build a 30,000 square foot temple/ashram building with a temple hall seating 1,400, a conference room, 2 dormitories accommodating 100 people and a 40 by 100 foot temple tank. Future buildings include a community hall and kitchen, children's camp, classrooms and meditation pavilions. A secluded shrine is planned for Lord Siva at the most powerful spiritual point on the land, a large rock by a stream which was probably the focus of the American Indian worship.

A truly outstanding performance of bharata natyam by Anuradha Naimpalli of Austin highlighted the cultural program which ended the day. Guests also enjoyed tours of the immaculately kept grounds. All complimented the volunteers on their gracious hospitality.

Shree Swamiji has personally trained five of his devotees - all women - and initiated them into the order of Vaishnav Sannyas to spread his teachings. Barsana Dhan and the Radha Temple is also intended to be the spiritual powerhouse of this movement. He has fourteen ashrams and centers: nine in the United States, two in India and one each in Canada, New Zealand and Ireland.

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