

[Spirit of Pilgrimage Awakening in West](#)

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Beginning with Ganesha Temple in N.Y., Sanctuaries Are Burgeoning

The spirit of Tirta Yatri has begun its long journey through time in the New Saivite World most auspiciously. Tirta Yatri is the age-old tradition of pilgrimage so widely experienced in the East and almost non-existent in the West - at least in the New World. The culture of the West is so young that it is not too surprising that holy places have not proliferated, but it is perhaps surprising that none at all have evolved. There is Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome and other places of spiritual importance in the old countries. Of course, in India and Sri Lanka there are literally thousands of destinations for the pilgrim of the spirit. There are the Brobdinagian temple complexes which sprawl without apparent end across the low plains of India, the modest ashrams where saints lived their exemplary lives in ancient and contemporary times, the endless array of shrines and, rarely but worth the patient wait, the holy man himself immersed in the holiness all men eventually search out. In India the possibilities for pilgrimage are indeed endless and one can very easily (as many sincere seekers do) spend a lifetime in peripatetic worship and meditation.

Of course, not all are fortunate enough to experience the treasure-house of Indian culture. But there is hope dawning. In recent years the first Hindu temples have begun to grace the skylines of the cities of North America. The first to be completed, to our knowledge, was the Hindu Temple in Flushing, New York, That Lord Ganesha inaugurated this new direction for Western Hindus gives us strong assurance that it will proceed uninhibited by obstacles.

Other temples have begun as well. Some are in the planning stages while a few have broken ground for construction. There is a temple in Pittsburgh for Lord Vishnu and another planned for Malibu, California thirty miles north of Los Angeles. In Houston a temple is being erected for Sri Meenakshi, a Shakti temple. Swami Satchidananda is building his long-dream-of LOTUS Temple in Connecticut - Light of Truth Universal Shrine. This shrine will be built around an eternal light and provide niches for all the major world's religions. A Muruga temple is being erected in London, England and we have seen the Ganesha Deity that was carved for a shrine

in Frankfurt, Germany. There are more, many of them being built by small groups for the exclusive use of members much like our own Kadavul Hindu Siva Nataraja Temple on Kauai.

As the next decade unfolds, we may expect this trend to continue. If that happens then our children and our children's children will be able to pilgrimage throughout the New Saivite World as their Hindu forebearers have done for so many millenia. The Saiva Siddhanta Church is intently aware of the need for these refuges of the spirit, these houses of the Gods, and is continually encouraging all such efforts. Most of our encouragement has gone directly to the Hindu Temple in Flushing for several reasons. First of all, it was the first public Hindu temple to be completed in America in the traditional manner. Secondly, the main Deity is Lord Ganesha, the most unifying principle in Hinduism, the one God whom all Hindus worship regardless of sectarian belief. For these reasons, and even more essentially because the temple provided an element of the Sanatana Dharma heretofore not indigenously available. When Gurudev heard of the completion of the Flushing temple, he moved swiftly to purchase the two-story Indiashram building located across the street, thus providing a place where Church members could stay during their pilgrimages and reducing the exorbitant costs involved with hotels and restaurant meals. Then in August the house next door came up for sale and the Church purchased it for use as the Tiruvadi Ganesh Monastery where monastics now live and perform sadhana and care for guests to Indiashram. So many wonderful things have happened in connection with the Flushing Temple.

The temple itself is primarily a Ganesha Temple, with four shrines for Lord Shiva, Lord Shanmuga, Lord Vishnu and Goddess Laxmi. Church members who pilgrimage to New York go there primarily to worship Ganesha. They are able to stay at Indiashram, cook their own meals and enjoy access to the pujas, abhishekams and cultural events held in the temple Cultural Hall. Perhaps one of the most enchanting experiences for all who have come is the exposure to Indian culture which was only possible before through journeying to India itself. The various music and dance concerts, the spiritual discourses, Indian marriage Samskaras have all been a rich boon for us.

Indiashram became ours around July 15th, 1978. On July 20th Gurudev moved in to bless the building during the Guru Poornima days that were celebrated at that time. Within a few days the Tiruvadi Ganesha Monastery was founded though it would be a month or two before we would actually own the property. August saw the first pilgrims to journey to Ganesha's Feet. Janaka and Bhavani Param and their two sons, Kumar and Jothi, spent a full week there. It was to have been only 3

days, but the experience proved so rewarding that it was extended. Little Kumar warmed the hearts of all temple goers who saw his sincere and concentrated worship. Only five years old, Kumar was already setting the example for others, prostrating with a mature sincerity seldom even seen in adult devotees. In particular at one long puja Kumar was inspiring. The puja was conducted by one of the more orthodox Brahmin pujaris and lasted a full three hours. It is the habit of devotees to not remain fully concentrated on the puja during the entire evening, but to talk quietly among themselves and attend each shrine as the camphor flame is passed during the high point. Kumar would have none of that! He stayed with the pujari through each of the five half hour pujas as the long chants of the Lord's names were recited in Sanskrit. Very gradually those in the sanctum began to notice this child in rapt devotion. After a while a few joined Kumar. Then more and more. Finally, all present in the temple were worshipping together. The Brahmin was amazed. As he came out of the sanctum during the final puja he spoke to Kumar, "I like you. I like you very much." We all felt blessed by little Kumar's example of discipline in worship and will always remember the "long puja" spent with him at Ganesha's feet.

In August the Param family was followed by the Nallurans, Muni, Sivakumar and their two children, Muruga and Kali. Deva Rajan was the next pilgrim to stay at Indiashram followed by Dr. Sanmugasundaran who spent two weeks there on the final leg of his three-month journey across America and through Canada. September brought Daya Ganesha and the newly married Satya and Vasuki Sivam to Flushing. Soma Sunderan and son Surya came next for a few days in October along with Kanda and Isan Alan. The Katir family from San Francisco pilgrimage from one Ganesha temple to another in November. Their daughter Amala had a dream during her stay in which Ganesha came to her and asked if she wanted to come into the Second World. "Yes," replied Amala and off they flew!

In December another newly married couple, Murthi and Shama Vinayaga, arrived by train from the province of Alberta, Canada, seeking Ganesha's grace to bless their life together. Each performed 108 prostrations in the temple before continuing their journey to Murthi's father's home and then on to Sivashram for their Namakarana Samskara. In January of 1979 Jothi and Ramya Kumara, Sitara Nadesan and Gayatri Ananda Devi came.

Each pilgrim to the Ganesha Temple, as we call it, participates in a personal archanai in which the specific guidance or blessings of Lord Ganesha are sought in special puja for a particular event or problem in life. A fine pattern has been established and it is a joy for all to see the trays of offerings, fruits, flowers,

coconut, camphor, vibuthi, etc, going to the temple on those special days.

So tirta yatri is flourishing in the New Saivite World. Admittedly the scale is small when set beside the immensity of the Indian experience, but it is a solid and promising beginning. Indiashram is serving its purpose, largely due to the very generous contributions received in 1978 and to the continuing support that each pilgrim offers so that the facilities may be maintained properly. The land and building are 50% paid for and other improvements are proceeding. Nearly 100 rose bushes have been planted to provide beautiful offerings for the temple. We look forward to their blossoming in the spring. and as they bloom so does the spirit of pilgrimage in North America. Jai Ganesha!

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