

[Saiva Community Works and Worships Around S.F. Ganesha Shrine](#)

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## Saiva Community Works and Worships Around S.F. Ganesha Shrine

The San Francisco Mission of the Saiva Siddhanta Church, known as the San Francisco Ganesha Shrine, was founded twenty years ago at 3575 Sacramento Street in the Laurel Heights district not far from Presidio Park. For many years the Ganesha Shrine was filled - and over-filled for it only holds about a hundred devotees - every week for Gurudeva's inspired talks or upadesa. Hatha yoga classes were held on Wednesdays and Master Course classes on Fridays. Innersearch pilgrimages were arranged from its offices, and Holy Week activities brought intense days of bhajan, puja, fasting, and karma yoga. For eleven years there was them monthly Guru Puja, held in the early hours before dawn, followed by a pilgrimage to the top of Mount Tamalpais - and for those eleven years Gurudeva missed not a single one. In 1969 Saiva Siddhanta Church purchased a second property nearby which was destined to become for many years the residence monastery for the staff that cared for the Guru Temple as well as monastics serving in the Silent Ministry waiting training. In March of 1973 a third property was purchased, consisting of an apartment building with four large units and a special two-story home built in the quaint San Francisco style and now called Ganesha Ashram, one of the very few to survive the 1906 earthquake that decimated most of the City. These three properties are all interconnected by a common garden.

In recent years, especially since 1970 when the Church moved its headquarters to the island of Kauai, activities at the San Francisco Mission have shifted away from classes, Silent Ministry and administrative matters. Today the full emphasis is on the Ganesha pujas held daily and on the families who live in the Bay Area. The apartment building has become the San Francisco Monastery, and the second property is now the Saiva Siddhanta College, with the Tirumular Hall upstairs used for special cultural event and discourses and the Saint Auvaiyar Day Care Center downstairs for the children. Gurudeva still uses the Ganesha Ashram as his quarters when he is in San Francisco.

Ganesha puja is held daily at noon and six in the evening for members of the

Church. On Sundays and Wednesdays it is open to the public and to Himalayan Academy students. Pujas at the Ganesha Shrine are conducted in the South Indian tradition, and attendance is generally highest on Fridays for that is the Hindu Holy Day.

It is the children who are most inspiring at the pujas. This is the first generation of Hindu children to be raised in the United States that could enjoy the benefit of the Hindu temple. Heretofore Hindus in America had their own home shrines, but there were no public temples. In fact, this very essential part of Hinduism is only now finding its way to the United States, with temples being built in New York, Pittsburgh, Houston, Los Angeles and other cities. Until recently Hinduism in America meant the high advaitic principles of Vedanta or the individual disciplines of yoga and meditation, but finally the rich storehouse of devotion to God Siva, of singing His praises and worshipping at His sanctified shrines, has been introduced to the West and with it comes a full understanding of this oldest religion on the earth. Of course, it must be mentioned that the Ganesha Shrine in San Francisco is not a full-scale Hindu Temple. It is a shrine, primarily serving members of the Saiva Siddhanta Church and immigrant Hindus from India and Sri Lanka.

The pujari at the Ganesha Shrine speaks of the experiences of the children, who come to worship Lord Ganapati, Remover of Obstacles, Lord of Categories and Patron of the Arts and Sciences: "It is a joyous experience to hear a scraping sound and to turn and see a one-year old dragging a meditation wedge across the carpet, or to look up another time to see another little one hanging on the altar railing with both hands, staring with those big, open eyes. There are others, not much older, who come forward for the sacraments and look up with wonder as if to ask, 'Did I do it right?' They are so open, so innocent. They are our reason for being here and serving the Lord. And they are Ganesha's blessing to us, allowing us to see the future now...They receive the prasadam from the puja, not knowing sometimes what to eat and what to apply to their little foreheads. But they are learning, and then teaching others. They all seem to enjoy receiving the sacraments, smiling from ear to ear.'

At Gurudeva's behest many families have moved either to the Bay Area where they can attend the Ganesha Shrine or to New York where they can attend the Ganesha Temple recently built in Flushing. It is important, Master feels, for the families to live near a temple, attend the pujas and participate in the cultural events of the Hindu community.

The families living near the San Francisco Ganesha Shrine have contributed generously in recent months, both in their time and skills and in special and much-appreciated gifts. Manu Yogendra has spent uncounted hours in the temple garden, bringing spring's beauty for all to enjoy. Manu has also built a fine cage to house our new peacock, Muruga, and peahen, Moyil - both a gift from the Yogendra family. Now they are working on the archway that leads from the Saiva Siddhanta College into the Ganesha Courtyard. Manu has now painted the arch and his wife, Asita, is painting the deities which will adorn it - Siva, Muruga and Ganesha.

Deva Katir has been working very hard completing construction projects in the shrine and making essential repairs. Deva Seyon and Deva Rajan have given eagerly of their very professional construction skills in various projects around the Ganesha Shrine. Recently the main entrance to the shrine was repaired by Deva Katir and then painted by Nathan Palani. Other projects recently completed include the building of a new wall behind the Guru Altar, some plumbing tasks, the making of a clock and the construction of a wooden holder for the daily puja schedule. Now several of the family men, including Jothi Kumara, are at work in their Sivathondu erecting a wall for the Saint Auvaiyar Day Care Center in the College building.

Last year, the San Francisco Ganesha Shrine was overjoyed to receive as a gift from the Ganesha Temple in New York an exquisitely designed and gold-plated Makarathoranam to place arched over the Ganesha Deity in the Sanctum Sanctorum. The Makarathoranam came from India where it was made by temple craftsmen generations old in their art.

On Monday, April 9th, Master Subramuniya held Satsang in the Ganesha Shrine enroute to New York, London, Jerusalem, Madras and Colombo. He spoke of the importance of bringing Hinduism "down to earth," of talking about Hinduism to our friends, family and associates so they will understand our faith, as complex and sometimes perplexing as it can seem at first due to its immensity and antiquity. Much of Master's thoughts that day were directed to the difficulties recently being faced in Pleasanton where a permit for construction of a Hindu temple has recently been rescinded. Mr. Muthuraman Iyer, who is the chairman of the Hindu Community and Cultural Center which seeks to build the temple on a small lake in the Bay Area City, was present for Gurudeva's satsang. He and other heard Gurudeva speak of the importance of educating the American people, overcoming misunderstandings, "It is essential that the spiritual leaders within the Hindu religion meet and speak with the priests and ministers of the various Western faiths. There should be a clear understanding at that level, then the congregations will come into tolerance and comprehension. All religions have their problems. The

Catholics, the Protestants, the Jews and the Hindus all have problems, and we can share those problems. Each of these other religions has immigrated to America. Hinduism is the last religion to immigrate. The problem it faces were faced by all previous religions and must be faced by us as well. It is a natural process. Soon our Hindu temples will stand beside the great cathedrals, synagogues, churches and mosques."