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Category : [July 1980](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 1980

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Massive Granite Nandi Revered and Acclaimed on Journey Through South India

In the continuing saga of Nandi Keswarin, reports have reached the West from the Indian subcontinent that the massive granite bull carved for the Kadavul Hindu Temple on Kauai will sail past the Golden Gate Bridge and into the Port of Oakland in the next few weeks after a long voyage from Cochin in South India. Shortly thereafter the largest Nandi to be carved from solid granite in this century will be departing from Oakland, bound for the Hawaiian Islands where he will be installed permanently.

At Cochin a large crowd waited patiently for hours to watch him loaded onto the special container and then aboard the S.S. President Eisenhower. Stories and photos of the event appeared in many daily newspapers throughout South India, (notably the Indian Express, The Hindu, Kannada Prabha and Dinamani) adding to a great deal of press coverage for Nandi from previous weeks.

Nandi was to be shipped from Madras, but the Madras port could not handle his staggering bulk. Therefore, the shipment had to be from Cochin port, in Kerala state, on the opposite coast of the South Indian peninsula, a distance of several hundred miles. Further obstacles arose from his Brobdignagian presence, for Nandi is too large to load into a conventional freight container for shipping. To solve the problem, an open container had been brought from Singapore by the shipping firm, Binny & Company, to Cochin.

A special truck was prepared at Mahabalipuram in the week before June, 1st, fitted with entirely new wheels and suspension springs to bear Nandi's weight over the narrow mountain roads to Cochin. The loading got under way on June 1st and was completed after 36 hours, a task accomplished painstakingly as the stone was inched onto the truck entirely by hand and levers, about twenty men working at a time, as there are no cranes or lifts at the Tamil Nadu Handicrafts workyards. Once

on the trailer, the Nandi was oiled for the first time and special pujas were celebrated to bless his completion and departure. Traditional gifts were presented to honor Neelameham Staphathi, the master craftsman who oversaw the creation of Nandi. The truck left Mahabalipuram loaded with garlands, coconuts, fruits and flowers and at every village along the way these were added to. Nandi was surrounded at each stop by exuberant villagers who showered their devotion on the itinerant bull of Lord Siva by bringing baskets of flowers, burning incense, singing hymns of praise, offering puja and escorting Nandi in festival procession through their town. The villagers would sprinkle water on the road in front of the truck as it passed through their town, as is done when the great temple chariots are brought out at festivals. The route took him through Pollachi, Trichur and Ernakulam and finally to the dock at Cochin, where he arrived on the 5th. With such a load the truck only cover a hundred miles or so a day.

The ten-ton Nandi is five feet wide, six feet tall and nine feet long; it rests on a base of huge granite blocks weighing another ten tons. When installed on the base, called the peedam, Nandi will tower almost eleven feet from the ground. The monolithic sculpture of Lord Siva's vehicle, or vahana, is carved entirely from one piece of solid granite and represents two years of work by Neelameham Staphathi. He considers Nandi one of the two finest creations of his lifetime. A Staphathi is the temple craftsman who learned the trade from his father and is in charge of the building of temples and the creation of the Deities which go in them. He is regarded by Hindus as more of a Deva or angel, who lives in our world as a tool for the Gods to craft their images than as simply a skilled man.

Nandi means "joyful or compassionate one." As Nandikesvaran, the particular name of our Nandi, he is the "Lord of Gladness." Traditionally associated with justice, virtue and the qualities of the strong, He is said to represent Dharma, that is, the righteous path which controls the instinctive mind.

Once in Oakland, Nandi's voyage to Kauai will take about two weeks. Preparations are well under way now to receive him. Following the basic agamic (traditional rules for South Indian Temples) dimensions and location for construction prescribed by Neelameham Staphathi for the mandapam, or open pavillion, to house Nandi, a local draftsman and architect produced plans this week to submit to the Building Department for permits. The architect required a foundation for Nandi' of reinforced concrete two feet deep throughout. These plans are now in hand and work on the Mandapam should proceed directly.

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