

[Odyssey Pilgrimage Links Saivites of East and West](#)

Category : [August 1982](#)

Published by Anonymous on Aug. 02, 1982

Odyssey Pilgrimage Links Saivites of East and West

The five-week pilgrimage of thirty-eight Western Saivites and their Sat Guru, Sivaya Subramuniaswami, began on January 6, 1982, in Honolulu, Hawaii, where they had gathered from their homes in Canada and across the United States, including New York, Chicago, Houston, Denver, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Their 35 days in Saivism's Holy Land came to an end when the last group of pilgrims touched down at the Honolulu International Airport the morning of February 10th. For three days in India and a couple of days in air-travel time the 1982 India Odyssey proved to be a profound personal Sadhana as well as a bridge uniting the devotees of God Shiva in the East and the West.

During their sojourn in the three countries, the pilgrims worshipped in over 50 individual temples and participated in some 100 receptions held for His Holiness Sivaya Subramuniaswami. It was a thirthayatrai, complete with customary austerities of travel and accommodation, individual worship and meditation, fresh insights into different cultures in new lands, philosophical discussion and the intimate confrontation of man with God. According to the staff which coordinated the journey, personal worship and inner transformation were the intended purpose of the 1982 India Odyssey and nothing more was needed for its success. However, much more happened which enriched the travels of the pilgrims - and sometimes overwhelmed them as well, for they were not prepared for the boundless generosity of their hosts. Receptions and welcoming ceremonies were arranged, elaborate special pujas were conducted and Sivaya Subramuniaswami was often called upon spontaneously to address large gatherings of Saivites. As one pilgrim described it, "In all, close to a third of a million Southwest Asian Saivites exchanged thoughts and shared a mutual devotion to the Saiva samayam with their Western brothers and sisters. Each of us Western Saivites was deeply impressed with the vigor of Saivism in each of the countries visited and overwhelmed with the love and selfless care shown to us throughout. We returned home to Canada and America with renewed inner and outer commitments and many new friends."

Departing Honolulu the morning of January 6th one day after Sri Sivaya Subramuniaswami's jayanthi, the Odyssey pilgrimage began. Each and every day

brought the "Innersearchers" face to face with the empowered murthis of Saivism's palace of the Gods-the temples, both ancient and contemporary, mammoth and diminutive. On many days several, even up to 7 one day, temples were visited. A few of the pilgrims commented that even though their remembrance of the physical features of each temple may be blurred, the shakti, the inter radiance they felt, remains securely in their minds.

After crossing some 10,000 miles of the earth's surface a 747 jet to reach Malaysia, the pilgrims quickly settled into what would be their regimen for the following 5 weeks - rising early, bathing, performing a morning sadhana, studying, participating in the day's temple worship, having supdesha with Gurudeva, meeting fellow, Saivites, enjoying Tamil cuisine in the traditional fashion and above all observing and absorbing the subtle nuances of the Saiva Dharma. As expected, it was a pilgrim's life - uncluttered, religious and infinitely reading. Making up the pilgrimage group were eleven monks from the Church, including five Saiva Swamis, who served as the coordinating staff of the journey; two families, including a baby (Isan Selvan) whose first birthday fell on Thai Pongal, and a number of Church members, all of whom are devout practicing Saivites in the West. More than half of the group were returning as old friends, having visited Sri Lanka and India before; the others were anticipating the introduction to Saivism's fountainhead.

Mirroring the '81 India Odyssey, this year's pilgrimage did not confine itself to worshipping in Saivism's temples alone. The journey also served as a two-way street for interaction between the Western & Eastern Saivites. Whether through formal addresses given by Sivaya Subramuniaswami to large gatherings, or informal discussion groups held by him, or casual conversations, exchanges of addresses between two Saivites from different hemispheres, a tremendous interchange of insight and knowledge occurred. Sandwiched into every other day's schedule were several hours of religious music, dance & drama performances. The Western pilgrims took home as much Saiva culture as they could absorb and contain. Eastern Saivites were rejuvenated, encouraged, and emboldened to take a hard look at the problems facing the Saivite religion. Taken along on the pilgrimage was 250,000 pieces of free literature freshly printed for the purpose by the Saiva Swamis at Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii. It weighed over a thousand pounds.

Of uppermost importance were Sivaya Subramuniaswami's inspired talks. When invited to speak, he boldly addressed the profound philosophical and metaphysical truths and the most pressing problems facing Saivism today. "In America the technological age is flourishing, but people are still religious. Here (Sri Lanka and India) there is some misconception that in order to progress, in order to move into

the age of technology, we have to abandon our religion, give up our culture. This is a false concept. Religion does not conflict with technology, but enhances it, gives it balance and purpose...our religious teachers are beginning to teach the fact that Saivism is the one religion on the planet best suited to this great age, which agrees most closely with the most advanced postulations of modern science, yet, it itself is even more advanced. "Addressing an assembly in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Gurudeva thus accurately pinpointed a major area of concern for contemporary Saivites the world over. Along with detailing very real problems, concrete solutions were offered. Speaking at receptions in Saivism's most venerated temples, in Sabha assembly halls and at village podiums throughout Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India, Sivaya Subramuniaswami stirred his fellow Saivites into action with such strength that crowds were moved to rousing applause. Newspaper coverage of the tour was extensive and in Southern India a taped radio program of Gurudeva's talks was broadcast on All India Radio.

The repercussions of last year's pilgrimage are still resounding throughout Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India prompting at least as many receptions for the Western Saivite Sat Guru and pilgrims as were arranged last year. Literally hundreds of people worked thousands of hours to arrange and coordinate the often ceremonious and elaborate receptions. As Siva's devotees met and mingled, there arose a mutual respect & admiration, a rekindling of dedication and a fresh awareness of contemporary Saivism. Heartfelt speeches, appreciative welcome addresses, beautifully-wrought plaques and bushels of garlands were given as tokens of love and respect; and to the heart of these receptions was an ineffable recognition of Sivasambhandam, that bond of oneness among world-wide Saivites, and the responsibilities such a bond carries. In the city of Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, alone, some 80,000 people turned out for a two-hour welcome parade down the main street, with joyous citizens showering the pilgrims with baskets of flower petals from the rooftops as they rode by in their rickshaws and horse-drawn carriages. From the temples of downtown Kuala Lumpur, to school assembly halls in Jaffna, to the Aadheenams of south India, these gatherings between Western and Eastern Saivites set new patterns, tilled fresh soil.

The fourth in the Church's history of this kind, the 1982 India Odyssey pilgrimage was a 108% success. Details of the experiences in each country are covered more fully elsewhere in this edition of The New Saivite World. Of course, individual personal enrichment from such a journey can never be measured or fully expressed. But collectively, this Odyssey and last year's have strung another girder on the great arching bridge between East and West.

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.