

[On Pilgrimage to India 1996: Gurudeva's Raja Yoga Yatra](#)

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From among the many experiences of our publisher's 1995-96 ten-week pilgrimage to India, we share with our readers these three highlights--the powerful temple of Mahakaleshwara in Ujjain, the Rama and Siva temples of Jammu and a marvelous meeting with 120 Sivacharya priests at the unique three-story Mumbai Murugan Temple.

Ujjain

There was no question of passing up a last-minute invitation to worship at the famed Jyotir Lingam temple of Mahakaleshwara. Occurring just a few days into the yatra, it remained one of the great highpoints.

By Ashok Kumar Sharma, Ujjain

I had been hearing a lot from many mouths about the spiritual realization and appealing sadhana of the 69-year-old, tall, living master who passionately loves Hindu religion, culture, tradition and holy scriptures. Motivated to be in the boon company of him, I undeservingly invited Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami to visit Ujjain. By fateful chance he came

December 17th and blessed a huge gathering of religionists earnestly waiting for him in the Mahakaleshwar auditorium. It was unfortunate news for us that at the last minute his flight was delayed by six hours and the massive reception at Indore airport and the royal procession with elephant in Ujjain had to be canceled. In spite of his delayed arrival, Swamiji was received at Ujjain with Vedic invocation according to Malwa culture and garlanded by many, many social and religious organizations amidst overflowing enthusiasm of the devotees.

Ujjainists felt as if Lord Siva had appeared when Gurudeva pronounced "Om" at the outset of his discourse. He declared Hindu religion to be a global religion because it conveys universal welfare upon all living beings. It is the Vedasonly which provide adequate religious guidance for one's life. Pilgrimages, temples and scriptures are the substantial lively evidences of God, so have strong faith in Him. Lord Siva gives us power to speak, to see, and to carry out all physical and mental activities in our life. Let us try to recognize Him everywhere, in everyone, because He is ever-pervasive. The grace of Lord Siva is the ultimate goal of human life, so he said.

Ujjain is a world-famous city of age-old temples, a center for spiritual realization, meditation and transcendentalism since time immemorial. Ujjain was the capital of the ideal king Vikramaditya who developed the Vikram Samvat calendar and set the zero degrees of latitude in Indian astronomy to pass through the Ujjain Lingam.

It is almost impossible for me to express in words about the

mighty glories of Mahakaleshwar's Ujjain and the heart-felt pleasures of Gurudeva's graceful visit. I can only chant "Om Nama Sivaya" with you.

Jammu

Gurudeva's visit to Jammu as the guest of Dr. Karan Singh, son of the last Maharaja of Kashmir, was both spiritual and educational. We'll let Dr. Singh recount the visit as well as share some thoughts on Hinduism.

Hinduism Today:What is the significance of this visit for you?

Dr. Karan Singh:It is the culmination of a whole decade's planning and hoping. I first met Gurudeva May 2, 1985, and on many occasions since I have invited him to come here. I am personally delighted that he has. I wanted him to see particularly the first Nataraja temple built in North India [photo right], and also to see our famous temples, Shri Raghunath Temple and Ranbireshwar Temple, two of the most beautiful temples in North India.

HT:What is their history?

Dr. Singh:Both were built by my great-grandfather, Ranhir Singh, who ruled from 1860 to about 1880, the second ruler in this dynasty of Jammu and Kashmir. He was a great scholar and one of the greatest temple builders in Indian history. He created this Raghunath temple complex dedicated to Shri Rama, as we Singhs are descendants of Sri Rama. Rama is our

traditional family deity. Also here are the series of samadhis of our dynasty, these great Siva temples outside the main temple. It is in those that I have built a Nataraja temple known as the Karanishwara temple. A half-kilometer from Raghunath temple is the Ranbireshwar Siva Temple, unique because it has eleven great Siva Lingams outside, one very large one and ten much smaller. Then it has eleven rock crystals formed into Siva Lingams [see photo above]. The Raghunath temple has 125,000 miniature Saligramas, and this Siva temple has 125,000 small Narmada Lingams.

HT:Where were the large Lingams and statues made?

Dr. Singh:They came up from Jaipur. There is a story about the great five-foot-high Sivalingam in Ranbireshwar temple. The Maharaj at the time was in poor health. He was building this temple and was very keen to have it completed before he passed away. Everything else was in position, but this huge Sivalingam could just not be loaded upon the elephant for transport, even though there were hundreds of people tugging and pulling. He had a dream in which Lord Siva appeared to him, and said, "Look, I am not going to go there until you yourself come and lift me." And so the next day, the Maharaja went there, even though he wasn't well. It is said that he just put his shoulder to the Lingam and immediately it lifted into place.

HT:Do you oversee other temples?

Dr. Singh:The Dharmarth Trust, of which I and my two sons are

trustees, administer about 115 temples. The total budget of the trust this year was about a crore of rupees. I also head the trust for Amarnath Cave temple, a few other temples and a Sanskrit school. Our biggest single shrine, which used to give a lot of income, was the Vaishno Devi shrine, but that was taken over by the government about nine years ago.

HT:What are you doing now to enhance the Hindu presence in India and the world?

Dr. Singh:There are three things. I am running these temples here, which is part of my family responsibility and which is our basic dharma to Hinduism. Second, I lecture on Hinduism and represent Hinduism at world conferences of religions. I try to build themes of the Vedanta, especially the Upanishads, into my talks on various levels. They developed when there were not any other religions, as you know, so they are universal in their impact. Third, I am involved in the interfaith movement as chairman of the Temple of Understanding. In those functions I talk not only about Hinduism, but how Hinduism is in some ways the most compatible religion to take part in a interfaith dialogue. I try to bring those universal elements of Hinduism into the interfaith process.

HT:Is the Temple of Understanding growing in India?

Dr. Singh:Yes, I have set up centers in Trivandram, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bombay, Varanasi, Calcutta and Patna. This isn't a very dramatic or well-financed group, each is just a small center. Our guideline is to involve as many religions as

possible that are available in that city. The general philosophy is to preach harmony and understanding, not a synthesis. The interfaith movement is not a new religion, this is very important. Some people are worried, "What is this interfaith? Will we lose our own faith?" That is not it at all. Interfaith movement simply means that instead of being in a confrontational attitude toward each other, the great religions of the world make a deliberate attempt to try to understand the essentials of all religions and to highlight those common elements like compassion, love, harmony, fellowship and brotherhood.

HT:Do you think Hindus have to rediscover some of this transcendent ecumenical thought?

Dr. Singh:Recently there has been an upset with fundamentalism within religions, and Hinduism is not untouched by that. Hinduism is also part of the global civilization now. But I would think that the basic tenets of Hinduism being in some ways universalistic, particularly the Vedanta, would prevent Hindus from becoming narrowly sectarian. There is a difference to being devoted to your own sect and being narrow and hostile towards others. It is an attitudinal thing. Hindus need to rediscover these ideal principles, through a rediscovery of our cultural heritage, our basic texts and also of the experience of living in India--of living in a pluralistic, multireligious society.

Mumbai

Where a spontaneous conference of 120 Sivachariya priests magically happened.

The following is the caption of a photo essay which appears in the July issue of Hinduism Today.

Left: Sivagama Kalanidhi A.V. Viswanatha Sivacharyar (chairman, board of trustees of the world-famous Palani Hills temple in South India) and assembled priests greet Gurudeva at the three-story Murugan temple of Mumbai. This unique recently-built concrete and stone temple has 108 steps leading to its rooftop main sanctum which sits above the choking diesel fumes and deafening noise of the streets below. Right: The temple's founder, A.R. Acharya, had arranged for these 120 traditional Sivacharya priests to come from all over Tamil Nadu for a week of special ceremonies. On the only day Gurudeva could visit, they were having a break from the ceremonies for discussion and to pose for this unique photograph of leading priests. The main topic discussed was the well-being and future of this critically important caste of priests, who face challenges as well as great opportunities in both India and the West.