

[The Marvelous Malaysians](#)

Category : [April/May/June 2002](#)

Published by Anonymous on Apr. 02, 2002

MISSION

The Marvelous Malaysians

From the early 1980s Gurudeva received a warm reception among this nation's Hindus

Yogaswami was known in Malaysia in the 1940s and 50s. About that time, Sri Jeganathaswami, a Malaysian sadhu, told one of his devotees who was going to Sri Lanka to pay homage to Yogaswami. Later, in 1951, Jeganathaswami predicted that an American swami by the name of "Subramaniam" would come to Malaysia to spread Saivism and Hinduism. When Gurudeva first arrived in Malaysia in June, 1980, with two swamis, several people recounted the story of what, until that moment, was regarded as an highly improbable prophecy.

Gurudeva didn't suddenly "take Malaysia by storm." In fact, he never took any place by storm. He sought no self-promotion, but rather worked to support and strengthen local religious leaders and institutions. Malaysia was already beginning to experience an awakening among Hindus brought about in reaction to several negative incidents in the late '70s. Gurudeva

gave form, style and impetus to this awakening as he traveled through the country and visited the major Hindu institutions, such as the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, the Maha Mariamman Temple, the Ceylonese Saivites Association, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Divine Life Society and others, to make friends. Especially drawn to him were those of the Tamil community. Many of Sri Lankan descent, particularly those who knew Yogaswami, made an easy connection.

As a result, the hundreds of Malaysians who turned out for the December 20, 2001, memorial service for Gurudeva held at the Sri Kanthaswamy Temple in Kuala Lumpur were a cross section of the Hindu society. Close devotees, friends, religious and political leaders all came to honor Gurudeva's contribution to Hinduism. "Malaysian Hindus owe Gurudeva a deep debt of gratitude," said Dr. S.M. Ponniah, former president of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, "for helping all Hindus to know themselves and their cultural and religious heritage." As in each country he visited, the whole of society similarly appreciated his inspiring and stabilizing influence.

The situation of Malaysian Hindus, just eight percent of the country, is different than that of Hindus in India. Official government policies favor Islam and the Bumiputra, native Malaysians, over the Indians and

Chinese. One result of this inequity is the turning of Hindus to their religion as a means of self-identity, especially among the youth. Malaysia was the first place in the world, for example, that Gurudeva ever met a youth group attached to a temple. This fine group of young men all wore jackets with "Siddhi Vinayaga Temple" on the back and assisted with the temple's management and care. Likewise from 1981, when Gurudeva came through Malaysia on a travel-study program with 33 devotees, he received an enthusiastic reception from the younger generation and counted it a good sign.

An incident at this time deeply impacted those that learned of it. Gurudeva was quite fond of the Ulu Behrang Ganesha Temple in Tanjong Malim, Perak. During one visit, according to Gurudeva, Lord Ganesha Himself appeared and blessed him at this temple. Gurudeva's respect for temples and this vision in particular was a very encouraging and faith-building sign for many.

Over the next few years, Hindus attracted to Subramuniaswami's teachings started classes in Hinduism, held after hours at public schools. These popular classes and the widespread distribution of Hinduism Today magazine had a huge impact on Hindus in Malaysia. Gurudeva's dedicated members

disseminated clear Hindu teachings to the youth and instilled a pride in Hindu religion. He sent one of his monastics to teach classes all over the nation for nearly a year. In 1986 successful Hindu youth camps in Malaysia were conducted by his devotees, which inspired the other Hindu organizations to put more emphasis on youth camps. When Gurudeva returned to Malaysia in the 1990s his lectures were packed, and at his last book signing tour two years ago, more than 2,000 people showed up, beyond the hall's capacity. Many of Gurudeva's initiated members are Malaysian, as are three of his 14 swamis.

"Once upon a time," writes Appasamy Kuppasamy, an initiated disciple, "Gurudeva was ignored by many Hindus of Malaysia because he was white. But after getting to know him, the same people praised him for his services to Hinduism worldwide." "More recently," Appasamy went on, "he's advocated abolishing corporal punishment in the homes and schools, directing his devotees to teach classes for other Hindu parents in nonviolent means of parenting and to change school policies regarding corporal punishment of students. At a national level, the cumulative impact of his work has been a dramatic increase in the pride of Hindus."

Whenever Gurudeva visited Malaysia, he would always stop in Singapore, and nurtured a small group of devotees there. As in Malaysia, he encouraged and promoted the local temples and organizations. In the last few years, Gurudeva's devotees have waged a campaign against corporal punishment in Singapore's homes and schools. They made substantial progress in the local schools, which were already tackling the issue, by seeing to it that teachers still using corporal punishment were reprimanded and retrained in better methods.

Gurudeva's publications have always been popular in Malaysia. In the 1980s, local devotees requested Gurudeva to write a book on Lord Ganesha, to explain this elephant-headed God to the Hindus. They wanted it right away to distribute at an upcoming festival, so Gurudeva and his monks created the entire book in eight days. That was a 12-hour-a-day effort of a dozen monks, and the resulting book, *Lord Ganesha, Benevolent Deity for a Modern Hindu World*, was a spectacular success. The title alone was an inspiration to people. Later it was expanded into the even more popular *Loving Ganesha*. When

Hinduism Today was in newspaper format, a local edition was published in Kuala Lumpur, and later, when it switched to magazine format, more than a thousand copies an issue each read by dozens of people continued to be sold. Local devotees have been called upon to stage photo shoots for the difficult social issues of corporal punishment and domestic abuse. The photos depicting all aspects of these societal ills were very powerful, and appeared not only in Hinduism Today, but were requested by other organizations in the US fighting domestic violence. Devotees have independently arranged publication of Gurudeva's writings, such as the small book, Satguru Speaks on Hindu Renaissance, drawn from "Publisher's Desk."

Gurudeva's children's course, Saivite Hindu Religion, has been a hit in the country. One lawyer established an endowment to see that it is printed and distributed to poor students. Many classes are taught using this course, which is in Tamil, English and Malay and based on the Saivaneri course on Hinduism produced by the Sri Lankan government.

Certainly the most important development in publishing occurred just prior to Gurudeva's mahasamadhi, when he decided to have Uma Publications in Kuala Lumpur print his three-volume, 3,000 page trilogy, Dancing, Living and Merging with Siva, in full color and hardbound. Living with Siva is the first book to be completed in this new format, and it arrived in Hawaii just days before Gurudeva passed on. These elegant books printed in Malaysia are exported for sale worldwide.

Just as Gurudeva has benefitted Malaysia, so has Malaysia benefitted his worldwide mission. His Malaysian and Singaporean devotees are among his staunchest and most active. Not only have they hosted each of his travel-study programs as it passed through the country, they've substantially supported every one of Gurudeva's projects, including major fund-raising efforts for Iraivan Temple. Some help electronically with World Wide Web assignments or news gathering for Hindu Press International. Others have worked on translations to Tamil or Bahasa Malay. Devotee Jiva Rajasankara took early retirement to move his entire family to India and supervise the

Iraivan Temple carving worksite. At Gurudeva's encouragement and under his supervision several successful cross-national marriages have been arranged between devotees born in Singapore, Mauritius, Malaysia and America.

Tiru Kuppusamy shared with Hinduism Today this summary of Gurudeva's impact on his life. "At the beginning, I was not very serious about doing the sadhanas, the religious practices, but later I did do them seriously. I learned the Atmartha Puja for home worship and taught it to others. I and my wife, along with our ten-year-old son and 22-year-old daughter, all became vegetarians without any reluctance. Gurudeva made me realize my mistakes, my bad karma done earlier in this life, and had me correct it through penance, prayaschitta. After that difficult penance, I am relieved and happy that this karma is gone. I thank Gurudeva because he changed our lifestyle. He taught us Hinduism. He taught us discipline. He made us see God everywhere. He taught us to do thondu, religious service, all of which I am doing my level best to follow."

At the December 20 memorial meeting, Saiva Periya Sangaratna Tan Sri Somasundram, president of the Malaysia Arul Neri Thirukkootam, said, "Gurudeva avoided arguing the philosophies of the various sects of Hinduism. He showed the importance of religion but not the arguments. He was not only the guru for a particular group of Saivites, but he was accepted by all of us as a guru. If we are to respect him, we must live according to his teachings, to have peace in the world, peace at home, peace between husband and wife, peace everywhere."