Diaspora
Category : December 1998
Published by Anonymous on Dec. 02, 1998

Diaspora

INDIA

Birla's Legacy

With the Hindu renaissance, India has spawned numerous temples in the last 100 years. One of the most popular is the Lakshmi Narayan Temple in central Delhi, popularly known as Birla Mandir. It was built by Jugal Kishore Birla in memory of his father, wealthy businessman Raja Baldev Dass Birla. Inaugurated in 1939 by Mahatma Gandhi, the temple draws thousands of devotees and tourists daily. It's a spectacular sight, designed in the Nagar style with a 160-foot central shikhara, tower. Exquisite Jaipur marble images of Lakshmi, Vishnu, Siva, Ganesha and Hanuman adorn the shrines.

BIRLA TEMPLE, MANDIR MARG, NEW DELHI 110001 INDIA

DENMARK

Mother Moves In

Sri Lankan Tamils displaced to Europe over the last 15 years are keen to maintain their religion. Hence, temples are blooming there. The first Tamil temple in Europe to have a priestess was founded in a Denmark basement in the early '90s by Abhirami Upasaki. She had gone into trance--a siddhi that started as a young girl in Sri Lanka--and Goddess Abhirami Amman (a form of Shakti) spoke through her, asking some friends present to start a temple. The Abhirami Amman

Temple eventually shifted to a large hall and includes outdoor shrines. When the Milk Miracle occurred worldwide in 1995, this temple had it big time--the miracle was shown on national television and drew many Europeans, who now form a large portion of the devotees. The temple was the first in Denmark to have a chariot shipped from Sri Lanka and a subsequent chariot festival in the local town. It has also served as a protective shield from aggressive conversion efforts by Christian missionaries. Today, Upasaki travels to other European countries to perform puja, counsel devotees and heal their sicknesses during trance. She's inspired the Tamil community to print religious books, including a children's religion course in several languages.

ABHIRAMI AMMAN TEMPLE, ENGTOFTZEN-28, BRANDE, 7330 DENMARK

USA

Launched in All Major Cities

You hear about a new one every few months. Temples are burgeoning due to soul-searching by Hindu emigrants after achieving financial security. One of the first to be built in the US was the venerated Sri Venkateswara Temple in Pennsylvania, perhaps the wealthiest of the several hundred temples. Begun in 1976, it cost about US$1 million. It's modeled after the famous Tirupati Temple and has four main Deities: Venkateswara, Mahalakshmi, Andal and Ganesha. More recent temples include one outside Memphis, Tennessee, where Hindus installed a beautiful ten-foot granite image of Vishnu and have the warm support of their neighbors.

SRI VENKATESWARA TEMPLE, PO BOX 17280, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15235 USA

FIJI

India's Gift to the Islands

School children officially had the day off--and everyone else seemed to take it anyway--as most of Fiji's Hindus of Nadi and the surrounding towns gathered at the Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami temple on July 15, 1994, to witness the consecration ceremonies of their new national temple. Five eminent priests and a nagasvaram troupe were flown from India to officiate and an exquisite life-size Deity of Lord Murugan (Kartikkeya) as a sannyasin monk was brought to life. The ceremonies were presided over by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and broadcast live on all-Fiji radio. The original Subramaniya Swami Temple of Nadi was founded by Ramaswami Pillai in 1913 on land leased from the native Fijians. When the lease finally expired, it was decided to move the temple to a more secure location at the other end of town on leased government land. The US$1.2 million temple, Fiji's largest, represents a resurgence of Hinduism in Fiji, and a statement of confidence in the island's

future by Hindus. Native Fijians (who are Christians) and ethnic Indians are approximately equal in population at 350,000 each. The temple is owned by the Then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam, Fiji's largest Hindu organization, operating 26 schools and many temples. Y.P. Reddy, the Sangam's president, called the temple "Our gift to the nation."

SRI SIVA SUBRAMANIYA SWAMI DEVASTHANAM, PO BOX 9, NADI, FIJI ISLANDS

MALAYSIA

Murugan's Masterpiece

More than 10,000 Hindus from Malaysia and Singapore thronged the Sri Kandaswamy Temple in 1997 for reconsecration rites [see HT, Aug. '97]. Temples are normally repaired and rededicated every twelve years, but this was different. Chairman Thiru S.

Perampalam explained, "In 1984 we discovered the foundation had to be reinforced, so we resolved to reconstruct the temple completely." A further motivation was to upgrade the temple's presence as the area had become surrounded by apartment buildings. The edifice boasts marble walls and floors. The Deities and shrines are granite with ornate motifs and carvings.

NO. 3, LORONG SCOTT, OFF JALAN TUN SAMBANTHAN, 50470, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

UNITED KINGDOM

The Church Replacers

Hindu temples were razed for hundreds of years by Christian armies. The karma's come full circle, but peacefully this time.

Churches in Britain, closed due to poor attendance, are being sold to growing Hindu communities, such as the Sanatan Deevya Mandal below. Founded in 1979 by members of the '72 Indian exodus from Uganda, the Mandal is a community pillar lauded by the Dean of Bristol for its "excellent race relations."

SANATAN MANDAL, 163B CHURCH ROAD BS5 9LA REDFIELD, BRISTOL, UNITED KINGDOM

MAURITIUS

Spiritual Park

Aunique public sanctuary is manifesting on the paradisiacal island of Mauritius (near Madagascar). Acres of ocean and riverfront property will sport exquisite Kerala-style, open-air shrines (first one is above) housing giant nine-foot granite

icons of Ganesha, Karttikeya and Siva. The oceanfront shrines are surrounded by sacred flora, winding paths and meditation groves.

SPIRITUAL PARK, LA POINTE, RIVIERE DU REMPART, MAURITIUS

THE VEDAS
God's Word, Sages' Voices

Contemplating Him who has neither beginning, middle, nor end, the One, the all-pervading, who is wisdom and bliss, the formless, the wonderful, the highest Lord, the ruler, having three eyes and a blue throat, the peaceful--the silent sage reaches the source of Being, the universal witness, on the other shore of darkness. Atharva veda, Kaivalya Upanishad 7

Eyes cannot see him, nor words reveal him; by the senses, austerity, or works He is not known. When the mind is cleansed by the grace of wisdom, He is seen by contemplation--the One without parts.
Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8

Let the wise, the knowers of Brahman, realizing Him, practice their wisdom. Let them not ponder many words, for in speech is mere weariness.
Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.221

When a person comes to weakness, be it through old age or disease, he frees himself from these limbs just as a mango or a fig or a berry releases itself from its stalk; and he hastens again, according to the entrance and place of origin, back to

life."

Rig Veda, Devi Sukta 10.125.8