America is Ready for Our Hindu Gods
Category : December 1998
Published by Anonymous on Dec. 01, 1998

MY TURN

# America is Ready for Our Hindu Gods

How the new Kauai temple is going to return God and Gods to their rightful places

Ram Swarup

The chiselling and hand-carving of 4,000 stone pieces weighing 3.2 million pounds in South India and shipping them to the site in Hawaii is a remarkable feat. But the will and conception that undertook and sustained this effort is equally extraordinary. History will remember Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who presided over this labor, as a man of great vision and energy, a man who extended the frontiers of Sanatana Dharma. The island of Kauai, his field of activity, karmabhoomi, is itself likely to become a significant religious site, a place of special manifestation of Siva in this part of the world.

Though Kauai's Hindu temple is special, it is part of a larger movement of great historical significance taking place in the Americas. Many Hindu temples are appearing there, the importance of which is not immediately obvious. When Europe came to the New World, it unfortunately brought along with it such concepts as a "jealous God," a "chosen people," a

"promised land," an appointed "savior," all eminently hegemonic ideas which could do no good and bring no justice. But now, for the first time, the new world is receiving through Hindu spirituality very different ideas--ideas which in their intuition of Deity, man and nature are close to those of its own ancient peoples. Hinduism brings to them the Vedic ideas of "friendly Gods," of nature inhabited by Gods, isha-vasya, of man being both good and godly. In this scheme of ideas, there is full recognition of different modes of worship, acceptance and respect for different fraternities, peoples, ethnic groups and jatis. These ideas have the power and potentiality of helping Polynesians and indigenous Americans in their religious and cultural revival.

A Hindu temple is a miniature cosmos; it is all the Gods and all the worlds (lokas) at one place. But at a time when man's mind is divided and his world so much fragmented, the temple's inscribed motto of "One God, One World" serves an immediate need and calls for a special emphasis. The Hindu Gods that are coming are no "foreign" Gods, nor are they going to a foreign land. They belong to a shared spiritual landscape and sensibility, already there in the New World and known under different names. Though they cannot undo the past, They may heal old wounds and provide a new principle of reconciliation.

These Gods could not make their excursions earlier. America had to get ready spiritually to receive them; she had to pass through much self-questioning, intellectual ferment and to learn to throw away much of her old baggage. The New Age movement had to intervene before this could happen and America could derive benefit from the presence of these Gods.

Hindu Gods are manifestations of a great spiritual culture; their source is a pure and wise heart; they are sustained by great spiritual practice and deep spiritual reflections. We hope the new temples, while they serve the social and religious needs of those who build them, will also promote these qualities. In this way alone, they would provide truly congenial habitations for their Gods, become messengers for the Sanatana Dharma, draw those, now a growing number, who are earnest inquirers and seekers after the deeper truths of the spirit and provide a new meeting-point between the Old and the New World.

Ram Swarup, 78, New Delhi, is a leading author and architect of Hindu renaissance ideology. See www.hindu.org/publications/