ESCAPE From Kuwait
Category : October 1990
Published by Anonymous on Oct. 01, 1990

ESCAPE From Kuwait

Yoga Master Held Hostage by Iraq Tells His Tale

All eyes are on the middle East during these trying times. Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's recent invasion of his small but oil-rich neighbor, Kuwait, is holding world attention ransom. Among those detained was Sri Shiva Bala Yogi (profiled in HINDUISM TODAY, August), held hostage in Kuwait for 16 days. Also detained was Bhaskar Menon, whose father and uncle were India's secretary of finance and secretary of defense respectively.

These two men and other Indians were enroute to Madras aboard British Airways flight 149 which lanced in Kuwait just minutes after the invasion occurred. Twenty minutes after their arrival, the airport was closed, no one was allowed to leave.

From the beginning of the crisis, HINDUISM TODAY remained in close contact with Shri Shiva Bala Yogi's USA devotees as well as his Bangalore ashram. Days passed, and there was no news of his well-being or whereabouts. A grim article was composed, bearing the hope that the yogi was in good health and would soon be released. Then, two days before press deadline, we received a call. Shri Shiva Bala Yogi and his disciple/interpreter, Jagadish Kumar, were safe and on their way to India. The next day, we talked to them. Here follows his personal account and assessment.

HINDUISM TODAY: Please describe what happened in Kuwait.

Shiva Bala Yogi: We landed in Kuwait on August 9, and the crew changed. The plane was about to take off. Then the captain was told that the airport was closed

for the next two hours. We heard explosions nearby. The crew asked all the passengers to go out of the aircraft into the terminal. From the terminal, we could see columns of smoke rising up in front of us with each explosion. After about two hours, we were moved into the Kuwait airport hotel. We were surrounded by guns. While we were watching, the airport, the TV stations, the radio stations and the palace of the King were taken over by the Iraqi army. Apparently, there was no resistance from the Kuwait army. We wondered weather at any moment the war might break out and we would be lost. People started panicking, I assured them that the bombs would not fall on us, and I asked them to be strong in mind.

All telephone communication was cut off. We were imprisoned in the hotel.

All the passengers holding American, French and German passport were asked to come to the side. Their passport were taken away by the Iraqi army, and they were boarded onto buses and taken away. We do not know where. The captain and crew were allowed to stay with us. The manager of the airport hotel was not allowed to get any supplies from outside. But on instructions from the captain, he took very good care of the soldiers entered the hotel or troubled the passengers.

On the 16th of August, the captain and crew were taken away from the airport hotel. Again, we don't know where. The airport hotel manager booked tickets for twelve of us to leave on the 25th. British Airways staff booked us air tickets out. But the army canceled them, so immediately the British Airways staff booked us to travel to Jordan by road. We crossed the border at 11 PM on the 25th August. Our tickets to Bombay, then to Bangalore, were booked. Generally, when a government detains people, it provides them food and takes care of them, but the Iraqi government did not even give us a glass of water. This is our sad story.

HT: What would you propose as a solution to the Kuwait problem?

SBY: This problem is not just confined to Kuwait. President Saddam Hussein wants to capture all the Arab countries. This capture of Kuwait has boosted his desire much more. We cannot solve this problem through war. That would cause a lot of destruction to life and property. Instead, we should all talk with him, and get him out of the situation. If the United Nations takes strong action, this problem will be solved.

HT: How does this affect your future planes?

SBY: Earlier I declared that I shall be personally present at the place where the war would break out. It happened. As long as I was there, the war did not start. Even now after I have left the place, I shall be careful to see that it does not. The United Nations has also got to take care now to avoid war. If war breaks out, a lot of people shall suffer. My plan is to bring peace and to reduce tension. Automatically, I shall solve the problem. I shall not let go until Kuwait regains freedom. Neither my future plans nor my mind have changed because of this. These experience are quite normal for yogis. You might be afraid. I was not. As planned earlier, I shall leave on my next U.S. trip on the 2nd of April, 1991.

HT: What message do you have for the readers of HINDUISM TODAY regarding this?

SBY: I send my blessing to all the readers of Hinduism Today, and I ask them not to be afraid. The tensions are very old. I will take care to see that there is no war. All readers should in turn reduce the tensions in their own minds and work along with me to avoid war and to bring peace.

Kuwait in a Nutshell

"I need $30 billion," shouted Saddam Hussein at a recent Arab conference. "And if they don't give it to me, I'm going to take it." They didn't, and he did. On Thursday, August 9, hundreds of Iraqi tanks rolled into the tiny emirate of Kuwait (comprising 7,000 square miles, one half the size of New York state) to achieve Hussein's easiest conquest ever.

The Emir of Kuwait (a hereditary Moslem ruler whose family is descended from Mohammed's daughter Fatima), Sheik Jabir al-Ahmad al-Sabah, narrowly escaped the invasion of his "little fortress" (The literal meaning of Kuwait) by helicopter into neighboring Saudi Arabia. With the oust came a break of continuity in his family's rule which had lasted for almost 250 years and many be ended forever. Iraqis now claim that Kuwait does not even exist.

No one expected this invasion to happen. Just nine days before the attack, Hussein had announced that "invasion was not an option" knowing full well it had been planned for two years. But not keeping promises is not the worst of this man's misdeeds. In the wake of a long, bloody war with Iran, the whole world dreads him as a terrible tyrant capable of ruthless torture and conscienceless warfare. Now the invasion of Kuwait makes Hussein the strongest leader in the Arab world and the most potent force in the global oil market. And his lack of scruples makes him one of the world's most feared and dangerous leaders.

Hussein's reasons for attacking Kuwait were simple. He needed money. Eight years of war with Iran left him bankrupt, and billions of dollars in debt. When Kuwait tried to help with a $15-billion-dollar loan, Hussein got upset because Kuwait refused to write off the loan out of love for the common Arab cause. This fueled the fire of Hussein's long-term hostility toward the emirate which blocked Iraq's access to the shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf on territory that some claim historically belongs to Iraq anyway.

Ironically, Hussein's move into Kuwait is uniting the world in a way unheard of in recent past. This man has managed to first aggravate, then affiliate, previously unfriendly nations into a one cohesive enemy of fearsome potential.

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.