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Presently Unkempt Site to be Restored as International Center in Honor of Philosopher

The ancestral maternal house of Jagadguru Adi Sankaracharya (686-728CE), standing for centuries on eight-acres of land in the village of Veliyanad in the state of Kerala is at last going to get the care it needed from the people of India. It is being acquired by the Chinmaya International Foundation and will be carefully protected, maintained and turned into a historical monument of great attraction for the devotees of Adi Sankara all over the world.

It was in this house that the great saint of the Vedantic religion was born about 13 centuries ago to revive the glory and grandeur of India's cultural and spiritual values. It was in this house that he lived for years studying the Vedas, the Upanishads and other valuable works concerning spirituality and meditating to seek answers to the crucial questions facing his country in those days. Even the venerable mother of the saint, Aryamba, was born and brought up in this house.

Aryamba belonged to the ancient Nambudiri family known as Melpashur Illom. The house is an excellent example of the splendid architectural style of old Kerala, a style in which the structural strength was admirably blended with practical utility and artistic workmanship. The house in which Sankara spent many a summer serving his ailing mother was in sad ruins for decades. There was only one solitary structure that still bears eloquent testimony to the exquisite wooden paneling and engraving expertly done by the carpenter artists of the ancient days.

In keeping with the traditions followed by the Nambudiri families of the past, a Siva temple was also constructed on the compound grounds of the house. It is believed that Sankara lived in the house even after he became a world teacher and dedicated himself to the service of humanity. Traditionally, a sannyasin (renunciate monk) would not live at his family home. It was here that he had composed his Hymn to Uma-Maheswara to glorify Siva and Parvati installed at the temple.

Sri Sankara had also written his commentaries on the Brahma Sutras while living here. The commentaries were reduced to ashes when the whole gatehouse where the acharya's maternal uncle had kept them (along with other works of the saint) caught fire. Fortunately for the world, the commentaries in their entirety were safely preserved in the marvellous memory of Padmapadacharya, Sri Sankara's foremost disciple. He wrote the commentaries down from memory and thus preserved them for future generations.

The Chinmaya International Foundation, (CIF) set up by Swami Chinmayananda in 1989, intends to fully restore the house to carry out a cross-cultural program it is planning. A postal tutorial course in Sanskrit has already been started. During the summer, the newly created CIF facility will be available for various training sessions for children, youth, teachers and managers. Some international programs are also being planned.

The foundation is organizing a Gita chanting competition from district to a national level. Students from schools and colleges will participate in the competitions and win cash prizes worth over us$44,000. In all about 120 students will win prizes for reciting the various chapters of the Gita in a style that helps elevate the minds of the listeners. The national winners will be taken free to Washington D.C. to participate in an international spiritual camp to be held from July 5th to 14th this year.

The foundation is also planning to set up what Swami Chinmayananda calls the "Chinmaya Institute of Living Values." The swami told HINDUISM TODAY in New Delhi recently that the institute will work for the encouragement of the living values relevant to our society. "With the continuous decay of moral values and consequent mental dissipation we are unable to cope with the problems faced by us and the society," he said. Swami explained that the values sought to be propagated would have their roots in India's culture and spirituality. The institute's actions and activities will promote value-based approaches to living applicable to

persons of any profession.

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