

Triplicane Residents Oppose New Construction In Temple

TRIPLICANE, INDIA, June 20, 2012 (The Hindu): Residents of Triplicane, visiting devotees and heritage enthusiasts are at loggerheads with the Parthasarathy temple authorities. They are protesting against the ongoing construction at the temple meant to cover the prakara or circumambulatory passage. In their opinion, the construction is impairing the architectural character of the temple and denying the faithful a venerable view of the gopura (temple gateway) and vimana (tower over the sanctum). Agitated members have sent a letter to the Chief Minister's cell requesting her intervention.

The Parthasarathy temple is one of the important Vaishnavite shrines in the country and literary references about it are datable to the 6th century AD. The iconography of the main deities is older and historians think the six icons in the sanctum are a part of a much-older Vrsni or Pancavira sect.

"The Parthasarathy temple, like other South Indian temples, has a distinctive character with a high compound wall, large towers, pillared halls and open prakaras. Over a period, people in power have insensitively modified this heritage structure. What is now left is the open space around the inner sanctum. If you cover the last of the open prakara with a roof, it would no more be a temple but a kalyana mandapam [marriage hall] with some shrines in it," said an agitated R.K. Ragavendran, a resident of Triplicane and a regular at the temple.

The temple officials in their defense explained that all aspects of worship and convenience were considered before starting the construction. "We discussed with the experts and followed

due procedure. What is coming up is only a translucent roof, which will let in sunlight and provide shade at the same time. We often cover the space during festivals using temporary materials. This used to add to the cost of conducting the festivals. The new construction will reduce the recurring cost and help perform the rituals conveniently. Though the roof covers the prakara, a portion of it is left open so that devotees can view the gopura and vimana without hindrance," they added

University of Southern California Creates Chair of Hindu Studies

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, June 21, 2012 (USC Press Release): The USC School of Religion will establish the first chair of Hindu studies in the United States funded by the Indian-American community. The Dharma Civilization Foundation's \$3.24 million gift to the USC School of Religion, housed within the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, will establish the Swami Vivekananda Visiting Faculty in Hindu Studies and the Dharma Civilization Foundation Chair in Hindu Studies.

"USC has a long history of welcoming and embracing people from a wide variety of cultures and creeds, backgrounds and beliefs," USC President C. L. Max Nikias said. "We're home to more student religious groups than any university in the nation. Now we are very proud to house the first chair of Hindu Studies in the United States endowed by the Indian-American community."

Just last year, President Nikias led a delegation of university faculty, administrators and trustees, including USC Dean of Religious Life Varun Soni, to India. There they met with key Indian

partners in higher education, business and government, and with USC alumni, to build sustainable alliances in the areas of medicine and health care, neurosciences, the arts, communication and journalism, business, and technology and engineering.

Based in Los Angeles, the Dharma Civilization Foundation's mission is to fund studies of the Indic civilization, focusing on the Dharmic religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. The objective is to promote Dharma education through research scholarship, degree courses and endowed chairs.

"This historic gift to the USC School of Religion highlights the department's commitment to study the enduring questions of human life and values from a global perspective," said Duncan Williams, the chair of the USC School of Religion.

The celebration and signing ceremony for the gift was at 11 a.m. June 23 on the USC University Park Campus.

"There is a profound wisdom tradition embedded in Hinduism and we humbly believe Hinduism can make a valuable contribution to global problems and challenges. An accurate portrayal and study of Hinduism will be important not only for Hindus but for the world," the Dharma Civilization Foundation stated.

USC was selected for this historic gift because of its tradition of reflecting the values of its community, locally and globally.

Williams is one of few ordained Buddhist priests to chair a religious studies department in the United States. He previously served as the Buddhist chaplain at Harvard University and held the Shinjo Ito Distinguished Chair of Japanese Buddhism at the University of California, Berkeley.

Dean of Religious Life Varun Soni is the first university chaplain with a Hindu background. A member of the State Bar of California, Soni

spent time living in a Buddhist monastery in India.

"As one of the preeminent research universities of the Pacific Rim, it is a natural for USC to be a leader in the study of Asian religions," Soni said. "This gift makes that goal immediately more attainable. I also believe that this is a watershed moment for the Indian-American community, which has built many Hindu temples in the United States, but has never before endowed an academic program in Hindu Studies."

USC, which boasts more than 100 student religious organizations and 50 religious directors on campus, sits in the middle of what is considered the most religiously diverse city on the planet - Los Angeles. There are more than 70 houses of worship within a mile of the USC University Park Campus and more than 600 different faiths in the L.A. area.

USC also is a destination for top Asian students. For the tenth year in a row, USC has enrolled the highest percentage of international students of any American university, with most coming from India, China, and South Korea. More than 1,800 Indian students enrolled at USC, the largest group of Indian students on any higher education American campus.

"The USC School of Religion is creating a distinctive program embodying a new Asia Pacific/West Coast style of religious studies," Williams said. "We aim for a multi-faith and global religious studies program that takes advantage of our place and moment as we position ourselves to be the intellectual hub for the Asia Pacific century."

"This gift will help distinguish the USC School of Religion by emphasizing strengths in areas that don't have a history in divinity schools," Williams said. "We are looking at things in a global way by creating a religious studies program that isn't biased toward one part of the world."

A brochure for the DharmaDharmic Civilization Foundation lists the following goals:

To promote the study and interpretation of Indic Civilization and Dharma traditions.

To foster a new generation of outstanding scholars in the areas of theological, philosophical and spiritual dimensions of the Religions.

To support the creation of Visiting Professorships, Endowed Chairs, and Centers for advanced learning of the four Dharma Traditions.

To establish graduate programs culminating into a full-fledged Hindu University of Dharma Studies.

To fund innovative projects aiming to uplift humanity.

And these initiatives:

Creation of Dharma Centers and setting up Endowed Chairs at renowned Universities in North America.

Publishing relevant Journals containing works of eminent Scholars.

Online Masters' level Courses in Vedic Chaplaincy, Dharma and Civilizational Studies
Establishing a "School of Divinity"

Providing Scholarships to students wanting to pursue Dharma Studies

Establishing Think -tanks for optimum representation of the Dharma paradigm

Offering seed money for strategic social innovations

Vault Of Kerala Temple Opened For Treasure Count

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, INDIA, July 5, 2012 (Daily Pioneer): Vault A, first of the six secret cellars of the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple, Thiruvananthapuram holding treasures worth over US\$18 billion, was opened on Thursday morning for evaluation and

documentation of the invaluable artifacts, ornaments and other items kept in it. An expert committee appointed by the Supreme Court for the evaluation and documentation of the six secret chambers in the temple has prepared detailed guidelines for the examination of Vault A. This vault is said to be holding 90 percent of the treasures which gave the Sri Padmanabha temple the status of the richest Hindu shrine in the world. Vault A is holding a minimum of 300 pitchers made of solid gold, 2,500 Sarapoli Malas (gold chains studded with several diamonds and rubies), several stone-crowns and other items collected there over the centuries. According to the temple records, invaluable articles that had been given to the temple as offerings since fourteenth century are kept in this vault. Preliminary assumption of the expert committee is that a minimum of four to six months would be required to document and evaluate the articles kept in Vault A. The vault was opened on Thursday as the scientific assessment of items in vaults C and D was over. Evaluation of the articles in Vault C was completed a month ago while that of Vault D was completed on Monday. Vault D used to be opened five times a year to take out items required for puja on auspicious occasions

Mauritius Immigrant Hindus Establish a Temple in Italy

PALERMO, ITALY, February 23, 2012 (ricerca.repubblica.it, translated from Italian): A search began in 1997 when a group of Mauritian, residents in Palermo, decided to found a temple called Ganesh Mandir, managed by the religious association of the same name. They scoured the whole city before finding a warehouse in the heart of the historic city center that suited them. The temple, which has moved several times, is now located in a narrow alley, Viccolo Guli, just a few steps from the Teatro Massimo [Palermo's famous opera house].

The place, dedicated to the religious needs of part of Mauritian immigrant community, also welcomes those of other nationalities who practice the Hindu religion. Especially on the special days of prayer dedicated to Lord Siva. The space, however, is very small. It is an old warehouse divided into two rooms. The community, which has a thousand people, pays a rent of US\$615 per month, plus all expenses, for this warehouse converted into a temple. To raise the money, all the members give a portion of their budget, according to their income level.

The temple opens every evening at eight o'clock and on Sunday at five in the afternoon. The space can accommodate a hundred people at a time, with many having to wait their turn for prayer outside the door.

These Mauritian Hindus say, "Most of us live in the area, so when we finish work in the late afternoon, we prepare ourselves and come to the temple. It would be nice to have a bigger space. But it is not easy in Palermo. Rents are expensive and we cannot afford one." To hear it from this community, the ideal would be to have a single place large enough to accommodate all of the Hindu immigrants from different countries, but it's a fairly

large number, more than 3,000 people. So what has happened is that each group has started with a small place to use as a temple for now

Upanishads to Accompany Astronaut Sunita Williams to Space Station

AHMEDABAD, INDIA, July 2, 2012 (indiatimes.com): When Sunita Williams is thousands of miles above the Earth taking a bird's eye view of the universe from her space shuttle window, she will try to understand universal truths of the Upanishads. The Indian American astronaut — who will spend six months in space from July 14 — is carrying with her an English translation of one of the most important Hindu scriptures. Her father, Deepak Pandya, is hoping that the farther she goes from Earth, the closer she will come to understanding her Indian roots. It was his idea that she carry a copy of the Upanishads with her. "The last time she went into space, I had given her a copy of the Bhagavad Gita," Pandya said. "She was full of questions when she came back. She wanted to know why it became necessary for Krishna to narrate the Gita, what were its eternal teachings, was it not possible to gain similar knowledge from other works, and many such questions. I feel that she will find some of the answers in the Upanishads." The astronaut is all set to go into quarantine ahead of her second space odyssey after which it will become increasingly difficult for the family to stay in touch with her. Williams last worked aboard the International Space Station for six months in 2006. She will take off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan with two other astronauts, a Russian and a Japanese.

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