

# THE HINDU FRIDAY REVIEW

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2012

## Salute the SCULPTOR

**HONOUR** The Viswakarma community has been recognised for its outstanding service.

GEETHA VENKATRAMANAN

### About the founder



Gurudeva and Veylanswami

Kauai's Hindu Monastery, founded in 1970 by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001), is under the spiritual direction of his successor, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami (right).

It is part of the Saiva Siddhanta Church, founded in Sri Lanka in 1949. Its spiritual heritage derives from the Nandinatha Sampradaya, which goes back to 2,200 bc.

For over five decades Subramuniyaswami, affectionately known as Gurudeva, taught Hinduism to seekers from all faiths.

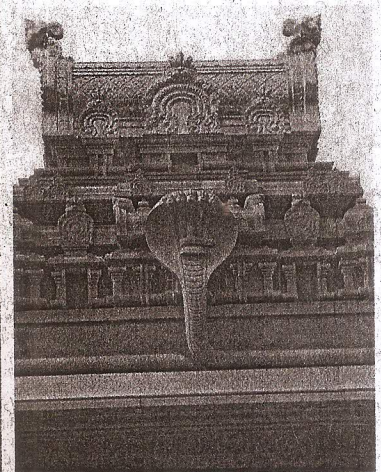
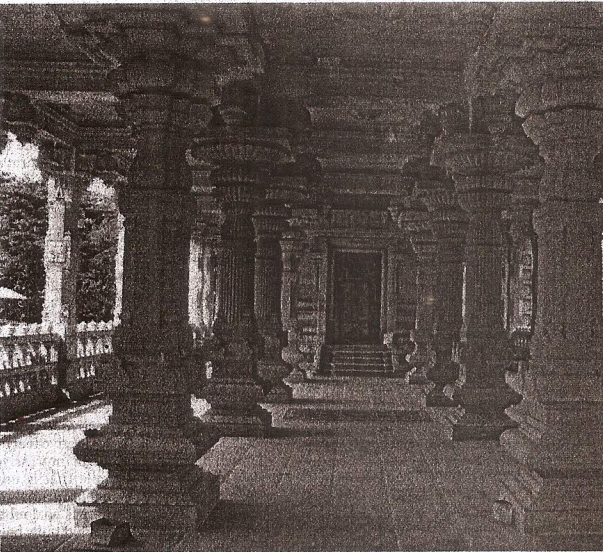
In the line of succession, he was the 162nd Jagadacharya of the Nandinatha Sampradaya's Kailasa Parampara and Guru Mahasannidhanam of Kauai Aadheenam (also known as Kauai's Hindu Monastery), a 458-acre temple-monastery complex on Hawaii's Garden Island.

Recognition has come for temple architects, from Hawaii. *Hinduism Today*, run by the Saiva Siddhanta Church of Kauai Adeenam, founded by Sri Sivaya Subramuniya Swami, has conferred the Hindu of the Year Award collectively on the creators of divine edifices. "It is a proud moment for the entire Viswakarma community," exults Selvanathan Sthapati, nephew of the illustrious Ganapati Sthapati, himself a descendant of Perunthachan to whom Raja Raja Chola entrusted the construction of the Big Temple.

"Right from the junior draughtsman to the senior sculptor the award includes everyone," adds Selvanathan. "I think of all those sthapatis, whose monuments in stone dot the length and breadth of the country, especially the South." Seniors such as Muthiah Sthapati, Kuberan Sthapati of Swamimalai and his brother Karunanithi have expressed their joy about the recognition, first of its kind.

It is a salute to all those sculptors and builders, whose work has gone into the rise of temples that dot cities across the globe, says the journal. An excerpt from the article, 'Our Temple Builders: Hindu of the Year 2012'.

"A few years ago, the U.S. immigration service suddenly stopped issuing the Religious Worker visa for carvers and plaster sculptors. Reason? They are just construction workers." After several months of correspondence with other Hindu organisations and the help of high-priced lawyers and the office of Senator Kennedy, that decision was reversed. We made a convincing case to the



**WORK IN PROGRESS:** A view of the white granite Iraivan temple in Hawaii and its vimanam. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

American Government, based on scripture, history... that their work was no ordinary job but a religious calling, just as it is for the sthapatis.

"Perhaps not all approach their work with this attitude, but it is shared by everyone whom we know. For that and for their central role in preserving and expanding Hindu culture in thousands of communities around the world, we honour our temple builders, north and south as our 'Hindu of the Year' for 2012."

#### A tribute

The journal pays tribute to the stupendous contribution made by the BAPS Swaminarayan organisation in the field of temple construction - more than 1077 in

41 years. But what clinched the award is the work going into the making of the Iraivan temple in the island of Kauai, Hawaii. Sthapati Selvanathan had to answer a questionnaire in this regard. "I didn't know it was for the award at that point of time," he says.

Selvanathan Sthapati was 13 when he first met Sri Subramuniyaswami, who blessed him. The swamiji was visiting the Government College of Architecture and Sculpture in Mammallapuram of which Ganapati Sthapati was the principal.

The next meeting took place, again in Chennai, after Selvanathan sthapati had graduated. The Swamiji, referred to as Gurudeva, and Ganapati Sthapati were discussing the project the former had visualised. "One God, One Religion," was the concept and Sri Subramuniyaswami wanted to build a temple for that God, Iraivan.

The temple was going to be unique and might take many years. Who would take over after the Sthapati's time? Ganapati Sthapati named his nephew as his successor, who would continue the project. Selvanathan Sthapati makes periodic visits to Kauai to oversee the project. The aim is to complete work by 2017.

In accordance with the

vision of Sri Sivayashubramuniya Swami, Ganapati Sthapati designed the temple with a garbagriha, vimanam, mantapam, mahamantapam, Nandi Mantapam and Pancha prakaram. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wanted everything to be handcrafted in this temple of white granite, sourced from Bangalore. His aim was to preserve Hindu Dharma and spread it around the world.

He chose stone as the medium so that the temple would be strong and last long just as the Brihadiswara temple has.

The principal deity is a massive crystal lingam set on a panchaloha avudaiyar. The website [www.gurudeva.org](http://www.gurudeva.org) has details about Sri Subramuniyaswami, the Saiva Siddhanta Church and the Iraivan temple.

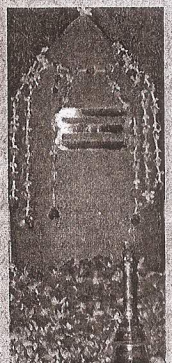
### Wonders of Iraivan

The Iraivan temple faces South - direction of Moksha.

It is completely hand-carved - perhaps the only temple to enjoy this distinction in recent times. Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wanted it to last for a thousand years. Even quarrying is done in the ancient style with hand tools, sans dynamite.

It has breathtaking works of art - e.g. a massive bell and the chains from which it is hung, are all carved from one giant stone; lion pillars - the stone ball in the mouth of the lion can be rotated.

The massive Spatika lingam is a wonder by itself. "The 700-pound, 39-inch tall, perfectly pointed and six-sided gem looks and feels smooth, like cool ice. Yet it was neither carved nor polished, but discovered in 1975 in Arkansas, the U.S. in a small chamber 65 feet below the surface of the earth where it took 50 million years to grow. Noted one Indian pilgrim to Kauai: 'Of course it's holy. It was made by God, not by man.'"



Spatikalingeswarar

G.V.