

REPORT ON THE GRAND PUBLIC FORUM AT TIRUPATHI

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Basara's Saraswathi Mandir to Tirumala Balaji - A Maha Padayatra covering 3200 Kms ended with a Public Forum at Tirupathi attended by 10,000 people!!

3200 Kms

130 days

Visiting over 2500 Village Mandirs and addressing countless Simple Hindus enroute.

This Maha Padayatra has made a very simple person like Shri Kamal kumar ji, the Gen Secretary of Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti as Kamal Kumar Swamiji. His Padayatra of 3200 Kms from Basara to Tirumala is something to feel proud about. Because, he could interact with devotees of 2500 Mandirs and villages to drive home the point on the evils of the Endowment Department.

"Mana MandirAlani Maname KApadukontAm" - meaning, "let us protect our own Mandirs" was the key theme of this Maha Pada Yatra, supported by the **Global Hindu Heritage Foundation, USA and world wide.**

For the 8000 simple Hindu Bhaktas who came to Tirupati from some most backward Districts of AP to be a part of this Bhakti Sangamam, he has become truly, their Swamiji.

One Padayatra made a christist Samuel Rajasekhar, the CM of Andhra Pradesh.

One Padayatra has made a Swamiji of Shri Kamal kumar ji.

The above observation of Sri Paripoornananda Saraswati Swamiji of Sri Peetham, Kakinada was true, having witnessed the adulation in the eyes of these simple people in the presence of Kamal ji. The Sri Peetham Peetadhipathi gave one of the most dynamic speeches I have heard in Telugu, in recent times. I shall deal with the points in the next article.

One Maha Pada Yatra that made 8000 of simple Hindus to get pro-active. On the Mandir Endowment issue. And these 8000 simple Bhaktas and countless left behind in their hamlets praying for the success of the Padayatra and getting some spiritual upliftment and great consolation from this, added colour and vibrations to the event and to the holy town, as a whole.

Just Imagine!

This makes me wonder, what would happen to mullahs who visit unfailingly on Fridays to many of our villages and the evangelists and proselytizers who make a lunch and dinner date on Sundays with our Hindu brothers and sisters in backward villages, if only the tradition of Padayatras by our Sadhu Sant is revived to its early prestine glory?

If only this tradition of Padayatra is blessed by our own Swamijis. If they can reach the deprived Hindus through Padayatras, every dollar spent by the evangelist would surely be a wasted effort. Even the promise of a perpetual virgin in the current life, leave alonw the life-after would not wean away our Hindu brothers.

The success of the Yatra has made us to resolve that:

We will start praying to two neighboring town Swamijis to undertake Padayatras from their Mathams to Tirupati. Covering just 50 Kms. But visiting innumerable villages enroute. Blessing simple Hindus. Who are looking for spiritual leadership all along. And with the vaccuum left by our own Sadhus, the mullahs, moplas and the cancerous evangelist padres have boldly occupied. Inflicting daring damage to the very fabric of our Hindu society.

I Salute the spirt of two great workers:

Sri Subramania Yadav, the State Vice President of Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti and Sri Shailendra Mishra ji, both of who live in Tirupati - we are greatly indebted to their tireless work. Having spent some mind boggling days and hours by the ring-side, I was truly amazed at their indomitable spirit and the never-say-die-attitude for some great leg-work and some lightning quick thinking. While I had a fairly decent role in the planning of the event at Tirupati, to its minutest detail; it is still a HUGE task that could not have been achieved by just us, the three volunteers; without the Blessings of the Bhagawan Balaji Himself. He decided to stand behind us firmly. And I could feel His presence at every challenge that we faced and every solution that emerged out of nowhere and unfailingly. I am sure He is equally fed up with the Endowment Departments and will stand behind Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti in our fight to do away with the Hindu Endowment Act and its most corrupt and Adharmic Department.

And for those who care to read beyond this point, the magnitude of the work that we handled between the three of us, creating some 50 Karyakartas of the participants after they arrived at Tirupati !(because we did not have any infrastructure or assistance from organizations that had the infrastructure). We are deeply indebted to Shri Satyanarayana, the artist and the art director who designed each of the banners, the dias and spent two whole days without sleep because we did not have volunteers to oversee the work even in shifts!!!

The beginning estimate:

We were given to understand that around 1500 members would come from the districts and others would be from the local population. So arrangements for their stay, food and their Pada Yatra to Tirumala etc., was something the three of us thought we could handle with some ease.

Accordingly, TMR Kalyana Mandapam was booked for their stay. And the owner of Bhimas Group of Hotels, Shri Raghu, my personal friend agreed to provide them with food at the cost price.

Simple, isn't it? So we went ahead with the designing of the banners, the statutory permissions from the Local Administration, District Administration for procession, the route of the procession, the permission for mike, speakers, banners and such things. Everything was put in writing and permissions, obtained in writing.

The estimate escalates:

We had no idea the kind of response Kamal ji's Maha Pada Yatra would have on simple villagers in various districts he set his foot on. I was not personally with him on any of this stretch except the final.

It stuck me that I had grossly underestimated the impact he had created on the minds of simple Hindu Bhaktas enroute. I was wrong and had to slog it out the last four days so we could make my wrongs, right.

Two days before the Bhakti Sangamam (25th Jan), calls started coming in from various districts on the number of people who will be there at Tirupati for the Bhakti Sangamam meet. And by the time the meet started, we had 8000 of them at Tirupati, who joined him on his last lap of the Maha Padayatra to Tirumala.

Dr Subramanian Swamy accepts:

Shri Prakash Rao from Global Hindu Heritage Foundation, USA called me to tell that Dr Swamy had informally accepted to be there at the Tirupati meet. I was asked to confirm this with Dr Swamy, who upon calling, readily accepted and said:

"This is a great Hindu Occassion. I will be there"

This added to our ever growing responsibility. For we now have apart from so many Swamijis to take care and attend to, but our very own Dr Swamy.

The core team tears its hairs apart:

The team met at my residence, which became the temporary Karyalaya of the Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti (we do not have an office at Tirupati).

We had deliberately decided NOT to invite any guests from the TTD. None, because this organization is meant to work towards disbanding the Endowment Law and the Department and will be tough on erring officials, so no favours to seek and feel embarrassed to be hard on them at the meet. I was very happy when my proposal to this effect was agreed upon by both the local HDPS and the Karyakartas of Global Hindu Heritage Foundation after some deliberations.

We decided that we would address all our requirements in writing to the TTD, on behalf of the Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti, Andhra Pradesh. And strongly felt that it is their duty towards the Hindu Bhaktas and that they were not doing any special favours to these simple Bhaktas.

I drafted letters to the Chairman TTD. Met him personally for help to house the Bhaktas. Sought space in the free TTD's second choultry.

"How can I do for so many people? Please take it up with the Executive Officer, Mr.Badri".

I simply gave him one of my best smiles and walked out.

More determined now that we should get **everything** done through the TTD. And give them a strong message that it is their DUTY and that they are NOT doing us any favour.

Our Modus Oparandi:

We decided to make it simple. We identified what we needed to do, And get from TTD:

1. House about 8000 Bhaktas on the night of 24 - feed them
2. Take them on a procession of the town and conduct the meeting
3. Take them on Pada Yatra to Tirumala - 25 th after the meeting
4. House them at Tirumala
5. Feed them for two sessions there
6. Arrange for their comfortable Darshan of the Bhagawan
7. See them off from Tirupati

We divided the tasks into three:

1. Place for stay at Tirupati and Tirumala for these 8000 Bhaktas
2. Food at Tirupati and Tirumala for them
3. Darshan of Bhagawan Balaji - 8000 people

The TTD's resistance and its final gestures:

At every stage, we had to face the typical beauracratc resistance. From a large Hindu Organization. To the requests of the small and simple Hindu Bhaktas.

None of the senior officers like the EO, the JEO or the Security officers, the Deputy EOs could be personally met. Two visits to each of their offices made me kind of aggressive, because it was frustrating that none of them were available in their offices.

We had to tell their junior officials that, as they keep arriving at Tirupati, we will bring the Bhaktas to the huge Administrative Offices, built on the donations and offerings of Hindu Bhaktas and ask them to rest on the sprawling open lawns of the office. We had no option and that was made very clear to them. We said, we will even have make-shift bath and toilets on the lawns.

The official for accomodation at Tirupati relented. Granting us the Padmavathi Kalyana Mandapam (for payment of appropriate fee) and not FREE as we needed from them for the Bhaktas. Having no time to argue, we agreed and wrote a strong note to the Secretary, Endowment Department, to write to the TTD to waive these charges and refund us with the money.

Naturally, nothing has been heard from him so far.

In one day, we located two catering contractors (tough job here since it is the wedding season and difficult to get workers, cooks and helpers). And by the evening of 24th we had everything in place - the accomodation, the food and the meeting mandap all spruced up.

TTD gives in again, this time, more graciously:

The next round of our letters to TTD (delivered and handled in person by Shri Yadav ji) was for the Tirumala part of the arrangements.

Letter to the Annadanam Vibhag of the TTD yielded a proceedings in our favour for feeding all these Bhaktas at Tirumala as long as they were there (two sessions).

Letter to the JEO (Joint Executive Officer) and the EO (Executive Officer) yielded proceedings in favour of easy Darshan of the Bhagawan by giving specific times to three batches of the entire number of 8000 pilgrims.

We had by this time made groups of 50 to 100 and xerox copies of all these proceedings were handed over to a Karyakarta we identified from each group. We divided them into three batches district-wise, for Darshan timings. They were told to be together throughout the padayatra and which office to approach at Tirumala to flash these copies of the permissions.

This is real Dalita Govindam - Take the Dalit to Govinda, without much hindrance - NOT the other way around!

What gave us the best satisfaction was that we could arrange Darshan for each of these simple people. Tribals, Lambadas, Banjaras and from various Backward configurations.

Without them having to wait indefinitely in the long queue. They are our VIPs. And for the first time to my knowledge, they were treated like the VIPs by the TTD also, according them Darshan at specified times at Tirumala.

This is the real Dalita Govindam at its best. Bring them. House them. Feed them. And let them pray to their Bhagawan in peace.

I shall write in detail about the procession that took Tirupati by storm, the meeting and my reflections on the post Tirupati meeting, by separate articles.

I shall also share with you some exciting things I learnt about some Mandirs from Kamal ji's experience visiting them on the Maha Pada Yatra.

I shall write to you about my most memorable experience talking to a lady and she spontaneously agreed to take the entire cost of Annadanam for these simple Bhaktas for three sessions in Tirupati.

Bhakti Sangamam – The meet at Tirupati – 25th January, 2008

It was Bhagawan Balaji's Blessings that made the meeting a grand success. He tested us at every stage. Testing our Bhakti, as only He would of His Bhaktas. And when we surrendered to Him with folded hands, having no way to go, He showed us ways that only He can unfold. Let me cite one example for which I have no explanation than to credit it to His test of the Bhakta's devotion:

On the morning of the 24th January, when Kamal Kumar ji commenced his Padayatra to reach the Annapoorneshwari mandir in Tirupati, there was a call to him from one of the volunteers. Police offloaded some 50 of our Bhaktas from the Krishna Express at the Vijayawada Station and he was sounding panicky. Kamal ji said he would call back in five minutes. All that he could do was to turn towards the Seven Hills and pray to the Govinda to show us a way out, besides calling us to urge us to think of some way out.

In five minutes, there was a call from the same volunteer. He was very excited when he said that all of them are on board the train and are on the way to Tirupati. The simple Bhaktas who were offloaded shouted with their hands held high up in Pranam – "Govinda, Govinda", with the entire train repeating the chant, reverberating the Vijayawada station. The four constables who stopped them, folded their hands in absolute Bhakti and repeated – "Govinda, Govinda". The detainees were dutifully put back on train.

It appears that for the first time a saffron flag waved the train off from Vijayawada instead of the GREEN!

Each square inch of the train was occupied by the Bhaktas. Many of them traveled standing for more than 17 hours of their journey. This surely is not a gathering for a political rally. Nor were the crowds paid for to attend rallies. We later came to know that for more than 98% of them, it is their FIRST visit to the Balaji Mandir, Tirupati. And we delighted that we could organize their Darshan with such dignity, reserved only for the VVIPs in Tirumala. Two days later, volunteers called us to tell that they were taken care

of so well and compared the whole meet to their family wedding where guests are taken care with affection and dignity.

Three district volunteers confirmed that their district would have a strength of 10,000 each for the next meet during Feb, 2008.

The procession that started at 08-30 on 25 Jan was a splash of color and a blend of divine chants of Bhajans, Village folk art like Kolattam, flute, Nadaswaram and the frenzy of tribal drum beats reaching a crescendo. Two men were dressed as Kali and Durga. The endowment department was represented as the evil Mahisasura. And the act of Mahisasuravadham was enacted enroute the procession. There was Ram, Krishna, Hanuman; Vali and Sugreeva with their famous battle of mace, enacted in street play. The whole procession through 5 K.M. route was very thrilling and absolutely disciplined. People lined up in hundreds on both sides of the road, cheering the crowd as they moved on. Each participant was carrying the Saffron flag, the Dwaja. For the first time, the entire English and Vernacular Press, the Electronic Media gave extensive coverage of the meeting and the procession, with pictures splashed the next day and encouraging write-ups of the meet.

The meeting started at 11-30.

I had the honor of reading out the "Anugraha Bhashanam" in Telugu, of the Kanchi Seers. The Acharyas expressed the need to protect our Mandirs. And stated that it is time that we started taking over our own Mandirs. They offered their Blessings to the Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti and urged the gathering to follow our Sanatana Dharma.

Pujyasri Aprameyanandagiri Swamiji, Vyasashram, Yerpedu expressed His solidarity with the movement. He offered His support and the Co-operation of Vyasashram in all the future activities of HDPS.

Sri Arjun Dasji Maharaj, Mahant of Hathiram ji Matham, Tirumala stated that it is the duty of every Hindu to retrieve the Mandirs from the clutches of the evil endowment department. He emphasized the need for unity amongst us to run our own temples in the most efficient manner.

Sri Vrathadara Srinivasa Ramanuja Jeeyar Swamiji of Jaggannath Matham, Hyderabad spoke in chaste Hindi. He said that Hindus have become docile. Indifferent, to our causes. And that the need of the hour is to get aggressive on Hindu issues. He flayed the pseudo-seculars and said that the word secularism has been hijacked by the politicians and Press to mean anti-Hindu.

Sri Paripoornananda Saraswati Swamiji of Sri Peetham, Kakinada asked the assembled Bhaktas – Can't we send 270 "good Hindus" to our Assembly and to our Parliament? Are we so stupid that we allow even the so called Hindu parties to keep fooling us all the time, by becoming silent to Hindu issues even after coming to power? He cited the example of BJP who failed the Hindu voters by stating that they had to abide by coalition Dharma after getting Hindus to vote for them. He said that He would have been happy had the party quit the government stating the partners are NOT for Hindu causes and that BJP would like the voters to give them a majority of their own to take up genuine Hindu causes. He expressed his happiness that this meet is taking the dalits to the

Govinda and not the other way around as is being done by the TTD. He said that the TTD should work out with the government to transport Bhaktas like these, free of cost once in two or three years and ensure they get good darshan of the Bhagawan. He questioned the Haj subsidy while no move is made by the government to reach the poorest or poor and the most backwards to Govinda, the ultimate God of Kali Yuga.

Dr Subramanian Swamy spoke in Hindi. Since the majority of the people in the audience are from the Telengana and Hindi speaking areas, they could appreciate his message. Dr Swamy spoke briefly on Ram Setu and said how he could succeed in the Supreme Court and obtain a stay of the dredging. This was received with a thunderous applause and shouts of "Jai Sri Ram". He said that the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister ignored his advice and he had to go to court. Similarly he would move the court if the Andhra Chief Minister refuses to understand the demands of the Hindu society to restore the Mandirs to the Samaj, by dismantling the Endowment Act and the Department. He told the audience that he will be shortly leading a delegation to meet the CM as also the leader of Opposition in AP, Mr Chandrababu Naidu on the issue of Mandirs in AP.

Sri Stephen Knapp, Vedic Friends Association, USA spoke on why he became a Hindu, though being born to Christian parents. He briefly narrated his early years when he could find no answers to all his questions in all the major religions in the world and how only Sanatana Dharma could answer all his nagging doubts. He told a cheering audience that he has been practicing Hindu for the last 40 years. His lament was that Hindus in America had more freedom to practice their religion than Hindus in the land of birth of this great religion, because of such discriminatory laws and anti-Hindu governments, ironically led by Hindus in many cases. He said that it is the duty of Hindus that they should never allow this great Punyabhoomi to such a fall that they should start importing Hindu dharma from abroad, where there is so much freedom to practice.

Sri Velagapudi Prakasa Rao, Chairman, Global Hindu Heritage Foundation, USA and world wide, the organization that supported the Maha Padayatra and the meet spoke of the need for the Pada Yatra, what it had achieved. He explained the support of the Foundation in the cause of retrieving our Mandirs from the Government clutches back to the Hindu Samaj. He said that the Foundation will stand by the activities of HDPS and would ensure that we stay focused on our goal.

Sri Yalamanchi Prasad Rao, Secretary, Global Hindu Heritage Foundation made a very emotional appeal to the Hindus to come together in the fight against the unjust Department. He introduced the Kali, Durga and other artists by calling them to the stage where they regaled the audience with a spirited Nrtya to the mind-boggling rhythm of the tribal beats.

Sri Dussarla Satyanarayana, President Hindu Devalaya Parirakshana Samiti, Telangana Region brought the house down with his most eloquent call for dismantling the Endowment department. He was very critical of successive governments that openly had an anti-Hindu slant. He said it is time to question ourselves should we vote such anti-Hindu people back to power. As a powerful tribal leader, his voice carried much weight as we could see and the crowd roared at every word that he spoke.

Sri Kamal Kumar ji spoke at the end. He shared few of his experiences during his 130 day 3200 Km Maha Pada Yatra. He made following vital points:

The Government should state firmly that it would not add any new Mandirs to the list of Mandirs already under its control under the Endowment Act.

It should instantly stop public auction and or sale of Mandir lands in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

The Fixed Deposits of money belonging to various Mandirs have suddenly vanished because of withdrawals by the Department. The government should immediately replenish the funds and restore it to the rightful Mandirs.

The sale proceeds received by the Government so far by the sale of lands belonging to the Mandirs have not been credited to the Mandir Accounts. The Government should pay to these Mandirs the amounts as per today's market value and not on any notional value.

Kamal Kumarji announced a cheering audience that his second Maha Padayatra will commence during August, 2008 and will take him through innumerable villages. He will commence his Yatra from Srikakulam District and will travel through the districts of Vijayanagaram, East Godavari, Khammam, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore, Chittoor and will culminate at Tirupati. He will be reaching Tirupati during the first week of February, 2009. 5000 Kms in all.

One lakh very simple Bhaktas will converge at Tirupati. I am sure we will be geared up to receive all of them.

We have already identified the open ground which will be our venue for the meet.

You have a lot of time to plan your itinerary. Be there at Tirupati. Strengthen our cause.

I shall write in a separate article, the follow-up and consolidation work that we intend doing, the brief plan for the second Yatra and what we intend taking up during our meet with the AP Chief Minister and the Leader of Opposition, A.P. around 15th Feb, 2008.

Tail piece:

Each Bhakta on the Padayatra to Tirumala carried one Saffron Dwaja as he/she marched valiantly in one group. When these Bhaktas went to Alipiri, the foot-hill of the Saphthagiri, they were stopped by over-zealous TTD security. The reason being that they were carrying the Saffron Dwaja in hands. "No political rallies" – was the diktat. We had to step in vociferously and educate the TTD employees and the security that these are NOT political flags, but Hindu religious symbols – the Dwaja of Bhagawan Krishna. After a few minutes of "convincing", we were allowed to proceed, EACH one with a Dwaja in hand to Tirumala! Perhaps, another first.