

Trinidad's Hanuman fest: Learning from wisdom of monkey god

Trinidad and Tobago is set to host a 'Hanuman Heritage Festival' next month that will include cultural events, religious discourses and a global Hindu conference on the popular monkey god.

'It is aimed to provide a profound and enlightening spiritual experience; to explore and benefit from the...wisdom and devotion of Lord Hanuman for the attainment of a higher level of consciousness,' said Swami Brahmadeoji, spiritual leader at the Brahma Vidya Peetham.

The festival will be held April 10-20 at the Dattatreya Yoga Centre, Carapichaima, central Trinidad.

Ramesh Persad Maharaj, president of the Dattatreya Yoga Centre, said in an interview that Trinidad and Tobago was 'Ramayana Country' as well as 'Lord Hanuman Country'.

He said that Hanuman was an important personality 'in the civilization of the people of Hindu heritage. 'His life and times serve as a message not only to those of the Indian diaspora but also to the world at large,' he said.

Swami Brahmadeoji said the Hanuman festival was being organised under the guidance and direction of Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swamiji of Mysore, India, who would be present for the 10-day event.

'We expect that after the conference, we will become a more socially, morally and spiritually conscious civilisation on the planet; and as well to experience some of the culture of India through music, dance, art and cuisine of Indian and Hindu heritage,' he said.

The 500,000-strong Indian diaspora comprises 40 percent of Trinidad and Tobago's population. Indian indentured labourers, who migrated to work on sugarcane plantations, brought with them Hinduism to the Caribbean between 1838 and 1917.

Persad Maharaj said noted speakers from across the Indian diaspora and India would present papers that would be followed by discussions at a seminar during April 17-19 as part of the festival.

The speakers include Ken Ramchand, provost, University of Trinidad and Tobago; Satnarayan Maharaj, secretary general of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha; Swami Prakashananda of the Chinmaya Mission; Swami Aksharananda of the Saraswati Vidya Institute, Guyana; and Anthony Grell of the International Meditation Society.

There will be religious discourses by spiritual leaders and cultural programmes by artistes from India, Trinidad and Tobago and other parts of the Caribbean.

Swami Brahmadeoji said the 'hallmarks of Lord Hanuman's life and times are found in the (Hindu epic) Ramayana where he played a prolific, dynamic and quintessential role in the search and eventual recovery of Mother Sita, and His deep and unwavering benevolence to Lord Rama.'

Persad Maharaj said they 'intended to organise similar forums on a bi-annual basis in other countries in order to create, foster and enhance a greater awareness of this outstanding messenger and intermediary between Lord Rama and mankind'.

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