

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA SOCIETY TRUST
SHREE LAKSHMI NARAYAN MANDIR



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first flame of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society was lit in the year 1970. It began with a vision, with perseverance, with dedication and focused determination by some pioneers of the community, namely Bhikhabhai Ukabhai Master and Dayabhai Hari.

The start of the journey began at the Ram Mandir, established at Master Mansions and was the brain child of Shree Bhikhabhai Master. He was inspired by Swami Nischalananda of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. Swami Nischalanandahad vision was that the children of Hindu families all over South Africa must learn about Hindu Religion and Culture. In order to promote this vision, Swamijii had organised numerous activities. It is also noted that Shree Dayabhai Hari participated actively in these activities.

Sadly, Shree Bhikhabhai Master passed away in the year 1962. However, the ever-determined Shree Dayabhai Hari continued with the objective of developing the Hindu ethos amongst the community. In 1962, with the objective of promoting the Hindu Dharma, Shree Dayabhai took the opportunity to invite Swami

Nisreyasananda from the Ramakrishna Math, but based in Zimbabwe, to come to Johannesburg.

Swami Nisreyasananda would stay on 7th floor Master mansions with Rajnikantbhai Master and the rest of the Master family. For 30 years, Swami Nisreyasananda was invited twice every year to South Africa. In 1955 the Nationalist government decided to establish a township for Indians in the Transvaal. This township was called Lenasia.

Around 1969/70 Swami Nisreyasananda suggested to Dayabhai Hari and Rajnikantbhai Master that to meet the demands of the people of the Transvaal, a separate entity could be established with its own constitution. Rajnikantbhai Master suggested the name Ramakrishna Vedanta Society.

This plan was carried out, and Dayabhai Hari encouraged Rajnikantbhai Master to take up the post of Secretary, a post he held for 17 years. Together with Dayabhai Hari and his meticulous book-keeping skills, kept painstaking records of the finances of Ramakrishna Vedanta Society.

The apartheid government were in the meantime meeting resistance from the Indian community regarding the relocation to Lenasia and they were only too eager to book plots to Indian buyers.

Rajnikantbhai agreed with Dayabhai Hari and four plots were booked in the name of Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Kingfisher Street, Ext 1, Lenasia. The Group Areas Board allowed only four plots for each religious organization and it is with their foresight that the maximum land was booked.

During a visit to India, Rajnikantbhai Master heard Shivram Maharaj render a katha at a particular hall in the state of Gujarati in what can be termed – a most wonderful and spiritually enlightening way. Rajnikantbhai made tape recordings and brought them to South Africa. These tape recordings were heard by Swami Nisreyasananda who, without hesitation, suggested that Shivram Maharaj be invited to South Africa because of his religious knowledge and as kathakar in the Gujarati language. His simple style would be of great benefit to the community.

These discourses took place at the Gandhi Hall in Fox Street, Johannesburg. The community were greatly impressed and inspired by Shivram Maharaj's Katha Programme. Thus when Shivram Maharaj launched an appeal for funds to build a Hall and Mandir in Lenasia, the community obliged most graciously.

Among the first pioneer donors who enthusiastically gave donations to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society were the late Vasantjee Nagar, the late Jinabhai Parekh, Kikabhai Bawa, Parshotambhai Bijla, the late Bhulabhai Diar, Bhulabhai Chhita, the Bodalia Family, the late Bhanabhai of Malice Spice Works. In the memory of late Bhikhabhai Master, Bhikhabhai's three sons (Rajnikantbhai, Arvindbhai and Harshadbhai has also contributed) .

A concerted effort was made by Rajnikant Master, Thakorbhai Daya, and Maganbhai Morar to fill the coffers and subsequently the 4 plots booked were purchased. Adjacent to these four plots were two other plots, owned by a Muslim family and by a Gujarati Hindu family. These additional two plots were also purchased but in the name of a Religious and Cultural Institute.

Hence, it must be noted that the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society complex stands on six plots. Rajnikantbhai Master approached Sompura Temple Architect in India, who had graciously sent architectural drawings, drawn according to scriptural requirements. The architect designed the Garbha Grah (where the Shree Lakshmi Narayan murtis are placed), the Mandir hall and the entrance area. Subsequently, a local architect, the late Van Der Merwe from Pretoria was assigned to sketch a new temple plan based on Sompura Temple design.

THE STORY ABOUT THE CARVINGS THAT LINE THE WALL OF THE MANDIR.

A German gentleman, Mr Hoj Melville used to come regularly to attend Swami Nisreyananda's discourses at Ram Mandir, Master Mansions. One day Hoj Melville saw some wooden carvings of Indian deities in a carpet shop in Johannesburg. These were probably taken from ancient Indian temples. Hoj Melville bought these wooden carvings and showed them to Rajnikantbhai Master. Navnitbhai Solanki took special interest and generously contributed for purchasing the wooden carvings.

They decided to approach Mr Theo Wald in Johannesburg, who had a business of making rubber moulds and using them, to make decorative ornaments. Mr Wald made rubber moulds from the wooden deities. It was Mr Hoj Melville's enthusiasm that persuaded Rajnikantbhai Master and Dayabhai Hari to let Mr Melville make lots of plaster cast copies of the wooden carvings and decorate the frame area of the Garbha Grah and also one line around the inside of the Mandir hall. Mr Hoj Melville experimented with special cement mixture and iron rods to make the plaster casts strong. Jyoshnaben Rajnikantbhai Master assisted Mr Melville and the plaster casts were made onsite as well as in the yard of Arvindbhai and Diwaliben Master's house in Turtledove Avenue, Lenasia Ext 1. It took many months and very hard work to make all the plaster casts. The plaster casts were sprayed with colour that would resemble the original. A suitable glue was used to stick the plaster casts inside of the Shree Lakshmi Narayan Mandir. Originally the plaster casts were stuck on the outside as well, all around the temple walls but became unstuck in rainy weather and all fell off.

A Bhumi Pujan (Khaatmurat) was performed in 1970/71. Swami Nisreyasanandaji placed copper yantras under the foundations of Shree Lakshmi Narayana Mandir and the Ramakrishna Hall. Shivram Maharaj who performed the Murthi Sthapana (consecration ceremony) suggested that the Mandir should be dedicated to Shree Lakshmi Narayana which was unanimously accepted. The murtis of Lakshmi Mata and Lord Narayan were made in Jaipur and housed temporarily and with great honour at Arvindbhai Master's house in Turtledove Lane, Ext 1 Lenasia. Shree Lakshmi Narayana Temple was officially opened on the 25th December 1972 by Swami Venkatesanandji.

Office Bearers

The first chairman of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society was Jinabhai Parekh, followed by Bhulabhai Diar, Rajnikantbhai Master, Chhibubhai Naran, Rajubhai Kala, Anilbhai Vallabh, Javie Ravjee and the present chairman, Shailesh Ravjee.

PICTURES

Ramakrishna



The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa was founded in 1942 by Swami Nischalananda in Sea View, a suburb of Durban.



Ram Mandir –Master Mansions Photos taken on 21-05-2015





7th floor was later added to Master Mansions, and Bhikhabhai Master chose to occupy the flat on the 7th floor because it is right next to the Ram Mandir. A small satsang hall and a library were also built at Ram Mandir.



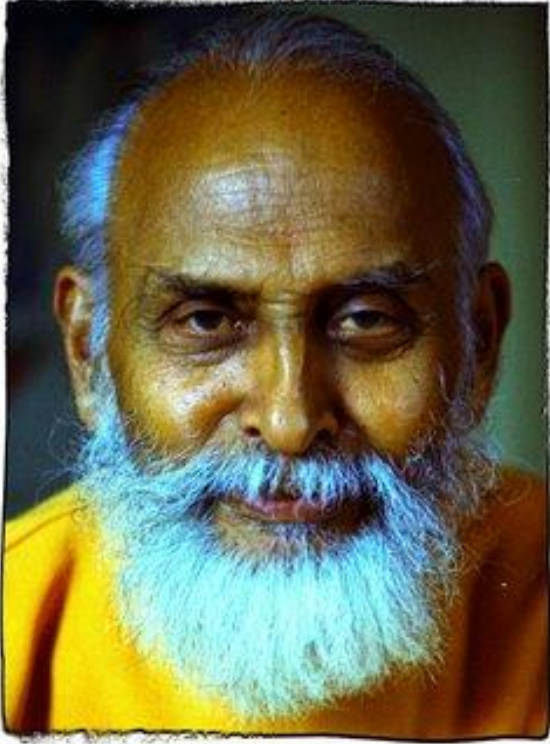


December 1955. Swami Nischalananda with baby Kumudini Rajnikantbhai Master in Swamiji's lap. Seated next to Swamiji is Bhikhabhai Ukabhai Master (wearing glasses), also seated next to Swamiji is Mr Grantham.

Swamiji came for fund raising with the 'Group of Draupad'.

Standin: second from left is Soni, 4th from left is Devan, 6th from left is Bhagoobhai Parbhoo (Newcastle).

Photo taken in Bhikhabhai Master's flat, Master Mansions, Johannesburg.



Swami Nisreyasananda

Swami Venkatesanandji





Sitting: Shri Bhoobhai Chhitabhai Patel (Trustee & Treasurer), Shri Nathubhai Motiram Mistry, Shri Venilal Mananlal Modi (Trustee), Shri Manubhai Z Y Parskh (Secretary), Hon. Swami Vandananandji, Shri Bhulabhai Dayaljee Patel (Trustee & President), Hon. Swami Nishreyasanandji, Shri Rajkant Bhikhabhai Master (Trustee), Shri Mananlal Morarbhai Patel (Trustee & V President) Shri Umivastanker Manishanker Jadhakar (Trustee & Vice President), Shri Govindbhai Nagarjee (Vice President)

Standing: (Middle Row) Dr Sashikant D U Mistry (Secretary), Shri Sukhabhai Kaidas Mistry, Shri Vallabhba Gosaiabhai Sookna, Shri Rajeebhai Ramjibhai Tavadia (Trustee), Shri Kamalal Ragnunathji Daya, Shri Khushalbhai Vasantjee Mistry (Trustee), Shri Matvarlal Pranjivandas (Trustee), Shri Balubhai Vallabhbhai (Trustee), Shri Thakorbhai Dayabhai Patel, Shri Anratlal Monbhai Parbhooabhai Patel

Standing: (Back Row) Shri Dehyabhai Haribhai (Trustee & Treasurer), Shri Dhiralal Nathubhai Mistry, Shri Surendra Ramanlal P Patel, Shri Chhimabhai Naranbhai (Trustee & Vice President), Shri Bhanabhai Jairambhai Jhina (Trustee), Shri Harshadrai Bhikhabhai Master (Asstt Secretary), Shri Harishchandra Jivanjee Arya



Swami Vimokshananda (Belur Math, now spiritual head of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa) at the residence of Harshadbhai Bhikhabhai Master in Lenasia (Johannesburg).

Seated is Shobhashni Manoj Master (orange sari). Seated is Toral Susheel Master (in lilac-purple sari).

Standing from left: Manoj Harshad Master, Bhavya Harshad Master, Prabhavati Harshad Master, Milan Manoj Master, Harshadbhai Bhikhabhai Master, Susheel Harshad Master.