



**Jay Sobhraj (Executive Vice President of Zara Luxury Apartments & Homes)
funds Guyana Sevashram Sanhga documentary**

Revealing the Monastic Journey of Swami Vidyanandaji Maharaj and the Birth of the Cove and John Ashram

*'Vaasaami jeernaani yathaa vihaaya
Navaani grihnaati nara'paraani
Tathaa shareeraani vihaaya jeernaa
Nyanyaani samyaati navaani dehee*

*'Just as a man casts off worn out clothes
And puts on new ones
So also the embodied self casts off
Worn out bodies and enters others
That is new to achieve
The purpose of human life*

*'Thus while I know I was here many times
before but cannot remember any of those
births...I would like you to know that I will be
back again...so until then, the journey contin-
ues...' narrates Swami Vidyanandaji Maharaj,
with poetic elegance, at the conclusion of the
historical documentary titled: First Swami of
the Caribbean.*

While Hinduism embraces the concept of re-incarnation, the continuous cycle of births and deaths, it is in the journey of human life that man achieves his finest hour, but none so, as when he can conquer death itself.

Brahmachar-yena tapasa deva mrityumupagnata:

The Vedas declare that through brahmacharya (austerity) and penance, the devas (gods) have conquered death!

It is only when mortal man finds this form of liberation that he has truly graduated from the cyclic clutches of re-embodiment.

Swami Vidyanandaji Maharaj through whose eyes this documentary is presented, is the first Guyanese, first West Indian, first person from the western hemisphere whose petition is before the Gods, on behalf of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, to have dedicated his entire life to brahmacharya and seva (service), relinquishing all material and biological connection! It was in essence and practice, a life of detachment, a life of discipline, and a life devoted to upholding the values of the divine.

First Swami of the Car-

ibbean reveals the spiritual journey of this humble Hindu hero whose advent was at Albion, Corentyne, Berbice, in July, 1936. While in retrospect his birth seems all pre-destined, the inevitable struggles and sadness in an ocean of economic strangulation and moral degradation, was the first of his many tests. A bigger void was created with the passing of both his parents while just eleven; and in the vast, rigorous, sweltering world of sugar production, this orphan child without an education, developed a resistance that would have defied rampaging armies.

He lived alone in a logie, cooked only vegetarian meals for himself; worked late, long shifts – day or night – with colleagues twice his age, yet superbly holding his own! Admirably, he never succumbed to any of the nefarious temptations of the 'backdam' society. Instead year after year, his unique, detached lifestyle, inspiring to the community, became a quest for self-realization.

No one could deny his purpose or purity and in a country beleaguered by the presence of the colonial masters injecting their toxic brew of race hate and conversion. It could be deduced that Swami Vidyanadaji was in fact a special birth, like that of the late President Cheddi Jagan, placed among the suffering masses to redeem their lives with pride and dignity.

But still unaware of his national duties, it was not until the arrival of the profoundly pious



Producers: Jay and Sylvia Sobhraj, Sarvan Budhu and Nardeo Singh with Swami Vidyanandaji.



Launch of First Swami of the Caribbean: (From L to R): Sarvan Budhu, Swami Vidyanandji, President Bharrat Jagdeo, Swami Shivshankar, Rajkumarie Singh, Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Manniram Prashad. (Courtesy Guyana Chronicle)



Cove and John Ashram. (Circa 1956: Courtesy Guru Govind)



Swami Purnanandaji

master, Swami Purnanadaji Maharaj in the mid 1950s, that the youth from Albion would have understood the meaning of his birth. Not since Swami Vivekananda's visit to North America almost 50 years earlier, which had inspired the world as to the richness and radiance of Hinduism, had they seen such a virtuous guru as Swami Purnananda in the West Indies.

Thousands were immediately drawn to him but it was his meeting with the orphan from Albion that became providential. Against this meeting and their subsequent development Cove and John Ashram, ECD, Guyana, the documentary traces their enormous spiritual strides, bringing hope and a pro-active brand of Hinduism to British Guiana.

A Hindu college and dorm, the first in the country was built; an ashram was established – another first; a non-sectarian community was born – first again.... And the unbelievable lists of achievements in notorious times all make up this body of work.

Through its natural evolution the Guyana Sevashram Sangha needs no introduction to the Guyanese community but this documentary is a work that was long overdue, as a single compilation, which chronicles significant aspects of its history in one production. And for this no one deserves more credit than Mr. Jay Sobhraj.

"I see this as an educational project. While I was resolute in my commitment to its production, I am

reluctant to accept any credit upon its completion," Jay declares sternly. "The real heroes of this assignment are Swami Purnananda and Swami Vidyananda, and the many others who toiled and labored with them for the past sixty years, to make the Guyana Sevashram Sangha such a spiritual and educational facility beyond compare.

"Personally, I was moved by the visuals but to witness the accomplishments of these swamis, with limited resources, is an inspiration. This was truly the handiwork of God through his dedicated disciples. Apart from the Swamis there was also Mrs. Maraj or Big Mai, Mrs Mangri and even President Bharrat Jagdeo spent some of his formative months there. Former West Indies Cricket Captain Shivnarine Chanderpaul also speaks of the moral and spiritual guidance he has received from the institution. I am just happy that I could share the same frame with some of these masters," said Jay.

The 84 minutes' First Swami of the Caribbean documentary was appropriately launched on Maha Shivraatri, in Guyana last Friday by Swami Vidyanadaji Maharaj and Sarvan Budhu, another member of the production team. Simultaneously, Jay and Nardeo Singh presented the video product at the American Sevashram Sangha, Jamaica, Queens.

This latest Zara Realty addition was written and directed by Richard B. Mahase and narrated by Jonathan Smith. It was edited by Indira Mahase and Cyril Ramrattan.

Some of the other prominent presenters are Swami Shiveswaranadaji, Guru Govind, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, Sasenarine Kowlessar, Rupnarine Jadoonanan, Jailall Kisson, among many others.

Coipes of the DVD "First Swami of the Caribbean" Documentary are available at:

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