

## **Dr ANANDA'S SUCCESSFUL TRIP TO ITALY-2007**

Yogacharya Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani had a highly successful maiden voyage abroad to Italy in April 2007. He was hosted in an excellent manner by Svami Yogananda Giri at the Gitananda Ashram in Altare near Savona.

Svami Yogananda Giri, the sole Sanyasin disciple of Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri founded the Gitananda Ashram in his beloved Guru's name in the mid 1980s and has developed a "Mini India" there. The Indian ambiance with emphasis on Hinduism and its culture is a key aspect of the Ashram that has a magnificent temple to Devi that is one of the few in Europe that is in tune with the Vasthu Shastra.

A hectic two-week schedule awaited Dr Ananda who was guided well by Svamini Hamsananda Giri who is the vice president of the Italian Hindu Union and secretary of the Gitananda Ashram. Hatha Yoga and Yantra Classes, special conferences, performances Bharatanatyam and Mridungam lessons were all on the schedule for Dr Ananda who enjoyed every moment of his interaction with the Ashramites and local students of Savona city centre.

Special Pujas including a wonderful Homa by Pundit Kowshik Joshiji from London were conducted and the Tamil New Year was celebrated with more than 150 immigrant Tamils who are currently residing in Italy. The energetic Bhajans by Ma Uma Shakti with accompaniments by Dr Ananda and Priyananda were full of powerful Shakti stimulating all those who had assembled for the Puja.

Dr Ananda gave many performances of vocal music, Mridungam as well as lectures and classes on various aspects of Yoga in general and Gitananda Yoga in particular. He also presented the key aspects of Gitananda Yoga during the official inauguration of the Gitananda Federation of Italy on the 9th of April 2007. The Gitananda Ashram was also featured on Italian TV during Ananda's stay and it was a job well done indeed. Ananda also had exhaustive interviews with Maxine of the UK that will appear some time in the near future on British.

One of the major highlights of Dr Ananda's visit was his meeting with the Prime Minister of Italy Mr. Romano Prodi, who is also the former President of the European Commission. It was of great significance that Dr Ananda was in Italy for the signing of the important agreement between the Italian government and the leaders of 8 minority religions in Italy. Dr Ananda as the honorary chairman of the Italian Hindu Union was a member of the three member team that represented Hinduism at the meeting along with Shri Jayendranata (a leading lawyer of Italy) and Svamini Hamsananda Giri who are the president and vice president respectively of the Italian Hindu Union. While meeting Mr. Prodi, Dr Ananda expressed his happiness at Italy giving importance to Hinduism that signifies the acceptance of one ancient culture by another ancient one.

Dr Ananda presented conferences on various topics including the Yoga sutras, Yoga for the modern world and Yoga therapy in relation to the Pancha Kosha at Rome, Milan and Savona. He also sang many compositions of Carnatic Music with excellent rhythmic support from the energetic Priyananda.

Lilavathi and Dr Ananda performed a special programme of Indian music and dance at the Inter-religious Meeting in Rome that was well appreciated by all the representatives of various religions, educational authorities and school children of Rome who were in attendance at the wonderful Auditorium. The meet also had Chants by the Orthodox Church as well as energetic Jewish music. Hamsananda, Priyananda and Lilavathi took Ananda on a spectacular tour of Rome and had a great time seeing the ancient architectural marvels of the city. They also visited Pisa where Ananda and Priyananda had a trip to the top in addition to the routine photos of Ananda holding up Pisa!

When asked to give us his thoughts on the trip Dr Ananda said,  
"I have gained a great amount of experiences from my lovely trip to Italy and in particular the wonderful spiritually uplifting Gitananda Ashram of Swami Yogananda in Savona I have learnt a lot, seen a lot and hopefully all those who have had contact with me there have also benefited from my short stay there The Ashram is a wonderful place and the Devi temple has energy very similar to that of Kambaliswamy Madam

Lilavathi is a great dancer and is better than most Indian professionals dancing today-to have the opportunity to teach her a few new items at "Ananda speed" was really lovely for she has such deep interest and love for the dance.

Priyananda has become a strong and capable young man and is taking up the responsibly so well that I am really proud to call him and Lilavathi my brother and sister without any reservation at all. He played the Mridungam for me in an excellent manner and his respectful attitude was really great as it spurred me on to new heights. His love shone through the wonderful photos that he took of me as Amma always tells us that we must have pictures taken by the ones who love us if we want ourselves to look good in them!!

Hamsananda took loving care of me and was always there when I need her guidance. She was the one responsible for getting me to meet the prime Minister of Italy and that is something that I treasure for I haven't yet met the Indian prime minister!! She didn't leave any stone unturned in making my stay comfortable. A lovely woman of real substance, who is doing a great Karma Yoga for Hinduism in Italy.

Uma and her Bhajans are the liveliest of all and her affection in all ways was so touching. Her Shakti is enormous and her love matches it! If you want to hear real Bhajans go and listen to her!!

We had a lot of meetings, cultural performances of music, Mridungam and dance, Hatha Yoga classes, lectures on the Yoga philosophy and Yoga therapy at Rome, Milan and Savona, celebration of Tamil new year with expatriate Tamils of India and Sri Lanka, lecture demonstrations, Pujas, a powerful Homa, trips to Rome and Pisa, dance and Mridungam lessons and a lot of singing in the car!!!

We also had the main TV channel of Italy do a short presentation on the Ashram and its activities while I was there. It was very nicely done and it was the broadcast the day before I left so I had a chance to see it.

The food was really good, the countryside magnificent and the architecture amazing. I also enjoyed the flight from Rome to Genova by witnessing the lovely coastline of Italy all the way. A wonderful country with loving people receptive to Indian culture, Yoga and this way of life of Sanathana Dharma

Hariharan and family as well as Shankara and family made me very happy by coming to visit me at the Ashram. I appreciate their deepest love and dedicated efforts as it was the Easter weekend and not many are willing to sacrifice that. To be the recipient of their love and see their families was truly heartening. It was also nice to meet up with my dear friend Maxine who has made a nice interview with me at the Ashram that should appear on British television some time in the near future.

Swami Yogananda has truly achieved the impossible. To build and develop such an Ashram in Italy and create the feeling of real India there is something to be seen to be believed. Swamiji would be proud of him in the real sense for his living the teachings with efforts to have India in them at all times. Even his city centre in Savona resonates with Indian vibrations in every nook and corner. His dedication to Swamiji and his efforts to preserve Rishiculture deserve our heartiest applause and support. I pray Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj to bless him and the Gitananda Ashram Family with all strength to continue their wonderful Guru Dakshina for the memory of Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj.'