



Shiva-Vishnu Temple
Hindu Community and Cultural Center.

Sthala Puraana

(Temple Story)

Of Shiva Vishnu Temple



Hindu Community and Cultural Center
1232 Arrowhead Ave.
Livermore, CA 94551



स्थल पुराण
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of
Shiva Vishnu Temple
Livermore, California, USA



My personal recollections of the many miracles that
made our temple dream come true!

- Muthuraman S. Iyer



Om Ganeshaya Namaha!

Respectfully dedicated to the Presiding Deities of
Shiva Vishnu Temple, Livermore, California,
on the occasion of 33rd anniversary of the Temple,
July 2019

Sthala Purana of Shiva Vishnu Temple Livermore, California, USA

My personal recollections

- Muthuraman S. Iyer

Shri K.A. Kannan still reminds me often that when we first met in 1971, we said to each other that we ought to build a temple. Shri Hosali Gangadhara also reminds me these days of how we said the same thing when we rode elevators together in San Francisco's Metropolitan Building in 1975. But many people may not be aware of how this great temple rose from the ground, and how we were blessed with the deities unexpectedly. I'm happy to share my personal recollections of the many miracles that were brought about by the Lord's blessings to make this kshetram (temple) possible in our adopted land, 10,000 miles from India!

Back in the 1970s, many engineers came to U.S. from India for higher studies and employment. But still, the Indian population was very small, compared to levels now in Silicon Valley. In the early 1970s, not a single traditional Hindu temple existed in the U.S., built on virgin land with a Bhoomi Pooja (ground worship), according to aagama shaastra (temple code), with gopurams, dhwaja sthambhams, carved stone deities, poojas and rituals that are regular features of traditional Hindu temples. Even in the late 70's, if you wanted to see a traditional Hindu temple, or even just find a poojari (Hindu priest), you had to go all the way to Pennsylvania or New York.

So, it was a dream even to imagine the possibility of a traditional temple.

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The idea sprouts ... a traditional temple built from the ground up in Bay Area!

Shrimathi Annapoorna Krishnamurthy is organizing music concerts by inviting musicians from India to her home in Walnut Creek. A few families meet and dream of a hall to hold concerts, and a temple to pray in – just as we wish for daily staples like curry leaves and hot pickles, with no Indian grocery stores here!

In 1976, I visit a former classmate in Pittsburgh, PA, who has been helping to build a traditional Sri Venkateswara temple there. When I return home, I start collecting donations for that temple. My neighbor and best friend, Shri Chandar Ramrakha, asks me why we can't build our own temple here in the Bay Area. Though I've had earlier chats with others to build a temple, it is Ramrakha's question that catalyzes my starting to work on our own temple here, though I'd never even had the idea in my childhood.

Prior to the emergence of Silicon Valley, Bechtel Corporation, a multinational engineering, and construction company, is the largest employer of professionals from India. By virtue of my supervisory position at Bechtel, I have a good number of colleagues from various geographic and linguistic backgrounds. So, the idea of an inclusive temple for all devotees, regardless of language, origin, or sampradaya (religious tradition), soon emerges!

In the mid-1970's, the number of South Indian families in all of Northern California is only around 160 – and from all other regions of India, just 400. I want to draft an Appeal Letter that 50 interested families would send to the rest of the community, asking for support to build a temple here. Around August 1976, I invite about 15 families to my home to discuss this. Shri & Shrimathi Satyas, Sarkars, Kudlus, Janakiramans, Ramrakhas, and Dantuluris come over. I request them to identify well-known people from various regions of India, so we can reach out to them with an Appeal Letter. With help from

Shri Arun Joshi, Kiran Parikh, Raju Dantuluri, Sanat Roy, Shashikant Desai and a few others, I then contact well-known people from various regions of India to get their concurrence to the Appeal Letter.

Enthusiastic support comes from Shri Durvasula Sastry, G.S. Satya, Mrinal Sarkar, Arjan Karadi and Chandar Ramrakha.

Once around 60 Individuals agree to the Appeal Letter, I meet with Shri Ramesh Murarka, publisher of India West newspaper, to get the Appeal Letter published. Ramesh tells me there is already another group of people talking about a temple, and suggests we join forces, giving me the name of Shrimathi Malti Prasad of Los Altos. Very soon, Shri Durvasula Sastry, Satya, Mrinal & Sulata Sarkar, Dantuluri, Ramrakha and I meet with Malti and her group in Fremont. She not only graciously agrees to join us, but also brings her friends from Swami Chinmayananda's organization, where she has been quite involved, also to join us.

With the growing support of a wide group of friends – and their friends – the miraculous idea of a traditional temple for all devotees right here, built from the ground up in our adopted homeland, thousands of miles away – quickly evolves!

Our small community acquires kshetra bhoomi (temple land)

As the enthusiastic group grows, we hold many discussions on what our major goals and a name for our organization should be. We decide on the name Hindu Community and Cultural Center (HCCC) as we are equally interested in religious and cultural activities. At a meeting in Shri Kiran Parikh's home in Fremont, everyone agrees to get our organization incorporated, with Shrimathi Malti Prasad, Shri Ramesh Murarka and me, as incorporating Directors. This incorporation in July 1977 is the first step toward accomplishing everyone's dream!

We decide to seek a site around Pleasanton for all devotees in Northern California. We want a minimum of four acres at a cost about \$60,000. After scouting numerous locations, we select a beautiful land in Pleasanton on the

banks of a lake along Route 84. Our offer to buy it is accepted by the Owner, contingent upon getting a Use Permit from the local government to build a temple there. Alameda County grants us the Use Permit in January 1979, but soon, local opponents to a Hindu temple collect about 3,000 signatures and force the County Board of Supervisors to revoke the permit.

This has a demoralizing effect on the enthusiastic committee members. The group effort abruptly comes to a halt as several core volunteers lose interest.

I am then transferred by Bechtel to Pennsylvania for two years. When I visit Bay Area every two months, my good friend Lalit Mathur and I continue to look for another location. Finally, a four-acre parcel is located in Springtown area of Livermore, at a cost of \$60,000. Core team members unanimously agree on the property, and it is purchased in November 1980.

The years that follow, leading up to the Kumbhabhishekham (consecration ceremonies and opening of the temple for worship) in 1986, are studded with many miracles, brought about by God's blessings.

City of Livermore annexes our kshetra bhoomi (temple land)

The Springtown property happens to be in an unincorporated part of Alameda County even though the adjoining Heather Lane is within Livermore city limits. As a result, the property is land-locked with no access to even basic utilities like water and electricity. The first step therefore is to apply for annexation to the City of Livermore. When we contact the Planning Commission, we are told that the City has no plans to annex the area until 2002, and we are told to look for other sites.

We place our faith in the Almighty and request annexation anyway in November 1981. A lengthy public hearing process begins.

In a stunning turn of fortunes:

- ❖ Newspapers in the Livermore-Pleasanton-Dublin (Tri-Valley) area come out strongly, urging the city to accord annexation, as they are sympathetic to our having been denied a permit unfairly in

Pleasanton. ❖ The Organization of Valley Churches writes to the City that they welcome and want the Hindu Temple in the Livermore area.

- ❖ Rev. Elizabeth Jones of First Presbyterian Church near Scenic Avenue attends every single hearing and speaks in our support.

And finally, Livermore City Board of Supervisors votes in favor of annexation in November 1982, paving the way to “energize” our kshetra bhoomi (temple land) with electricity, water, and other utilities!

Optimism Resurges, Temple Plans are Made!

Even though the property is annexed, we need a way to bring utilities to the site. Again, we place our faith in the Almighty. Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniya Swami of Saiva Siddhantha Church has been running a Ganesha Temple in a garage on Sacramento

Street in San Francisco from the early 1950s. Geetha and I visit the temple in the mid 1970s, as do a few other devotees. We develop a good relationship with several of the Church members. I request one of them, Shri Easan Katir, to come and help us purchase a home adjoining our kshetra (temple) bhoomi (sacred land) on Heather Lane. He knocks on doors and successfully persuades the owner of 1395 Heather Lane to sell it to us. We purchase the home in the name of Shrimathi Renu Prasad (daughter of Shrimathi Malti Prasad), who has just started her professional career.

No major project can be successful unless the people leading the effort act in unison. God’s blessing is in the form of several community leaders coming forward with dedication to the cause. These are truly GODSENDS ... Shri & Shrimathi (in no particular order):

Malti and Rajendra Prasad

Durvasula and Lakshmi Sastry

Sulata and Mrinal Sarkar

G.S. and Katyayini Satya

Chandar and Prem Ramrakha

N. and Mala Seshagiri

K. and Shyamala Venkateswaran	D.V. and Vasantha Giri
Sudhin and Rama Vittal	B.R. and Prema Govinda Rao
H.K. and Geeta Narayan	Sheela Shastry
Lingagoud and Kala Memula	Bina and Desmond Erasmus
G.R. and Leela Srinivasan	Mulki Kamath
T.N. and Vijaya Narasimhan	S. and Vimala Ramani
Jagannadham and Lalitha Akella	Y.T. and Madhuri Thathachari
Ravi and Nancy Kaw	Arjan and Shalini Karadi
Geetha and me	

The tireless and invaluable dedication of these devotees is key to the ultimate realization of this divinely monumental task!

Each one of these spearheads one or more critical areas of developing this young organization and planning the temple. While each one expresses a unique viewpoint or opinions on key decisions, once the final decision is made, all act in unison for the good cause!

Bylaws are established for our young organization, as required by the State of California for any non-profit organization. Our core members are members of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee, spearheading various committees. Regular meetings are held. Most significantly, they come up with cash contributions whenever major expenses have to be faced, like the purchase of land. They also provide guarantees for the construction loan by pledging their homes as liens to the bank. They popularize the effort by speaking at gatherings of various Indian organizations in the Bay Area. They raise funds by knocking on doors and collecting anything from \$5 and \$10 to \$1,000 contributions from our community.

A weekly devotional music radio broadcast is started, with Shrimathi Sheela Sastry hosting it. Fundraising concerts are held in various parts of Bay Area

with the most eminent artistes of Indian music and dance of the era coming forward in support of our organization.

These include great legends: M.S. Subbulakshmi, the first musician ever awarded Bharat Ratna (India's highest civilian honor) and the first Indian musician to receive Ramon Magsaysay award; Bharat Ratnas Ravi Shankar and Bhimsen Joshi, Padma Bhushans Vempati Chinna Satyam and Parveen Sultana, Padma Vibhushans Uday Shankar, Sonal Mansingh and M. Balamuralikrishna, and Shri Dilshad Khan, husband of Parveen Sultana and eminent Bengali singer in his own right.

It is now time to start drawing up plans for building the temple. Padma Bhushan Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapathi (temple builder) visits from India and stays in Shri Seshagiri's house, and blesses us with an early design concept, which is used as the temple logo.

A small core team of us visits the just-opened Los Angeles (Malibu) temple and is impressed with its design. Based on this, Padma Shri Muthiah Sthapathi, chief sthapathi (principal temple builder) of Tamil Nadu state in India, is engaged as our sthapathi, following a formal evaluation by Goud Memula.

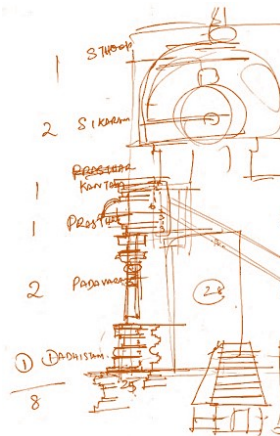
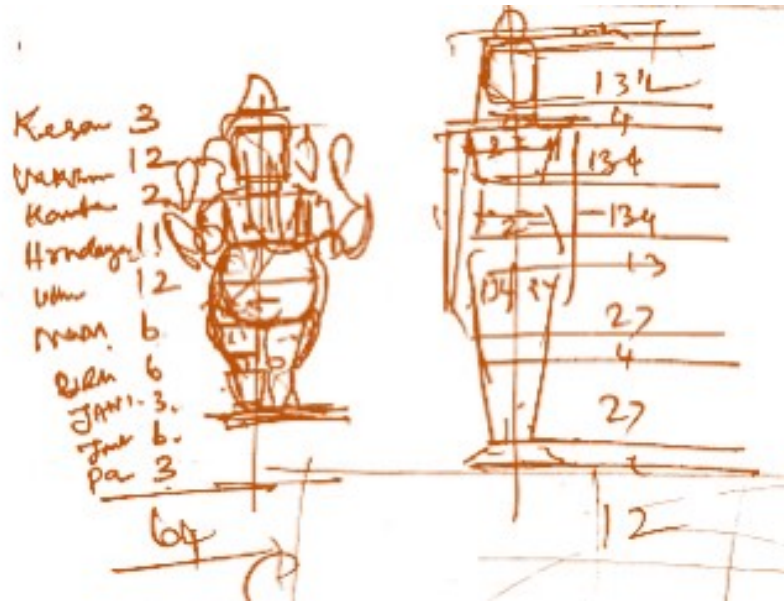
Sthapathi prepares architectural drawings strictly according to shastras, on drawing sheets pasted on walls of Seshagiri's home. He later makes full size drawings on large plywood boards, kneeling on the floor, at 1395 Heather Lane, such as the 13-foot-tall pillars in the mandapa (temple main hall), chanting the proportions according to the shastraas. He also produces detailed drawings of the vigrahas (idols) and builds a wooden model of the temple – a miniature version to scale that includes sculptural details. These drawings and model tremendously help devotees and donors visualize what our temple would look like when complete...helping to generate more community support!



Temple as the divine form of God reclining on sacred Bhoomi (land)

The Shiva Vishnu temple concept has to be translated into a proper layout. Dr. Ganapathy Sthapathi earlier suggested a mural of Lord Shankara Narayana in the middle to bridge the two sides of the temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu respectively. With the engagement of Padma Shri Muthiah Sthapathi now, it is time to prepare detailed designs for the temple. When he arrives, he suggests a Subramanya (Karthikeya) sannidhi (sanctum) in the middle, and all committee members unanimously accept his recommendation.

A personal miracle is included in this. The original list of sannidhis (sancta) selected by the committee does not include one with Lord Subramanya (also known as Muruga or Karthikeya). My ishta devatha (personal deity) is Muruga but I don't want to antagonize my teammates by pushing my personal desire. I secretly pray to Lord Muruga to somehow find a place, and He answers my prayer – a big blessing when Sthapathi comes up with his recommendation!

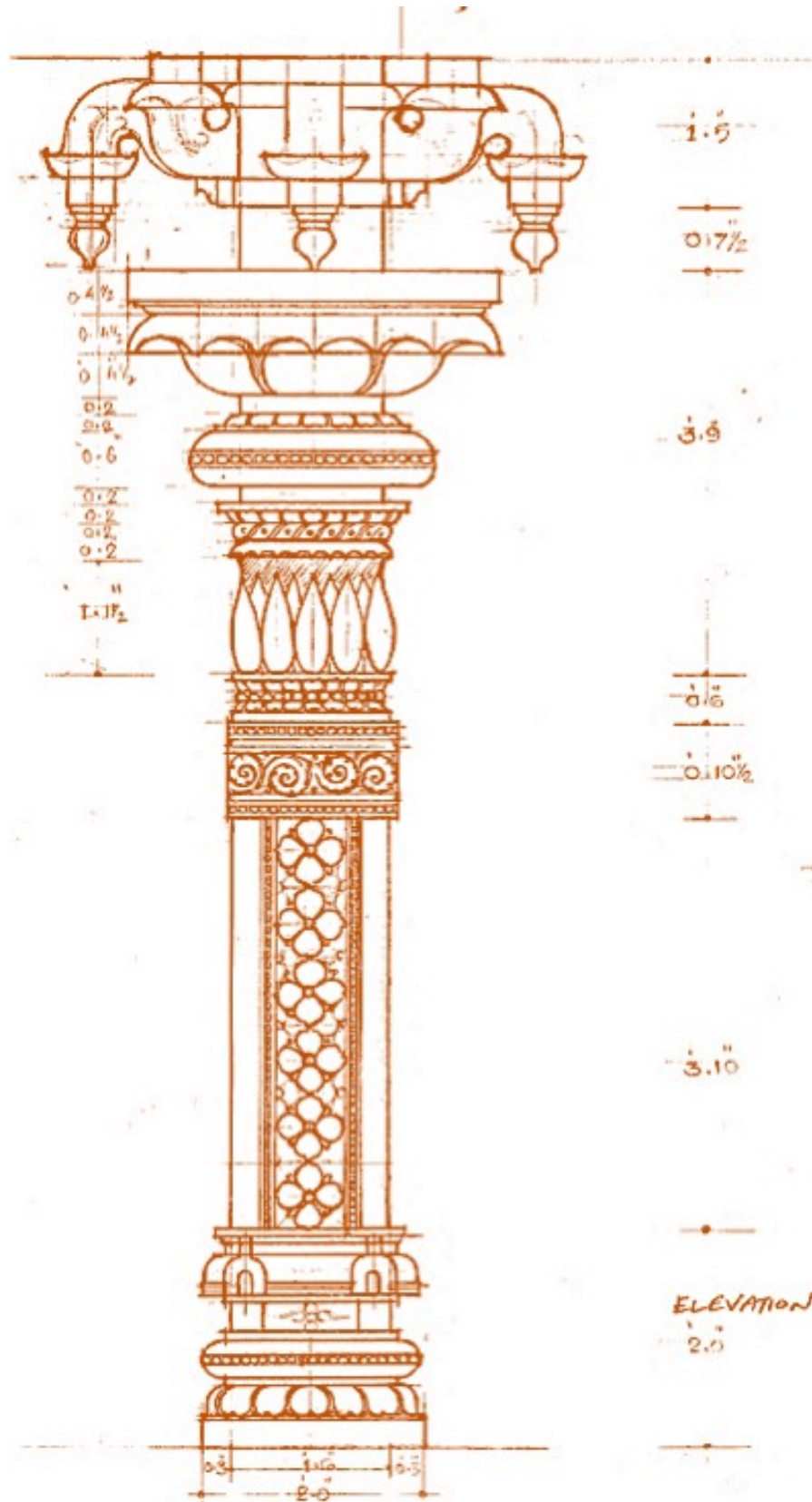


Padma Shri Muthiah Sthapathi creating the design of Shiva Vishnu Temple

Our inclusive approach to serve all devotees, regardless of region, language, sampradaya (religious tradition) or regional origin, requires the temple architecture to include both South Indian and North Indian styles. The sthapathi comes up with a harmonious blend for both the exterior and interior of the temple – Chola style for the Vishnu shrine and Kalinga style for the Shiva shrine – and likewise for the parivaara (accompanying) shrines of Ganesha, Durga, Parvathi, Kartikeya, SriDevi, Bhoo Devi, Rama-Sita, Radha-Krishna, Hanuman, Kala Bhairava and Nava Graha. All committee members happily agree to the sthapathi's uniquely integrated concept.



Shiva Vishnu Temple Design Concept Evolution by Sthapathi



Shiva Vishnu Temple Design Details drawn to full scale by Sthapathi



Our temple plans are blessed by His Holiness Jayendra Saraswathi of Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt, and by Swami Chinmayananda. Prof. R. Natesan, retired principal of engineering colleges in Andhra and Tamil Nadu, and an early supporter of ours, accompanies the Sthapathi to Kanchipuram for this blessing of our temple plans. Shri Bhupendar Gosain is hired as the Project manager for the engineering and construction of the temple. He coordinates the development and submittal of detailed design drawings, which are submitted to the City of Livermore. A permit to build the temple is received in September 1984.

Lords Ganesha and Subramanya (Karthikeya) Arrive to bless us to build the temple!

Sometime in the early 1980s, I receive Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniya and two of his followers in our Danville home for dinner. Gurudeva extends his support with enthusiasm for our temple. One day when my wife Geetha and I visit his San Francisco temple, Gurudeva asks me to meet him after the services and take home two guests. When I meet him, he hands over two small granite idols of Ganesha and Muruga. I tell him we have no place (temple) to keep them, but he says, "take them and a temple will come up".

Understanding our situation, and to bless us to reach our goal, Lord Ganesha and Lord Muruga (Karthikeya) come with us to stay at first in the homes of many Bay Area devotees. This hosting of the Divine Lords by devotee families brings many more strong supporters and volunteers to join forces with us.

Baalaalaya (interim temple) opens for worship during temple construction

An inexpensive but elegant wooden structure is built with our limited funds in the backyard of 1395 Heather Lane to house Lord Ganesha and Lord Karthikeya. This Interim Temple is auspiciously inaugurated as Baalaalaya (interim temple) while the main temple is being built. Shrimathi Malti Prasad requests Swami Chinmayananda to bring a poojaari (priest) to the temple for daily rituals and festivals. Pandit Ravichandran soon arrives from a Flint, Michigan temple, as our first poojaari, and performs all traditional poojas and rituals, as never before seen in Bay Area. This results in great satisfaction of devotees, and funds start coming in more and more.

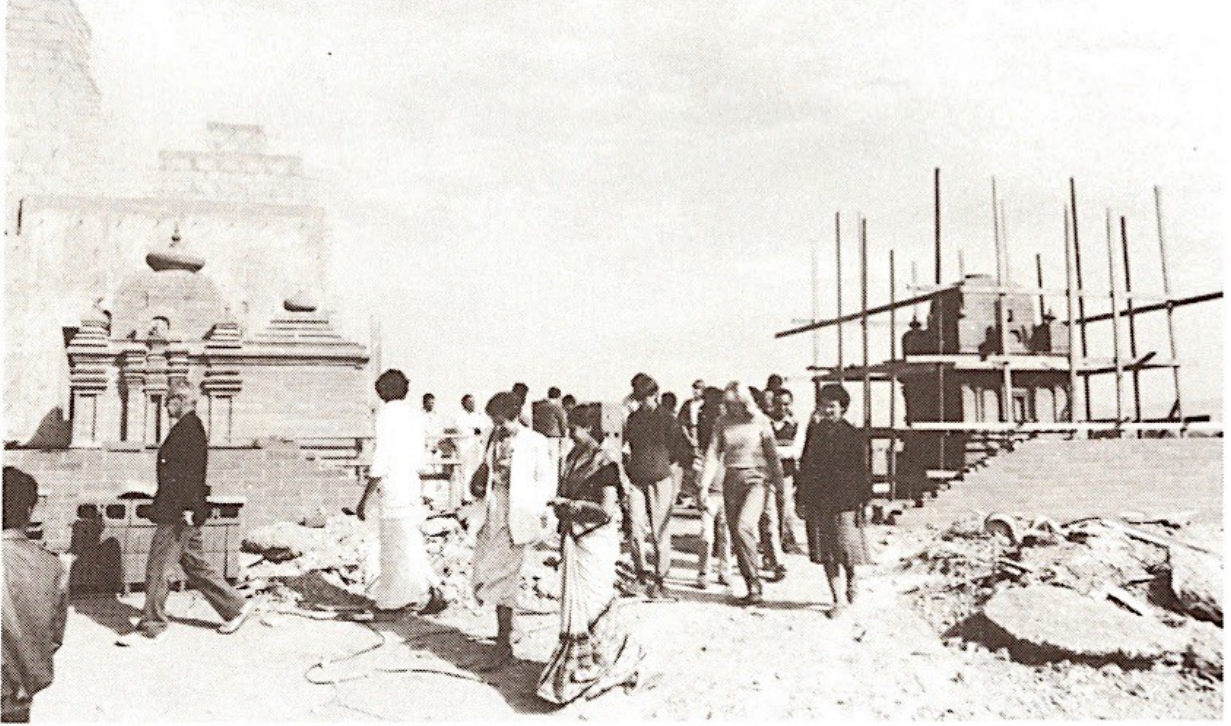
As there is still no road access to the temple ground, we propose to the City of Livermore that we relocate the 1395 Heather Lane house – which we'd purchased earlier – to the temple property and open up access to it from Heather Lane. At that time, there is nothing but an agricultural field from there all the way to Freeway 580 to the south. The City doesn't like the idea; instead, they offer to redraw the area development plan to create Arrowhead Avenue, but want us to construct the Arrowhead Avenue from Wisteria Way. We agree to it.

Sannidhis (shrines) emerge from the ground!

With much enthusiasm, Bhoomi Pooja (prayer to the sacred land) is traditionally performed in November 1983. Shri Y.T. Thathachari brings Swami Satchidananda as a special guest for the event. We begin with an auspicious pooja to invoke God's blessings for construction to be auspicious and successful. Mantras are chanted, rituals performed, and nava ratna (nine gems) are "seeded" into the land where the temple is about to rise!

Honorable N.T. Rama Rao, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, India, graciously visits and lays the foundation stone for the temple in June 1984.

State Bank of India gives us a loan of \$500,000 for construction. The bank requires guarantees from the community in the form of liens on homes. About 26 families generously come forward, pledging their homes to the Bank in an act of faith – another miracle!



Enclosed shrines in first phase, with temple roof and Raja Gopuram to come later

Major construction work starts in October 1984. Shilpis (temple sculptors) arrive from India in March 1985. As the cost of the entire temple is still way beyond our funds, we decide to build it in phases: sannidhis (enclosed shrines) on a concrete slab with a compound wall at first, a roof and Raja Gopuram coming later.

The anticipated cost for opening the temple in the first phase is about \$1 million. Fundraising is our topmost priority. A donation of \$1,000 is considered significant. One day Shrimathi Malti Prasad comes to the meeting with a check of \$50,000 from Shri Gulu Advani and a pledge of another check for a similar amount from another person. This is astonishing!

Very soon Dr. Vittal and Dr. Bina Erasmus come forward with checks for \$50,000 each. Almost every core team member donates around \$25K. While everyone of the core group puts forward great efforts to raise funds from the community, the effort of Shri G.R. Srinivasan is exemplary - he raises about \$200,000!

Padma Vibhushan Ali Akbar Khan and Bharat Ratna Pandit Ravi Shankar perform bhoomi pooja and lay the foundation stone for the cultural center (assembly hall) building behind the temple, in October 1985.

Idols are graciously donated by TTD and Tamil Nadu Government

A good friend of mine, Shri Pannakad Subramani of Chicago, is in my house one day. After we discuss the temple project, he calls Honorable V.R. Nedunchezhian, Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu State, and introduces me to him. Soon, I visit the minister's house in Chennai, India. Several members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are waiting to see him, but he invites me in immediately. I request his help for the temple. After a pleasant conversation, he promises to consider the matter favorably.

Most of our committee members are skeptical, as the ruling party is considered to be anti-religion. But then the next miracle occurs! Within a month of our meeting, we receive a letter signed by Honorable M.G. Ramachandran, Chief Minister, stating the vital role of a temple in preserving our culture, with a generous donation of idols for our temple, and a gift of Rs. 5,00,000, approved by him.

At the same time, Shri Durvasula Sastry contacts Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in Andhra Pradesh and obtains a loan of Rs. 11,00,000, along with the donation of granite idols of Shri Venkatachalapathy, Sridevi and Bhoo devi. The loan is repaid by us after completion of construction and kumbhabhishekam (temple dedication).

We want South and North Indian communities' desires to be integrated into the temple design. Rama, Krishna and Durga are most frequently worshipped in North India as marble idols. Idols of Vishnu, Sri Devi and Bhoo Devi are generously donated by Tirumala-Tirupathi Devasthanam (temple). Granite idols of other deities, and utsava moorthies, are donated by Tamil Nadu government.

The money from the above sources is used to pay for marble deities of Rama-Sita and Radha-Krishna in Northern Indian style, and Durga Maata in a dasa-bhuja (eight-armed) Bengali style, as well as pooja materials and wages of shilpis (sculptors/artisans), managed by our Agent, Shri Rajaratnam, in Chennai. Thus, the idols in the shrines also are in various styles, to serve all devotees inclusively.

Kanaka Durga Maata Arrives to Bless Us!

The story of our Kanaka Durga Maata arriving here is yet another great miracle. As construction is proceeding, one day I receive a call from Dr. Alagappan, founder of New York Ganesha temple, saying that one Shri O.V. Raju of Chennai wants to donate a Kanaka Durga idol to our temple. We decline the offer as we already have a marble Durga idol for the sanctum. Alagappan then wants to take Devi to his New York temple but changes his mind for personal reasons.

I then receive a call from our agent in Chennai, Shri Rajaratnam, requesting me to come and meet Shri Raju. As he is a Telugu man, we authorize Goud and Kala Memula to meet him and explain our situation. They return and recommend that I personally meet with him.

Accordingly, Geetha and I go to his house in India, accompanied by my in-laws. The moment we enter, Shri Raju (84 years old) and his wife (over 75 years old) fall on our feet (saashtaanga namaskaaram), startling me, as I'm only 45 years old. He then exclaims "you are not Muthuraman – you are Muthuswamy". This jolts me further, as my given name at birth was Muthuswamy and my father changed it to Muthuraman later, when he started performing Sri Rama Puja daily when I was six years old. How does Shri Raju know - even my wife does not know this!

Shri Raju has been Chief Engineer of Public Works Department earlier, and his wife is the first woman Ph. D. in Economics in India. He has given up his professional career to become a Durga worshipper and writing down in a diary everything Devi tells him whenever She comes to his vision.

He shows us his diary notes dating back to 1969 when Devi told him She wanted to be installed in a temple that a Muthuswamy would build in California. He says my purpose in coming to USA is not to be an engineer but to build a temple! He then leads us to the shrine in the back of his house with the Kanaka Durga idol blessed by His Holiness Maha Periyavaa of Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt, established by Sri Adi Sankara in the year 482 B.C.

Feeling the grace of Kanaka Durga, I agree to bring Her to our temple. As there are already Parvathy and Durga deities within the temple, Sthapathi says we should not

install Her inside the temple, but permanently in what is now our interim temple, Baalaalaya, to continually bless us!

Kumbhabhishekham Happens!

The feverish pace of construction continues for the kumbhabhishekham – auspicious consecration – dedication – inauguration ceremonies for temple, to be performed on July 13, 1986.

Plans include bringing an elephant (Lord Ganesha) to bless the occasion, and to drop flowers on the shrines from a helicopter during Kumbhabhishekham muhurtham (auspicious time).



Helicopter showering flowers on the shrines

A crowd of about 2,000 people (very large these days) witnesses and participates in the Kumbhabhishekham ceremonies. Their ecstasy climaxes when the helicopter showers flowers on the shrines at the auspicious moment.



Kumbhbhishekam Celebrations

The sthapaathí installs the stone moola murthis (permanent deities) in the sannidhis (sancta) with nava ratna (nine gems), and “opens” Their eyes. This is the traditional “hand-over” of the murthis in a temple during the first kumbhabhishekam by the Sthapaathí to the Poojaari (Hindu priest) for rituals, as specified by shastraas (scriptures). This is the happy and successful culmination of the 10-year drive by the Bay Area Hindu Community and the sacrifices of core committee members and volunteers.



Dream come true, finally!

On the day of kumbhabhishekham, San Francisco Sunday Examiner publishes a story and a picture of me on the front page with two prominent poojaris from India, who have come to perform the sacred rituals. The Examiner front page is held in high esteem by local communities and so this spurs TV channels 2 and 7 also to cover the event as well.

In my personal life, yet another miracle now occurs in my office. Television Channel 10 approaches Shri G.S. Satya with a request to interview the best person on the Committee. Satya nobly directs them to me. They ask for permission to film me in my office to show first that we are highly-respected professionals, and then follow me to the temple, where they would finish the story, showing viewers how we worship in a temple in traditional attire.

The problem: my employer, Bechtel Corporation, a 100-year-old private company, has never before allowed any media into their premises, and categorically refuses permission. My boss doesn't give up, and takes it up with Vice President of Public Relations, and convinces management that this particular TV interview would create tremendous public goodwill with hundreds of engineers from India working for their Company. They make an unprecedented exception to policy, and approve the request. The story airs on TV.

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A Final Word...

I have identified the core team members earlier in this “diary”. I would like to record for history that without their sustained dedication and team spirit, it would not have been possible to realize the goal we jointly embarked on! As memories fade after decades, I may not have identified all the significant individuals, or highlighted the significant contributions of many core team members. My apologies for any omissions.

I started about 25 years ago to write down these recollections, but never published these yet, as I feared it might be misconstrued as bragging or self-promoting. Now I am over 80 years of age. My core teammates have urged me to share my story with everyone, as newer temple devotees may not be aware of the sacrifices and struggles of founding members, and the Lord’s miracles, which made this temple become reality for the whole community!

I would like to express my thanks to Shri Seshagiri for editing, augmenting, and enlivening my write-up. He contributed enormously to the sacred effort right from the beginning. He got our newsletters (Paschima Vani) started; developed booklets and other publicity materials but was always self-effacing. Very rare to find a humbler soul!



Shiva Vishnu
Temple

