

Ālaya Vānī

PUBLISHED SEMI - ANNUALLY
NUMBER 2 • AUGUST 2011

*"He who is unattached
everywhere, who
is not delighted
at receiving good
nor dejected at
coming by evil, is
poised in wisdom."*

-Bhagavad Gita

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**Message from the Chairman
The Council of Hindu Temples of North America**

Dear Fellow Hindus,

Namaste and salutations to the members of the Council of Hindu Temples of North America (CHTNA) and likeminded Hindu organizations/temples. The CHTNA's goal goes beyond uniting Hindus through Hindu temples; specifically it seeks to identify and come up with detailed practical solutions to common issues and challenges facing Hindu temples at this moment and in future. The Vision of CHTNA is to ensure NA Hindu temples remain vibrant and effective in order to serve Hindus for many decades to come.

My SWOT assessment for North American Temples is summarized as follows: 1) Strengths - good infrastructure, serving numerous devotees; 2) Weaknesses - aging generation with knowledge base; 3) Opportunities - Integrate Youth through Seva projects; 4) Threats - Religious conversions in our own families and trapped in rituals and organization of events.

Unless we adapt our temples to this country in terms of services provided by religious organizations, temples will increasingly become less effective and more symbolic as the youth will not be motivated only by rituals and grandiose festivities. In this regard, we in CHTNA have realized that Hindu temples not only have to increase our Seva efforts but also involve youth in Seva programs, coordinate and document the Seva efforts in the entire country in order to do the RIGHT thing as part of our DHARMA, and also have a visible positive footprint and media coverage.

Given this context we invite NA Hindu temples to join CHTNA and be a partner in collectively envisioning the road map for the next few decades and also making due diligent efforts to preserve our common heritage and legacy for Hindus and Hinduism in this Continent. We will achieve this through a detailed dialog and sharing the mutually beneficial practical solutions to our common challenges and issues.

Namaste and dhanyavad.

Mr. Sharma Tadepalli
Secretary

Sri Meenakshi Temple, Pearland, TX

**Summary of the Annual meeting of the Council of
Hindu Temples of North America (CHTNA) held on
May 14th, 2011 at Sri Meenakshi Temple, Pearland, TX**

- Participated by 10 Temples.
- Membership drive discussed in detail. Recommendations included; need for preparation of marketing brochure/flyers and personal contacts with Temple Management.
- Benefits for the new/existing member Temples of CHTNA include:
 - Collective bargaining power with suppliers/vendors such as flowers, fruits, and services for Temple employees etc.
 - Sharing experiences regarding common issues affecting the Temples including recruiting priests, musicians / artists / spiritual leaders etc from India.
 - Open discussions on issues affecting Temple operations.
 - Internal / External conflicts of interest
 - Compliance with State/Federal regulations including zoning laws, court/litigation cases etc.
 - Roles of Temples in dealing with current challenges and preserving Hinduism.
 - Issues related to Priests.
 - Focus on Youth and Volunteerism.
 - Domestic Violence.
- Members shared their experiences and opinions on the safety and security of the Temples;
 - Need for alarm security and CCTV cameras inside and all around the Temples.
 - Security guards.
 - Background checks on contractors / contract employees for services such as cleaning / janitorial services etc.
 - Tighten security leaks including credit cards.
 - Need to educate local community in the neighborhood.
- Mr. Tejas Dave of Coalition of Hindu youth presented a detailed report on involvement of the youth in Temple activities and on volunteerism.
- Ms. Anju Bhargava of HASC made a presentation on the activities of HASC and the forthcoming conference at the White House in July 2011.
- Work assignments for 2011-2012 were discussed and given to the member Temples present at the meeting. One of the highlights of this was to have a new website for CHTNA to update and maintain it.



**MEMBERSHIP APPEAL
TO ALL THE TEMPLES**

PLEASE JOIN AND BE A PART OF THE COUNCIL OF HINDU TEMPLES OF NORTH AMERICA BY BECOMING A MEMBER AND MAKING THE COUNCIL A STRONG BODY REPRESENTING ALL THE TEMPLES. THE COUNCIL CAN HAVE A POWERFUL VOICE IN DEALING WITH ISSUES SUCH AS RELIGIOUS WORKERS VISAS, ETC - COMMON CONCERN OF ALL TEMPLES.

For Further Information regarding membership form and dues, Please call the Secretariat of The Council - Dr. Uma Mysorekar
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**ANNUAL COUNCIL
MEETING OF 2012**

will be held in April/May 2012

Location: TBA (To Be Announced)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING MEETING CONTACT
SECRETARY/TREASURER - DR. UMA MYSOREKAR
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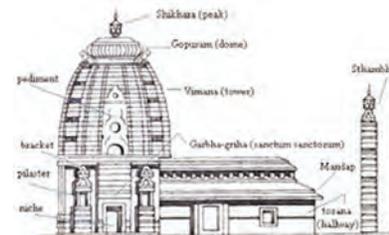


Annual Meeting of the Council of Hindu Temples of North America (CHTNA) at Šri Meenakshi Temple, Pearland TX

The Resonance of the Divine: Hindu Architecture and Its Tenets by: Priyanka Srinivasa

In the pantomime of Andhra heat, my fingers spread across cool sandstone pillars. I trace over cattle, flowers, bees, and celestial beings carved from rock older than the New World. Each step echoes against holy chambers that were places of worship for more than a millennium. A priest lights incense just as his father and his father had done for centuries. *Breathaking* I whisper as my voice carries into the spiritual abode.

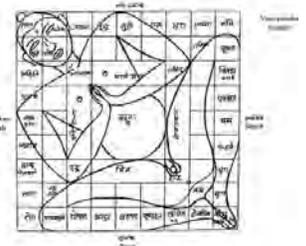
One of the momentous achievements of Hindu civilization is unquestionably its expository architecture. The physical manifestation of the rich heritage of India is over five millennia old. A tradition hailing from the civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, Hindu architecture is that vast tapestry of production of the Indian Subcontinent that encompasses a multitude of expressions over space and time, transformed by the forces of history considered unique to the sub-continent; sometimes destroying, but most of the time absorbing. The result is an evolving range of architectural production that none the less retains a certain amount of continuity across history. But this tradition of stone is not cemented in history solely because of its aesthetically pleasing designs etched into the *balipitha*, but rather of the divine resonance that reverberates in the structures. It is no wonder that these alcoves of faith have been the centers of Hindu life since the dawn of civilization.



In Sanskrit, the word for architecture is “*Vastu Shaastra*” or science of structure, illustrates the cross-thematic nature of Hindu architecture: It aligns both religious and scientific aspects of humanity. What is truly spectacular about this tradition is the fact that the structure harmonizes the body while educating Hindu society on myths and legends. The first thing one notices about the temple is its sheer size and asthetic appearance. The temple is ornately constructed so that the individual knows that this place is not any other structure. This alcove is the house of the Gods. It astounds the devotee. It moves him as he sees the towers, the highest point in range. Hindu architecture has aspects that are both pleasing to the eye and resonate with a spiritual and diving meaning. The following is the exploration of beauty, education, and spiritual resonance.

First, we must acknowledge the layout of a Hindu public sphere and its metaphysical manifestation.

The basic plan of a Hindu temple is an expression of sacred geometry where the temple is visualized as a grand mandala categorized as sacred shape consisting of the intersection of a circle and a square. The plotting of the temple plan is in relation to the cardinal directions and the heavens. The square-shape is symbolic of earth, signifying the four directions



WINNERS & PARTICIPANTS of the ESSAY COMPETITION 2010-2011 conducted by The Council of Hindu Temples of North America

The top two winners in each category were :

College -

- Priyanka Srinivasa
- Sudha Rao

High School -

- Aparna Peri

Middle School -

- Pari Vijay
- Deepak Subramanian

The participants in each category were:

Middle School -

- Tarjani Shukla
- Harshini Rallapalli
- Pari Vijay
- Deepak Subramanian

High School -

- Aparna Peri

College -

- Priyanka Shaam
- Shruti Acharya
- Priyanka Srinivasan
- Sudha Rao

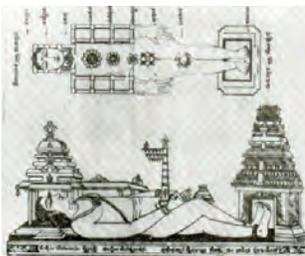
The Council members congratulate all the participants and winners for their interest and dedication.

“What God values most is your faith, yearning and humility. Hence sit before God laying bare your mind. Only then you will be able to beseech him without any reservation and to forget yourself enjoying the ineffable beauty of God. The more your faith, devotion and yearning, the more you will enjoy feast of perpetual bliss.”

- Swami Vivekananda

which bind and define it while the circle is a metaphor for heaven. Without beginning or end, it signifies timelessness and eternity. The mandala is the meeting ground of heaven and earth. The *mandala* is steeped in an ancient legend about the balance of good and evil.

Once when *Shiva* was engaged in a battle with the demon *Andhaka*, a drop of sweat fell from *Shiva's* forehead to the ground. The drop transformed into a beast who attempted to destroy the Universe. The gods, in retaliation, held him down. When the demon fell, the deities lodged themselves onto different parts of his body and compressed him. Thus the Sanskrit word “*vastu*” gains its significance as ‘the lodgment of the gods’. In the diagram, he is illustrated as lying down inside the mandala with his arms and leg, his head pushed into the north-eastern corner of the square.



The temple is modeled after the anatomy of a human body, representing chakras and harmonious aligning as illustrated above

This *vastu-purusha* is the spirit in mother-earth which needs to be pacified and is regarded as a demon whose permission is necessary before any construction can come up on the site. The *vastu-mandala* is divided into square grids with the lodging of the respective deities marked. It also has represented on it the thirty-two *nakshatras*, the constellations that the moon passes through on its monthly course.

There are six attributes to the temple.

1. *Rajagopura* or tower. It represents the feet of a human. The pyramid-like structure shooting up the landscape dominates the skyline. On top of it resides the *shikhara* (peak). It marks the location of the shrine room and rises directly above it.
2. *Lanchana* or copper flag. The *lanchana* is inscribed with the deity of the temple and is a symbol of the structure’s holiness. On the human body, the *lanchana* represents the loins.
3. *Praakaara*. The third is the walkway. Most temples have a walkway around the walls of the inner chamber for circumambulation by devotees around the deity as a mark of respect to the temples god. The field enclosures and pavilions through which he must pass to reach the sanctum are symbolic. They represent the phases of progress in a man’s journey towards divinity. According to the scheme of transition, architectural and sculptural details vary from phase to phase in the devotee’s onward movement, gradually preparing him for the ultimate experience, which awaits him in the shrine. This process mirrors the four-phased spiritual evolution described in yoga: the waking state (*jagrat*); dream state (*swapna*); the state of deep sleep (*sushupti*); and finally the highest state of awareness, *turiya*. The *prakaram* represents the hands.
4. *Mandapam* or the Temple Hall. Most large temples have a hall meant for the audience to sit. This is also called the *nata-mandira* (hall for temple-dancing) where, in days of yore, women dancers or used to perform dance rituals. Devotees use the hall to sit, meditate, pray, chant or watch the priests perform rituals. The hall is decorated with paintings of deities. On the human body, the *Mandapam* is the abdomen.

5. *Antaraala*. The Front Porch: This area of the temples usually has a big metallic bell that hangs from the ceiling. Devotees entering and leaving the porch ring this bell to declare their arrival and departure. On reaching the main gateway, the worshipper bends down and touches the threshold before crossing it. He is ready to pass into the abode. Entering the gateway, he is greeted by a host of figures on the outer walls. The sculptures carved in sandstone tell stories and educate members of society on the stories of creation and the

6. *Garbhagriha*. Always in the North-east, The head represents the *garbha griha* (sanctum sanctorum) in which the *murthi* or deity resides. It has no pillars, windows or ventilators. Here, the idol resides in peace. It is the interior and most intimate area of worship in the temple. Finally the shrine, devoid of any ornamentation, and with its plainly adorned entrance, leads the devotee further to the highest achievable state of consciousness of tranquility (*turiya*), where all boundaries vanish and the universe stands forth in its primordial glory. It signifies the coming to rest of all differentiated, relative existence. This utterly quiet, peaceful and blissful state is the ultimate aim of all spiritual activity. The devotee is now fully-absorbed in the beauty and serenity of the icon. He or she is now in the inner square of *Brahma* in the *vastu-mandala*, and in direct communion with the chief source of power in the temple.

The temple is a place of worship, self-reflection, education. Every aspect of the architecture of the temple is built for the betterment of the individual and society. Why is that? The answer is three-fold: 1. due to the astrological and meditative significance the temple aligns the body due to feng-shui like elements. 2. It rings joy due to the aesthetics of the temple. 3. The temple educates society on themes. As we have explored the astrological and asthetic value of the temple, we now view the education aspects. The exterior of the halls and porch are covered with figural sculpture. A series of niches highlight events from the mythology of the enshrined deity, and frequently a place is set aside for a variety of other gods. In addition, temple walls feature repeated banks of scroll-like foliage, images of women, and loving couples known as *mithunas*. Signifying growth, abundance, and prosperity, they were considered auspicious motifs. These sculptures were built to educate. For example, tucked into the hills of Andhra Pradesh sits *Tirumala Venkateswara* Temple, an ancient temple with a story that is as beautiful and poetic as Hinduism itself. It was once said that *Sri Venkateswara* himself walked in the hills. This place is beyond holy. The architecture scrolled in the metals that line the temple tells the story of *Sri Venkateswara*. Every curve of garlands, every deity, and every tree has significance. The ornately designed building has tiny



statues craved into the metal to illustrate the story of the divine. These parables have a larger message. They educated society on respect, devotion, and truth. Hindu architecture is a fecund, moving, ancient, and spiritual tradition. There is no other physical tradition like it. No other tradition has such sensitivity to the self and the universe; interlocking both self and community, The Hindu temple is the ultimate abode of faith..