



With superfine architecture, this place of worship attracts non-Hindus also.

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The New England states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont and Maine in the US, well-known as the location of knowledge centres Harvard and MIT, envisioned in 1978 a landmark of religious importance-- and the result was a Hindu temple with Goddess Sri Lakshmi as the presiding deity. This New England Hindu Temple, Inc (NEHTI) for Sri Lakshmi in Ashland near Boston, is at a distance of 45 minutes' drive for most of them.

Sri symbolising auspiciousness and Lakshmi being the symbol of prosperity, it is no wonder that the Hindus who moved to the US in search of wealth and comfort early in their lives felt it appropriate to worship Goddess Lakshmi.

A committee was formed in March 1978 to take steps for construction of the temple. The committee decided to celebrate the forthcoming Deepavali with Mahalakshmi Puja. The Puja continued every month thereafter at the rented Needham Village

Club and firmed up the resolve to build the temple and fulfil their ambition.

“One large sponsorship from late Dr. Ramaswamy accelerated purchase of the 12-acre land in



Sri Lakshmi Devi

the summer of 1981,” said Sri K. Vaithyanathan, one of the founders of the temple, who also performed the *pujas* in the initial stages. Several other initiatives, such as a *Ramayana* ballet by danseuse Smt. Padmini and concerts by Sri Maharajapuram Santhanam and Pandit Ravi Shanker set the ball rolling for the fund drive.

Icons Getting Ready

By this time, a few temples constructed by Sri Ganapathy Stapati had sprung up on the Eastern Seaboard and NEHTI approached him with their proposal. The *stapati* sculpted the main icons in his workshop in Mahabalipuram. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, (TTD) lent a helping hand and donated Rs. 5 lakhs towards payment of the materials and the *silas*, the black granite icons of Sri Lakshmi, Lord Venkatesvara and Ganesa made by him.

It was on Sunday, May 27, 1990 that the first *kumbhabhishekam* and *prana*

pratishtapana ceremonies took place for the five-foot-tall icon of Sri Lakshmi, the seven-foot-tall black granite icon of Lord Venkatesvara, and three-foot tall Ganesa in the respective shrines set nicely in the *Maha Mandapam* along with bronze icons of Lord Nataraja and Goddess Sivakami in their own *Alankara Mantapam* adjacent to the main shrines.

Sri Sampathkumar Bhat-tachariar from Bangalore and Sri Sambamoorthy Sivachariar from Chennai officiated at the *kumbhabhishekam* ceremonies.

From the time of ground-breaking ceremony in 1984 up to the first *kumbhabhishekam* in 1990, the devotees continued to keep the spirits high by performing pujas to the portraits of the deities at the temple site. "When the seven-foot-tall Venkatesvara icon arrived at last, after quite some delay since the original one carved and ready to be shipped to Boston found its way to Malaysia, "our joy knew no bounds" exclaimed Smt. Ranjini Ramaswamy, who has been serving the temple since inception and is the current president as well!

With the installation of *Navagrahas* in 1993 and icons of Garuda, Sri Subramanya with Valli and Devasena, *Dharma Sasta* and Hanuman in 1995, Sri Muthiah Stapathi completed the Rajagopuram work also in 1996 and the *Maha*

Kumbhabhishekam was celebrated on August 18 with the participation of devotees from different states across the US. Sri Krishna Bhattar from Mysore has been with the temple serving as the chief priest from the beginning.

Punaruddharanam was done in 2005. Nine acres of land adjacent to the temple has been acquired for expansion, which will include

Nataraja in Ratham



a state of the art auditorium cum function hall for multi-purpose utility, a library and additional priest quarters.

Sri Lakshmi temple conducts all major festivals of the Hindu almanac. Needless to say that Deepavali is the grandest of all the festivals, which sees the non-stop flow of devotees from morning till night. Each of the festivals attracts over 5000 devotees. *Abhishekam* to Sri Lakshmi every Friday is a regular feature. *Akhand Parayana of Tulsi Ramayana* on Sri Rama Navami day every year is a unique event drawing the North Indian community from different places.

Other important festivals celebrated here are *Ganesh Chaturti*, *Navaratri*, *Brahmotsavam*, *Pavitrotsavam* and *Purattasi Sanivarams*. The temple gets a big draw of devotees during the midnight New Year's eve cum New Year's Day.

Since the temple is located with its beautiful architecture in the midst of the local communities comprising people from different religious following, it receives wide attention. As a reciprocal gesture for the local community support,

NEHTI has instituted \$1000 scholarships rewarding academic excellence amongst Ashland High School students.

As part of the Outreach programme different church groups from far and near come in busloads to see the imposing temple structure, and learn about the Hindu religion and its beliefs. Ms. Diana L Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University, has been an ardent supporter of the temple building project along with the NEHTI body. She also brings her students to the temple on a regular basis. Students from different Boston colleges and schools also visit the temple regularly.

The Youth Committee is very active in conducting cultural events year-round, including *Tyagaraja Aradhana*, *Dishithar Day*, and several concerts featuring important artistes from across the nation and from India. Starting 2001, *Sanskrita Bharati* conducts Sanskrit classes at the temple every Sunday from 9 am to 2 pm. Five teachers are engaged to serve seven different levels of classes.

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