Boronia & The Basin COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue 296
Feb. 2021



Temple Upgrade

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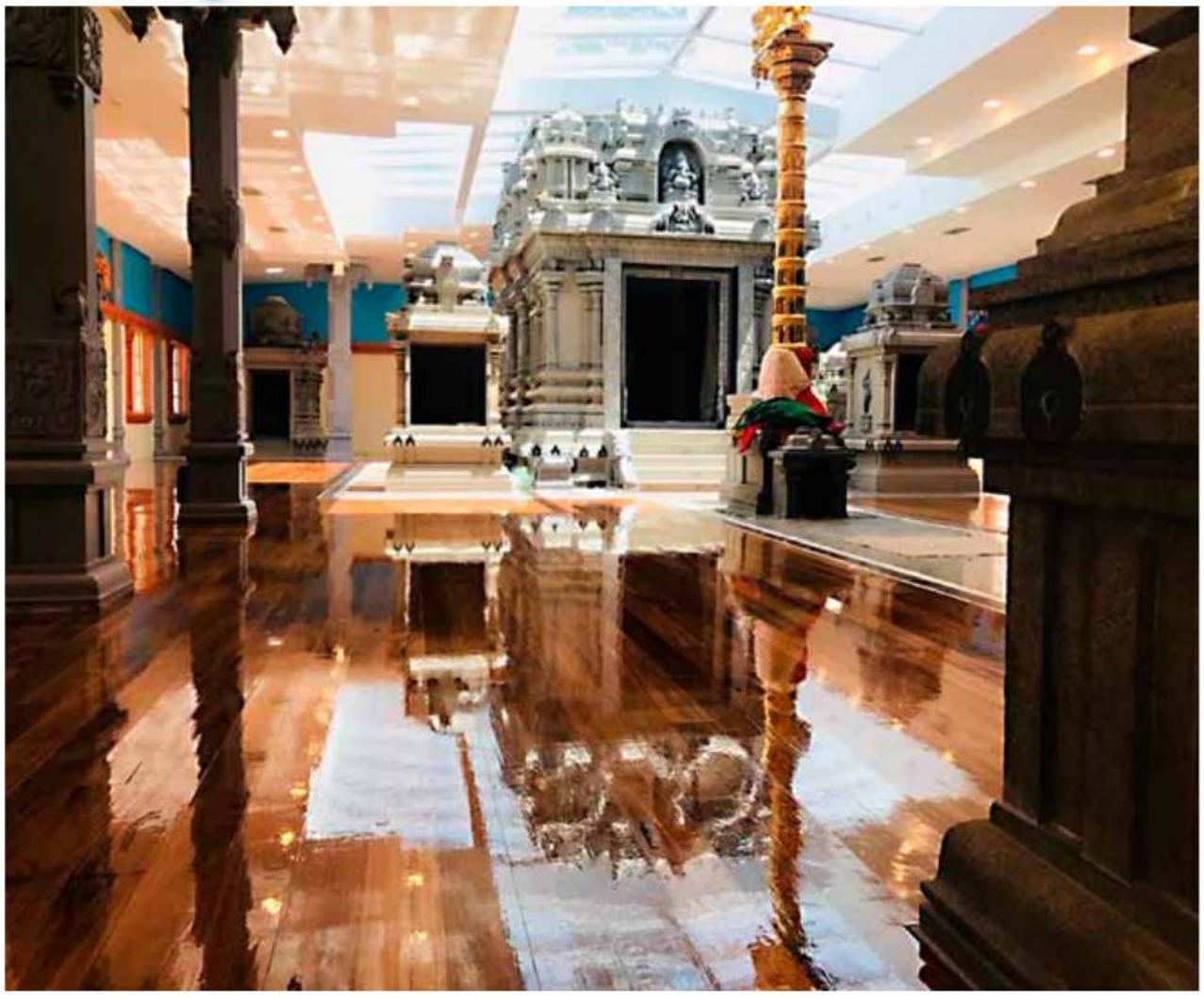
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Published by Boronia and The Basin Community News Inc., ISSN 1321-3164



Largest Granite Hindu Temple in the Southern Hemisphere opens in The Basin

Victoria's oldest Hindu temple, Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple is undergoing a historic transformation, making it the largest granite Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere.

Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple, home to Hinduism's most-loved deity Lord Ganesha, has been designed by Australian temple architect (Stapathy) Purushothaman Jayaraman (Puru). Puru drew inspiration from the UNESCO-listed Chola temples and sourced the granite from a single quarry in Tamil Nadu, India. South Indian Hindu temples are reconsecrated once every 13 years and this granite transformation has been completed successfully despite the global pandemic.

The main shrine for Lord Ganesha alone is built from 17 layers of granite, all carved by hand. The roof of the Moolasthanam (the shrine where the main deity resides) is constructed in a conical shape which amplifies the sound of the chanting so that it can be heard around the temple. The roof is capped off by a 6 tonne dome made from a single stone, similar to the UNESCO-listed Brihadeeswarar Temple in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. Hand carved Ganeshas, elephants, peacocks, lions and lotuses adorn the walls, corners and panels of each shrine.

Granite is a stone that has all the five elements of nature - air, earth, water, fire and space - in optimal proportions. Hindus have always constructed temples using this stone. This age defying stone, which is strong and scratch proof, is believed to

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absorb the divine vibrations and the daily chanting in a temple. The temple is designed to precise mathematical calculations on paper to ensure that when each stone is laid, it is done in such a way that the weight transfer takes place to the sides of the structure. The drawings and designs were sent to the Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai and the calculations were verified and validated by UNESCO-approved civil engineers. They were then rechecked by qualified Australian civil engineers and appropriately certified.

A combination of traditional and modern sculpting tools was used to carve every stone. The figurine is initially drawn on paper, then transferred onto the stone by way of markings. The stone is hollowed out using sculpting tools such as a chisel and hammer as well as modern stone cutting and grinding machines. Depending on the sculptors' imagination, intricacy and complexity of each design as well as the desired outcome, this process can take from a few days to months. At the end, exceptionally fine cement and water are used to hold all the pieces together which make the final form look continuous and flawless.

In India, where the carving and sculpting was done, the project spanned three locations and involved more than 1,200 granite stones weighing from 200kg to 6 tonnes. Close to 100 artisans were involved in the work in India. The carved stones were then packed in expensive silver oak wood to avoid pests and shipped to Melbourne. Once in Melbourne, specifically skilled stone masons were brought from India to assemble each stone to produce this magnificent temple.

Pulling off this project took almost two years, from selecting the temple architect to the final completion. This was done by the 15-member Management Committee of the Melbourne Vinayagar Hindu Sangam (MVHS) which runs the Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple. Specifically, highly-skilled project consultants, architects and engineers such as Babu Akula (Project Director), Sritharan Sathasivam (Chairman, Building Committee), Markandu Sivakumar (Project Engineer) and Sivagnanam Pillai (Operations Manager) generously volunteered their time to bring this historic project together. The Management Committee wishes to thank Jeeva Balasingam (Site Manager) and Vibhav Nawathe (Project Co-ordinator) for their tireless efforts. The entire project, from fund raising to managing the various aspects of the running of the temple, is done by the Management Committee headed by the executive committee - Balaa Kandiah (President), Shan Pillai (Secretary) and Sivanathan Thamboo (Treasurer).

A Brief Look into the Temple History

The Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple in The Basin was first conceived in 1989, when a breakaway group moved away from the Hindu Society of Victoria, frustrated at the slow progress in the development of a Ganesha temple. The Melbourne Vinayagar Hindu Sangam was founded, and a pro-tem committee was formed with trustees, members, and volunteers, and with donated funds, the process of building the temple began in 1990. When pro-tem committee member Shan Pillai and his wife went to India to source a deity blessed by the Kanchi Shankaracharya Swamigal, they could not find one. They paid a visit to the Shankaracharya Swamigal regardless and were pleasantly surprised when he offered them a deity. It was the first of many miracles they encountered. The deity was named Vakrathunda Vinayagar and brought back to Melbourne, and lived in the home of trustee S. Somasundaram until the temple was built. The deity was taken to a community hall every month for worship. On 20th April 1990, the Management Committee successfully purchased a plot of land at The Basin. The site had formerly housed the disused St. Mary's Anglican Church. The foundation stone for the Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple was laid in 1991. The first brick was blessed by Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal and flown from Kancheepuram to Melbourne, and laid in November 1991. The temple building was completed in 1992 with its Consecration held on 11th October 1992, making it the first Traditional Hindu temple in Victoria. The second Consecration was done on 17th June 2007 when a Raja gopuram was built partly in granite and extensive renovations including shrines for Durga and Murugan were completed. Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple is also the first temple, and continues to be the only temple, that takes the Thaer (Chariot) out in the streets of Melbourne. The Temple also participates in community events in the City of Knox such as the Knox Global Cooking Show. The third Consecration will see the Temple become the largest granite Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere with all its 11 shrines in granite, intricately carved by hand, inspired by the great Chola temples of India and permanently transforming the multicultural landscape of Melbourne.





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