

Sanatan Temple and Cultural Center Thoughts and Emotions Behind its Creation and Operation

All the cosmic elements from fire to water that create and sustain life are represented in a Hindu temple. The temple atmosphere is filled with the sounds of temple bells and sweet smells of incense and chanting of prayers for peace and prosperity for all.

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु
मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Niraamayaah |
Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu
Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet |
Om Shaantih ||

Meaning:

- 1: Om, May All be Happy,
- 2: May All be Free from Illness.
- 3: May All See what is Auspicious,
- 4: May no one Suffer.
- 5: Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

The temple provides a common place for the community to strengthen emotional connection (Bhava) with the supreme Sagun Brahm (Bhagwan). Visiting the Temple for service, prayer or darshan (properly seeing God with devotion and concentration) helps the devotee to make that connection, Bhav-Sadhana. Bhav se Bhagwan Prapti: To make it possible for people from all parts from India to achieve that emotional connection the community worked together whole heartedly and elected the Vighras to be installed in the Temple.

The Philosophy Behind the Design of the Temple

Selection of Temple Location

Even though people of Indian origin and Hindu faith started settling in the Charleston area in the 1960s the community did not reach a critical mass until the first decade of the 21st century. Until then devotees visited the Hindu Temple in Columbia to meet their spiritual needs. The Sanatan Temple and Cultural Center of South Carolina (STCC) was created in 2006 ([Create hyperlink to history](#)) to pursue the dream of establishing a Temple in the Charleston area. After some growing pains, the decision was made to acquire a centrally located place of worship and modify it to meet our needs since that was economically feasible and sustainable for the limited resources available to the small community of devotees.

The location of our Temple with proximity to the river and surrounded by trees matching the description in Brahat Samhita, which declares that “God’s presence can be felt easily near the groves, rivers, and springs, on the mountains, and in towns with blooming gardens.”

The building at 1740 Jervey Avenue had been in use as a place of worship (Church) for more than 30 years and needed some modifications to meet the requirements of a Hindu Temple. The modifications were undertaken by youthful volunteer devotees.

Shuddhi Puja was performed on 3 May 2010 as per Vedic rituals by the Priest from the Hindu Temple of Columbia to sanctify it as Hindu place of worship. The Temple opened for services with the chal-sthapana (installation) of Vighrahas (murtis) transported from the Hindu Temple, Ladson on 17 October 2010, the auspicious day of Vijaya Dashami, a major Hindu Festival. The Anniversary Temple opening is celebrated on Vijay Dashami.

Selection of Bhagwat Swaroopas for the Temple

Hindu Temple of Charleston, which functions under the aegis of Sanatan Temple and Cultural Center of South Carolina (STCC) follows Adi Shankaracharya’s Panchayatan principle (five Deities) with some important additions to meet the aspirations of Charleston Hindu community.

An Interim Committee([hyperlink](#)) representing the Hindu Community of Charleston area was involved in the initial organization of the Temple. The consensus of the Interim Committee was that Maryada Purushottam Ram will be the main Deity in our Temple as a reminder to the community of the boundaries established by Sanatan niti dharma (moral code). Sita-Ram were also a natural choice as Akhand Ramayana Paat was an established tradition in the Charleston Hindu community long before the establishment of the Temple.

Bhagwat kathas were also held along with yearly Akhand Ramayan Paat on several occasions leading to a strong desire that Radha-Krishna should also be installed in the Temple.

Instead of Shiva-Parvati Vighras along with Shiva lingam, the consensus was for a more traditional approach of establishing Shiva Parivar. However, in 2010 our Temple did not have Parvati and Ganesha dedicated to Shiva Parivar. They were added during the 2017 renovation.

Since the worship of Devi in her different forms (Durga puja, Saraswathi puja and Laxmi puja) during Navratri festival was also a well-established tradition it was joyfully decided that we will not only have Durga Ma but also Maha Kali-Maha Laxmi-Maha Saraswathi.

Shri Hanuman Jii, the widely worshipped devata, was also included.

The physical presence of Holy scriptures is an integral part of a Temple. In our Temple, Ramcharitmanas and Bhagwad Gita are placed in proximity of Shri Ram Parivar and Radha-Krishna, respectively.

During the 2017 Murthi Sthapana, the original Vighras installed in 2010 were replaced by the current ones by a decision of the Murthi Sthapana Committee led by Dinesh Ji. The Vighras were custom designed for our Temple by master craftsman in India according to our specifications. Murthi Sthapana and Maha Kumbhabhishekam were celebrated over three consecutive days April 27-29, 2017. The celebration included traditional Vedic rituals conducted by five invited senior Priests from several Temples in the South Eastern United States.

All Vighras were installed on an open sanctuary (stage) designed for the most aesthetic presentation and best possible use of the available space.

Philosophy behind the placement of Vighrahas

The central philosophy of our Temple is Bhavana se Bhagwan Prapti. The placement of the Vighrahas on the sanctuary is based on tradition allows devotees to achieve Bhav Sadhana.

Recommended Darshan Procedure

By following the recommended procedure as described here you may experience greater joy with a clearer understanding of the placement of each Vighraha in our Temple.

It is noteworthy that we acquired a place of worship, where we enter from the left wall of the Temple hall which is considered Shubh Kalyankari (auspicious).

As you enter you see the grand panorama of all the Deities. Walk towards the sanctuary and ring the beautiful bell hanging on the left side of the Temple hall - the first thing one does before darshan. As you hear the bell, lower your eyes, and go around the sanctuary for Pradakshina in a clockwise direction. Enter from the left side chanting the name of your Ishta Devata and come out on the right to meet Hanuman Ji.

The main reason Hanuman Ji is established at this specific spot is due to the famous verse from Hanuman Chalisa: "Ram duware tum rakhaware, hoth na aagya binu paisare."

After taking the blessings from Hanuman Ji look up at Ganesh Ji and seek the blessing of "Vivek", the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

Then focus on Durga Mata and Maha Kali - Maha Laxmi - Maha Saraswathi and seek blessing of Shradhha.

With vivek and shradhdha, you are now ready to receive the blessings of Vishwas (eternal trust) from Lord Shiva. During Shiv darshan, make sure you do pranam to the entire Shiv Parivar: Parvati, Kartikeya, Ganesha and Nandishwara. Praying to Nandi is important because you can ask for blessing from Shiva through Nandi Ji as well. You can touch the Shiva lingam and perform Jalabhishek while chanting Om Namah Shivaya.

Please do not pour water or place flowers or kumkum on Nandishwara or any other marble murtis of Shiv Parivar.

Now focus on Ram Parivar, the Presiding Deity of our Temple.
Do pranam to Bhakti incarnate Sita Mata; Parabrahm Paramatma Shri Ram; and Vairagya incarnate Shri Laxman.

With mind in a state of bliss, you are ready to take darshan of Param-Aanand-Swaroop Radha Krishna.

Now you are in Vaikuntha for blessings from Lord Venkateshwara (Balaji).

After darshan of Balaji, you may like to do a saashtanga namaskar (prostrate full length) for all Gods. While in that state consider a manas-puja (praying in your mind with full concentration) with the following words of Sant Namdev kirtan “Ghalin lotangan, vandeena charan...” (hyperlink to document Hindu Temple Charleston Aarti)

I am Prostrating before you, praying at your lotus feet,
Taking darshan of your beautiful form, reaching out to you for a hug,
Full of joy I am doing your puja and aarti.

The priest will offer you Tirth, Prasad and blessings by touching your forehead with the shatari (Charan Kamal) located at Balaji’s feet.

After darshan one is not supposed to ring the bell, but sit silently, chanting Mantra or God’s name (Naam) in the Temple hall. -You may borrow a mala from the priest for Japam.

Invocation to Deities

Om Aim, hrim, shrim, clim, Gam, Shree Maha Ganapati, Shree Skanda Devata, Shree Maha Kali, Maha Laxmi, Maha Saraswathi, Laxman sahit Trigunatmak Shree Sita Ramachandra, Kanakaditya, Maha Vishnu, Bhawani Shankaro vande, Shri RadhaKrishnaya Namaha: OM Ham Hanumataya Namaha.

Trigunatmak, “The One with Satva-Rajas-Tamas”, in the mantra is an invocation during puja and havan. Energies associated with all three Gunas of the Lord, with decreasing amounts of each, respectively, are necessary for us to prosper in this world.

Performance of Aarti

The aarti in our Temple follows a sequence which relates the verses of the “Om Jai Jagdish Hare” in a meaningful way to the placement of each Vighraha on the sanctuary.

The priest stands in front of each deity while singing a verse of aarti focusing on the uniqueness of each one.

Opening lines of the aarti are for the Puja Vighrahas (small brass murtis) located near Balaji on which the priest performs nitya puja.

The first three verses are for the forms of Vishnu in our Temple represented by Balaji, Krishna, and Rama.

The verse Tum Puran Paramatma relates to the description Shri Ram as Parabrahma Paramatma in Tulsi Ramayana which has guided us in the design of our Temple with Ram Parivar as the central deity.

Tum Karuna ke sagar is for Devis.
Tum Ho Ek Agochar is for Shiva Parivar.
Deen bandhu Dukh harta is for Ganेशha.
Vishaya vikar mitao is for Hanuman.

The last verse, Tan-Man-Dhan, is for Sarva Devatas. The priest stands in the center of the hall and performs the aarti for all Gods with whole arm movements.

Description of Temple Vighrahas

This following description of the Vighrahas is given to help the Devotees enhance Bhav-Sadhana during Darshan since some of the subtle but noteworthy characteristics may not be immediately noticed by a casual observer or first-time visitor to our Temple.

Shri Venkateshwara, Lord of Tirumala, lovingly called Balaji by his Devotees, is unique among all the Vighrahas in our Temple because He chose to come to OUR Temple without any planning on our part and out of the blue. This beautiful Vighraha with all shubh-laksanas was hand-

carved in Tirupati and was donated by Radhakrishna and Mithra Baliga who worshipped Him with great devotion in their home in Mississippi for thirteen years. The Pran Pratishtha of this Balaji Vighraha in our Temple is a turning point in the expansion of our devotee base. Priests from the Hindu Temple of Atlanta performed the Pran Pratishtha rituals on October 26, 2013. Venkateshwara Suprabhatam and puja were done daily (by Dinesh Ji) for forty days according to the proscribed rules by Devotees since our Temple did not have a full-time Priest at that time.

Take a close look at Balaji's face from all directions. Notice the expression of concern from the right, shanti from the front and a benevolent smile from the left symbolizing Trigunas: Tam-Satva-Rajas, respectively. We have observed devotees crying blissfully (this is one of the signs of emotional connection) in front of this Vighraha many times. This is Bhava sadhana.

Hanuman Ji: Common representations of Hanuman Swaroopas in Temples include Daas Hanuman in a namaste position in front of Sita- Ram or holding Ram Charan, Sewak Hanuman holding Dronagiri or Veer Hanuman with Gada in hand. Our temple has Bhakta Hanuman Swaroopa to help us develop Bhakti: pure love and devotion.

Notice the exquisite details of the brass Hanuman murti. He is blessing us with varad hasta with eyes half open as if in ecstasy doing Ramnaam Japam holding a mala in his left hand. Also important is that in Ramcharitmanas, the first doha praises Hanuman Ji as the one in whose heart resides Ram holding bow (Knowledge) and arrow (Vivek). Our Hanuman Ji has the exactly the same Ram Swaroopa. The larger marble Hanuman is a replica of this Hanuman custom-designed by the murtikars in India.

A short story of Hanuman's chatatkar in granting us our wish is as follows: After the decision was made to look for this particular type of Hanuman murti a devotee couple were visiting India and were given the task of finding such a murti. After extensive search and enquiries in several traditional places no Hanuman of our dreams was found. Then just on the eve of returning with empty hands a murti was found almost by accident in the back corner of a shop, covered in dust and forgotten by the shop owner. Clearly Hanuman wanted to come to our Temple. Things happen when God decides they should.

Ram Sita: According to the starting Dhyana-mantra of Ram Raksha stotram, Sita Mata is sitting on Rama's left lap with Her eyes fixed on His face. Our Sita Ram Vighraha is created in one stone, as per this description, Ram inseparable from Sita.

If you look at Sita Mata while standing near the left side bell, you may notice that Sita Mata is looking at you and blessing you with Bhakti.

Maha Kali -Maha Laxmi- Maha Saraswathi: Mata Saraswati is Goddess of Knowledge and the Arts. You may notice the eyes of Saraswathi Mata, are looking downwards, emphasizing Satva guna: humility. Maha Laxmi is looking straight ahead indicating Rajas guna. Maha Kali is looking upward representing some Tamas guna of a warrior Goddess.

An important Devi mantra begins with the beeja mantras Aim, Hrim, Klim of these three forms.

Vaishnodevi, (a very famous Devimata temple), also has these three Devis represented by three pindis. When one visits the Vaishnodevi temple, the priests guide everyone who may not be familiar with the tradition to take Darshan of the pindis, as these three pindies form the Vaishnodevi.

Radha Krishna: During the 2017 renovation, our first choice of Krishna Vighraha was that of a bala (child) swarupa, with curly hair and open top Peacock feather kirit (crown) and round mouth, just like a Kishor (around 10-12) or child. When we asked the sculptor (from India) to send all Vighrahas of the same height, he sent the Radha-Krishna which was our second choice. Whatever happens, happens for a reason - Radha Krishna wanted to come to our Temple in this Swaroopa.

Ganesha: We hope you noticed that Kamal (lotus) is a theme for our Vighrahas. Kamal reminds us of Charan Kamal of the Lord. Ganesha is sitting on Kamal and there is a snake on his stomach. Ganapati's snake represents the energy which ties the whole world - Vishwa together. The snake on the Lingam represents vasanas: in general, vasanas control people by residing inside, here it implies that vasanas are controlled by the Lord.

General rules for the Devotees to follow:

Foremost among the rules is that due to delicate nature of the hand-painted beautiful “Shrungar” or “Alankaram” (decorations) of the marble Vighras, they should not be touched by anyone except on special occasions and only as directed by the Priest.

There is another very important reason for not touching the Vighras. In 2017, Pran Pratishta of these Vighras was done after three days of formal prayers, including Abhishek with purified holy water, fire rituals (Homa-Havan) and Vedic mantras. Learned priests spent many days chanting mantras for each of the Vighras. These rituals were performed according to the rules proscribed in shastras for each Vighra. Since that day, only a priest can touch these Vighras. In general, devotees who are assigned duties to help the Priest and who also follow certain rules of purification and dress code may touch these Vighras on some special occasions.

In our Temple devotees may touch Shiv lingam and Hanuman Ji’s brass Vighra. They may also do Abhishekam for Shiva with water kept next to the Shiva Lingam. For Hanuman Ji, and Shiva lingam (not Shiva Parivar) devotees may offer flowers, fruits, or malas. Other items including oils and sindhur are not allowed to be applied on them or on the Shiv Parivar. The marble Vighra of Hanuman Ji is not supposed to be touched by the devotees as explained above.

The thoughts and emotions expressed here are presented in humility while acknowledging that they may not be totally acceptable to all people since religious symbolism is subject to different interpretations.

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