Ancient Temples in India were built on enormous extent of land with the shrine in the middle with various halls – mandapams - surrounded by two or more processional paths. A tall tower as tall as 200 feet at the entrance gateway dominates the skyline of the village. It is visible to the entire village. The people in the village as they wake up in the morning turn towards the tower and pray to God almighty and then only they proceed with their day to day activities. Temple is the focal center of social and cultural activities of the people.

The tower is filled with sculptures depicting stories from Hindu epics and scriptures inspiring the beholder in divine contemplation. Architecture and sculptures being the intuitive expression of infinite beauty of God through the medium of finite materials (stone, metal, etc.) is an important aspect of Hindu Religion.

It is said that the Hindu Temple planning is symbolised by the human body. It is evolved from the position of a man lying on his back with the head to the West and feet to the East. The main shrine (Garpagrahan or Athimoolam), where the deity representing the all powerful cosmic force, is installed at the head of the man. At the neck is the first hall (Artha Mandapam), at the chest...
second hall (*Maha Mandapam*), at the stomach, another hall (*Sthampa Madapam*), at the thighs are halls for cultural performances (*Sabha Mandapam*), and at the feet with the toes up is the main Entrance Tower (*Gopuram*).

In the modern times, if we are to build a Hindu Temple, it is not possible to follow or observe all the traditional features of an ancient temple. We have to adjust and as far as possible observe the main Agamic principles and build the Temple to suit the environment, customs, habits, climatic changes and above all satisfying requirements of local authority of the country, where the temple is built. There is a saying in Tamil "Do not live in a place where there is no Temple". Wherever the Hindus and particularly Tamil Hindus settled, their first priority was to build a Temple. The Encyclopaedia Britannica (9th edition, page 396) quotes *The Tamil races were perhaps the greatest temple builders in the world.*

When Chola Empire (A.D. 802) extended to Java, Bali, Bornio, Malaya, Indonesia, Siam, Cambodia, etc. the Hindus who settled there built temples. It is not surprising that the Hindus who have adopted Sydney as their home have by their religious and cultural instinct ventured to build a Temple in their midst. The *Saiva Manram* of Sydney took up the task of building the Temple.

## THE TEMPLE SITE

Selecting a site in the suburbs of Sydney for a Temple is a difficult task as stringent local authority rules and regulations have to be satisfied. Temples will not be allowed to be built in residential areas. A plot of land between two highways was selected as this site does not have residences on three sides. The strange coincidence is that this land is located in a suburb called "Mays Hill". LORD MURUGAN finds His aboard on hills and SYDNEY MURUGAN perhaps chose this hill.

## PLANNING OF THE TEMPLE

The land 1700 sq. m. in extent is triangular in shape. A cultural hall and a Temple, with ample parking were to be accommodated in this small area. Due to these and financial constraints a small building was planned for the Temple. Planning a Hindu Temple in a restricted site in a westernised country with varying climate is not easy.

Temples built in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore do not need to have enclosed halls. Here, in Australia the hall has to be enclosed for heating and air-conditioning. When the hall is enclosed it may present an appearance of a commercial building. In order to avoid this, Hindu architectural columns and motifs have been introduced to the exterior.
The building has been carefully designed as far as possible observing Agamic principles, yet providing modern conveniences.

The original plan was prepared with tiered Gopuram, but the council requested the height to be reduced to three tiers and not to exceed 12m, also to lower the building by excavating the ground by 1.2m, and the roof ridge of the building not to exceed 8.7m. The council also restricted exterior architectural embellishments. Accordingly, temple plan was revised and re-submitted. The drawings were exhibited in the council for public to make any comments, or objections. There were number of objections, but the council after careful evaluation approved the plan with some conditions.

As the first stage of the temple building, the bare hall was constructed. In the mean time, by the grace of LORD MURUGAN the SAIVA MANRAM was able to acquire the adjoining land. This gave confidence and encouragement to the MANRAM to enlarge the building. Plans were prepared by enlarging the building by nine meters. The original size was 21.5m x 27.0 m and now it is 21.5m x 36.0 m.

Fortunately for the MANRAM the present council has encouraged the introduction of Hindu Architectural Motifs and Embellishment to the exterior resulting in the present beautiful edifice shining as a testimony to Hindu Architectural and Sculptural elegance.

**FEATURES OF THE TEMPLE**

**Gopuram**
A devotee enters the Temple by the main gateway - the Gopuram. The Gopuram is in 3 tiers 12m high. It is embossed with Hindu Architectural motifs and sculptures. Number of figures usually seen in Indian Temples has been reduced in relation to the environment. The entrance door 2.4m x 3.0m is in particular wood acceptable to the AGAMIC norms, was carved in India and brought to Sydney.

**Main Shrines**
As the devotees enter the temple, the main shrine is seen. The main shrine has three chambers. The middle one is for the main deity of the Temple SYDNEY MURUGAN and others on either side are for SIVAN, the father of MURUGAN, and AMBAL, the mother. The shrines are profusely decorated in keeping with the belief that God can be reached through Art and Beauty. Main shrine consists of the Garpagram or Athimoolam 3.0m x 3.0m in size where the Moola Moorthy or the main deity is installed. Next to this is the Artha Mandapam 3m x 3m in size, where the priest stands and performs Poojas - rituals.
Next to this in front of the shrine is the *Vehicle* of the deity: *NANDI*, a bull for *SIVAN*, peacock for *MURUGAN*, lion for *AMBAL*, and mouse for *VINAYAGAR*.
Next is the *PALIPEEDAM* - sacrificial platform, and next to this will be the *KODISTHAMBA* - flag staff where flag is hoisted during annual festivals. In this Temple all other halls or *MANDAPAMS* prevalent in traditional Temples are contained in one hall due to space restrictions.

**Other Shrines**

There are two small shrines on either side of the aisles, one for *VINAYAGAR*, and other for *SUBRAMANIAR* with his consorts, Valli and Deivayani.

**Vasantha Mandapam**

At the right of the Temple is the *VASANTHA MANDAPAM*. As the main deity cannot be moved, its replica called *UTSAVA MOORTHY* will be decorated in different forms daily and carried in procession during festivals.

**Bhiravar and Navagraghas**

Near the entrance, Bhairavar shrine is located. At the right-hand corner of the temple, Navagraghas are located.

*The photographs were taken by Dr Sri Ravindrarajah of Aum Muruga Society.*