

[Toronto, Canada: Hinduism Arrives In Style](#)

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Hindus by the hundreds of thousands from the Indian subcontinent and former British colonies settle down in Canada's premier city

Lavina Melwani, New York

lassiwithlavina.com

Think Canada and you think the Land of the Rockies, Niagara Falls, maple syrup and ice hockey. Think Toronto, and you think CN Tower, the world's largest freestanding structure, the Skydome, which can take in thousands of sports fans, and the beautiful Harbor front. What you may not think of either country or city is temples: Canada has at least 90 Hindu temples, 63 of them in Toronto alone, each temple an anchor and a bulwark for the ever-growing Hindu community. Hindus number a million country-wide, half of whom live in the Greater Toronto Area. In July of 2004, I was sent on assignment to Toronto by Hinduism Today to report on this large and varied Hindu diaspora.

Most Hindu Indians came to Canada to seek a better life. The Sri Lankan Hindus, aided by Canada's liberal immigration policies, came largely as refugees from the devastating civil war in their home country, where the Tamils and majority Sinhalas have been locked in a bloody battle for the last twenty years. It is perhaps for this reason, having been violently separated from their temples and their traditional way of life, that the Sri Lankan Hindus have gone all out to recreate their homeland in Canada, and have built many of the temples.

Shan Shanmugavadivel, president of the World Saiva Council, came from Sri Lanka in 1986 and is a dentist by profession. He recalls, "After the 1983 riots, we narrowly escaped the carnage, and I came here as a refugee. At that time there were just a

few thousand Sri Lankans in Toronto. Now I would say there are about 300,000 Sri Lankans in Toronto and its suburbs."

After Toronto, Vancouver has the largest South Asian population, about 350,000, with another 100,000 spread over Hamilton and Waterloo, Ottawa, Montreal, Edmonton and Calgary. There are Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, from India, East Africa, Guyana, etc. They are academics, physicians, engineers, entrepreneurs, as well as taxi and truck drivers.

While some of the Sri Lankans are professionals, most lacked higher education. They have taken jobs as factory workers, machine operators, and as real estate and insurance agents. This is a different situation than in the US, where most immigrants from India and Sri Lanka came under visa preferences for the well-educated, and refugees were not particularly welcome unless joining close family. In the Sri Lankan community, regardless of the parents' level of education, every effort is being made for the higher education of their children, many of whom are entering universities for professional training.

My first experience with a Sri Lankan temple here was a visit to the Sri Varasiththi Vinayagar Hindu Temple in the Kennedy/Finch area for the Sapparam Festival. I encountered auto repair places and a Kung Fu center in a gritty industrial complex in Scarborough, a suburb where many Sri Lankans have settled, on my way to the temple, itself housed in a large, no-frills warehouse. The temple is negotiating to purchase land across the street.

On a recent Sunday, hundreds had gathered to celebrate the festival of Ayyappan. So many devotees had turned up that we had to park our car several blocks away. Women in their best silk saris and gold jewelry, holding babies, along with teenagers and the elderly, all swarmed near the Deity as He was paraded around the temple in the holy chariot. During the summer months, the festivals take advantage of the balmy outside weather; in winter, with temperatures reaching -4°F (-20°C), events take place inside. Nearly all the temples, including those newly built, are housed in relatively nondescript buildings, with the gopurams inside cavernous spaces, for climate control.

Inside the Vinayagar temple, hundreds more had gathered, the women forming an

assembly line cutting and chopping for the next day's feast. They were dicing carrots, while nearby huge vats of chopped eggplants stood ready, soaking in water. Young mothers sat on the ground, tending to their babies, strollers by their sides. You saw the temple is the very heartbeat, the throbbing heart of Hindu culture and community.

Scattered across the suburb of Scarborough and in the Parliament and Wellesley areas of downtown Toronto are many Little Sri Lankas in small strip malls. Walk through one and you could be back in Jaffna. There are bustling Sri Lankan bakeries, restaurants, jewelry shops and stores selling the latest music CDs--often pirated--and movie videos from back home. Walk into any grocery store and you get a taste and fragrance of home with aromatic rices, dry curry powders, fresh vegetables. Small storefront take-away joints serve Sri Lankan delicacies such as string hoppers and pitu (made out of rice) and kotthu roti (flat bread and vegetables), rice and curry as well as dosai and idli. The difference between the Indian and Sri Lankan style is that the latter is chili-hot!

The Gerrard India Bazaar in downtown Toronto is touted as the largest South Asian Bazaar in North America and as a jewel in the crown of Toronto's ethnic areas. It has over a hundred businesses, ranging from grocery stores to jewelry and sari shops, restaurants and electronic items. These stores are not just Indian, but Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi, too. You can do anything from getting your nose or ears pierced in Gerrard Street to buying ayurvedic and homeopathic products.

Besides the main Little India on Gerrard Street, there are scores of Little Indias scattered across the suburbs, such as Mississauga and Brampton where you can rent a video or buy a CD of the latest Indian music, eat a delicious Indian meal and then stop at a vendor for sugar cane juice, an after-dinner kulfi ice cream or a condiment-filled paan or betel leaf as a fragrant mouth freshener.

Fitting In, Multi-Ethnically

While in Toronto, I met with Ajit Adophia, a community activist who writes on religion for The Toronto Star. He is the author of a book, *The Hindus of Canada*, and is on the resource list of the Board of Education.

As with many of the Indian immigrants, religion came late to Adophia. He says, "When I was in college, I used to believe that God is a hoax created by some very smart people just to keep ignorant people in line." Since his father was a strong Arya Samaji, he never received any formal worship or puja orientation: "I saw my father going into a dark room and doing sandhya (Gayatri Mantra) in the morning. I think that's the drawback of Arya Samaj, since kids in the family need something visible. You have to accept murti puja (worship of the sacred icon of God) because people are attracted to it."

Even though his father was with the Arya Samaj, his mother would be in the next room worshiping Durga Mata, and there was perfect harmony with each doing their own thing. Adds Adophia, "There was never a conflict; this is how Hindus are so open to diversity and open to plurality that it comes naturally to us. We are most suited to live in a society that is multi-ethnic and multi-racial because this is how we are brought up."

The website, http://www.shopumust.com/temple_canada.html lists many of Canada's temples. Adophia said that out of the 63 in Toronto, about 15 are major temples. There is a Federation of Hindu Temples of Canada. According to Shraavan Kumar Aggarwal, President of the Hindu Sabha Temple in Brampton, "The idea is we want to bring unity among Hindus and visibility in the mainstream, as well discuss youth and social issues."

Aggarwal observes that the 80-20 rule applies: 80 percent of the people go to twenty percent of the major temples. Says Adophia: "If you look at north, south, east or west of Toronto city center, you will find a Hindu temple." Each community seems to have found a temple they are comfortable with. While the Hindu Sabha caters largely to the Punjabi community, go to the Ganesh temple in Bayview and you find most of the devotees are from the South or Sri Lanka.

Similarly, the Sanathan Temple in Markham caters mainly to the Gujarati community while the Vaishnudevi temple in Falkland is largely favored by the Punjabis. Explains Aggarwal, "In some of these temples, the pravarchan (discourse) is given in Hindi. But then people who come from the West Indies have difficulties in following this, so they have their own temple--the Vishnu Temple, as well as the Ram Mandir in Mississauga." Thus each linguistic and geographical group is served.

Aggarwal, who is from a small town in India called Puwayan with a total population of 10,000, also naturally moved toward religion, having got it absorbed by osmosis at home. "I was close to religion--you know how free-formatted it is in India, " he says. "I would get up very early in the morning and my father would say go pick lotus flowers and bel leaves for Lord Siva's puja. My father would go to pray, and at every temple he stopped at he would close his eyes. I would do the same."

Little wonder then that Aggarwal got involved with the creation of the Hindu Sabha Temple in Brampton, trying to recreate the way of life of his family in that small town in India: "I remember in the early 80's we had five founding members, and funding was raised from the community. In those days even collecting \$500 from people was difficult. We took interest-free loans to obtain the land."

They had a lucky break: A big highway was planned close to the temple, so the government appropriated the site and paid a good price for the land. That money was then used to purchase 25 acres for a new site. Aggarwal says, "Over the years, we must have spent more than us\$3.86 million on the temple--it's all from donations, no government funding."

He was chairman for several years, and says that in the beginning days if 50 or 60 devotees turned up on a Sunday, it would be considered a good crowd. Now on big occasions they get 10,000 people, and have to call in the police for traffic control!

The Sri Lankan Tamils

Temples are thriving, and perhaps the prime example is the Hindu Temple Society of Canada, also known as the Richmond Hill temple, developed by the Sri Lanka community. It is the oldest temple in Canada. The land for it was acquired in 1983.

Tiru Satgundendran came to Canada in 1984 due to the war back home. He recalls that in those early days there were hardly any ethnic grocery stores and certainly no temples: "At that time, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, Gurudeva (founder of Hinduism Today), came and gave the community a Lord Ganesha statue and told them to build a Hindu temple. So they found and bought this space in Richmond

Hill."

Standing in this impressive 25,000 square-foot temple set on 3.5 acres, it's hard to believe that in 1984 there was just barren land, and Lord Ganesha was housed in a little shed. Gurudeva had told the community to "begin the worship of Lord Ganesha, " no matter how meagre the facility to do so. "He will then open the doors and remove the obstacles to the temple's construction, " he predicted. A year later, Goddess Durga Mata was installed in a trailer facility. Thiru recalls driving there in an open truck in the freezing chill of wintertime: "A few people used to come in the knee-deep snow and worship there in the early days." Gurudeva advised many communities planning to build temples to "start the worship of Lord Ganesha, " resulting in successful construction of the Sita Ram temple in Chicago, Meenakshi Temple in Houston, Ganesh temple in Edmonton and dozens more.

The trailers and sheds are now history, and in their place stands a massive temple, started in 1988. It took two years to build. Artisans were brought in from India and the shrines were installed according to Agamic traditions, followed in 1990 by the consecration ceremonies for all the deities. Over the years, the expansion of the temple has continued and it is now 75 percent complete. The temple maintains an extensive website at <http://www.thehindutemple.ca> It is one of the few temples in Toronto that looks like a temple from the outside, with its prominent gopurams, or temple towers.

What is remarkable about this temple is that it is a complete collaboration between the Indian and Sri Lankan communities. As Satgundendran recalls, "The Indians were all professionals, and they had the money. When we came, we came as refugees, so they pumped the money and we brought the crowds, and the devotees."

As bells clanged and worshipers chanted, the priest completed the abhishekam, or bathing of the Lord. Soon the doors of the shrine would be reopened, revealing the bejeweled Lord in all His glory.

It is a place of solace where all devotees can find the face of God that is most familiar to them. The temple has three main deities--Lord Ganesha, Lord Subramaniam and Lord Venkateshwara. In addition, it has subsidiary altars for Lord

Siva as Nataraja, Goddess Parvati, and shrines for Durga, Balaji, Mahalaxmi and Bhoodevi or Andal. There are also shrines to Rama, Lakshman and Sita, as well as to the Navagraha or nine planets.

Says Sathi, "We give the opportunity to every Hindu to pray according to their family traditions or their own cultural traditions." The temple conducts all Hindu festivals in addition to a 15-day festival for Lord Ganesha in the month of May, a 15-day festival for Lord Subramaniam in June-July and a ten-day festival for Lord Venketeshwara in August-September. There is also a ten-day festival for Lord Siva in August, and in each of these the Deities are taken out in procession with pomp and ceremony.

All these holy days draw vast crowds to the temple, and although Hindus from many different communities come in, the majority are from South India and Sri Lanka. Says Sathi: "There is not a concentrated Hindu community in this area. Richmond Hill is just a location. It is where God has willed He should take His honored seat."

This first temple became a reality when five Hindu immigrants each put in \$100,000 as seed money to buy the land. "There was a need for a Hindu temple. If we don't educate and provide facilities for worshipers, the Hindu community will become dispersed and later on it will become a problem for Hindus to cope with," says Sathi. "We all are family people, and we wanted that our children know something of the Hindu traditions and worship."

Nor do these devotees dream small: the handsome flag mast is made of wood and carved with silver. The temple is topped by two towering gopurams--interestingly enough prefabricated by a Hindu company in Bahrain, and shipped to Canada. The concrete towers were hoisted by a crane to the roof of the temple.

Why prefabricated and why in Bahrain? It seems this work cannot be done outside in the long Canadian winters and prefabricated work is not done in India. In the heat of Bahrain, the prefabricated panels set quickly and are ready to be sent out.

Walking around the temple, one admires the beautiful carvings which are all hand

made by artisans from India. But also the building is very modern and airy with skylights and all the modern amenities of heating, lighting and air-conditioning, certified to Canadian standards. The temple has cost \$7 million to date and about another \$2 million work is still to be done.

Priest-Owned Temples

While most of the temples have boards and are publicly owned, there are at least eight or nine temples that are owned by priests, something rare in the US.

Sivasri Thiagarajahkurukkal Kanaswami is one such priest who felt the need to create a temple for the Sri Lankan community. Using his savings and loans from his relatives, he leased a warehouse in Scarborough. A formal inauguration of the Sridurka Hindu Temple took place in 1991, with 1,008 holy conch shells being installed inside the foundation.

"In 2001 we had a big consecration here with about 40,000 people, " he explained through a spokesperson. "There were 55 priests from all over the world--and that kind of consecration ceremony has happened only 32 times in India and Sri Lanka." In 2002, the temple had Kodi Archana, or chanting God's name 10 million times.

In Sri Lanka there are Murugan and Siva temples, and Ambal is part of those temples. Ambal has so many forms--Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi. The Sridurka Temple is unique in having all three Goddesses--Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati--all in one space. Plans are also on to build an ashram and a university within a decade.

About 60 percent of the devotees at the temple are Sri Lankan and about 40 percent Indian Hindus. It is also probably the only Hindu temple in North America to have images of 63 Hindu Saivite Tamil saints, the Nayamnars.

Currently the temple is involved in Navpurdi Archana--the chanting of the Goddess's

name 90 million times, for three years continuously. According to Kanaswami, "In India this has happened only one time, in the Patisvaram Durga Temple. Our temple is the only one to have this ceremony and the climax will come in 2006 with over 108 priests chanting."

Not far away is the simple little temple, Sri Ayappan Samaj (www.ayyappan.com/) where you could see the great devotion of the small congregation as Lord Ayappan was bathed. The energy and the faith was almost palpable as the worshipers raised their hands, touched their ears and bowed to the floor in complete dedication. As the Lord was taken out in procession, the crowds followed, chanting joyously as the flutes, cymbals and drums reverberated.

The colorful festival of Ratha-Yatra has now become an annual feature in Toronto, with a parade centering around three 30-foot tall chariots. With continuous entertainment throughout the weekend, a free vegetarian feast sponsored by the mainstream newspaper, Toronto Star, exhibits and entertainment, the chariot festival draws thousands of devotees as well as curious onlookers to the streets of downtown Toronto. Were it not for the cityscape and the skyscrapers, the joyous crowds could be in Brindaban or Mathura.

State of Hinduism

Ask Shanmugavadivel whether Sri Lankan Hindus are keeping their faith alive, and he offers, "I won't say all of us, but most of us are. I did a survey and found that most children follow the religion. They learned about it from their parents, and they really like the rituals. I would say the population as a whole is into it. There are some people who revolt against following the faith, but they are a minority. The temples are busy, and you see lots of people participating. Sometimes when you go for a festival, you can't even find a parking space!"

Musician Arumugampillai (see sidebar previous page) said the children tended to follow their parent's example and teachings. If they got a good religious upbringing, they'd be religious, otherwise, likely not.

Weddings are celebrated with all the trappings, and often musicians are called all the way from Sri Lanka. Indeed, wedding planners and catering services have sprung up, and with bigger halls, weddings are being organized for 500-600 guests.

A virtual homeland has been recreated, and traditions are alive and well in Canada. Says Shanmugavadivel, "Very much so. We are following the traditions--how I got married, the same way my daughter is getting married." As he points out, everything from decorative saparams, or seats for the bride and groom, to mango and plantain leaves are available right in Toronto. When he lived in Nigeria, Africa, he recalls, they could not even find a Hindu priest for their ceremonies!

Religion and language are also being passed on to the next generation through Tamil classes by various Sri Lankan organizations. In fact, in multicultural Canada, Tamil is also taught in the public schools as well. What is noteworthy about Canada is its policy of genuine inclusion of all faiths.

Priests regularly come in from India, Sri Lanka and England to perform prodigious pujas, and often the mainstream press reports on these events. Says Satgundendran, "That's a good sign. Also, politicians are invited to the temples. They come and learn more about our religion."

The Toronto Star newspaper deserves special mention for covering Hindu events. Many of the photos accompanying this article were taken by Toronto Star photographers. True, the paper irritated the Hindu community by publishing last year a disrespected photo--that of an unfinished and unclothed festival icon of the Goddess Durga being prepared in India. After a bit of back and forth with community leaders, the editors graciously apologized for the photo and, in the process, got some education on local Hindu sentiments.

Hindus are not without problems. As Satgundendran observes, "Sri Lankan Hindus are changing religion big time in Toronto. They are promised employment and monetary help by the Christians and are gradually persuaded to change their religion for economic reasons."

Another concern is that many elderly parents are unable to get to the temple, as their children are often too busy to take them. Elderly Hindus who are in long-term care also do not have access to Hindu priests, and are often coerced into Christianity by missionaries who come and minister to them.

The young have their own problems. Frets Satgundendran, "Often in schools and colleges, teachers ridicule the Indian students-- "Why are you praying to a snake, a monkey or an elephant-faced God?' These children come and ask their parents, who, in turn, don't know how to explain."

The young people from Sri Lanka, often coming to a new country alone as refugees and reacting to racism, have sometimes gotten into bad company, and Sri Lankan gangs have been quite a problem. Several years ago the Toronto police department had even formed a special unit to deal with Sri Lankan Tamil gangs. One community member said the problem has been greatly reduced, in part through deportation of trouble makers.

The Canadian government has a vigorous campaign against corporal punishment of children. Teachers will investigate any suspicious injuries, and children are told in school to call the police if their parents hit them. The commendable program is bringing about needed changes in the community's child-rearing methods, though parents chafe under the scrutiny.

Hindu temples do not have pastors in whom the congregation can confide or turn to for help and advice. So many feel that there is room for improvement in the temples. As Shanmugavadivel points out, "The feeling of some is that people have to buy tickets for archana, but the money should instead be used to help the community. There should be language classes and community services, but most of the temples are not doing that. They are not doing enough--we hear it all the time. We are trying to train ten people to conduct Tamil spiritual service in our nursing homes and hospitals for people who are terminally ill or for those who need religious sermons."

West Indies Hindus

No description of the Hindu community of Canada would be complete without a mention of the West Indian community from Trinidad and Guyana which has carried its faith with it and nourished it in all its journeys.

Visit the Vishnu temple in Richmond Hill and the first thing you see as you enter is a towering bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi. The temple is the vision of Dr. Doobay, a busy heart surgeon who has sutured religion into his life. He has built this impressive temple against great odds. "When I came from Guyana, " he says, "I saw that we had no temples. We were worshiping in school halls and church halls. I told our people, 'Even if it's a small little place, we must have our own place.' "

He had just enough money for a down payment and bought a small house in 1981. Doobay was advised by a South Indian friend to obtain the blessings of the sainted Sankaracharya and then again by a North Indian friend to do the same--so with the signs coming from north and south, he set off on a long journey to visit Sankaracharya. When he went there, he did not get the opportunity to meet him because the great saint was observing mauna, or silence.

But he was told he had been blessed. And when he came back, things seemed to miraculously fall into place. "I came back, and in five months the temple started construction. Swami Dayanand Saraswati did the cornerstone, and in February of 1984 we opened our temple. And when we opened, we had no debts. All this I feel was the blessing of Sankaracharya."

Says Doobay, "Guyanese and Trinidadians have really kept Hinduism alive. They sing bhajanas with so much devotion!" He points out that their ancestors were very religious. Does he think the children are going to adhere to the faith? He reckons, "I think not every child, but most children will continue."

On a recent Sunday, the temple is quiet and calm, quite different from the action-packed temples of the South. The white marble murtis are a draw to visitors who come and pray, meditate and ponder.

There is, however, no dearth of activities for the entire family. The temple has a

vibrant Bal Vihar Sunday School for children of all ages, modeled after the curriculum designed by the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania. The Gurukulam was established in 1986 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who is a popular teacher of Vedanta.

The Youth Group takes part in conferences and cultural shows and meditation and hatha yoga classes are also held. The women's organization arranges seminars for the betterment of women and their families, and holds summer camps for kids and trips for seniors.

A library has books in English, Hindi and Gujarati. There is also a community hall with a capacity of about 300 people for weddings and cultural shows. The Voice of the Vedas, about Hindu philosophy and teachings, is Doobay's half-hour television program on VISION network through cable in Canada and through satellite in the US.

Dr. Doobay has been the catalyst behind all these happenings. He explains, "We have built the temple. But there are many temples, and temples are only a structure for gathering. So besides that, how can we get Hinduism to live, to be a living entity? And we thought by having a museum we would explain what Hinduism is."

The temple space is 17,000 square feet, and we walk up to the vast area reserved for this dream museum. Go one flight up and you come to the site of a proposed cosmic theater with wondrous water projected images, a technology (Tsunami Water Screens) available only from the US which would project a mighty 60-foot high figure of Sri Krishna on a water screen in the atrium. This museum is planned as a virtual travelogue of Hinduism from The Temples of Time documenting the origin of the Vedic religion to the great saints and temples, right up to the invasions and contemporary times.

"The Tanjore temple capstone is 82 tons of granite. How did they get it 200 feet high up in the air?" asks Dr. Doobay. "The engineering skill and mathematical skills of our ancestors made such magnificent temples possible. To carve the temple of Ellora out of a mountain, they carved from top down, instead of the other way around."

Today the Vishnu Temple is a life force for the Hindu community, and can take in 1,000 people. Just recently an icon of Balaji was added to the Gods and Goddesses resident in the Vishnu Temple. Enthuses Doobay, "When I was in Tirupati, I said to Balaji, 'One day I'll bring You to Canada.' For 25 years I tried to bring Him--and He only came this year."

So in a way it's all predestined? Responds Doobay, "I'm not saying that God spoke to me or anything but are these coincidences or are these some divine intervention?" Doobay's father was a Hindu priest in Guyana, and he often assisted his father in doing pujas and rituals in devotees' homes.

In a way, he is following in his father's footsteps, for while his father promoted Hinduism through readings and pujas and even a radio program, Doobay is doing it in the ways of the technological age, through television and a hi-tech museum.

While Doobay's is a large, magnificent vision of Hinduism, the religion is fed by many sources, many small efforts. Visit Rita Sadhwani's home in North York and you find the holy tulsi plant thriving in her small garden. This plant, which is an essential in Vaisnava homes, has managed to take root in Toronto.

In the harsh winters, when snow can reach knee-deep, Sadhwani moves the tulsi indoors. There, in the cold and snow of Toronto, it still flourishes and blesses the household. And like that tenacious tulsi plant, Hinduism has taken root and bloomed and blossomed in an alien land, providing joy, strength and succor to thousands of Hindu immigrants and their future generations.

At the Hindu Temple Society, Sathi said, "Lots of contributions have also been made by Sri Lankans as well as Hindus from South Africa. It's not a very united community, to be honest with you. Like everywhere, there are some dissensions here and there. But generally we are pulling along well, through God's grace. This is a very noble project, and nobody has a personal agenda. God has been good enough to give us all the good things in life. By God's grace, all the Hindus in Canada are fairly well off, so they all contribute voluntarily."

In Conclusion

As temple after temple goes up against the Canadian sky, Indo-Canadian and Sri Lankan Canadians finally feel at home. They try to hold on to their heritage even as they themselves are changed by their exposure to Canada. In this give and take, busloads of young Canadian children come to view the biggest Hindu temple in Canada. Says Sathi, "We ensure that everyone is welcome." Out in the hall you can see letters written by children who have had their first exposure to Hinduism through the temple. "Dear Sir, " wrote young Deaux Gillian, "I had a great time at the temple. It was a lot of fun. It was fun watching a new different thing when the person put all sorts of different sorts of stuff on Ganesha. I'm really interested. Thank you for the holy bananas. They really taste good." And isn't that what Hinduism is all about? Generating sweetness and spreading joy, enlightenment and peace, embracing the world as one family.

Canada Fact Sheet

Population: 32,500,000 estimated in 2004. Ninety percent of the population lives within 100 miles of the US border. Average annual family income (1996) us\$48,157.

Area: At ten million square kilometers, Canada is slightly larger than the US and three times the area of India. Canada has one million lakes.

Cars: Canada has one car for every two people, the highest rate in the world. It also has the world's longest highway and, on the downside, .3% of all traffic accidents involve hitting a moose.

Toronto Highlights:

Population of The Greater Toronto Area is approximately 5,000,000. Toronto is the capital of Ontario province and Canada's largest city, as well as its commercial, industrial and financial center. Forty-three percent of the population are minorities. The top four are Chinese, 10.6%; South Asian, 10.3%, Black, 8.3% and Filipino, 3.5%. Toronto immigrants speak a hundred different languages and dialects and have 79 ethnic publications. Two million people a year visit the CN broadcasting tower. At 1,815 feet, it is the world's tallest structure. There is a revolving restaurant at the 1,000 foot level, which includes a section of glass floor allowing you to stand over and look straight down to the ground below.

Temple Musicians Rock in Toronto

We at Hinduism Today are rather familiar with the temple musicians of Toronto. Why? Because when we need a traditional tavil and nagaswaram troupe here at our temple in Hawaii, we just call Tiru Arumugampillai Murugathas in Toronto and he arranges a group from among his stable of musicians. They're very talented, and the visa situation is much easier from Canada than India. We have to schedule well ahead of time, because the fifteen musicians on his team are booked months in advance. During the peak festival season, from April to September, he handles 25 bookings a week for two or more musicians each. Even then he has to bring in more musicians from South India or Sri Lanka when an especially grand event is taking place, such as the dedication of a new temple. Business is good, and he's been able to support his family for over seven years playing music full-time.

Murugathas plays the nagaswaram, the double reed temple horn akin to an oboe. Others in his group are expert on the tavil, a two-headed drum. Both instruments can be extremely loud, able to dominate over any level of crowd noise or Sanskrit chanting, and thus a means of indicating high points of the ceremonies. Traditionally, they were played only in the temple. Use elsewhere, for home celebrations or stage concerts, is a relatively recent development. Beyond meeting the needs of Toronto's dozens of temples, the troupe is called upon these days to perform at weddings, birthdays and the ritu kala samskara, coming-of-age ceremony, performed for all girls in the Sri Lankan community. The girls' ceremony may be performed at home with family and relatives, or at a hall with 200 to 300 guests.

Murugathas said there is a big business for Indian wedding planners. Only one temple, Richmond, has a wedding hall, so most weddings are held at halls rented from the Italian community. The Ayyappan temple, he said, has plans both for a wedding hall and an elder center.

During his last visit to Hawaii, Murugathas explained that the musicians are also farmers in Sri Lanka, tending to their fields during the off-season of festivals and weddings. That pattern continues for the musicians in Toronto with most other than himself holding a second job.

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Caesar, the Elephant

Loved by all, he worships, gives blessings and serves at dozens of Hindu events a year

Each year on Ganesha Chaturthi, the Siddhi Vinayaga Temple brings Caesar the elephant from the Bowmanville Zoo. Caesar's quickly gotten the idea of Hindu worship, sitting back on his hind legs and doing namaskaram with his front legs together to the Deity. Now in his fourth festival, he instantly recognizes Dr. Somaskanda Kurukkal (doing the arati below) as the person who brings him sugarcane and mangoes, which the 19-year old consumes in any quantity. Zoo owner Michael Bowman (he's standing behind the priest in the photo) said Caesar is not only called for temple duties nearly every week of the summer, but does some 18 Hindu weddings a year. It costs us\$3,000 per wedding, half of which goes to insurance, said Bowman. "It's a lot of fun for Caesar, " he explained. At their first wedding, it was requested that Caesar garland people. The pachyderm didn't know how to do this, so Bowman took him aside and taught him how in "five minutes." A similar session was required to teach tapping people on the head as a blessing. "He loves to go places and will even jump into his transport trailer if it is left unlatched, like the family dog jumping in the car in hopes of going someplace."

Bowman affirms that elephants must be cared for properly in captivity. Indeed,

successful reproduction and care in captivity is the only hope for their survival. "We humans are the cause of the destruction of their habitat, therefore we are responsible to develop alternatives. A return to the wild is unrealistic." He endorsed the idea of elephant camps as instituted in Tamil Nadu to give the elephants a break from routine. "Kids like summer camp, so do elephants." "There is a severe lack of appropriate husbandry, " he said. "Elephants in North America are obese and bored. They need work to do. Elephants enjoy work. We need to breed them, and need facilities to hold males in season when they can't be handled. More than one elephant must be kept together. They have to walk ten to fifteen miles a day. Ours are turned loose on 200 acres of forest, which they proceed to enjoy by knocking over trees and generally wrecking the place."