

[Montreal Temple Nourishing All](#)

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Open Attitudes Encompass Diverse Community Needs

The Hindu Mission of Canada has established its temple in what is not only the country's most populous city, but also the second-largest French-speaking city in the world and the reluctant yearly recipient of ten feet of winter snow. Nevertheless, Hindus find themselves comfort come in this eastern Canada city. The recently settled here are generously called "New Canadians" - unlike America where immigrants are called "aliens," the same term as would be applied to a two-headed visitor from a distant galaxy. Canada prides itself on facilitating immigrants to maintain their cultural identity. There is even a government department for this purpose.

Hari Tuknath, president of the Hindu Mission, told HINDUISM TODAY how he enjoys the Montreal's ambiance. "There is no discrimination at all, these French people are nice, better than the English. Except for the language problem, Montreal is the best place to live in Canada. One can walk safely on the streets even late at night." But the safe streets mask what attorney Aran Veylan of Edmonton, Canada, calls a "rough and tough city" with a powerful crime and drug underworld which, however, rarely touches the average citizen.

Unemployment has been a concern, Tuknath admits. A number of companies relocated to Toronto when French was mandated as the only language in which business could be conducted - a linguistic row reminiscent of India. Among the dispute's manifold consequences is that Hindu children are taught both English and French in schools. The language issue has given rise to a real prospect of Quebec seceding from the rest of Canada, with unforeseeable repercussions on Hindu residents.

The Hindu Presence

There are two major Hindu temples in Montreal: the Hindu Mission, largely attended by Hindu new Canadians, and the Hare Krishna temple, supported by both French and English-speaking Canadians of European descent. Due to unplanned scheduling differences Indian Hindus can attend major festival celebrations at both temples - The Hindu Mission celebrates festivals on the nearest weekend, whereas the Krishna temple observes the exact day.

The communal atmosphere of Quebec has not fed similar divisions in the 15,000-strong Hindu community. Temple president Tuknath actively solicits the participation of all Hindus, largely avoiding the tendency toward exclusive linguistic divisions that is present in some areas. He explained, "I tell them this temple belongs to every Hindu who believes in Hinduism." Montreal resident Tapas Majundar of West Bengal confirmed to HINDUISM TODAY that the temple was looked at as the gathering place for all Montreal Hindus. The majority of the Hindus in Montreal are from Punjab and Gujarat. Tuknath said there were no problems with Christian missionaries.

Establishing the Mission's temple

The Hindu Mission temple began under the inspiration of Om Prakash Gupta in 1971. A handful of devotees gathered to worship at the home of J.K. Awasthi. A YMCA hall served as the site for their first Janmashtami celebration, while their fortnightly meetings moved to C.B. Singh's restaurant. They got formally organized in 1976 under the presidency of Hitesh Sharma and collected \$25,000 from the 150 families then participating. In 1980 a permanent building was located. The main room's wall-tile design of wheels and cogs still puzzles visitors, unaware of the building's previous service as a mechanic's union hall. The corner building, a house wide and a very small city block deep, was acquired for a \$117,000, but Tuknath says the owner expected the Hindus to default on the mortgage. With a monthly income averaging \$200 and a mortgage of \$ 1,000, default it almost did, but shortfalls were always made up from the temple committee's personal pockets.

At the end of the first year, temple devotee Ram Swarup Kushal engineered a payoff for the mortgage (much to the owner's surprise, says Tuknath) by getting

interest-free loans from the devotees. Now all loans are cleared and, with the help of generous devotees such as Ramesh Sahni, major improvements are being added each year. Most recently a new kitchen was installed and new carpeting laid.

The temple is arranged and worship is done in North Indian style. Large murthis of Radha and Krishna are in the center. To the left is Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi, to the right Goddess Durga seated on a lion. A three-foot Lord Ganesha which belongs to Tamil devotees is set up with a base which allows abhishekam. Siva Nataraja and a Siva Lingam are also on the altar. In October, 1986, the Mission acquired the services of a full-time priest, Pandit Sitaram Sharma from India. Panditji has since received full immigrant status and was joined by his family from India in February, 1989.

The Tamil Temple Community Plans

The 5,000-strong Tamil community in Montreal presently holds worship services at the Hindu Mission every Friday evening. These attract between 300 and 700 devotees. According to the secretary of the Saiva Mission of Quebec, Thiru Nadarajah, the South Indians are planning their own Murugan temple to be built according to agamic tradition. For this purpose they have raised US \$84,000, not yet enough to purchase land. Priest Govindraja Sharma of Jaffna, Sri Lanka conducts the weekly abhishekam as well as popular festivals such as the just-celebrated Thai Pongal and the upcoming Maha Sivaratri.

Plans for the Future

Demonstrating the community's generosity, a serious future plan is a fund-raising dinner not for the Montreal Hindu Mission but, according to Tuknath, to help clear the remaining \$50,000 mortgage on the Krishna temple. Improvements will continue to the Hindu Mission's premises, and strong thought is being given to expanded teaching programs for the young. Overall, Montreal's Hindus appear comfortably settled in this hospitable city.

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Youth Programs

Seventeen-year-old Seema Srivastva liked best of all playing Sita in the youth production of Sita's Swayambar, when Sita chose Lord Rama for her husband. Seema said, "The temple has a very nice priest who is very fond of children. He explains a lot and has started many children's activities."

According to Seema's mother, Shanta, plays based on episodes from the Ramayana were begun at the Indu Mission two years ago and are now held on Ramnavami and Devali. Thirty-five to forty children participate in each, which are put on with elaborate costumes, devotional dancing and preliminary bhajan. The plays are done in Hindi with commentary in English.

Seema likes the temple's recent emphasis on children's programs but says it should be increased to include regular classes on religion and Hindi. She said, "In [the Christian] school we may learn some Hinduism but there should be a keep up with our culture, especially since we have never been in India, the temple helps us that way." Her mother wants to start children summer camps and other programs, but complains that there are not enough people willing to devote time necessary to develop temple activities.

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