

Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple
Dudley Road East, Tividale, Oldbury, west Midlands B69 3DU

Information Sheet

This information sheet is produced in response to questions raised by the visitors to the temple and it is intended for general information

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

Balaji Temple is a Hindu place of Worship built in the style of the most visited Shri Venkateswara Temple in Andhrapradesh in India. Balaji Temple is also the largest temple of its kind in Europe set in approximately 30 acres of land in Tividale in The West Midlands.

Visitors to the temple include groups of school children, university students, faith groups and many other interest groups from across the UK and overseas. Temple and its ground are open to all, regardless of one's race, faith, religion or sect. At present, guiding by trained guides is only available in English. Prearranged fully conducted and guided tour can take up to 2 hours and can be varied to suit the visitors' needs and expectations. The guided tour is free when guides are available.

Facilities such as ramps, lifts and wheelchairs are available for the physically impaired. The visitors are reminded that the temple site is a no-smoking zone and are requested not to bring any alcohol or meat products to the temple site. The tour consists of visiting the main temple, various shrines and the Faith Hills in the temple grounds. One is required to remove one's shoes and place them in the designated areas before entering the prayer halls in the main temple and other shrines. During inclement weather conditions, one may feel some discomfort walking without shoes along the paved paths in open air.

Car and coach parking space is available within the site. Light vegetarian refreshments can be provided by prior arrangement. Temple will gratefully accept any contribution or donation from visitors if they wish to do so.

Visitors are advised to note the opening hours from the Temple web site www.venkateswara.org.uk/ before planning the visit.

Current Temple opening hours are:

Weekdays: 8.30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

Weekends: 8.30 am to 2.30 pm and 4 pm to 9:00 pm,

Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple, Tivdale.

The Temple Architecture

The site, over 20 acres in all, situated off Dudley Road East in Tivdale is bounded by a canal on the Western side and by the river Tame on the North Eastern side. These features fit well with the tradition of building the temples adjacent to a water feature such as a river, lake or sea.

The Temple, *not a home for God but a form of God* and worthy of worship, is built in the traditional Hindu style of architecture which was evolved over many centuries and has many distinctive features. *Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple in Tivdale* reflects the South Indian Dravidian styles (*Pallava, Chola & Pandya. The ruling dynasties*) with hand sculpted granite *Gopuras (towers)* incorporating many carvings. The external shrines are also in the same style with features in cement plasterwork hand moulded by Indian artisans. Various machine-carved geometric stone features were produced from Spanish granite whereas the main *Gopuras* were erected on site by Indian artisans using the stones hand sculpted in India and shipped to UK.

The East facing temple complex with shrines and the main *Gopura* are planned symmetrically about a true East West axis with a minute bias to North. The access road leads one to the courtyard through a doorway in the *Raja Gopura* (Royal tower) which contains the priests' quarters. Minor shrines are planned on either side of the courtyard and the imposing main temple with grand ceremonial stairs is in the front.

In designing the *Balaji Temple*, it was necessary to modify many of the traditional features of the temples in India such as open *prakara* for perambulation around the shrines, colonnaded *mantapa* or assembly area, low flat roof, separate amenity buildings etc to suit the local conditions and incorporate additional amenity areas within the main temple without deviating too far from the traditional concept. The initial scheme design was prepared by Dr. Adam Hardy, a specialist in South Indian Temple architecture. The detailed design was carried out by the *Sthapathi Sri Dakshinamurthy* in association with the local architects.

The temple complex consisting of the main temple, the shrines and the *Gopuras (towers)* covers an area measuring 450 ft long and 200 ft wide. The main temple is 166 ft long, 111 ft wide and 55 ft high to *Kalasa (finial or crown)*. The assembly hall in the main temple is 120 ft long and 74 ft wide with space for up to 700 devotees. The building complex is set in 12 acres of the site and has generous space for the planned seven faith hills to reflect the community we live in and to show our respect for other major faiths. The welcoming open landscaped area includes space for reflective meditation and relaxation.

The community Centre containing two assembly halls, a kitchen and other amenities has the facility for educational, cultural and recreational activities and is open for use to all faiths in the community. This building reflects the Buddhist style of architecture with distinctive vaulted horse-shoe roof form.

The work towards completion of the whole of the scheme is continuing.

Ram Aithal. (Faith Guide) September 2009

Some of the principles used in the design of a Hindu Temple

1. The architect is at the foremost a **philosopher** followed by a visionary, skilled craftsman and technician, a sculptor and an artist.
2. Connection between man and God is not made in a Temple any more than a concert hall makes the connection between man and music. Both the temple and the concert hall provide a congenial environment in which one can experience spirituality or music. Historically, spirituality and God experience are realised by mankind without the need for external support. Some chose to sit under a tree, close their eyes and experience the spirituality. Where one needs such support, the temple, its setting, the sight and sound together with one's fellow devotees provide a total environment for the fulfilment of one's spiritual needs. The temple, at the centre of the community helps to knit the social needs with the spiritual experience.
3. Where one has the luxury of choice, as was the case in India thousands of years ago, one chooses a tranquil spot such as a banks of a river or lake, seaside, top of a hill in the middle of unspoilt natural beauty etc. Being the focal point of a community, the temple is also built in a location in such a way as to serve the needs of the community. **Vastu Shastra** provides a guide in this matter.
4. The plan form, the choice of materials, the prominent features such as the towers (gopuras) are constructed in traditional style. **Shilpa Shastra** provides vast freedom for the artisans to use their skills acquired, accumulated and formulated over generations to the full potential. Vastu Shastra sets out the proportions, orientation and forms in the context of visual experience and practical needs in the form of code of practice with the full knowledge of all aspects of construction. Apart from the spiritual connotations, these **shastras** provided excellent guide to the temple builders taking into account the material properties, the site conditions and the needs of the devotees. These days, we have geotechnicians, environmental experts, engineers and scientists whose collective expertise are used by architects to create the most appropriate structure for any specified purpose. At Balaji Temple, the founders were eager to create a temple that evoked the spirit of the **Thirupathi** temple in the midst a disused farm and a tip. In principle, **Vastu Shastra** has been followed although for practical reasons some of the details have had to be changed. Attached brief history of the temple may provide you with some relevant information. **Vastu Shastra**, as I see it, is a code of practice in the absence of the various physical sciences and a set of rules to create an order in design and construction. Today, technically, we can achieve many things that were deemed to be forbidden under the **Shastras** only because by forbidding, it avoided futile attempts within the bounds of knowledge prevalent thousands of years ago. Proportions were set based on the proportions that go to make a beautiful human and other natural forms and the same rules were adopted for the buildings. Detailed guidance can be obtained by reference to books on **Vastu Shastra**.
5. The **Sthapathi** or the architect considers the basic dimensional units based on the horoscope of the owner/principle trustee as set in the **Vastu Shastra**. Balaji Temple was designed by a Sthapathi Mr. Dakshinamoorthy from India in collaboration with local architects and specialists.

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DHARMA

The ancient Indus civilisation was built on the concept of living a spiritually fulfilling life following a path known as '**Dharma**'. The faith was known as '**Sanathana Dharma**' or the eternal code for spiritual and virtuous living.

Dharma: (Sanskrit) "Righteousness." From dhri, "to sustain; carry, hold." Hence, dharma is "that which contains or upholds the cosmos."

Dharma is a complex and all-inclusive term with many meanings including: divine law, law of being, way of righteousness, religion, ethics, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. Essentially, dharma is the orderly fulfilment of an inherent nature or destiny. Relating to the soul, it is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path.

Persians coined the term '**Hindu**' meaning 'the people living on the banks of the river '**Sindhu**' known today as **Indus**.

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GODS IN HINDUISM

One of the frequently asked questions is "*How many Gods are there in Hinduism?*"

The answer, in short, is "**One**"

Naturally, this begs another question "*Why do Hindus seem to worship many gods?*"
Hindus believe that the supreme **God** with no attributes through which we can reach and understand, can be reached by the various qualities of God that we are able to feel through our limited five senses and our mind, the same way we can feel our emotions such as happiness, sorrow, compassion, gratitude etc by thousands of musical compositions to suit the occasions although there are basically only a few basic musical notes.

The names of the deities that Hindus worships represent various qualities of God and the name is a form of adjectives rather than a noun such as '**Brahma**' as the creator, '**Vishnu**' as the sustainer and '**Shiva**' as the one who ends life. Hindus believe that all forms of worship achieve the same objective the same way all the tributaries of a river ultimately reach the same ocean.

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HINDUISM

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The word "Hindu" is in mediaeval Persian "Hindō," representing the ancient Avesta *hendava* (Sanskrit-*Saindhava*), a dweller on the *Sindhu* or Indus Valley, northern India. The archaeological evidence of 'Harappa' and 'Mohenjo-Daro' from the Indus region indicates a civilisation dating back to 2250BC. Historians suggest that a tribe of Aryans, originally from southern Russia, invaded Indus region around 1750BC and together with the original Dravidian culture laid the foundations of Hinduism.

SPIRITUAL CONCEPT

It is suggested that the world is made by the Supreme out of His own nature. God is both instrumental and the material cause of the world. The analogy of soul and body is used to indicate the absolute dependence of the world on God even as the body is absolutely dependent on the soul.

The reality of the Supreme is not a question to be solved by dialectic, which the vast majority of the human race will be unable to understand. Dialectic in itself and without reference to personal experience can not give us conviction. Only spiritual experience can provide us with proofs of the existence of Spirit. The emphasis of the Gita is on the Supreme as the personal God who creates the perceptible world by His nature (Parkti). He resides in the heart of every being. The individual self is a portion of the Lord, a limited manifestation of God. We can reach the goal of perfection; attain the saving truth in three different ways, by knowledge of reality (jnana) or adoration and love (bhakti) of the Supreme Person or by the subjection of the will to the Divine purpose (karma).

Belief in One Supreme God remains at the centre of Hinduism. It also sees the need for faith to meet the spiritual needs of individuals and the necessity for moral laws to meet the needs of an orderly society. On the basis that God is without attributes, Hinduism sees no contradiction in one seeing or experiencing God in any form within the confines of one's own intellect. Despite the complex rituals that a Hindu performs he is equally aware that such rituals could be dispensed with in the pursuit of achieving the ultimate goal. He sees the Creator God in all His creation and therefore views everything in the world with some element of reverence. He also sees himself in the same light and considers that ultimately the personal soul can be with the One Supreme.

HINDUISM – THE RELIGION

The development of Hinduism took many centuries. As a religion it has undergone many changes. The customs and practices have continued to evolve and change right to this day. The scriptures have been subject to many interpretations by scholars throughout the ages. Although there are many variations in the interpretations they are considered to be mutually complimentary.

The entire life of an average Hindu revolves round a complex set of rituals, religious ablutions, prayers, visits to temples and other religious symbolic acts intricately enmeshed with other secular activities. However, to the mystic thinker all this is useless, but he accepts that it is necessary for those who feel the need of it. Each individual is free to adopt the rituals as necessary if it helps to achieve the goal of salvation. Hinduism accepts that salvation may be achieved through devotion and worship (Bhakti), through proper observance of moral laws (Karma), or through meditation and knowledge (Jnana).

Hinduism does not claim to offer instant answers to all the questions but it can stimulate one to a state of self-awareness. Spiritual truth is reached only beyond the working limits of the logical mind and in this respect Hinduism shows many paths to reach the same goal.

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January 2008

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A brief history of the Temple

The dream

During the 1970's our founders had a dream; a dream to create a sanctuary for prayer & meditation to **Lord Venkateswara** (*Lord of the heaven*) and to establish a Hindu spiritual centre in this part of the country to fill the vast gap in the spiritual life amongst a large section of our community. The inspiration was the **Thirupathi** (*heaven on earth*) Temple in Andhra Pradesh in South India. The charity **Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple** as a Charitable Trust was set up in 1984 by a dedicated group of Hindus.

The Site

The **Thirupathi** Temple which the Tividale temple is modelled on is set amongst seven hills in the lush tropical forest in the second oldest Rock Mountains called Eastern Ghats; the oldest being the Rocky Mountain in Americas. The natural beauty of the setting justifies its name meaning 'heaven on earth'. The **Thirupathi** temple is the most visited Hindu place of worship in the world and it is the richest in terms of offerings made by the devotees and this fund supports a large number of charities. After three decades of scouring the country for a suitable place for the temple, the trustees found the land here in Tividale. The nearest thing to Thirupathi we got was **Brades Hall Farm** – a disused farm and a tip called '**Monks Tip**' bounded by a canal, a neglected stretch of river Tame and a narrow busy road A457. Who would have guessed that there would be a place of worship here? The site was acquired in 1995.

The Mile Stones

Plans for an ambitious scheme involving a Temple, a community centre and shrines, were prepared and the task of raising the necessary funds began in earnest. In 1996 the Millennium Commission approved the scheme for a grant by way of matching funding. The foundation laying ceremony **Bhoomi Pooja** (*ritually sanctifying the ground*) was held in 1997. In the Hindu tradition, installation of **Ganesh** and **Shri Venkateswara Utsava Moorthy** (*a small statue used during processions*) took place in 1999. The installation of the main statues of **Shri Venkateswara** and **Hanuman** took place in the main temple in April 2000. In May 2000 completion ceremony of **Shri Subramanya Swami** (*protector of family life*) temple was performed.

In July 2002 installation of **Shri Sudashrana Swami** for procession took place. Foundation ceremony for the Community Hall took place in January 2003. In July 2003 installation of **Navagraha** (*nine heavenly bodies including the Sun, moon and the planets*) was performed. The grand opening ceremony for the Community Hall took place in August 2004. In August 2006 the grand opening ceremony of the main temple was performed.

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VAHANA (Vehicle)

Hindu *deities* (personified form of god) have each a vehicle or *Vahana* on which they travel. These vehicles are either birds or animals in the creation which represent various qualities or forces represented by the particular deity or god. Deities are mostly represented with their corresponding vehicles. Examples are:

Goddess of knowledge '*Saraswati*' is depicted with the graceful **peacock** or **swan**. Similarly the Sustainer '*Vishnu*' with a primal **seven headed serpent** representing desire and consciousness, the terminator of life '*Shiva*' with '*Nandi*' the bull representing power and energy, Shiva's consort '*Parvati*' with **lion** representing pride and rage. The lord of spirits, the elephant headed deity '*Ganesh*' with a humble and nervous **mouse** representing one's feelings on embarking on a new venture as opposed to overconfidence and arrogance.

Other examples are:

The sun *Aditya* - *Seven horses*,

The fire '*Agni*' - *The ram*,

The creator of life '*Brahma*'-*Seven swans*

The god of thunder & rain '*Indra*'- *the elephant*, or '*three headed elephant*'

Hindu epics and narratives depict everything in creation in prominent and significant roles amongst gods representing various qualities indicating that we should have respect to everything in creation.

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HANUMAN

Hanuman is one of the many divine entities (deities) in Hinduism and is an ardent devotee of **Rama** the central character in the Indian epic *Ramayana*. He is a general amongst *Vanaras* – an ape-like race of forest dwellers. He is believed to be an incarnation of the divine and a disciple of **Lord Rama** in the struggle against the demon king *Ravasna*.

Hanuman is known by many names such as *Anjaneya, Maruti, Pavanputra, Anjaniputra, Bhajang Bali, Hanumant, Anoman, Andoman etc* throughout India and across many countries in the far East.

Hanuman's exploits are much celebrated in a variety of religious and cultural traditions, particularly in Hinduism, so much so that he is often the object of worship for his unfettered and deep devotion to **Lord Ram**.

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THE STATUE IN THE ORNAMENTAL POND

The story of ANANTHAPADMANABHA

In the beginning, God created the universe in all its glory and its complex order out of himself. All his creations, by their very nature, are time limited while the creator remains eternal. The universe and everything in it has a *beginning*, a *life span* and an *end*. God is thus seen in three functional forms as the **Creator**, the **Sustainer** and the **terminator** known as *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* with Vishnu as the supreme.

It is said that the God created Brahma & Shiva out of himself for the two functions of creation & termination of life while remaining as the sustainer. Shiva, being content with the power bestowed upon him, did not seek any special form or status in the order of things and was quite happy to be represented by an ordinary river washed cobble (*Lingam*). Vishnu graciously blessed him with his right hand as can be seen in the sculpture.

Brahma, on the other hand, challenged *Vishnu* for the supreme status on the basis that Vishnu's task of sustaining the life was only secondary to that of the creation of life. Vishnu did see the merit in this logic, but suggested that *Brahma* should first see the universe and be familiar with it before aspiring to preside over it as the supreme. *Brahma* agreed and set off on an epic journey to see and understand the universe.

Brahma's first impression of the universe was one of great fascination. However, on closer scrutiny, each tiny part of the universe presented myriads of complex forms such as galaxies, stars, planets and countless life forms, all mutually dependant on each other and influencing each other in an extremely complex but seemingly chaotic order. *Brahma* went on discovering new creations and new orders every step of his way through his journey. Wherever he turned, the unexplored universe seemed as vast as ever and he could see no end to his voyage of discovery. His initial feeling of fascination turned to despair. He could hardly comprehend the power of the creator and the magnitude of his creation. He accepted his limitations and saw no option but to return to face Vishnu and ask for forgiveness for challenging him for the supreme status. Being stranded in the universe, the only way he could see to reach *Vishnu* was to pray and seek directions and he did so with all the humility. *Vishnu* instantly answered and told him to continue travelling. *Brahma* travelled for eons and found himself as a puny figure seated on a huge lotus flower with its stem emerging from *Vishnu's* naval. Before him he saw the magnificent figure of Vishnu reclining on a seven headed snake on an ocean of milk. *Brahma* humbly said that he sought no special status in the firmament and that he was content with doing his task of creating life.

You can see the figure of Brahma on the lotus flower in the bronze statue.

The story conveys the concept of the eternal nature of the creator, the transient nature of the creation and the concept that the creation is a form of the creator. It also demonstrates the importance of humility in everyone irrespective of one's status.

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FESTIVALS

One of the main features of Hinduism is the celebration of numerous festivals. Each festival represents some significant event either mentioned in Hindu epics or the events that mark the movement of the sun or other celestial bodies like planets as per Hindu calendar.

In addition to daily worships, special worships to some deities take place in the temple on weekly and monthly basis. These include the **Full Moon Days**, **Fourth day of the waning moon**, etc. These worships signify certain events referred to in the scriptures and are performed as prayers for certain effect. Special annual events include the celebration of the installation of the deities.

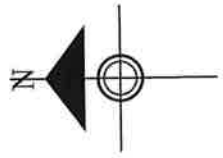
In Hindu calendar, annually, some 40 special event days are listed. Some of the major events are ***Festival of Ganesh*** (for the elephant headed god), ***Shri Rama Navami*** (the birthday of Lord Rama), ***Grand chariot procession***, ***Vijaya Dashami*** (celebrated on the tenth day of autumn lunar month signifying victory of righteousness over the evil), ***Holi*** (spring festival), ***Maha Shivarathri*** (Great Night of Lord Shiva), ***New Year's Day***, ***Deepavali*** (Festival of lights) etc. On these days many devotees with their family attend the temples for celebrations.

The stories behind the festivals and the practice vary from one part of India to another and the celebrations in Balaji temple are attended by many sections of the Hindu community in the UK.

Ram Aithal (Faith Guide)

Key

- 1 Access Road
- 2 Car Park
- 3 Community Centre
- 4 East Entrance tower
- 5 Sacred Pond
- 6 Shrines
- 7 Main Temple
- 8 Faith Hills
- 9 Conservatory
- 10 Gower Branch Canal
- 11 River Tame
- 12 Children's play area
- 13 Yagashala



Shri Venkateswara (Balaji)
Temple, Tivendale.

Site Plan

