Wonderments...Wow!
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IRAIVAN

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One-of-a-kind features make Kauai's Island Temple unique in all the world

What sets any temple apart, making it different from all others, bringing pilgrims from afar to admire, even worship, it? Sometimes in India it's history, the place having become known by an enlightened saint's visit or a legendary event. Other times it's a miracle or a power for which the temple is known: healing, visions, yogic insight, wealth or even finding a good husband.

The wish-fulfilling crystal on Kauai has such power, one of a dozen aspects of the Island Temple that conspire to make it extraordinary. Hindu scriptures say that of all the icons permitted in a Siva temple, none is more profound than the Sivalingam, or "mark of Lord Siva," for it represents the timeless, formless, spaceless, causeless Absolute Reality that is the core of all existence. And of all Sivalingams, the texts continue, the greatest is the naturally-formed crystal, called svayambhu sphatika in Sanskrit.

Iraivan's 700-pound, 39-inch tall, perfectly pointed and six-sided gem looks and feels curiously smooth, like cool ice.

Yet it was neither carved nor polished, but discovered in 1975 in Arkansas, USA, in a small chamber 65 feet below the surface of the Earth where it took 50 million years to grow. Noted one Indian pilgrim to Kauai: "Of course it's holy. It was made by God, not by man."

The master architect in charge of Kauai's Island Temple, Thiru V. Ganapati Sthapati--whose family has for generations been builders and who is also directing a Statue-of-Liberty-scale stone monument of Saint Tiruvalluvar at Cape Comorin--told Hinduism Today that Iraivan in Hawaii will be his finest masterpiece, the summit of his craft. In speaking of this jewel in the Pacific, tears came to his eyes. He lamented how people have forgotten the old arts, opting for efficiency over art and for economy over beauty. To him, "This temple is not only a place where we worship but is an object of our worship." To him, the stones are not inert. They are alive. They contain a lyrical sound, "They sing their own praises to the Lord." He has termed the several works of art the "wonderments of Iraivan." The island setting is itself a wonderment, as are the grounds on the river bank where the temple will sit. Other uncommon elements include the requirement that Gurudeva has made that the temple be carved entirely by hand. Gurudeva is not permitting any electric tools, hydraulic tools, any modern implements, to be used in its creation. He is asking the team to carve this in the old way, in order to preserve the skills and pass them on to the next generation. Only the hammer and sixty kinds of iron chisels are being used. Iraivan is singular in its purity, too. And he has asked them to quarry the stones in the old manner as well. This means time-consuming work by hand, without the use of dynamite, which Indian builders say "shatters the molecular integrity of the granite, ruining the musicality of the stone." When Gurudeva decreed that only

Siva would be enshrined inside, the architect was thrilled, saying that it used to be that way in ancient India, but in recent centuries all the Deities have been added. Lords Ganesha and Muruga will have charming shrines beside the 12-foot-wide entry steps leading up from the Wailua River, but upon entering the Island Temple, visitors will only encounter Lord Siva, in His compassionate, mystical and multifarious manifestations.

Fabulous Artifacts

Unique is the word for them, the enchanting components of the temple. There are the two monolithic musical pillars, single black stones five feet wide and thirteen feet tall. Craftsmen carefully carve out 16 thin "rods" which when struck with a mallet give a different and precise musical tone. This is by far the most difficult challenge to the sculptors' skills. The only other musical pillars carved this century, less elaborate than Iraivan's, are V.G. Sthapati's work, shown here in New Delhi.

The stone chain and bell that will greet pilgrims at the entry gate look simple enough, but they, too, are rare. In the Island Temple the chain's links and the 32-inch diameter bell are all carved out of the same giant stone, so they are totally interconnected. The bell hangs from a ceiling in which the motto "One God, One World" will be carved in hundreds of languages. The bell is rung with a sandalwood mallet.

Two six-inch-thick sandalwood doors leading to the main sanctum will be elaborately carved with sacred motifs and hung on polished black-granite frames. Ironically, though scriptures require these, they have not been part of any

temple for hundreds of years. Asked why, the architect smiled, "These doors are made from the finest heartwood, carved to perfection. The first time they are left unguarded, thieves take them off their hinges. So, long ago temples stopped making them."

The eight lion pillars are special, since a ball is carved inside the lion's mouth. Pilgrims can reach in to twist and turn the ball. Iraivan's are more elaborate than shown here.

Twin time capsules will be installed in the foundation, one high-tech, argon-gas, stainless steel canister and another old-style rock crypt holding sand and etched copper plates. Both will preserve the philosophy, people and culture that gave life to the temple, to be opened 1,000 years from now to inspire and inform generations yet to be born. Imagine their wonderment in opening the chambers!