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Lankan Hindus transplant their religion far north

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The Saiva Mission of Quebec began in 1984 with a dozen devotees meeting in borrowed space at local temples. They were among the Tamil Hindu refugees who flooded out of Sri Lanka following communal riots in 1983. The subsequent prolonged civil war has resulted in more than a hundred thousand Sri Lankans finding refuge in Canada. The dawning realization that the return home will be long or never in coming has motivated the group to seriously consider building a permanent temple to their favored Deity, Lord Murugan (Kartikkeya, in North India).

By 1991 hundreds of devotees succeeded in raising ^{can} \$135,000 toward a temple. A year later they located and purchased two acres of land for ^{can} \$450,000 in the Montreal suburb of Dollard-des-Ormeaux. "Only faith in Lord Murugan and guru's blessings encouraged the Tamils to embark on a multi-million dollar venture with only \$135,000 in hand," recalls one organizer. The project was blessed by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, publisher of Hinduism Today, who is providing the main temple deity in granite.

Poorana Thiyagaraja Kurukkal of Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, performed the blessing of the land in 1992. A few months later a huge tree-planting ceremony was attended by more than 1,000 devotees, government officials and guests. The 7,000-square-foot cultural center completed in 1995 serves as a temporary temple. Construction of the real temple, designed by Sri Ganapati Sthapati of Chennai and patterned after the Maviddapuram Murugan Temple in Lanka, will begin in early 1999.

Devotees haven't waited for the construction projects to bring to life their traditional celebrations. In 1997, 8,000 joined the August chariot festival. Dozens performed austerities such as piercing the body with small silver spears, or rolling on the ground behind the chariot. In November, even freezing weather did not inhibit some men from braving outdoor festivities barechested during Skanda Shasti--an example of the spirit brought to Canada by these staunch Hindus of Sri Lanka.

ARULMIKU THIRUMURUGAN TEMPLE, 1611 ST REGIS

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