

[\\$25 Million Temple Commenced in U.S.](#)

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ISKCON's Massive 27,000-Ton Granite and Marble Krishna Temple to Open in W. Virginia in 1992

In early summer this year, the shila ropana ground-breaking ceremony was held for the ISKCON New Vrindaban community's Radha-Krishna Temple of Understanding. The presiding Shankarachariya Abbot at Kanchi Peetam monastery in South India had set the auspicious hour, and the senior 93-year old Shankarachariya had sent a message of good will.

By 1992, the 18-story, 216-foot high Vaishnava Hindu temple will rise out of West Virginia's northern hills. It is the largest temple to be undertaken in the Western hemisphere and the biggest Radha-Krishna temple to ever be built. Its South Indian architecture is an ancient design that has never been used before. A world-class religious building, its size exceeds St. Peter's Basilica, Christendom's largest church.

It will take seven years to build and open the basic structure. Four more years are planned, until 1996, for the details the Hare Krishna craftsmen work into their sanctuaries. The story of Lord Krishna will be told through sculpture, murals, tapestry, wall frescoes and paintings all in the style of Krishna temples in Mathura, Vrindaban and Dwarka in North India. New Vrindaban spiritual leaders see the Temple and its 33-acre grounds as the centerpiece of their pilgrimage center.

On the day of the ground-breaking it rained, forcing the crowd of 500 indoors until the weather cleared. Despite the shuffle, Public Affairs spokesman, Tulsi Dasa, felt the ceremony was a tremendous success. One U.S. Congressman, two state senators and many local politicians attended, demonstrating how popular New Vrindaban has become.

The community puts \$5-7 million a year into the county and "that's just the beginning," said Tulsi Dasa. New Vrindaban anticipates hiring over 200 people for their project. Recently, a reporter from the The Wall Street Journal visited the community to do a story. Swami Kirtanananda Bhaktipada, wondered out loud why the Journal hadn't done a story before. The reporter replied, "We didn't take you that seriously up till now." The community is now being taken seriously not only by the press, politicians and state tourist officials but also by a group of U.S. Hindu architects and engineers who are assisting in the Temple's design complexities.

The \$25-million price tag is relatively economical considering that all 27,000 tons of granite are being donated by a non-Hare Krishna well-wisher in Georgia. New Vrindaban is now making this resource available to other U.S. temple projects, for little or no cost.

With a supply of granite readily available, the planners face cutting it, an operation they estimate would take 1,000 men 10 years to do by hand. That's just for the central tower itself. After researching in Japan and Germany for robotic and water-jet stone slicers, the community is now outfitting its high-tech stone cutting shop. Before winter sets in this year they expect to have lowered the ground level by 25 feet and started the foundation work.

The Temple will amaze Americans and is meant to do so. Tulsi Das says they expect far more visitors to tour the Radha-Krishna Temple than now tour New Vrindaban's legendary Palace of Gold. There will even be elevators to take people from the ground floor up to the main level. The Hare Krishnas intend to educate the public in its theology and sadhanas, thus the name: Temple of Understanding. The first and second levels are designed to contain a 3,000-seat dining room, a marriage hall, yagna fire-ceremony hall, library, family counseling offices and a multitude of ISKCON's unique preaching facilities: a multi-media planetarium, "The Lord Has Form" exhibit, a Vedic Science Hall and an Exhibition Hall.

Ironically, while Hare Krishna devotees are the top communicators of Vaishnavism around the world, throwing open their temples to the public, Western members are still barred from entering the Jagannath Temple in India.

The Radha-Krishna Temple of Understanding is part of New Vrindaban's Land of

Krishna project. In 1980 New Vrindaban enjoyed instant success when it opened the Prabhupada Palace of Gold, dedicated to Hare Krishna founder, H.H. Bhaktivedanta's, memory. TV and print journalists dubbed it "the Taj Mahal of the West." To date 2.5 million people have visited it. New Vrindaban was on America's summer vacation map. Seven hundred bus tours are scheduled so far for the '85 season. The economic fallout of all those tourists in West Virginia has made even state officials happy. Money attracted the local tax officials who wanted the non-profit-tax-exempt community to start paying taxes on its restaurant and gift shop sales. New Vrindaban filed suit last year and vow they will take it to the state Supreme Court if necessary.

Spurred by the Palace of Gold popularity, the spiritual leadership of New Vrindaban drafted a master plan for a 100-acre Land of Krishna or KrishnaLand to be developed within the community's 4,000-acre property. KrishnaLand is divided into 3 sectors: the 40-acre Home of the Spiritual Masters, which includes the Palace of Gold; the 27-acre Krishna Book Forest Park which will have a tramway to view some 500 9-to-12-foot statues depicting the boyhood pastimes of Krishna; and the 33-acre Temple of Understanding, including the actual temple and the "Gardens of Lord Chaitanya." Many of New Vrindaban's 500 devotees are daily working on the project's initial terraforming and landscaping. A two-million gallon man-made lake is underway, miles of brick paths are going Down and eventually two 100-room hotels will be built. Sector One is scheduled to be open some time in 1986. The total price tag for KrishnaLand is \$50 million.

Dreams and Palm Leaves: The Palace of Gold came out of New Vrindaban's own forges and lathes. Twenty workshops developed, often with the devotees learning "lost" crafts from scratch. That spirit and skill is now going into the Land of Krishna project. Most especially it will be used for the Temple, an undertaking far more ambitious than the Palace. Right now, the Temple only exists in blue prints, computer analyses, a wall-length illustration and palm leaves.

Yes, palm leaves. A few years ago Swami Kirthananda Bhaktipada had a dream of a great temple. Months later, in Madras, he showed a drawing of the dream temple to M. Mutiah Staphati who recognized it as similar to a temple design etched into his family's palm leaf records. Slowly the design was transferred from leaves into computers where the Indian measurements were converted into feet and inches.

Unusual for the North India-based ISKCON, the Temple style is vintage South Indian - reminiscent of the Thanjavur "Big" temple, built in the Chola period some 1,000 years ago. Thanjavur's capstone poised on the top of its central tower required a 5-mile long ramp to drag it to a height only half as high as the Radha-Krishna temple. At the highest level of the Radha-Krishna Temple "Holy Name" tower, under its capstone, will be a shrine for Nataraja-Krishna, "Krishna, the Master of Dance." Future visitors will enjoy the rare opportunity of climbing up through the several galleries in the hollow interior of the tower. But many may be unaware that the most famous Nataraja is Siva, an image Albert Einstein regarded as the best depiction of the living cosmos.