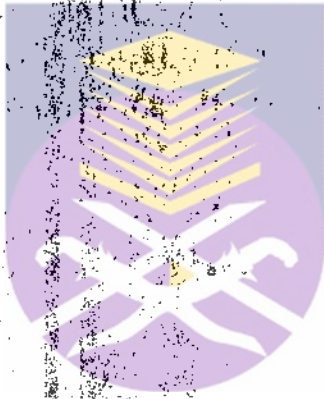


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**SRI  
MAHAMARIAM  
TEMPLE**  
JALAN BANDAR, KUALA



A THESIS ON  
**SRI MAHAMARIAMMAN TEMPLE**

Research thesis for the diploma in Architecture  
Mara Institute of Technology under the subject  
of History and Social Studies.

done by

**HANAFI ABD JALIL**

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**MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgements.

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I would like also to express my grateful appreciation to the secretary of the Sri Mahamariamman temple, Mr. Kumar, for the information, suggestion and encouragement which have been very invaluable. To Mr. Maniam, the caretaker of the temple who had guided me most on religious, cultural, technical and architectural background, I owe more than I can easily express.

I also wish to thank my History lecturer, Mr. Michael Emrick. His lectures on the Indian Architecture in my second year of the course have been very helpful. A large part of putting together a thesis is nothing but labour. To those who did much of this labour including typing, photographing and measuring my sincere thanks.

HANAFI ABD JALIL.

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# Preface

## PREFACE

The principle aim of this thesis is to set before the reader the historical background and descriptions of an old Hindu temple in Kuala Lumpur. I have chosen the temple as my subject of study because I feel it exhibits many interesting architectural features. The temple is in its third stage which is a modern concrete structure, yet it reflects many historical values and shows great technical and architectural achievement. The temple of Sri Mahamariamman is the oldest Hindu temple, most parts of its great height are severely expressed and decorated.

When I commenced this thesis, I expected the traditional literature in Sanskrit to furnish the terms for designating various parts of the temple. I consequently acquainted myself with the section devoted to temples in few published Indian Sastras. The architectural terms which I have chosen are largely based on these. They are very similar to those used in this temple.

I must apologise that drawn elevations are not provided here. Instead I have taken a lot of photographs to replace these. Plans are difficult to obtain so the alternative is to measure the temple.

The nature of the plan presented in this thesis may not turn out in exact form due to errors which arose while measuring. Again I apologise for non-professional towards this line.

Most of the thesis are being the description of the building design. I have also inserted services and structural analysis in different parts of the building which I have described separately. Certain areas are difficult to gain access. Thus the structural analysis on these parts are based to the logical explanations of the trusted person who has been familiar with the construction. Besides I also included short description of the previous temple buildings as well as brief accounts on the cultural and religious aspects which seem to be important.



# Introduction

... convey only conveyed in spatial term the intensity of their longing for a 'life of release'. The

## INTRODUCTION

Visiting the temple I was struck by its massiveness of proportion and excellent of craftsmanship found in its sculptures, ceilings, pillars, towers and frieze laden walls. I stood amazed at its magnificent construction which is quite modern and possible. The glowing colours of the walls turn the building into a handsome textural sculpture overpowers the other buildings in the area. The statues of the deities are in tremendous shapes, very finely carved, painted and beautifully decorated. So I began with my research on this building, The Sri Mahamariamman Temple of Kuala Lumpur.

Beneath the architectural achievements found here lay the urge of Hindu mind to subordinate life to religion and seek it in the motive and ideal of all human endeavour. The temple became an aesthetic formulation of an essentially theistic religion. The building is a focal point of its worshippers involved in economics, socials and academic learning.

Those magnificent sculptured walls are religious and symbolic. Religious was in fact a synonym of civilised existence. The architectural of the temple only conveyed in spatial terms the intensity of their longing for a 'life of release'. The

deity to whom the structure was dedicated symbolised the supreme principle which controlled the affairs of the world and gave direction to spiritual urge.

The temple is a place of worship where through it man sought to make accessible to sense perception all that belief symbolised. These beliefs indeed influenced and commanded individuals in the privacy of their conscience. But as a visual emblem of the religion, philosophy and moral principles. The temple played a role far more vital than any other institution.

The architectural of the temple is the reverse of that of the Muslim mosque or the Western cathedral in which everything was arranged to form a large interior space soaring upward to heaven. In Hindu temple the part that soars is the entrance gateway or the the gopuram, while the interior is the pattern of straight passages. Perhaps the difference in architecture reflects the difference in attitude toward worship between Muslim or Christianity and Hinduism. Hindus worship more or less individually, seldom in masses; whereas in the two former religions the heart of the matter is the communal service requiring large spaces in which hundreds of worshippers can see the officiating priest.

Since the religious aspect of Hinduism in some extent governed the forms and architectural shape of the temple it is thus important to precisely

describe this religion. The divinity or deity control to the Hindu religion is the spiritual concept whose many aspects and attributes are expressed or personified in the personalities of the individual members of the Godhead. These attributes and personalities are illustrated in the allegorical histories of the Gods. Hindu religion is described as theistic or monotheistic. The relationship between the members of the Godheads are Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, all three maintain eternal cycle. Each share a special attribute with his consort, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati respectively. The two sons of Siva and Parvati are Ganesha the wise and Murugan the warlike.

In every Hindu temples such special names as above can always be found. Most of the Indians in Malaya were, then as now, Tamils and others are of Dravidian stock from South India. Most were and are not only Hindu but particularly devoted to Siva and Murugan. Another tradition brought from South India was the dedication of shrines to deities considered to be the special protector of the particular village or community. One of these, Mariamman, was adopted by the Tamil community in early Kuala Lumpur. It is believed that the name of the Sri Mahamariamman Temple was taken from this. In the temple itself Mariamman or the mother is seated on throne in the middle between Murugan and Ganesha.

# Historical Background

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is very important to know how the Hindu religion had come to Malaya before further describing the historical background of the Sri Mahamariamman Temple, the first Hindu temple in Kuala Lumpur. From the archeological evidents found in the caves at Batu Pahat, Kedah, show that Hindu religion had come here 1200 years ago. The great Hindu kingdom of Srivijaya held sway in Malaya for more than 500years until its declined in the late 13th century. But in the 15th century during the Muslim expansion through the region most of the Hindu princes were displaced or converted to Islam. However, it was not until late 19th century that the Hindu religion was again practised by the substantial minority in Malaya.

Kuala Lumpur was a thick jungle when it founded by a chinese captain, Yap Ah Loy. Few years after that many people dwelled the town and helped its expansion. The main reason for this expansion was tin, people from all over the country had come here in searched of tin. Wooden houses and huts dominated the area and the two rivers, Sungai Klang and Sungai Gombak became the means of communications. These area where the two rivers meet was then developed into a commercial centre where trade had been

carried out for many years. Palms and bamboos were the chief building materials. Those who dwelled here were from many races. Most of the Malays were from Klang, the capital for the state of Selangor. The Chinese and Indians were traders. As they arrived they brought with them their religious and cultures. They very soon set about erecting places of worship according to their beliefs. The Hindus built their places of worship out of attaps and bamboos which easily available at that period. Those places where they put their deities were small in size found in shed and under big trees.

The settlement was little or more than a collection of attap huts when the people of Kuala Lumpur got theirs first mosque, first Chinese temple first Christian church, first Indian temple. The first Hindu temple is the Sri Mahamariamman Temple built in 1873 by Kayoroganam Pillai. It was a very small building near the present Central Bank in Victory Avenue. The site which opposite the present Central Market is now occupied by the north goods yard of the Railway Authority.

The temple was described to have an attap roof and timber walls. It has a simple square plan with small gateways. The main temple building had a raised floor of a rough cement screed while the surrounding area had a compacted soil finish. Besides the temple proper two pavilions were also

built for deities. They were in the form of shed. The temple was opened on three sides except for the wall opposite to the main entrance. It was fully decorated with leaves. At this end there were three raised platforms about 3ft high at a distance of 4ft apart from each other where gods and deities were seated. The columns were made of timber. Some of them were carved while others had deities fixed to them. The gateways was not fully expressed and it was in the form of hut 3ft by 5ft in dimension with thatched roof and bamboo columns. Most of the construction were temporary because there were lots of renovations as years passed by. The outer wall which was once nippah leave was replaced by timber planks while some parts of the roof had new tiles.

In 1884 an ordinance was passed by the Legislature of the then Federated Malay States which resulted in an influx of Indian workers, almost all of Tamil race and Hindu religion. Most were employed in plantations although a few engaged to run the new railway from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. They soon outnumbered the traders, troops and police of various ethnics origins, linguistic group and religions, who had hitherto represented the Indian sub-continent in the Malay peninsula. Because the number of Hindu worshippers had grown, the need of a new temple was necessary.



In 1885 the site was taken over for the Kuala Lumpur terminus railway line and the temple was moved to its present site in High Street, now known as Jalan Bandar. The temple was constructed in the same year. At the beginning the Hindus used as a place of worship. Other activities and functions including socials, cultural and education were not concentrated here. Later a committee was set up and elected K. Thamboosamy Pillai the founder of the new temple to be the stanigar or president. He was the first person to get the honour that is to receive coconut, flower and ashes from the temple. K. Thamboosamy was very famous at his time. He was a former student of the Victoria Institution and there is a road named after him which can be found near Jalan Chow Kit in Kuala Lumpur.

Management of the temple of that time was vested in the prominent south Indians, K. Thamboosamy Pillai, R. Doraisamy Pillai, K. Doraisamy Pillai, T. Ramasamy Pillai and Kayoraganam Pillai, the father of Thamboosamy. Together they formed a committee or the 'Panchayat'.

At same time another Pillai by the name of Visvalingam, a police constable from Singapore started a construction of the Sri Vijayanagar Temple in Old Pudu Road. When the temple was completed it annexed to the Sri Mahariamman Temple by K. Thamboosamy. Few other temples which were built after

this also came under the management of single committee which had its headquarter at Sri Mahariamman Temple. These include The Sri Subramaniam Temple at Batu Caves and The Sri Ganesa Temple in Old Pudu Road.

After the Second World War the management of the temple, in addition to its religious and charitable activities, expanded its programme to education, taking over four schools in Kuala Lumpur namely,

1. Mahatma Ghandi High School, which has now closed down,
2. Upper Secondary English School,
3. Upper Tamil School and
4. Batu Caves Tamil School.

Besides these the temple also owned a school bus used for the school children around the Batu Caves area. Hostel facility for the students of the other states who study at the Upper Tamil School is also provided. Other properties of the temple include a piece of land at the foot of the Batu Caves where Thaipusam Takes place annually.

This old brick temple was then demolished to be replaced by a new one. The demolition took place in 1964. When it was moved to High Street 91 years ago the temple was in a form of attap shed. This was replaced by a brick structure in 1887. It was a small building, smaller than the Sri Subramaniam Temple of Sentul as comparison. The temple was

like the other surrounding buildings and did not have any distinguish features as it is today. The roof were tiles with a dome over the main deity. Columns and walls were cement rendered the floor was smooth screed finishes. The area around the temple was congested with bluster of houses. They were wooden structures located at both sides of the main temple building. A pavilion dedicated to Jurga was the only interesting piece of architecture found in the massy temple site. It was situated on the eastern end of the temple proper. The gopuram was not there and entrance to the temple was through its main gateway of double- swung timber braced doors.

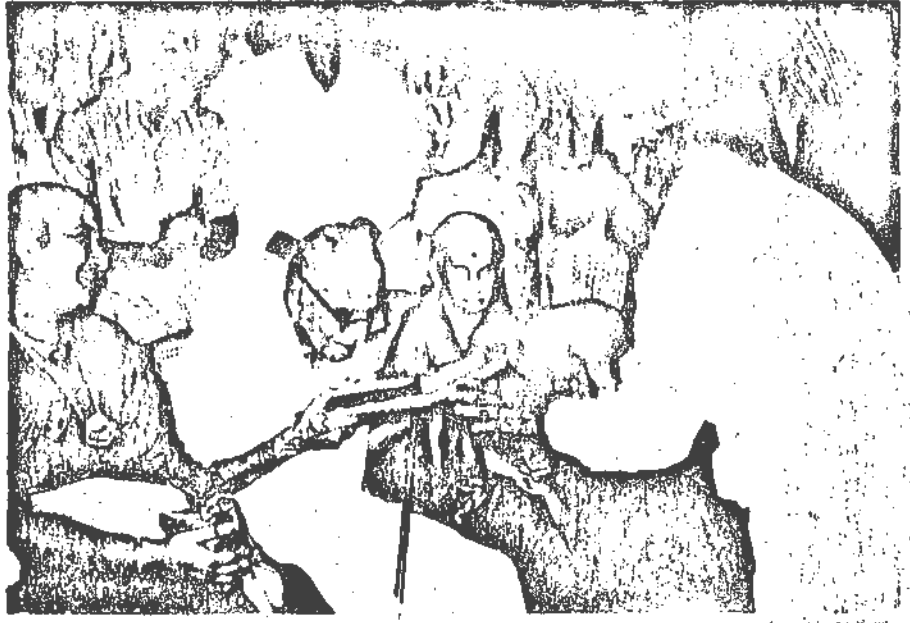
In 1965 the construction of the present temple began. The proposal to have this new temple was made during the annual meeting of the Hindu Temples Association of Malaysia. The nineteen Hindu temples which are the member of the association found it was necessary to have a central headquarter for for their organisation and also for the benefit of the Hindus in this country. They derived to an unanimous decision to have the Sri Mahamaria man to be their centre. The chairman of the temple at that time was Mr. Palany Villapule. He organised a committee to raise fund for the cost of the building. In same year Tun V. T. Sambathan, minister of telecom laid the foundation stone which led to the start of building this new temple.

The temple found that the only person that can design to suit the need of Hindu community here was Mr. R. Ravindran, an architect from South India. The temple consulted him with knowledge and imagination to develop a very interesting architectural building which at certain extent resemble those in South India.

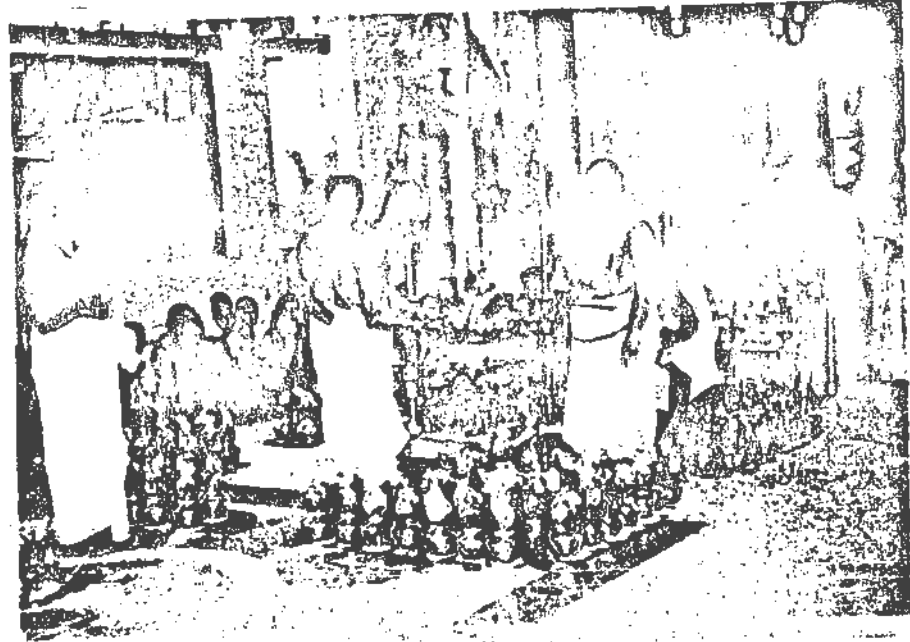
The project is divided into three phases. The first phase which was completed in 1968 was the temple proper. The second phase was the building of gopuram or gateway. The third phase which is in the planning stage are flats, shopping arcade and a place for wedding ceremony. The cost of the first two projects was over one million Ringgit. The Malaysian government had donated 200,000 Ringgit while the Selangor State government donated 70,000 Ringgit to the temple. Donations also came from special organisation and individuals.

Many skill workers from South India were brought here to complete the building. This included the late Mr. P. T. Rajan, chairman of the Madura Temple, an old temple in South India. He gave sculptors to the Sri Mahamariamman Temple. Due to this the temple had honoured him during its 100th years anniversary in 1973. The cost of the trip was all from the temple expense. He also stated the number of sculptures that should be placed on the gopuram and in the temple proper.

The date the temple 100th years anniversary was 10th September 1973. Holy priest from Madhira .  
afe. invited to performed hindu rites or Pooja. His  
name is Tangga Phatta. The holy ceremony was known  
as Fumbansagen or concept ration and it was done  
for 48 days and nights. During this time Bri Maha-  
mariamman Temple became the Mecca of Hindu people  
from all over the country. Holy water from all rivers  
in was brought here and it was poured from the top  
of the Palasa or the top part sikhara by the special  
priest. A lot of politican including the chief mi-  
nister of Selangor participated. The ceremony which  
was considered as grandest could not be forgettep  
by every Hindu worshippers in the country. Till to  
the present day a lots of activities have been carried  
out in this temple. Everyday at 6.30 am, 12.00 noon  
and 5.30 pm poojas are done.



Mr. P. T. Rajan receiving honour from the Temple of Sri Mahamariamman during its 100th anniversary.



Hindu priests from The Temple of Madura performing Hindu rites or poojas.

# Design Analysis

... architecture. The reason for having  
this is mainly because most of Sri mahamariamman