

Dear conference members,  
PAMHO. All Glories to Srila Prabhupada!

The 3-D animation of the current Capitol design of the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium (TVP) has been viewed more than six thousand times:

<http://www.dandavats.com/?p=5543>

One reason for this U.S.-Capitol design is that land planned for the previous and larger Indian-style temple is temporarily unavailable from the government. Only five acres between the puspa-samadhi and the long building in Mayapur are now available. Another reason is the cost of the Indian-style temple. So there were two alternatives:

- (1) scale down the Indian design and modify it to cut the cost and
- (2) make a totally new design.

Ambarisa Prabhu and the design team chose the second option. Recent discussions have suggested to us that this choice is problematic.

We have therefore submitted a GBC proposal, sponsored by Bhanu Swami, to change the design of the TVP. It has been given to the Executive Committee of the GBC in the hope that it will be put on the agenda of the GBC meeting in October.

Giriraja Swami wrote to us: "I too have heard many devotees express dissatisfaction with the present design, and I encourage the GBC to reconsider the plan."

We are now trying to determine, before the October GBC meeting in Mumbai, whether or not the majority of devotees and leaders in ISKCON approves of the Capitol design and thinks it is what Srila Prabhupada really wanted; if it is not, then the GBC, in consideration of the devotees' and leaders' disapproval of the Capitol design, can take advantage of its last opportunity to change the TVP design.

Do you find the U.S. Capitol design suitable for the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium, or do you want it changed? Please vote! And forward this message to free forums in your country or have it translated. It is urgent, in our opinion, that the GBC reconsider, before construction starts, what design will best fulfill Srila Prabhupada's desires for the Mayapur project.

All of us appreciate Ambarisa Prabhu and his team's dedicated service. As the backer and the planners of the Capitol design, they understandably hope to construct the TVP within their lifetimes, and they deserve respect for wishing to fulfill Srila Prabhupada's desire as soon as possible. However, it is not clear that changing the design would necessarily have to delay the TVP for very long.

Our position is that the decision to build the current, Capitol-inspired temple should be changed in favor of a first-class Indian design.

## NINE REASONS TO CHANGE THE DESIGN OF THE TVP

1) Srila Prabhupada, in mid-1976, made three brief statements (added at the end of this file) which suggested that the TVP should look like the U.S. Capitol. But he never insisted that the latter must be its exact model. He said only that the TVP, like the Capitol or the Victoria Memorial, should have a big dome. Five years before these statements, Srila Prabhupada approved Ranchor Prabhu's very different design for the TVP, and after the statements he did not object to, and seems in fact to have approved, Saurabha's Indian design; he allowed Saurabha to make a model of it and to display it outside the Lotus Building. It is therefore unclear to what extent he really wanted the TVP to resemble the U.S. Capitol. Hari Sauri Prabhu describes, in Transcendental Diary, Srila Prabhupada's "extreme enthusiasm" for Saurabha's drawings of an Indian design, in January 1976 - the very drawings that resulted in the model that was put on display. We are on safe ground if we give priority to Srila Prabhupada's direct statements about the architecture of the TVP. The problem is that there are not many such statements. The brief and never repeated ones about the Capitol dome, at least two of which were made in the course of long conversations about other things, are supportive only of the idea that the TVP should have a big dome similar to that of the U.S.

Capitol, to the extent of being a dome and big. This being the case, the exact nature of the dome should be decided on the basis of other related instructions Srila Prabhupada gave in his works. Such instructions of course suggest that the architecture should be Indian.

Srila Prabhupada said that the whole world will come to Mayapura to see "the architectural culture, they'll come to see the civilization culture, the philosophical culture, the religious culture." (Feb. 28, 1976, Mayapura)

2) The purpose of the planetarium, to display the Vedic cosmology, is thwarted by the U.S. Capitol design. The exterior is the first impression people will get, our first statement to the public, and it will be the only one on many pictures. But people will be puzzled as to what it is. It looks like a government building rather than a temple. With an added crescent moon and star or a cross on top of the dome it could be taken to be a mosque or a church. And Western Renaissance and neoclassical architecture symbolize a different worldview than the one the planetarium temple has as its purpose to display. The architecture represented by the U.S. Capitol was partly inspired precisely by the modern Western scientific cosmology to which the Vedic planetarium is intended to provide an alternative.

3) The design is eclectic, i.e., it represents a poor, artificial, external combination of disparate - Western and Indian - architectural elements rather than a mature, integral, credible synthesis.

4) The design's combination of Eastern and (predominantly) Western architectural elements is considered by some to symbolize the synthesis of East and West - explained metaphorically as the cooperation of a lame and a blind man - that ISKCON as a whole is often seen as representing. But this view of ISKCON is problematically one-sided. Although the idea of East-West synthesis, and its architectural and other symbolization, is relevant in the West, it is less so in the most important dhama of

Gaudiya Vaishnavism in India and at ISKCON's international headquarters. Srila Prabhupada's samadhi already includes Western architectural elements to an extent that is controversial to some, but since it is relatively successful as an East-West stylistic synthesis in comparison with the current TVP design, this may be acceptable as a symbolization of Srila Prabhupada's personal prioritization of the West, in the sense of his choosing to first take Gaudiya Vaishnavism there. Yet the mission of Srila Prabhupada is a global one, bringing Gaudiya Vaishnavism to all cultures and civilizations, and thus producing also other syntheses than that of the East and the West (and the East of course includes other cultures than that of Hindu India). It would therefore be wrong to symbolically link the whole of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition to the West, as the current TVP design does. The TVP should represent, neutrally in relation to all other cultures, only the Vedic tradition in the language of its architectural form.

5) The current design gives misleading American and Disney associations and connects ISKCON with problematic, arrogantly imperialistic American politics and culture - problematic not least in view of the spiritual mission of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The U.S. Capitol is of course a Western architectural masterpiece, as are even more the European domed buildings, like Brunelleschi's Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence and Michelangelo's St. Peter's in Rome, from which the designers also draw inspiration. The U.S. Capitol was also built at a time when the U.S.A. represented other values and ideas. But the very idea of building today a temple resembling the U.S. Capitol in Mayapur, India, is Disneyesque, and the kitsch features of the design add to this impression. The design will reinforce and consolidate the view of the critics who regard ISKCON as an all-American sect. The assertion by Hari Sauri Prabhu (see Dandavats) that American culture has conquered the world even suggests that the associations and the critics' view are correct. (ISKCON's Western leaders may even be pushing their Capitol design on the Mayapur management without its support.) The design will compromise ISKCON and diminish its, Srila Prabhupada's, and Ambarisa Prabhu's reputations. This central ISKCON temple should instead express only the integrity, the authenticity, the unadulteratedness, the primordially, the bona-fidelity, the authority, and the beauty of the Vedic tradition, on which Srila Prabhupada always put so much emphasis - and which ISKCON must, to a much greater extent than today, be seen as representing in the rest of the world.

6) Tourists will want an Indian-style temple. If they want to see Renaissance and neoclassical architecture, they go to Florence, Rome, Paris, London, or Washington and get the real thing.

7) Much work has already, with the support of Ambarisa Prabhu, been done on first-class Indian designs. Locating the temple in a congested area is architecturally far inferior to surrounding it with open space, and building it without provision for creating a tourism infrastructure will defeat the main purpose of attracting and hosting visitors, especially international tourists. Our efforts to overcome the current obstacles to acquiring land from the West Bengal government have been frustrated, but ISKCON's influential members in Mumbai, Delhi, and Calcutta could become involved in negotiations with this government. Support might even be gained from the central government of India since, with the mentioned Indian designs, the project can be presented as being of even greater

national importance than the Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi; the government-approved Swaminarayan project did not involve a vast international community of foreigners friendly to India, as our TVP project does. A world-class Indian design, produced by the best professional architects, would be a cultural and religious project of historical importance, fulfilling in its grandeur Lord Nityananda's prophecy. That is the only kind of project worthy of Mayapur and of Srila Prabhupada.

8) If, for some reasons, the temple must be built on the Lotus Park, one of the previous designs could be scaled down, or a new Indian one of the required size could be produced within a year or two.

9) Dina Bandhu Prabhu said (on Dandavats) that he has "not met a single person who likes this design, and a lot of people come through Vrindavan," (Dina Bandhu lives in Vrindavana). Other reports confirm that there is widespread dissatisfaction with and opposition to the design in ISKCON. But most opponents do not speak up because they tend to think that something is better than nothing. We argue that this is not always true, and that it would be better to postpone realization of the project until the requisite land and funding for one of the previous Indian designs is available, or one of them is scaled down, or a new design of similar quality is available. The many who dislike the U.S. Capitol design have no reason not to speak up, and we hope they will do so now, before construction begins, and thus help persuade the GBC to change its decision on this centrally important issue.

#### VOTING

Please answer this email or reply to >[tattvavit.acbsp@pamho.net](mailto:tattvavit.acbsp@pamho.net)< if you wish to vote. You can use this ballot:

- 1) I approve of the present design.
- 2) I disapprove of the present design, but I will go along with.
- 3) I disapprove of the present design, but I am willing to keep the same basic structure, with some substantial improvements that minimize the controversial features.
- 4) I disapprove of the present design, and I am only in favor of a change to a better design, which will not delay the project more than a year or so.
- 5) I disapprove of the present design, and I am only in favor of a change to a better, Indian design, which will not delay the project more than a year or so.
- 6) I disapprove of the present design and prefer that nothing be built in the Lotus Park now and that ISKCON wait until a better design is made and/or better land is available and/or some other condition is met.

--Your servants,  
Tattvavit Dasa and Janaki Rama Dasa

SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENT: QUOTATIONS FROM SRILA PRABHUPADA

Srila Prabhupada on the TVP in relation to the U.S. Capitol

There are three brief statements in the Vedabase.

1) In 1976, Srila Prabhupada was visiting Washington, D.C. and he was impressed by the U.S. Capitol. He asked Yadubara and Visakha to photograph the building, inside and outside to "have picture, planetarium in Mayapur." It was not clear in what way the photographs were to be used or what the instruction meant regarding the Vedic Planetarium.

Prabhupada: . . . I wanted both of you to take various detailed photographs of that Capitol.

Yadubara: The Capitol Building. For what purpose, Srila Prabhupada?

Prabhupada: We shall have picture, planetarium in Mayapur. [break] . . .

. . . spiritual world, material world, and so on, so on. Planetary . . . succession of the planetary systems, everything. A building like that.

Yadubara: That would be a separate building from the temple?

Prabhupada: Yes. We are acquiring 350 acres of land for life for constructing a small township . . .

Yadubara: I think we . . .

Prabhupada: . . . to attract people from all the world to see the planetarium.

Svarupa Damodara: Is this near the temple?

Prabhupada: Yes. Planetarium name, actually it will be temple. But all round, things will be . . . anyway.

Yadubara: I know before the idea was to have it inside the main temple.

Prabhupada: Hm?

Yadubara: As you walked up the outside of the, or the inside of the main temple, inside that dome, they would have it on the walls. But that would . . . That original plan was to have it inside the main temple.

Prabhupada: Yes. You take all details, inside, outside. That will be nice.

Svarupa Damodara: Can you take inside? Is it allowed?

Yadubara: Yes, I think so.

Ref. VedaBase / Room Conversation, July 6, 1976, Washington, D.C.

2) The next day, Yadubara and Visakha returned, having taken the photos, and Prabhupada asked that copies be sent to the Mayapur GBC, the architect, and himself. It is still not clear for what purpose the photos are to be used.

"Srila Prabhupada had his noon massage as soon as we arrived back in Potomac. Yadubara prabhu came along to report that he and his wife had taken about twenty-five photos of the Capitol. Prabhupada was pleased they had responded so quickly to his request. He asked for three sets to be developed: one for himself; one to be sent to the Mayapur GBC, Gargamuni Swami; and one for our architect, Saurabha prabhu."

Ref. VedaBase / Transcendental Diary: Washington, D.C., July 7, 1976

Prabhupada: . . . So these pictures are available to be seen?  
Yadubara: I think today they will, by this evening, they will.  
Prabhupada: How many?  
Yadubara: I took about . . . Well, one boy is doing it for free of charge, he's producing ten of them just to get the idea. If we want more, we can get more. I took about twenty-five.  
Prabhupada: All detailed?  
Yadubara: Some detail, yes.  
Prabhupada: Yes, that's nice. . . . One set to Gargamuni and one set to Saurabha and one set for me, three sets. And if you like, you can keep one set for you. The negative will be with you. What is the height altogether?  
Yadubara: Actually, I don't know, I didn't get that. I can get that information also.  
Prabhupada: So, guessing?  
Yadubara: Oh, I don't know; two hundred fifty feet? Something like that. Three hundred?  
Rupanuga: That's too big, three hundred. The Washington monument is five hundred fifty feet.  
Prabhupada: Then it is all right.  
Yadubara: Maybe two hundred.  
Rupanuga: Maybe a hundred seventy-five. We can check a reference book easily. You'll find out today.  
Room Conversation, July 6\*, 1976, Washington, D.C.  
\*probably a mistake; it should be July 7

3) In the third and final quote, Srila Prabhupada says to George Harrison that the construction should be like the Capitol building. But it is not clear that the construction should be like the Capitol in any other respect than having a big dome.

Prabhupada: . . . We are just attempting a big planetarium in Mayapur. We have asked government to acquire land, 350 acres. That is negotiation going on. We shall give a Vedic planetarium.  
George Harrison: Is that the one you were talking about? With all the . . .  
Prabhupada: In the Fifth Canto.  
Gurudasa: The planetarium will be 350 feet high and show the cosmology of the spiritual world.  
Prabhupada: The construction will be like your Washington Capitol, like that.  
George Harrison: A big dome.  
Prabhupada: Yes. Estimated eight crores of rupees.  
Conversation with George Harrison, July 26, 1976, London

Other quotations that cause us to doubt that Srila Prabhupada wanted the Capitol design in Mayapur

There are no quotes after July 26, 1976 to indicate that Prabhupada wanted the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium to look like the Capitol building. He mentions the temple often, but does not describe its external appearance, except to emphasize its grand size and height. In

the following conversation, he describes a future Vedic city at Mayapur. It is difficult to imagine a Capitol building as the centerpiece.

Prabhupada: We have applied for 350 acres of land from the government. The process is going on. If we get, then we shall spend crores of rupees for . . . The description is . . .

Jagadisa: "Within the next ten years, according to ISKCON plans, the Mayapur project will extend to a complete Vedic city with fifty thousand inhabitants, its own university, airport, and stadium. It will also claim the world's largest planetarium with a 410-foot-high Temple of Understanding."

Dr. Kneupper: It sounds like a beautiful project. That is near Bombay?

Prabhupada: No, that is near Calcutta.

Dr. Kneupper: Calcutta.

Prabhupada: About sixty miles.

Dr. Kneupper: Have they progressed much now?

Prabhupada: Yes, the enquiry is finished. Now government is considering to give that land. [indistinct] that land.

Talk with Dr. Theodore Kneupper, Nov. 6, 1976, Vrndavana

The following is one of the earliest statements about the TVP:

Prabhupada [quoting Brahma-samhita 5.43]: Goloka-namni nija-dhamni tale ca tasya devi-mahesa-hari-dhama . . . About our temple contemplation, it will be almost a skyscraper building.

Bhavananda: Will be . . . .?

Sridhara Maharaja: Eh?

Prabhupada: Skyscraper building in temple shape, with four divisions. Goloka-namni nija-dhamni tale ca tasya devi-mahesa. So Mahesa-dhama, how it will be depicted?

Conversation with Sridhara Maharaja, June 27, 1973, Navadvipa

Note that the U.S. Capitol is not a "temple shape".

In February 1976, in Mayapur, Srila Prabhupada said:

Prabhupada: . . . the architectural culture, they'll come to see the civilization culture, the philosophical culture, the religious culture . . .

Morning Walk, February 27, 1976, Mayapur

In his Transcendental Diary, Hari Sauri writes about Srila Prabhupada's response, in January 1976, to Saurabha's drawings: "In the evening Saurabha prabhu showed Prabhupada the preliminary plans for the new temple. He estimates the cost will be at least eighty crores of rupees (\$80 million). Saurabha's drawings revealed magnificent plans for an entire city, centered around a huge temple structure. It will be surrounded by satellite temples, a gurukula campus, a commercial area, bathing ghats, and other facilities. The whole area will be protected from flooding by a latticework of canals.

The main feature is to be a gigantic planetarium within the dome of the main temple. Srila Prabhupada was extremely enthusiastic about the plans. He wants the planetarium to demonstrate the Vedic alternative to modern scientific cosmological propaganda, illustrating the structure of the universe as described in the Srimad-Bhagavatam.

Impressed with Saurabha's work, Prabhupada suggested that the plans be presented to the state government with an application for official acquisition of the land we require."

"[T]he Vedic alternative to modern scientific cosmological propaganda" and "the structure of the universe as described in the Srimad-Bhagavatam" simply cannot be credibly displayed in a temple that looks like the Enlightenment, neoclassical U.S. Capitol.

Hari Sauri Prabhu did not bring this paragraph from his book to anyone's attention on Dandavats in June, but argued instead that "If it is a question of preferences, why not accept Srila Prabhupada's own preference - the Capitol dome?".