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Hindu blessing for Queen's first visit to a British temple

By Caroline Davies

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Shoeless and garlanded, the Queen paid her first visit to a Hindu temple in Britain yesterday as [the Golden Jubilee tour](#) continued apace.

She removed her shoes and put on thin slippers out of respect for the rules of the Highgate Hill Murugan Temple in Archway, north London, on a visit during which she was blessed by four high priests.

A garland of fresh marigolds and purple chrysanthemums was presented to her as two women held a tray bearing three candles and leaves to "cleanse" her senses and bless her with a long reign.

The garland was not immediately placed around her neck. Instead, she hung it over an arm and put it on in private a few moments later when she disappeared into a side room to remove her shoes.

The blessing took place at the entrance to an elaborate shrine to the six-headed god Murugan.

The Queen and Prince Philip, also shoeless, were then introduced to worshippers. The Queen chatted to worshippers in saris and the prince, in socks, talked to the high priests.

On learning that they were Sri Lankan, he inquired, tongue-in-cheek, if they were Tamil Tigers, the militant fighters.

"He asked us which part of Sri Lanka we were from and we said we were from the north and east and were Tamils," said one priest.

"He asked, 'Are you Tigers?'. I said, 'No, we're priests. We're not associated with violence.'

"It was just friendly, just a joke. We were not offended. We blessed him with a long life and health and peace."