Goddess Moves In
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TEMPLES

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A South Indian Temple Arises in Rishikesh

The construction of the grand Omkarananda Kamakshi Devi Mandir of Rishikesh, India--which is actually a complex of six temples--was initiated on April 23, 2002, and completed on April 4, 2004, with the celebration of its maha kumbhabhishekam (grand inauguration). Financed mostly by one anonymous devotee, this is one of only two temples in Rishikesh constructed in the traditional South Indian style. It was built by Sthapati S. Ravichandran of Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. The officiating priest at its maha kumbhabhishekam was Kamakoti Shastri, Chief Priest of Kamakshi Mandir, also in Kanchipuram.

The Kamakshi Devi Mandir is the main temple of the newly constructed complex. The Sri Meenakshi Devi and Sri Chamundi Devi temples stand to its left and right. On the opposite side, facing these three Devi mandirs, are the Lord Venkateshwara, Padmavati Devi and Gurudev Paramahamsa Omkarananda Saraswati Mandirs. To the north there is a navagraha temple (dedicated to the nine planets), and to the east there is a yagnasala (a separate building dedicated for fire ceremonies).

The maha kumbhabhishekam occurred during the first four days of April in 2004. It was a grand event. Here is a brief summary.

Thursday, April 1, 2004
Temple rites began at 5:00 am featuring two elaborate fire ceremonies: one in the morning dedicated to Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed God of auspicious beginnings, and the other in the afternoon dedicated to the navagrahas, or nine planets. At dusk, 16 large kumbhas (pots) were filled with sacred Ganges water at the river's edge, empowered through ceremony to be used during blessing rituals

three days later at the culmination of the kumbhabhishekam, hoisted onto the heads of the priests and carried in procession to the new temple. During the procession, the priest holding the kumbha meant for blessing the main Kamakshi Devi Mandir, suddenly went into trance and needed to be supported by nearby devotees. This is considered a good omen.

Friday, April 2
Priests climbed to the top of each temple and secured the golden kalasas (decorative pots) one by one onto the temple spires with a mixture of cement, honey and fruit. Each kalasa contains a golden yantra (a mystical engraving), as well as an assortment of jewels and precious metals. At 10:00 am, 11 havans (fire ceremonies) began and continued throughout the day. There was a cultural program in the evening.

Saturday, April 3
As the eleven havans continued throughout the morning, preparations were under way to install the Deities in Their respective temples. The murtis (statues) were washed with ghee, oil, milk, yogurt, herbs and coconut water--then elegantly dressed and decorated. After "the eye opening ceremony " was performed to bring life into each of the icons, ten men lifted the Kamakshi Devi statue onto its pedestal in the main temple where it was secured in place with a golden yantra. All of the other murtis were then installed following the same procedure.

Sunday, April 4
At 4:30 am the priests began their preparations for the final ceremony. All the murtis were tied together with a thick rope. Pujas were performed for the devas (angels) in all of the kumbhas, which were filled with sacred Ganges water three days before. Priests hoisted these large kumbhas onto their heads and paraded around the new temple complex, led by temple musicians. Each priest then climbed onto the top of each temple and poured the Ganga water on the newly installed golden spires. A number of devotees and sannyasins also climbed onto the roof to observe the event. By noon the kumbhabhishekam was over. A lavish feast was served. Two hundred respected sadhus were the honored guests.