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Category : August 1982
Published by Anonymous on Aug. 01, 1982

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On Thai Pusam day of 1982, February the 7th, the culmination of temple consecration ceremonies - the kumbabhishekam - was performed at the Karaneeswarar Temple in Saidapet, South India, re-sanctifying the temple after the completion of an extensive renovation project. Literally tens of thousands of devotees thronged to the temple, jammed the streets for blocks around and crowded on rooftops to be present or at least catch a glimpse of the ceremony, for, to witness a kumbabhishekam is said to earn one the merit of 2,000 normal temple visits. Present among the thousands of devotees were Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, and 40 pilgrims of Saiva Siddhanta Church.

This kumbabhishekam was the peak ceremony of many days of preparatory rites involving intense Vedic chanting and performance of dozens of homa rituals by a staff of more than 20 priests. It was performed at the auspicious moment of 9:15 a.m. In anticipation of that moment, all attention was focused on the elegant kumbams - the golden spires - stop the temple's four vimanas, the ornate part of the sanctums which protrude above roof level. Surrounding each vimana, a team of priests standing on bamboo scaffolding, awaiting the sacred moment, were ready with several brass vessels filled with water that had been blessed during the rituals of the previous days. Then, at the signal from the head priest at precisely 9:15 a.m., amidst a fervor of nadaswaram and tavil music and the sound of "oohs" and "ahs" of the throng of devotees, all four teams of priests simultaneously performed abhishekam to the four golden spires, pouring the holy water over them, symbolically bathing the entire temple and sanctifying it for the Gods to live in the work through. The devotees on the temple roof clamored to be anointed with the holy water which the priests sprinkled down from the scaffolding.

The kumbabhishekam, a grand ceremony, is generally performed every 12 years, following a major renovation or just a long passage of time. At Tiruchendur Temple, for instance, we learned that the kumbabhishekam is done every 12 years and the next will one occur in 1983, following the completion of gopuram renovation now in progress. Construction on a sacred temple, though of course necessary and vital

from time to time, disturbs the inner forces, making the re-consecration necessary when it is complete. Once a temple has been re-consecrated, any further large-scale construction must be followed by another consecration. The kumbabhishekam also is performed as part of the rituals blessing a brand new temple.

The pilgrims of the 1982 India Odyssey pilgrimage observed the pujas from the vantage point of the temple's outer prakaram roof and felt a great blessing from them.