

KUMBHABHISHEKAM, THE CONSECRATION CEREMONY OF TEMPLE

Sanatana Dharma, popularly known as Hindu Religion gives us the liberty to worship the Supreme in many forms of which “Prathima Upasana” and “Praatika Upasana” are widely prevalent. One should begin by seeking God at least in one object (Saligraama, Linga, Sculpture, SriChakra etc) through concentration, which is the rationale behind “Prathima Upasana”, concentration through the medium of consecrated idol or symbol. The other form of worship is the meditation through sound symbols, like “OM”. Both these forms are conveniently practiced in Temples, where one can feel the presence of God (Sannidhyam) that leads one’s thoughts to greater heights in a spiritual atmosphere.

The sunrays contain a lot of heat energy. If we keep a piece of cloth in the sun it does not catch fire. But, if we place a lens and focus the sunrays on the piece of cloth, after sometime it will catch fire. Similarly, in order to get the grace of omnipresent Lord, we have to build temples where we can focus the power of the Lord in a consecrated idol. The process of the consecration is called “Praana Pratishta”. The devotee or the learned Priest, on behalf of the devotee, performs “Aatma pooja” first, that is, he meditates on his inner Self encased in his body. By appropriate mantras he first purifies his body including his life forces (praanas) and his sense organs. The vital airs and the organs of perception and activity animating in him as the microcosm of the universe, which is the macrocosm, are transferred by gestures to the accompaniment of mantras on to the idol or the image, wherein the manifestation of the supreme (ishta devathas) is devoutly invoked. The following prayer is uttered before the “Praana Pratishta”:

“Svaatma-samstham ajam suddham twaa-madhya Parameswara
Aranyaa-miva havyaasam moortau aavaahayaam-yaham”

“Oh Lord of the world, you are unborn and pure; Thou art in my heart;
I invoke you in my concentration even as fire in ‘arani’ wood comes out by friction.

The “Aagama” texts deal with the manner of conducting the kumbhabhishekam ceremony (pouring the consecrated waters on the deity and the temple Gopurams (steeple)) at the end of “Praana Prathista” periodically which consists of a group of rituals beginning with the selection of site up to and including the installation of the deity. The process of homogenizing, synergising and uniting the mystique powers of the idol (vigraha) of the Lord constitutes “Kumbhaabhishekam”. ‘Kumbha’ means head and denotes ‘Shikara’ or crown of the temple. On the appointed day and at the auspicious time fixed thereto, the ‘Kumbha’ is bathed with the charged sanctified holy waters in the sanctified pots and by a mystique process the life forces (Praanic powers) trickle down a silver wire and enter the Deity installed in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. ‘Kumbhabhishekam’ consists of a number of rituals that may extend from one to nine days.

“Navaaham sowkhyadam proktam saptaaham devikam param,
Panchaaham saantikam proktam, trayaaham tu sivapriyam;
Ekaaham rogasaantyartam tasmad sampoojaye Sivam”

Nine days of ceremony will bring in well being; seven days will please Devi (Goddess); Five days will bring peace. Three days will please the Lord Siva. One day will cure you of all diseases, so it is said and therefore worship accordingly.

The word aagama generally refers to Vedas. However, the descriptive literature under the heading 'Aagama' is a discipline describing various forms of worship, esoteric rituals for installation of the deity, rules of building temples, role of priests etc. Aagama is called so because it has come from the five faced Lord Shiva, understood by Goddess Parvathi and acceptable to Lord Vishnu.

*“Aagatam Panchavakrathu gatancha Girijaanana
Matanacha Vaasudevasya tasmaad-Aagama-muchyathe”*

Aagamas are divided into three categories- Saiva, Vaishnava and Sakta. Saiva temples(Siva worshippers) use the Saiva aagamaas to perform this consecration and Vaishnava temples (Vishnu worshippers) use the Vaishnava aagamaas. Devi (Goddess) worshippers use the Sakta aagamas in Devi temples to invoke the image or symbol in the female form.

The 'Pratishta' ritual begins with “Karshana”, ploughing done when the temple site is selected, followed by 'Vaastupooja'* and finally Kumbhabhishekam. After the consecration, the image in the sanctum is no more looked upon as a stone image. Now it is the Lord Himself worshipped in all 'His' powers and 'Glory'.

The Aagama shastras, ordain performance of a “punar-uddhaarana kumbhabhishekam” of every temple once in twelve years. Sometimes, major repair works have to be carried out to the temple at this time, then it is called “Jeernod-dhaarana Kumbhabhishekam”. This ritual is required to be performed to all the deities, in the garbhagrahas of all temples in a temple complex. Through the medium of an elaborate chain of Yaagas and Yagnas (fire sacrifices) the full potency of infused powers (Sannidhyam) is restored to the idols at the appropriate muhurtam (time) on an auspicious day.

Through the redress of genuine difficulties and grievances of the discerning and deserving devotees, the inherent and infused spiritual powers of the installed idols are diminished over a period of time. It is also possible that through unintended deficiencies (apacharaas) while conducting of poojas, prayers, aaraadhanaas etc., to the installed deities in the sanctum sanctorum, by either, in the absolute merits and physical purity of the performing priests or in the improper pronunciation and recital of the prescribed number of mantras or a host of other related factors, the installed idol's omnipotence (sannidhya) gets progressively diminished and demand rejuvenation or restoration. This is the purpose with which Kumbhabhishekam is done periodically.

The Kumbhabhishekam ceremony consists of the erection of Balaalayam, japas, chants of Vedas, sanctifying Kalasaas (pots of water), Homas and Yagnas. The finale is the pouring of the sanctified water from the kalasas over the stupis (steeple) on the top of the central Vimaana or the sanctum sanctorum, the gopurams and the main and other deities, by the priests.

BALAAALAYAM: During the Jeernoddhaarana (renovation period), the divine presence of the Murtis (idols) must be transferred to the holy waters contained in the Kalaasas. Pooja is done to these Kalaasaas and Ustava deities (bronze idols taken out in processions). The kalasaas remain in a miniature structure known as Balaalayam. ‘Baala means mini and ‘aalaya’ means temple or structure in Sanskrit. During this time the devotees will not be able to see or do poojas to the stone sculpted moola vigrahas (idols). The scheduled poojas will be done only to Utsava moortis. The divine presence of the Lord will remain here until it is transferred back to the Moola vigrahas. Scheduled Poojas to Moola vigrahas will start only on the Mahaa Kumbhaabhishekam day.

According to Kaaran-aagama, for this transfer to happen, depending on the time required for the renovation (Jeernodharana), kalasaas with water may be provided for a month long duration, a sword for two months, photo of a deity for six months period, or a wooden carved figure for a year in the Balaalayam.

*“Eka maasancha kumbhancha, dwou maasou khadgamevacha,
Shaan maasaaha pratimaachaiva, samvatsaram daaru bimbancha,
Baalaalaye pratishtitaha”*

Usually the kalasa of water is widely installed as the renovation is done expeditiously.

During the Jeernodharana (restoration and renovation) time, important temple repair work is carried out around the pedestals of the idols that are installed. During this process, natural glue specially prepared consisting of eight ingredients called “Ashtabandhana” is used to cement the idol firmly to the pedestal. Priests perform a special pooja called the “Ashtabandhana pooja” prior to the construction work in the shrine around the vigrahas. Experienced Shilpis (temple sculptors) participate in this and are graced with temple honors.

An ‘Aacharya’ who is sufficiently experienced in conducting such spiritual rituals is identified and the temple management requests him to conduct the kumbhabhishekam. Recitation of the Vedas inside the temple premises is an important prerequisite for this ceremony. A Yagnasala is built by the side of the main temple. Apart from the pedestal for the main kalasa at the center of the yagna shala, five homa kundas are generally prepared for the main deity, besides individual homa kundas for the other deities. These five homakundas are intended for the five forms of fire- Sabhya, Aahavaniya, Anvaharya, Garhapatya and Avasathya. The main kunda is sanctified by the performance of the various homas. Along with the Kumbhabhishekam done to the main deity, the same is being repeated to the other deities of the temple simultaneously. Vimaana (steeple), Dwjasthamba (flag post) and Balipeetha (sacrificial pedestal) abhishekams are also done at the same time. After this ceremony is over, the priests come around, sprinkling this holy water over all the devotees present. This is considered very auspicious and is called ‘Prokshanam’.

Homams, ordained in the Aagama sastras, to be performed during this time, are performed with due ritualistic care and attention. Poornahuti and Mahaa Deepa-aradhana are performed at the end of the proceedings. At the conclusion of the ceremony the power secured by the performance of the various Homams are transferred to the main homakunda. Thereafter, rituals follow to transfer the divine power accumulated in the main homakunda to the main kalasa installed at the center of the Yaagasala. The sacred fire of the Homakunda is extinguished thereafter. Elaborate poojas are conducted to kalasaas to energize the same with all the power.

The highlight of this process is bathing of the Vimaana (steeple) and all the deities from the water of the kalasaas, by the priests. The Aacharyas are the center of attraction with their prominent turbans.

Mahadeepa Aradhana to the sanctified deities after the kumbhabhishekam, and performing Shodashopachara (sixteen steps) Pooja is a memorable sight. Theertha, prasada distribution and 'Annadhaana' (free food distribution) bring down the curtain to the grand ritual of great significance.

Traditionally, the Kumbhabhishekam ceremony is followed by special poojas for the benefit of society and mankind as a whole. Accordingly, on the evening of this ceremony Kalyana utsavams (marriage ceremonies) are performed followed by taking the deities in a procession.

According to the Aagama sastras that guide temple rituals "Mandala Abhishekam" must be performed for over a month (normally 45 days) after the completion of the Mahaa-Samprokshanam or Maha Kumbhabhishekam. The Mandala pooja enhances the divine presence in the consecrated (recharged) archana and moola (main) vigrahaas.

Kumbhabhishekam ceremony has everlasting effect on the society as a whole, besides on devotees. Aagama sastras mention,

"Sarvaroga nivrityartham, sarva yaaga phalapradam

Sarva sampathkaram nreenam putrapoutrabhi vardhanam,

It is conducted with the sole purpose of eradicating all illness, obtaining good benefits from various Yagaas, deriving rich benefits for the well being and for the healthy propagation of the progeny.

The kumbhabhishekam brings all-round prosperity not only to any particular group or devotees but also to the society as a whole. As we all know Sanatana Dharma postulates 'Vasudheka kutumbakam' the whole world is one family and 'Eko vipraha Bahuda vadanti', wise men call the ONE (Supreme) by many names and forms.

In our Sri Ganesha Temple Jeernoddharana Kumbhabhishekam Programs are starting from Aug 25th 2003 Monday and concluding on Aug 31st 2003 Sunday, and the Balaalayam is starting on July 10th Thursday 2003. For the Main deity Sri Ganesha, the Homas will be performed in ‘Pancha Kunda Paksha Yagaangam’ (five homa kundas) and for Sri Shiva Parivara and Sri Venkateshwara Parivara, Homas will be performed in Eka Kunda Paksha Snapanangam respectively. Communication between the kalashas and the deities in the main temple are maintained by means of silver wire with twisted cotton holy ropes and inter woven dharbha (holy grass) cables. The three cables signify the three “Naadees”- Ida, Pingala and Sushumna.

Please join us at these celebrations.

***Vaastupooja is a fire ritual to please the deities of the purusha vaastu mandala (visualizing the site in a square dividing it into 64 or 81 parts and to obtain their permission for the building site).**

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