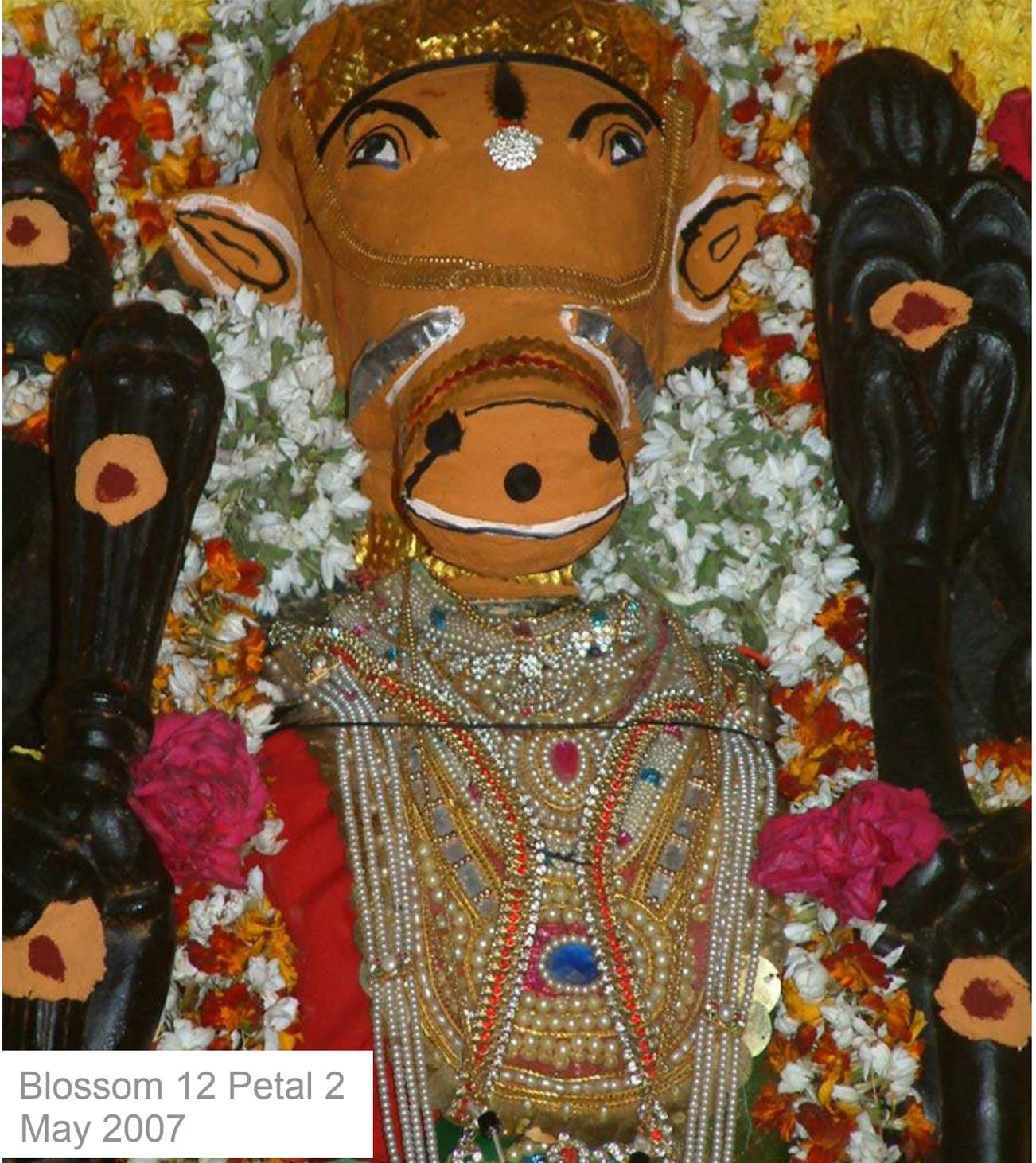




Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY



Blossom 12 Petal 2
May 2007

OUR THOUGHTS

Dear Devotees,

This issue of the *Sri Chakra* is very dear our hearts for quite a few reasons. First of all, it commemorates the recent kumbhabhishekam at Devipuram from the vantage points of several visitors—many of whom are friends and regulars of our Rajarajeshwari temple in Rochester.

Secondly, this is the first issue of the *Sri Chakra* for which Aiya has written an original article since our revival in 2005! Just think—it took two whole years to convince him to write! Fortunately, it didn't take that much convincing for all the contributors who are featured in this issue. It's the first truly international issue of the *Sri Chakra*, with generous contributions from devotees from Chennai to Holland.

A kumbhabhishekam is the general term for the grand celebration and series of purification rituals that are done during the construction or major renovation of a temple. It's traditionally performed every 12 years, at which time any repairs are also commissioned.

Devipuram's kumbhabhishekam marked its first 12-year period of existence and to re-energize the property as well as the murthis on the premises.

"Kumbham" refers to a highest peak of the temple, which receives abhishekam at the culmination of the festival. A full kalasam, or many kalasa as is often the case, is charged with mantras and pujas for several days. The kalasam can also hold the existing power of the mula murthi(s) at the temple. Sometimes, puja is only done to the kalasa until renovations are finished.

On the final day of this observance, the murthi and/or the actual temple itself receive the abhisheka of all the kalasa used throughout the festival—sometimes, it is arranged so that both abhisheka will happen simultaneously. The remaining water is sprinkled throughout the property.

This pattern of events changes from temple to temple. The activities and methods of worship will definitely vary from temple to temple—for example, bhajans, homams, chanting, or any combination of pujas can be performed. But the one thing that always takes place at a proper kumbhabhishekam is the charging or re-charging of the deity and the surrounding environment.

The Hindu belief is that it's not just enough to build a temple; it must be maintained both physically and spiritually. This strict and regular maintenance schedule is a major reason why so many temples have lasted centuries and are still in use today, such as the Kamakshi temple in Kanchipuram, which is about 3,500 years old. Compare this to the state of ancient temples from Greece and Rome—which were built not even 2,000 years ago—that lie in ruins today.

A kumbhabhishekam is also a community-building activity by its very nature—so many people are needed to co-ordinate the different parts that the event naturally draws hundreds of devotees who are connected to the temple. This was the case in Devipuram, which hosted and fed hundreds of people during the festival at the end of January and the beginning of February.

The *Sri Chakra* would like to thank the guests who were also contributors to this issue—namely Aiya, Guruji, Ahalya and Sundara Arasaratnam, Gratuz Devanesan, Raj Jadon, Sangeetha Prakash Krishna, Sunandini Lakshminath, Dr. Devi Padmanaban, Frances Perera, Shyamala Ramaswamy, Soumitro Sengupta, Bill Thomas, and all the contributors to the Temple Lore section. A very special thanks goes out to Kathy Allen as our guest editor, whose stalwart efforts have made this issue what it is. As always, please send us your articles, pictures, questions and comments at sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org. Every e-mail will receive a response!

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

The *Sri Chakra* staff



MAY NEWSLETTER

Since the last issue...

The beginning of February saw Aiya and Amma in Devipuram for the Maha Kumbhabhishekam festival. Aiya returned home to Rochester for a few days after the festival but then had to jet off again to Arizona where he conducted a series of lectures. Before mid-February, he also traveled to the United Kingdom for four days to perform a series of pujas.

Aiya came back in time for Shivarathri on Feb. 15 and remained in Rochester for most of the rest of the month. On Feb. 27, he left for Europe to consult with a committee in Pfozheim, Germany (about 125 km from Frankfurt) whose devotees were planning to build a temple. He returned to North America on Mar. 3, and stayed in Rochester until Mar. 18 when he taught his children's class in Toronto.

He attended a wedding in Nashville, Tennessee Mar. 25, but then left four days later to Germany again, for another session with the Pfozheim committee. He returned to the States on Apr. 4 and performed a wedding in Rochester on Apr. 8. The weekend of Apr. 13 saw Aiya perform the dhani puja for Tamil New Year and a grand Pratyangira homam on Apr. 15.

Sri Subbarao Kompella of Devipuram visited the temple on Apr. 21-22 to conduct a Navavarna puja class. The remainder of April was filled with preparations for the temple's annual Pratishta festival in May.

Past Month Events

Maha Shivarathri, Feb. 15

by Abhi Somaskanda

This year's Shivarathri was celebrated in grand fashion as volunteers arranged 1008



Beginning of the shankus set up from the yajna shala to inside the temple

valampuri (right-handed) shankus to be poured on the Shiva lingam for abhishekam.

Set up of the shankus took volunteers almost 9 hours as each shanku was filled with tulasi leaves, dharba, lotus petals, and water mixed with 108 different herbs. In the line of shankus stretching from the homa kundam in the yajna shala to the dvaja stambam inside the sanctum, there were seven different sections. In each section, the shankus were shaped into the amount of petals in the seven chakras of the body, and accompanied by the appropriate deity in the center.

Aiya began the puja at 6 p.m. and devotees had the opportunity to perform abhishekam to the three mula murthis and also to perform bilva archana throughout the night. Volunteers handed out bilva leaves to devotees circumambulating the 1008 shankus, and bilva was offered at each of the seven chakras as well as the mula sthanam.

Once milk abhishekam and alankaram concluded, the main lingam was undressed again, and the shanku abhishekam commenced. Accompanied by the chanting of the panch suktas and

the Shiva Sahasranamavali, each shanku was carefully removed and given to devotees to pour to their hearts content. The water in each shanku is considered as holy as the Ganga flowing from Shiva's matted locks.

After the final arathi at 7 a.m., devotees retired to the yajna shala for maha prasadam.



One of the chakras with naivedyam for each pair of shankus

Tamil New Year, Apr. 13

by Abhi Somaskanda

Festivities for the Tamil new year began early morning, as the new year dawned just after 1 a.m. Aiya performed a small puja to Ganapathi and Devi, and returned at 8 a.m. to set up for Dhani puja with offerings to Surya Narayana and Lakshmi. A pongal kalasam was set up with two trays on either side of jewelry, clothing,



A tray of auspicious items that was offered to Maha Lakshmi

kumkuma, rice, and several other auspicious items to be offered to Lakshmi for the new year.

Once the milk in the kalasam

spilled over, everyone present offered a handful of rice into the pot and Aiya performed a short puja to the kalasam. Following the puja, Aiya gave everyone present "kai visesham," an offering of a dollar to all devotees as the Devi's first blessing of the new year.



As the kalasam spilled over, devotees offered handfuls of rice

Prathyangira Homam, Apr. 15

by Abhi Somaskanda

For the second year, the temple hosted its annual Maha Prathyangira homam the day after the Tamil new year. Again, devotees were allowed to sponsor a bakshanam to be offered into the homam. Because of weather complications, this year's homam took place indoors.

Over 34 different types of palaharams were offered to Maha Prathyangira as Her mula mantra was chanted for more than two hours. Devotees lined up at the



Aiya and the sponsors offer chili into the homam as a devotee adds a handful of palaharam.

Vayu konam and offered the bakshanams into the homam after each recitation of the mantra.

Aiya and the sponsors offered Prathyangira Devi's favorite, dry chilis, by the basket. After all the bakshanams were given, the

purnahuthi was placed into the fire.

All devotees had a chance to eat the left over palaharams after the homam.

Navavarna Puja Workshop, Apr. 21-22

by Kamyam Ramaswamy

This workshop was conducted in the library room of the temple over two days by Sri Subbarao Kompella, the peetadhipathi of Devipuram. A 30-year veteran of Sri Chakra puja, he has been teaching the process for decades and this was his first time conducting a class at the Rajarajeswari Peetam. Sri Subbarao went through the steps of the puja on Saturday and largely used Sunday as a day for review and questions. The students went over several mantras, yantras and rituals within the Navavarna puja throughout the weekend.

Chitra Poornima, May 1

by Kamyam Ramaswamy

This was the day on which people who have lost their mothers may offer *tarpanam* for her soul. This day only needs to be observed for a person's late mother if, for whatever reason, that person missed offering *tarpanam* on her actual day of passing. Several devotees registered with the temple to sponsor the puja, which was led by Aiya. They performed the puja themselves in the yajnashala and then made the offerings at the end to their late mothers.

Upcoming Events

May Festival (Pratistha), May 18-20

by Kamyam Ramaswamy

This will be the ninth anniversary of the Rajarajeswari Peetam, and it will be celebrated with great pomp as usual. The Friday will be devoted to Ganapathi, Saturday to Devi and Sunday to the Guru. Friday evening will see the ceremonial

carrying of the Utsa Ganapathi murthi around the temple, while Saturday will start with a Chandi homam at 5 a.m. and end with the pulling of the chariot at night. The temple's children will plan and execute Sunday night's Dattatreya celebration, shortly before the festival flag comes down. All are invited and welcomed.

Guru Poornima, July 29

by Kamyam Ramaswamy

Each year, Aiya chooses a group of students to implement Guru Poornima the following year. This year, that group is the team from Syracuse, NY. Several meetings will be scheduled throughout the next few months and all are encouraged to participate.

In Three Months

The next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine

Devi willing, the next issue of the *Sri Chakra Magazine* will be up on the temple's website (www.srividya.org) at the beginning of August 2007.

This issue will come along in the middle of the summer and will be the first time there will not be a theme or feature section to the magazine. Articles, poems, stories, and the like about any spiritual topic are welcomed and will be accepted.

The *Sri Chakra* is looking for devotees to help out this issue by contributing stories, pictures, poems, experiences or anything at all by July 9th. Please e-mail us at

sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org with your submissions, as well as your comments on this issue.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

please check the website, www.srividya.org, for more festival pictures!

AIYA THE PAIYA

part 2

“Paiya” in Tamil means, little boy. During the Thiruvempavai festival, the temple was graced with a surprise visit by someone who had known Aiya during his university years. Frances Perera (or Nicky as we now know her) was best friends with Aiya when they both attended Colombo University in the late 1960s. While visiting her children in Mississauga this Christmas, she called the temple to reconnect with her old friend. The Sri Chakra had an intimate chat with her about Aiya, then and now. Here is the second half of that conversation.

Nicky : I called the temple from Oman, before we came to Canada), and they told me he’s away in India but he’ll be back on the 20th (of December). I came here on the 16th and was biding my time. On the 22nd I called and the same person answered the phone. He came on the line and I said, “Haran this is Nikki,” and there was silence. Then he said, “Oh my God, is it really you?” I was just jumping for joy on my end. He sent Pravin to get me and all the way to the temple Pravin was asking me questions about Haran. And then he said, “You know something? All this time Aiya was telling us it took him 60 years to get to where he is... but he knew and could do all of these things when he was younger than I am now!”

Sri Chakra: I’m thinking the same thing right now! I’m so behind compared to where he was then!

N: He must have started when he was 20 or even less. What he told you guys is that it took him 60 years for him to get to where he is, but he never told anybody how young he was when he started. Before that he knew there was something there, but he was one of these rioting kids—he told



Nicky and Aiya met again after more than 30 years

me that he was a rioter and that Shaku (Amma) was the one who got him to go to Mataji. They got married in 1970 or ‘71 I think. He arranged a bus for my whole family to come to the wedding because we were like family to him; he called my mom ‘amma’ and my father ‘aiya.’

SC: So that was after you all finished university?

N: I quit after he left! I never finished. He said, “You idiot, if I was there I would have made you finish.” I told my children that if I hadn’t quit they wouldn’t be there, I would never have met my husband and I probably would have moved to Australia and married a white guy or something. You know, Haran told my friend, Prabha, that she would marry a white guy. She’s a Sinhalese Buddhist and she thought she would never do that, but today she’s married to a white guy!

When I just started going out with my husband, Haran had

gone to Zambia but he had come back to visit in ‘74... Saru was only two years old. They were there, and I left my husband now in the car and ran in to see them. Haran said that the guy in the car is the one I’ll get married to.

SC: We all see Aiya as someone special who can see other things and predict other things. What are some things that made him more human?

N: He was an absolute prankster.

SC: Still is today.

N: You just couldn’t help but laugh when you were with him. I’ll tell you what he did to us, my girlfriend and myself, when he brought Shaku for the first time (to Columbo). He used to write these books—these 40-page booklets, when it was full he used to book-post it to Shaku in Jaffna. He sat us down and told us Shaku was coming and she didn’t understand English, and asked us

if we would take care of her. So we said sure, no problem. We cut one class and took her to the canteen. We were pointing to different things and asking if she wanted tea, if we could buy anything for her... she was so calm and so quiet, as if she really didn't understand. And we bought her tea and cake.

There was this trellis to one side and we could see Haran standing behind it and peeking at us. I caught him grinning and I thought, "Oh, there's something up here." So I looked at Shaku and asked her, "Shaku, you understand English, don't you?" And she said, "Yeah, I understand English." We told her to wait there for us, and we chased Haran around the campus but never caught him.

SC: Was that special relationship there between Aiya and anyone else in your group of friends?

N: It was mostly me. I asked him why is that I seemed to get the most benefit out of his company out of all of us, and he said I was the most open. And that I was willing to accept anything, which surprised a lot of people; me being a devout Catholic. Whatever it is, Haran—I don't see him as a Hindu priest, I see him as a good, devout, honest person. I could relate him to Christ or something like that. It's not that I think he's Christ, but he's pretty close.

SC: It sounds like he was very much back then the way he is now.

N: Absolutely! I didn't see much change; I think he has got more powers now. Then he had to concentrate a little harder to help some others. He told me this time when I saw him that he had initiated me; I had no idea. But this time I said I would never lose him again. I wrote to him in Zambia in '77, and now 29 years later I found him. We told each other we had so much catching up

to do but we never talked about anything. But it feels like we have caught up. It's strange.

I didn't know I was initiated into anything, I just knew I was close to him. And I still don't understand what he has done. Everyone else around there, like Pravin and Kathy and Aparna, they all understood what it meant to be initiated... and I was asking if they could explain it to me. I like what Haran preaches, that whichever religion you are, you just want to go to God, that's it. I e-mailed him yesterday asking him what I'm supposed to be doing—I have the feeling there's something I'm supposed to be doing, but I don't know what it is. He said I will know it when I have to know it.



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NAYANMARS

Thiruneelakanthan

by Gratuz Devanesan

Thiruneelakanthan is a common name for Lord Shiva, who having drunk the poison, ended up with a blue (neela) throat (kanthan). Whatever the esoteric meaning of that story, we do learn and understand that Lord Shiva separated the poison from ambrosia in a fluid that contained both—and maybe that he can do similar things for us.

Once there lived a devotee of Lord Shiva in Chidambaram who always kept Lord Shiva in his heart. He was a potter by profession and as a service to Lord Shiva he would offer his services freely for all those who bowed down to Lord Shiva. He was gifted with an exceedingly beautiful wife, whose physical beauty was only exceeded by her kindness and her love for Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva forever abided in her heart and her mind forever dwelled on the feet of the Lord. The potter devotee lived a happy life with his wife. His wife being exceedingly beautiful, and the potter being quite virile, they enjoyed the sensual side of married life.

One day the potter devotee glanced upon a prostitute who, for whatever reason enticed him and though he had a much more beautiful wife at home, he wondered if maybe he could not try his luck here also. His wife in the moment of ecstatic pleasure would call him “Thiruneelakanthan” –that loving remark going to his head, he convinced himself that he too could separate the poison and enjoy the prostitute without any real negative effects.

Going home, having a loving truthful relationship with his wife, he saw no real reason to keep it from her. His wife was understandably extremely disappointed. Moreover, the potter devotee thought it would even be possible to visit the prostitute again—which his wife immediately forbade. He tried to bring down her anger with kind words and gestures but she held on to her anger and disappointment—after all she was a loyal and loving wife, who happily did all her duties.

As he approached her to hug her, in an effort to calm her and convince her she said, “How dare you touch us! Thiruneelakanthan!” He knew that Lord

Shiva abided in her heart and that at that moment she had said “us” as supposed to “me,” he felt that Lord Shiva himself had send him this message. He looked at her and immediately took a new resolve. He promised that from this day forward, a female would not be able to entice him even in his dreams. He promised that he would put away his lust and touch no other female, including his wife.

Having taken that resolve he did not consider the difficulties involved, considering that his wife was still very young and beautiful and his emotions had in the past always drawn him near her. He took this resolve with steady fate in the Lord and his wife accepted this promise.

From that day on they lived a loving platonic relationship, with love flowing from their hearts and minds, but never extending as far as physical sensuality. The years based by, and their skins wrinkled, their bodies tired but their resolve never wavered.

Many years later, the potter devotee having grown quite old saw a sage very near his home. He walked over and asked the sage what service he could provide him. The sage looked at the devotee and simply said the he should hold onto this special begging bowl of his until he would retrieve it from him at a later time. The devotee, not suspecting anything, took the bowl and promised that he would keep it safe. It had been Lord Shiva who had come in this manner but the devotee did not even imagine that Lord Shiva would have come to him in person. At night Lord Shiva came back as a robber and stealthily stole away the bowl. In the morning Lord Shiva returned as the sage and asked for his begging bowl back.

The devotee looked in the place where he had put it, and not finding it there looked through his entire house and the surrounding area. However, he could not find the bowl. He came back and told the old sage that he did not know what had happened and that he would replace the bowl with a new one, even if it has to be a golden one. The sage refused all such



offers, demanding that he should have his original bowl returned to him. The sage took this whole thing to the priest of Chidambaram, for he said only they could pass proper judgment.

The priest heard the case, and the pleadings of the devotee, but decided that the sage was right and he needed his bowl returned. The devotee did not have the bowl and had no idea what to do. The sage, who was of course Lord Shiva in disguise, offered a compromise. He told the potter to take his first born and jump into a well. The devotee explained that he had no offspring, but did not elaborate on why. The sage then said he should take his wife's hand and jump and if he was telling the truth surely nothing will happen.

The devotee now felt that there was a slight problem as he had made the promise never to touch any female, including his wife. Nonetheless, he thought that to clear his name he should have faith

in the Lord and jump with his wife. All these years he did not tell anyone of the promise he had made so many years ago, and he felt only troubled by breaking that promise and not by the fact that he had to jump into a well.

He went home contemplating the whole thing and returned with his wife; instead of holding her hand they both held a stick of bamboo. Once in front of the priest of Thillai he explained to all the promise he had taken many years ago and jumped into the well, expecting to die.

However, the very moment he jumped, the water rose and lifted him up, transforming him and his wife to a youthful age. The very same time the sage disappeared and the Lord of Thillai appeared near the horizon, sitting on his bull and accompanied by his loving consort. The Lord proclaimed that the potter couple was truly great for conquering the five



Thiruneelakanthan Nayanar

Temple Lore

The stories of the devotees at the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam create the very essence of the temple's soul.

Aiya has verified all these tales for their authenticity, and he urges devotees to share their experiences for the benefit of future generations. All identities will be kept in the strictest confidentiality unless otherwise informed.

Last year, the Sri Chakra was able to interview an upasaka who had recently received diksha and was on a trip to Rochester. He told the magazine about his spiritual experiences and some of the lessons he has learned from Aiya and Devi. This month, the Sri Chakra features the thrid in four parts of that interview.

Sri Chakra: When you say you see things, or someone comes and tells you something (like Saraswati did), does that happen within your head? Or is it an external experience that happens outside of your body?

Devotee: From the way that Aiya has explained it to me, it's occurring on a different plain, so I'm deep in my japam. But even now I can see external things... it's like, I would look at something and at the same time I could see and overlay type of thing. It's the same sort of thing with auras. I can look at a person, and with my eyes closed I could still see their aura. So what I'm saying is that you're looking at a person with your eyes and then you're looking at them with your mind as well. Now I don't look at people's auras normally, because I think it's an invasion of privacy.

SC: What do you see when you look at an aura and how is it an invasion of privacy?

Devotee: Because what you see is... For example, one time I looked at Aiya's aura. Now, for Aiya, he's protected by his Guru Paduka and the fact that he's said it for so long... I cannot take a lock on the colour of Aiya's aura because it keeps shifting. However, when Aiya was in union with Devi, during a time when he was doing bhajans, I could see this golden sphere that encompassed him.

When Aiya refers to an aura, he's referring to the predominant chakra that you're at in this moment in time, which varies with the colours. For me, what I see is the electro-magnetic field around a person, which extends to about three feet or so. Or at times it might be jagged or it might change depending on the condition of the person.

I think it's an invasion of privacy because if I see someone's aura, I can see a person and I can tell whether or not they're a Sri Vidya upasaka without asking them. Because the colour of their aura would appear a certain way to me. Or I could see if this person was a Kali worshipper or something else, or what has happened to them.

I don't think a person should be able to have that unless they've reached a certain level. Now, I wouldn't talk to people about (other people's auras), but I don't think it's right for me to use it. Like with any siddhi, Devi will keep you at arm's length if you use them because you'll start getting enamoured with them and also they're a horrible distraction to have.

SC: Are you at the point where you have attained any siddhis?

Devotee: Little things. I've had pre-cognitions. When I've been in japam at times, I would think a person has already walked up to me and I'll open up my eyes. But

then there's no one there and then the person actually comes along. It's kind of seeing things a few things earlier. These things just get you slightly confused.

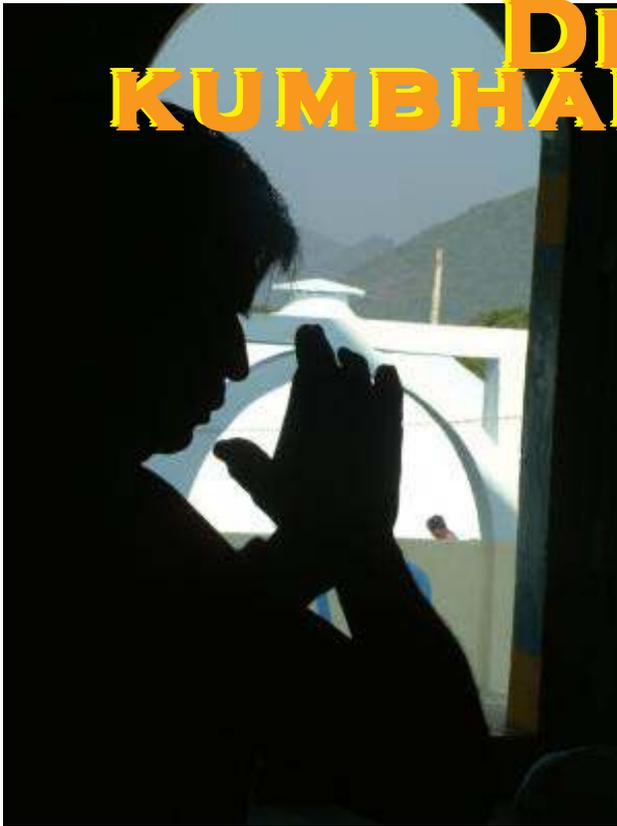
I've realized that all of these things, there's no point looking for it... I don't even bother with it now. There's no point in trying to understand what She has planned for you. She'll let whatever happens happen.

...to be continued next issue

**YA DEVI SARVA BHUTESHU PRITI RUPENA SAMSTITHA,
NAMASTASYAI, NAMASTASYAI, NAMASTASYAI, NAMO NAMAH**



DEVIPURAM KUMBHABHISHEKAM



by Chaitanyanandanatha Saraswathi

Over the last weekend in January the Sri Meru Temple in Devipuram saw the twelfth year "Punarutharana" kumbhabhishekam being performed. Quite a few devotees from the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam in Rochester, NY were there. Almost 20 people were there from the USA and Canada, observing and participating in the festivities. There was Suhir, Devi, Jayadeva, Thuriamba, Parameswari Teacher, Raj Jadon, Ravi and Rani, Venu and Kanakeswari, Madhuri and her sister, Santoshi Ma, Sundara, Ahalya, and Amma and myself attending the festivities.

The arrangements at Devipuram were handled by a host of people including Dattatreyananda, Sri Subbarao (the newly installed Peetadhipathi at Devipuram) Guruji's daughters Ananta, Radha and Rama and her husband Prabhakar. Several dignitaries that included Sri Swami Lalithananda and other senior Sri Vidya upasakas attended. They were all received with due respect with Purna Kumbham and the

chanting of vedic mantras and Chatra.

Notable attendees included almost 40 devotees from the famous Nemili Sri Bala Thripurasundari Peetam, led by



Aiya leading a Maha Prathyangira homam in Kamakhya Peetam

Peetadhipathi Nemili Sri Ezhilmani and his wife Smt. Nagalakshmi. They were properly received at the entrance and conducted to the temple where

they had an audience with Guruji and Ammah and later made their way to the temple. They spent a good two hours at the peetam and left after dinner. There were excellent arrangements made for the food, a team of expert cooks were there preparing tasty, nutritious and timely meals for those people attending.

The pratishthapana homa and kumbhabhishekam ceremonies were led by a senior Sri Vidya upasaka and a number of his disciples. There were a thousand kalasas installed by these men and they performed Veda parayana, while Surya namaskaram, Sahasralinga, Mahalingarchana and Mahanyasa purvaka Rudrabhishekam were performed daily. Guruji personally led the daily Sri Chakra Pujas to the 108 purna mahamerus sponsored by various people. This was always the highlight of the day. The suvasinis from Hyderabad led the daily chantings of Soundarya Lahari and Sri Lalita Sahasranamam.

In the evenings there were musical performances from



homam was performed, Rochester style and was very well received with Guruji gracefully in attendance.

On the final day Guruji, Ammah, his children, The New Peetadhipathi Sri Subbarao, his wife, Amma and I were in the yajnashala for the purnahuthi of the Pratishtapana homam followed by kumbhabhishekam performed by the chief ritvik, Guruji, Sri Subbarao, Swami Lalitananda, another senior Sri Vidya Upasaka and myself. Everyone who had sponsored one of the thousand kalasa then got an opportunity to carry the kalasa

various artistes from Chennai and Vizakapatnam. Notable among them were the much beloved and wildly popular nadaswaram duo of Kalai mamani Sheik Subhani and Kalaimamani Mehboob Kalishabhi. They were no strangers to the attendees from the USA and Canada. They accompanied Sri Ganesh, Smt. Gnanapurani and I when we sang bhajans on the second day of the ceremonies.

Sri Premasagar and Sathiwathi, the longtime devotees of Guruji from Chembur Mumbai, who are living in Devipuram, made sure Guruji and Guruji Amma were properly looked after and were not overstressed during the festivities.

In the mornings, of the days I was there, I led anushtanas at the Kamakhya peetham, the powerhouse of the complex. There were daily Sri Sukta Vidhana pujas and a Maha Pratyangira homam performed with Guruji's three daughters in attendance. The early morning pujas were heavily attended. On the third day at Guruji's request a homa kundam was constructed at the Easanya side of the Maha Meru. At Guruji's request I led a Maha Shodasi Homam for the devotees who were there, in particular for a devotee based in New Delhi, who had sponsored it. This



themselves to the top, and Sri Subbarao and the chief Ritvik performed the abhishekam for them.

The festivities ended leaving all those who attended with a feeling of fulfilment.

clockwise from top left: Aiya and Amma leading a Maha Shodasi homam; The gang from America and Canada hanging out with Aiya and Amma; Aiya and Amma with Nemili Ezhilmani and his wife, Smt. Nagalakshmi.



Arriving in Devipuram on the eve of Maha Kumbhabhishekham felt like a huge family reunion, with Sahasrakshi's children arriving from around the world. I immediately felt swept away by loving smiles. As soon as I got down from the car, I ran to Guruji and Guruji Amma's house to offer pranaams. Sitting and chatting with Guruji was Yanamandra Venugopala Shastry, the acharya who was to lead the four day function. Right away I noticed the same sparkling, loving eyes of Devi. Throughout the festival he was a bright light embodying Devi's love. As he lead a team of ritviks in front of the Yagna Shala, their chanting voices harmonized with the pujas simultaneously occurring in the Sri Meru temple, Kamakhya and Shivalayam. Could we be in Deva Lokam? It felt like Chintamani Grihantasta.

Each day was a full feast of offerings: divine pujas, chanting, music, friendship-new and old, chatting, sharing food and relaxing in the cashew groves, all amidst the divine company of true Mahatmas.

On the final day, which coincided with magha masam pournima, we spent a full morning with beautiful pujas and then gathered in the yagna shala for the maha purnahuthi. Once the maha purnahuthi had been offered, Guruji and Guruji Amma climbed the spiral stairs of the Sri Meru temple accompanied by a small group of devotees and priests. Thousands of devotees



Aiya,
Guruji,
and
Guruji
Amma

watched from the ground as they climbed up 60 feet, to the top of the bindu, above Sahasrakshi's sahasrara and poured the first of 1,000 kalasams which would soak the temple and all the devotees in showers of bliss for the next several hours. The words which best describe the experience of this culminating puja are Amrita Ananda, as if the Guru physically manifested his true form and showered all with blessings and divine love. After four days of charging the atmosphere and the 1,000 kalasams, the flow of water pouring over the Sri Meru temple was an ecstatic outpouring of bliss. As the

water flowed off the temple some devotees held empty bottles to collect the tirtham and others simply stood under the downpour and let it drench their souls. Sacred birds flew overhead, circling the temple, as devotees spiraled up the Sri Meru, chanting while carrying the clay kalasams on their heads, rising to reach the bindu. Nothing could be greater than sharing the divine occasion with your Guru Parampara, as our Sri Gurus and Parama Gurus bestowed full blessings on the occasion. I will never forget the ecstatic, crazy, blissful look on Aiya's face as he sat with Guruji and Guruji Amma witnessing the great event.

by Kathy (Thuriamba) Allen

THE DIVINITY OF DEVI'S HOME



It is an understatement to say that Devipuram is a beautiful place. It is a place that embodies the beauty of the Goddess, both physically and spiritually. I spent two weeks in that paradise during the *Maha Kumbhabhishekam* festival. It is Devi's own Palace Of

peetadhipathi of Nemili Bala *Tripurasundari Peetam*, and his family. Once couldn't have wished for a better divine constellation.

The events of the festival were structured in such a way that the ritual and spiritual activities (like *puja*, *homam* etc) were scheduled for

simultaneously reminding me of the timeless eternal relevance of Devipuram and Guruji's vision.

When the *abhishekam* ceremony was done by Guruji and Amma, I saw three eagles (*Garuda*) in the sky circling over the temple dome.

THE ESSENCE OF

MAHA

by Sangeetha Prakash Krishna

KUMBHABHISHEKAM

Splendor (*manidweepam*). I finally had taken my much-dreamed-of vacation in paradise and got to spend time with Mother at Her place.

Before the festival started, all the deities in the temple complex, including all the *Khadgamala* Devis, were freshly garlanded, and they looked enchantingly beautiful. The whole place looked colorfully decked and freshly painted. Devotees had gathered from many countries and from many parts of India. Getting to know them, living with them, sharing our experiences, recounting our stories, was a memorable experience. Even while I was there, I remember thinking that these were some of my best days.

I had the opportunity to spend time with Guruji and Amma, to share in their simple lives, and bask in their love and affection. Aiya and Amma from the Rochester *peetam* were there for the festival. While Amma made her loving presence felt, Aiya regaled us with his mesmerizing stories and anecdotes laced with divine wisdom.

As if the collective power of Guruji/Amma and Aiya/Amma were not enough, we also had other spiritual dignitaries visit Devipuram during the festival. One notable presence was the

the mornings, while the afternoons and evenings were for relaxing and socializing within the temple complex. We had world-class *carnatic* music concerts on all five evenings of the festival. It certainly felt like we had gathered in the Mother's home to celebrate Her presence.

Celebrating thus, the day of the grand-finale arrived. It was the day of ritual climax. After the ceremonial completion (*purnahuti*) of the *homam*, Guruji and Amma proceeded to the top of the temple structure to perform the *mahakumbhabhishekam*—the ceremonial bathing of the Sri Meru Temple. I too, along with all other devotees, had the opportunity to carry the sacred *kalasam* (pot) of water to the temple dome. It was a rare once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to do so.

I was moved to tears when I saw Guruji at the top of the temple *gopuram* (dome), who had climbed there with considerable difficulty, over the makeshift stairs. He performed the *abhishekam* to the Sri Meru Temple. It was a magical and powerful moment, as the first *kalasam* of water was poured over the temple spire. That tiny moment in time will stay frozen in my memories. For me, it symbolizes the culmination of a festival in a small slice of time, yet

In South Indian temple tradition, such a presence of the eagles during a *kumbhabhishekam* ceremony is considered highly auspicious. It is believed that the presence of such *garudas* is a reassuring visible symbol of the sacred presence of the gods, rishis, sages, siddhas and yoginis assembled to witness and to bless such a highly powerful ritual, and offer their whole-hearted well-wishes to the temple.

I joined other devotees in wholeheartedly praying that Devipuram, always and forever remains a vital resource for tantric Sri Vidya worship of Devi, for all our future generations. When Guruji did the *abhishekam*, I had this refrain on my lips - "*pallaandu, pallaandu, pallaayirathaandu, pala koti nooraayiram.*" It is a Tamil devotional song that is sung during a blessing, and roughly translates as, "May the blessings be showered for many years, many years, many thousand years, many ten million hundred thousand years..."

After all, that is what a *mahakumbhabhishekam* is in its essence—it is a collective prayer, a wholehearted blessing, a spiritual reaffirmation and a timely reassurance that the symbol and legacy of the *shakti peetam* (Devipuram) will live on forever!

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OF

Hundreds of people descended on Devipuram for the Maha Kumbhabhishekam in Feb 2001. The people below were kind enough to share their thoughts and experiences during the event with those who could not be there.

KUMBHABHISHEKAM

 The onlooker cannot miss the grandeur of the Meru Temple. He (She) was at the Meru Temple, dressed in white, radiating like the moonlight and enjoying the presence of His (Her) children. Guruji Amma greeted everyone with her most inviting smile while all the volunteers and workers embraced everyone with motherly gentleness and endearing smiles.

Devipuram pulsed with a unique energy throughout the Maha Kumbhabhishekam. Ecstasy sprints through your spine witnessing Sahasrakshi revealing Herself as Ganapathi, Meenakshi and Varahi. How fortunate we were to have both Gurus and Patnis in one sacred, esoteric place. Wherever Aiya and Amma went, they magnetically drew crowd like bees to honey. Kamakya Peetam echoed with Aiya's mesmeric chants. In the early morning, Guruji's chants in a soft, tender voice exuded life in every particle and granule while the homams conducted by Aiya resonated in the air with invigorating energy. From young to the old, trees to the birds, inanimate to animate were pregnant with vitality.

Like a lotus in a pond, the Meru Temple blossoms in the midst of a lustrous cashew plantation. Stay atop the Shivalayam and feel Her exuberance all around you. Marvel the beauty of the breast-like mountains, witness the cloud impregnate the valleys, listen to the distant chants, laughs and cries, let Her wrap your body with a calm breeze and warm your skin with gentle rays, admire the unfolding

 beauty with every twilight and dawn and taste its lusciousness. Let the surrounding intoxicate every cell in your body while you melt away into the timeless warp sleeping in this Mother's womb. It was enchanting and electrifying.

It is a place where time or thoughts do not dwell. Nothing matters anymore. This cannot be painted on a canvas by an artist, nor can any vocabulary convey its spirit. It is an experience that will remain in one's soul through eternity.

Ahalya Arasaratnam

 I was a child playing in the Mother's lap

Cherishing every moment
nourishing Her sap

Floating in the boundless
smothering love from Kanchi
Kamakshi

Déjà vu inspiration tearing my
heart at Madhurai Meenakshi

The playful little Girl, giggling
and ruling my life at
Kanyakumari

Trotted along to enjoy the
divine Grace at Pillaiyar Pathi

Went in search to experience
the Maha Senathipathi

Bounded by the harnessing
energy in Swami Malai

Proceeded to rejoice the
spearheaded divine force of
Thiruperungkunram

Bathing in the twenty two
wells for penance at
Rameshwaram

The shiver of bliss and losing
myself at Chidambaram

Lost the weed of need at
Arunachalam

Drowned totally in the Absolute
Contentedness

Permeating every cell was the
inexplicable Sweetness

Defeating my human will while
feeling the "SHE"

Now, nothing ever matters as to
how things will be

Without the grace of my Gurus
where I will be

Without adoring Her feet there
is no life for me

Everything She is to me

Nothing will bother what come
maybe

No more need I have, now no
fear I have

The Guru's Grace is protecting
all the "we."

Anonymous

 In my moments with divine
Mother, I asked her "when would
I see you next?" She replied, "My
sweet child look into the eyes of
every devotee and you will see me
there."

Guruji

 After Guruji had performed
the abhishekam of the kumbham
he came down and sat before the
Sri Meru temple with Amma to
giving blessings to the people. A
few volunteers and I formed a
human chain around him so that
the oxygen supply to Guruji and
Amma does not get compromised
due to the large crowd. There was
a long queue of people waiting to
touch his feet. A few of them
where taking a longer time and

trying to talk to him while getting his blessings.

Suddenly two more guest peetadhipathis came and sat next to Guruji and Amma and started to bless people who prostrated. This was further delaying the queue. So a few of us were ushering the people to make it faster, as each one of them prostrated separately before four Gurus. We stopped people from having too many words with them and prevented people who had darshan to stand around Guruji. The prime screamer was me saying please don't overcrowd, please make it faster, please don't talk now, etc. Guruji called me closer and said with his usual smile, "It is okay, now there are two queues! Why do you hasten them; see the people in one queue are all standing in the sun, first make them to come under the shade."

While reciting the LS mantra—Avyaja karuna moorthi—in my opinion and experience refers to the unusually benevolent Guruji, as he usually usual walks his talks and spreads ripples of Karunya Rasa.

Sunandini Lakshminath

 Devipuram truly is a place that defines solitude, as it is cradled deep within a valley surround by giant hills that guard against the encroachment of civilization, where time has no significance, where Devi's grace and love flows in abundance. On arrival you feel like you have reached your spiritual home, as the warm fresh air caresses your body like a mother affectionately cradles her child after a lengthy absence.

By attending the Mahakumbhabhishekam we were all able to quench our spiritual desires and fulfill our inner spiritual quest as the guru's grace oozed profusely. During the four days of celebration, the land graced use with its beauty from dawn to dusk, the winds caressed us all with her gentle motherly

breeze, the devotees were all filled with goodness and love, the young pundits (ritviks) chanted like thunder to provoke the gods to shower their blessings. Each day of the celebration was different, aside from the regular pujas, devotees could participate in numerous activities such as homans, cleaning and sponsoring pujas.

In the evening, a variety of special singers would come to pay their respects to Devi and sing Her glory. The ultimate joy was to see Aiya and Amma grace us all by being able to attend the celebration, but more importantly, it was the indescribable joy that Guruji expressed on seeing Aiya and Amma that filled our hearts and gave him strength. As the celebrations ended on the fourth day with the commencement of the abhishekam from the highest point of the main temple by our gurus, we all regained our spiritual strength by drenching ourselves into the abhishekam water that trickled down to the temple floor, while eagles acknowledged and celebrated the successful event.

Raj Jadon

 Most of the old crowd in Rochester remembers me I'm sure; I was present at the first Kumbhabhishekam at Devipuram 12 years earlier and when I heard that this was happening again, I felt I needed to be there for this even though it was happening at a most inconvenient time with very little time to prepare.

After a very difficult trip getting to Devipuram, I was finally there. Everyone was very busy preparing for this and I told Guruji that I would like to do photography for this function. And he gave me this responsibility, so that was my part to help out during this time.

Well, it was not easy; I was having back trouble and even got

very sick half way through the function. I was not the only one including Guruji. Even with all this going on I felt it was only because of the Devi's blessings and grace that I was even there. This function was a crowning achievement for Guruji and Ammah. With the release of Guruji's new Meru, I eagerly purchased a five-inch version to take home. It was great seeing Haran and Amma and so many of the Rochester crowd as well as making many new friends.

My powerful experience happened the day after the function, when I was allowed to sit in the Sahasrakshi Meru temple alone by myself inside with the gate closed. I was sitting and talking with the Devi from my heart when I heard a women's anklet jingle in my ear. I tried to see if someone was there outside. I could not see; I was sitting too far to the right. When I heard it again, this time I got up, and outside was a beautiful young lady in a golden sari.

She was motioning with her hand towards the inside of the temple, I said do you wish to do namaskara to the Devi and she did not speak, but kept moving her hand towards me to the ground. I opened the gate and she prostrated before Devi. Without even thinking and as though some one had taken control of me, I took some kumkum, touched it to the Meru, Shiva's feet, and the Devi's jewelry and placed this on the young woman's forehead.

When I did this, some tears rolled from her eyes and this must have been something very special to her. I thought this was strange that she was all alone. I left shortly after and I did not see her anywhere outside. I thought was she real, but I knew this experience was very special, moving and real for me, as it was for that young woman. I will always remember that for the moment that Devi and I shared those blessings.

Bill Thomas



It was the last day of the Kumbhabhishekam at Devipuram. The day's activities were not clear to me. All I knew was that the sacred energized water in the 1000 kalasams that underwent days of constant chanting with various powerful mantras was about to be generously offered to the Kumbham that sits on top of the Meru Nilayam temple. Devotees were scattered all over the place and there was no sight of the Rochester group. I found myself walking aimlessly. Suddenly I remembered that the offering of the 1000 gold coin mala was scheduled for that day.

I rushed to the Sahasrakshi goddess who sits on the bindu of the Meru temple. There I met with Prema aunty, Tejasvi, and Vijaya all disciples of Guruji engaged in sorting out the garlands for the alankaram. The young boy assigned for the Devi's alankarams, for all the days was also there. I expressed my appreciation for his devoted, artistic and creative touch to the different alankarams of the Devi. The mother was dressed up as Ganesha, Shyma and Varahi in the past days and today it was going to be Lalitha.

Before I could plunge into a volley of questions, Prema aunty pulled me aside and asked me to help with the sorting of the decoration articles. I could see that they were all pressed for time and orderly completion of the alankaram before the arrival of Guruji to do the prokshanam with the kalasam water. I watched the young boy applying sandalwood paste to the Devi's face with intense concentration and devotion. Something told me that he was going through some journey doing it, for every move appeared to be dictated by the Mother. Meanwhile, the jostling crowd had gathered outside the Sahasrakshi sanctum door, anxiously trying to get a glimpse of the Devi. We all took turns to hold the sanctum door tight.

As we were just done with draping of three sarees as one on the mother, we heard the door open. Guruji, Amma, and the main priest walked in with the kalasams. The ritviks accompanying them were chanting loudly, and then I saw Aiya, Amma and Subbarao jostle their way through inside. They all took turns in doing the prokshanam for the Devi with the energized kalasam water. Later, they headed to the pinnacle of the Meru temple, to pour the kalasam water on the kumbham. The rest of us stayed back in the sanctum to complete the alankaram. We adorned her with garlands made of different sizes and flowers and She looked beautiful.

Suddenly, drops of water were dripping from the sanctum roof. We soon realized that it was the kalasam water that was being poured on top of the kumbham. We all acknowledged the fact that the mother was showering her Grace to us in this form. Outside the sanctum, devotees made a beeline to offer the kalasams. A ladder was laid to get to the top of the kumbham. Only few people were allowed to climb on it due to practicality issues.

As I was helping with the technicalities of adorning the kasu malai for the Devi, Guruji's brother-in-law walked inside and asked the few of us if we would like to offer a kalasam. We all jumped with joy. I picked up a kalasam from a devotee and climbed up the not-too-steady ladder. I did not care. I reached the top and gave the kalasam to Subbarao, who was engaged in diligently pouring the water from the kalasa offered to him. I saw Rema (Guruji's daughter) sitting right near the kumbham, drenched in water smiling at me. Someone asked me if I wanted to sit there. All this was so unexpected that for a moment I could not collect myself. I came down to the sanctum and made my humble pranams to my Guru lineage and the Mother.

Dr. Devi Padmanaban



Sri Gurubhyo Namah
Sri Gurubhyo Namah