

Kumbhabhishekam

July 18, 2020

Kumbhabhishekam of (consecration) of the 1,010-year-old Brihadeeswarar Temple was held after 23 years in Thanjavur recently. It was held after the Madras High Court's verdict on the ritual purification process

What is Kumbhabhishekam?

- It is a ritual is held to sanctify (abhishekam) the crown of the temple (Kumbha shikhara) with spiritually charged water.
- It is performed to consecrate new shrines or re-consecrate existing shrines after a renovation or every twelve years.
- The highlight of the ceremony is pouring of sanctified water from pots atop the gopurams by priests to energise the entire temple.
- During the event, holy water brought from the **Yaga salai** – the site of the yajna in the temple compound – was poured on the gold-plated kalasam that tops the 216-foot vimana over the sanctum sanctorum.

About previous Kumbhabhishekam

- As per the customs of Hinduism, 'kumbhabhishekam' is done once in 12 years.
- According to the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department, the temple had 'kumbhabhishekam' in 1010, 1729, 1843, 1980 and 1997.
- On April 3, 1980 when the State was under President's rule, the consecration took place after 137 years.
- In 1997, it was planned for June 8, but was held the next day (June 9), as a fire broke out at the "yagasalai" on the evening of June 7, triggering a stampede which led to the death of 46 persons and 107 persons getting injured.

Intervention by Madras High Court

- The judgment delivered on January 31 by the Madurai Bench of the court addressed the struggle for supremacy between the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions that lies at the heart of several cultural battles in the state and which also played out in the kumbhabhishekam ceremony
- The court, in a dispute over which language should be used in the slokas at the kumbhabhishekam, agreed with the state government's affidavit that the ceremony should be in both Sanskrit and Tamil.

About Brihadeeshwarar temple

- The Sri Brahadeeswarar Temple (also spelt Brihadisvara, and called Rajarajesvaram/Peruvudaiyar Koyil, which translates simply to 'Big Temple') is the most famous of the many temples in Thanjavur.
- It is one of the world's largest and grandest, was **built between 1003 AD and 1010 AD by the great Chola emperor Raja Raja I (Arulmozhiarman) (c. 985-1014 AD).**
- The temple is dedicated to lord shiva and an exemplary example of a fully realized Dravidian architecture
- It is located on the south bank of Kaveri river
- The temple stands amidst fortified walls that were probably added in the 16th century. The vimana (temple tower) is 216 ft high and is the tallest in the world.
- The Kumbam (the apex or the bulbous structure on the top) of the temple is carved out of a single rock and weighs around 80 tons.
- The temple is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Great Living Chola Temples", along with the Chola dynasty era Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple