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(L to R) Vishal, Lakshami, Girish & Vibha Gaitonde, Poonam & Prabhu Goel, Arthi & Viswas Gadbole and N.Swamiji at Sunnyvale Hindu Temple for Ganesh Chaturthi.

3-Day Ganesha festival celebrated at Balaji Temple **-Life size Ganesha Murthy Unveiled Amongst Grand Rituals**

Sunnyvale, CA: Balaji Temple in Sunnyvale celebrated Ganesha Chaturthi in a very unique way by performing Ganesha Stapanam (Prana Prathishta) to the Life Size Ganesha Murthy (Vigraha) acquired in August, as well as the Ganesha Utsava Murthy. The 3 day festival and rituals started on September 13, 2007, Thursday 7 PM and concluded on September 15, Saturday 2 PM.

The first day of festival on Sep 13, Thursday, the Temple entrance was decorated with Banana Trees giving the devotees a prelude to the festivities inside. A very beautiful sight of all the 9 kalashas sitting on top of Nava Dhanya representing each of the Nava Grahas and a Vasthu kalasha and the main kalasha were all ready, waiting to be invoked as the devotees walked in. The evening started with Ganesha Puja, and Punyavacham by Vishwas and Arthi Gadbole, followed by Deeksha Dharana by devotees who were participating in all 3-day rituals. Head Priest Narayana Swamiji started the Charastapana procedures according to the scriptures Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda by invoking Pancha palaka (five elements), Dwarapalaka, Displace Devatas, and performed Nava Graha Puja, Yagasala (Mandap) Puja. And concluded day 1 rituals with Aarti and Pushapanjali. It is very interesting to note that the water in these kalashas would be used for Ganesha Abhishekha on Saturday.

The second day of festival, on September 14, Friday afternoon several Homas were performed including Maha Ganapathi homam, Navagraha homam, Vastu shanti, Chandi Homam, and Netranirmalan followed by Swarna Gowri Puja, Lalitha sahasranama stotram and Devi Puja. Balaji Temple is a shrine to chant Devi stotrams including Mahishasura Mardhini and Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma songs on Fridays.

The 3rd day of festival, September 15, Saturday, was Ganesha Chaturthi day. The day started with traditional Venkateshwara Suprbhatham by all devotees. Girish and Vibha Gaitonde, Vishwas and Arthi Gadbole and Prabhu and Poonam Goel family participated in the puja, and performed the Shanti Homa and Purna Ahuti. This was followed by Jaladhivasam Abhishekham by Head Priest Narayana Swamiji assisted by Manoj Kumar and Sri Sathyanarayana Maratheji. It started with the holy water from the main kalasha being poured on Lord Ganesha followed by water from each of all the Navagraha Kalashas and corresponding Nava Dhanya poured in succession and also by various dravyas (Panchamrit) including yogurt, ghee (clarified butter), honey, white sugar and brown sugar, turmeric water, and kum kum water and Ganges Water. The Murthy looked radiant in each of the colors. This was followed by covering the Murthy with dry powders of bhasma, turmeric and kum kum and a separate Aarti after each Aankaram.

The final phase of the Abhishekham was with a lot of milk while all the devotees chanted

Ganapathi Atharva Seersha form Upanishads for one hour. The air vibrated with this chanting invoking the power into Lord Ganesha Vighraha. Then Prana Prathishta was performed and the curtain was closed for decorating Lord Ganesha.

The devotees sang Ganesha Bhajans while waiting for Divya Darshan of Lord Ganesha. The wait was worth every moment. It was indeed a great sight to see the new Lifesize Ganesha all decked with Silver Alankaram and Garlands of 1000 Modakas and flowers which will please any child young and old.

The radiance from the Murthy filled the Temple and all the devotees certainly received the Divya Darshanam of Lord Ganesha. The puja consisted of Ashtavadhana Seva which included reciting poems from all 4 Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharatha, Bhajans, music and various instruments: Nadaswaram, Veena, Tabla, Drums and Shank (Conch), and Ashtothara Namavali (praising the Lord with 108 names) with flowers and silver grass leaves.

The devotees enjoyed a Pravachan by Head priest Narayana Swamiji on Lord Ganesha. The story of Lord Ganesha, how he came into being and why he is called Gowri Putra (son of Gowri), and celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi

Temple Secretary Lakshmi Vittaladasi gave a good and positive financial report and Vice President Vishal Sangalji thanked all the devotees for their dedication and donations.

The highlight of the morning was honoring the 3 couples who donated the Murthys, with garlands, shawls and Mysore Raja Paethas (head gear like Maharajas).

The puja concluded with Grand Maha Aarathi and Maha Prasad.

The 3-day festival and Chara Stapanam of Lord Ganesha concluded with Gaakara Sahasra, Namavali Puja and Aarti.

Indeed it was a grand festival at the Balaji Temple and a unique one at that because, to perform Prana Prathishta to Lord Ganesha (Initiation of New Life size Vighraha Murthy) on Ganesha Chaturthi day is truly a rare occurrence at any Temple and all the devotees at the Balaji Temple in Sunnyvale, California USA had the good fortune to witness it.

Balaji Temple is open 7 days a week at 678 Cypress Avenue in Sunnyvale CA.