

[U.S. Paint Company Makes Special Paint for Chidambaram](#)

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## U.S. Paint Company Makes Special Paint for Chidambaram

The renovation of the Rajagopurams of the great Siva Temple of Chidambaram, S. India, has been plagued with difficulties in the painting. The cement paint coating, initially employed in the renovation to paint the numerous intricate and beautiful sculptures, faded in a matter of weeks and began to flake and peel off. During the visit by Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniaswami, and the 35 pilgrims of the 1981 India Odyssey, the problem was presented by G. Vagheesam Pillai, Chairman of the Temple Renovation Committee. A sample of the sculpture from the temple was given to Gurudeva for experimentation in the United States.

Upon the pilgrims' return, the sculpture and a description of the problem with the paint were taken by one of the pilgrims, Deva Rajan, a contractor, to Dunne Paint Company in Oakland, California. At no charge, they happily undertook the project of finding a suitable paint for the plaster sculptures and immediately set to work. By mid-June, their experiments bore fruit, and nine quarts of paint in nine different colors were air freighted to Chidambaram for testing. Based on the results of the tests, formulas will be finalized by Dunne Paint for the production of the paint, either in India or elsewhere.

A recent letter from Sri Vagheesam states, "The paint has been used for the 'Arthanasi' on both sides of the South Rajagopuram and the same is found to be satisfactory. It gives a beautiful appearance. It penetrates even into the plastered surface of mortar, and the hair cracks are also duly filled. The different colours even out after the application and later also maintain the same beautiful shade. We are very grateful to Swamiji for having evinced great interest and sparing no pains in arranging to send colours of quality, and we are much indebted to you for the same."

The experiments conducted by Dunne showed that the original coating, a cement base type of paint, reacts chemically with the lime in the plaster used to make the

sculptures. The first reaction from the simple contact of the paint on the plaster is to fade the paint. Then, because the cement paint has a different percentage of cement compared to the plaster, the paint and the sculpture expand and contract at different rates in the hot sun and cool nights, causing cracks to appear in the cement paint. Water then enters through the cracks, leeching more lime out of the plaster, causing the cement paint to fade further and also to flake off. As a result of this process, the magnificently painted North Gopuram faded within weeks from its original brilliance, and now the paint is cracked and peeling.

An acrylic paint developed by Dunne does not react with the lime in the plaster and is somewhat flexible, allowing it to expand and contract along with the plaster. Dunne has selected 48 different colors which should work for the Rajagopurams. Certain colors cannot be used, as they are made with pigments which react strongly to lime and fade.

The experimental paint has been applied, with careful note made of its coverage. Its performance in the hot sun will be observed for some time. Based on the results of this, the final formula for the paint will be made. Then will remain the unknown expense of producing this paint, either in India or elsewhere. (Dunne Paint Co. is supplying the formula free of charge). Saivites throughout the world are encouraged to support this invaluable renovation of the revered Saivite temple of Chidambaram. Your generous contributions may be sent to: G. Vagheesam Pillai, Secretary, Arulmigu Sabanayagar (Sri Nataraja), Koil Thiruppani Committee, Chidambaram, South Arcot District, South India.