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UPCOMING EVENTS FROM SRI RAJARAJESWARI PETTAM

N/A

REGULAR SERVICES:

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

MORNINGS - 9:30 am - 1:00 pm

EVENINGS - 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

AND USA HOLIDAYS

ALL DAY (9:30 am – 9:00 pm)

- ? **Pujas on Weekdays are at 9:30am, 12:30pm & 7:00p**
- ? **Pujas on Weekends are at 10am, 12:00pm & 6:00pm**
- ? **Abhishekam for the Devi is at 10:00am on Saturdays**
- ? **Navavarana Pujas are performed every Poomima**



Sri Rrajarajeswari Peetam

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SRI CHAKRA

THE SOURCE OF THE COSMOSE

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PEETAM, RUSH. N.Y



Siva Lingam at the Peetam

SRI CHAKRA

THE SOURCE OF THE COSMOSE

At The Peetam:

This bimonthly period was highlighted by Guruji's visit & Gurupoornima celebrations at the peetam. Guruji performed the wedding of Alok & Anju in Buffalo, in the presence of a number of devotees. Alok & Anju have set up home in Cherry Hill, NJ where the Sri Lalithambika peetam resides. Chaitanyanda performed pujas at the Swaprakasha peetam, Syracuse, Sahasrahki peetam, Toronto and at the residence of Arabindi and Veena in Montreal. He also participated in 2 Chandi homams performed. by Sri Sambamoorthy Sivachariar in Buffalo & Hamilton. Chaithanyananda's boyhood friend Sri. Balasingham and his wife Mahalakshmi were guests at the peetam and Sri Balasingham participated in the bhajan singing at Gurupoornima & at a Durga temple festival in Toronto where the peetam group sang. Chaithanyananda performed the wedding of Sri Indradas's daughter in NJ and performed Sudharshana hornam in the residence of Sri Nathan in NJ. He also performed the wedding of Sri Krish Chakravarthy & Grace in Rochester NY and several pujas at the residence Sonia and Beena Bawa and Amber. He also commenced pujas at the Hindu temple Rochester on Wednesdays.

Sri Chaithanyananda performed a puja at the Sangeeta Yogini peetam Buffalo. The peetam welcomed Smt. Sasivalli and Sri Thanigainayagam, brother & sister of Smt. Gnanapoorini. He performed Gauri puja at G.V. Srinivasan's residence in Buffalo. In Toronto he performed Sathyanarayana puja at Tillainathans' residence. New peetams consecrated were: Chamundeswhari peetam, Bangalore, India, at the residence of Jaya & Raj Nagaraj, Vishnu Durga peetam at Sagars' residence in Hamilton, Mathumaiyal peetam at Olga and Louis's residence in Boston, Kamadhenu peetam at the Kamaths' residence in Syracuse, Ashtalakshmi peetam at the Venkatadris' and Nandikeshwara peetam at Sriganesh's residence, both in Buffalo, and Manonmani peetam at Sailesh's residence in PA.

The word "kathir," in tamil means a ray of light or an ear of corn. Kathirgamam which lies in the South of the island of Sri Lanka is another of the famous shrines having the distinction of being sung about by the Saivaite saints of Tamil Nadu in India, in this instance, Arunagirinathar, the famous poet composer who is credited with composing the "Thiruppugal" (which translates to "In Praise of the Divine". These songs are characterized by a robust and often complicated "thala" or rhythmic pattern), the "Alankaram" (decoration) and the "Anubhuthi" (grace). Historians are not in agreement that he physically visited Kathirgamam but concur that he did sing the praises of the Lord of Kathirgamam and his two Divine consorts.

Kathirgamam is a tiny jungle shrine about 180 miles by bus from the capital city of

Colombo and has been revered by the Saivaites from times immemorial as a great spiritual center. There are many legends relating to this shrine; over the next few issues, we will look into some of the lesser known stories and traditions of this temple.

The temple is nestled on the banks of the river "manicka ganga". It is a collection of small shrines scattered around a ceremonial, circumambulatory path. The main temple consists of three chambers. The first chamber where devotees gather is the largest - about 20 feet by 15 feet. The second is around 10 x 15, and the last about 10 x 10. At the entrance to the second chamber from the first, there are painted curtains covering the entrance, so one cannot see beyond. The chamber where devotees gather is profusely decorated with old paintings of Skanda and his two consorts. Lamps hang from the rafters, more lamps stand as tall as the devotees on the ground. The thick smell of continuously burning incense pervades the chamber.

What lies beyond the curtained entrance is not known to the public. The priests, all from the hunter class that has inhabited the surrounding jungles since times immemorial, are the only ones allowed inside the second of the chambers.

This is an account of how whatever is inside the chamber got there. In the early part of this temple's history, it was virtually inaccessible to people because of its location in the middle of the elephant-infested jungle. No historian has been able to precisely date the origin of worship here.

There is a "vel", a leaf shaped spearhead embedded into a huge rock at the peak of two holy hills very close to the temple. The spear is the symbol of Lord Subrahmanya. How this metal spear got there is a mystery.

Legend has it that a sannyasi by the name of Kalyanananda Giri arrived in Kathirgamam from Kashmir to perform Tapas on the banks of manicka ganga (the temple was already in existence). He had been initiated into the powerful six-syllabled mantra of Subrahmanya and wanted to obtain a vision of the Lord who was reputed to be inhabiting the locale with his consort "Valli". He is said to have been a yogi of the Siddha order and had the ability to remain awake without any sleep. When he came to the banks of the river and set up his "parashala" (hermitage), a young boy of about nine and a young girl of about seven from some "veduva" (hunter) family came from the jungles to help with menial tasks like fetching water from the river, preparing for puja, gathering firewood, flowers, wild fruits etc. With these to help him, Kalyanananda Giri went about his tapas with diligence. Twelve years passed in this fashion and the object of his austerities remained unfulfilled. The young boy and girl who had come to assist him had long since left and had their places filled by two others from the jungle. The swami was frustrated that after twelve years of intense tapas, nothing had been achieved. So it is said that he constructed a gold yantra (a mystical diagram) for Subrahmanya and infused it with all the power of the mantra he had recited, without sleep, for 12 years. He then placed the yantra in a box and lay down to rest with the box under his head. A short while later, the boy and girl who were

helping him came upon him and startled that he was drifting off to sleep, shook him awake. The swami, vexed at being so rudely awakened when he was trying to sleep after 12 years, chased the boy and girl to try and punish them. They ran away from him towards the river with the swami in hot pursuit. They crossed the river to the other side (the water was waist-high) and as the irate sannyasi prepared to cross the river himself, they disappeared in front of his eyes. In their place stood Lord Subrahmanya and Valli of incomparable beauty. Overjoyed at the marvelous and sudden turn of events, the sannyasi worshipped them on the banks of the manicka ganga. Then the Lord of beauty asked him what boon he desired. The sannyasi requested that He live there along with His other consort "Deivayani" and be eternally present there for the benefit of His devotees. Lord Subrahmanya then instructed the sannyasi to place the box containing the powerful yantra in the second chamber of the main temple, where it rests to this day.

The sannyasi lived out his remaining days at Kathirgamam and when he left his body a few years later of his own volition, his mortal remains were placed in a samadhi about a quarter mile to the south east of the main temple, on the banks of the manicka ganga. A short time later a pearl colored lingam grew out of the samadhi; this is still there today and a shiva temple is built around it and is known as "muthulinga swami koil" (the Temple of the Pearl Lingam).

In the main temple, the third chamber is shrouded in mystery. There are many stories of how some devotee in some part of the country would be instructed by Lord Subrahmanya to come and change the tiles over the temple. When one climbed up the roof to change the tiles, one could then see what was in the third chamber, but as soon as they finished their task and climbed down, they would shed their mortal frame in a state of ecstasy, and the secret of the third chamber has been maintained intact to this day. About sixty years ago, the temple was roofed with copper sheets and has remained without any need for re-tiling ever since.

As a young lad, my late mother would tell me stories of Kathirgamam and this instilled in me a strong yearning to visit this temple. However, I did not get a chance to visit this place till 1964. Legend has it that if one tried to go to the temple without being called there by the Lord himself, one would never get there and would face untold difficulties.

I had been initiated into the Maha Mantra of Lord Subrahmanya by Swami Shiva Satchidananda Mataji and was doing mantra japa with intensity to, you guessed it, receive an invitation to go to Kathirgamam. We were living in a small town called Vaddukodai about 280 miles from Kathirgamam where I had been schooling. One of my childhood friends was a lad named "Kangesan" (another name for Lord Subrahmanya). One day, after I had lunch, I was in my room reading a book. It was about 3 pm in the afternoon. My mother was reading a newspaper and resting on an easy chair outside the house. I clearly heard some one, it was a male voice, call me

"Wijayaharan". Now, no one ever called me by my full name. I was referred to as "Rajan" by my friends and family. I replied, "I am coming" and came out to see who it was. My mother, who was outside said she had never heard anyone call, when I said that I had heard someone clearly call out my name. I was perplexed but quickly dismissed the incident. A couple of hours later, Kangesan, my friend, came home to leave his bicycle (he always left it at our place before going to school) and as soon as he saw me, said to me that we should go to Kathirgamam. I had not spoken of my desire to anyone and when he said this, I took it that I had my invitation.

Robert Knox, the British author who wrote extensively on Sri Lanka has mentioned that the antiquity associated with Kathirgamam had something to do with the mysterious power of that jungle shrine. It was rumored that prior to the Portuguese destruction of all the religious edifices in Sri Lanka, the Kathirgamam Shrine contained a statue made of Ruby (Manickam) and that it was hidden in the river and subsequent to the pillaging of the temple could not be located. It is missing to this day.

After my friend expressed his desire to visit Kathirgamam, we both decided to leave that weekend by bus. After arriving at the main temple we booked in at the Ramakrishna Matam, which was a free pilgrim's rest house there and impatiently bathed in the river and went to the temple for pujah. The priest went through the ritual, but nothing happened to me. My heart was like stone, dead and unmoving. I was very disappointed. After the pujah, we took a bus

to SelvaKathirgamam, site of a very powerful Ganesha shrine situated about four miles from the main temple on the banks of the Manicka Ganga. Here too, in spite of the quiet deep solitude of the location and the obvious divinity present, I remained unmoved. Needless to say, the disappointment was great. By the time we returned to the main temple, it was late evening and I again felt nothing at the pujah.

The next day, both of us woke up and after bathing in the river decided to climb one of the mountains where a 'vel' lies embedded in a massive granite boulder at the peak. After an exhausting climb, we neared the peak, which was about fifty feet higher than where we were. This was the site of an abandoned watering station ('thannir pandal'). Here we saw a sanyasi with a flowing beard and ochre robes leaning against a sapling and looking at us. He beckoned us with his right hand. I nudged my friend and indicated to him that he was being called. The old man spoke and said in Tamil, "Not him, but YOU". So, I went up to him. He put his hand into a small pouch at his waist and extending his hand with holy ash clenched in his fist said, "Here, take it!" I reverently held out my palm and he dropped a handful of holy ash and a small rudraksha bead mala (garland) on it.

When I saw the Rudraksha, I did not know how to handle it. So I asked him what I should do with it and he said, "Wear it!" I wore it, bowed at his feet and moved on to the top of the hill, where throughout the pujah I felt an immense presence near me

and my heart was overflowing with devotion and joy and ecstasy. The pujah was in progress but I still had questions about the mala. So, my friend and I came down to the spot where we had seen the old man but he was gone. We literally ran down the rest of the way hoping to catch up with him but to no avail. He was nowhere to be seen. Unless he had gone into the jungle, there was no way that he could have descended the hill so soon.

That evening, on our return to the main temple for pujah, I had the same high and was weeping uncontrollably. When I looked sideways about ten feet away, amongst the hundred or so devotees I saw the old man. I quickly turned to my friend and said, "There he is, let's go to him" and then looked back again but he was gone!! I never saw him again. From that year onwards (1964), every New Year (which is in April for the Tamils), I would somehow be at the temple and soon would begin to lead the singings in the rear of the festival procession.

(To be continued)

Aiya