Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

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February 2007

February Newsletter

Since the last issue…

Compared to running the temple's brahmotsavam festival of Sharada Navarathri, Aiya had a relatively slow November. He performed a marriage ceremony at the temple during the first weekend of November and then headed to Pickering, Ontario the next day to conduct a Rudra homam at the local Hindu temple.

In mid-November Aiya went to Mississauga, Ontario to speak to 120 Islamic students at one of the city's largest mosques. The students were all women and they were joined by about 600 others over the Internet for Aiya's lecture on Hinduism. On the 18th, the temple was graced with a concert by famous singer O.S. Arun. Toward the end of the month, the temple musicians got together and held a special bhajan session in honour of Sri Satya Sai Baba's birthday.

Aiya spent most of December in India, where he visited several holy kshetrams including Thiruvannamalai, Kanchipuram, Nemili, Chidambaram and Devipuram. He returned on the 20th to prepare for what turned out to be two well-attended workshops: Mantra's Effects on the Body, conducted by Aiya on the 24th, and a session on the Lalita Sahasranamam conducted by Parashuramananda natha (or Sri Kumar) on the 25th. The last major event of the year was the kids' Raja Matangi homam on the 31st, which was attended by about 60 children—all of whom received the mantra that day.

The latter three events all happened during Thiruvempavai, which concluded with a very serene Ardhra Darshanam on Jan. 3, 2007. Pongal in mid-January saw Balananda (or Shankar) perform the Sankaranthi puja, which included the traditional boiling-over of milk from the pongal kalasam and a Suryanarayana puja. Aiya was in California at that time, and then traveled to India for a few days at the end of the month for the kumbhabhishekam festival in Devipuram

Past Month Events

Karthikai Deepam, Dec. 4

by Abhi Somaskanda

This year's Deepa puja saw the temple aglow in the night, once again. Clay deepams surrounded the inner sanctum and lined the windows in the yajna shala. In front of the homa kundam, the temple's large hand-made lingam sat atop a few wooden bases that were stacked like steps. Each layer's four sides were adorned with clay deepams until they reached the lingam, decorated with lights as well.

Once all the deepams were lit by the devotees, Dr. Viswanathan led the ceremonies with a Navavarna homam, as Aiya was in India. The puja began at 6pm and ended at 9pm, with prasadam for everyone afterwards.

Mantra's Effect on the Body (workshop), Dec 24

by Abhi Somaskanda

Following last year's lead, the temple hosted another workshop on Christmas weekend, Sunday December 24th, from 9:30am to 4pm.

Aiya spoke to more than 100 people in the packed yajna shala, about the biological, metaphysical, and physiological effects of mantras on the human body. Surrounded by dozens of charts, drawings, and hand-drawn sketches hung around the yajna shala, Aiya explained the impact of chanting mantras, and one's sadhana, on the brain, heart, and even on the microscopic cells within the body. He also detailed the proper way to chant the primordial sound "AUM," holding out *A*kara and *U*kara for nine counts, and *M*akara for 18 counts.

Each devotee left with a CD of all the slides used during the workshop.

Raja Matangi Homam, Dec. 31

by Abhi Somaskanda

Rounding up a busy last month of the year at the temple, the children organized another homam, this time in praise of Raja Matangi. This is the third year that the kids have planned and excecuted an elaborate homam, complete with garlands, purnahutis, saris, palaharams, and much more.

The homam allowed children between the ages of 6 and 16 to actively participate. The day prior to the homam, several of the kids and some adults received the Raja Matangi mantra from Aiya so that they could chant it during the

One child offered the purnahuthi into the fire after each Sri Suktam.

The final purnahuthi after the sixth Sri Suktam

homam.

The homam was broken up into 6 recitations of the Sri Suktam, each line separated with the Raja Matangi mantra. There were 6 groups of children who rotated sitting around the homa kundam, a different group after each Sri Suktam. At the end of one, a child offered the purnahuti, packed with a sari, a thali, a garland, and several other items for the goddess.

Along with the homa dravyam, children were given some of the nine different palaharams made. The nine palaharams were made in groups of 108 each, and what was not offered as bakshanam, was served to the people and taken home by the kids.

From the cleaning and preparation, to the chanting and offering, the children took charge from top to bottom in yet another magnificent homam.

Everyone in the yajna shala linked up during each ahuthi offering.

Thiruvempavai, Dec.25-Jan. 3

by Abhi Somaskanda

Coming off the heels of the workshop, Thiruvempavai began on Christmas morning this year. As all the devotees gathered in the temple at 5 a.m., Aiya began singing the Thirupalliyelichi and Thiruvempavai songs. The Thirupalliyelichi is recited to wake up the gods first, and the Thiruvempavai songs are in praise of Lord Shiva.

The ritual lasted until 6:30 a.m. every morning. Each devotee was given the chance to do abhishekam and pancha upachara puja to a small Nataraja and Shivakami following each verse of the Thiruvempavai.

After the puja each morning, Aiya told stories of different saints in the towns between Chidambaram and Annamalai, where these songs were sung many years ago and are still sung today.

The final day, Ardhra Dharshanam, saw the big Nataraja and Shivakami brought in front on the dvaja stambam, and placed in a large tub for abhishekam. Everyone was allowed to do abhishekam and groups of people at a time performed puja.

Nataraja and Shivakami adorned with finery after abhishekam

After alankaram of Nataraja and Shivakami with elaborate jewelry and rudrakshas, Mannikavasagar (who expounded the Shivapuranam), and the Thirumurai books were taken in procession around the temple.

Following a few songs from the Thiruvachagam, Aiya and the devotees retired to the yajna shala for maha prasadam and one last story.

Aiya poured a tray full of vibhuthi on Nataraja and Shivakami

Shankaranthi (Thai Pongal), Jan. 14

by Abhi Somaskanda

Balananda (Shankar) beginning Suryanarayana puja

Thai Pongal was held on a Sunday morning this year, with the exact time of pongal at 10:17 a.m. A large brass kalasam was place on top of a kolam in front of the large artistic Sri Chakra that greets devotees as they walk in the temple.

With Aiya out of town, Balananda (Shankar) commenced Suryanarayana puja as the pot was placed on the burner. Everyone offered a handful of rice grains into the pot once the milk in the pot spilled over, auspiciously to the Northeast first.

This festival of the South India and Sri Lanka is in celebration of and praise to Lord Surya to bless the land with good grain and abundance.

Kalasam milk spilling over

Upcoming Events

Maha Shivarathri, Feb. 15

by Kamya Ramaswamy

This year's Shivarathri falls on a Thursday night, and will see the usual chanting of 11 Rudrams. However, guests will enter the temple that evening to behold an elaborate arrangement of 1008 valampuri (right-handed) shankams, placed in an intricate formation stretching from the inner sanctum out to the yajnashala. As usual, guests will be given bilva leaves with which to place on the various Shivalingams around the temple during worship. The night will begin around 8 p.m. and conclude at about 7 a.m. the next morning.

Tamil New Year's, April 14

by Kamya Ramaswamy

The traditional dhani puja (worship to rice, grains and other forms of wealth) that is performed for new year's will be incorporated with the Saturday puja. There is also a possibility that the temple will hold another large Pratyangira homam at the homa kundam located in the field beyond Kashi. Please check the temple website for regular updates.

Chitra Poornima, May 1

by Kamya Ramaswamy

This is 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. Devotees may register with the temple if they wish to sponsor and take part in that day's puja, which will be led by Aiya.

Please keep checking the temple website www.srividya.org for more pictures of festivals!

left: Devotees putting rice into pongal kalasam
below: Final camphor aarathi to the pongal kalasam

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 May 2007.

The historic first kumbhabhishekam of Devipuram is happening during the first week of February, and the Rochester temple is lucky enough to have several of its own in attendance. As this event will only take place once in 12 years, the next issue will be all about the Devipuram kumbhabhishekam. The *Sri Chakra* is looking for devotees to help out this issue by contributing stories, pictures, poems, experiences or anything at all by April 16th. Please e-mail us at sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org with your submissions.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

***The editorial will return. Meanwhile, the Sri Chakra would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to Aiya, Kathy Allen, Gratuz Devanesan, Dr. Ravikumar K., Pathmanathan uncle and Parameswari auntie, Frances (Nicky) Perera, Dr. A. Somaskanda, Dr. Devi Padmanaban, and the devotee(s) in temple lore for their insightful contributions to this issue.

MUSIC REVIEW

By Dr. A. Somaskanda

O.S. Arun Concert at the Temple, November 18

Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam of Rush New York ended its phenomenal year of musical programs with a much awaited concert by the wildly popular icon of carnatic music, Sri O.S. Arun, on November 18, 2006.

Since his burst onto the classical music scene, Sri Arun has had a cultish and almost fanatical following both in India and abroad. Scion of a storied musical lineage, this Gandharva prince holds such magical sway over his fans as would befit a peerless magician with almost mystical powers. Gifted with a ringing, sonorous voice, laced with an array of mellifluous overtones, he wields absolute control over its lightning passages across the swara scale and its deft negotiations of the swara maze.

He has carved out a niche for himself in the carnatic music world by his unique style of singing. It is this style, well grounded in the stringent grammar of the carnatic idiom but redolently embellished with flourishes from the Hindustani idiom, that sets him apart from his peers. Thus his renditions of traditional compositions assume an elegance and vigor rarely matched in the contemporary music arena. He holds a masters degree in carnatic music and Sangeet Shiromani Diploma. He has won accolades and awards too numerous to mention. Sri Arun is a prolific composer and an innovator par excellence, and has collaborated with many jazz musicians in the West in joint musical ventures. He has also composed music for classical dances of India.

OS Arun receiving shawl from Aiya

His concert format stands out in marked contrast to the traditional cutcheris in the sense that he freely mixes the classical sahityas with bhajans inTamil, Hindi, and other major Indian languages. This perhaps is a deliberate affirmation of his deeply held conviction that the apparent dichotomy of classical music into true classical and light classical is illusory and contrived. This stance has often raised the hackles in some quarters of musical orthodoxy.

The Concert

He started his concert with a delightful bhajan on Lord Ganapathi, "Prabho Ganapathe," composed by Agastayar and set in raga Tilang. This is a famous bhajan popularized by Swami Haridas in the 80's. Tilang is an audava (pentatonic) raga that originated from Hindustani music, but has been a favorite raga among all the major carnatic composers. As if to underscore his theme that bhajans are no less classical, he ended this bhajan with pleasing raga phrases and swara passages that served to delineate and expound the integrity of this raga's melodic structure.

His rendition of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer's "Pahimam Rajarajeswari" in raga Janaranjini, was evocative and flowed with a languid grace that spoke to the presiding deity of the temple, and warmed the rasikas hearts.

His essay of Saint Thyagaraja's famous kriti, "Nagumomu," in raga Abheri, was brilliant in its execution. His elaborate alapana, exploring the upper reaches of chatursruti Dha and Kaishiki Ni, caressing its melodic permutations, was stirring in its

articulation. His sound grammar, imagination, and power were amply evident in his effortless Janta and Dattu Varisa prayogas.

He mesmerized the audience with three hauntingly beautiful numbers, all set in pleasing audava ragas. "Aanika Doosara" by Sant Tukaram was set in Misra Sivaranjini, an alluring offshoot of the hugely popular raga Shivaranjini, a member of the so-called Sa Ri Ga Pa Dha Sa family. Ashtapadi "Charuseele" by Jayadeva, was rendered with deeply moving bhava, recalling Krishna's heart-rending, remorseful pleas to his beloved Radha, begging her forgiveness and imploring her to place her cooling feet on his head. This piece was set in raga Vaasanthi, again a member of the Sa Ri Ga Pa Dha Sa family (Mohanam is another popular member of this group). Sant Surdas's "Madhukaru Shyamu Hamare Choru" was a soulful rhapsody on Krishna, set to a bewitching raga called Surya.

I think the high point of this concert was his exuberant rendition of Namdev's "Bhaktha Jana Vatsale." This melody, set to a lively rhythm, was in raga Megha Mallar, which is a pentatonic Hindustani raga (it omits Gandharam and Dhaivatam). It has no carnatic counterpart but is somewhat similar to raga Madhyamavathi. It is also a monsoon raga that, like the carnatic raga Amrithavarshini, is credited with the power to produce rain if executed properly. Sri Arun, as always, plunged into the bhajan with gusto. His whole persona was aglow in rapturous ecstasy, rhythmically swaying to the quickening tempo of the music. His complex and expansive hand gestures added a charming dimension to the music. He enjoined the audience to sing along with him at the concluding portion of the bhajan, while his sinuous voice unleashed a flurry of sangatis in a thousand rhythmic permutations and combinations. In blissful abandon, the audience obliged, singing and clapping in lock step with the tempo of the music.

Melakkaveri Thyagarajan was outstanding in his collaboration and sensitive interpretation of the music. His recaptures of the alapanas and swara prayogas with their countless nuances were electrifiying.

Manikandan on mridangam, and Kirankumar on tabla were brilliant. Their jugal bandhi in the concluding passages of "Nagumomu" and synchronization in the opening piece "Prabho Ganapathe," were particularly spellbinding, bringing to the fore their virtuosity.

The concert ended with a few requests such as "Anjaneyan," and a resounding ovation from the wildly cheering audience.

OS Arun lost in one of the many moving compositions

PART 1

AIYA THE PAIYA

"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 first half of that conversation.

Nicky and Aiya met again after more than 30 years

***SC*:** How was Aiya like back then? Now everyone sees him very much as a leader.

Nicky: Oh yeah! Oh, I felt like that 30 years ago too.

***Sri Chakra*:** What did you do together in school? Were you in the same classes or same activities?

N: I met him when I was just starting—I was in first year and he was in his final year. I was so surprised when he just came along and talked to me. It was out of the blue; this was before I joined the department (of Architecture at the university). I joined Colombo University to do science. And then Architecture opened up and they asked me to apply. When Aiya joined, it was not in the university. Before I even went for my exam he spoke to me and he said, "You're in!" and I thought, "Yeah, right, whatever." When I went for my exam I didn't do very well at all. But I asked another friend of mine to check the results and I was in!

Three of us freshmen girls, Haran, and another friend of his used to hang out together all the time and people couldn't understand why. Somehow the five of us got along so well, but somehow I got really close to him and he told me I was his sister in a past life and he'd been looking for me and finally found me.

***SC*:** Oh wow! How old was he then?

N: Probably 26.

***SC*:** And he was doing all that telling-the-past stuff then, too?

N: Before we met, yes! Oh yeah, he was well into it. And people were coming around asking (his advice) and to tell them what would happen to them, and so he would (help them). I used to go sit by him and I asked him to do the same for me, as well. And he said, "No, because your mother doesn't like this," because I'm Catholic. And he said to go ask her, but I didn't ask… I just came back the next day and said, "Yeah, she says it's fine!" And he said, "You didn't even ask!" And I thought, "Why are you like this?"

We had a telepathic connection; I only had to say, "Haran, I wish you were here," and he'd be there even though we were miles apart. It actually happened. The main campus was in one place and the Department of Architecture was about three or four miles away. And I went to the grounds for a basketball game and my sister told me she had lost her purse. So I thought, "Oh, I wish Haran was here," and I didn't think twice about it and we both got changed and went to the basketball court. So we were just starting practice and suddenly I said, "Oh, I have to go!" and my sister asked where. I said, "Haran's coming!" and ran to the entrance. He was there and he asked, "What did you want me for? You called me and that's why I'm here."

Nicky, Aiya, and Nicky's son, Nuwanka

I told him what happened, my sister lost her purse and she's worried about her library card and some other documents she had in it. He concentrated for a while and said, "Well, the purse is there outside the chemistry lab by the third window. It's on the ledge. She had some money in it and it's not there but everything else is there. So she ran to get it and it was exactly where he said. There was no money but the rest of it was all there. And he said, "Please don't do this again," because he was close to his exam and in the middle of his final drawings. If it didn't happen to me, I wouldn't even believe it.

Also, he told me once that he'll appear to me in my dream. I said, "Oh yeah, I have nothing else better to do than dream about you!" But that night he appeared and he was in a cream-coloured veshti and he was standing there and waving at me. And to this day I still remember this dream.

About six months ago I dreamt of him again, and he was much younger like during our school days. When I met him this time he said I had asked him to meet me again, and that's why he came again in a dream. I knew from that time that I would definitely see him. Before that I thought I might see him, but then I Googled him. I did it about five years ago, but then this 'priest' and 'temple' words started coming up and I thought, "Yeah, right, Haran in a temple? It can't be."

***SC*:** Why did that seem like that was so impossible?

N: It wasn't impossible, but come to think of it, it crossed my mind that it could be but maybe I didn't need him too much at that time so I didn't even look. But this time I was very determined and I thought whatever Wijayaharan comes up, I'm looking. This time I put in 'architect' and it said 'Lusaka' so I took a look. And his picture came up and I thought I was going to cry, I was so happy. I just couldn't believe it. From that time, I was waiting to see him.

…look for part 2 of Aiya the Paiya in the next *Sri Chakra!*

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 second in four parts of that interview.

Again, when my third eye was open, distance was not quite the same thing. Things would appear closer or further… one time the flame from the deepam was touching the ceiling and Lakshmi was standing the whole way up.

In one of my previous births, I had been a kshatriya in the early 1950s from what I feel, I was alone, I think my family was dead or they had abandoned me. I was a vagabond and I was walking around feeling a lot of self-pity and I came to this one village and there was this one swami who was sitting there and there was a line of people who were there busy getting blessings from him.

At the time I remember I thought this guy was a joker—he was smiling the whole time, he was rather rotund (had quite a tummy), he was a short-ish person and he was wearing sannyasi robes. He was sitting there and laughing the whole time and I thought this was a fool. But I joined the line because that's how tradition goes when he came, he touched me on my forehead and I went off.

I don't remember feeling anything at the time, but the next day I immediately decided to go to the Himalayas and search for my guru. I went off to the Himalayas and donned the sannyasi robes because as you know with kshatriya tradition the last stage of life is to be a sannyasi so I decided to take that.

And during times like when I'm saying Sahasranamam nowadays, I can remember times like when I first saw the Himalayas, walking through a forest and just seeing it up there. Other images happen when, like when I'd have a really cold shower now, I'd have an image of me standing or praying in the mountain stream. I could even see myself with my long beard and such. I can even remember living in a cave at the time.

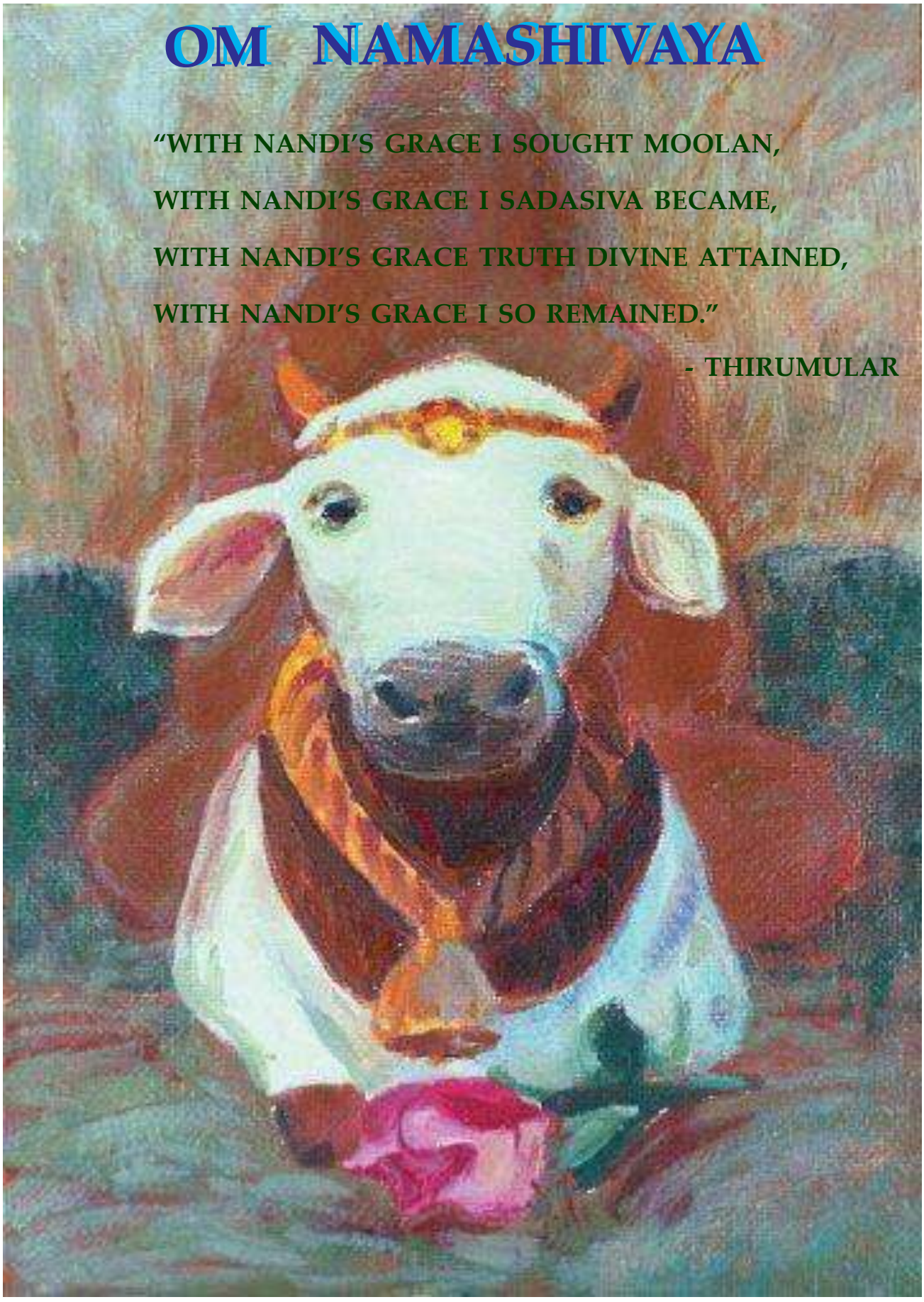
From what Aiya tells me, at the end… I lived three years as a sannyasi and then I died. And Aiya says right at the end when I died the guru I'd been searching for the whole time had actually been the guy who I thought was the fool, who'd touched me. And that had been Rajarajeshwarananda (the guru of Kalyanananda Tirtha, and parama guru of Guru Garu, in our lineage).

What Aiya says is the when Rajarajeshwarananda had given me my shakti phat, what he had done was that he'd given me the Bala mantra—the whole of Bala, the amount of the Bala mantra that I had to say throughout my whole life—he gave that in one go. And so because you have to have a Shiva-Shakti balance and my Shakti was so far out of balance… I had this very strong tendency and feeling of going to the Himalayas for Shiva.

So I went there and I hung around, as Aiya would say with these orange-robe jokers and I learnt Rudram and started chanting it and all of these Shiva mantras and I went to Kailas and climbed up to it. Hence even now I feel this very strong yearning to go to Kailas and I get feelings of climbing up to the top and holding it and saying Rudram continuously.

That's why when I got initiated this time, Aiya put me straight to Panchadasi because I'd finished Bala.

…to be continued next issue



OM NAMASHIVAYA

"WITH NANDI'S GRACE I SOUGHT MOOLAN,
WITH NANDI'S GRACE I SADASIVA BECAME,
WITH NANDI'S GRACE TRUTH DIVINE ATTAINED,
WITH NANDI'S GRACE I SO REMAINED."

- THIRUMULAR

63 NAYANMARS

Kootruvar

by Gratuz Devanesan

February 2007

Kootruvar was not your average saint. He did not walk around barefoot (he might have I don't know for sure that he didn't) in a dhoti, spreading the word of the lord and performing miracles here and there– bringing people to life, making them get stung by cobras etc.–that sort of thing, was not his thing. He was a chieftain who conquered swathes of land in southern India, cutting into the Chola kingdom. (As such, he must have killed quiet a few people, but probably didn't bring any of them back to life…).

On the other hand for a chieftain with a group of followers to defeat Cholas on their own soil, at a time when Cholas dominated southern India, required, for lack of a better word, a miracle on its own.

Kootruvar kept defeating his adversaries and made it as far into the Chola kingdom as Thillai. There he desired that the 3000 priests of Thillai should crown him king. However, the priests, being politically affiliated to the Chola king and fearing reprisals, refused saying that they would only perform that rite to those stemming from the Chola lineage.

After all, the Chola kingdom had been in place for centuries, and this guy with his hairy bunch of followers, would probably not last too long. As priests who have little faith in god often do, it is best to side with the one who has the dough and the muscle to provide the dough for the longest time– back then it was the Chola kings, not Kootruvar.

Despondent, he left Thillai and went to Kerala, which was part of the Chera kingdom.

Kootruvar was not a politically vain chieftain. He was aware that all the glory and bounty he had won came as the lord's prasadam. Kootruvar was a devout Shiva bhakta who chanted the pancaksharam continuously, especially on the battlefield. In turn he used his bounty to make life more pleasant to Shiva bhaktas, by providing them with necessities and land. When he wished to be crowned in Thillai, not just some city, but Thillai, he had other motives than vain glory.

The priests were not aware of that, but the Lord who dwelled in his heart was fully aware. He appeared in a dream to the despondent Kootruvar, and placed his glorious feet as a crown on Kootruvar's head. This is what Kootruvar wanted when he had tried to convince the priest's to crown him. He was now certain that he had conquered the one thing that mattered–a place under Shiva's feet.

SAPTHA TANDAVA NATYAM

By Dr. Devi Padmanaban

Saptha Tandava Natyam during Sahasrajyothi Linga Archana

One's mind is relegated to Lord Shiva at the utterance of the word 'dance,' be it in India or elsewhere. Lord Shiva is the Lord of Dance, also popularly called Nataraja in Tamil. He stands there in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram in the most striking and regal pose, subjecting the observer to question beyond the mundane attributes of one's own existence.

The distinct elements of the Tandava Nritya are derivations from the distinct mudras and objects depicted in this symbolic and sacred pose. On Nov 16, 2006 I performed the Saptha Tandavam of Lord Shiva at the Sahasra Jyothi Linga Archana in New Jersey, an auspicious and elaborate puja performed by Mr. Kompella Subbarao, the new peetadhipathi of Devipuram, India. 'Saptha' means seven and 'tandavam' literally means leap or jump.

This is more a masculine, vigorous style of Bharatanatyam, which demands intense energy and grueling practice. I was delighted and thrilled to perform at this event, especially because I strongly believe that Bharatanatyam should be performed between and during rituals, for its innate essence is spiritually ordained.

It was a challenge for me to perform all seven as a solo and even more to perform the duality role of Shiva and Parvathi. As usual, I choreographed my entire dance repertoire but often would break down emotionally during my practice sessions. Insane love for the great Lord overpowered me to noncontainment. That is when I decided that I needed my Guru Aiya's guidance. And there I got it.

Dr. Devi Padmanaban

Before I delve into the aspects of the seven tandavams of Lord Shiva, I would like to give you a snapshot of Sahasra Jyothi Linga Archana. One-thousand and sixteen agal villaku (clay lamps) were placed in the form of Shivalinga in 16 avaranas. Each avarana was constructed with a specific number of lamps that symbolically represented the manifest and unmanifest essentials of the universe.

Amidst the auspicious lighting of the lamps there was powerful Rudra parayanam, bhajans, vedic chanting, and Shiva tandava nritya.

The Shiva tandavam as I mentioned earlier has vigorous movements that are deliberate and forceful, competing to create geometrical alignment within the natural flow of energy that operates at the two levels of existence—macrocosm and microcosm.

Moreover, it is imperative to state that the core of this dance reflects the five important actions: shristi (creation), sthithi (maintenance), samhara (destruction), tirobhava (illusion), and anugraha (grace or emancipation). The dynamic principal within the dance movements is meant to achieve the perfect alignment of all—the dancer, audience and the source.

The tandavam is encompassed with 108 karanas, and 32 anghaharas which are the primary composites of this beautiful nritya. You need to be trained from a young age to master the 108 karanas, when the flexibility of the muscular joint ligaments is still at your disposal.

The Saptha Tandavam include Ananda tandavam, Sandhya tandavam, Kaliga tandavam, Tripura tandavam, Oordhva tandavam, Umamaheshwara tandavam, and each of these will be discussed later in this article.

Dr. Devi Padmanaban in a few of Shiva's Tandavas

Getting into the dance aspect of the tandavam, I would like to mention that the jathis for the footwork and leaping movements for the respective tandavams were comprised of distinct syllables. These syllables are inherent in the particular kriya that governs the laws of the universe. The sahityam which is the story-telling piece of the dance recital had stories of the great Saivite saints Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar, and Manikkavasagar.

Ananda tandavam (dance of bliss) as legend goes, talks of Lord Shiva performing this dance for his consort Shivakamasundari, Vyaghrapada and other rishis in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram (cosmic hall of consciousness). The kriya here is creation and the footwork and movements are evenly tempered.

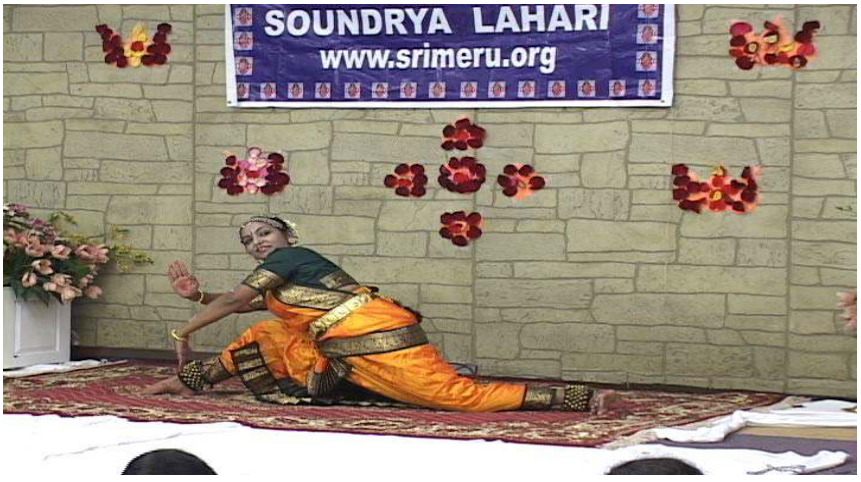
In the Sandhya tandavam, Lord Shiva performed the dance during the hours of twilight witnessed by everyone in Shivalokam. In the Kaliga tandavam, I performed the dual role of Shiva and Kali creating an ambience of mild agitation, executing heavy rhythmic footwork in an alternate order. The play of Shiva conquering the Tripura demon was portrayed in the Tripura tandavam where the created mood was a dominant, jubilant victory.

In the Oordhava tandavam, I had to bring alive the fierce, robust and competitive nritya in dualistic role as Shiva and Parvati. Here, I strived to execute the jathi sequences in alternate order, set in an escalating mode. In the Umamaheshwara tandava nritya, the prevailing mood was equanimity where the dualism of Shiva and Parvati was distinct in the realm of unity. Also, the jathis were scaled toward this mood.

The last of my tandava sequence was the Samhara tandavam, which spells dissolution at all levels. During the puja, I performed this when all but one lamp was lit. The electric lights were turned off and the feeling at that time was reflected in the light of the lamps (representing the soul) amidst the darkness.

I really enjoyed this piece. It is said that Samhara tandava is only witnessed by Her, as two of her names from the Lalitha Sahasranamam are Mahapralayasakshini and Mahatandavasakshini.

Every dancer should strive to create an awareness of on ongoing experience that unfolds when performing. This great spiritual art is studied for its own sake, and is destined as its sole purpose. Moreover, it lends itself to a great and intense puja, not only for the audience but also for the dancer and the source—because we are all connected.



DR. RAVIKUMAR K.'S

on the way to vyasa Guga – where Mahabharata was dictated by Deva Vyasa and written by Ganesha – it is 5111 years old

Yamunotri

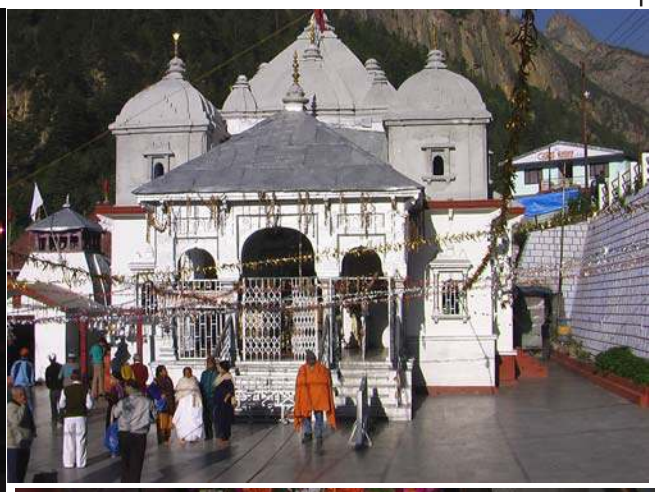
Rishikesh - on the banks of the Ganga with the Himalayas in the background (near Dayananda ashram)

Saraswathi river- the only visible part of it. The rest only runs underground.

Saraswathi temple

Hari-ki-pairi, in Haridwar (entrace to Himalayas) -- people come to this spot for Ganga arthi at 7 p.m. daily

Gangotri temple from front



Uttara Kashi - where the Ganga turns from north to south

Uttara Kashi - people are allowed to touch the murthi

Dr. Ravikumar K. at Bhadrinath temple

This is part one of a two-part photo spread. In the next issue we will have more of Dr. Ravikumar K.'s trip to the Himalayas

TOUR OF THE HIMALAYAS

Sri Gurubhyo Namah

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