Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

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September 2014

September Newsletter

Since the last issue...

After returning to the States from Pujyashri Mathioli Saraswathy's (Sri Amma's) vilakku puja in Ottawa June 1st, Aiya crossed the border again for functions in Toronto. Sri Amma was also present at the Ganga puja in Toronto June 7th and the Satyanarayana puja June 8th.

Aiya stayed in Toronto to perform a wedding June 10th. A week later, he flew to Texas to perform a prana pratishta (installing life) ceremony for a temple there, and was in Texas from June 17th to the 27th.

He was back in Canada on the 28th and 29th, as he had to perform two weddings in Toronto on each of those days, but then returned to Rochester for the temple's Alankara/Pratishta festival (known familiarly as July festival) from July 4-7th. Sri Amma was also present for the festivities.

Aiya went back to Toronto to do another wedding on July 9th, but returned to Rochester for Guru Poornima on July 11th.

The Hindu Heritage camp of Rochester visited the temple July 15th, and Aiya was on hand to educate the kids. He was the guest of honour for a dance performance in Toronto July 19th, but then was back in Rochester to host the 2nd half of Hindu Heritage's kids on July 29th.

Aadi Puram was July 30th, as was the beginning of the temple's Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion, which lasted until August 2nd. Soon after on Aug. 4th, Aiya performed Natarajan uncle's (the temple president's) Bheema ratha shanthi (70th birthday puja) on Aug. 4th.

Aiya presided over the temple's Varalakshmi puja Aug. 8th, and performed yet another wedding in Toronto Aug. 9th. He did a grihapravesham in Buffalo Aug. 16th and then left for a weeks-long trip to Australia Aug. 23rd.

Watch this space for details about Guruji's 80th birthday celebrations (Sadaabhishekam).

Past Events

All event articles by Abhi Somaskanda

Gurupoornima, July 11

This year, devotees took advantage of the beautiful sun, and organized the annual Gurupoornima festival outdoors. A festive mandapam was built and decorated for Aiya and Amma next to the outside Bhairava. Everyone gathered around, chanting along with the puja, and offering their prayers. Following the puja, the temple children capped off the blessed evening with a variety of musical performances.

Aiya and Amma pay obeisance to their gurus upon their arrival

Aadi Amavasya, July 26

Every year, devotees gather on Aadi Amavasya to commemorate their paternal ancestors. Each devotee is given a *pindam*, mixed with bananas, rice flour, jaggery, black sesame, and ghee, as well as a tray for offering fruits, flowers and naivedyam during the puja.

Aiya performed Shiva puja, and everyone performed abhishekham to the Kashi lingam while chanting the Shivapuranam.

Kashi Shiva received abhishekam from everyone present

Aadi Puram & Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion, July 30 - Aug. 2

Every child had a part to play in the youth chariot festival

For the last few years, Devi's coming of age has been celebrated in grand fashion with a Chandi homam, followed by abhishekam with kush grass, and several *palaharam* offerings to the temple's Vishnu Durga after she is adorned with a pavadai, and elaborate jewels. This year proved even more exhilarating, as the festival fell on registration day of the annual Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion camp.

Excited children filed into the temple for this year's camp. Even though the camp was shortened to just three days this year, it proved to be just as fun-filled, and jam-packed with activities for the children. The main focus for this year was the second annual chariot festival, completely planned and executed by the camp counselors. On the third day of camp, the children all gathered around a chariot, chanting "Arohara!," and successfully pulled the chariot around the temple's perimeter.

Varalakshmi Vratham, Aug. 8

One of the most auspicious days to worship Goddess Lakshmi falls in the Tamil month of Aadi. Every year, volunteers adorn a lamp with a sari, jewels, and flowers, dressing the lamp as they would a murthi. Dozens of sumangalis surrounded the lamp, offering shodasa upachara to their own lamps and silver Lakshmi faces. Each participant received a sacred Varalakshmi thread to tie around her wrist as well.

Sponsors performed their own vilakku pujas while the Devi received the main puja on Varalakshmi vratham night

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Aug. 29

Ganapathi wore his fanciest duds on Chaturthi, as he received an elaborate puja throughout the day

Ganapathi's birthday began with tarpanam, abhishekam, and kalasa puja. Devotees lined up next to the homa kunda to offer a handful of the 1000 modakams, as the Vancha Kalpa Maha Ganapathi mantra was chanted.

Once the morning festivities came to an end, the Utsava Ganapathi murthi was ornately dressed and lovingly surrounded by flower garlands. The evening procession around the temple was filled with united cries of "Ganapathi Bappa Moriya!," as devotees carrying Ganapathi thoroughly enjoyed themselves, dancing and singing His praises.

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Upcoming Events

Event	Date/time	Location
Sharada Navarathri	Sept. 24 - Oct. 2	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, indoors
Vijayadasami	Oct. 3	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, outdoors
Kedara-Gowri vratham	Oct. 3 - Oct. 23	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnashala
Skanda Shashti	Oct. 24 - Oct. 28	Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full property

In Three Months

Devi willing, the next issue of the Sri Chakra will be up on the temple's website at the beginning of December 2014.

This magazine cannot keep publishing without contributions! Articles, poems, stories and photos about any spiritual topic are welcomed.

The next deadline for article submission is November 10, 2014. Please e-mail us with your contributions or feedback about this issue at sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org or talk to Kamya or Abhi at the temple.

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

Our special thanks and gratitude to this issue's volunteers: Aiya, Vilas Ankolekar, Smt. Geeta and Sri Ramesh Kutticad, Laven Sivarajah, Abhi Somaskanda, Vimalan Sothinathan, and Michael Steinberg.

****Guruji's story*, Chidagni, *will return*

Alankara 2014

Day 1—Fri. July 4

The first morning saw a grand Vancha-Kalpa Ganapathi homam, with 1008 modakams going into the fire. Everyone was invited to put the modakams in with their own hands.

Sri Amma (Pujyashri Mathioli Saraswathy) makes a sole offering into the fire of the Vancha-Kalpa Ganapathi homam.

Sri Amma leads the way in her modern vahanam as Ganapathi's chariot follows.

The utsava Ganapathi makes his way around the temple in procession Friday night.

Day 2—Sat. July 5

The Devi proudly wears her silver kavacham upon conclusion of the afternoon alankaram.

Devi's utsava murthi wears her anna pavadai after alankaram. All guests present received a piece of her "dress" as prasadam that day.

Visitors and volunteers alike filled the temple parking lot Saturday night during the chapparam procession.

Day 3—Sun. July 6

Left: Volunteers worked tirelessly through the previous night to arrange these shankams in the formation of the Sudarshana chakra.

Above: During the puja that evening, Sri Amma blesses the kids taking part in the Lord Dattatreya procession.

Left: Aiya shares a laugh with the children dancing before Lord Dattatreya's chariot on Sunday evening.

Day 4—Mon. July 7

Right: Volunteers efficiently arrange the offerings that have been carefully prepared for that day's Bhairava Madai.

Above: The temple "ammas" had been cooking since early that morning for the madai. Here, they transported the food down to the Bhairava tree themselves.

Right: After the madai is completed, Aiya introduces Sri Amma to address the crowd on this last afternoon of the festival.

Ekambareshwara

part 1

by Michael Steinberg

In the last two issues of the Sri Chakra*, Michael Steinberg wrote about his experiences travelling to different holy grounds in South India, including the ancient Kailasanathar temple. This series continues with part 1 of 2 about his experiences at the Ekambareshwara temple in Kanchipuram.*

I went to bed feeling as if a door had been opened. Maybe two doors, because I had not just been allowed into the temple. Something had opened within me, too. In my fright and fret I had let myself be carried through the *pradakshanam* instead of walking through it as a self-sufficient being who noted his observations and reactions as he walked. I had given something up, let myself be helpless, and in that moment my world had grown a little bigger.

That afternoon and evening I felt I was living not by myself but as a part of something else—not the puppet of some transcendent god, which I didn't believe in even as I chanted, but a living part of some nameless activity that accepted my voice and returned it to me, blending it with many other voices. I could call it Lord Shiva, give it some other name, or refuse to name it at all.

I could conclude that I had glimpsed a deeper form of experience, the unspoken bodily knowledge that I'm convinced is the underpinning and source of our everyday thoughts and insights. I could mark it down to some combination of personal history and ancient stagecraft, but at heart I felt that I had reached something far more real than the solid and sensible world in which I passed my life the rest of the time.

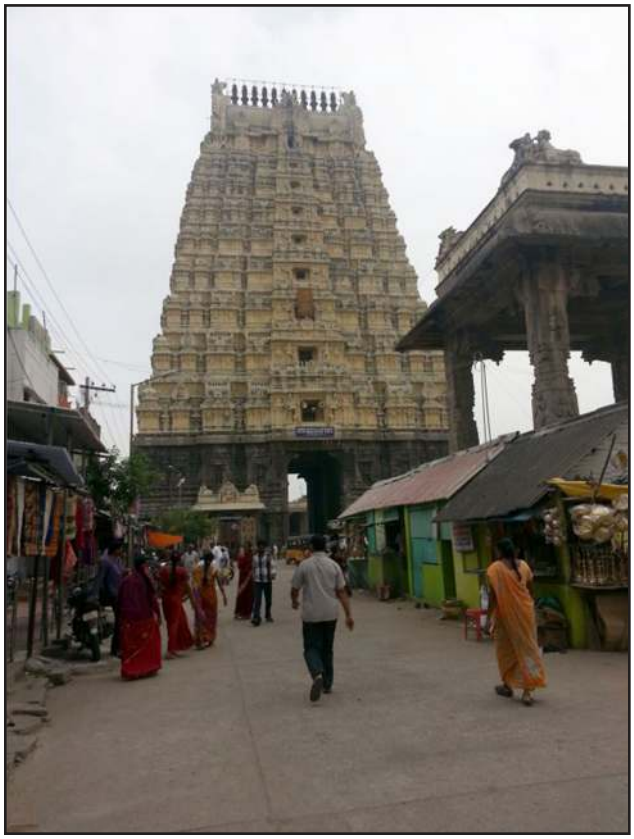
The names and explanations really weren't important. I wanted to avoid them, in fact, because they got in the way of simply living. When you focus on *nama rupa*, "name and form," you stand apart from experience itself. You have some nice interesting ideas to think about, and whenever you think about something you keep it at a distance. You stay comfortably locked up inside your head, and that's just the prison I came to India to escape.

I wanted life to unfold within and around me and I wanted to stop telling it what it should look and feel like. For an afternoon and evening I felt comfortable letting it do just that.

But these moments always fade, and nothing kills them faster than fear. This was only the first day of my pilgrimage and I couldn't help worrying that the door might close again. So many times I have found myself, like everyone else, suddenly falling to earth when I had really convinced myself I could fly. As I planned my visit to Ekambareshwara the next morning I was back to my old self.

I did have some real reasons to worry. I had been to that temple with a group two years before and remembered very well the big blue sign that notified foreigners that they were not to enter the sanctuary. Back then Aiya and other temple members had worked hard to get all of us, European as well as Indian, into sacred ground. This time I didn't have that help.

A foreigner I obviously



One of the entrances to the legendary Ekambareshwara temple in Kanchipuram. Visitors say it is impossible to see the whole temple within a single day.

was, but it seemed to my foreigner's eye that, face and skin color aside, I looked as Hindu-looking as anyone else. I wore a *dhoti*, of course, put on my three strands of rudraksha beads (the wrinkled reddish seeds that are sacred to Shiva), added the crystal mala that I had bought the day before at Kamakshi Amman's temple, applied lots of vibhuti ash and red kumkumam to my forehead, and instead of a shirt I tossed a shawl over my left shoulder. (In South India, at least, proper temple dress for men is to go shirtless, though very few people go that far.)

As always, a few minutes of walking lifted my spirits. It was too early for most of the shops to open and the streets were full of children in their school uniforms, the older ones on bicycles and the younger ones being walked to school by parents and grandparents, crowded into auto rickshaws, or hanging on to motor scooters. This time I knew where I was going, and Ekambareshwara is hard to miss.

It's the largest temple in Kanchipuram, its walls surrounding an area of forty acres, and its main *gopuram* is nearly 200 feet high. In front of the south gopuram is a small marketplace, a rare clearing in the dense fabric of buildings, with a high, open-sided, pillared, flat-roofed stone mandapam in the center. Built to shelter the vendors, today it was mostly being used for parking.

Emperor Krishnadevaraya was a great king during the Vijayanagara period (1300-1650), and ruled over a vast empire.

For 50 rupees (about 80 cents) I bought some flowers and a coconut for a puja and walked through the gopuram into the outer courtyard. It was all but abandoned. There was patchy grass, a forlorn-looking snack stand, and signs for free shoe checking that pointed to what looked like closed or non-existent offices. Part of the courtyard was being used as a parking lot, which made me wonder why I had left my shoes so far outside.

I had remembered the emptiness of the outer courtyard from before and knew that things became more lively once I passed through the next set of walls. I was still cautious; like a good lawyer I headed straight to the temple office to see if I would be permitted darshan. Of course I was, the official said. Apparently my being a foreigner was a detail of no importance whatsoever. So I headed directly through the overwhelmingly grand passages to the sanctuary.

The temple's outer courtyard, outside one of the gopurams

Ekambareshwara started as a *Pallava* temple like Kailasanathar, but it was torn down and rebuilt in the 10th or 11th century by the Chola kings and remodeled and expanded in the 15th and 16th centuries under the Vijayanagara Empire.

The last major Hindu rulers of South India, the *Vijayanagara* rulers, were enthusiastic patrons of Hinduism at a time when it was under siege by Islam, and their temples seem to advertise the strength and vitality of their tradition. Where Kailasanathar is intimate and ornate, Ekambareshwara is spacious and imposing, laid out as formally as one of the great Iberian convents or the palace of Versailles. It is all right angles and colonnades, vistas and hallways.

They're not the kinds of

One of the majestic hallways inside the Ekambareshwara temple

colonnades and hallways you would see in Europe, though. For one thing, there are no arches, no vaults, and no domes anywhere. Indian architects knew all about these, certainly after the Muslims started building their mosques and tombs if not before, but when it came to designing and building temples they made other choices.

Architecture books will tell you that Hindu temples were originally caves and that those origins shaped the building of temples ever afterwards. I'm not so sure. To me temples like Ekambareshwara resemble wooden temples, only they're made out of stone. Everything is post and beam. In each room or corridor dozens, a hundred, even a thousand pillars rise from platforms several feet high that flank the hallway floors.

These fat columns hold up immense stone beams that run parallel to the hallway, and massive, ornate corbels lean in from on top of the beams to support the flat stone ceiling, 20 or so feet up. Everything is gray to black stone and everything is covered with sculpture—framed images of gods and goddesses, dancers, musicians, auspicious snakes, mythical and real animals, and scenes from the endless riot of Indian myth and legend. The sculpture softens and humanizes the dark stone and so do the curves of the corbeled brackets—sometimes they swoop in an S-curve and a stone bulb like and onion points down at the end. There is plenty of room for crowds but there were no crowds when I got there. I was all by myself when I paid my special *darshan* fee, when I handed the priest my bag of puja items, and when he did my little puja, breaking the coconut after he offered the flowers and before he circled the light in front of the deity. I was alone in the anteroom with the priest and the object of our devotion.

In front of me was a strange, mis-shapen *lingam*, bottle-shaped with a top that was much narrower than its base, as if it had been squeezed or kneaded. This is one of the two objects that make Ekambareshwara different: the lingam of earth and, in the courtyard directly behind the sanctuary, the single mango tree from which it gets its name. And for both of these there is a story.

Several stories, actually, because like almost everything else in the Indian tradition they have multiple overlapping and often contradictory explanations. This drives people crazy if they're trying to pin down the one true reason for things, either for themselves or for the business of defining what it is that Hindus "believe."

It doesn't drive me crazy. As I've said, I'm not really interested in definitions. I'm interested in the way the world unfolds for me, and how that unfolding could be different, could be more illuminating, and could feel more like being at home. The stories help open up the space where that can happen. They suggest ways to live and hint at how things might be without letting me think that I actually know how they are. They're possibilities that never collapse into certainties, and it's exactly because they can't be literally true that they remain fruitful and provocative.

Watch for part two of this article in the next issue of the Sri Chakra.

The ancient mango tree inside the temple is between 2500 and 3500 years old, depending on the source

Q & Aiya

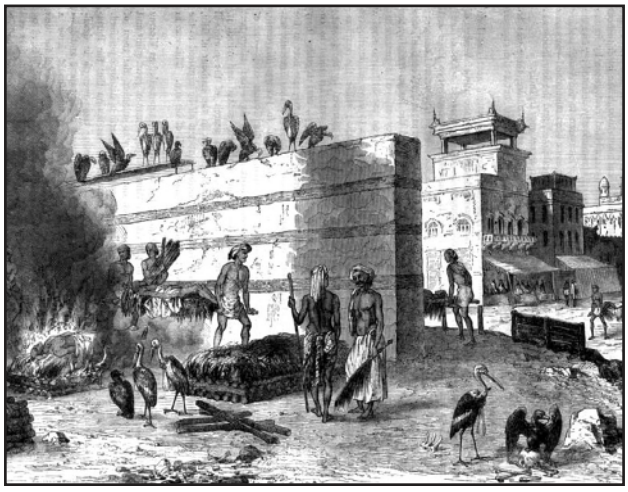
We all love hanging out with Aiya, drinking tea, and sometimes getting some guidance on how to travel down our own paths to the Devi. Here, he addresses questions he picked out of a hat during a workshop in Scarborough, Ontario.

Q: Should you not use steel for a kalasam unless it's during a funeral?

Aiya: If you look at the properties of steel according to the Periodic Table of Elements, it has depressive qualities. At a funeral, you are depressed anyway, so it is usually fine to use steel kalasams—it won't affect the energies in the room. But even then, it depends on how you conduct the funeral. If the priest is crying along with the people crying, he's useless. He has to be able to heal them and calm them.

For that, we usually use Shivapuranam in our Tamil funerals, and use certain ragas to evoke those emotions through the melody. It also depends on how the person died—was it accidental? A suicide? A slow natural death or a sudden natural death? Was the person doing mantra japam? Did they receive purna-diksha? Depending on the answers to these questions, the entire cremation ritual has to be modified. It's not a one-size-fits-all ceremony.

But for your question, an earthen pot is often used for a cremation ritual—they don't even use a steel pot. Clay with some iron content has been shown to kill bacteria. After finishing the cremation ritual, they take the clay pot around the body and then it is dropped and broken. That symbolizes that all the attachment you have to that person is cut from that point, so you can let them go and they can move on.



A typical Hindu funeral employs earthen pots and almost always uses cremation as the method of body disposal, not burial.

Q: Can we light a lamp made of earth, much like how we do during Deepavali?

Aiya: Ahal vilakku and mannu vilakku are the same—they're earthen or clay deepams. You can use those as long as there's no steel. Since they discovered stainless steel, every puja item is steel—people proudly display them in their homes during vratham times. Saneeshwara will happily enter your home because steel is associated with the planet Saturn.

Use a silver plate. Don't tell me

that if you can afford your cell phone and iPod and big screen TV, you can't afford this. A silver plate with a gold coin in the center is the ideal. If you go to orthodox Brahmins' houses in India, they will eat off plates just like that. If you absolutely can't have silver, ceramic is also okay.

Q: What is the effect of using navadhanyams as a base for a kalasam to sit on instead of rice?

Aiya: Navadhanyams are the 9 grains associated with each of the 9 planets. If you have ill effects from the positions of the planets, you would use the navadhanyams to

help neutralize those effects. Wheat is for the Sun; white rice is for the moon; toor dhal is for Mars; green moong dhal is for Mercury; chick peas are for Jupiter; kidney beans or soy beans are for Venus; black sesame seeds are for Saturn; urad dhal is for Rahu; oats are for Kethu.

Q: If you were to dilute turmeric in water every morning in a silver cup and do your japam before drinking it or bathing in it, will it have a similar effect of drinking kalasam water? If not, are there any benefits of doing so?

Aiya: How much turmeric are you going to drink? If it's a teaspoon, you'll be running to the bathroom every five minutes! A pinch is fine. Yes, it will have a benefit but how much japam are you going to do? If it's 9 Balatripurasundaris, 4 Ganapathis, 8 Gurupadukas, 32 Panchadasaksharis, the effect is minimal. If it's 108,000 Balatripurasundaris, yes, there's huge benefit! Every molecule in that water is changed and charged.

Q: Why do you use alcohol in kalasams during puja?

Aiya: You have misunderstood the process. I said earlier that in a mixture for something like viseshargyam during Navavarana puja, you would use a tablespoon of alcohol within 2 or 3 or 4 cups of other ingredients. If you're using a full bottle of wine, yes, that is a problem. You can use honey in place of alcohol inside a kalasam too. A full kalasam of honey is 20 times more powerful.

Q: How long should a person stay in deep meditation to get the maximum result?

Aiya: Always interested in the results. If you think I'm going to sit down and meditate because I'm going to get a result or a maximum result from this, you're in the wrong business. Go play the stock market. You sit before the Devi just because you want to become one with her—you want to become Her.

And how long should you stay in that deep meditation? If you ever got there, you wouldn't ask this.

That's not in your control. When you are in that one state and completely merged with her, it's called Nirvikalpa samadhi. If you stay in that state for 21 days, you will leave the body.

Q: What are the different types of samadhi?

Aiya: Sahaja samadhi is the first one; that's your natural state. Bhaava samadhi is where the emotion with which you have been worshipping the deity will take over. Next is Savikalpa samadhi and Vikalpa samadhi. In these states, the ego is being gradually worn away. If you stay persistent in Nirvikalpa samadhi, you will enter Maha samadhi. That is physical death.

The energy is attached through your body in a tiny silver cord. After 21 days, it will snap and the soul will exit the body through the top of the skull.

Q: What does advaitam mean?

Aiya: Advaitam means you experience the oneness of the Devi and the universe at all times. That means even the person who has the most ill feeling towards you—if you look at that person, you should feel the kind of love a mother would have toward her helpless babies. If you can tell me you can feel that for someone who has sullied your name or hurt your family, then you have achieved that oneness.

The Valaikaapu

by Kamya Ramaswamy

For those of us who are unfamiliar with this traditional South Indian event, first a brief definition—the *valaikaapu* is the ceremony held for a mother-to-be around her 7th month of pregnancy. During this celebration, mothers, married women, and young ladies come up to the mother-to-be who is seated in a chair, rub *chandanam/manjal* (sandalwood paste or turmeric) on her arms and face, and put bangles on her wrists.

Valail is the Tamil word for bangles, hence the term valaikaapu. Sri Lankan, Telugu, Malayali and Kannada families also hold this event for their pregnant daughters and daughters-in-law, although the specifics may vary from region to region. One thing that is consistent is that a valaikaapu is only performed before the birth of a woman's first child, because it is intended to mark the beginning of a new generation within the family.

A valaikaapu differs from another pregnancy milestone called the *seemantham*, which is more structured and formal. Here, a priest typically performs a brief puja for the mother-to-be, during which Vedas and other shastras are chanted, often including a homam. Many families do both—first the valaikaapu, which is the social event, then the seemantham a few hours later, which is the religious event.

I learned most of this very recently while delving into research on what a valaikaapu was and why we perform it for pregnant women. After years of attending these traditional Tamil ceremonies it was now my turn in mid-July to sit in the chair as the mother-to-be, and I had little to no knowledge about how to pull this off.

I had heard many varying accounts from sources in my Tam-Brahm family and community about valaikaapus, and was quite confused about the logistics of executing one. For example, my late mother's valaikaapu was attended only by a handful of people and the pictures indicate they all dressed up, sat around, made my mom feel happy and ate nice snacks.

My dad said he didn't know the details—the males in the family were all in another room, and no priest attended either. I listened to his account but still had no idea what the point was of that event.

Yes, a good time may have been had by all, but I've been spoiled by Aiya in always being given a logical and often scientific basis behind why we perform cultural and religious rituals. I could definitely get on board with the snacks, but I was content to not even have a valaikaapu if it was just going to be a social event.

My mother-in-law never had one and neither did many of my husband's maternal and paternal aunts, so there weren't guidelines I could look to on that side of the family. My friend Bhuvana, however, did have a priest and a puja at her valaikaapu, which I thought odd because she's from the same background as my family—why did her family's tradition differ so greatly from ours?

Finally, all my mommy-friends at the Rajarajeswari Peetam had their valaikaapus performed at the temple, often by Aiya, and they all experienced the bangle-placing and chandanam-smearing, accompanied by a full but brief puja. Why, I wondered, were there so many discrepancies within the same event being held within a generally similar Tamil community?

I only learned the answer to this while seated in the chair. Not enough people know why we even do valaikaapus, so these events have morphed into the Western baby shower, except with samosas and chai replacing mimosas and cucumber sand-

wiches. We hold these "traditional" events because we know we're supposed to, but often without a purpose in mind. And I definitely was not interested in having a baby shower.

When the time came, I was fortunate enough to have Aiya's wife, Amma; my good friends, Pravin and Mick; and several family friends present at a small valaikaapu held at my dad's house. Pravin, who performed a wonderful puja, first made it a point to explain to everyone what we were doing.

Pravin explained the valaikaapu ceremony to everyone present

He said there were a couple of goals the valaikaapu is intended to accomplish. First, the mother-to-be is rife with hormones and chemicals flowing throughout her body that no one else in the room (I was the only preggo there) would have. Something else she'd have that no one else would have is the largest amount of fluid within her body—namely, the amniotic fluid in her womb in addition to 50 percent extra plasma volume.

In combination, those ingredients make her a walking kalasam that is ready to be charged with spiritual energy. This is one reason why this ceremony is performed at the 7th month—at that point, she's already done most of her growing but still energetic enough to sit through a puja. Additional reasons why we do the valaikaapu in the 7th month is because by that time, the family is fairly confident the pregnancy will be successful (something they couldn't always be sure of several centuries ago back in the village), and they're ready to announce it.

But the most important reason why we perform the valaikaapu in the 7th month is because by 28-29 weeks of pregnancy, the baby's senses have almost fully developed.

It can hear sounds and see light from outside the womb, although not clearly. Its frequency of movements are reaching a plateau by this stage and it's quickly running out of room to move around within the uterus.

In short, it's the perfect opportunity to bombard that baby with mantras!

It's important, Pravin said, to include the puja aspect. Simply chatting, eating, and giving bangles doesn't result in much. Many families choose to do a combined event as Bhuvana's family probably did—ladies still get to put bangles on the girl to convey their blessings, but only after the formal seemantham is done. That's the style in which I've seen Aiya perform most valaikaapus at the temple, and that's how we did things that evening for me. The biggest reason why the puja is done at all is for the protection of the mother-to-be and the fetus.

By the 3rd trimester, she's bigger than she has ever been, and many women experience shifts in their center of gravity, lack of balance on their feet, and changing spatial awareness. My husband said "Tell me about it," when Pravin explained this part because I am a big tripper on a normal day. Now that I can't see my feet and most of my weight gain has been on my belly alone, I'm an even bigger tripper. The puja, however, will guarantee that my klutziness won't result in harm to myself or the baby.

Even if we're dealing with a graceful mother-to-be, birth and labour still carry their own risks. Maternal and infant mortality back in the day was even greater than it is today, especially when our ancestors used to have a minimum of 6-8 kids. The valaikaapu/seemantham was performed to pray for a healthy delivery, the safety of the mother and child, and for the success of a family's new generation.

My close friend, Suba, happily went overboard with the manjal-ing

Meditative Experience in Navavarana Puja

part 2

by Smt. Geeta and Sri Ramesh Kutticad (Yogamba sahita Atmaanandanaatha)

C. Kāmakala dhyāna (Yajana)

The final and highest philosophical ritual to clean kārmika mala is *kāmakalā dhyāna*. The long vāsanās in cycles of birth and death are the most 'sticky stain.' This can be effectively removed once we fully realize the eternal and all-pervading nature of the Divine as not different from an individual.

In ritual sequence, after offering flowers (puṣpāñjali) we are directed to practice kāmakala dhyāna. Paraśurāma kalpasūtra says, '*bindunā mukham bindudvayena sthanau sapardhena yoni iti kāmakalā svarūpam vicintya - saubhāgya hrdayam āmrśan.'*

Deeply meditate on the face of Devi as bindu, her breasts as two bindus and her genital region as a triangle and remember the most glorious heart—which is the central theme of pūjā—the identity of self and upāsya devatā Lalitā.

Nityotsava also says the same and meditate on the bīja *'sauh'* as Devi's heart. We also recite two stanzas from *Śrī Devi Bhujaṅga* in this regard. Let us see the slokās and their meaning:

Mahāmantra rājānta bījam parākhyam svato nyasta bindum svayam nyasta hārdham

Bhavat vaktra vakṣoja guhyābhidānam sva svarūpam sakṛtbhāvayet sa tvameva (1)

tathānye vikalpeṣu nirviṇṇa cittāh tatekam samādāya bindutrayam te

parānandasandhāna sindau nimagnāh punar garbharandhram na pascyanti dhīrāh (2)

Mahāmantra rājānta bījam parākhyam: The seed letter which is in the end of the Mahamantara raja called 'para.' The Mahāmantra rāja is Pañchadaśi mahāmantra. The third kuta is *'sa ka la hrīM,'* end letter is *'hrīm,'* and seed letter at the end is *'īm.'* This is called 'para' – The highest consciousness.

svato nyasta bindum svayam nyasta hārdham: Place a circle (bindu) and two more circles (hardham is half of 'ha', which will sound like 'h', is visarga written as two circles—one above and one below) on your body. The above seed letter has to be meditated in the form of a bindu and triangle and placed in (our) body.

Bhavat vaktra vakṣoja guhyābhidhānam: (Let the above be meditated as) your (Devi Lalitā Mahātripurasundari's) face, breast and genital. Since there are three parts in the body to be mediated, we can meditate face as a bindu, the two bindus as breasts and a triangle said above as the genital organs.

svarūpam sakṛtbhāvayet: (Devi Lalitā Mahātripurasundari's) real form, mediated and thus conceived at least once. In the previous part *'abidhānam'* means 'so called'. So there is a real meaning behind these body parts.

The face: This represents the individual since the face is the main source of individual identity.

The breasts: This represents this universe. We can see the breasts of women, but not fully, they are ever present but not seen by an individual to the full extent. The visible universe is also like that, we can see it but not fully, it disappears while we close our eyes and re-appears when we open the eyes. We can't even see beyond room, so what to say of countries?

The genitals: This represents the Supreme Lord īsvara. This part of the body is totally covered and cannot even be visualized from outside; such is the nature of īsvara, for he is hidden from the common plain sight.

tathānye vikalpeshu nirviṇṇa cittāh: The sādhaka free from thought constructions of the bodily parts of the devi mediated above.

tatekām samādāya bindu trayam te: Identifying these three bindus said above as one. The verse now directs us to see the connection that these are parts of 'a body.' Likewise, the unity of these three separate ideas of individual, universe and Creator is to be recognized with practical knowledge.

parānandasandhāna sindau nimagnāh: Fully realizing this identity in totality, the sādhaka is wholly immersed in the sea of bliss.

punar garbharandhram na pascyanti dhīrāh: (He) shall never see the birth channel again. Thus he is 'free' and 'liberated' while living. The removal of dual notion is wholly emphasized and has to be experienced in this level of pūjā. Hence the removal of Kārmika mala is seen here.

Practical Guide for the above meditation:

After chanting the above verse we can do *kāmakalā nyāsa* with *dhyāna* here in our daily routine (nitya pūjā). This includes the repeating of *Pañchadaśi mahāmantra* with each syllable being merged in the final *kāmakalā akṣhara*. Initially place the seers as below on your crown (head):

6
5 1 7
3 2
4

1. 4- suprabodhaikanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah
2. 4- raktāmbā pāda Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah
3. 4- śuklāmbā pāda Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah
4. 4- niṣkalānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah
5. 4- sakalānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah
6. 4- navātmānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah
7. 4- akrūrānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah

In the navel: 3 1 2
1. 4- sadānanda paramasamivide namah
2. 4- cidānanda paramasamivide namah
3. 4- ānandānanda paramasamivide namah

āgain in the navel - 4- *īm namah*
Heart - *4- īm namah*
Mid eyebrow - *4- īm namah*
Mouth - *4- īm sakalasacchidānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah*
Heart - *4- īm niṣakalānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah*
Genitals - *4- īm sarvānandanātha Śrī pādukām pūjayāmi namah*

The Kāmakalā nyāsā:

Do pranayama with the mantra *'ī'* 36 times.
Then do *ṛṣyādi nyāsa* as follows:

asya Śrī kāmakalāyā: Paramānandabhairava ṛṣi amṛta virāT gāyatrī chanda; śakti bhairavi Mahātripurasundarī devata. Do kara ṣadaṅga nyāsā with long vowels: ām, īm, ūm, aim, aum, ah

dhyāna: *prakāsa Madhya sthita citsvarūpām varābhaye sandadhatīm trinetrām*
sindūravarṇām ati komalāṅgīm māyāmayīm tattvamayīM namāmi

prakāsa Madhya sthita chitsvarūpām—Devi is meditated as in the form chit śhakti in the middle of great effulgence. She is the experience in the midst of intellect.

varābhaye sandadhatīm trinetrām—Showing gestures of dispelling fear and granting boons and having three eyes. The greatest boon is the experience of universal identity. Removal of duality is the dispelling of fear and three eyes signify knowledge of past, present and future.

sindūravarṇām ati komalāṅgīm—Of Red hue with beautiful features. Red hue represents love, which breaks all barriers and unifies the whole universe and that is the beautiful body of Devi.

māyāmayīm tattvamayīM namāmi—Of the form of Māya and the tattvas, I salute her. Māya is the cause of experience and tattvas are the created universe. The experienced salutation denotes removal in the sense of duality.

Show pañcha upachāra mudras.
Repeat the *Pañchadaśi mahāmantra* with each letter getting merged in the final *kāmakala akṣhara*, and place trikhanda mudra on head while repeating this sequence.

Ka E ī la hrīm ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
E ī la hrīm ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
ī la hrīm ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
la hrīm ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
hrīm ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
la hrīm sa ka la hrīM
hrīm sa ka la hrīM
sa ka la hrīM
ka la hrīM
la hrīM
hrīM
rīm
īm

Mouth: *4-Ka E ī La hrīM saccidānanda paramasamivd ī kārasya saparārdha kalānātha ūrdhva bindvātmane Śrī mahātripurasundaryā: kesādi avayava sahita vaktrāya namah*

Heart: *4-Ha Sa Ka Ha La hrīM saccidānanda paramasamivd ī kārasya saparārdha kalānātha adho bindu yua-galatmane Śrī mahātripurasundaryā: bāhu catuṣTayādi avayava sahita sthanadvayāya namah*

Genital: *4-Sa Ka La hrīM saccidānanda paramasamivd ī kārasya hārdha kalātmane Śrī mahātripurasundaryā: pādādi avayava sahita yonaye namah*

Whole body: *4-Ka 15 saccidānanda paramasamivd ī kāra samasta kāmakalātmane Śrī mahātripurasundaryā: sarva avayavebhyo namah*

Meditate on the self as Śrī Mahātripurasundari seated on the lap of Śivakāmeśvara and show the *āyudha mudras*.

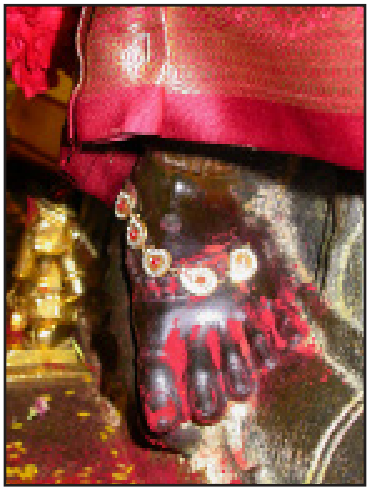
The Arrow (Bāna) mudra: *4- drām drīm klīm blūm sah sarva jambana bānāh*
The Bow (dhanur) mudra *4 – dham sarva sammohana dhanuh*
The noose (pāsa) mudra *4- hrīm sarva vasīkarana pasa*
The goad (ankusa) mudra *4-krom sarva sthambhana ankusa.*

On the brahmarandhre (crown-head), again remember the guru:
4- am hsaum prakāśānandanatha śukla Śrī pādukaām pūjayāmi namah
4- ham shau: vimarśāmbā rakta Śrī pādukaām pūjayāmi namah
4- am ham hsaum shau: prakāśa vimarśātmaka rakta śukala svarūpa parāśakti(amukā)mbā sahita paramaśiva(amukā)nandanātha hamsah śivah soham nirvana pādukām pūjayāmi namah

(Please place the name of your guru with his śhakti in above nirvana pādukā only if they are not in the physical form)

Thus to conclude, we have seen in the above discussions that *bāhya saparyā* points to deep inner meditative state experienced by the removal of three stains in *śākta upāya* (‘ways’ or ‘means’ in the action field).

Dear Lord! Most Gracious Guru natha! Here are flowers at your feet!



Sri Gurubhyo Namaha