



Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY



Blossom 18 Petal 3
September 2013

September Newsletter

Since the last issue...

From June 1 to the 10th, Aiya was in Singapore doing house pujas, workshops, and homams for the various devotees in the area.

Upon his return to the States, Aiya conducted a wedding on June 12th, that of Vinita who has performed many a classical dance program at temple festivals. Five days later on the 17th, he presided over the wedding of Srinidhi and Ananth. Yet another six days later on the 23rd, Aiya performed the wedding of Shinthujan.

The annual alankara festival was held from June 28th to July 1 on a grand scale. The following week, Aiya and Amma were at the Scarborough Sai Centre to do the annual Paduka Puja and homam, with Lord Krishna as the main deity this year.

On the evening of July 9th, the first batch of kids from the Hindu

Heritage camp visited the temple and Aiya was there to receive them.

He went to Toronto on July 14th to conduct another wedding, but was back in Rochester before the 18th for his 70th birthday celebrations. This day began at 5 a.m. and involved over 12 hours of chanting and homams, followed by several more hours of bhajans.

On Sunday July 21st, Aiya and Amma participated in the food service at a local Rochester shelter in honour of Guru Poornima the next day. The evening of the 21st saw the Sashti-abdhapurthi of Mohan Kamat at the temple. After Guru Poornima on the 22nd, Aiya educated the second group of kids who visited from Hindu Heritage camp on the 23rd.

Our own camp, Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion, took place the week of July 27th to Aug. 3. Soon afterwards, Aiya presided over the

Aadi Amavasya puja on Aug. 6th but left later that day to catch a flight to India. He only returned Aug. 29th.

In the meantime, it was Shankar aiya who very ably ran the Aadi Puram festival Aug. 9th and Varalakshmi puja Aug. 16th.

The temple has a new website! It is still at the same address of www.srividya.org and your old log-ins and donation/sponsorship information are still effective. If you're not receiving temple e-mails, please register your e-mail address again on the new website. Also, please contact info@srividya.org if you did not receive an e-mail with a new password.

The annual India Yatra is scheduled again over Christmas break 2013, with a special puja to Aiya to happen shortly afterwards. A few spots are still available, but you must contact info@srividya.org as soon as possible!

Past Events

Alankara Utsavam, June 28 - July 1

In addition to the Ganapathi festival on the Friday, the Chandi homam and chariot on Saturday, and the Dattatreya/Guru puja on the Sunday, we added the Bhairava Madai on the Monday to round out this exciting and jam-packed festival.

Hundreds of people filed through the temple over this long weekend, including busloads on the Saturday. The deities went around in procession on each day of this festival, and everyone in attendance was welcomed to participate.



The temple's children and young adults organized and ran the Lord Dattatreya puja and chariot festival on the Sunday.

Guru Poornima, July 22



Aiya and Amma arrived at the temple in the late afternoon on this day and joined the procession welcoming them inside. After doing a small Kamadhenu puja and a puja to his own gurus (pictured left), Aiya watched his students perform their own paduka pujas to him. This was done with everyone seated in several rows, while a main paduka puja to Aiya and Amma happened at the front.

Following that, everyone did their namaskarams to the gurus, final aarathi was carried out by two sumangalis, and everyone assembled finally sat down to have mahaprasadam.

VSI (camp), July 27 - Aug. 3

This year saw the largest Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion ever, with about 125 campers descending onto the temple property for all of eight days! The camp imparts much of the traditional teachings of the East mixed with the fun activities our kids have enjoyed while growing up in the West.

On a daily basis, campers learned Sri Sukdam, Purusha Sukdam, and Shivapuranam; learned about temple arts/crafts, dance, and nature; played sports; and enjoyed a pure vegetarian diet.

This was also the first year the kids executed the Youth Chariot Festival with every child carrying out a role.

Aadi Puram, Aug. 9

Shankar aiya and several devotees proficient in chanting the Devi Mahatmyam ran the five-hour Chandi homam first thing in the morning. After offering bali for the homam, everyone who was present was given the chance to do milk abhishekam to the Vana Durga murthi.

Since in the Saivite tradition, this festival marks the day the Devi entered into womanhood, many snacks and *bhakshanams* were also offered to her, one by one. Sumangalis performed several sets of deepam aarathi around mid-day amidst joyous bhajans.

After that, everyone was given mahaprasadam to eat.

Aadi Amavasya, Aug. 6

Aiya presided over this very important ritual where sponsors offered *tarpanam* to the souls of their departed fathers, as well as all ancestors on their fathers' side. Sponsors sat in rows (pictured right) outside in the back fields close to "Kashi" creek, while Aiya walked them through the puja and accompanying mantras.

After everyone had completed their offerings, the pindams representing one's physical body were appropriately disposed of by temple volunteers. Everyone then did abhishekam to the Kashi shivalingam.



Varalakshmi vratam, Aug. 16

This festival always falls on a Friday evening. About 50-75 married ladies assembled to pray to Varalakshmi Devi for a happy married life and long life and health to their husbands.

Shankar aiya guided them through their deepam pujas, performed before a standing murthi placed on a mantapam and dressed up as Goddess Varalakshmi (both pictured right). Each lady performed her own individual puja in accordance with the Sri Suktam sodasa-upachara puja.

After the 1-2 hour ceremony was complete, the women were given red *sharadu* threads to tie on their wrists as part of their prasadam.



Goddess Varalakshmi is celebrated by many women in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.



Upcoming Events

| Event | Date/time | Location |
|---------------------------------|------------------|---|
| Vinayaka Chaturthi | Sept. 8 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full property |
| Dvajarohanam | Sept. 28 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, garbha-graha |
| Sharada Navarathri | Oct. 5 - Oct. 12 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full property |
| Vijayadasami & Chariot Festival | Oct. 13 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full property |
| Kedara Gowri Vratam | Oct. 13 - Nov. 2 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, garbha-graha |
| Skanda Sashti | Nov. 3 - Nov. 8 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, yajnasala |
| Karthikai Deepam | Nov. 16 | Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, full temple |

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 2013.

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, 2013. 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, Venkateshwar Babu, Smt. Geeta and Sri Ramesh Kutticad, Mohan Murali, and Vimalan Sothinathan.

A Letter from my Guru

The following is a transcription of Guru Mataji's letter to Aiya dated March 17, 1976. Known at the temple as Aiya's first guru, she initiated him into Subramaniam diksha in his early 20s. The letter is a word-for-word transcription except for areas where there are [square brackets] in italics, which are editor's notes included for clarity. In [square brackets] and non-italics are words that Guru Mataji originally wrote in Tamil in her letter, but are transliterated into English.

The original, handwritten letter appears on page 6.

Shivananda Thapovanam
Trincomalee
17/3/'76

Om NamaShivaya,

Dear Shakuntala, Haran, baby [*Aiya and Amma's daughter, Saru*],

Lord bless you all & your home.

It is a joy to know of the work you are doing & the spirit which you are doing it. DLS [*Divine Life Society*] knows not of caste, creed or colour differences; developing interest in the people's mind—whoever they are—in matters Divine is our objective. Go ahead with all my blessings. Along with the bhajan Hindu Dharma need be propagated; this need be done rather imperceptibly. Also see that all of them wear [thiru-neeru & chandanam & kumkumam]. If you have not already started it, get started. Make them feel that prayers are more effective when you wear these & explain the significance of these to them. Wish you God speed. Hoping to go to Pakistan for a religious conference & may go to Mauritius and Zambia if finance permits. To Pakistan, someone has offered to buy the ticket.

By the way, let me know your bank account number & the name of the bank for me to deposit the 400 rupees you both very thoughtfully gave me in Annamalai. Had been to Madras for the World Hindu Cultural & Philosophical conference and returned only last week.

Re your queries: Sri Vidhya puja is a very complicated matter & has to be learned by a competent authority. You may wait till you are a little older. For the moment, continue as you are doing the Panja puja and Lalitha Sahasranamam. All the 15 Bijaaksharas are in the Lalitha Sahasranamam. Bhakti is the most important factor.

The [Panchadasakshari] is Sri Vidhya; the Sodasakshari is the same with one more akshara. All the fifteen aksharas are in Trisadhi. Along with the Lalitha Sahasranamam, you could recite the Trisadhi, i.e. twenty names for each akshara beginning with [ka]. Total 15 X 20 = 300. There are various bijaaksharas for various aspects of Devi Lalitha Thirupurasundari, i.e. [satvika muhurtham]. To the best of my memory—I'm writing this in a hurry—[Om Aim Hreem Sreem] are bijaaksharas for Kali; yet I've to verify, no time just yet. Shall let you know. As long as your worship is [nish-kaamyam] [*without desires*], you need not worry. Kaamyam karmam, all details have to be carefully observed. So you go on reciting the Lalitha Sahasranamam & Trisadhi & do the puja. Do continue your Shadaakshara. Never give it up. That's your foundation. You may memorize the Trisadhi & recite leisurely. Do continue the ['Shadaaksharam.']. This should continue forever. Shadaakshara people getting Devi's visions & Gayathri people getting [Murugan's] visions seems a common experience with my people.

Success is bound to be; do continue your Sahasranam. Do accept all members, whoever desires to join, whatever their creed or colour.

Lord shower His Blessings on all of you.

In haste,

Om Tatso,
Guru Mataji



3) Swananda Shapovanam,
Trincomalee
17/3/76

Lord bless you all & your home;

By the way, let me know
No. & name of the bank for me to deposit
The 400/- you both very thoughtfully gave me
in Annamalai. Had been to Madras for the
World Hindu Cultural & Philosophical Conference
and returned only last week.

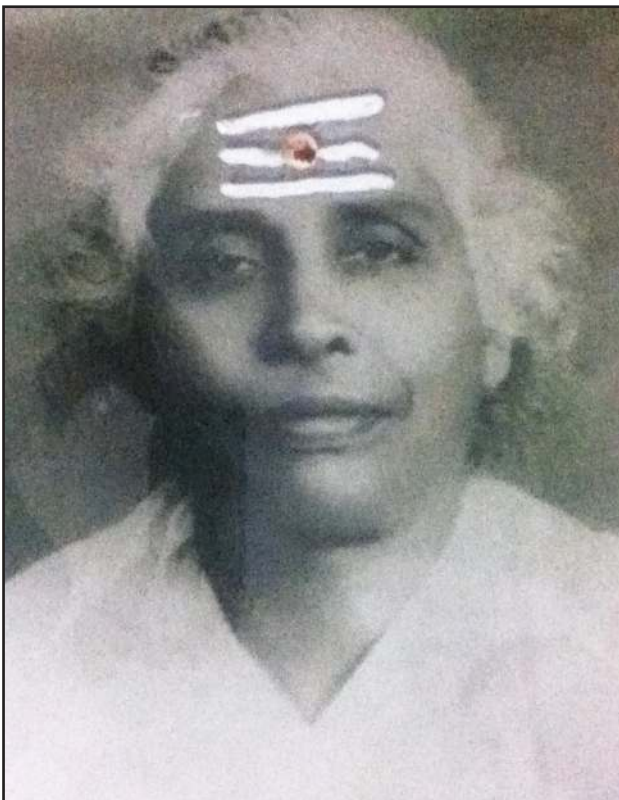
nam am. Bhakti is the most important factor

The Visargand is Pratikhyas the Sodasaachshara is the same with one more achshara. All the fifteen achsharas are in Dheda. Along with the vidya mantras you could recite the Dheda is one achshara for twenty names for each achshara beginning with a. Total 75 x 20 = 350. There are various deejahs haras for various aspects of Dev Lalitha Thir perumal etc. an argala (pranagita). To the head of my memory, I'm writing this in a hurry - go on after write an argala achsharas for Kali, get time to verify. I'll write just yet. I shall let you know. As long as your work helps Dev mantra you need not worry. Prasanna Karuna all details have to be carefully observed. So you go on reciting the vidya mantras & Dheda do the puga. Do continue your Shadaachshara. Never give it up. That's your foundation. You may incorporate the Dheda with Mantra. Do continue the Sargam. This should continue for ever. Sadaachshara people get; Dev's vision is joyful people getting God's vision seems a common experience with my people.

Success is bound to be; do continue your
Jagaranam. Do accept all members, whoever
desires to join whatever their caste or colour.

Lord shower His Blessing on all of
you, in haste. Am Jot, So

Wm. H. F.



RAJAVADYAM

During the Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion (camp) in early August, the children were fortunate to have great instrumental masters on temple property. S. Kasim and S. Babu have long been the live nadhaswaram artists at the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam. But this was the first time they explained their craft to a new generation in this part of the world, accompanied by their thavil vidvans Natarajan Panchapikeson from Pudhukottai, and Nallakumar Raju from Thiruchi.

Aiya: The nadhaswaram has been around for hundreds of years and throughout its entire existence, it has never changed. It is very similar to the western instrument, the oboe, as both of them are quite long. But the nadhaswaram is designed in such a way that if you play it in the open air outside, people a mile away will be able to hear. It has natural amplification. In those days, they did not have microphones and amplifiers so they used this instrument.

When they played it, it went in front of a temple procession or a wedding procession, and people far away would know that a celebration of some sort was happening and a procession was approaching. Within this instrument, there are two types; one is called thimiri nadhaswaram, and the other one is called paari.

Now, talking about the brothers that you see in front of you, they are the grandsons of an established master of the instrument. He is someone that people of my generation followed from temple to temple in Sri Lanka, listening to his music. He is called Sheik Chinna Moulana sahib. He was a pure vegetarian and had a very interesting story.

About 800 years ago, there was a gentleman by the name of Hussein. His nadhaswaram teacher had chased him out of his class and told him he was an idiot and did not have any talent for the instrument. Hussein was afraid to go home so he slept in a temple on the outskirts of the village. In the middle of the night, the Devi appeared to him,

wrote something on his tongue, and told him, "Play."

And he picked up the instrument and was able to play it. He went back to the teacher and asked him to take him back. The teacher said he would play a complicated piece; if Hussein was able to repeat it back to him, he would take him back as a student. The student was able to play it back better than the teacher.

So this Devi told him that she would live for 800 years throughout this family. And traditionally, father, son, grandson would all play the nadhaswaram throughout every generation. Chinna Moulana sahib was a contemporary of Karukurichi P. Arunachalam and Rajaratnam Pillai, who was an established master.

And the thavil vidvans—

here, they are also always two. Sometimes there will be 6 nadhaswaram players and 24 thavils. I used to follow Karukurichi P. Arunachalam pillai from temple to temple when I was about 18. At one temple that was about 5 miles away from my house, I remember going and sitting there 18 hours before the kacheri was to begin so I could get a good spot. When he came there and played, he was with one other nadhaswaram artist but there were 24 thavils, 12 on each side! Everyone wanted to claim they played for Karukurichi Arunachalam.

When you hear me singing bhajans, all the variations you hear I learned from nadhaswaram vidvans. I didn't have any other training in music.

I feel very sad these days that when you go to any temple in Tamil Nadu, not much emphasis is given to the nadhaswaram anymore. This is



called Rajavadyam, the kingly instrument. It is also called Mangala vadyam. They will play it differently in a temple, or when a procession is taking place—they will play pieces called mallari while swaying from side to side and keep time exactly. That is how it should be played.

The mallari has several curves and turns and avenues to it and you must be able to adapt yourself while you are carrying the deity. So these people are masters.

You will also note they are the aastana-vidvans of Thirupathi Devasthanam. You know what a rich and popular temple Thirupathi is—they are the in-house musicians of that temple. During Navarathri, it is the brahmotsavam here and also the brahmotsavam in Thirupathi. Duty calls them there but otherwise they would be here with us. But every year for the alankara utsavam (July festival) they come here, and we are very fortunate to have them here to explain to the children what a temple's instrument is supposed to be.

S. Kasim: Aiya has already demonstrated about the different varieties of the nadhaswaram and the maestros who have developed the instrument. As

Aiya said, we have many instruments in India but only nadhaswaram and thavil are known as rajavadyam and mangala vadyam, and no other instrument is known like that.

This is because the sound coming from a nadhaswaram denotes an auspicious environment. Originally, it was only played at temples during processions and thirukalyanam. But as people grew to know the importance of this instrument, it slowly came into social life and other auspicious occasions.

On this occasion we are going to demonstrate how this instrument is played in temples.

As you know, our temples are open early in the morning. At that time, the bowli ragam is played with this instrument, and a particular composition within the bowli ragam is played that is connected to the deity in the temple. So if it's a Devi temple, a bowli ragam piece on Devi will be played; if it is a Vishnu temple, a bowli ragam piece on Narayana will be played.

We call those pieces Thirupalliyezichi—that is, those songs are rendered to wake up the deity in the morning. Next is when a deity is taken for a procession outside the temple. In Thirupathi, that is the kalpa-vksha vahanam. When the deity is taken around the temple, the composition of mallari is played.



The significance of the mallari is that it gives energy to the vahanam bearers—those are the people who are carrying the deity.

This mallari is a rhythmic composition so there will not be any lyrics. It is in the ragam gambhira nattai, and the significance of that ragam is veera-rasam. Before rendering the mallari, the thavil artists play alaaripu, which is a specific combination in kandan-adai. Kandan-adai refers to the number five, and alaaripu is played to invoke the five pancha-bhutas to invite them

for the procession.

When the chariot is taken around the temple, another composition called therr mallari is played. This therr mallari is also played when kalasams are being taken around at our temple. Also, there are float festivals in India. When the deity is being taken across the temple pond, a composition called oadam is rendered. After all pujas are completed, the deity will be taken to a sleeping place and made to rest.

We call this occasion the saiyans-utsavam, and we play the neelambari ragam at this time, along with a particular song connected with that deity. After the saiyans-utsavam, the temple will be closed. And those are the important occasions and ragams that are associated with temple situations. We have chosen only the important ones to explain to you today.

Next are the wedding compositions. On the arrival of the groom to the wedding location, we play a song called, “Rara maa inti daaka” asking the groom, “Please come to my house.” When the bride and groom exchange garlands, a composition called, “Maalai maatinaal” is played. Also, the bride and groom are made to sit on a swing or oonjal during the wedding. As they enjoy the sway-

ing of the swing, that is when nadhaswaram players play the oonjal paatu.

After the sacred thread is tied around the bride's neck, the thiruman-galyam, a composition known as anandam is played. Anandam means joy. At the moment the mangalyam is being tied, getti melam is played. Getti melam is nothing but strong beats from the thavil accompanied by high notes on the nadhaswaram.

When the wedding is concluding, they will do aarathi. When aarathi is being done, the mangalam-aarathi song is played by the nadhaswaram. This is usually played in the ragam madhyamavathi. With that, the wedding function comes to a close.

Secret Code in Tantra

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

part 1

Spirituality is a wonder by itself; there are many paths to realize this reality. All these paths have been revealed at some place and some time to the sages/prophets by the Divine. Indian spirituality is very ancient and complete in itself.

The most public spirituality in India is the Vedic one. The Vedas' focus is mostly toward ritual practices by the individual in a group/community, which happen daily and aim mostly at cleansing the clouded intellect of the common man (called chitta shuddi).

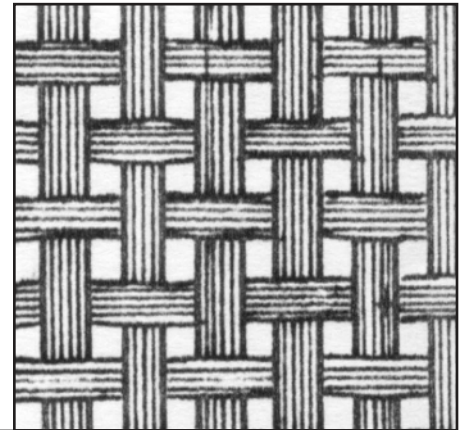
These are to be learned from a preceptor, who is venerated as the Divine clothed in human apparel. A clear man now focuses on the more subtle aspects of creation. Herein, the Vedas declare that these are specific to the individual and these have to be obtained from a Master, who has a deep understanding and experience.

Some passages of the Vedas also hint in a coded manner of these higher spiritual practices. Tantra is often a misconceived territory in a mysterious world. People attribute drinking liquor and having sex as tantric in nature. Mantra, Tantra and Yantra is a triad. Here Tantra will denote the doctrine or system which will have practice mystic words (mantra) with usage of the mystic diagrams (yantra). These practices are the basis of the sadhaka in his sadhana. Simple basic yoga sadhana like pranayama, placing of the seed sound (bijaakshara) on the body (called nyaasaa), placing vessel for outer worship (called 'paatraasadhana'), worship of the main deity and the attendant deities (called pradhana puja and avarana puja) are some of the aspects we see in most of the tantras.

Some tantras also deal with the metaphysical and philosophical basis of these rituals.

The Meaning of Tantra has a lot of aspects. Some are:

(1) The Sanskrit word tantra means the warp of a loom or the strands of a braid. The root of the word tantra comes from tanoti and trayaati. 'Tanoti' will mean stretch, expand or to continue without a break and traayati will mean protection. The highest protection is recognition that verily all of this is the self and is no different from it. This is liberation. Thus, this will mean a set of principles or system (likened to a web), which will lead to liberation.



(2) Tantra is often translated as "continuum" or "unbroken stream" and indicates a flow of consciousness from ignorance to enlightenment. Thus we can see that Tantra represents the interconnecting energies between all things in this and other planes of existence, leading to the liberation.



Tantra is likened to being like a weave, or an unbroken stream

(3) Tantra—the word itself will mean 'tanu vistaaryate iti tantra'. That which expands the body is Tantra. Now, how would it look if we had a long nose after tantric sadhana, does it mean that? Or big ears? Or short becoming taller or vice versa? Since none of these are happening, then it must be something that is connected to this body that is expanding in the above statement.

It is body consciousness or the awareness that the 'I' exists. This is clear, when at midnight it is the darkest

and no other sound is heard, we are aware of our own existence; nobody is there or is needed to identify that the 'I' exists. Expansion of this is hinted by the above meaning to encompass the entire creation and re-establish the identity with the Divine.

Other words used to describe tantra are: leading principle, essential part, model, system, framework, doctrine, rule, theory, scientific work, order, chief part, rule, authority, science, mystic works, magical arts etc.

We all have a strong faith that the Vedas are ever existent from the initial time of creation and were revealed to the sages. They 'saw' the mantras—the sound structures—and hence are called rishis, i.e. rishyao mantra drastharah.

Tantras also exist eternally. They are said as revealed by the Lord to Devi, and called 'Agama' or vice versa called 'Nigama'. Many secrets in this line are revealed in them. These being secret in nature have not been revealed directly. Various codes have been deployed to protect them from reaching the common man who still has a clouded intellect. However, Masters had access to the 'key' of such codes and passed them down the lineage to deserving disciples. A small effort is done here to understand the rationale behind such a code called 'katapay-aadi'.

These codes are used to specify the numbers of syllables in mantra which are revealed in a hidden—coded—manner, referring to certain words which will mean a certain syllable, or the number to times the mantra is to be repeated, or the number of deities in an enclosure (avarana).

All vowels will be assigned the number zero. The 'ka' is assigned number one, 'kha' is two, 'ga' is three, 'gha' is four and follows up to 'jha' which is nine, the next 'jna' is zero. Similarly start from 'Ta' to 'dha' is from one to nine and 'na' is zero, again 'pa' to 'ma' is from one to five only. The last 'ya' to ksha' will be one to nine and zero respectively.

Let us see some examples from tantra / commentaries to find the decoding principles:

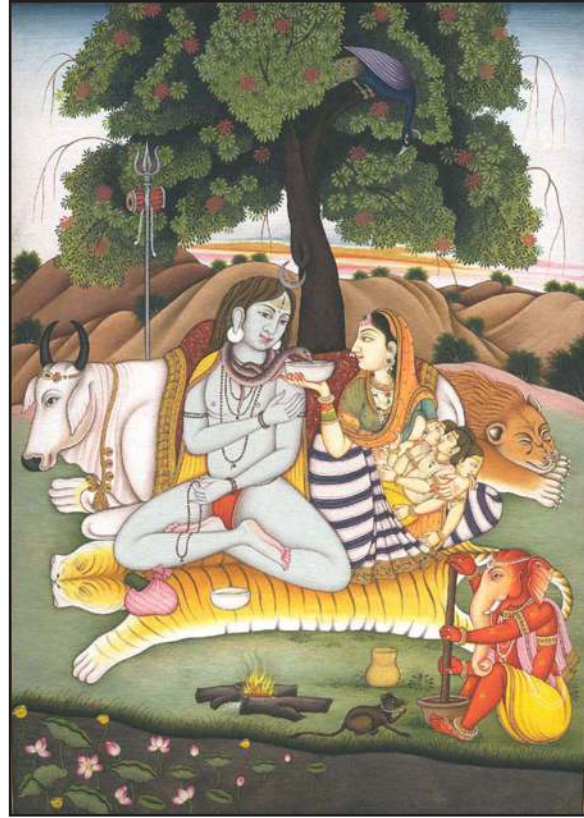
In Paramananda Tantra there is a parayana called Chakra Parayana. It relates to the avarana deities and repetition with different bijas. In the dhyana sloka we find a reference to the number of repetitions as 'gyaanaa-gyaana nayaanga bheda ruciraam,' decoding with the above ideas in mind—'gy' and 'n' will denote zero, 'y' to one.

Substituting, we find five zeros and one, reversing this will give one lakh—the number of counts this parayana will end up which after practice.

Using this code, looking at the word ajapa, will result in number 180, which when multiplied by the inhalation and exhalation—once cycle breath—will result in 360, pointing to the total aggregate of rasmi's in the shat chakra.

In the Sri Vidya ratna sutras of Gaudapaada, the chakra of Sri Vidya is described as 'kagaja dasaara dvaya.' The first three words when decoded will give the numbers as 1, 3 and 8 respectively, which will mean the bindu, trikona and astakona.

Look for the second half of this article in the next issue of the Sri Chakra.



Lord Shiva teaching tantra and agama to Devi Parvati

Abhirami Andadhi

During the Vibhuti Saivaite Immersion (camp) in early August, Aiya gave daily talks to the parent volunteers about the Abhirami Andadhi. The Sri Chakra thanks Mohan Murali, one of the volunteer dads, for sharing his audio of these talks.

The name of the text I have chosen is Abhirami Andadhi. Abhirami is the Devi in a Shiva temple, who is the consort of a form of Shiva called Amritagateshwara. He is also called Kalasamharamurthi. Look at Amritagateshwara—amritam is nectar, and a gatam is a pot. So the pot of nectar became the shivalingam. If you ever get to see the abhishekam being done to him in India, you will see that as they pour the milk, you will see the form of Shiva appear on the shivalingam.

In that temple, the consort is Abhiramavalli. Shiva is facing one way



and Abhiramavalli is facing him. She has a separate temple but she is facing him. Normally, if Shiva is facing east, the Devi's sannidhi will face south.

In this town, there was a gentleman by the name of Subramaniam, who was very devoted to Devi. He was a Shakti upasaka of the highest order. He had evolved to that

point that anything female he saw on the street or anywhere would appear to him to be the Devi. And he would run—even if it was a little girl or a grown lady—and fall at her feet.

So everyone thought he was crazy, and this was very disturbing to the priests at the temple. Because he was a Brahmin, they couldn't stop him from coming in to the temple. When he went, he would first do his namaskarams to Amritagateshwara, turn around, and then go to Abhirami's temple and sit there and completely become lost. That state is called Samadhi, and to reach Samadhi, there are five stages that you must first go through. First, you must be able to withdraw your sense organs to a point where you are not aware of your body. For a seasoned practitioner, it will take anywhere from 20 minutes to one hour, even if the person has been practicing for 50 years. At least one hour must pass before your body and your mind are prepared to be on that plane. By the way, the people who eat non-vegetarian food,

this is the main reason why it is not advisable. It will take between three and seven days for your body to flush that stuff out of your system. Even if you have practiced for 50 years, when you sit, your body will twitch if you are still eating meat. And you cannot concentrate

and so you cannot get anything out of that practice. So is it worth it? No.

And even if it's sattvik (neutral/peaceful) food, it doesn't mean you have to eat 50 plates of it! Only one-third of what you eat is actually absorbed into the system. The balance is traffic—it just keeps going. The people who cannot stop eating have gotten so used to putting away 50 plates because they have extended their stomachs to such a level that if it is not filled, they feel hungry. But once you start spiritual practice in a serious manner, the first indication is that your dependency on food goes down.

At that point, a handful of rice will be enough, and absorption into the body will increase from 30% to 80%—it doesn't matter if you are a teenager or a regular householder; it is the same. So when you are at that peak and eat only one handful of rice, it's quite enough for 24 hours. Only then, the states that you will experience on the way to Samadhi will happen.

The first one is called Sahaja Samadhi. What is Sahaja Samadhi? It is the state your mind and body were at when you first came out of your mother's womb. That newborn baby will have no kalmisham, it will not know the difference between black and white, it does not know how to discriminate—nothing. It's just a pure, innocent being. You will get to that point.

If you persist and you are a seasoned practitioner and your concentration is there, you will get to what is called Bhaava Samadhi. After that stage, you will get into Vikalpa Samadhi. After that is Savikalpa Samadhi. After that is Nirvikalpa Samadhi—your breathing would have stopped, your body won't move; you can sit there without going to the bath-

room, without consuming food or water for 21 days.

Back home, Yogaswami stayed in that state for six days before Sellappa Swami came and woke him up. He was in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. If you stay for more than 21 days, the jeeva (life-force) will separate from the body and you'll be dead. You will enter into what is called Maha Samadhi.

So Subramaniam Iyer in Thirukadayoor was always in Savikalpa Samadhi. He would go into the temple and be seated that way, much to the annoyance of the priests. Because naturally, when you are in that location and seated in that way, the energy emitting from your body would be very compatible with the energy coming off the Devi, Abhiramavalli. So people would look at him, do namaskarams to him, and go. And this irritated the priests to no end.



And they wouldn't just do namaskarams; they would sometimes also put money in front of him. The priests were upset because people were giving this guy the dakshina they would normally give to them!

At this time in Thanjavur, there was a king who came from a Maharashtrian lineage, I'm told. His name was Sarafoji, and he was a great devotee. In fact, it was during Sarafoji's time that the Saraswati Library in Thanjavur reached its maximum. He was so crazy about the religious books that were there that he had a tunnel built from his palace bedroom to the library. In the night when everyone in the city was asleep, he would go

there, read until morning, and then go back.

Somebody told the king that there was a crazy person in Thirukadayoor who would be seated in the Abhirami temple, and his body would become stiff as he sat there for hours and no one could wake him up. Immediately, Sarafoji knew this guy must be experiencing Samadhi and that he had to see him right away. So his minister started making inquiries.

Some people would say he was crazy, others would say he was just crazy about women. When they asked around the temple, they would say he was just completely unhinged. The minister went back to the king and told him what he heard. The king was even more convinced now that this man was experiencing something that was not normally within the experience of a common person.

So on an Amavasya (new moon) day in the 14th century, they came to Thirukadayoor, saw Amritagateshwara, and proceeded to the Abhirami temple. Subramaniam was seated there, completely lost in meditation, and he was able to see the mukha-mandalam of the Devi as a Pournami full moon. And he was so moved by it that tears were pouring down his face. So the king waited for him to come out of meditation, and he slowly did.

When Subramaniam Iyer opened his eyes, the king folded his hands before him and asked, "Oh, great one, what is today's thithi?" [Thithi refers to the name of a day within a fortnight—ed] Subramaniam was still seeing the Devi's face as a full moon so he told the king it

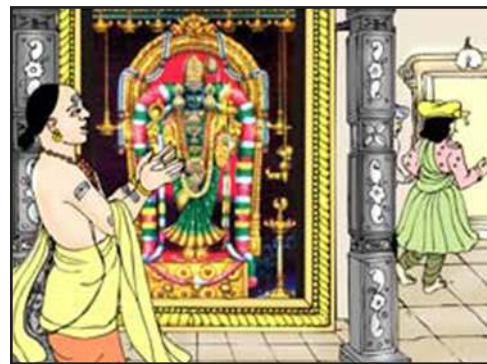
was



Pournami. The priests, who were very jealous of him, tried to tell the king that this guy was crazy. But after seeing the glow and joy on Subramaniam's face, the king was not convinced.

He didn't say anything, but left. He was concerned that if Subramaniam was such a great devotee of the Devi, why did he say it was Pournami on an Amavasya day? He was wondering about this.

In the meantime, Subramaniam had come completely out of meditation and realized he had said it was Pour-



nami when it was really Amavasya. And he was so disturbed about uttering this untruth to the king that he went outside the temple, dug a fire pit, filled it with logs and flammable material, set it ablaze, and put up a type of swing above it, which was supported by 100 small pieces of rope. He sang a verse to Abhirami Devi, and cut one of the ropes.

And he told the Devi, "Because I was so engrossed in you, I have given my king false information. Unless you make those words true, I will cut each rope one by one and fall into the fire pit. And what will people say later on? That a devotee of the Devi was let down by Her and he committed suicide. The



bad name will not come to me; it will come to you.”

Until the 75th song, every verse was heart-wrenching. After the 75th song, even the Devi couldn't bear to hear him cry out like that. She took her thaatankam (earring) and threw it into the sky. And what is Abhirami's thaatankam? It is a Sri Chakram, just like Akilandhiswari's. That is the only other deity that has a Sri Chakra thaatankam. So Devi took her earring out and threw it.

So Sarafoji Maharaja was out on the terrace and he saw the full moon. And he thought, “Oh my God, look at this.” And it stayed there. If you go to the Royal Astronomical Society in London, England, this event is recorded as an unexplained astronomical phenomenon.

The Devi then told Subramaniam Iyer to complete his songs. And what were the songs called? They were called Andadhi—‘andha’ means beginning. So if a song begins with that particular word,



it will end with that particular word as well. If it starts with a word, the previous song would have ended with that word.

Even to this day when you go to Thirukadavoor, the house where Subramaniam Iyer lived is still there; they preserved it. Of course, after he became famous, all the priests claimed, “Oh, I knew him, I knew him!”

Now, there are things about the Abhirami Andadhi that you need to know. The first thing is, if you do not know Sanskrit but you do know how to chant the Abhirami Andadhi, which is in Tamil, it is equal to chanting the Lalita Sahasranamam itself. These words came from Sri Amma.

Number two, you have to realize that 200 years before the time of Abhi-

rami Bhattar, there was a Pandya king by the name of Kulasekhara Pandyan. If this guy was a Pandya king, would he be a Brahmin? No, he was a Kshatriya. He sang something called Madhurapuri Ambika Malai, and some of the phrases that were in the Abhirami Andadhi have been taken from there and placed here. And I have that text here.

This was done in the 12th century. And of the words in Abhirami Andadhi, many phrases are taken from here. Kulasekhara Pandyan wrote 30 songs.

It's not a copyright infringement. I am saying that Madhurapuri Ambika Malai was the first instance of some of these phrases, and the person who has composed it has receded into darkness. No one knows that he wrote it. There's nothing wrong with taking the words of a great person in that way—only in the Western world is it plagiarism. The copyright here rests with Meenakshi Devi.

There was someone who wrote a commentary on the Lalita Sahasranamam in Tamil. I have never read anything in my life that detailed and that excellent—not by Bhaskararaya, not by Lakshmikanth, not by Siddhbhavananda.

Some of our children here wanted it to be translated so I went to the head of the mattam in Chennai to see who published it and who wrote it. Those fellows were long dead by the time I got there, but the chief priest of that place told me, “Aiya, the copyright over Lalita Sahasranamam reside with Hayagriva, so you publish what you want.”

Anyway, this bit of information you now know—that what you read in the Abhirami Andadhi is not the original stuff, and that Abhirami Bhattar took some of the lines



written by the king Kulasekhara Pandyan.

Another thing to know about Abhirami Andadhi or Madhurapuri Ambika Malai is that they are written in code. It's called Paribaasha. The actual information is never given to you in outward language. Why is that? If you unlock it and it falls into the wrong hands, it can be misused. It is even in the mantras you chant.

The power of the Laghu Shyamala mantra is only unlocked by another mantra, called the shaapa-vimochana mantra. The rishi himself has given another mantra to unlock the first one. But do you think there is a shaapam for Lalita Sahasranamam? N-O, no! So any Tom, Dick, Harry, James or Periyannayagi can chant it.

Some people tell you that unless you have Panchadasakshari, you can't chant it—I don't believe that. The Vak-devatas who composed it did not say you have to have Panchadasakshari before you read this. If you read the stotram or the phalasruthi, there is no place where it is mentioned. So Lalita Sahasranamam is for everyone, and Abhirami Andadhi is for everyone—the effects are the same, whether you choose the Sanskrit way to worship the Mother or the Tamil way.

Chidagni

The story of Sri Amritanandanatha Saraswati

part 10

The biography of Sri Amritananda Saraswati—who is affectionately known as Guruji to most of Aiya’s students—was penned in Telugu by Smt. Nethi Seeta Devi. These chapters were translated into English and graciously submitted to the Sri Chakra by Venkateshwar Babu from Philadelphia in an ongoing series.

Sri Devi Yaagam

Exactly six months after the conclusion of the grand event at Sagara Giri Durga Temple, Divine Mother appeared to Guruji. Divine Mother, in the form of Bala said, “When do you plan to build a home for me?”

Guruji laughed, and said, “If it possible, kindly make me build one yourself, because I am not in a position to build you one. I don’t have that much money. You very well know that.”

Bala: “I know. Please go ahead and conduct Sri Devi Yaa-gam.”

Guruji: “Why now?”

Bala: “Sri Devi Yaagam is for the same purpose. I told you so.

So, please go ahead and organize one as suggested.”

Guruji: “Looks like your intention is not to leave me alone quietly. I have no clue how to conduct these yagnas, and yaagas.”

Bala: “Is it just for you to sit idle; did I convince you to quit your job? Even otherwise, is it you who is doing all this? It is me who is getting things accomplished through you. Just consider yourself lucky that it is you. So, please go ahead and start working on this immediately.”

Guruji: “Divine Mother! You very well know I always obey your orders, and will continue to do so in future. Without any second thoughts, I quit my job. As you know, I have 3 kids that I need to take care of. To perform Sri Devi Yaagam, I need lots of money, which I don’t have.”

Bala: “Just listen carefully. Your kids are my responsibility. Your future is my responsibility. Those who strongly believe in me have never been left in the lurch! Nor will anyone be! You are in safe hands. Please go ahead and start your preparations for Sri Devi Yaa-gam.”

Guruji offered his salutations to the Divine Mother, and started his inquiries about

who/where and how such Yaagas are performed. Guruji then came to know that Sri Krishnayaji of Surya Peetam from Parvathipuram had a lot of experience in performing as well as conducting such a Yaagam on a grand scale.

Guruji immediately went to Parvathipuram to meet Sri Krishnayaji.

Upon patiently listening to what Guruji said, Sri Krishnayaji started explaining the process and procedures of Sri Devi Yaagam. He detailed all the items needed, and mentioned that rithviks would perform homams daily. In addition, there would be group Lalitha Sahasranamam and Vishnu Sahasranamam chantings, along with kumkuma pujas every day. Sri Krishnayaji also suggested that it is better if kumkuma pujas are performed by suvasinis (married ladies).

Guruji said, “As suggested, let me try to have suvasinis perform kumkuma pujas. But, will it be okay if widows also take part?”

Sri Krishnayaji said, “It is



Widows are wrongfully shunned from society and religious events in traditional Hindu circles



against the traditions.”

Guruji responded, “Why is it against the traditions? It is not just Suvasinis alone. If someone has something already, they are not going to pray to get what they already have. So, widows who have not been lucky in this lifetime will have the opportunity to pray to Divine Mother requesting her to bless them with marital bliss in next birth. So, it is unclear to me as to why it is against the traditions?”

Sri Krishnayaji, “That’s what our elders and wise men have said.”

Guruji replied, “In my opinion, I don’t believe this is ever mentioned in any underlying principles of Vedas or traditions. These have been incorporated by some few men, which have been accepted as traditions by the rest.”

Sri Krishnayaji said, “Please don’t say that. I just informed you what the traditions are. That’s the only thing that I am aware of, and would like to practice. Kindly let me know if you still wish to proceed.”

Guruji said, “I just can’t believe this. All would like to get closer to God, especially those suffering, and unlucky in life. We as fellow human beings should ensure that we provide them with all op-

portunities to get closer to God. That’s what I strongly believe. I would not like to say anything more, and leave it up to you. Please let me know if you have a change of heart.”

Guruji did not say anything further, and returned to Visakhapatnam.

Guruji started wondering, “Will Sri Devi Yaagam ever conclude successfully? Why do people follow traditions to the word, without ever taking into consideration the human aspect of those suffering? To those who are blessed with health, and wealth, what else can God give them, especially when they have everything? In the name of religion, traditions and customs, why is the human aspect missing all together?”

Guruji was extremely unhappy with the outcome of his meeting with Sri Krishnayaji.

Guruji’s brother-in-law Sri Prasada Rao said, “Are we in a position to bear the expenses associated with Sri Devi Yaagam? Why do we need to do all these now? I think you have made a sincere attempt to make it happen. Let us give up now.”

Guruji responded, “No way! Divine Mother has asked me to. So, we need to go ahead with no questions asked. That’s it!”

The next day Guruji rested for a while after his lunch, and when he woke up, he had a surprise awaiting him. Sri Krishnayaji showed up unannounced at Guruji’s doorstep. Guruji cordially invited him inside, and requested him to sit.

Sri Krishnayaji said, “Looks like you have a strong will. Divine Mother appeared in my dreams last night and said this

yaagam is very special. ‘Don’t be stubborn and stick to these so called customs and traditions. Please do as Sri Amritananda has requested.’ So, whatever you say will be a doctrine to me. Kindly go ahead and start your preparations for Sri Devi Yaagam. I will give you a detailed list of what is required. I will go ahead and invite rithviks. Kindly take care of the rest.”

It was at that stage that preparations picked up speed. The next big question was about the location. Where could this grand event be conducted?

It was around the same time that Simhaachala Devasthaanam had constructed a brand new marriage hall named ‘Prahlaada Kalyana Mandapam’ near Jagadamba Center in Visakhapatnam. Though construction had completed, this location was not yet inaugurated. Guruji contacted Simhaachala Devasthaanam to request them for conducting Sri Devi Yaagam at this location.

Temple Management immediately agreed to Guruji’s request. Temple Management was extremely happy and felt blessed that Sri Devi Yaagam will take place at their marriage hall, and consider this grand event as a formal inauguration.

April 27th, 1983 was decided as the start date for Sri Devi Yaagam. Since this was an event in honor of Divine Mother, Guruji thought it was appropriate to have



an idol of the Divine Mother on the main dais. Guruji was contemplating whether to have an idol made for this occasion.

A Telugu movie “Sri Rajarajeshwari Mahatmyam” had a successful run in Visakhapatnam around the same time. The owner of the movie theater had a huge idol of Divine Mother for the release of this movie.

Once the movie was no longer screened, he placed this idol in his office room at the theatre. Guruji wondered if this theatre owner would oblige giving Devi’s idol for the grand event.

Guruji approached the theatre owner, and explained his situation. Theatre owner immediately agreed. He told Guruji, “We consider ourselves lucky that you have asked us to participate in this grand event. Kindly take the idol of Divine Mother.”

Guruji thanked him and went home to request Ammah accompany him for bringing the idol home. Both of them went to the cinema theatre to bring the Divine Mother idol home.

As the cycle rickshaw was about to leave the cinema theatre with Divine Mother idol safely tucked in their arms, Guruji realized that someone was calling asking them to wait. Guruji heard music coming from musicians behind them and was wondering how this happened.

Guruji said, “I did not request the bhajantrees.” Ammah responded, “Why do we need to request? Divine Mother wanted them, and so they are here! Let’s go.”

With all the grandeur and pomp, Divine Mother ultimately graced the dais where the grand event was scheduled.

As planned, Sri Devi Yaagam commenced on April 27th, 1983 and was performed for the next 15 days. Sri Krishnayaji and

Guruji’s relatives attended Sri Devi Yaagam. In addition, this grand event was witnessed by more than 100,000 locals. Guruji himself funded this entire event.

Initially, it was Guruji’s intention to install 18 Sakthi Peetams as a precursor to Sri Devi Yaagam. As logistics did not permit this, Guruji installed 18 kalasams and commenced the grand event.

Every morning, the program commenced with a navaavarana puja at 5 a.m. Guruji and Ammah had actively conducted some special homams all by themselves every day. The grand event had everything going on—navaavarana puja, homams, Veda paarayanam, Devi sthuthi by ladies—all in one place these 15 days reminded everyone of good old Naimishaaranam.

Every day from 10 a.m. to noon, Lalitha Sahasranamam paarayanam and kumkuma pujas were performed. In addition, shodasa-upachara pujas were performed to 18 spinsters and nine suvasinis every day by applying paarani to their feet, providing bangles to wear, honoring them by showing mirrors, and giving them blouse bits.

Kids participated enthusiastically in Bala pujas. Guruji treated these little kids with equal respect and dignity and showered

them with love and affection by performing shodasa-upachara pujas. Who knows in what form the Divine Mother would come? So, Guruji performed every task, every puja



meticulously with love and devotion while taking care of every minute detail.

One -day, an old poor suvasini showed up at the doorsteps and requested Guruji perform suvasini puja to her. Guruji, with no second thought, cordially invited her to sit down, and with utmost devotion and dedication performed suvasini puja to that poor lady. Ammah was next to Guruji when this happened. Guruji said, “These are the situations when Goddess Mother takes the liberty to test us. She may come in any form or disguise. Just because this lady appeared poor and dirty, we should not send her back. Had we done so, we could have failed the test of Goddess Mother. No one can be ignored or disrespected during this grand event.”

There was hardly any break for anyone every day during the grand event. Every evening attendees had the opportunity to listen to religious discourses by distinguished speakers. Then, cultural programs like a classical music concert or a dance performance by enthusiastic kids followed it. After these activities, navaavarana pujas, and



A typical Indian street marching band. When deities are transported from one location to another, it is a sign of pomp and respect to have musicians present

pujas to couples (dhampathi puja) were performed every day.

The grand finale to the daily function was the mangala-aarathi using a lamp with 360 intertwined wicks, performed while religiously chanting Mantra Pushpam. At the conclusion, devotees would offer their final respects to Goddess Mother, take prasadam and leave for the day.

Donation of Devipuram land

On the third day of the Sri Devi Yaagam, to everyone's surprise a wonderful thing happened. On the third day of Sri Devi Yaagam, a blessed soul Sri Putrevu Babu Rao along with his brother attended the event, and donated 3 acres of cashew gardens on the suburbs of Narapadu village to Guruj. Guruj said, "What can I do with this land far away from the city"? Sri Babu Rao replied, "Please come and see this place for yourself once. Kindly accept our donation, and you can later decide what to do with it." Guruj accepted the invitation.

April 27th, 1983 was the day on which Sree Devi Yaagam started, which also happened to be the first day of Vasantha Navaraathri. Sree Devi Yaagam was celebrated with pomp and splendor all 15 days. On the 16th day, all 18 kalasams along with Divine Mother were taken in a grand procession around the city and they ended up on the beach for immersion.

Everyone who participated in the procession walked bare foot all along the entire route. Some of the participants were disappointed upon the conclusion of grand event.

They questioned Guruj, "Why did you conclude Sree Devi Yaagam so quickly? Why not extend these events by few more days?"

Some wept profusely, and said, "Divine Mother! We wish to come with you!" They started walking towards the sea.

With a quick presence of mind, Guruj immediately formed a human chain along with few other men to prevent

women from moving ahead into the sea. All 18 kalasams along with the idol of Divine Mother were slowly immersed into the ocean. The idol of Divine Mother danced to the waves of the ocean while slowly making its way towards the ocean bottom. Though there was lot of joy all around, they kept staring at the ocean with a heavy heart, and started reminiscing sweet memories



on the sea shore, before they could return back to the hall. Upon return, Guruj and Ammah changed out of their wet clothes and performed remaining formalities to conclude Sree Devi Yaagam. All those who participated in this grand event profusely thanked and commended

Guruj for having given them this unique opportunity to participate.

Once the dust settled, Guruj took the time to tally the expenses, and realized that the returns were 3,000 rupees more than his initial investment of 70,000 rupees for this grand event. Guruj deposited the entire amount back into her account at the bank.

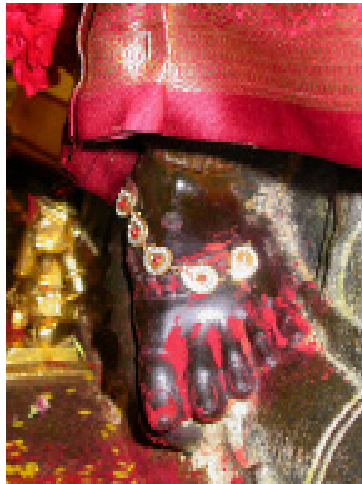
The location of these divine wonders next shifted to the cashew gardens near the suburbs of Narapadu village, the current location of Devipuram.



of the grand event that occurred over the past few days.

Sri Krishnayaji ensured that Guruj and Ammah completed their traditional rituals right

Deities are immersed in the ocean after a festival when they can no longer be worshipped on a regular basis. The deity's energy also goes back into the earth to benefit everyone through the flow of the water



Sri Gurubhyo Namaha