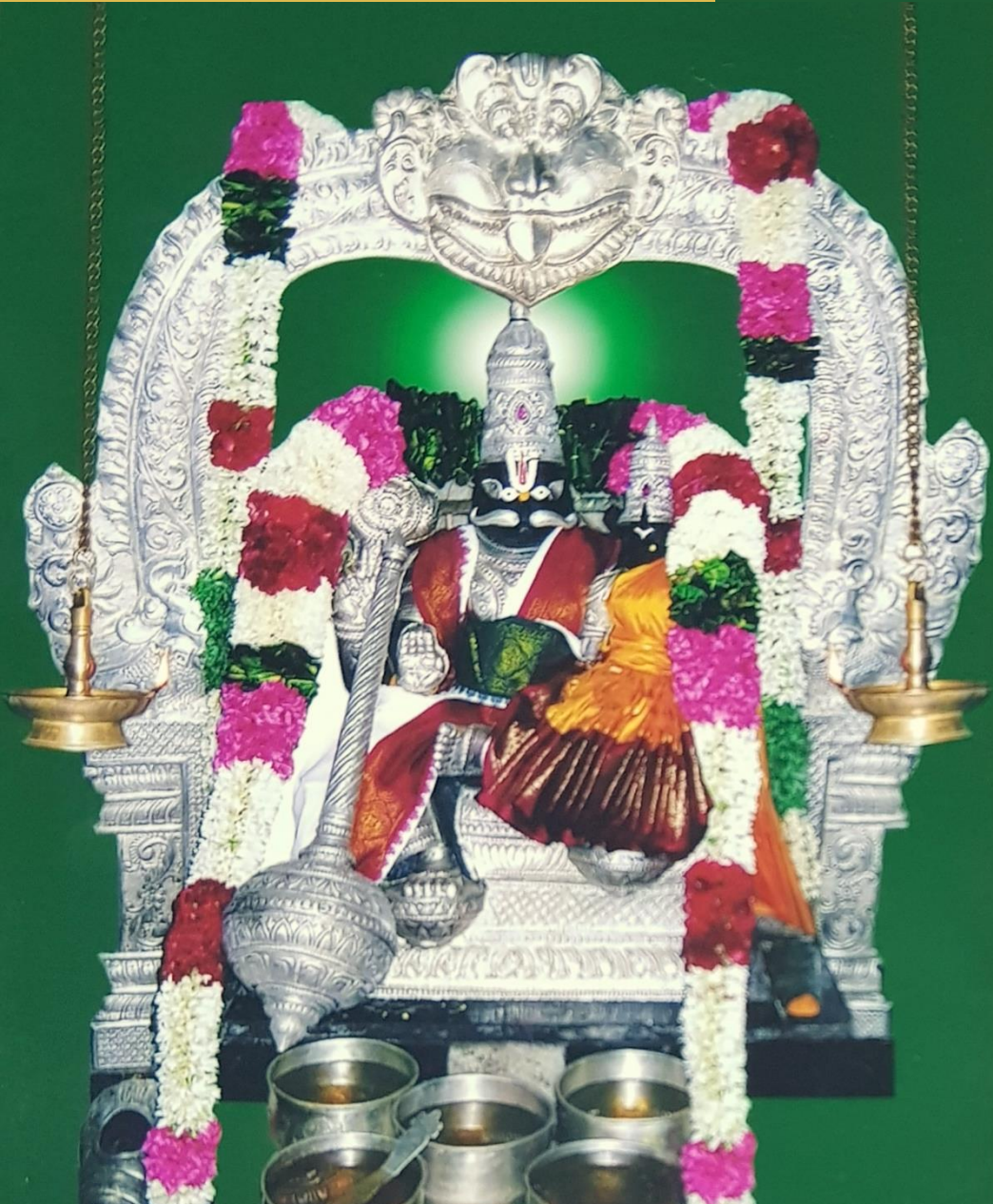


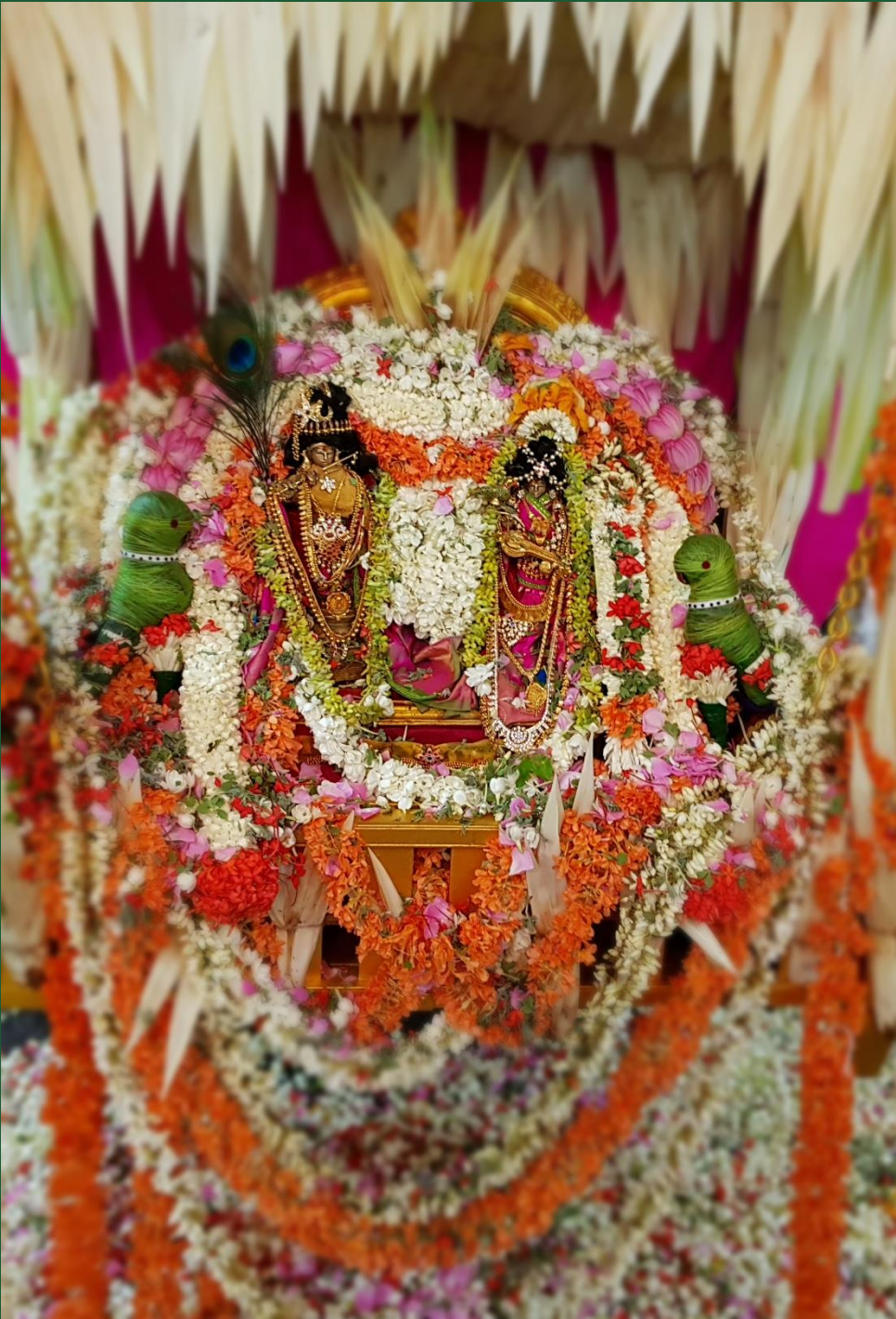
Sri Hari:

MADHURAMURALI

July 2019

*Spiritual Monthly with the Blessings of
HH Maharanyam Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji*





The family of Mr. Hariharan and Dr. Padmavathi has been involved in our Satsang for the past ten years. Their parents, siblings, and children Akila and Siddharth, all have deep affection for our Gurudev. Satsang is verily the foundation of their life. They have constructed the first floor of their house to facilitate the conduct of Satsang. Our Gurudev has also been there several times and conducted Satsangs. Let us now see an event connected with Mr. Hariharan's father Mr. Mathrubhootham.



MADHURA SMARANAM

My Guru As I See Him

Dr A Bhagyanathan

**(Sri Sri Swamiji's
Personal Secretary)**

Mr. Mathrubhootham turned 93 in 2018. He suffered from Parkinson's disease and was afflicted with cancer in food pipe. Due to cancer he was unable to eat food. Liquid diet was being fed into him through a tube that had been inserted through a surgery. His condition was beyond any treatment. Cancer had spread gradually to other parts of the body. A state of 'no further treatment could be got in the

hospital' had been reached. He had to be taken care of round the clock. As both Mr. Hariharan and Dr. Padmavathi were employed he was, under the advice of doctors, admitted to palliative care hospice in order to keep him free of pain in his last days.

However, Mr. Hariharan was restless and anxious. Neither could his father be given any treatment in a hospital nor could be kept at home and given personal family care; he lost his peace of mind seeing his father suffer. Spending sleepless nights, he rushed to Gurudev, the only solace to his upset heart. In our Gurudev he experienced nothing but verily a mother's embrace and a father's guidance. Sri Swamiji gave a patient and compassionate hearing to all that he had to say.

Gurudev was aware that of his two brothers one was in Bengaluru and the other in Hyderabad. Sri Swamiji asked Mr. Hariharan, "Are your two brothers here in Chennai or have left for their homes?"

Mr. Hariharan said, "They are here now but intend leaving tomorrow."

"Let them not leave tomorrow. All three of you stay with your father and keep chanting the Mahamantra incessantly," was the instruction from Sri Swamiji. Without another word Mr. Hariharan told his brothers to remain in Chennai. He then rushed to the Hospice in Sri Perambudur with his brothers and chanted the Mahamantra incessantly.

The very next day, around 8 a.m. in the presence of his sons, even as he was listening to the Mahamantra, Mr. Mathrubhootam attained the Lotus Feet of Sri Krishna! Living life to the full, becoming a vessel to Sadguru krupa and listening to the Divine Name of Sri Hari he was freed from his physical sufferings. Mr. Hariharan realized this fortune only too well.

Yet, on the one hand he was filled with sorrow over his father's demise while on the other hand he shed tears thinking of Sri Swamiji's grace! His brothers had stayed back in Chennai at the behest of Sri Swamiji. The last rites were conducted well with the Prasad that Sri Swamiji had sent. After a few months Gurudev blessed him further by making Mr. Hariharan perform Moksha Saptaham (reading the Srimad Bhagavatam over a week) in Vrindavan during the time of Rasa Poornima.

Absorbing and adhering to our Gurudev's words unquestioningly that family earned the great blessings of the Lord.

Answers and Beyond

Q: Does Temple Prasad bring about a change within us?

A: It is true that the Lord accepts the food offered in the temple. Well! let us now look at the structure of a temple. In a huge temple built with large prakaras (walls that separate an inner zone of temple ground from an outer zone) stambha (tall pillars), gopuram (sky high gateway), the garbha graha (Sanctum Sanctorum or the womb house) where the Deity is installed, is built small! The priests who go in to do puja for the Deity enter with great difficulty and the Sanctum Sanctorum is very sultry and small. It is in this manner that the Divine Presence of the Lord is placed concentrated in the Sanctum Sanctorum. The food that goes in and comes out also comes out with that Divine Presence.

In Srimad Bhagavatam (11:13:04) says

आगमोऽपः प्रजा देशः कालः कर्म च जम च ।
ध्यानम् मन्त्रोऽथ संस्कारो दशैते गुणहेतव

Shastras, holy rivers, a good son, country, time, karma, birth, deities' related matters such as dhyana, Mantra, samskara – these ten matters are the basis for the formation of character. All these ten matters have the power to change the chemistry within us. Our noble men who knew this had placed them in the temples and made way for bringing about a change in the chemistry of

Bhaktas who come to worship. The food that enters the Sanctum Sanctorum, the Mantras that we hear there, the structure of that place, fragrant incense sticks and lamps – all these bring about a divine chemistry within us.

The Deity in the Sanctum Sanctorum does accept the food offered – this is absolutely true! However, that is matter far from our perception. Be that as it may.... as consecrated food (food prasad), flowers, holy ash (vibhooti), holy water (teertham), have the power to attract and hold within them the divinity in the Sanctum Sanctorum they pass on the divinity there, to us. They act as a carrier of Divinity. Therefore, temple prasad certainly brings about a change in our chemistry.

Q: Why should an Age (Yuga) called Kali be made? Don't Shastras say that defects in earlier Yugas were far less? Those Yugas could have continued to stay.

A: Let us see how a day passes from the time of Sunrise to the next day's Sunrise? A day can be divided into four parts. A day that has 24 hours will thus have 6 hours in each part, right? We wake up early in the morning in Brahma muhurat. That hour is very supportive to controlling the mind and meditate on the Lord. Thus, the early hour period is akin to the Krita Yuga (the first Yuga -Age). Shastras show that in Krita Yuga, that is the first part of a day, all should meditate.

The next part of the day we all involve ourselves in some activity. We attend an office, earn our living, thus the mind is involved in activities. Thus, in the next Age of Treta Yuga activities such as Yaga and Yajna had been prescribed as the dharma for that Age.

In the succeeding time of dusk, we visit nearby temple, have darshan of the Lord and involve in temple worship. Likewise, in the succeeding Age of Dwapara Yuga worship of Archavatara (Deities in temples) has been prescribed.

The final part is in darkness, is it not? It is only in darkness of the night wicked deeds such as robbery, etc. take place? Such notorious activities that take place in the dark hours will also, generally, happen in this Age. Kali yuga is indeed a dark Age.

The Shatras that say 'kaler dosha nider raajan....' (Kali yuga will be filled with defects) also say 'asti hyekO mahaan guNa: keertanaath eva Krishnasya mukta sangam param vrajet' – that Kali also has a great quality. By mere Krishna Nama kirtan all will be liberated. Can anyone do Yaga or temple worship at night? Remaining in his place one can only do bhajan, is it not? Therefore, the befitting dharma for Kali is verily Namakirtan.

The four parts of a day repeat themselves and we follow the various dharmas befitting each part; so too, the four Yugas (Ages) and their primary dharmas have been formed.

There are innumerable paths to attain god's grace. In fact, there are as many paths as there are people in the world. Bhagavan Yogi Ramsuratkumar used to say, "God is infinite and there are infinite ways to reach him". Nobody's faith should be shattered.

Many people follow various practices like yoga, dhyana and vedanta. What is our practice? We chant whenever we find time. Otherwise we recite Srimad Bhagavatham; or we either do discourses or listen to them. We visit Brindavan, Pandharpur and other divyadesams to have darshan of the Lord. We worship God by offering fragrant flowers. When we talk, it is only about God. We conduct 'Utsavs' (celebrations) now and then and take the Lord on a procession. We seat the Lord in a swing and sing kirtans; at times, we also dance.



**WHAT
ELSE IS
NEEDED?**

- Sri Swamiji

We never feel that we have had enough of all this. What is the reason? We feel blissful when we do all these. The salvation which others attain with great difficulty, is easily bestowed on us by Sri.Premika varadhan. While the path of others is hard, ours is sweet. Hence it is known as 'Madhuropasanam' (sweet path). We should first thank Lord Brahma who wrote the destiny on our heads that we should do 'Madhuropasanam'! Devotion itself is graceful. Our 'Madhuropasanam' is highly graceful.

A visitor once asked Sri Swamiji,
“Why do you chant Nama?”
Sri Swamiji replied instantly,
“I chant because I am alive!”



After singing on the importance of fasting on Ekadasi days, which is mandatory for the devotees of Sri Hari, Sri Swamiji now proceeds to elucidate on the steps to be followed in the Bhagavatha dharma.

**“EkAdasi vratham irundhiduvAi nlyE
andru thoongamal keerthanam seidhiduvAi
Hariyin kadhaikaLai kEttiduvAi
Hariyin gunangaLai pAdiduvAi
Hariyin rUpathai kandiduvAi”**

After outlining the important components of Ekadasi vratham which are fasting, staying awake in the night and most importantly, the principal dharma of namasankeerthanam, our Guruji proceeds to highlight the first step in the path of Bhagavatha dharma, namely, ‘kathasravanam’, i.e. listening to the glories of the Lord, which has to be done on all days and particularly on Ekadasi days.

Stairway to devotion

- M.K. Ramanujam

8



The first step in the Bhagavatha dharma was mentioned to be 'kathasravanam'. A question may naturally arise as to what is the meaning of all the steps that were discussed earlier. It requires lot of spiritual merit to listen to the glories of the Lord from a saint. Only when we cross all the earlier steps, will we acquire the faith and qualify to listen to the glories of the Lord from a saint.

From this it becomes clear that, visit to holy places, a dip in the sacred rivers, temple visits, fasting etc. are the preparatory steps, which makes one worthy enough to listen to the glories of the Lord from a saint.

That the first step in Bhagavatha dharma is 'katha sravanam' is proclaimed not only by the Paramahansa Suka brahmam, but also by Prahlada, the emperor of bhagavatha dharma and by Lord Krishna himself.

Sri Suka, even in the beginning of the Bhagavatha discourse says,

'tasmAt bhArata sarvAtmA bhagavanIshvarO hari: |

ShrOtavya: klrItavyascha smartavyascha chitratAbhayam'

'Therefore, Hey Bharatha! Those desirous of moksha should listen to the glories of Sri Hari, who is immanent in all. They should sing his name, virtues and leelas and remember Him always'. In that, he mentions 'kathasravanam' first.

Prahalada alwar also, in the nine steps that he identifies in the Bhagavatha dharma, namely, sravanam, keerthanam, vishno: smaranam, pada sevanam, archanam, vandanam, dasyam, sakhyam and atma nivedhanam' gives primary importance to katha sravanam.

Lord Krishna also, in the Uddhava gita (11-19-20) indicates a stairway to devotion. In that, he assigns the first step to 'sraddha amrutha kathayamme' i.e to listen with faith to the glories of Lord Hari.

Sri Swamiji also in another Madhuraageetham sings, 'Listen with faith and devotion to the glories of the Lord from someone who narrates them with devotion and dispassion'. He lays importance to listening with faith and devotion.

‘Hariyin kadhaikaLai kEttiduvAi’

In what way should one listen to the stories? One should listen with faith and devotion like Parikshit, who listened to the stories on the Lord without bothering about hunger, thirst and the impending death.

‘vishnurAthana pOl kadhai kElu’

The purpose of this human birth itself is to do this kathasravanam. We should do more and more listening with deeper devotion and faith. While the purpose of this kathasravanam itself is for the vision of Lord Hari, the king Prithu when he had darshan of the Lord prayed to him for ten thousand ears with which he could listen to the sweet glories of the Lord. Like him, realising that there is no better benefit than kathasravanam itself, we should listen with faith.

‘Vishnu prithuvai pOl kadhai kElu’

While it is true that one is bestowed with liberation (Vaikuntam) as a fruit of kathasravanam, the great bhagavatha, Hanuman, even refused Vaikunta granted to him by his Lord and wished to stay in this world itself and listen to the glories of the Lord. Like him, we should think of kathasravanam as an end in itself and not as a means to attain liberation. Hence Madhurageetham says,

‘vishnu dAsana Hanumanai pOl kadhai kElu’

So when it is said that ‘Listen to the glories of Lord Hari’ it means that we should listen like Prithu and Hanuman.

One should pray humbly with love to the Lord, ‘Oh Lord, Please bless me that I should be able to listen to the stories on Lord Rama and Krishna and the numerous glories of Lord Hari and also on the lives of the devotees of Lord Hari which will enhance my devotion’. Hence Sri Swamiji in a nutshell, like an aphorism says,

‘Hariyin kadhaikaLai kEttiduvAi’.

When and how much to listen? ‘Kadhai kElu, kadhai kElu, sadha Hari kadhai nee kElu’; listen at all times whenever you get an opportunity.

If we are fortunate to obtain the darshan of a saint, we should plead with him to bless us by reciting the glories of Lord Hari and also listen with faith and devotion. Hence Madhuraageetham sings, 'sadha Hari kadhai nee kelu'. One should listen always without wasting time. If one is blessed with faith and involvement in to listening, nothing else is required. The listening itself will do all that is required and take one right up to the lotus feet of the Lord. The Hari katha itself will become Lord Krishna. Liberation will be waiting for us. Bhagavatham also says, 'Liberation will be like a gooseberry in one's hand'.

Lord Hari is deathless. His stories themselves are ambrosia to the ears and the mind ('shrOtra manObhirAmAt') The stories of Lord Hari themselves will bless one with the deathless liberation'. In the small sentence, Sri Swamiji indicates the highest blessing of kathasravanam which has to be done with faith and devotion like Hanuman, Parikshit and Prithu.

(to be contd..)

HUMBLE PRANAMS AT
THE LOTUS FEET OF GURUJI
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Sanskrit Word of The Month

The Sanskrit word "Koota" means "Mountain Peak or Top". The word "Giri Kootam" again means "Mountain Peak". In the 5th Canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, while writing about River Gangamaiya it is said that "बहूनि गिरी कुटानी अतिक्रम्या हेमकूटात् हेमकूटनी", The above verse means Gangamaiya, while descending from Brahmaloakha, on her way to earth passes through various mountain peaks and then reaches the peak called Hema Koota and then passes through Himalayas also known as Haima Koota.

Similarly in the 8th Canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, in Gajendra upakhyaana it is stated that Gajendra or the king of elephants lived in a place where there existed a mountain called Trikoota. "त्रिकूट इति विश्रुतः" which means mountain range with 3 peaks. It is also said that these three peaks were of Silver, Iron and Gold respectively.
[रौप्यायासाहिरण्मये:]

Sri Vishnupriya

The Sanskrit word Koota also means kapata or "Fake/false", At the time of Pralaya Lord Brahma emerged from the lotus in Lord Vishnu's navel and performed severe penance. Pleased with his penance Bhagawan appeared before Lord Brahma and said "O Brahma, I am pleased with your long and sincere Penance. Fake Yogis cannot please me easily". Here the word used is "दुसतोषः कूटयोगिनाम".



We can also see in several places in Srimad Bhagavatam usage of the word “गृहेषु कूटधरमेषु ” referring to the plight of a गृहस्ता (Family man) entangled in worldly affairs. The usage means “Gruhasta Dharma consisting of several fake/false dharmas”.

Sanskrit word Koota also means something which is puzzling or confusing. In Srimad Bhagavatam when sage Narada counsels Daksha's sons the word used are “वाचः कूटम तु देवर्षेः”. Along these lines, if we see the usage of this word in modern times the word “कूटपदः” means password, the one which is found in computer usage.

The word “कालकूटम” means the name of a poison. अहो बकी यम स्तनकालकूटम which translates to “How merciful is Lord Krishna who gave Vaikunta even to Poothana who smeared poison on her breasts and came to feed little Krishna. Can anyone be more merciful than him”!! Uddhava concludes.

The word Koota also means “Heap or Crowd.” That is why we say “अन्नकूटं”, arrangement of cooked rice in heaps in the shape of a mountain. This festival is called Annakoototsavam and celebrated in our Madhurapuri Ashram at the time of Govinda Pattakbhishekam . Different types of rice are cooked, arranged in heaps and offered to Lord Krishna.

WE also find another usage for the word Koota in Srimad Bhagavatham. “रमे स्त्रीरत्नाकूटस्थो” which means’ Krishna shone amidst his many wives”, (here “koota” indicating the numerous wives of Krishna).

The next meaning of “Koota’ is something which in Immovable, Permanent, Eternal etc . Therefore Parabrahmam is referred to as “कूटस्था”. There is a reference in Bhagavad Gita “कूटस्थं अचलं ध्रुवम्”, alluding to the qualities of Nirguna Brahman.

“कूटस्थ आदिपुरुषो” is what Dhruva says in his praise of Bhagawan.

“कूटस्थम इमं आत्मानम यो वेदाप्नोति शोभनम्”, Bhagawan says to Emperor Pruthu in Srimad Bhagavatham, meaning, “The one who knows the Kootasth(Eternal) soul attains immortality and blessed with everything”.

Sri Namdev

Maharaj Charithram

Shri Kanya - Shiv Kanya

In the evening, when Dhamushet arrived, Konabai narrated all that Namdev had told her about his pooja to Keshavaraja and how Bhagavan appeared and accepted all the offerings. Though Dhamushet was taken by wonder, he did not doubt all this to be Namdev's imagination or mere lies. 'Namdev was born by the grace of Panduranga and so Panduranga is playing with him', thinking so, he called Namdev.

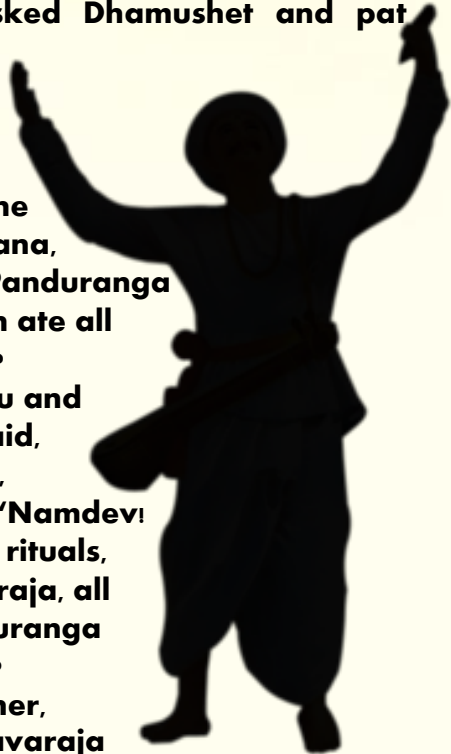
"Namdev, did you perform pooja to Keshavaraja this morning?", asked Dhamushet and pat came the reply from Namdev,

"Yes father, as you were unable to return back home on time for the pooja, mother asked me to perform the pooja. I did exactly the way you would do the thirumanjana, archana, pooja and nivedanam. Panduranga too accepted everything and even ate all that I offered. Father asked, "Is it?

Panduranga appeared before you and partook of the food?" Namdev said,

"Yes, He fed me too!" Dhamushet, filled with joy and wonder, said, "Namdev! Now that you know all the pooja rituals, will you do the pooja to Keshavaraja, all by yourself? Will you invite Panduranga and offer food tomorrow as well?

Hearing these words from his father, entitling him to do pooja to Keshavaraja



from the very next day, Namdev jumped up in joy, thinking, "Am I going to do the pooja from now on? I'm going to do Thirumanjana all by myself? Am I going to feed him? He ran to his mother with great joy, saying, Mother! from now on, father has permitted me to do Pooja to Keshavaraja on my own.

The next day, Namdev, waking up early went along with his father to Chandrabhaga river to take bath and as they returned back, his mother dressed up Namdev very beautifully. Then, taking all that is required for the Pooja, he went to the sanctum of Keshavaraja along with his father.

Just like the previous day, he opened the doors of the sanctum and gently woke up the Lord by singing Prabhodanam in his sweet and childish voice. He gave milk to Panduranga and after removing the nirmalya, did thirumanjana, decorated the Lord and offered flowers. Dhamushet was taken over by great surprise on seeing Namdev do all these on his own so beautifully, with no help and without being taught. He wondered, "When did he learn all these?" Dhamushet enjoyed the way Namdev was doing pooja with so much ease just like the one experienced in doing pooja everyday. Then, it was time for offering the incense, dheepam and Neivedhyam. Like the previous day, he made his father wait outside the Sannidhi. Dhamushet, too, heeding to the child's words, stepped outside, but, observed what was happening inside through an opening in the window.

After closing the door, carrying the plates with offerings in his hands, Namdev invited Panduranga to partake of the food. He sang an abhang calling out to the Lord, Hey Kesava! Hey Madhava! Please come to eat. Panduranga too, as he had promised the earlier day, came immediately on being called. As Namdev fed the milk, Kheer, rotis, Pooranpoli, curd rice, all offerings one by one, Panduranga ate them all.

Dhamushet, who was observing everything quietly through the door, saw this wondrous happening. Namdev was not telling lies. He understood that Namdev, although a little child, with his unshakable faith, was able to make Bhagavan appear out of the image and is able to even feed Him food like this. And tears of joy welled up in his eyes on thinking of his highest fortune of having begotten Namdev. While Panduranga was eating inside, he sprang open the door and ran inside.

Falling at the feet of Panduranga and with hands folded in submission, he began to speak. " Hey Prabho! Panduranga! All these years I have been starving you out.Today, Namdev is feeding you. I did not know to converse with you like Namdev. I have been so ignorant all along, without knowing the ways of feeding you like Namdev. Please forgive me" saying so, Dhamushet cried his heart out. But Panduranga smiled and started talking in a lighter way. "Hey Dhamushet! Pay attention to what I'am saying. Do not tell anyone about all that is happening here. Keep this as a secret" Dhamushet replied," Hey Panduranga! Do you think people come to know of your divine plays only after I tell them? I did not tell the people of Pandharpur about your stealing of milk, curd and butter from the houses of Gopis in Gokula. Yet, everyone is well aware of your lilas. Similarly, I don't need to tell this to anyone. Everyone will be aware of this too without me having to tell them.

On hearing this, Panduranga sported a beautiful smile and left. Dhamushet embraced Namdev and caressed him. " Hey Namdev, I have attained the highest fortune with you as my child and my entire clan has been blessed", saying so, he held little Namdev's hands and took him back home.

(to be contd...)

Snippets We Loved

How an Ancient Indian Art Utilizes Mathematics, Mythology, and Rice

Computer scientists have studied these “pictorial prayers.”

May 7, 2019

www.atlasobscura.com

BEFORE THE FIRST RAYS OF sunlight stream across the rice fields and mud roads in the Nilgiri Mountains, before they force their way through the high-rises in the urban jungle of Chennai and Madurai, the women of Tamil Nadu are up for the day. In the dark, they clean the threshold to their home, and, following a centuries-long tradition, painstakingly draw beautiful, ritualistic designs called *kōlam*, using rice flour.

Taking a clump of rice flour in a bowl (or a coconut shell), the *kōlam* artist steps onto her freshly washed canvas: the ground at the entrance of her house, or any patch of floor marking an entrypoint. Working swiftly, she takes pinches of rice flour and draws geometric patterns: curved lines, labyrinthine loops around red or white dots, hexagonal fractals, or floral patterns resembling the lotus, a symbol of the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi, for whom the *kōlam* is drawn as a prayer in illustration. The making of the *kōlam* itself is a performance of supplication. The artist folds her body in half, bending at the waist, stooping to the ground as she fills out her patterns. Many *kōlam* artists see the *kōlam* as an offering to the earth goddess, Bhūdevi, as well. But the *kōlam* is not just a prayer; it is also a metaphor for coexistence with nature. In her 2018 book, *Feeding a*

Thousand Souls: Women, Ritual and Ecology in India, an Exploration of the Kōlam, Vijaya Nagarajan, a professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Francisco, refers to the belief that Hindus have a “karmic obligation” to “feed a thousand souls,” or offer food to those that live among us. By providing a meal of rice flour to bugs, ants, birds, and insects, she writes, the Hindu householder begins the day with “a ritual of generosity,” with a dual offering to divinity and to nature.

The word kōlam means beauty. What it also embodies is a perfect symmetry of straight or curved lines built around or through a grid of dots. Nearly always, the grid of dots comes first, requiring spatial precision to achieve symmetry. The dot in Hindu philosophy represents the point at which creation begins—it is a symbol of the cosmos. No tools other than the maker’s deft fingers, and the rice flour, are used. Sometimes the designs are one continuous line that loops over itself, snaking to infinity. Intersecting into infinite figure eights, in a style known as pulli kōlam, the kōlam is also believed to be a representation of infinity, of the infinite cycle of birth and rebirth that forms a foundational concept in Sanathana Dharma.

Mathematicians and computer scientists have keenly studied the kōlam. The kōlam is “an unusual example of the expression of mathematical ideas in a cultural setting,” writes Marcia Ascher, a professor emerita of Mathematics at Ithaca College. Citing her ethnomathematical research (a field of study combining anthropology and mathematics), Nagarajan adds that “The kōlam is one of the few embedded indigenous traditions that have contributed to the western mathematical tradition.”

While the kōlam-makers themselves may not be thinking in terms of mathematical theorems, many kōlam designs have a recursive nature—they start out small, but can be built out by continuing to enlarge the same subpattern, creating a complex overall design.

This has fascinated mathematicians, because the patterns elucidate fundamental mathematical principles. Nagarajan writes about how the symmetry of kōlam art, such as the recurring fractals in the design, have been likened to mathematical models such as the Sierpinski triangle, a fractal of recursive equilateral triangles.

Computer scientists have also used kōlams to teach computers language fundamentals. Kōlam designs can be studied as a picture language. Quoting Ascher, Nagarajan notes that “akin to natural languages and computer languages, picture languages are made up of restricted sets of basic units and specific, formal rules for putting the units together.” Teaching the computer to draw kōlams gave computer scientists insight into how picture languages function, which they then used to create new languages. “It’s actually helping computer scientists understand something elemental about their own work,” said Nagarajan, in a presentation on the geometry of kōlam. Kōlam is meant to be ephemeral: the rice flour pattern gradually fades as day turns to dusk, trodden upon by visitors, family members, the odd bicycle, mailman, or stray animals. Holes appear in the design from tiny ants or nibbling bugs. But as the ritual of making kōlam itself is fading away, perhaps as a counter to this loss, more and more kōlam makers are turning to powders and acrylic paints that will hold the design for longer. The traditional kōlam continues to be made with rice flour and kavi, red ochre considered sacred. This is the kōlam drawn within the temple sanctum sanctorum, for the eyes of the gods, says Purandhar. But the elaborate kōlam displays entered in competitions and drawn on the streets of Tamil Nadu during the Pongal festival use a variety of colored powders, to the consternation of traditionalists who rue that kōlam is becoming more like the rangoli of North India—similar floor art made with colored rice flour, stone powders, or flower petals that follows a different set of design principles.

