

HINDUISM FOR JUNIORS

Part II

Compiled By Pathma

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Goddess Gayathiri



Gayathri Mantra

Om Bhur Bhuva Svaha
Tata Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi
Dhi Yo Yonah Prachodhayat Om

Oh Lord, You are the protector of life
You destroy all our problems and
Bring happiness. You create Knowledge
And light. You remove our sins.
Please guide us into the right direction.

Beliefs of Hinduism

Hindus believe in the Vedas and Aagamas. These are the world's most ancient scriptures, revealed by God.

Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and destruction.

Hindus believe in karma, where everyone's destiny or future is a result of the choices and actions they make.

Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, taking many births until all karma has been resolved, attaining moksha, the state of no birth.

Hindus believe that spiritual beings (souls) exist in unseen worlds.

Hindus believe that temple worship, rituals and sacred rites create a spiritual connection with Devas (divine spiritual beings) and God.

Hindus believe that all life is sacred so we must practise ahimsa, "no harm" to all life.

Hindus believe that everyone must tolerate, understand, respect, help and love each other.

Hindu Festivals and Celebrations

Thai Pongal



Thai Pongal is the harvest festival. It is held to thank the Sun and the cattle for the bountiful harvest every year. Pongal is celebrated on the 14th January. It is observed on the 1st of Thai month (in the Tamil calendar) which is in the middle of January. Thai is considered to be an auspicious month to hold weddings and other functions.

It is a three day festival of nature worship. The main activity is the boiling over of a pot of milk followed by the cooking of the Pongal (a mixture of newly harvested rice, jaggery and dhal).

There is a Tamil proverb that says 'when Thai is born, a new way will be born'. On the day before Pongal, house yards are cleaned, very old things are discarded and replaced with new things and houses are repainted and decorated. On Thai Pongal day, everyone wake up before the sun rises, shower, wear new clothes and gather in front of the house.

A flat, square pitch is made and decorated with kolam (designs in coloured flour). This kolam should be exposed to the Sun light. A fire wood hearth (stove-like) is set up using bricks or stands made of mud. A senior member of the family would begin by filling the pot (decorated with holy ash, sandal, kungumam, ginger, turmeric and mango leaves) with water and milk and then placing it on the stove while others worship the Sun and God.

The climax is when the milk boils and spills out of the pot. This is a symbol of joy. Fire crackers are lit and everyone shouts 'Pongalo Pongal'. Then the senior member of the family picks up raw rice with both hands, takes it round the mouth of the pot 3 times, while looking at the Sun, and finally places this raw rice into the pot to cook. The other members of the family will do the same.

After the Pongal is cooked this rice and fruits are offered to the Sun. A banana leaf is used as the plate to hold the rice and fruits. All family members will say prayers and thank the farmers, Sun, nature and God.

Finally the Pongal is served with fruits to family members and shared with neighbours, friends and relatives. It is a joyous occasion for the poor and rich

farmers. All villagers celebrate this harvest festival together irrespective of their religion.



“Mattuppongal” is celebrated on the next day. The cattle that help the farmers to plough the fields, transport the goods and provide the milk are thanked. On this day the cattle are bathed and decorated. Turmeric and kungumam are applied on the horns of the cattle. Flower garlands, small bells and a garland of vadai are hung around their necks and they are paraded in the streets in India. This festival is also known as ‘Mahara Sangraanthi’. After decorating the cattle, freshly cooked Pongal is fed to them. The cows are regarded as the symbol of The Holy Mother (Goddess Shakthi).

Thaipoozam

The Thai Poosam festival takes place in the month of Thai (Jan-Feb) on the day of the star Poosam, during full moon time. The popular myth or legend behind Thaipoozam is associated with Idumban and Murugan.

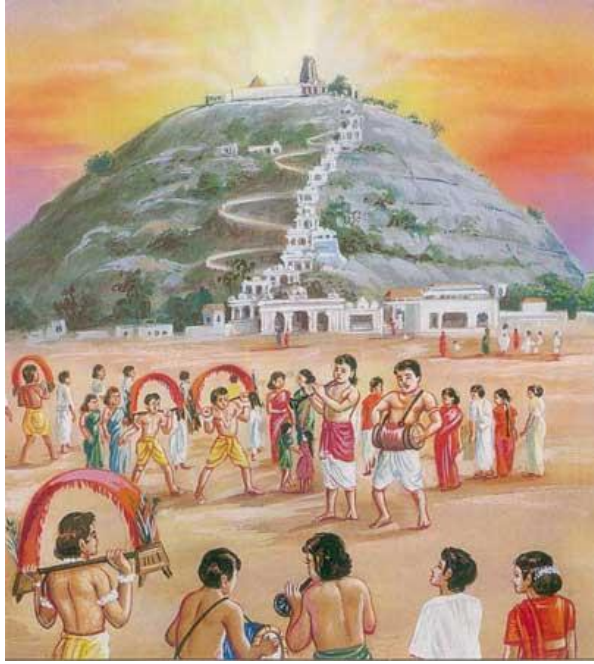
Sage Agastya wanted to take two hills Sivagiri and Saktigiri to his place in the South and told his Asura disciple Idumban to carry them. On the orders Sage Agastya, Idumban carried the Sivagiri and Sakthigiri hills slung across his shoulders, one on each side.

When he reached Palani feeling tired, he placed the hills down to rest.



When Idumban restarted his journey, he found that he could not lift the hill. God Murugan had made it impossible for Idumban to carry it. Upon one of the hilltops the great Asuran spotted a little boy in loin clothes. Idumban demanded the boy to vacate the hill at once so that he could proceed with his task. The boy stubbornly refused. Idumban and the boy began to fight.

In the battle Idumban was slain. Idumban's wife pleaded with the little boy to forgive and free him and so Idumban's life was restored. Idumban realized that the boy was none other than God Murugan. He asked for forgiveness, requested God Murugan to allow for everyone to celebrate this day by carrying the kaavadi on their shoulders (signifying the 2 hills).



Idumban also requested that he guard the entrance to the Palani hill. Hence we have the Idumban shrine half-way up the hill. Every pilgrim is expected to offer respect to Idumban before entering the temple of Dandaaudhapaani Swami.

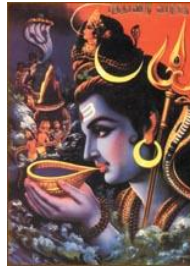
Since then, pilgrims to Palani bring their offerings on their shoulders in a kaavadi. The custom has spread from Palani to all Murugan temples around the world.

Kaavadi bearers must have strict vegetarian food, must not drink any intoxicating drinks and must be in constant thought of God.

Many of the Kaavadi bearers especially who do it as spiritual Sadhanaa, impose various forms of self-torture. Some devotees pass a sharp little spear through their tongue, which is made to protrude (thrust) out of the mouth. Others may pass a spear through the cheek. This type of piercing is done in other parts of the body also.

These 'Sadhanaas' are performed to achieve the feeling of detachment from the body. The Kaavadi bearers enjoy high state of religious fervor. They dance in ecstasy (delight) and some appear to be possessed by a divine spirit.

Sivaraathiri



One of the most ancient festivals in India is Sivaraathiri, meaning 'night of Siva' which falls on the new moon day of February/March. On this night, God Shiva took the form of a huge column of infinite light, jyotirlingam (lingam of light). There is nothing to distinguish the appearance of this lingam, but it is believed that a person can see this linga as a column of fire piercing through the earth after he/she reaches a higher level of spiritual attainment.



There are several myths associated with the festival as to why Maha Sivratri is celebrated:

1. To remember the day God Siva took the form of the Jyotirlinga to settle a dispute between God Brahma and God Vishnu.
2. To commemorate the day on which Lord Siva consumed the deadly poison to save the world from destruction

Devotees of God Siva stay awake through out the night praying. Siva temples are flocked by devotees, mostly women who perform traditional worship. The devotees abstain from eating and drinking for whole day and break their fast only the next morning, after the night worship.

Poojas are performed through out the night in the temples. Maha Sivaraathri poojas is divided into 4 yaamams (sessions).

1. 6:30pm – 9:30pm
2. 9:30pm – 12:30am
3. 12:30am – 3:30am
4. 3:30am - 6:00am

The well known story of the hunter illustrates the greatness of celebrating this night.

Maasi Maham

Sivaraathiri and Maasi Maham festivals are the special Hindu festivals between 1st half of March and 2nd half of February (Tamil month Maasi). The star Maham is a powerful star among the 27 stars. The festival on Maham star in Maasi is said to be Maasi Maham.

Maha Maham, also called day of Maamaangam, is celebrated only once in 12 years. This is because in the month of Maasi, when the sun, the full moon, the Maham star sign and Jupiter are aligned in a certain way, water in the Mahamaham tank at Kumbakonam (in India) is said to swell. On this day the nine holy rivers are believed to swell and meet at the Mahaamaham tank. The names of these Holy Rivers are Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswathi, Krishna, Godawari, Narmadha, Cauvery, Thungabadra and Sarayu. Pilgrims from all over the world flock to bathe (dip) in the Theertham (Holy water) in the Kumbakonam Kaasi Visvanaatha temple. They believe that realizing, asking for forgiveness and dipping in this tank will purify them.

It is believed that many celestial beings (even Lord Brahma) have prayed for forgiveness for their sins by dipping into this tank. Also Dhaakshaayini, an incarnation of Goddess as daughter of King Dhaksha was born on this day, which is why Maasi Maham is celebrated throughout Shakthi temples.



MahaMaha Tank at Kumbakonam.

There are two holy theerthams (tanks) One tank is called MahaMaham tank while the other is called as Pottramarai tank at Madhurai.

Maha Utsavam

'Maha' means 'great' and 'Utsavam' means 'festival'. This is an annual festival that is celebrated in Hindu temples between March and August. The festival usually lasts for 10 days. (The number of days may differ from temple to temple.) This festival gives an opportunity for all communities to involve themselves in hosting (upayam) a morning/evening pooja on one of the 10 days. This annual festival is expected to draw tens of thousands of devotees. Almost every Hindu will visit the temple for at least one of the Poojas.



On the first day the ceremony begins with the Kodi Etram (Flag Hoisting) to mark the beginning of the temple festival.

For all 10 days, the morning and evening pooja involves the decorating of the deities, rituals, poojas to these deities, followed by the procession (carrying around) of the Utsavamoorthies, deities made of brass from the Vasantha Mandapam, within the inner court of the temple.

The highlight of the festival will be the "Ther" (Chariot) festival which occurs usually on the 8th day in the morning. The temple bells will ring early in the morning, filling the area with a spiritual atmosphere. The "Ther" is taken round the outer-yard by hundreds of devotees, and accompanied by instrumental music and devotional songs. Many carry the kaavadi behind the 'ther' as a form of worship. Then the Utsavamoorthies are taken out from the chariot and placed in the Vasantha Mandapam where the final pooja, for the day, will be performed.

The last day involves the Theertham or "water cutting" ceremony. The deities are immersed in the pond to mark the festival's end. In the evening the flag is brought down after special pooja.

Poongaavanam, which is also known as The Festival of Flowers, takes place the day after. This is to celebrate the Holy Wedding. This annual festival is concluded with an abhishekam and pongal to Lord Bhairavar.

Panguni Uthiram

(The day of Celestial marriages)



Panguni Uthiram falls in the month Panguni (March-April) when the Uthiram star and the full moon occurs together. It is said to be the time chosen for celestial weddings.

On this day the well known celestial marriages took place:

1. Meenakshi – God Shiva
2. Devayanai - God Muruga
3. Kamalavalli (Valli for short) - God Muruga
4. Andal (also known as Kothai) – God Vishnu
5. Sita and Rama (incarnation of God Vishnu) according to Valmiki Ramayana

From Brahmanda Puranam, we learn that on Panguni Uthiram, every holy water joins Thumburu teertha (also spelt as Tirtha), one of seven sacred tanks in Tirupati Tirumala.

The ancients chose Uthiram to convey to humans that it is for illustrating Grahasta Dharma (married life) that the Almighty manifests in the marital state despite their changelessness (no childhood, youth or old age).

Devotees go to the temple at this time to see these weddings.

This day is also the Jayanthi (day of Incarnation) of Lord Ayyappa

Holi



Holi is a joyful festival of colours and is celebrated on the full moon day which usually falls in the later part of February or March. It is celebrated in many parts of India, especially in North India. This festival is celebrated for two to three days. People pour coloured water on each other and cook many types of sweets and other eatables. Holi is celebrated in spring because it is welcoming spring. They also believe that it welcomes the New Year.

There are many stories behind this festival

Lord Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Lord Vishnu is also worshipped during the Holi festival. Putaki, the female demon was sent by the cruel king Kamsa to kill the child Krishna. But the infant Krishna destroyed her instead. Hence, bonfires lighted to celebrate the victory of Krishna.

Holi, also known as Holika Dahan (death of Holika). The bonfires are lit in memory of the miraculous escape of young Prahlad. Hiranyakasip (the king of demons) had a son, Prahlad who was the greatest devotee of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakasip wanted to kill his son. So he called his sister, Holika. She had a magic robe. This robe had the power to save the wearer from burning in fire. Hirnyakaship ordered his sister to sit on burning fire along with Prahlad. He thought that her sister would not be harmed by fire because of the magic robe and Prahlad would be burnt to death. But the result was the opposite Prahalad walked free. It is believed, no one can harm the person who has God as his savior. That day was celebrated with joyful colours to mark the victory of virtue and goodness over evil. This festival got its named 'HOLI' from this incident

The spring season, during which the weather changes, is believed to cause viral fever and cold. So the playful throwing of natural coloured powders has a medicinal significance: the colours are traditionally made of Neem, Kumkum, Haldi, Bilva, and other medicinal herbs prescribed by Ayurvedic doctors

Hindu New Year



Hindu New Year is celebrated according to the Hindu calendar (Panchangam). The Hindu calendar is based on lunar months corresponding to the phases of the moon. The New Year usually falls on the 13th, 14th or 15th of April.

The house and surroundings are cleaned several days before the New Year day. The elders of the family read the Panchangam to find out the times of the New Year. They also note the auspicious days and time for social visits and "Kaivishesham" (giving cash as presents).

On the morning of New Year day, the householder and family have their ceremonial bath in specially prepared, medicated water and attend the poojas at the nearest temple. On returning home the whole family has a New Year meal consisting of milk-rice, delicious snacks and fruits. Then the head of the family gives Kaivishesham to the family, friends and employees.

Several old customs are observed on this occasion. It is the time of great rejoicing and feasting, but above all, of family re-union.

Ram Navami



Ram Navami is the celebration of the birthday of Rama, a divine figure in Hinduism.

In the Ramayana, Dasharath, the king of Ayodhya, had three wives. They had no children, so they had no heir to the throne. Rishi Vasistha advised him to perform Puthra Kamesti Yagna, through which he could have a desired child. According to Guru's advice, King Dasharath went to Maharshi Rushya Shringa's ashram, to get him to perform the yagna.

As the result of yagna, Yagneshwar appeared and gave Dasarath a bowl of Payasam and told him to give it to his wives. Dasharath gave one half of the payasam to his elder wife, Kausalya, and another half to his younger wife Kaikeyi. They both gave half of their portions to Sumithra, the youngest wife. After a few days, all three Queens conceived. On the ninth day (Navami) of April (first month in Hindu calendar), at noon, Kausalya gave birth to Lord Sri Ram, Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharath and Sumithra had twin boys, Lakshman and Shatrughan.

Prince Ram and Lakshmana accompanied Viswamitra to the city of Mithila, the capital of King Janaka, where he married his daughter Sita after performing the superhuman act of bending Siva's bow (Siva Dhanu).

Lord Ram, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, took the human form on earth when Adharma (evil) ruled over Dharma (good). He protects all his devotees by destroying the roots of Adharma. Lord Ram was born on earth to destroy the demon named Ravana.

Celebrations begin with a prayer to the Sun early in the morning. At midday, when Lord Ram is supposed to have been born, a special prayer is performed. In northern India especially, an event that draws popular participation is the Ram Navami procession. The main attraction in this procession is a decorated chariot in which four persons are dressed up as Ram, his brother Laxman, his queen Sita and his disciple Hanuman. The chariot is accompanied by several other persons dressed up in ancient costumes.

For the occasion, Hindus are supposed to fast (or restrict themselves to a specific diet). Temples are decorated and readings of the Ramayana take place.

Chitra Pournami – Chitracharya Vrata

(Full moon day in the month of April on the star of Chitra)

The full moon of Chitra (April) month during the influence of Chitra star is particularly sacred to the Chitracharyas, the recording demi-gods of the Yama Loka (the abode of Lord Yamas).

According to the Hindu mythology, Yama's divine assistant, Lord Chitracharya, sends the soul of the deceased either to Svarga (Heaven) or Narakas (Hell) according to the nature of their sins.

The terms of Chitracharya means "Hidden picture" representing the true picture of all our good and evil actions.

The worship on this day is to remind us of the higher power that maintains a constant watch over every act of ours. This memory serves as an invisible check on our conduct. This is a powerful inducement to keep us engaged in constantly doing good actions only.

Pournami is a day dear to the mother. (Both full moon and new moon days are favourable for fore-fathers and mothers). On this day Uma Maheswarar Vrata is observed. Ancients believed that on these days the souls of our ancestors are resting in peace.

The importance of the worship to the 'Chitracharya' is brought out in the following legend.

Prahaspathy was the teacher of Indra (the king of demi-gods) Indra disobeyed his Guru. Then Guru gave up instructing Indra on what good deeds had to be done, and what should be not. During the period of Guru's absence Indra did many evil deeds. When Guru resumed his duty again, Guru told Indra to undertake a pilgrimage for the wrong actions he had done in Guru's absence.

When Indra was on his pilgrimage, suddenly he felt the load of sins taken off his shoulders at a place near Mathurai in South India, and he found a Sivalingam there.

The miraculous incident made him build a temple and perform the worship of the Lingam,

The God Himself caused Golden Lotuses to appear in a near by pond.

Indra was greatly pleased and blessed. The day on which Indra worshipped the God was Chitra Pournami. So he constructed another temple at that spot. That spot is Mathurai Meenaakshi Temple in South India. On this day in Mathurai annually 'Devendra Pooja' continues to be performed.

Sathya Naaraayana Vrata

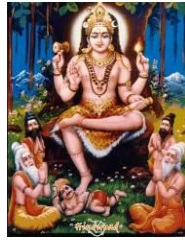


‘Satya’ means truth. ‘Naaraayana’ is a name of ‘Vishnu’
In the Hindu tradition ‘Sat’ means ‘Truth’ or Pure Being –it is considered the highest Reality; Satyanarayana Vrata reminding us all names and forms, refers to the nameless, formless God.

In Hinduism the term ‘vrata’ denotes a vow or religious practice to carry out certain obligations with a view to achieve divine blessing for fulfillment of one or more desires.

In Hindu mythology, Naarada Rishi was a Triloka Sanchari—the one who moves about in the three worlds. When he once visited the earth, there was great misery. He was unable to find a way to relieve human suffering. He approached Lord Naaraayana and related to Him the sad state on earth. Lord Naaraayana said to Naarada, to ask the people to observe the Satya Naaraayana Vrata in the evening of Shankranti or full moon day and hear the story of Satya Naaraayana, and that all miseries will come to an end. Rishi Naarada there upon returned to earth and preached the glory of the Satya Naaraayana Vrata. Many observed the vrata without taking any food during the course of the day and attained what they desired. All were happy and prosperous.

Pradhosha Vrata



(Holi Kailash & Manasarova lingam in Nepal in pradhosha pooja)

Pradhosha occurs twice a month. One is during the growing or waxing moon period and other during the waning moon period. This denotes the meeting of the Sun and the Moon in a Horizontal Line.

The Pradhosha worship is to be done in the evening just after sun set on the thirteenth day of each lunar fortnight.

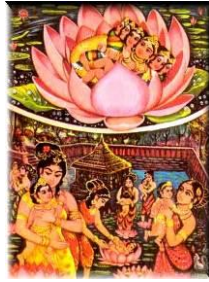
On this pradosha occasion pradhakshana should be done (circumambulation) anti clockwise around the temple.

Pradhosha is a time for redemption from sins accumulated over rebirths. The reason that we struggle in life is due to our sins or karma. Though this is meant to teach us some invaluable lessons of life, it is often painful.

Performing the Pradhosha rituals enables us to soften the bad karma. Karma removal lifts spirits and creates positive change in both the material and spiritual aspects of our life. Saturday Pradhoshas occur on Saturn's day itself.

They are traditionally the most auspicious days to rid oneself of troublesome karma. Pradhosha vrata will shift our outlook on life and help us to have positive thoughts in any situations.

Vaikaasi Visaakam



Vaikaasi visaakam is Lord Muruga's Birthday.

Vaikaasi Visakam, when Visaaka stars and full moon meet, it is particularly auspicious for worship of Subrahmanya. On this day (in May-June) Lord Muruga was born with the mission of saving earth from Soorapadman. According to mythology He emerged as sparks from the third eye of Lord Siva, and passing through sky, wind, fire and the waters of Ganga, reached earth, formless at first and finally acquired form in a pond.

There are so many names for Lord Muruga:

Visaakhan as he was born under the star Visaka;
Pavaki from having rested a while in fire;
Gangeya, since he acquired form in Ganga;
Skanda, as he took in and poured out Ganga water;
Karthikeya, as he was brought up by Kruthika maidens.
'Brahmanya' is a term applied to Lord Shiva. From interpreting the pranava mantra to Siva, So Muruga came to be called Subrahmanya.

Sashti is regarded as ideal for worship of Subrahmanya as it was on that thithi he destroyed the demon Soorapadman.

Adi Sankara composed the 100-verse Subrahmanya Bhujangam in praise of Muruga. Saint Arunagiri composed several thousand hymns

On this day that the Buddha Purnima is celebrated - the day on which Gautama Buddha (founder of Buddhism) is said to have been born, got enlightenment and attained Nirvana.



Aani Uthiram



குற்றாலம் சித்ர சபை	மதுரை வெள்ளி சபை	திருவாலங்காடு ரத்ன சபை	சிதம்பரம் பொற்சபை	திருநெல்வேலி தாமிர சபை
Kutraalam	Mathurai	Thiruvaalangaadu	Chithamparam	
Thirunelveli				
Chithra Saba	Silva Saba	Ratna Saba		
Gold Saba	Copper Saba			

The Uthram star falls on the month Aani (June-July). Special Thirumanchanam (also known as abhishekam) is performed to God Siva in the evening. It is believed that God Nadarajar gives Dharshanam (special blessing) in this month of Aani. This is the best time for worshipping God Shiva.

Scriptures say that it was on Aani Uthiram, under a kurundai tree, that God Siva, disguised as a Sivachariyaar (Brahmin priest) revealed the Nama Sivaya manthra to Saint Maanickavaasagar (the composer of the famous Thiruvaasakam) in his ear (upadesa).

Aadippirappu

'Aadi' is 'July' and 'Pirappu' means 'birth'. On the first day of each month of the Hindu calendar, Hindus usually go to the temple and do pujas. However the first day of Aadi is considered to be a special day. There are no significant rituals attached to Vedas or Aagamas but Aadi is a sacred month for them.

During this time the monsoon peaks on the west coastal rivers of Tamil Nadu. The ancient Tamils believed in the power of nature, astronomy and astrology. For the welfare of the country, this festival is traditionally celebrated by Tamils.

Aadi Pirappu is also an important festival for the newly-weds. Most of the temple festivals are fixed in this month.

Aadippirappu is remembered in a popular poem written by Navaaliyur Somasunthara Pulavar (poet)

"Aadip pirappukku naalai viduthalai

Aanantham Aananm Thoalarhalae



The traditional offering to the God, on this occasion, is sweet stew called 'Koozl' and Kolukkaddai (which is made with rice flour, jaggery and split mong beans).

Aadip perukku



Aadip perukku is an important festival for the people living on the banks of the River Cauvery. Aadip perukku is celebrated every year on the 18th of the Tamil month Aadi.

'Aadi' is July and 'perukku' means overflowing. During this time the river would be overflowing with new flood after the summer. This festival has been celebrated to welcome the water from the distant hills.

This festival is celebrated all along the towns and villages on the Banks Rivers in Tamil Nadu. Now the man made dams and reservoirs stop this natural flow of the river and has made this festival meaningless.

People prepare a picnic lunch and set off for the banks of the river. Small children would be pulling 'chapparams' (a small pull-cart decorated with coloured papers (imitation of a temple-like structure)). The women treat the River Cauvery as a woman and offer flowers, bangles and earrings made of palm leaves.

There would be big neem and peepul trees each on the banks of the river. The statues of snakes (worshipped as deities) are under these trees. The Seven Virgin Goddesses (Saptha Kanni) placed under them hundreds of years back. Women and men would tie yellow threads (dipped in turmeric) their hands / wrist as a mark of their prayers.

Newly wed couples would be offering puja to the river for the first time. The bride would be staying in her parents' place during the month of Aadi and the groom would have been invited to her place for the festival and would be showered with feasts and gifts. The womenfolk of the house would change the 'thaali' made of yellow thread around the neck of the bride (which has been tied as the 'Mangalasutra' by the groom on the wedding day) to a gold chain on this day, as it is considered an auspicious day.

Aadippooram



In Hindu Mythology, Aadi (July) is considered a special month for Goddess Sakthi. On the day when the Pooaram star appears, Goddess Shakti gave Dharshanam to deities as Sri Lakshmi and Aandaal.



Aandaal was a remarkable girl who married Lord Ranganatha. Aadippooram is the day of the chariot festival at Sri Villiputtur and the grand festival in Sri Rangam Temple.

Aandaal is the only female among the twelve Vaishnava Aarlvaaars (Saints) who composed Naalaairava Dhiyava Prabandham).

Life History of Aandaal



A pious Brahmin, named Vishnusittar, lived in Villiputtur which is a town near Madurai. His daily duties included collecting flowers and making garlands for the temple. One morning, he found a baby girl lying under a tulsi plant in his flower garden. Having no family of his own, Vishnusittar felt the child was a gift from God, and filled with joy he took her home and raised her as his daughter. He named her Godhai (gift from mother Godhai grew up in an atmosphere of love and devotion. Vishnusittar used to sing songs to her about his beloved Krishna, taught her all the stories and philosophy which he knew and shared with her his love of Tamil poetry.

The love Vishnusittar had for his Beloved Lord Krishna, deeply influenced his daughter, making her fall in love with Lord Krishna. Even as a child, Godhai made up her mind to marry none other than Lord Ranganatha.

Unknown to her father, she decorated herself daily with the flower garland which he made for the temple. After admiring her reflection in the mirror and thinking of herself as his ideal bride, she used to put the garland back.

One day Vishnusittar noticed Godhai's hair in the garland. Shocked and saddened by this pollution, he scolded her for misusing the garland and discarded it. He carefully made a new one and offered it to the lord, begging His forgiveness.

That night, Lord appeared in Vishnusittar's dream and told him that He missed the scent of Godhai in the flowers and asked Vishnusittar to continue offering the garlands worn by Godhai. Overcome with emotion; Vishnusittar awoke and

cried tears of both joy and regret. .He realized her spiritual greatness and from this day on she became known as “Aandaal” the girl who ‘ruled ‘over the Lord.

When Aandaal became older, she only agreed to marry Sri Ranganaatha. Vishnusitter lost hope, wondering what happened to his daughter. One night Lord of Srirangam appeared in his dream and asked to send Aandaal to him as a bride. At the same time, the Lord appeared in the dreams of all the priests of SriRangam, and asked them to arrange the welcoming function for the bride Aandaal. With joy, they did all the preparations.

Aandaal was excited about her wedding. When Aandaal and her bridal party entered the temple, she jumped out of the palanquin (pallakku) running into the temple sanctum, she embraced Lord’s statue and disappeared in the supreme light. She was fifteen years old at that time.

Aandaal is one of the best Tamil poets. She is present in all Vishnu Temples next to her Lord, as she always desired

Aadi Amaavaasai

Aadi Amaavaasai has a special significance for Tamil Hindus as on this day, every year; Hindus remember their male ancestors.

Aadi Amaavaasai occurs in July under the Tamil calendar. Amaavaasai means the new moon and Aadi means the month of July. The Tamil Almanac which is called the Panchangam can be used to find out the dates that are important to the Tamils and particularly the Hindus.

The day begins by cleaning the house early in the morning, having a bath, wearing clean clothes and fasting. A vegetarian meal is prepared, photographs of the male ancestors are displayed (e.g. father or grandfather), an oil lamp is lit and prayers are offered to them with their thanks for looking after them. The food is offered to them and the fast is then broken and the descendants partake in the food.

In this way we seek the blessings of our ancestors so that we lead a good life and follow in their footsteps.

Chithirai Pournami

One of the significant characteristics of Hindu Philosophy, tradition and custom is to respect and remember parents, especially mothers. Specific days of the Calendar are set aside to honour our Female Ancestors. This day is called Chithirai-Pournami which is the full moon day that falls in the month of April/May of each year.

Customary procedures are the same as for Aadi Amaavaasai except photographs of female ancestor(s) are displayed.

Ganesha Chathurthi



Basic sounds a-u-m, form the origin of all sounds. The three combined constitute called AUM pranava. Vedas say Aum emanated from Brahman, the Supreme soul of the universe. Science acknowledges that from this sound that all earthly forms were born. God Ganesha is the symbol of pranava. His trunk is in the form of Pranava Manthira-AUM.

Ganesha Chathurthi is Lord Ganesha's Birthday. It falls on the fourth day after the new moon in the Tamil month of Aavani (August\ September)

Gana means "beings", Esha means "God". Therefore if we surrender ourselves to Lord Ganesha, He will remove all obstacles in our lives. He will protect and bless us with success.

Once upon a time there was a rakshasa elephant named Gajasuran who was a strong devotee of God Shiva. He meditated for years and received many boons. His last boon was that he wanted to be remembered by all forever.

Goddess Parvathi created a doll out of sandal paste while she was bathing and brought this doll to life. She presented this child to God Shiva. God Shiva replaced the child's head with Gajasuran's elephant head to fulfill Gajasuran's wish to be remembered forever. The elephant head is a symbol of Lord Ganesh's qualities: Patience, Strength, and Wisdom.

Lord Ganesha holds a goad, an axe, a rope, a lotus and a sweet ball (mothakam) in His hands.

Lord Ganesha's Vahana is the Mouse.

Other names of Lord Ganesha:

Vigneshwara - One who over comes all obstacles

Ganapathy - Lord of all living beings

Gaja Mukan - One who has the Face of an Elephant.

Vidhyamoorthy - Giver of Knowledge

LumbhoUtharan - One who has big belly

lynkaran - One who has five hands.

Raksha Bandhan



Raksha Bandhan is observed by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs celebrates the relationship between brothers and sisters. This festival is celebrated on the full moon day in August. The central ceremony involves the tying of a rakhi (sacred thread) by a sister on her brother's wrist. This symbolizes the sister's love and prayers for her brother's well-being, and the brother's lifelong vow to protect her.

The literal meaning of 'Raksha-Bandhan' is 'the bond of protection'.

It is not necessary that the rakhi can be given to a brother by birth. Any male can be "adopted as a brother" tying rakhi by the female's wrist.

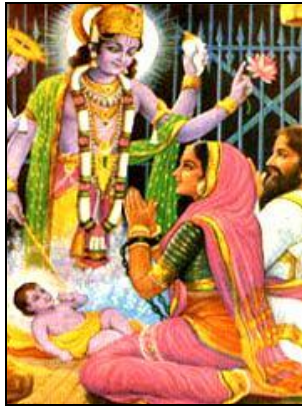
This becomes the most lasting bond in each individual's life. The festival Rakhi brings the feeling of strong and divine relationship between a brother and sister. The affectionate relationship and love among brothers and sisters is strengthened by this festival. On this auspicious day, sisters tie a rakhi or a silvery/golden ribbon around the wrist of their brothers and wish them to remain free from any evil influence throughout their lives. Also the brothers also take the oath that they will protect their sisters from any difficult situation at any cost.

Therefore, Rakhi is not a mere piece of thread; it is a strong knot of never dying relationship between a brother and a sister. The other values which are associated along with this festival are joyfulness, love, rituals and prayer to the almighty. As the love and moral values can be promoted through Raksha bandhan, this festival is considered as a unique festival. The values of this great festival overlap the boundaries of all castes, religions and nations. On this auspicious day, several rituals and traditional customs are fulfilled by the family members.

Brothers indicate their feelings by giving gifts to their sisters. The gifts that are given during this occasion include clothes, jewelry, chocolate boxes, sweet boxes and other miscellaneous objects.

Raksha Bandhan has become a sacred festival for sisters and brothers. The festival of Rakhi represents not only the sibling's emotional bond but also an occasion of family get together, renewing the relationships and social harmony.

Krishna Jayanthi



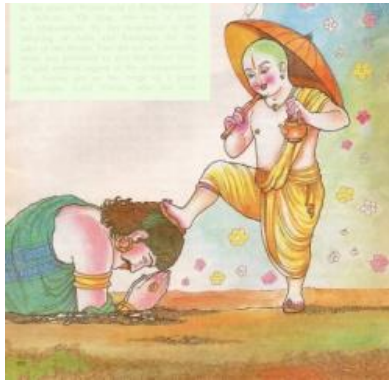
Lord Vishnu's 8th Avathaaram is 'Krishna Avathaaram'. Lord Krishna was born in a prison in the month of August/September. He was born under the Star Rohini. It was the 8th day after the full moon and this day is known as Janmashtami (Janma – birth, Ashtami – 8th day). Krishna's birthday celebration is called Krishna Jayanthi.

On this day, in Krishna temples, the Krishna idol is decorated and taken out in procession. Hindus decorate their homes with a trail of baby foot prints as though baby Krishna entered the house. Stories about Krishna and His miracles are recited. Any offering to him with love and affection would be returned to the devotees in a thousandfolds.

Lord Krishna has so many names: Govintha, Govarthana, Gopala, Kesava, Madhava, Giridhara, Mukuntha, Manivanna, Kannan etc.



Onam



Onam is the greatest festival of Kerala and occurs in the month of August. People of Kerala, including those of different religions, celebrate Onam. There are two reasons for this festival. The main reason is to celebrate the annual return of king Mahabali and the other is to thank God for the harvest.

King Mahabali was an Asura king but was very kind and truthful. During his rule, there was no corruption or deceit and also no need to lock homes at night because there were no thieves. His people lived in unity. The king was very well known for his generosity.

Lord Vishnu decided to test King Mahabali. He came to earth as Vaamana, a poor dwarf, to meet King Mahabali. Vaamana told the King that he had nothing and he wanted three feet of land to live. The king laughed and told Vaamana to take three feet of land from where ever he wished. Suddenly Vaamana began to grow and he covered the whole earth with one foot and covered the sky with other foot. He then asked Mahabali where he could get his third foot of land. The king wanted to keep his promise but there was no land left to offer. So without hesitating, he showed his head as the third location. Vaamana placed his foot on the King's head, pushing the king down into Paathaala Loka.

Once Mahabali reached Paathaala he requested Vaamana to show his true form. Immediately Vaamana disappeared and Lord Vishnu stood in front of Mahabali. The Lord told Mahabali that he wanted to test his generosity. The King was overjoyed, but he loved his people very much so he asked Lord Vishnu if he could visit his people every year. Lord granted his wish. The day that King Mahabali's spirit visits Kerala is celebrated as Onam.

Onam is a ten day celebration. People put flower mats in front of their houses to welcome the King. There will be competitions for (sumptuous) There is a proverb in Malayalam that "Kanam Vittu Onam Unnanam" that means "We should have the Thiruonam lunch even if we have to sell all our properties".

Varalakshmi Vrata



Varalakshmi Pooja or Varalakshmi Vrata is an important ritual observed by married women in India for the prosperity and welfare of their families. Vara means 'boon'. It is believed that Goddess Varalakshmi will grant boons to those who observe the pooja. Varalakshmi Pooja falls on a Friday in the month of August

Varalakshmi Vrata Myth

According to Hindu mythology, once Goddess Parvathi asked Lord Shiva about a vrata that will be beneficial to women. The conversation on Varalakshmi Vrata between Parvati and Shiva takes place in the Skanda Purana.

Lord Shiva narrates the story of Charumati. Goddess Lakshmi appeared in her dream and asked her to perform the Varalakshmi Vrata. The pious Charumati invited all her neighbours, friends and relatives and performed the Varalakshmi pooja. Soon after the pooja, all the people who participated in the pooja were blessed with wealth and prosperity. There are numerous other legends too.

Varalakshmi Pooja

Women clean their homes and decorate their front yards with rangoli / kolum. After bathing they begin the vrata by first arranging the kalasha (the sacred pot) by filling it with water and covering it with mango and betel leaves. They then place a coconut smeared with turmeric and kumkum on the kalasha and also decorate the coconut with a new cloth. They place this kalasha on a plate filled with rice.

The main pooja begins by worshiping Ganesh to drive away all obstacles and evil forces. Later, Goddess Varalakshmi is invoked into the kalasha. They then worship a bunch of nine threads with nine knots and tie one to the kalasha while the other one is tied around the right hand wrist of the lady performing the pooja. Later, they chant the Lakshmi Ashtottara Sahstanamam (a list of hundred names in praise of the deity). They then offer the goddess nine varieties of delicacies including both sweets and savouries. At the conclusion of the vratha, they sing hymns in praise of goddess Varalakshmi

and also invite other married women to offer prasada. That evening, they invite all the neighbouring ladies to their homes and offer them tamboolam which consists of betel leaves, fruits, betel nuts, kumkum, turmeric and dakshina (money). They also collectively sing songs in praise of Goddess Varalakshmi

Navaraathiri



The Navaraathiri festival is a nine night festival for three forms of Sakthi which is followed on the tenth day by Vijayadhasami (day of victory).

This festival falls in the month of September or October. During the first three nights Goddess Durga (symbol of power) is worshipped. The next three nights are for Goddess Luxmi (symbol of prosperity) and the last three nights for Goddess Sarasvathy (symbol of wisdom-knowledge) Different forms of gods statues arranged are called “Kolu” in the puja room during this festival



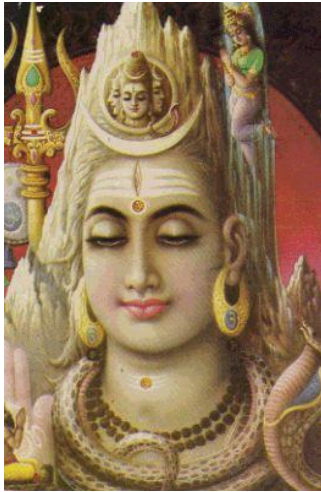
The special pooja is on the ninth night.called Mahanavami. The tenth day is Vijayadhasami (day of victory). On the same day, Vijayadhasami, the Pandavaas in Mahabharatham completed their 13 years exile and they recovered their weapons in the forest.

It is a special day to start new arts. This is called Vidhyaarambam.

These ten days are observed by taking vegetarian meals, fasting, prayer, poojas, music and dance.

Navaraathiri is a religious, cultural and social festival and it signifies a very auspicious period. It reminds us of the battle where Goddess Durga fought and vanquished Mahishasuran, in reality, a war between good and evil in our own life.

Kedhaara Gowri Vrata



Kedhaara Gowri vrata is one of the important Hindu vrata.

Kedaara vrata is observed for twenty one days starting from the eighth day in the growing moon phase in the month of Purattaasi (mid Sep to mid Oct). The final day (Deepavali) also should be observed in great devotion.

Brungi rishi was a great Siva bhaktha. When he prayed to Lord, he prays only to Lord Siva and ignored Sakthi. Angered by his act Sakthi Devi removed energy from his body. He was not able to stand. He prayed to Lord Siva. Lord gave him a stick to support his body

According the Hindu Mythology, Sakthi wanted to show that man and woman are respected equally. So she wanted to become part of Lord's body. She observed the Kedhaara vrata. Pleased by Her vrata God Shiva gave the left part of His body to Shakthi and became Ardha Naareeshwara. This form indicates that Siva-Sakthi consciousness both are equally important and are inseparable. The vrata is then called Kedhaara Gowri vrata since Gowri observed it.

Install Lord Kedhaarishvara Swami in a filled pot (kalasha), make a roof with flowers above the kalasha. Make vrata threads (cotton fibres) having 21 knots. This worship has to be done for 21 days. On the final day (21st) in a clean decorated area devotionally install the kalasha over the grains spread in a banana leaf and offer various food and fruits to the Lord.

The glory of this vrata is splendid as Sri Gowridevi observed this vrata in full devotion and became half of the body of Lord Siva.

Kantha Sashti



Kanthasashti (Kantha- Muruga, Sashti- six) is a six day pooja performed in all temples and is dedicated to Lord Muruga. Kanthasashti celebrates the destruction of the demon, Soorapathman, by Muruga. This festival is celebrated in a grand manner at the Arupadaiveedu.

Soorapathman was a strong devotee of God Siva and he desired to be the best king in the Universe and the only person who could not be destroyed by any living creature in this world. God Siva granted his wish because of his intense meditation, standing on agni (fire). After this, Soorapathman controlled the world peacefully.

One day, Soorapathman's sister, Asamuki, saw the beautiful Indrani (Indra's wife) and wanted to give Indrani as a gift to her brother. Asamuki tried to drag Indrani to the palace but Indrani's guard chopped Asamuki's arm off. Asamuki ran to her brother, Soorapathman and complained to him. Soorapathman responded by putting all devas in prison and treated them like prisoners. .

The Devas turned to God Siva for help. As no one in the world could destroy Soorapathman, God Siva needed to create a powerful person to punish him. So He opened His 3rd eye releasing Agni (sparks of fire) which passed through the 3 elements (space, air then water - the Ganga river) finally landing on the Saravana Poikai, a pond in a reed (type of grass) forest. Six babies were born from those sparks in the Saravana Poikai. Each baby was brought up by a Karththikai maid. After a couple of years, Parasakthi came down and embraced the six children forming one powerful child with the all 6 powers combined.

Years later, Lord Muruga sent Veervaahuthevar, as a messenger, to ask Soorapathman to release devas to avoid war. He was advised by his Guru (teacher) and family many times about the risk of fighting the powerful Lord Muruga. Soorapathman refused as he believed that young Muruga was no match against his powers. Lord Muruga had no choice but to declare war against Soorapathman.

God Siva gave Muruga the Lance (Vel) which was blessed with all of Parasakthi's power. The war with Soorapathman lasted six days, on the 6th day Lord Muruga threw his vel on him. Immediately he was split into two halves. One half became a peacock which he used as his vaahana. The other became a rooster and was transformed into his flag. Lord Muruga defeated the demon Soorapathman. The Devas who were tormented by Soorapathman, rejoiced and praised Lord Muruga.

Lord Muruga is also known as Karthikeya, Arumuga, Shanmuga, Kantha, Shakhthivel, Mayura, Sevatkodiyan, Gangeyan

Deepaavali or Diwali



Deepaavali is a colourful festival that is celebrated by all Hindus worldwide. This is also known as the Festival of lights. This festival usually falls around late October and November.

The meaning of Deepaavali is “The Garland of Lights” or “Rows of lighted Lamps” and is traditionally celebrated by lighting small lamps and placing them around the home, gardens as well as on top of the roofs.

Many good events occurred on this day.

- In north India, Diwali celebrates the return of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana to their kingdom, Ayodhya, from 14 years of exile (in the forest).
- Vaishnavaitis, those who pray to Lord Vishnu, celebrate the Govardana Pooja. This is a pooja for the Govardana Mountain that Krishna lifted to shelter the villagers from the storm. On this day, every year, a large number of poor people are fed.
- Gujaratis pray to Sri Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth.
- For Bengalis, it is the time to worship Goddess Kali. Even after destroying the evil demon Mahishasuran, mother Kali continued her rampage and destruction. It was on this day, Mother Kali calmed down and returned the world to its calm state.

The demon, Narakaasuran, performed an intense penance to Lord Brahma, who was pleased by his devotion and granted the boon to not be destroyed by anyone but his mother. Narakaasuran misused this boon, harassing the Devas and humans. The Devas approached Lord Vishnu for help, however as the boon prevented even God from destroying him, Lord Vishnu advised that Narakaasuran would be defeated in His Krishna Avathaaram. In this avathaaram, Lord Vishnu allows for the reincarnation of Narakaasuran's mother as Sathyabama, Lord Krishna's consort. Sathyabama fights and defeats the evil Narakaasuran and this victorious day is celebrated.

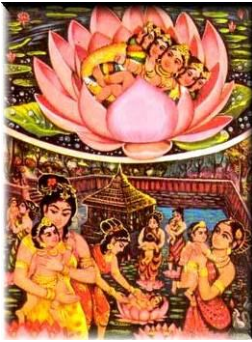
The preparation for Deepaavali usually begins two or three weeks before the festival. Hindus will be busy cleaning their house, shopping for new clothes for

them to wear on the day as well as presents for family members, buying or making different types of sweets and decorating their homes.

Every one forgives and forgets the wrongs done by others as this festival brings out unity and instills charity in all hearts. Hindus pay respect to their elders. Most families go to the temple. At night the children celebrate with fireworks.

Karthikai Deepam

Karthikai Deepam is also known as the festival of lights and celebrated in the Tamil month of Karthikai (during the 2nd half of November and 1st half of December) It is celebrated on the full moon day where the Krithikai or Karthikai constellation (Karthikai Nakshathiram) can be seen. There are 2 reasons to celebrate this day: the birth of the Karthikai constellation and Sivaraathiri.



It is believed that 6 Karthikai maids looked after the 6 forms of baby Murugan. One day Goddess Shakthi combined these 6 forms into one powerful child, Lord Murugan. Goddess Shakthi thanked these 6 maids by relieving them of their duties and creating 6 stars, known as the Kaarithikai Nakshathiram, so that devotees can always remember them. Hindus worship Lord Murugan by lighting deepams and bonfire in front of all temples and placing tiny lamps around the temples and homes.



In south India there is a mountain called Annamalai and it is on this particular day that a large column of fire exploded from the top of the mountain towards the sky. The fire eventually shrunk into the shape of a Lingam (known as Jothi Lingam) on Sivaraathiri. In remembrance of this day, an enormous bonfire with copra (Dried coconuts) is lit on the top of the Annamalai Mountain on the Karthikai Deepam day. Devotees worship the huge flame while reciting 'HaroHara' repeated.

Vaikunda Ekadasi

Vaikunda Ekadasi is the Ekadasi (11th lunar day) that occurs in the Hindu calendar month of Margali (December - January).

Fasting and all night prayer, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, is the main observance of the day. It is believed that this will help to free soul from cycles of rebirth and grant moksha (joining with God). Therefore this is also known as 'Mokshada Ekadasi'. The doors of Vishnu's abode, Vaikunda Dwara, are said to be open for those who perform this fasting with utmost devotion. Fasting on Vaikunda Ekadasi is equivalent to fasting on the remaining 23 Ekadasis of the (Hindu) year.



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In many Vishnu temples around the world, a special entrance called Vaikunda Dwaram that encircles the main shrine is opened only on Vaikunda Ekadasi and it is believed that any person who passes through this 'Vaikunda Dwaram' on this particular day attains salvation. The temple witnesses heavy inflow of pilgrims on Vaikunda Ekadasi.

Thiruvempaavai – Aaruthra Dharshan



Cosmic Dance of
Lord Siva



Arudha Darshan-
Chihithambaram



Chithambaram Temple

Thiruvempaavai is celebrated for 10 days in Hindu month of Maarkali (2nd half of December and the 1st half of January).

Centuries ago, two sages, Pathanjali and Vyagrapatha, meditated in a small temple in the forest. On the Thiru-Aathirai day stars appeared in the sky with the full moon, these sages had a vision of Nataraja performing the cosmic dance for them.

Many years later the king built a huge temple with golden roof, where this incident occurred and this temple is known as Chidambaram. Every year when the Thiruvaathirai stars appear with the moon, devotees carry the Lord Nataraja statue and move it around as if Lord Nataraja was performing the cosmic dance, also known as Aaruthra Thaandava (dance of Creation). This event is called Aaruthraa Dharshan. Where Aa means 'creation', Ruthira means 'Aathirai stars' and Dharshan means 'sight'.

Many years after the temple was built, Saint Maanikavaasagar, traveled to Chithambaram for this Dharshanam. He stopped at a Siva temple on the hill of Thiruannaamalai where he saw young girls singing in praise of Goddess Paarvathi, before dawn. Saint Maanickavaasagar admired that and sang Thiruppalli eluchi and Thiruvempaavai. Now those songs sung before dawn in all temples during early morning poojas.

Vaishnavites, those who believe that Vishnu is the supreme God, sing Thiruppaavai composed by Saint Aandaal, who sang this for her desire to unite with Lord Krishna.

Every morning, before sunrise, Thiruppalli elutchi is sung by a devotee, the temple doors are opened, abhishekam and poojas are performed for all deities and finally Thiruvempaavai sung

Streams of devotees flow to Chithambaram and other Siva temples to attend this Dharshan

Saints and Scriptures

Abhiraami Andhaathi



Abhirami Pattar (original name Subramaniya Iyer) (late 1700s - early 1800s) was a Hindu saint who wrote and sang poems, collectively known as Abhiraami Andhaathi, in praise of Goddess Abhiraami.

As he grew, Subramaniya Iyer developed a fanatical (extreme) devotion to Goddess Abhiraami. He would sit in a corner of the temple meditating and singing Her praises. He was so engrossed in his meditation and devotion that he began to see Goddess Abhiraami in the women around him and would shower these women with flowers. According to sources, soon, many began to regard him as a madman.

One day, Raja Serfoji, the Maratha Raja of Thanjavur who ruled over the land, visited the temple. On noticing the peculiar behavior of Subramaniya Iyer who was a temple priest, he inquired the other priests about the individual. One said that he was a madman while another explained to the king that Subramaniya Iyer was only a devotee of Goddess Abhirami.

Seeking to know the truth himself, Serfoji approached the priest and asked him what day of the month it was i.e. whether it was a full-moon day or a new-moon day. Subramaniya Iyer, who could see nothing else but the shining form of the Goddess, wrongly and rudely argued with the king that it was a full-moon day. The king rode off informing the former that the death sentence would be declared if the moon did not appear in the sky by six in the night.

Immediately realizing his mistake, Subramaniya Iyer is believed to have lit a huge fire and erected a platform over it supported by a hundred ropes. He sat upon the platform and prayed to the Goddess Abhirami to save him. He cut off one rope after another after completing each verse of his prayer.

These hymns form the Abhirami Anthadhi. On completion of the 79th hymn, he saw a vision of Goddess Abhirami who threw Her earring into the sky which shone as a bright light (like the moon) upon the horizon. The king and crowd were amazed. Overcome with ecstasy, Subramaniya Iyer composed 22 more verses in praise of the Goddess.

The king repented his mistake and immediately cancelled the punishment. He also gave him the title of "Abhiraami Pattar" meaning "priest of Goddess Abhiraami".

The 8th Thirumurai (Maanickavaasaka Swamikal)

8th Thirumurai is a collection of songs sung by Saint Maanickavaasagar. It has two major parts: Thiruvaasakam and Thirukkovaiaar.

Thiruvaasakam is the collection of all the songs that were sung during the entire life of Saint Maanickavaasagar.

"Thiruvaasakaththukku Urukaathaar Oru Vaasakaththukkum Urukaar" .This means" those who do not melt at hearing Thiruvaasakam, will not be able to melt for any other songs".

Thirukkovaiaar was sung by Saint Maanickavaasagar before he attained Saayujyam (mukthi).

One day God Siva went to Maanickavaasagar in the disguise of a Sivaachaariyaar (Brahmin priest) and asked him to sing the Thiruvaasakam and Thirukovaiaar while he wrote it down to study it. Maanickavaasagar agreed to do it. The Sivaachariyar wrote the hymns and left them lying on the temple steps and disappeared. Other Brahmin priests of Thillai found these and it was signed at the end as 'Maanikavaasagar repeated this, Thiru Chitrambalam wrote this'. The other Brahmins wanted to know the meaning, so asked Maanikavaasagar, who took them into the temple and pointing to the Natarajah statue 'This Thillai Nataraja is the purport of these stanzas. He is the meaning of them '. Then Maanikavaasagar immersed himself in the Supreme Light and become one with God.



"இம் பாடல்களுக்கு முரதுர் கடவுள் முருகன்" என்ரு
மாணிக்கவாசகர் உருது

Manickavasagar says that the meaning of the verses
is no other than Nataraja.

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Maanickavaasagar

Saint Manickavasagar was born in the 9th Century AD in Thiruvaadhavur, near Madurai, and was named Vaadhavurar by his parents.

Because of his great knowledge he became the trusted friend & chief minister of the King of Madurai.

One day, the king sent Vaadavurar with a large sum of money to buy horses. While he was travelling, on the way he heard the Kirtanai in a garden at Tirupperunthurai. There he saw a Siva Yogi, seated under a tree. At once he was attracted by the look of the Siva yogi and surrendered to his feet. Immediately Sivayogi revealed “Namachivaya” the Panchakshara manthiram in his ear. Lord Siva gave him the name “Manickavasagar He of the gem of the words” and blessed him the wisdom of Saivism

Maaninckavaasagar dedicated his life to Lord and built a Siva temple with all the money that the King had given to buy horse.

When the King came to know his activities and asked him to get back. Lord Shiva gave a diamond to Manickavasagar to give to the king, promising to bring horses on Aavani Mulam day. The king didn't believe him and put him in jail.

On the morning of Aavani Mulam, Lord Siva came in the form of a groom and brought the horses, but that night itself they turned into foxes and started to disturb the whole town. The king became really angry and punished Manickavasagar by making him stand in a dry river bed under the hot sun.



.After this incident, he dedicated his life to the Lord and built a Siva Temple with all the money that the King had given to buy

Lord Shiva made the river to flood to save His devotee. King ordered the people to block the river with sand. Lord Shiva appeared as a lazy labourer, to help an old helpless poor lady to block her portion.

But he did not do the work and the king ordered him to be beaten. Lord Siva made everyone else feel the pain of the beatings, the king realised God's Divine play and released Manickavasagar and begged his forgiveness.

Maanickavaasakar travelled around the Tamil Naadu, and reached Chidamparam.

In history that a Buddhist ruler from Sri Lanka (Ceylon), heard about Maanikkavaasakar, also arrived at Cidambaram, with the hope of getting him to perform a miracle, that would restore the power of speech to his mute (incapable of speech-dumb) daughter.

Maanikkavaasakar was challenged to a debate by a group of Buddhist scholars. They abused on the dancing God of Chidambaram. The ruler from Sri Lanka, requested Maanikkavaasakar, to perform a miracle and restore his daughter's power of speech.

Maanikkavaasakar's prayers caused the princess to speak, and also she answered every single question that had been raised by the Buddhist scholars.

At Chidambaram, Lord appeared as a Siva Yogi before him, in order to write down the Thiruvaasagam and Thirukkovaaiyaar that he had composed. When He had finished, the Lord placed them on the steps of the Chit Sabha and disappeared.



Thillai moovayiravar (Priests) asked Manickavasagar the meaning of the songs. Manickavasagar took them into the temple, pointed the Lord inside the moolasthanam and walked into the sanctum and disappeared.

Chandeswarar



Chandeswarar's original name was Visarasarmar. His father's name was Echchathaththan and mother's name was Bhaviththirai. In Visarasarmar's previous life he studied had all the Vedas and this knowledge remained with him in the next life. So at the young age of five he understood the power of God and followed the Vedas.

One day Visarasarmar was walking through the meadow and he saw the herdsman hitting a cow with a rod, heavily. He couldn't bear this so immediately stopped the herdsman hitting the cow and decided to look after the cattle by himself. He looked after them with so much love that they gave plenty of milk. He distributed the milk to the appropriate owners and temples.

Visarasarmar, while looking after the cows, decided to build a Lingam. Every day he would praise the Lingam and perform Poojas (abhishekam) using the milk. The villagers noticed this and believed that he was wasting the milk. They decided to complain to Visarasarmar's father.

One day the father went to the meadow and found his son worshipping the Lingam with the milk. Unable to understand his young son's devotion, he became angry because of the waste of milk and hit Visarasarmar several times on his back. But Visarasarmar in deep thought, concentrating on his pooja and could not feel the pain. This made his father even angrier and he then kicked the milk pot that Visarasarmar was pouring on the Lingam. Visarasarmar was furious and could only see this act of this father as a sin against God. He immediately grabbed the nearest object and threw it at his father as a punishment and continued with his pooja. This object ended up being an axe which cut through his father's legs, throwing him to the ground.

Immediately Visarasarmar saw the Supreme light and a vision of the form of God Siva and Sakthi. He heard a voice saying "You punished even your

father for My service. Now I am your father. All offerings from the devotees to me will also belong to you and here after you will be called 'Chandeswarar'". Then the forms of God Siva and Sakthi embraced young Visarasarmar, who merged with this Supreme light and disappeared. His father's soul attained Moksha because of this son's devotion to God.

By age, Visarasarmar was very young, but he showed the world the meaning of complete devotion and service. Following the words that were uttered by God to Chandeswarar, the last pooja in every temple is dedicated to Chandeswarar.

Seckilaar-Periyapuraanam



Sekkilaar was one of the greatest poets of Tamil literature. He was a 12th century poet. Chekkilaar was born in Saiva farmer's family at Kunrathur in Tamil Nadu.

The king Kulothunga Cholan¹¹ appointed Chekkilaar as his chief minister. Chekkilaar was a strong devotee of Lord Siva in Thiru Naageswaram and did a lot of services to that temple. He built a temple at Kunraththur and named that too Thiru Naageswaram.

The king Anapaya Cholan, was very interested in appreciating the Tamil book 'Jivaka Chintamani'. The dedicated minister Chekkilaar wanted to divert the king in proper way by telling about the lives of the devotees in the Thiruth Thondath Thokai and Thiru Thondar Thiru Andhaathi.

The life of the Saiva saints was narrated by St. Sundaramurti. As a minister of the state Seckilaar had access to study from stone carvings, plate engravings, above all he was able to know the histories through his knowledge due to the grace of God. He wrote about their lives in poetic form. The Lord gave him the 1st word to start the epic. 'ULAKELAAM' (he has used this word in the beginning, middle and the end of his work).

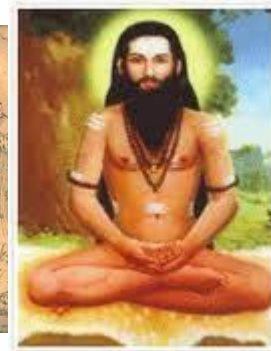


What other phrase is required when God himself gave the starting word for his work.

Periyaar (great Saints) Puraanam was made public (arangetram) in front of intellectuals, saints and others at Chithamparam. To praise the value of periya puraanam the king took Seckilaar on the royal elephant and he fanned Seckilaar in that big procession. He made Periya Puraanam the 12th Thirumurai.

Chekkilaar was honoured with the title of 'Uththama Chola Pallavan' by the king. After writing Periya Puraanam Chekkilaar involved himself completely in the lives of those 63 saints along with other devotees and finally reached lord's feet

Thirumoolar - Thirumanthiram



Thirumoolar is one of the 18 Siddhars. His main work Thirumandhiram, is called 12th Thirumurai.

A Shiva saint Sundaranathan, a vedha scholar from Kailash, wanted to visit and stay with sage Agasthyar at the Podhikai mountains in modern day Tamil Nadu. He started on his journey southwards, praying at holy temples. Nearing the outskirts of the village Chaththanur of Cholanadu, he saw a herd of cows in great distress. Their herdsman (idayan) by name Moolan had died on the banks of the river and the cows were in grief. The Yogi realizing that the cows would be consoled only if Moolan came alive, so he used his yogic powers to transmigrate his soul to the body of Moolan, and hid his own body nearby and the cowherd Moolan rose as Thirumoolar. The relieved cows grazed happily on the riverbanks and went back to the village in the evening.

The sage then went back to the meadow where his body was left. But his body was missing, he thought 'every thing is God's will and walked away. Shepherd Moolan's wife called him, cried aloud but the sage didn't turn her side, so she claimed that her husband was mad, and the people of the village consoled her.

He went to Thiruvaavaduthurai there he did meditation under a bo tree Every time he came out of meditation he sang a verse, like that he sang 3000 verses .These verses are called Thirumanthiram

Thirumandiram is a Tamil spiritual encyclopedia, about Science, Medicine, Human aspects of Life, the Divine, especially how to attain God through spiritual discipline.It contains all knowledge

right from the Upanishadic times down to the modern days, goes through the mystery of yoga and tantras.

Kaaraikkaal Ammaiyaar



Kaaraikkaal Ammaiyaar's original name was Punithavathiyar. Her father's name was Thanathathan.

Punithavathiyar by nature was so attached to God Siva from childhood. She got married to a merchant named Paramathathan at Kaaraikkaal. During her married life she enjoyed feeding and helping Siva devotees.

One day Paramathathan sent two mangoes home through his friend. That time a tired and hungry Siva devotee came to her place. As she hadn't finished cooking the curries, she fed him rice with one of those mangoes and sent him away.

Her husband arrived home shortly so she served the food and followed by the remaining mango. Her husband ate that mango and asked her to bring the second one.

Punithavathiyar was scared to tell her husband that she gave that mango away and went into the kitchen. She did not know what to do so she prayed, asking for help from God.

Immediately a mango appeared in her hand. She went outside and gave that to her husband. When he tasted the mango he was surprised at how tasty it was. He knew that this was not the mango he bought so asked her where she got this from. Ammaiyaar could not hide the truth any more so she told him what had happened. He didn't believe her story so asked her to pray and get another mango for him. Ammaiyaar went inside and prayed to God again. God blessed her again with another mango. She showed this mango to her husband who was shocked.

Ammaiyaar's husband was scared about her powerful devotion. So he decided to leave her. Their relatives tried their best to make him come back to her, but he told everyone that she is not an ordinary person and that everyone should respect and worship her. He then fled from Kaaraikkaal.

Ammaiyaar was upset that her husband had left her all alone so she prayed to God, requesting to get rid of her beautiful appearance. God gave her wish and turned her into a bony lady (like ghost appearance).

Ammaiyaar wanted to go to Thirukkailayam (Himalayas) hoping to see God Siva. Half way through she decided to crawl with her head and hands. Ammaiyaar did not want her feet to touch the holy place.

As Ammaiyaar approached the top, she heard a voice saying “AMMAIYEA COME”. Ammaiyaar looked up to see the form of God Siva. Ammaiyaar then screamed “APPAH” with joy and worshipped God Siva’s feet. God Siva then asked her why she traveled to the Himalayas. She replied, saying that she came to tell her wish to be never to be born again or to always be born as a devotee of God Siva. Ammaiyaar also asked if she could have the pleasure of seeing God Siva dance while she sang. God Siva granted her wishes and told her to go to the Thiru Aalangkaadu to see His dance. So she went there and God Siva danced for her while she sang. Ammaiyaar spent the rest of her life singing praise for God Siva.

Ammaiyaar is the only female saint in Periya puraanam called “AMMAI” by God and sang Atputha Thiru Anthaathi, Thiru Etaddai Mani Maalai and Thiru Aalangkaaddu Mooththa Thiruppathikam.

Markandeya



Mrikandu Munivar and his wife Marudmati worshipped Siva to saught from him a boon of a son. As a result he was given the choice of either a gifted son, but with a short life on earth or a child of low intelligence but with a long life. Mrikandu Munivar chose the first one, and was blessed with a wise son intended to die at the age of 16.

He named him Markandeya. The boy grew to be very intelligent and handsome. The rishi invested him with the sacred thread. Markandeya learnt the Vedas and Sastras easily. Every one liked him. As the boy was getting on to be sixteen, Rishi Mrikandu became sadder and sadder. One day Markandeya asked his father the reason for their sorrow.

The father said that the blessed son would live only sixteen years. You are now about to reach that age. How can your mother and I bear to lose you as we will at the end of this year?" Markandeya explained the way how God Siva protects His devotees and reminded his father about the stories told by his father. Then he started to worship to Lord Siva. Rishi Mrikandu was very happy to hear his son say this. He blessed his son.

Markandeya built a Siva-Linga at a spot on the sea-shore. He started worshipping Siva, morning, noon and night. On the last day, Markandeya was about to sing bhajans, when Yama, the God of Death, came to him. Yama rode on a buffalo. He held a noose in his hand. asked him to stop praying and told him to be ready to die.

Markandeya was not afraid. He clung to the Siva-Linga as one clings to one's mother. Yama threw his noose round the boy's neck, and pulled him along

with the Siva- Linga. Then the Siva-Linga burst open and God Siva came out of it, and said, "Yama, go away! Don't touch this boy. He is my beloved devotee. He will live for ever!" Yama went away. Markandeya then prayed to God Siva with greater emotion than ever. This prayer says at The end of each line, "What can Death do to me?" Many people recite this prayer even now.

Markandeya came home, and fell at the feet of his parents. They embraced him, and wept with joy. Markandeya became a great Rishi, and lived very long.

Saint Nandhanaar - Thirunaalai Povaar



Nandhanaar is one of the 63 Saiva saints in Secklaar's Periya Puraanam. He was born at Athanur in Tamil Naadu in an untouchable caste. He spent most of his time fixing the musical instruments of Athanur temple. Right from his young age, he was devoted to Lord Siva.

Once he took some members of his caste to Thiruppunkur to see the pooja performed for the Shiva deity in the shrine. As they were untouchable they all were standing outside the temple. However, the Nandhi was obstructing their view from seeing this pooja. So Nandhanaar prayed and pleaded to God to see this pooja. Then a miracle happened where the Nandhi statue (which is made of stone) moved so that Nandhanaar and others could have His dharshan. This can be seen in this temple today, where the Nandhi is not located at the usual centre position.

Nandhanaar was always talking and making plans to worship Shiva at the temple in Chithambaram. He kept telling every one that he would go tomorrow ('naalai povean naalai povean') so his nick-name became Thiru Naalai Povaar.

Once he asked permission from his master to go to Chithambaram. His master refused his request and ordered him to take care of sowing seeds and prepare the fields for harvest. Nandhanaar was sad and prayed that night. The next morning, Nandhanaar and his master woke up to find a miracle. The fields were ready for harvesting. His master realising this miracle, gave permission to Nandhanaar to visit Chithambaram.

Nandhanaar went into the temple and was never seen again. He is believed to have attained Moksha.

Naradar

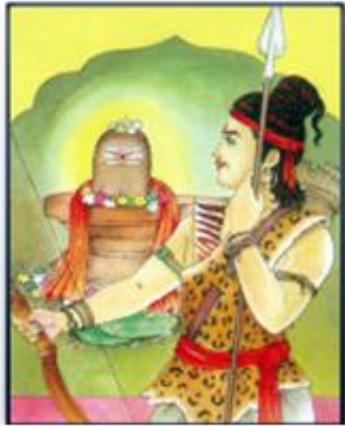


Narada Muni is son of Brahma, a divine sage from the Hindu tradition, who plays a prominent role in a number of the Puranic texts, especially in the Bhagavata Purana, and in the Ramayana. Narada is a travelling monk with the ability to visit distant worlds (lokas in Sanskrit). He carries a musical instrument known as a vina which he uses to accompany his singing of hymns, prayers and mantras as an act of devotion to his lord, Vishnu or Krishna. In the Vaishnava tradition

Naradar is the first living being discribed inthe Puranic universe. He is regarded as the Triloka sanchaari, who roams the three lokas of Swargaloka (heaven), Mrityuloka (earth, literally: "place of death") and Patalloka (nether-world). He does this to find out about the life and welfare of people. He was the first to practise Natya Yoga. He is also known as Kalaha priya as he playfully causes quarrels amongst Gods (devas), Goddesses and people.

Narada Muni has a specifically important place among the Vaishnava traditions. As he was a gandharva in his previous birth before becoming a Rishi he is in the category of a devarishi.

Kannappa Naayanaar



Nagan was the king of hunters at Uduppur in Pottapi Nadu and his wife was Tattai. They were great devotees of Lord Subramanya., They had a child, after a long time. It was very heavy so, they named him Thinnanar.



Thinnanar was Arjuna in the previous birth, according to Thiru Kalahasthi Puranam. When he went to worship Siva, to get Pasupatha Astra, and when the Lord came to him as a hunter, Arjuna did not recognize Him. So, he had to be born as a hunter again and worshiped the Lord, before attaining final liberation

Thinnanaar was educated according to the hunters' customs. He became a good archer. Even when he was young, his father retired, and crowned him king.

One day, Thinnanaar went out hunting. A pig escaped from its net and was running away. Thinnanaar followed it accompanied by two others, Naanan and Kaadan. The pig was tired and stood near a tree. It was quickly killed by Thinnanaar. They were tired and thirsty. They proceeded towards the Ponmukali River. Thinnanaar wanted to climb the nearby mountain. Naanan followed him, saying that in the Kaalahasthi hill, there was Lord Kudumithevar (God with a Tuft) temple. Kaadan was busy cooking the pork

When he began to climb the hill, He felt that a great burden was being lifted off his shoulders. He was losing body-consciousness. As he saw the Lord there, he felt supreme love and began to shed tears of joy.

He felt that the Lord was lonely there, and he should stay with Him. He thought that the Lord might be hungry and though he was reluctant to leave the Lord alone, he quickly came down the hill to fetch some food for the Lord. He tasted and took the best pieces of the pork for Him. He filled his own mouth with water from the river and gathered flowers which he wore on his head. He took the pork, bow and arrow and went up the hill again alone this time.

At the temple, Thinnaanaar poured the water from his mouth, which was his 'Abhishekam'. Then he decorated the Lingam with the flowers he had brought on his own head. This was his 'Archanai'. He then placed the pork before the Lord. He went out and stood guard for Him, at the entrance, in for the fear of wild animals should hurt Him. In the morning again he went out to hunt and bring fresh food for the Lord.

When Thinnanaar left the temple in the morning to get food for the Lord, Sivagochaariyaar, the temple priest, came there for the usual customary worship. He was horrified at the polluted state that some unknown person had done in the temple.

He was well versed in the Agamas (rituals of Siva-worship). He performed the necessary purification rites and took bath again and began his formal worship. He brought water in a holy pot, with a bandage around his own mouth to prevent the breath of his mouth should pollute it. He brought fresh flowers in a holy basket. He brought fruits and sweets, newly made and unpolluted by anyone tasting it, before offering it to the Lord. He went home after the worship.

Thinnanaar returned with fresh meat. He removed the priest's decorations, and did the worship in his own way, and then as usual, stood guard at the entrance.

This went on for five days. The priest was greatly upset about the pollutions of the holy place. He appealed to the Lord to stop it. Lord Siva wanted to show to Sivagochaariyaar the nature of Thinnanaar's supreme devotion. He commanded him in a dream, to hide himself behind the Lingam, when Thinnaanaar went to the temple the next day, and watch what took place.

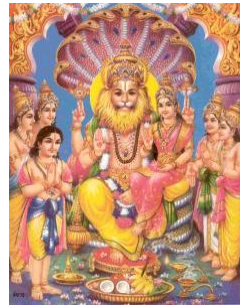
On the sixth day, Thinnanaar went out as usual for getting the Lord's food. While returning, he saw many ill omens, which made him feel that something had happened to the Lord: He ran towards the Lord. He was grieved to see blood coming out from the Lord's right eye. He treated the eye with herbs what ever he knew. Still the bleeding did not stop. A simple idea occurred to him: 'flesh for flesh'. At once, with his own arrow, he took out his own right eye, and fixed it over the right eye of the Lord. The bleeding stopped. He was very happy. When he was dancing with joy, he noticed that the Lord's left eye had begun to bleed. But, he had already found out the remedy. There was

only one problem: how to locate the eye of the Lord, when his own eye had been pulled out. So, Thinnanaar placed his foot at the place where the Lord's left eye was on the Lingam, and began to pull his left eye out, with his arrow.

Lord Siva appeared and held his hands shouting 3 times 'Stop Kannappa!' to stop from plucking his other eye. Lord Siva took him with both hands and returned Thinnanaar's eyes. Sivagochaariyaar understood the true nature of Thinnanaar's love and devotion. Thinnanaar then came to be known as Kannappar.

True Bhakti is far superior to pure ritual. Thinnanaar's readiness to pluck out his own eyes for GOD'S sake is total self-surrender or Athma-Nivedhana, the highest peak of devotion which immediately reveals the Lord in all His glory.

Prahalada



Prahalada is famed for his exclusive devotion (bhakti) to Vishnu. Despite several warnings from his father Hiranyakashipu, Prahalada continues to worship Vishnu. His father tried to poison him; got him trampled by the elephants, and ordered him into a room with venomous snakes, but Prahalada survived each and every time.

Holika, the sister of Hiranyakashipu, had a special shawl that would prevent fire affecting the person wearing it. One day, Hiranyakashipu ordered Prahalada to sit on a pyre on the lap of Holika. Prahalada prays to Lord Vishnu to keep him safe. When the fire starts, Holika burns to death, while Prahalada remains unharmed. This incident is celebrated as the Hindu festival of Holi.

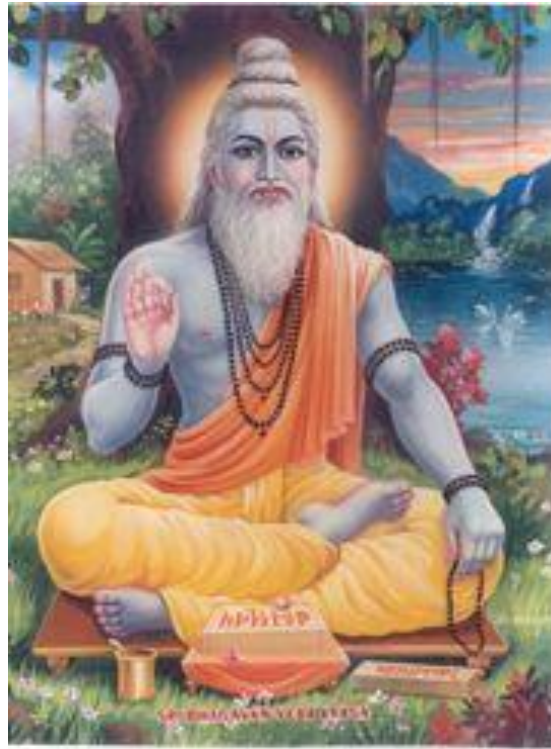
After tolerating much abuse from his father Hiranyakashipu, Prahalada was eventually saved by Vishnu in the form of Narasimha, (half-man, half-lion).

The story of Prahalada gives a number of moral instructions such as:

- God exists everywhere.
- God will always save his devotees.
- Devotion can be practiced at any point of time. Age does not matter.
- Constant faith in God leads to devotion.
- Evil will be punished.

In the Bhagavata Purana, Prahalada eventually became king then attained God's feet

Veda yaasa



Vyaasa is also sometimes called Veda Vyaasa the one who compiled the Vedas which are the oldest, sacred texts of Hinduism. He is recognized as the writer of both the Vedas, and texts such as the Puranas.

Vyaasa is considered to be one of the eight Chiranjeevis (long lived, or immortals), who are still in existence according to general Hindu belief.

Vyasa is the author of, and an important character in the Mahaabhaarata.

Thirukkural (Thiruvalluvar)



Thiruvalluvar is the author of Thirukkural and lived during the second century B.C.

Thirukkural is a poetic, Tamil literature covering the various aspect of life, for all periods and for the entire human race. Thirukkural is not biased towards any religion, caste or creed.

They are all in short poems of two lines (kurals). Thirukkural is composed of 133 chapters. Each chapter has a specific subject ranging from "ploughing a piece of land" to "ruling a country". Each consist of 10 kurals, and have three parts:

Part 1- Virtue under the title 'Araththuppaal' has 38 chapters, about the ethics of life.

Part 2- Wealth under the title 'Porudpaal' has 70 chapters about the skills needed in running every day life.

Part 3- Love under the title 'Inpaththuppaal' has 25 chapters dealing with every day home and family life.

The Thirukkural has been translated in many languages as follows:

- Indian Languages: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi. Sanskrit, Telugu, Urdu, Saur Astra, Oriya.
- Asian Languages: Burmese, Chinese, Malay, Sinhalese, Fiji.
- European Languages: Czech, Dutch, English, Finish, French German, Latin, Polish, Russian, Swedish

Thiruvilaiyaadal Puraanam

The National Puraanam of Pandya Nadu by Paranjothi Munivar



Puraanams and Ethihaasams are both a collection of stories, descriptions, explanations of rituals, geography, etc. There are 18 major Puraanams.

Thiruvilaiyaadal Puraanam describes the 64 Divine plays and the great act of Lord Siva of Madurai known as Chokanatha or Sundaresvara. There have been several Puraanams which relate the same theme. Thiruvilaiyaadal Puraanam dates back to the ancient period of the second Tamil Sangam. Many of the 64 Divine Plays have been mentioned by Thirugnaanasambandar and Thirunaavukkarasar which would date back before the 6th century AD. The latest version was composed by Paranjothi Munivar in the 16th- 17th century.

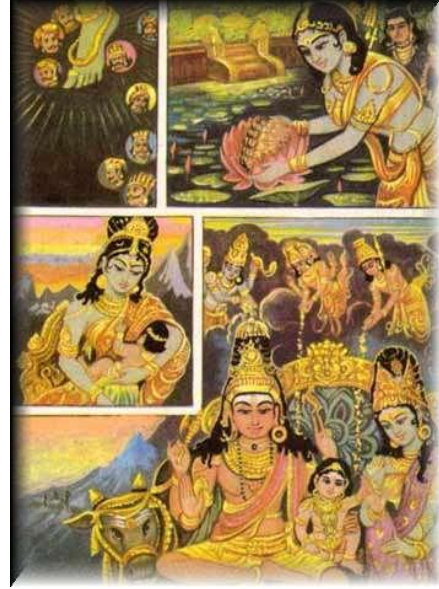
Paranjothi munivar was a native of Vedaaranyam of Tanjaavur. He was a Tamil scholar. He wrote the Vedaaranya Puraanam in Tamil from the original Sanskrit form. Then he went on a pilgrimage, visiting important places like Chidambaram, Thiruvaanaikkaa, Thiruvannaamalai, Thiruvaarur and finally reached Madurai. He became very popular among the people of Madurai. He stayed in Madurai and was performing his worship to God Siva. One day the people of Madurai, requested Paranjothi Munivar to compose a puraanam involving the 64 Divine plays of God Siva which took place in Pandya Naadu.

After he accepted this request, Sri Meenaakshi Amman appeared in his dream that night and ordered him to begin the Puraanam with the word “Sakthi”. He then woke up and started immediately, praising the first hymn which he dedicated to SiddhiVinayaka. Then he began: “Sakthiyai Sivamaagi ...”

With the blessing from Goddess Sakthi he completed the epic with beautiful verses and named 'Thiruvilaiyaadal Puraanam'. He sang a total of 3363 verses in three three major kaandams Out of the 64 Divine plays (Thiruvilaiyaadal) of God Siva, seven of them can be seen (carved on seven pillars) in Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple.

Kanda Puraanam

(Kachchi appa Sivaachaariyaar)



Tamil version of the Skanda Purana was written by Kachiappa Sivacharyar of Kumara Kottam at Kanchipuram. According to the account of Kachiappa, each day he would write his inspired account of Lord Murugan or Skanda and in the evening placed his day's work in the mūlasthaanam of Lord Subrahmanya at Kumara Kottam.

Each night, miraculously, the Lord Himself would modify Kacciappa's manuscript with His own corrections. Hence, the Kanda Purānam is considered to be the absolute account of Lord Murugan.

Naalaayira Dhivya Prabhantham



12 Aazhvaars have sung Divya prabandham in the Tamil language. There are 4000 devotional songs in the Dhivya Prabandam .108 Vishnu temples are called Dhivya Desams.

The 12 divine saints are;

1. Poigaiyalwar
2. Boothathalwar
3. Peiyalwar
4. Thirumazhisaiyalwar
5. Madurakavialwar
6. Namalwar
7. Kulasekaralwar
8. Periyalwar
9. Sri Andal
10. Thondaradippodialwar
11. Thirupanalwar
12. Thirumangaiyalwar

The “Dhivya Prabandam” is the essence of the vedas Upanishads, Ramayan, Srimad Bhagavatam, Mahabharat etc.

Nambiyaandar Nambi



Nambiyandar Nambi offering Neivethiam to Polla Pillaiyar .

Nambi's father was a priest of Pollappillaiyar of Tirunaraiyur in South District. One day his father, had to be absent at a neighbouring village, asked his son to do the puja for him. The boy carried out his father's instructions, had the God bathed, and then he placed the rice offerings before Him; when he found Pillaiyar did not respond, the boy thought that he did something wrong in frustration was about to knock his head against stone. Suddenly the God stopped him and ate all the offerings as desired. Then the boy said that it was late for the school and he feared the teacher would scold him for his late coming and so he requested the Lord to teach him his lessons. The Lord did so. The next day, the same course was repeated. The whole village wondered.

Rajaraja I (acc. 985 A.D.) was an ardent follower of the Saivite faith. He belonged to a family devoted to the Lord of Dance (Adavallan) at Chidambaram.

The miracle reached the ears of the Chola King when he was in need to search over the Devaram hymns. And the King at once resolved to go to Tirunaraiyur. Nambi got to know from Lord Ganesh that the complete collection is available at a chamber near the Chittambalam temple at Thillai where the three saint's Thevaaram is found. He also got to know about the compositions and the histories of the great saints.

Then the king accompanied by Nambi went to Chidambaram and told the men of Vedic Lore what had been revealed to them. The temple authorities then declared that the room would open only if those who set the seal came back. Upon this, the King conducted a festival for Nataraja, took the idols of the Tamil Saints in procession round the temple and stationed them in front of the room to the west of the Hall of Dance of the Lord.

The seals were noticed and the sealed room was opened. A heap of cadjan leaves swallowed mostly by white ants was found. They poured oil over the heap and recovered the surviving leaves. The King's distress was beyond words to find such a large-scale destruction of the holy texts. Then a divine voice from on high told him that there were in it whatever was needed for his age and this gave the king some relief. Then Nambi had them collected and arranged. The hymns of the Trio (Sambanthar, Appar and Sundarar) formed the first seven, out of the twelve books of the Saivites.

The king and Nambi wanted to know the original Raga (melody) in which the hymns were sung by the saints. God referred them to a lady who came in the tradition of Thiru Neelakannda Yazhppaanar. With her help the Raga of all the Padhikams were discovered. The king ordered to make copies of the Thevaarams in long lasting copper plates in order to preserve them. He arranged for many people to learn and sing those songs in front of the God during the worship at the temples. He supported them by granting aid to them. He made very many gifts for the same for the future also. His powerful service and the great treasure made the whole Tamil land turn out in devotional culture.

Panniru Saiva Thirumuraikal

Most of the devotional songs, sung at temples and bhajans, are from book known as Saiva Thirumuraikal. 27 Tamil saints sang these songs from time to time, hundreds of years ago. A devotee and scholar, Nambi Aandaar Nambi, compiled the songs sung by the individual saints into a group of Saiva Thirumuraikal in the 10th century. This compilation was made to preserve these songs, as they are sacred and spirituality enlightening. The songs contain all the information found in the Vedas. These songs have been placed in four categories and classified into 12 groups according to the saints who sang them.

1. Thoththiram (stotram in Sanskrit) - these are the first nine Thirumuraikal.
2. Sashtira - the tenth Thirumurai (Thirumandhiram)
3. Prabhantham - the eleventh Thirumurai
4. Puraanam - the twelfth Thirumurai

The table below shows the grouping and the naming of the 12 Saiva Thirumuraikal.

Group Number	Classification	Author
1, 2 & 3	Thevaaram	Thirugnanasambanther
4, 5 & 6	Thevaaram	Thirunaavukarasar
7	Thevaaram	Sundaramoorthiyar
8	Thiruvaasakam & Thirukovaiyaar	Maanickavaasagar
9	Thiruvissappa Thiruppallaandu	Thirumaaligai Thevar & eight Others ^{2`1} Senthanaar
10	Thirumanthiram	Thirumoolar
11	40 books	Kaaraikkaal ammaiyaar & Eleven others
12	Periya Puraanam	Seckilaar

It is traditional during worship to sing songs from the following five groups in the order given below

1. Thevaaram
2. Thiruvaasakam
3. Thiruvisaippaa
4. Thiruppallaandu
5. Thiruppuraanam

This order is known as Pancha Puraanam and it is also customary to sing Thiruppukal (praise of God Muruga by Arunagirinaathar) after singing the Pancha Puraanam. Normally other devotional songs are sung only after completing the above order.

Mahabharata

By
Vyaasar



The Mahabharata is the world's longest epic and contains around 220,000 lines and dates back to about 19th century BC (by sage Vyaasar)

A king named Santhanu (who was descendant of king Bharata), had a son named Bhishma. After Santhanu's death Bhishma brought up the two younger brothers Trirdharashtra and Pandu.

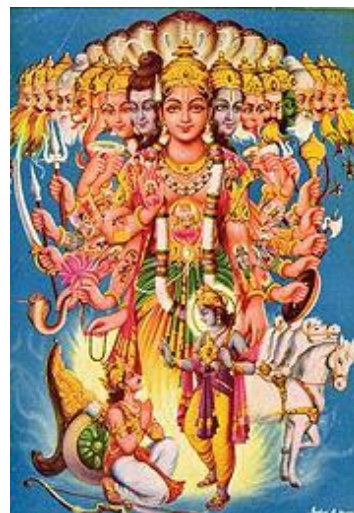
Trirdharashtra was born blind, younger brother Pandu became the king. but, because of a curse Pandu died in the forest, Trirdharashtra became the king.

Pandu had five sons called Pandavas. They were noble and good and represented Dharma in life. Trirdharashtra had one hundred sons called the Kouravaas. They were all evil.

The main theme of this epic is the power struggle between Dharma (justice) and Adharma (injustice).

Bhagavad-Gita

By Lord Krishna



Bhagavad-Gita is the most important section in Mahabharata. This is written in Sanskrit. It was written before 2nd century B.C and contains the teachings on the philosophy of life and nature of God.

Lord Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu but at this battlefield He appears briefly to only Arjuna as the Supreme Being. As he was related to both to Paandavas and Kauravas who were sons of king Dhrithrashtra and Pandu respectively who fought the Great War of Kurushetra, Lord Krishna agreed to Arjuna's request to become his charioteer without taking arms.

At Kurushetra (battle field) when two sides met facing each other Arjuna was fearful about the oncoming slaughter of his Gurus, friends and relations. He told about his critical situation to Krishna. Then Krishna began to advise Arjuna to do his duty as a soldier without worrying about the results.

Krishna preached about the nature of self, the path to reach Brahman, about Dharma, Moksha, and principle of Bhakthi (faith) etc.

Arjuna convinced by Lord Krishna's arguments and explanations got ready for the war which continued 18 days, finally the Paandavas emerged victoriously.

Saiva Siddhantham

The Saiva Siddhanta is the distilled essence of Vedanta. In the Saiva Siddhanta, there are 36 Tattvas. 24 are known as Atma Tattvas, 7 as Vidya Tattvas, and the remaining 5 as Siva Tattvas

Saivism became dominant in Southern India before the Christian era. Thirunelvely and Madurai are the centres of Saiva Siddhanta School. Saivite's typical philosophy called Saiva Siddhanta (about the eleventh century A.D). Saivism is a very popular creed in South India.

Thirumular's Thirumanthiram is the foundation upon which the later structure of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy was built. The 28 Saiva Agamas, the hymns of the Saiva saints, form the chief sources of Saivism.

Saiva Sidhantham explains the Reality of Supreme God

- He is eternal
- Formless
- Causeless
- Independent
- Omnipresent
- One without a second
- Beginningless
- Ever free
- Ever pure
- Not limited by time
- Infinite bliss and
- Infinite intelligence

Saiva Sidhaantham explains Siva as Brahman: the ultimate reality, the phenomenal universe and the principal of all existence.

Rituals and Fundamentals of Hinduism

Aum – Pranava

The most basic mantra in Hinduism is known as Aum. Pranava is the name given to the sound for the mantra “Aum”. This sound has no beginning or end and is like a humming sound.

‘Prana’ means ‘Life Force’. Pranava is the primordial sound (the original or fundamental sound) that created the Universe. This sound also continues to vibrate everything in the universe. Without this vibration, there is no Universe. This divine sound has the power to create, sustain and destroy, giving life and movement to all that exist.

It is found that there is an activity or vibration in all living and non-living objects. Science has proved that even stone, sand etc has this vibration in minute form. In human beings, animals, birds, insects, mosquitoes etc this vibration is clearly visible.

If you are meditating in silence deeply, you can hear the sound ‘Aum’ from your own nerve system.

The closest that humans can get in creating Pranava (the sacred sound) is by chanting ‘Aum’, but we have limitations so we are unable to create the actual Pranava sound. The best example of the Aum sound can be heard in the valampuri sanghu or the right conch..

Ahimsa and vegetarianism

Hindus practice ahimsa (non-violence) and respect all life because divinity is believed in all beings and non-human beings. The term ahimsa appears in the Upanishads, the epic Mahabharata. Ahimsa is the first of the five Iyamas (vows of self-restraint) in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

In accordance with ahimsa, Hindus follow vegetarianism to respect all forms of life. Vegetarians are those people who do not believe in eating meat, fish and fowl but subsist on vegetables, fruits, nuts, grain, etc. Vegetarianism is to achieve a satvic (pure) lifestyle.

Cow in Hinduism



The Cow is referred as 'Kamadhenu' and has a special place in Vedic worship. It is revered as the source of food (milk) and symbol of life so should never be killed. Vedas say that Goddess Kamadhenu represents the universe, where all the celestial beings of different lokas reside.

Some believe that if they worship the sacred cow, their financial difficulties will lessen and that karma will be easy on the sins they or their ancestors committed.

It is also stated in the myths that offering prayers to Goddess Kamadhenu is equivalent to worshipping our ancestors. It is considered to be auspicious to feed the cows on new moon every month with 'Agathi' herbs. It brings peace and the ancestors will shower blessings to the family.

Vibhuthi - Bhasma

Vibhuthi is the sacred ash used in religious worship in Hinduism.

The ash of any burnt object is not regarded as holy ash. Bhasma (the holy ash) is the ash from the Homa (sacrificial fire) where special wood, cow dung, milk, ghee, honey and other herbs are burnt. Bhasma is considered as holy ash because it has been made sacred with the rendition of mantras and shlokas.

The word Bhasma means “that by which our sins are destroyed and the Lord is remembered”. “Bha” implies Bhartsana (“to destroy”) and “sma” implies smaranam (“to remember”). The application of Bhasma therefore signifies destruction of the evil and remembrance of the divine. Bhasma is called Vibhuthi (“glory”) as it gives glory and protects the wearer from ill health and evil, by purifying him or her.

Bhasma is generally applied on the forehead. Some apply it on other parts of the body, like the upper arms, chest, etc.

Bhasma also is believed to have medicinal value and is used in many ayurvedic medicines. It absorbs excess moisture from the body and prevents colds and headaches. The Upanishads say that the famous Mrutyunjaya mantra should be chanted whilst applying ash on the forehead.

“Tryambakam yajaamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam Urvaarukamiva
bandhanat mrutyor muksheeya maa amritaam”

Why do we offer a coconut?

In India one of the most common offerings in a temple is the coconut. It is also offered on occasions like weddings, festivals, house warmings etc. It is offered in the sacrificial fire whilst performing homa. The coconut is broken and placed before God. It is later distributed as Prasaada.

The fibre covering of the dried coconut is removed except for a tuft on the top. The coconut is broken, symbolising the breaking of the ego.

Why do we have a prayer room?

All Hindu homes have a prayer room. A lamp is lit and God is worshipped each day. Other spiritual practices like Japa (repetition of God's name), meditation, Paaraayana (reading of the scriptures), prayers, devotional singing etc is also done here. Special worship is done on auspicious occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, festivals etc. Each member of the family worships here.

For the purpose of meditation, worship and prayer, we should have a holy atmosphere. Sacred thoughts and sound vibrations should spread throughout the place to influence the minds of those who spend time there. Spiritual thoughts and vibrations accumulated through regular meditation, worship and chanting. Even when we are tired or agitated, by just sitting in the prayer room for a while, we feel calm, rejuvenated and spiritually uplifted.

Why do we fast?

Most Hindus fast regularly or on special occasions like festivals. On such days they do not eat at all, eat once or make do with fruits or a special diet of simple food.

Fasting in Sanskrit is called Upavaasa. 'Upa' means "near" + 'vaasa' means "to stay". Upavaasa means to stay near (to God). Instead of thinking about food, we discipline ourselves by thinking about or praising God.

Fasting helps us to control our senses and desires. It also helps us guide our minds to be at peace. Fasting should not make us weak, irritable or create an urge to overeat later. This happens when there is no goal behind fasting.

Namaskaaram



Bow to the God that resides in you



Namaskaaram is to worship, greet or show respect. There are several ways of performing Namaskaaram.

1. Sashtanga Namaskar / Ashtaanga Namaskaaram

Sash means 'eight' and Anga means 'parts of body' (head chest, hands, knees and feet). This is performed by men only. They must face north and lie down flat, touching the ground.

2. Panchaanga Namaskar/Namaskaaram

Panch means 'five' and Anga means 'parts of body' (head, hands and legs). This is performed by women. They must kneel down with their palms joined together, touching the ground. Females must not do Sashtanga Namaskaaram. There is a restriction in the sacred scriptures.

3. Pranam

This is performed as a greeting when you join both hands (palms together), bow down in front of the other person, and say Namaste, Namaskar, or Pranam.



4. Pradakshina

This is when you circumambulate (walk around) the temple or deity in clock wise direction. It is believed that the deity in the shrine is placed in such a way that it absorbs and sends out vibrations and radiations. And a person going around the deity will be benefited from this. It is performed 3 times to cross the nether world, earth and heaven to reach Brahman.

5. Aathma Pradakshina

Aathma means 'soul'. Aathma Pradakshina involves rotating clockwise around ourselves in belief that our soul resides at the centre of our body and is part of God.

6. Knocking the two ends of forehead before Poojas in South India

Some devotees knock the two ends of forehead before beginning prayer and pooja. It is believed that the nerves, connecting to the intellect, passes through these two ends and the knocking is to invoke Ganesh, the god of Budhi (intellect).

Temple Worship

Temple worship is recommended at least once a week. The temple is a pure, clean and holy environment. Therefore, the entire body must be clean before entering the temple. This involves having a shower, wearing washed clothes, adorning forehead with holy ash (vibuthi) and tilak. Offerings such as fruit and flowers can be taken into the temple.

Before entering the temple;

1. Footwear must be removed.
2. Hands and feet must be washed.

Once at the temple;

1. Sashtanga Namaskaram in front of the flag post (Kodi Sthmabam) facing North on entering temple. This shouldn't be done anywhere else in the temple
2. Worship Nandhi
3. Worship Lord Ganesha before other deities.
4. Do no talk or gossip. Chant the mantras softly as so that you don't disturb others.
5. The Holy ash, given as the blessings (prasatham), should be worn saying "Sivaayanama". It should not be spilled on the ground or wasted.
6. Circumambulate (pradhakshina) the deities in the temple. The circumambulation would be done at least for three times. On special occasion like pradosha, circumambulate the temple anti clockwise.
7. Before coming out of the temple, worship Chandeshwarar and get permission by clapping hands 3 times.
8. Only prasadam can be taken out of the temple as blessings. Don't take anything else from the temple. It is a tradition to wipe (rub/clap) the hands together before Chandeshwarar.
9. Sit facing the north and meditate on the God chanting the Holy five letters Sivayanama.
10. Donations (whether they are material or physical service) to maintain the temple should be made if possible.
11. Sashtanga Namaskaram in front of the flag post (Kodi Sthmabam) facing north before leaving the temple.

Shanti is chanted thrice

Hindus chant prayers to invoke peace in mind and physical plane. These prayers always end with three chants of invocation, "Shanti, Shanti, Shanti" or "Peace, Peace Peace" These prayers spoken in thrice is generally interpreted peace in three fold. Peace in body, speech and mind. Chanted thrice are also emphasis 3 kinds of disturbances. In Sanskrit, these are referred as adhi-deivikam, adhi-bhautikam and adhi atmikam

1. Adhi-deivikam means "mental disturbances that comes from God" i.e. things that are utterly beyond our control: hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, etc. We have no control over these types of disturbances. So we say the first shanti, to be protected from these obstacles that are beyond our control.
2. Adhi-bhautikam means "disturbances that come from the world." That means anything arising from the world around us; we have some control over these disturbances. The 2nd shanti, to be protected from these obstacles
3. Athi-atmikam. This is the most powerful disturbance raging within self that is due to mental and physical attachments. This type of disturbances will be protected by chanting 3rd shanti

Required items for Abhishekam

- Gingelly oil (sesame oil) or Sandalwood oil
- Panchakavyam consists of Ghee, Milk, Yoghurt, Urine and Cow dung (Vibhuthi can be used in the absence of Cow dung or Cow urine).
- Panchaamirtham (consists of Banana, mango, Jack fruit, Honey, Jaggary, Ghee, Milk)
- Ghee
- Sugar cane Juice
- Vibhuthi
- Milk
- Sandalwood paste
- Pure water
- Yoghurt
- Lime Juice
- Scented oil (Aththar)
- Honey
- Young coconut

Required items for pooja

- Tumeric powder
- Banana leaves
- Wicks
- Rice for Kumbham
- Betel leaves & Nuts
- Flowers
- Silk cloth for covering Kumbham
- Agrabathi
- Offerings to God
- Mango leaves
- Camphor
- Small bowls & tray for sandal paste, Kumkum, Vibhuthi, Theertham and Akshathai.

Clapping hands after praying Chandeswarar

The Periya Puraanam was composed by Sekilaar. To sing this Puraanam, Sekilaar spent years of research and collected information about the 63 saints and the divine events in their lives.

Sekilaar, in his research, found that Chandeswarar was blessed by God and that all offerings to God by devotees belong to Chandeswarar as he has merged with God.

According to the stone carvings (Kalvettu saasanam), the Cholapura temple assets belong to Chandeswarar.

The ritual of temple worship, finished with prayer to Chandeswarar by clapping hands. Anybody before leaving the temple after worship must get permission from Chandeswarar for taking anything other than prasaadham from the temple.

Sariya Service

Sariya service means selfless service or serving the community and temple without expectations of return.

This is one of the four religious paths in Hinduism. “By doing selfless service, one attains spiritual growth.”

St. Thirunaavukkarasar followed this path and attained God’s feet.

Sariya service in Temples



Cleaning the temple



Making flower garlands



Maintaining the flower garden



Cleaning the oil lamps, arathhi trays, dhupa, deepams and the other things used for poojas



Samaya Dhiksha



Samaya diksha ceremony (in Hawai)

The Samaya Dhiksha is known as Siva Dhiksha. It is the initiation of a person into the Saiva religion by a guru with appropriate ceremony to meditate on the five Tamil lettered mantra of Siva (Panchaakshara).

Panchakshara Mantra, (AUM SI VA YA NA MA), must be chanted be at least 108 times on a mala of Ruthradsha beads. This practice will provoke the disciple, to realize the purpose of his life and relationship with God.

A person after obtaining Siva dhiksha should perform puja 3 times daily "Iyamam", "Niyamam", "Santhiyaavanthanam" (dawn, noon and dusk) to Sivalingam and recite Thevaaram and Thiruvaasakam. According to the Guru's instruction devotees have to do selfless service, go on pilgrimages to temples and perform "Mahesvara Puja" according to their ability.

After formal initiation a disciple is qualified to apply holy ash in three lines (Tripundaram). While reciting the mantra, with 3 fingers he should apply three lines on the forehead. The marks are not to extend beyond the sides of the eyebrows.

The 3 lines represent **Brahma, Vishnu, Ruthra** or **A, U, M** of the Pranava Mantra or **Kriyaa Sakthi, Ichaa Sakthi and Gnaana Sakthi**.

Receiving Samaya Dhiksha also gives receive the right and blessing to do daily rituals. One who obtained Samaya Dhiksha will gain spiritual benifits through daily pooja to regulate and bring the mind under control.

Spiritual rituals include temple worship; attending festivals, having a strict diet, observe vratas by fasting, becoming vegetarian, making pilgrimage, bathing in holy rivers and more.

Diksha with Vel – Blessing/Initatation with the Vel

Kumarakuruparar was dumb (unable to speak) by birth. It is believed that one day, Kumarakuruparar's parents took Kumarakuruparar to the temple and

prayed and cried for their son to speak. Both parents saw Goddess Sakthi appear before them and touched Kuamakuruparar's tongue with the Vel. Immediately he started to sing many songs in praise of Goddess Shakthi (Sakala kalavalli maalai) and Lord Muruga.

Nayana Dhiksha – Blessing/Initiation by site

Maanickavaasagar was blessed with Nayana Dhiksha. A Guru looked deep into Maanickavaasagar's eyes blessing him with great gnanam.

Thiruvadi Dhiksha – Blessing/Initiation by foot

It is believed that Lord Siva appeared as a Sivaachaariyaar and placed His foot on St Thirunaavukkarasar's and Maanickavaasagar's head to give them great gnanam.

Sparisa Dhikhas – Blessing/Initiation by touch

Touched by Ramakrishna paramahamsar on his chest, Narendran became Swami Vivekanandar

Rudraksha Mala



Rudraksha means the eye of Rudra (Shiva). Rudraksha is an object of worship.

These beads are the seeds of the Rudraksha fruit obtained from Rudraksha trees.

Rudraksha trees are mostly found in South Eastern Asian Islands and Nepal. It was first spotted in Indonesia and is now grown in Nepal Hardwar, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Rudraksha malas have traditionally been used by Hindus and Buddhist for control stress, overall healing, meditation, and to produce positive changes. For thousands of years in India, yogis have worn Rudraksha malas to experience the deep calm and concentration which are very important for meditation and control of mind and body.

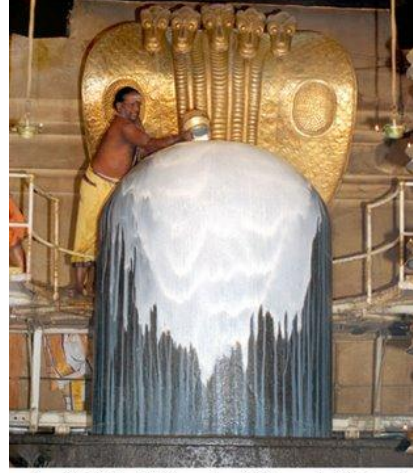
The Rudraksha beads hold a very special place in Hinduism as it possesses powers and divine properties. Necklaces (malas) made of Rudraksha beads are considered auspicious as well as powerful and are supposed to have astrological and health benefits. It is believed that one who wears Rudraksha is protected from all evil deeds or thoughts.

Abhishekam

“Alankarapriyayan Vishnu, Abhishekapriyan Siva”

Alankaram, which is to finely dress and beautify, is performed for Lord Vishnu and Abhishekam for Lord Siva.

In Siva temples a pot made up of copper or brass with a hole in the centre is kept hanging over the image of Lord Siva or Sivalingam and water is drips on the image throughout day and night over the God’s statue.



தஞ்சை பெரிய கோவிலில் மகா சிவராத்திரியை முன்னிட்டு குடம், குடமாக பெருவுடையார் திருமேனியில் பால் அபிஷேகம் நடந்தது.

Abhisheka is a part of Siva puja. Without Abhisheka, worship is incomplete. During Abhisheka, Rudra Maha-mrityunjaya mantra is chanted in a particular rhythm. Ganga water, milk, ghee, honey, rose-water, coconut water, sandal paste panchamritham scented oil, sugarcane juice and lime juice are used for abhisheka. After every abhisheka, pure water is poured over the head of statue to clean the statue.

The Abhisheka water or other articles used for Abhisheka are considered very sacred and believed to ward off evil forces. However Abhisheka, using any item and performed with pure devotion is the most scared.

Kannappa Nayanar, for example, who was a hunter, climbed a mountain, carrying water from the river in his mouth. He poured the water over the Linga as abhisheka and was blessed for his pure devotion.

Kumbhabhishekam



Yaagasaalai



Kumbhabhishekam is the ceremony of introducing spiritual powers into all the vigrahas (statues of the deities) by pouring holy water while chanting specific mantras. Thus the Hindu temple is not just a building; it is an abode of divine presence.

According to the Aagamas, Prathishta kumbhabhishekam consists of a number of rituals which extends from one to nine days. Each day starts with Nadhaswaram played by the temple musicians early in the morning, creating a spiritual atmosphere.

Kalasa Sthapanam: to install the kalasa (the holy vessel or pot) in the centre of the yagasaalai (where the Yaga is performed). Firstly the sacred fire is lit in the homakunda to invoke divine powers while chanting four Vedas and Gayathri mantras. The kalasa is filled with the water from all oceans and sacred rivers and decorated with sandal, kumkum, flowers and akshathas. Then holy water is sprinkled on the kalasa, all puja materials and the persons performing puja.

Ganapathi Pooja: ritual to worship Ganesh to remove the obstacles

Aarchariya ritvik varnam: to assign duties of the priests and offer special garments to them.

Vastu purusha anguraarpanam: for seeding Navadhanya on the soil. (The growth of plants from these seeds symbolizes the prosperity of the temple).

Punniya Aavaahanam: This ritual is for purification

Sayana dhivasam: for arrangement for the statues to rest

Nayana Unmeelanam: (awakening) this ritual is for the priest /sthapathi to open the eyes of the statues.

Ashta bandhanam: Ashta means 8 in Sanskrit and Bandhanam means tying or fixing. This ritual is to fix an idol to its pedestal (peetam) with a clay-like paste ground with 8 specific herbs is believed to keep the idol firmly to last for a period of 12 years. The Yantra which is a geometric representation of the power of the deities installed with nava ratnas. Bandhanam is performed with gold (Swarnabandhanam), the rejuvenating power of the deity is believed to last for a period of 100 years. This is followed by Abhishekam with sanctified water from the Kalasa along with the appropriate Mantras.

Then **Alankaaram, Dhupa Deepa, Archana** performed routinely.

The final ritual is pouring of the sanctified water from the kalasas over the stupis (steeple) on the top of the central Vimaana and the sanctum, gopurams main and other deities, by the priests .By this **the divine power flows gently down in a silver wire and enters the Deity installed inside the sanctum of the temple. The Deity which was granite a sculptured stone statue is transformed into living form.**

The Acharyas are the center of attraction with their prominent turbans. After kumbhabhishekam, is followed by special pujas, concluded with Shodashopachara (sixteen steps) aarathani.

In the evening of this ceremony, utsavams (celestial marriage ceremonies) are performed followed by taking the brass deities in procession. According to the Agama sastras “Mandala Abhishekam” must be performed for over a month (normally 45 days) after the completion of the Maha-Samprokshanam or Maha Kumbhabhishekam

Mandala Abhishekam

On Mandala Abhishekam day, consecrated waters from 81 kalasams (vessels) or 108 conchs will be used in the Thirumanjanam (sacred baths) for the Murthys.

At the conclusion of these ceremonies, devotees are welcome to acquire one of these kalasams or conchs through the sponsorship of the Mandala abhishekam. The consecrated waters from the 81 kalasams will be carried to the individual sannidhis for the abhishekam. Devotees can sponsor abhishekam for their favourite deity (Ishta dheivam). They can be used to perform sandhyaa vandhanam by men and abhishekams to Saalagraamams and Aaraadhana Murthy or can be placed in the pooja room of the house.

Shangaabhishekam



Shangu means conch shell. The speciality of a conch is the sharpness of the tone, which is even difficult to obtain in a human-made instrument. The superior sound quality of the tone from a proper conch represents the spiritual vibrations of the universal sound of Aum (has the spiritual vision of Light of God).

Valamburai Shanku (Right Conch) is considered as the holiest among all other conches. Mandala Abhishekam is always concluded with Shanga Abhishekam. Even Shivarathri festival devotees do abhishekams with Shanku to God Siva. Shangabhishekam is believed to bring peace, unity, wealth, prosperity not only to the performer, but also to the entire family.

On Shankabhisheka pooja day all conches will be decorated with flowers and filled with medicated pure perfumed water for abhishekam. Then with Vedic rituals, God's power will be initiated into the holy water and filled in 108 conches. Continuous Pooja with mantras will be performed and offered naivethiyam to the conches. This is followed by Abhishekam with sandal, milk, honey performed on murthies followed by holy water from each conch. Then all Vighrams will be decorated and performed deepa, dhupa pushpa aaraadhanai while chanting mantras.

The sound of the ocean humming gently can be heard when you hold the conch to the ear. It is the natural vibration or cosmic energy of the earth is entering the conch.

The reason for a conch is blown during sacred rites is to get rid of negative energy. The vibrations from the conch can dispel evil forces and also clear the environmental pollution.

Mantras, Pujas and Homa



In Hinduism, Puja, Mantra, Tantra, Homas and Astrology have been practiced in India since the time of ancient Hindus.

Man has been worshipping God to fulfill some desires. Some do it for salvation, some do it as a way of thanksgiving and some do it as a daily routine as tradition or fear. But all do it for seeking something.

Every religious scripture suggests - "Seek with faith and you will be rewarded." "Ask with faith and He will give you". Faith is natural, faith is eternal and faith is rewarding. There are countless recorded instances of how God has rewarded faith with His grace.

To worship God and seek for blessing against any negative influences of the planets (called dosha nivarana), various Vedic scriptures and astrology scriptures have prescribed several pujas that can be performed by fully qualified Vedic Pundits.

“Mantra” is a Sanskrit word made up of two syllables: “man” (mind) and “tra” (liberate). Thus “Mantra” means “to liberate one’s mind”. In Sanskrit a “seed” is called “Bija.”. Certain sounds which do not have meaning can have the power to create growth and expansion in humans at the physical, emotional and spiritual levels are known as “Bija” or Seed Mantras.

Any form of sound in the universe is vibrational energy. Human speech or words is also a combination of sound waves each of which resonates at specific vibrational frequencies. According to ancient Indian texts and modern day science, the whole universe was created through cosmic sound energy which was then followed by heat and light energy and eventually life forms. Sound vibrations are intimately connected to our “prana” or “life energy”.

In Vedic healing and spiritual traditions, “Bija Mantras” were developed to create balance and harmony in the human body, mind and soul.

Sanatana Dharma

Sanatana Dharma is "the natural, ancient and eternal way".

"Sanatana" means, "eternal, never beginning nor ending. "Dharma" is from "dhri" 'means to hold together. Thus Sanatana Dharma means eternally holds all together.

Sanatana Dharma is a universal truth on the nature of reality, humanity or consciousness (thoughts and feelings).

Everything in this Universe is born out of Truth. Dharma (righteousness) has emerged out of Sathya (Truth).It is said, 'Sathyannasti Paro Dharma' (There is no Dharma greater than steady devotion to Truth).

When Truth and Dharma result in Peace and from comes Love.

There is no place in this world, where Love is not present. Similarly, there is no place in this world where Truth is not present.

Finally from peace and love emerges bliss.

Manasika Worship

Manasika puja is when the devotee mentally performs a Puja to God without performing an external puja. Manasika puja is considered superior to worshipping something outside. Manasika puja should not be a rigid and systematic procedure, but should be the mind with greater love offering to God.

Through Manasika pooja, the devotee's love to God develops and finally the devotee will succeed in establishing in his real self (Swa-swarup). Gradually he will experience union with God.

In Mahabharata there is an example to show the power of Manasika puja.

Arjuna thought that Bhima was not doing any kind of worship. He was proud of his external worship of Lord Siva. He offered plenty of Bilva leaves. But Bhima offered mentally the bilva leaves from the whole world to Lord Siva. He was doing Manasika Puja of Lord Siva. The temple attendants could not remove the bilva leaves from the head of Lord Siva offered by Bhima. Arjuna once saw a large band of people carrying baskets of bilva leaves. He thought within himself that the leaves must be those offered by him to Lord Siva and questioned them thus: "Brothers, from where do you carry these Bilva leaves?" They replied: "O Arjuna, these leaves are offered to our Lord Siva by Bhima through Manasika Puja." Arjuna was struck with wonder. He came to know that Manasika Puja was more powerful than external worship. Bhima was a better devotee than Arjuna.

Manasika worship is best at Brahmamuhurta, at 4 a.m. There is a spiritual influence and mysterious silence in the early morning hours. All saints and Yogis practise meditation at this period and spread their spiritual vibrations to the whole world.

Sankalpam

Sankalp or Sankalpam literally means, taking a firm decision or forming a firm opinion.

No work can be successfully accomplished without dedication. Like-wise, no puja can be performed satisfactorily without invoking God's blessings through sincere devotion and complete surrender. We pray to God to bless us to successfully fulfil our desire by performing puja, with all senses under control.

In Sankalpa puja, particular mantras are to be recited to realise what, who and where we are.

Srutis (Vedas), Smritis and Puranas, has have said that any karma or act (being done with a desire) should be started with pure sacred Sankalpa, to get the expected result.

Karma

Karma means "deed" or "act" and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction that govern all life.

We earn Karma in four ways:

- through thoughts
- through words
- through actions that we perform ourselves
- through actions others do under our instructions

Everything that we have ever thought, spoken, done or caused is Karma. We are in position to do something about our destiny by doing the right thing at the right time. Through positive actions, pure thoughts, prayer, mantra and meditation, we can resolve the influence of our karma in present life and turn destiny for the better.

Hindu scriptures divide karma into three kinds:

1. **Sanchitha** is the accumulated karma. It would be impossible to experience and endure all Karmas in one life. From this stock of Sanchita karma, a handful is taken out to serve one lifetime. Hence, It is the sum of one's past karmas – all actions (good and bad) that follow through from one's past life to the next.
2. **Prarabtha** is the portion of Sanchita karma that appears as a particular problem in the present life.
3. **Aahaamiya** is everything that we produce in current life. All Kriyamana karmas flow in to Sanchita karma and consequently shape our future.

The cycle of birth and death will occur over and over again (reincarnate) while the stock of Sanchita karma exists.

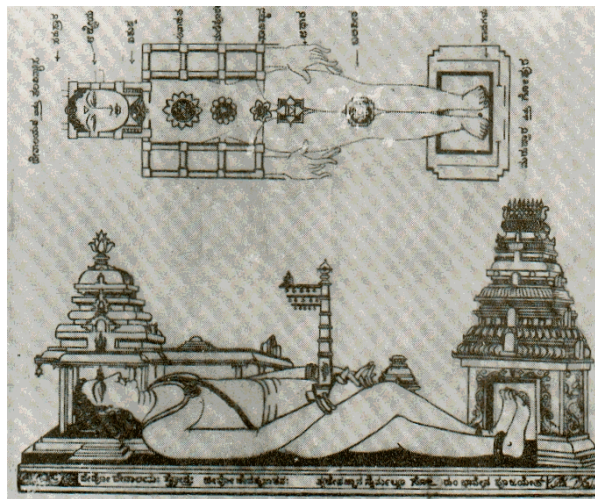
Reincarnation

When a person dies, the only "death" is that of the physical body (the body which we can see and touch). The astral body or soul (the body which we cannot see or touch), containing a person's mental impressions, continues after the physical body's death and eventually enters a new physical body, rebirth.

In almost every case, a new personality is developed during each life in the physical world, but some part of the self remains constant throughout all the lives.

Researchers have found and published evidence of cases where children have memories of their earlier lives.

Temple



A Hindu temple referred to in Sanskrit 'Devaalaya' consists of two words namely Deva (God) and Aalaya (House). (The house where God lives).

In Vedic Hindu view, an individual's body is referred as a temple with in (dweller as) God. The Vedic Rishis realized God within themselves and gave designs and functions of temples in scriptures (Agama Shastras) of Vedic Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma).

The purpose is to enable a devotee to use a physical temple and the ritualistic worship as a reminder to the spiritual journey to be carried out within oneself. In addition, it also serves as a place for celebrations of Hindu religious festivals.

Architecture

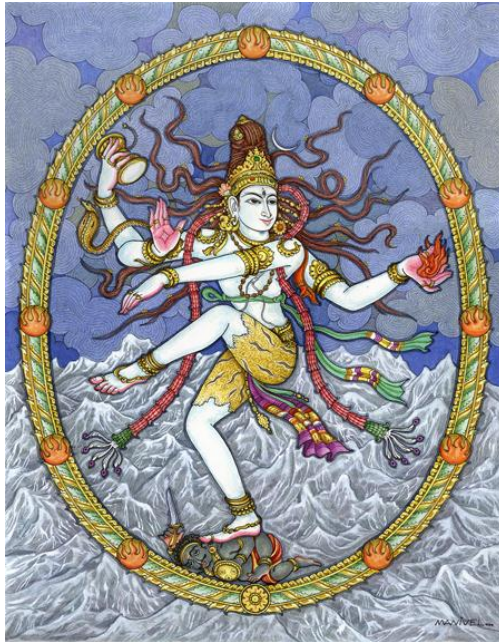
A Vedic Hindu temple's architecture is a divine and yogic representation of a human. The feet represent the Rajagopura. The hands represent the

walkway (prakaara) all around the temple. The main hall (Maha mandapa) represents the abdomen. The entrance porch (Artha Mandapa) represents the heart. The sanctum garbha graha represents the head. The deity is made holy with religious rites in the sanctum (garbha graha).

A temple plays an important role in providing a sacred place and means for spiritual development of a seeker. Focusing on the service in a temple we experience the joy of selfless service.

A Hindu temple (Devaalaya) has not only religious purpose but also spiritual, cultural, educational and social objectives. It provides a place for devotees to focus and develop their spiritual insight.

Significance of God Siva's Dance



This cosmic dance of Siva is called 'Anandatandava,' meaning the Dance of Bliss, and symbolizes the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, as well as the daily rhythm of birth and death. The dance illustrates the truth of the five principle action of eternal energy creation, destruction, preservation, salvation, and illusion.

In short, the dance of Siva represents His five activities:

1. Shrishti – creation and evolution
2. Sthiti - preservation and support
3. Samhara - destruction
4. Tirobhava – evolution to overcome illusion
5. Anugraha - release (free) from bonds, grace

Neelakandan



Siva

Lakshmi

(Centre Vishnu in his Kurma avatar below Asuras and Devas to left & right)

The story begins with Indra, riding his elephant. He came upon a sage named Duruvasar. The sage decided to honour Indra by giving him a scented garland. Indra took the garland, but placed it on the forehead of his elephant. The elephant was irritated by the scent and threw the garland off, trampling on it. The angry sage cursed Indra to lose his wealth. Indra was immediately dispossessed of all his wealth.

Indra then approached Brahma to help him to regain his wealth. Brahma suggested him to churn the Ocean of Milk in order to get back his wealth and obtain the Nectar of Immortality. However this task could not be performed by Indra and his Devas alone, so they sought the help of their enemies, the Asuras, with the understanding that the Asuras would be allowed to share the Amrita (Divine nectar of immortality).

Then the ocean was churned by using the Mount Manthara as the pole and the King of Snakes, Vasuki as the rope. The Devas held the tail of the snake while the Asuras held the head end of the snake and they pulled on it alternately causing the mountain to rotate which in turn churned the ocean. Once the mountain was placed on the ocean, it began to sink. Then Vishnu came in his 2nd incarnation, in the form of a turtle (Kurma), and supported the mountain on his shell back.

As the ocean was churned, a deadly poison known as Halaha emerged. This poison threatened to suffocate all living things. In response to so many prayers God Siva drank the poison, His wife Parvathi alarmed, stopped it in His throat with her hands.

This caused the throat to turn blue. Due to this, God Siva is called Neelakandan (neela-blue.Kanda-throat). Then Goddess Lakshmi with various treasures (14 ratnas) emerged from the ocean of milk with Amrita.

The story ends with the help of Lord Vishnu as Mohini by distracting and defeating Asuras. Then Devas drank the Nectar and repossessed everything and became forever young.

Pranayama

Pranayama is a Sanskrit word means “expansion of prana (breath)”. ”Prana” means energy and.”ayam” means expansion.

Mantra is a guide to a breathing exercise and a prayer also. While chanting a Mantra, keep the left nostril closed and inhale through the right nostril. Then close both nostrils and hold the breath. After this the left nostril is opened and air exhaled. Like that right nostril closed and inhale through the left nostril.



Many mantras including

1. AUM SI VA YA NA MA or
2. Aum -- Bhur, Bhuva, Svaha -- tat savitur varenyam -- bhargo devasya dhimahi -- dhiyo yo nah prachodayat-

Breathe in then stop and hold breath after each round.

When soldiers are stressed out during battle, they are advised to do Pranaayaama exercises. Children and adults with respiratory illness are also advised to do this breathing exercise to relax a stiff chest.

Mental chanting of Gayatri Mantra and Pancha Akshara mantra earns the highest reward.

There are five stops in reciting the Gayatri Mantras. (Five faces of Gayatri Devi).

Om – 1st stop;
Bhur, Bhuva, Svaha – 2nd stop;
Tat savitur varenyam – 3rd stop;
Bhargo devasya dhimahi – 4th stop;
Dhiyo yo nah prachodayat. – 5th stop

In a Yogic point of view, proper breathing is to bring more oxygen to the blood and to the brain, and to control the life energy.

Pranayama is a scientific method of controlling the breath, leading to better health. It helps the lungs and overall breathing.

Lack of oxygen due to neglect of systematic breathing exercise may lead to many complications like heart diseases sleep disorders, fatigues.

Pranayama helps to reduce stress related disorders, improve nerve functions develops a steady mind, strong will-power, and sound judgment.

Pranayama must not be performed after meals. A gap of five hours after the last meal is recommended. The best time is morning after one freshens up. It is advised to take a cool bath or shower after 10-15 minutes of the breathing exercises. This is to allow the body to cool down.

Practice pranayama, in a dry well-ventilated room. Select a clean and peaceful place (like a place near a clean pond), some kind of incense can be lit to create a clean environment at that place, lighting a lamp with purified butter.

Pranaayaama requires deep concentration and attention. It is always better to have the practice in a steady sitting posture. To avoid distraction of the mind do not keep anyone by the side.

Hinduism- the way of Life

The root of Hindu Dharma (religion) lies in the Indian subcontinent, in the Indus valley (valley of river Sindhu) where over 300 advanced settlements existed as early as 5000 BC. Hinduism, the world's oldest living dharma (religious philosophy and the way of life) has no founder, single teacher or prophet. Hindu Dharma is called Sanatana Dharma or Eternal Dharma. The word Sanatan implies that it always existed. Those who follow this faith are known as Hindus.

Hinduism is the world's third most practiced religion with over 900 million followers. Over 83% of the population of India regard themselves as Hindus. Hinduism is one of the most tolerant, peace loving and pantheistic (believe everything is a God) religions. Hindu religion is flexible and provides many ways to develop one's spiritual ideas in order to suit individual needs. Hinduism is often called the "oldest living religion

Hinduism in India influences family life, food, dress and architecture. Hindus have settled throughout the world and have taken their faith with them. Today Hinduism is practiced in many countries; Hindu literature and philosophy have influenced people throughout the world.

The Hindu idea of a supreme power or God developed from Rig-Veda (as early as 1500B.C.) and the early verse stories called the Puranas (from the 500's A.D.).

In the beginning, humans prayed to the unexplainable powers of nature such as rain, fire, wind and sun. Hindus **believe in one God, the supreme Brahman**. The philosophers of the Upanishads (before 700's B.C.) believed that Brahman is everywhere and had no form or gender. As Brahman is difficult to be understood by ordinary people, symbols or images were created to represent it in worship. Since Brahman is apart from concrete limit, can be represented as male or female; human or animal; or a combination of these. Many human-like images have been created and used in modern Hindu worship. But these images are only help to worship.

Hinduism recommends that a devotee's spiritual practice should be followed with their spiritual knowledge capacity, and **everyone should have the freedom to choose a form of Brahman (as their object of worship) that satisfies their spiritual needs**.

This is why Hinduism consists of so many Gods and Goddesses. These Gods are represented by a numerous idols and images that symbolize the different divine powers. Most of the idols and images are housed in temples. Hindus also worship trees, planets, animals and even spirits. This also goes to explain how so many idols can be worshipped by different members of the same Hindu family.

All Hindu deities or Gods and Goddesses represent different aspects of the Supreme Being, Brahman. The three most important aspects of Brahman are Brahma, the creator of the universe; Vishnu, the preserver; Rudhran the destroyer and regenerator.

The Rig-Veda praises natural forces which include Indra (rain), Agni (fire), Vayu (wind) and the gods called the Adityas (sun). Hindu philosophers believed that these Gods were different forms of the supreme Brahman. Bhakti or the deep worship of the personal God, even if by rituals gives power to the devotee to have deep, personal and mystical relationship with God and offer love to God easily. That is why in the Gita, Krishna recommends the worship God with Form, as compared to the worship of the Formless God. The three male deities are represented by a single image called the Trimurti. Their female consorts are respectively Saraswati, goddess of learning and the arts; Lakshmi, Goddess fortune, Shakti (also known as Parvati), the mother Goddess. Shakti in her destructive mood is known as Durga or Kali. Other important deities of modern Hinduism are Ganesha, the elephant-headed god who removes obstacles; Kartikeya or Subrahmanya, who is widely worshipped in south India Srilanka. All these gods are aspects of Brahman.

Hindus believe that Vishnu, the Preserver, came down to earth in nine Avatars, or incarnations to protect mankind, the tenth incarnation is still to come. The popular incarnations of Vishnu are Rama, the hero of the epic story Ramayana and Krishna. Despite to having many gods, Hindus worship only one supreme Brahman in many forms and under different names. Sanatana Dharma (the law beyond the time) is their belief and faith in Hinduism.

In Hinduism Bhagavad Gita says about the Varnashrama-dharma according to the mind and nature of actions classified in four varnas, or social divisions of life.

Unlike other major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, Hinduism was not founded on the teachings of one person; it was gradually evolved over thousands of years. Many sects (groups) arose within Hinduism and each developed its own philosophy and form of worship.

Hinduism has many sacred books divided into Shruti (revealed or heard) and Smriti (remembered) texts.

Generally most Hindus believe in Vedas, the oldest Hindu scriptures and the oldest sacred writings of any major religion. A Hindu also accepts the teaching of the Dharma-Shastras or ancient law books, the philosophical writing of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. Most Hindus believe in a supreme spirit called Brahman and in the reincarnation of a person's atman, or soul. Hindus must practice satya (truth) and ahimsa (non-injury), they must respect other people's property. Hindus believe in life after death, an individual can follow various paths to achieve moksha (release from the cycle of birth and rebirth) and ultimate union with Brahman or God.

Karma and Reincarnation

The word "karma" means action, it also means the result of action. Whatever acts we have performed and whatever thoughts we have thought have created an impression, both in our minds and in the universe around us. The universe gives back to us what we have given to it: Good actions and thoughts create good effects, bad ones create bad effects.

When a person dies, the only "death" is that of the physical body. The mind, which contains a person's mental impressions, continues after the body's death.

Hindus believe the soul will get a new body after death (soul is reborn). The continuous process of rebirth is called reincarnation. Reincarnation depends on karma the "birth" is a new physical body accompanied by the old mind with the impressions or "grooves" from previous lives. (A person's actions and their results), every action influences how a person's soul will be born in the next incarnation. The soul goes through many existences in a cycle of birth and rebirths called samsara. Eventually the soul achieves a new level of existence called moksha, when the soul is united with or comes as near as possible to the supreme spirit, Brahman.

The path of knowledge, *Gnana*, involves deep study of the Vedas and the Upanishads, under the guidance of a learned teacher (Guru). Understanding the scriptures frees an individual from attachment to the material world and enables his or her soul to approach the supreme spirit.

The path of *Yoga* or discipline involves the study of philosophy, meditation and physical exercises to achieve bodily control, with the help of a teacher. Yoga joins the spiritual force of the mind with the material forces of the body to give health, long life and inner peace. Yoga liberates the soul from the cycles of birth.

The path of devotion *Bhakti* is for most individuals the easiest way to experience the supreme spirit. The follower of this path concentrate his or her devotion on a chosen personal deity (Eshwara), offers worship to the image of the deity, chants the deity's name constantly and serves others by doing good deeds in the deity's name. The ultimate goal is to let the soul merge into the spirit of God.

Ahimsa means non-injury and in Hindu ethics is an important virtue. To practice ahimsa ideally, a Hindu must avoid all physical, mental, emotional and moral hurt to any living creature. Because Hindus believe that animals as well as human beings have souls, they have more respected.

Hindu society has divided in 4 varnas according their role in the community. They are;

1. Anthana-Bhramanas, priests and teachers (head)
2. Chathiriyar-Kshatriyar, rulers and warriors (Shoulder)
3. Vysikar – merchants and farmers (stomach)
4. Suthirar - support workers (legs)

A Hindu's life is divided into four ashramas, though in practice ideally each stage brings its own special duties. They are:

1. Brahmacharya (student) prepare to be a useful member of society
2. Grihastha (house holder) manages, earn, provide and guide
3. Vaanaprastha (retirement) body in the world, mind towards God.
4. Sanyaas (renunciation) (abandonment) physically detaches himself from the world

Sanyaas ashrama is optional and mostly man can become sannyasi, though women are also claiming the right to take sannyas.

About 500B.C, Hindus have upheld four aims in life. These provide a value system for each individual. Dharma (religious and social duties)

1. Governs the way of earning a livelihood by honest,
2. Enjoy the good things in life moderation
3. Leading the soul towards God and releasing from the cycle of rebirths.
4. The burden of karma does not bite the soul if actions are performed selflessly and according to dharma.

Pollution

In Hinduism the word "pollution" includes both physical and spiritual or ritual impurity. Certain foods like meat, poultry, fish and alcoholic drinks also cause ritual pollution. Death in a family puts blood relatives of the deceased person in a state of ritual pollution. Hindus use water for personal purification both physical and ritual. Running water is considered "pure".

Fasting

Fasting doesn't mean always going without food. Special dishes are associated with some Hindu festivals and food offerings are important in worship.

Worship

Hindus offer daily worship to family deities at the household shrine, they celebrate annual festivals dedicated to different deities and they go on pilgrimages to distant shrines dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva or the Goddess Sakthi

Hindus believe in one Supreme God (Brahman) which they see in different forms. Among Hindus there are six groups;

1. Saivism (Siva)
2. Saktham (Sakthi)

3. Vashnavam (Vishnu
4. Koumaram-(Muruga) ,
5. Ganapathim (Ganesh)
6. Sourashtram- (Sun).



Saivaism=Siva



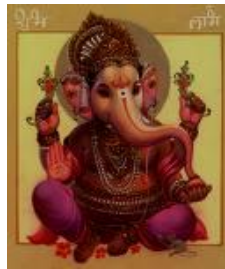
Shaktham-Sakthi



Vaishnavam-Vishnu



Koumaram- (Muruga)



Ganapathim -(Ganesh)



Sourashtram -(Sun).

Hinduism has many sects or groups and each has its own form of worship. In some sects a human guru or spiritual teacher is revered with the same fervors as a deity like SaiBaba, Ramakrishna Paramahamsar, and Aathi Sankarar

Hindu worship take different forms, ways of worshipping include offering water to the rising sun or a river deity, sitting cross-legged in front of a image in a temple and saying the name of the deity, walking around the shrine of a deity in a clockwise direction (pradashina) or singing hymns in a temple. Hinduism has developed numerous practices meant to help one think of divinity in everyday life. Hindus can engage in puja (worship) either at home or at a temple. At home, Hindus often create a shrine with icons dedicated to their chosen form(s) of God.

Temples are usually dedicated to a primary deity along with associated subordinate deities though some commemorate multiple deities. Visiting temples is not obligatory, and many visit temples only during festivals.

Puja

The ritualistic worship (puja) of consecrated deities (murthis) is carried out by priests on behalf of devotees to remind them of the inward yogic process of approaching the indwelling God. Worship of deity along with sacred rituals with Vedic mantras and the materials used in rituals such as water, milk, flower, incense, sandal paste, bells, conch-shell etc is to help devotees to focus their mind on the Supreme Being. Various steps in a puja include such as washing feet and giving sacred bath using milk and water. Then with screen closed the deity is decoratively dressed with special cloths, flowers and ornaments. After the decoration the screen is opened to devotees to

signify removal of veil of illusions so that devotees can see the beautifully decorated God. Then fruits and food are offered and incense sticks and lamps are waved to the deity. During the waving of lamp by a priest, devotees need to see with eyes open the radiating face of the fully decorated deity so that its memory will provide the spiritual joy. Then the priests distribute the sacred water (theertha) and sacred food (prasada) that devotees drink and eat for spiritual blessings.

The entire ritualistic worship can also be seen as expressing love, devotion and provides external and internal bliss. The Vedic sages have recommended the temple and rituals so that devotees through partaking in these can spiritually experience the bliss of God.

Pilgrimage

Hindus go on pilgrimages to distant temples to view the image of God and to offer worship, or to fulfill a vow. There are many centers of pilgrimage thought out India dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva or the mother Goddess. Important places of pilgrimage for Hindus are Badhrinath in the Himalaya, Mathura on the river Jumuna, Varanasi on the river Ganges, Puri in Orissa, Thirupathi, Kaachipuram near Chennai (formerly Madras), Madurai in Tamil Nadu, Raameshvaram and Kanyaa kumari at the southern tip of India, Kathirkamam and Thirukkoneswaram and Thiruketheeswaram in Srilanka.

Festivals

Vedic Hinduism or Santana Dharma is based on the Vedas and Vedic literature. The celebrations of Vedic Hindu festivals bring out the various aspects namely religious, cultural, educational and social. A devotee focusing on the meaning of the Vedic mantras and ritualistic procedures will gain the spiritual knowledge. One focusing on the prayers and feelings in rituals will experience joy of devotion. One focusing on service in a temple will experience the joy of selfless service. Temples play an important role in providing a sacred place and means for spiritual development of a seeker

Hindu festivals are colourful, joyous occasions. They are celebrated either as private worship at a household shrine or as public neighbourhood festivals. Every one in the neighbourhood takes part in the public festival. Some festivals such as Raksha-Bandhan, Diwali, Navaratri, Dusserah and Holi attract large crowds all over India. Other festivals such as Durga-Puja, Naga-Panchami and Ganesha chaturthi are more regional in their popularity. Every large temple celebrates the annual festival of the deity to which it is dedicated. At this time the utsava moorthy (images/statue) is taken in a chariot procession called ratha-yatra (chariot festival) through the town.

Raksha-Bandhan day in August, women tie a silk thread round the wrists of their brothers to renew ties of affection and bond.

Navaratri is the Nine Nights festival dedicated to the goddess Shakti. On the eighth night, Durga-Puja is celebrated as a public festival in Bengal.

People worship Saraswati in a public festival in other places. In rural areas of Western India the Hindus worship live snakes on the day Naga-Panchami in the month of August. Navaratri is Dusserah, festival (memory of the Prince Rama) in north India.

Twenty days after Dusserah, usually in October or November is the festival of Diwali, Deepavali dedicated to Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi.

Holi is celebrated towards the end of the Hindu calendar year with a bonfire and merry-making.

Rituals

The ancient Sanskrit word for ritual is called *samskara*, (means holy treatment). Hinduism prescribes both rituals and spiritual practices for the final liberation of mankind. They are aimed mainly to invoke the blessings of various Gods. Hindus perform rituals at important stages of development in life. They believe these rituals purify the body and dignify the personality.

Samaya Diksha

This is formal initiation of applying holy ash in three lines form (Tripundharam)

Samaya Deeksha is given by a guru to the disciple. The devotee is formally instructed to gain spiritual rituals through daily puja to regulate and bring under control their mind after this diksha.

Holi Ash

Agni is the presiding deity for Bhasma. The ash from the sacrificial fire is most sacred. In the absence of it, ash prepared from cow dung. Holy ash can be applied by all, and during all the stages of life. It will cure all the ills of the body, mind and spirit.

Prayer Rooms

The vast majority of Hindus engage in religious rituals on a daily basis. Most Hindus observe religious rituals at home.

But rituals greatly vary among regions, villages, and individuals. Strong Hindus perform daily practice such as worshipping at the dawn after bathing (usually at a family shrine, includes lighting a lamp and offering foodstuffs before the images of deities, recitation from religious scriptures, singing devotional songs, meditation, chanting mantras and reciting scriptures etc.

Yajna and Homa

Vedic rites of fire-oblation are now only occasional practices, are highly respected in theory. In Hindu wedding and cremation ceremonies, occasions like birth and death observe with great care in religious customs.

In Hinduism, life-cycle rituals include *annaprashan* (a baby's first intake of solid food), *Upanayanam* ("sacred thread ceremony" undergone by Brahmin children at their initiation into formal education.)

The Upanayana sacrament is important as the “second-birth” of a boy. After this ritual, he can represent his family in religious rituals. Worship and prayers are offered to Agni (sacred fire) to qualify the boy with strength and understanding.

Many different rituals are performed in a Hindu marriage ceremony. The most important one is the sapta-padi, or seven-steps, which the couple takes near the sacred fire at the time of their marriage vows

For most people in India, the exact date and time of the wedding and important matters are decided by the parents in consultation with astrologers.

The final ritual is cremation of the dead. Funeral pyre is lit either by the eldest or the youngest son of the deceased person

Cremation is considered obligatory for all except sanyaasis and children under five. Cremation is typically performed by wrapping the corpse in cloth..

Shraaddha/ Tharpanam

Tharpanam means “That offering which satisfies”. But what we mean by the word Tharpanam is the offering of water mixed with gingelly (sesame seed) oil to our deceased ancestors as a way of repaying our debt towards the deceased parents and ancestors. They are responsible for our birth. The son has a religious duty to perform shraaddha, a ritual in annual remembrance of the deceased parents or grandparents.

Literature

Vedic literature is a collection of compositions by a large number of rishis who were seers of Vedic truths.

Hindu scriptures are divided into Śruti ("revealed") and Smriti ("remembered"). These scriptures discuss theology (study of God) philosophy and mythology, and provide information on practice of dharma (religious law of living). Among these texts, the Vedas and the Upanishads are first in authority, importance and age.

Other major scriptures include Tantras, Agamas, Puranas and the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The Bhagavad Gītā from Mahābhārata, spoken by Krishna, is a summary of spiritual teachings of vedas. Saiva Siththantham, Meikanda Sasthiram Saiva Thirumuraikal are the essence of vedas and upanishads in Tamil language.

Mahabharata

The King of Hastnapura was dead and Bhishma, his uncle agreed to be the Regent, until the two baby princes grew up. Dhrishrathra the older baby was blind, and Pandu the younger brother was pale. Later the Court would decide on the succession.

The princes became young men, and Pandu was made king as they felt that a blind king could not do his duties well.

One day King Pandu went hunting to the forest and was cursed by an injured man. He was very upset and decided to repent by leaving the palace and to settling down in the forest with his two wives, Kunti and Madri. Then Dhrisharatra became the king.

After some years of forest living, Pandu had five sons, Yudhishtira, Beema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. They were splendid children, well natured and highly skilled. They would later be known as the Pandavas. Meanwhile Dhrisharatra had a hundred sons, the Kauravas. The oldest of them was Druyodana, now the Crown Prince, and a very arrogant boy. Unfortunately in the forest, Pandu and Mandari died. So Kunti returned to the palace with the Pandavas.

From day one, the Pandavas won love and admiration from Bhishma, the gurus, and all the people. The Kauravas, especially Duryodana, became very jealous of their cousins especially of Arjuna. He tried to kill them in several ways but without success.

Now they were young men, and Duryodana offered them a beautiful palace to live in. It was really a wax palace with no exit, and he planned to set it on fire and destroy the Pandavas. But one good workman secretly warned the Pandavas and had cut an escape underground tunnel.

The fire destroyed the palace and Duryodana and the Kauravas were happy but all the others were sad. But the Pandavas escaped and lived incognito and moved around as simple Brahmins.

In a neighbouring country, Princess Draupati was to be married. But the groom had to win the archery competition. All the young princes were there. The one who won was a Brahmin youth, but then everybody came to know that it was really Arjuna. Draupati was married. Bhishma and the Court decided that the Pandavas should be given half the land. Duryodana agreed to give the dry rocky part of the country to the Pandavas.

The Pandavas built a grand city called Indraprastha on the land, and a very beautiful palace. Princess Draupati and Kunti were happy. Krishna their cousin, would visit them often.

Duryodana was very jealous. He thought of a wicked plan, and invited the Pandavas to his palace and got Yudhishtra to play a game of dice with him, and his wicked uncle Sakuni. One by one, Yudhishtra gambled away his kingdom, wealth, brothers and even wife. Now they had become his slaves. Duryodana and his brother insulted the Pandavas and Draupati. He got his brother, Duhsasana to drag Princess Draupati by her hair from her chambers to the court and to pull off her dress. Everybody was horrified but nobody, not even Bhishma nor dared Guru Drona to challenge him. Draupati, in deep grief and pain prayed to Krishna. Then a miracle happened. Draupati could not be undressed as her dress became longer and longer.

The Court felt that all this was badly against Dharma. The elders, even Dhrisharatra, insisted that Yudhishtra, his brothers and Draupati should be given their freedom. But Duryodana refused and ordered them to give up Indraprastha and spend twelve years in the forest and one year incognito before they could come back to Hastinapura. Draupati who went through the agony made a vow; she would not tie up her hair until she washed away the shame with Duhsasana's blood.

After thirteen, long, difficult years, having gone through so many troubles and adventures, they returned expecting to receive their freedom. But Duryodana refused to give back their land. He did not want to give even a pinpoint of land. They sent Krishna to reason out with him. The answer was NO.

So the Pandavas had no choice but to wage a war- the Maha Bharatha Yudham, or the Great Indian War. Both sides had to find allies. Duryodhana had his own army, gurus, Bhishma and many others on his side. The Pandavas also got some kings to fight with them.

Both Arjuna and Duryodana wanted to get Krishna on their sides. Duryodana went first and found Krishna in deep sleep on his couch; He drew a seat and sat at his bedside near his head. Arjuna walked in and sat near his feet. When Krishna opened his eyes, he saw Arjuna. When he found that both of them needed him, he said he would give his whole army, arms, horses and elephants to one, and himself without weapons to the other. Arjuna was happy that Duryodana wanted the army. He could have Krishna on his side. Krishna offered to be Arjuna's charioteer in the war.

The battlefield was Kurushetra. When the battle was about to start, Arjuna looked before him and saw his grand uncle Bhishma, guru Drona, his many cousins, relatives and friends on the other side. He did not want to fight and kill so many people. He dropped his bow and pleaded with Krishna that war was bad

What Krishna told Arjuna was the Bhagavad Gita or the Song of the Lord. Some of the advice he gave was

One MUST do his duty. Arjuna, a Kshatriya coming from the ruling class, had to fight to uphold Dharma. He should not worry about the results and having done his duty well, accept the results calmly. Keep God in one's mind always and surrender oneself totally to God.

Arjuna's doubts were cleared and he went on to fight for eighteen days. At the end of the war, there were only a few left besides the Pandavas.

(By Mrs A Vamathevan)

Questions and Answers (1)

Year 3—6

1. What are the oldest Hindu literatures?
 - Vedhas
 - Aagamas
2. What is the basic literature of Hinduism?
Vedhas
3. What is the meaning of 'Vedha'?
Knowledge or Wisdom
4. Who revealed this Vedha?
God revealed this to Sages
5. What is a 'Puraanam'?
A 'Puraanam' is an ancient narrative or devotional songs of the saints
6. Which 5 groups of devotional songs make up the 'Panchapuraanam'?
 1. Thevaaram
 2. Thiruvaasakam
 3. Thiruvisaippa
 4. Thiruppallaandu
 5. Thiruppuraanam
7. Who wrote the 'Thirukkural'?
Thiruvalluvar
8. Who wrote the 'Thirumanthiram'?
Thirumoolar
9. What are the 6 abodes of God Murugan?
 1. Thirupparangkundram
 2. Thiruchcheeralaivaai/ Thiruchchendhoor
 3. Thiruvaavinankudi Palani)
 4. Thiruverakam (Swaami Malai)
 5. Kundruthoraadal
 6. Palamuthirsolai.
10. What is the name of the dance form of God Siva?
Nadaraj
11. What are the Gods of Trinity?
Brahma, Vishnu and Ruthran

12 Explain the word 'Thirumuraikal

They are a group of songs in praise of god Siva sung by
Religious saints

13. List the 4 groups of devotional songs in praise of Lord Muruga

Kandha puraanam
Thiruppukal
Kanthar Anupoothi
Kanthasashti Kavasam

14. What are the 4 religious paths (maarkam) practiced by the 4 saints to attain eternal bliss?

1. Saria- The path of selfless service (Dhaasa Bhava) Appar
2. Kriya- Path of devotion (rituals and temple worship)(Puthira bhaava) Sambanthar
3. Yoga- The path of Psychic Control (leading normal life treating God in mind as a friend. (Saha bhaava) Suntharar
4. Gnana---The path of knowledge (submission to God's will with extreme love and devotion (Maanickavaasakar)

15. What kind of eternal bliss have these saints attained by practising these paths?

1. Saaloka Mukthi - (living on the planet with the God) Appar
2. Saamipya Mukthi (always remaining with God) Sambanthar
3. Saarupya Mukthi(Attainind body exactly like God) Suntharar
- 4Saarujya Mukthi – (merging into God's radiance-the Brahma Jothi) Maanickavaasakar

16. Describe God...

God is Ommnipresent (Present every where)
God is Ommniscient (knowing every thing)
God is Ommnipotent (all-powerful)

17. What are the 6 groups of worshipers and their Gods in Hinduism?

1. Ganapathiyam- worship to God Ganesh
2. Saaktham- worship to Goddess Sakthi
3. Saivam- worship to God Siva
4. Koumaaram- worship to God Muruga
5. Vaishnavam- worship to God Vishnu
6. Sourashtram- worship to Sun God

18. Who sang the 'Thiruppukal'?

Arunakirinaathar

19. Who sang the 'Sakala Kalaa valli Maalai'?

Kumaraguruparar

20. Who sang the 'Abhiraami Andhaathi'?
Abhiraami paddar
21. Who sang the 'Kandha puranam'?
Kachchiyappa Siva Achchaariyaar
22. Which saint always carries the trowel?
Thiru Naavukkarasar
23. Who sang the 'Periya puraanam'?
Seckilaar

Questions and Answers (2)

Year 3 – 6

1. If God is one and has no name or shape, why should people worship images?

It is hard for the ordinary human mind to think and worship God, as God is formless. It is easier for the mind to concentrate on an imor superhuman representation of God. This is why the ancient Rishis created these images of God and passed it down to ordinary human. But we must be able to train our minds to concentrate and worship a formless God, think of nothing.

2. What is the meaning of Yoga?

Yoga means 'join' in Sanskrit. In Hindu philosophy it is the joining of one self with God by control of the mind to gain physical and spiritual well being.

3. Describe the four paths of Yoga?

1. Gnana yoga - path of wisdom
2. Karma yoga - practising duties without attachment
3. Raja yoga - practising meditation and controlling thoughts
4. Bhakthi yoga - complete surrender to God.

4. How do we celebrate festivals?

Fasting

Meditation

Appropriate procedures according to the auspicious day

Offerings (food, clothes, deepam etc).

Arms giving (dhanam- charity of food, clothes, money)

Honouring elders by receiving blessing

Feast

5. Why do we celebrate festivals?

There are many reasons.

A practical application of what we have learnt in Hinduism

Spreading knowledge to every one

Adapting spiritual discipline (control of body and mind to gain peace)

Rejoicing the goodness out of the story behind the festival

Encoureges more thought of God than other days

6. Hindus believe in one God, so why do we worship many Deities?

God is omnipotent (all powerful). The ancient Rishis, through the blessings from God, divided all these powers and gave each one of a Super human form to represent and explain each power.

For example, Brahma (the power of creation), Vishnu (the power of protection) and Ruthra

(the power of destruction). As an ordinary human being, this representation makes it easier for us to understand all the powers of God.

When we worship a specific deity with a specific human form, we have more of an attachment to God and have more belief that God will answer our prayers.

7. Describe the steps involved in worship to God?
- Invoking the presence of God in the image (Aavaahana)
 - . Offering a seat (Aasana)
 - . Giving water for washing feet and hand (Arghya)
 - . Ceremonial bath Snaana/Abhiseka
 - Water (Kandhana)
 - Offering flowers and garlands Pushpa)
 - Burning incense (Dhupa)
 - Waving of light (Dheepa)
 - Offering of food (Neivedhya)
 - Bidding Goodbye (Visarjana)

If all these steps of worship are performed with faith and devotion, it generates peace and joy in our mind. Those who visit the temple must enter physically clean and with a proper mood of faith and devotion.

8. Why is Sanskrit (language) used for worship instead of ordinary spoken language?

The Rishis are the originators of the explanation of Hinduism. They have given ordinary human beings procedures of poojas and rituals (holy acts) as well as mantras to be used. The sound waves produced by properly pronounced Sanskrit mantras, in absolute devotion and concentration, create a solemn and secret atmosphere producing salutary effects.

9. List the four Vedhas

1. Rig Vedha
2. Yajur Vedha
3. Sama Vedha
4. Atharvana Vedha

10. What is Puranas?

The Puranas are post-Vedic texts which contain a complete narrative of the history of the Universe from creation to destruction, family history of the kings, heroes and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology and geography. There are 17 or 18 Puranas, divided into three categories, each named after a deity: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. There are also many other works termed Purana, known as 'Upapuranas.'

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