

SRI RAJA RAJESHWARI

(Day 1 Alankaram)

Sri Raja Rajeshwari is the embodiment and fusion of Goddesses Parvathi, Lakshmy and Saraswathy. She is the supreme and omnipotent Parasakthi who creates, sustains and destroys everything in the universe. She carries in her four hands weapons such as ankusham (goad) that control emotions like attachment and arrogance, the sugar cane bow that controls greed and lust and flower arrows to control the senses. She sits on a glorious throne studded with precious gems and stones and rules the entire universe. On the very first day of the auspicious Navarathri, Ambal in the Sri Raja Rajeshwari alankaram, gives us a splendid darshan and showers blessings to all her devotees.

Story of Karunkuruvi (Tale of small black bird)

47th Thiruvilayadal

(Day 2 Alankaram)

Once there lived a small bird in a village called Parthibanar near Madurai. It was suffering from harassment and persecution from larger birds. Listening to the conversation of some travelers praising the kindness of Lord Sundareswara and the healing power of the Lotus tank of the Madurai temple, it decided to fly to Madurai. The little bird spent the next few days taking bath at the temple tank and worshipping Lord Siva with utmost devotion. Sri Meenakshi was so moved by this devotion and she asked Lord Sundareswara to bless the little bird. The Lord said that in a previous birth, the bird was King Suguna Pandian. He had done many good deeds, but at the same time had persecuted the less powerful chieftains. In his present birth as a bird, he was suffering persecution because of his karma. The ever forgiving Lord Siva blessed the little bird with the updadesam of the sacred Mritunjaya Mantram that gave him the ability to avoid harassment and torture from the bigger birds. The little bird finally attained moksha at the feet of the Lord.

The moral of this story from Lord Siva's Thiruvilayadal is (1) people in power and high position should not bully and persecute less fortunate ones and (2) Veda mantrams are open to all, provided they have attained the maturity and devotion to

learn it. Darshan of this alankaram is believed to help wash away the sins caused by one's arrogance of power.

Story of Naarai (Heron) - 48th Thiruvilayadal

(Day 3 Alankaram)

There was once a Naarai (heron), a large bird, that lived near the river Vaigai. It lived on the fish that was abundant in the area. But due to a drought the river dried up and the bird had to fly away to another place where it came upon a tank where Rishis (saints) took bath. It saw plenty of fish in the tank that were happily playing with the Rishis without any fear. The heron's initial reaction was that it had found the right place where it could feast on these fish. But then, it realized that this was a holy place and it would be sinful to eat these fish. After their bath, the Rishis read from books playful stories of Lord Sundareswara of Madurai. The heron then decided to fly to Madurai. It saw the famous lotus tank of Meenakshi temple with an abundance of fish. Realizing that this was a holy tank, the heron restrained its natural instincts and dedicated the next 15 days in bathing in the tank and worshipping Lord Siva. Lord Siva wanted to test the bird, so made a fish accidentally jump into its bill. The heron for a moment was about to swallow the fish, but then quickly restrained itself and let the fish go back to the tank. Lord Sundareswara and Sri Meenakshi appeared before the bird and blessed it and asked what wish it would like to be fulfilled. The bird wanted only 2 things – grant me moksha and may this tank be free of fish, so that other birds will not be tempted to commit sins. His wish was granted and to this day, no fish live in the famous Lotus Tank of Madurai.

PUTTUKKU MANN SUMANTHA THIRUVILAYADAL

61st Thiuvilayadal

(Day 4 Alankaram)

Manickavachakar was the chief minister to the Pandyan King Arimarthanar. In order to bolster his army, the King entrusted him with abundant money to procure young and strong horses to replace the older ones. But Lord Siva created a maya and made the minister forget this mission but instead use the money to build a big temple for Him. When the King found this out and asked the minister about the horses, Lord Siva took the form of a merchant and used his maya to convert wild animals into horses which he handed over to the King on the due date. But later that night, the horses returned back to their original forms and returned to the forest after injuring the old horses. The Pandyan King was enraged and ordered Manickavachakar to be chained and thrown on the hot sands and rocks of the Vagai river as punishment. But then suddenly there was a huge storm and the river got flooded. The King ordered each citizen to build a part of the levee to protect against rising waters. The citizens started this work. Vanniammal was a poor old lady who lived on the banks of the river all by herself with nobody to help in this task. Lord Siva appeared before her as a coolie and said he can build the levee in return for just the broken pieces of puttu (flour) cake that she made for her living. But then instead of doing the work, the Lord ate the puttu well and spent the day having fun while also disturbing others. When

the King came around to check later that day, his soldiers told him that this coolie did not do any work and was sleeping under a tree. The enraged King whipped the coolie, and lo and behold, every human and every creature felt the sharp blow on their backs. The coolie just smiled and dropped his load of sand and magically the levy was built. The King and the citizens stood amazed as Lord Sundareswara with Sri Meenakshi appeared and blessed Vanniammal and granted her moksha. The Lord told the King to release his minister Manickavachakar who from then on would dedicate his entire time and energy serving the Lord.

Viraku Vitra Leelai (A Wood-cutter's tale) – 41st Thiruvilayadal (Day 5 Alankaram)

Once during the reign of Varaguna Pandian, a famous musician called Hemanathan with his huge entourage visited the kingdom of Madurai. He was renowned for his mastery in music and during his tour of the southern kingdoms received several awards from the various rulers. He competed against other musicians in these kingdoms and defeated them. Thus he had become very arrogant. The King of Madurai welcomed him and invited him to perform in his palace. Everybody including the king were enthralled by his performance. Hemanathan requested the king for a competition with the best musician in the kingdom and the king agreed to it. The King ordered the local musician Bhanabhattar to appear the next day in the palace to face Hemanathan. Bhanabhattar was very perturbed because he felt he was no match for Hemanathan and was deeply worried he would fail badly and bring humiliation to Madurai. He prayed at the feet of Lord Sockanathar (Shiva) to save him and save Madurai from this humiliation. This moved Lord Shiva, who then took the form of a wood-cutter who walked around the city all day and by nightfall found a place to rest near the place where Hemanathan was staying. The supreme lord in disguise, then poured forth such a divine music that Hemanathan was completely astounded and blown away. He came out of the guest house to see where this music came from. He asked the wood cutter from where did he learn this

heavenly music. The wood cutter replied that he had learnt for a little while from Banabhattar, but then since he felt he was not good at music, he dropped out and took up the profession of a wood cutter. Hemanathan could not believe his ears! He thought, if a dropout student of Banabhattar can sing so well, how great would be his teacher. He decided to leave the city in a hurry, rather than face defeat at the hands of Banabhattar. He wrote a note accepting his defeat and gave it to the wood cutter to be handed over to Banabhattar. Next day, when Banabhattar read this note, he was completely overwhelmed and realized it was none other than Lord Sockanathar who came disguised as a wood cutter and saved the honor of him, King Varaguna Pandian and the city of Madurai.

Through this Thiruvilayadal, Lord Shiva shows humanity the values and virtues of being humble. Hemanathan was so proud and arrogant and his ego knew no bounds, until the Lord taught him a lesson. This Thiruvilayadal also teaches us that God helps those who have total bhakti (devotion) and who completely surrender at His feet.

ELLAM VALLA SITTHARANATHU

(The tale of the Saint with Incredible Powers)

20/21 Thiruvilayadal

(Day 6 Alankaram)

Abhisheka Pandyan was the King of Madurai. He was a very sincere devotee of Lord Sundareswara (Shiva) and ruled the kingdom well. He served the citizens with fairness and justice. He had everything he wanted in life, except a progeny who will rule the land after his time. He was sad about this, but kept this to himself. He submitted himself to Lord Shiva with the thought that he would most happily accept any blessing from Him. Lord Shiva took the form of a Siddhar and appeared in the streets of Madurai. He performed many miracles to the delight of the citizens. This soon reached the ears of the King. The King was very curious and wanted to meet the Siddhar himself. As he came out of the temple sanctum after darshan of Lord Sundareswara and Meenakshi, he saw the Siddhar seated in front of the sanctum, meditating. The King came gently by the Siddhar and asked him where he was from. The Siddhar replied he came from the Himalayas and that he could perform any miracle. The King wanted to test him, so asked if you could make the elephants sculpted in granite in the Indira vimanam eat the sugar cane that had been brought by devotees. To everyone's amazement, the Siddhar turned the stone elephants alive and fed him the sugar canes. King Abhisheka Pandian was completely overwhelmed and fell at the feet of the Siddhar, as

he realized that he was none other than Lord Sundareswara himself. The Lord said that his wish to have a son will be fulfilled and he should name him Vikrama Pandyan. By means of this divine play, Lord Shiva teaches us that He will always hear the sincere prayers of his devotees and will fulfill their noble wishes.

VALAYAL VITRA LEELAI (Bangle Seller's Tale)

32nd Thiruvilayadal

(Day 7 Alankaram)

This divine play by Lord Shiva happened during the reign of Kulabhushana Pandyan in Madurai. In the Tharukavanam forest, many sages were performing intense yagas and pujas for the devas and Gods. They even started to believe that without these rituals, the devas and Gods would lose their power and this made them arrogant. Their wives in turn started to believe that their faith and chastity was the reason that their husband rishis were so powerful. Lord Shiva saw this eruption of arrogance among the rishi families and wanted to correct them. He appeared as a sanyasi, so handsome and resplendent that all the rishi's wives swooned at his feet. When they gave alms to the sanyasi, due to his maya, the bangles they wore on their hands slipped and dropped into his bowl without them even realizing it. This upset the rishis, so they tried in many ways to use their magical powers to harm the sanyasi. When none of these worked, they realized that this was no ordinary sanyasi, but was Lord Shiva himself. They fell at His feet asking for forgiveness. Lord Shiva made them realize their folly that performing yagas and pujas with selfish expectations do not produce any substantial results, and that it was nothing but ignorance to think that the devas and Gods depended on their rituals to be potent. But the rishis never forgave their wives and cursed them to be born into the families of Vanniyar

community in their next birth. The wives then prayed to Lord Shiva that they be relieved of this curse and that He restore their bangles on their hands . Lord Shiva told them that he cannot undo the rishis' curse, but promised that in their next birth He will give them relief. Accordingly, they were all reborn as girls in the Vanniyar community during the rule of Kulabhushana Pandyan. In order to fulfill His promise, Lord Sockanathar himself appeared in Madurai as a street vendor selling bangles. The re-born girls were attracted by the bangle vendor and He himself restored the bangles on their hands. The Lord blessed them saying they will get married to worthy youths in that community and have a very happy life giving birth to a thousand children. To this day, it is believed their descendants serve many Shiva temples in the Pandya region. The moral of this Thiruvilayadal is that one should pray to God without any selfish expectations, and always remain humble. One should realize that it is God who makes you what you are and that ego and arrogance are very dangerous traits that will lead to one's downfall.

SRI MAHISHASURA MARDHANI

(Day 8 Alankaram)

During the age of the great wars between the Devas and the Asuras, there lived a Maharishi Karthyayanar and his wife Narayani. They did several years of intense penance to Goddess Parasakthi, with the plea that she be born to them to rid the world from the evil Asuras. The Goddess said she will grant their wish. Sukracharya, the guru of the Asuras came to know that this divine baby was soon going to be born, so told the Asuras to destroy them. They imprisoned the Rishi and his wife in the netherworld and tried to torture and kill them in many ways. But, the baby in the womb protected them from all the dangers. Finally, a beautiful baby girl was born and they named her Karthyayani. As soon as they came to know, they sent a demon called Kalasuran to kill her. The Goddess even as a little baby, fiercely fought and killed Kalasuran and the other demons that came with him. This earned her the name of "Kali". She freed her parents from the dungeons of the netherworld. The Devas were extremely happy to see the emergence of this brave form of Parashakti and called her Durga, meaning one who protects them like a fort. They made her the leader of their warriors. She destroyed many demons including Shumban and Nishumban, hence she is known as Nishumbsoodhini. Because she destroyed Chandan and Mundan, she is known as Chamundi. Finally, she set out to fight the meanest and most powerful Asura called Mahisha.

Being the embodiment of goddesses Parvathy, Lakshmy and Saraswathy, invoking their Nava (nine) shakthis, and her eighteen arms carrying powerful weapons, such as Indira's vajrayudham, Parashakthi's shakthi ayudham, Yama's dhandayutham, Niruthi's sword, Vayu's bow and arrows, Agni's fire torches, Shiva's trident, Mahavishnu's shanku chakram, Brahma's beadstring and kamandalam, Surya's lotus and Ganesha's ankusham. The Goddess in all her glory mounted her simha (lion) vahanam to go to the war with Mahisha. She battled with great bravery and courage and finally killed the demon Mahisha. This glorious victory earned her the name Mahishasura Mardhani.

The eighth day of Navarathri is celebrated as Durgashtami and having darshan of Devi in the form of Mahishasura Mardhani is considered to be very special.

SHIVA PUJAI

(Day 9 Alankaram)

The ninth day of Navarathri is marked by the Shiva Pujai alankaram in all the major temples.

Goddess Parasakthi takes the form of Durga and engages in a penance during the nine days of Navarathri praying to Lord Shiva in order to gain the power to destroy the wicked asuras who are ravaging the world. The Asuras had obtained a boon from the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva that their death will not be at the hands of Devas. But when the trinity asked them from whom they would face death, they arrogantly replied let it be from a woman, thinking women were weak and in no way posed a threat to them. Ultimately, through the intense tapas of the rishis and saints, Parasakthi took the avatar of Durga and was born to sage Karthyayanar and his wife Narayani. She grew up as a young girl and acquired the strength of all the goddesses and the powerful weapons of the Devas and the Gods. She then annihilated all the evil Asuras including Mahisha, bringing great relief to the world. But, even killing of evil demons result in Brahmahatthi sins. In order to absolve and wash away these sins, Parasakthi performed the Shiva Pujai and then re-unites with Easwara. The strength and power of women are exemplified in this avatar, proving that women are in no way inferior to men. The people of the world need to understand the strength of the union between men and women. Shiva Pujai brings peace and harmony to this

world. Get Parashakti's boundless blessings by having darshan of the Shiva Pujai alankaram.