



## **A Visit to Kathirgaamam**

**(A village where Sitaris lived)**

Pon Kuldiren

My father and my self are devotees of Murugan. The reason for it is because my house was located 200 yards from the famous Nallur Temple in Jaffna town. Nallur was one time the Rajasthani of Jaffna kingdom There are many popular Murugan Temples in Sri Lanka. To mention the most popular Temples are Jaffna Nallur Temple.

Maviddapuram temple, Selvasnathi temple in Point Pedro and Kathirgamam down south near Yala games Saturday. Murugan and Valli love story was written in that environment. Beddah was Veddha

girl. Veddha's worship Murugan and they use the spacer for their workshop. Spear is used in hunting as Veddhas are hunters.

Kathir refers to paddy. Gamma is called Kiramam which means village. Combining both we can infer it as the village where paddy is grown. Veddah community who are believed to be decent of Kuveni was chased from Northwestern Sri Lanka when Vijayakumaran fell out with his wife Kuveni. He marries a princess from Madurai. Kuveni and children moved to the footrests in Uva province. This how the legendary story of Veddah community known to the Singhalese people. Veddah is hunting and farming community. They used a spear for hunting. They worshiped spear as the symbol of their god. It is believed that Spear the symbol of Murugan started as the icon worshiped by Veddahs. A moreover legendary story about the love affair between the Veddah girl Valli and Murugan took place in the farmland in Kathirgamam. Murugan's brother Ganeshan (Elephant) helped him to get married to Valli. The Murugan Valli love story was written in the environment of Kathirgamam in Yala sanctuary, paddy fields, Veddha community, elephants. It is a traditional practice which exists even now that girls from Veddha community take part in pujas by serving prasadam to God Murugan. The temple for Murugan in Kathirgamam is located 228 Km south east of Colombo. 'Gamma means farming village area. Kathir, which means paddy. Hence Kathirgamam means a village where paddy is grown. The area was

once infested with elephants and wild animals. A river named Maanika ganga flows through this village. From 1972, devotees started walking more than 400 miles from Northern Lanka, along the eastern coastal area via Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Pothuvil to Kathirgamam. According to Sinhalese, historians, Kathirgamam temple was constructed 1<sup>st</sup> century BC by King Dutugemunu. Dutugemunu was the son of Viharamahavei, wife, of Kavantissa. She ruled Kirinda an area near the Yala games sanctuary. Before going to war with the Tamil Chola king Ellalan in Anuradhapura, Dutugemunu meditated in the bank of the river Mannicka ganga, prayed for help from Murugan and went to the battle. When he won the war, he became a strong devotee of Murugan.

There are several curtains that hang in the moolasthanam to hide the Yantra and the priest who does the puja is called Kappurala. Unlike in many Murugan temples in other provinces the priest tie his mouth with cloth when performing Puja. There is no idol taken out in procession after the Puja. No one knows what is behind the curtain which only shows the painted picture of Karthigeta.

There are many interesting stories that happened in Kathirgamam, which prove the greatness and purity of the temple. During 203 AD, Babaji Nagaraj born in south India, At the age of eleven went to Kathirgamam in search of his guru Boganathar sithar. Under a banyan

tree, Babaji meditated for six months. At the start, he meditated for 24 hours and later he reached a level of meditating continuously for 48 days. The banyan tree under which the Babaji meditated was cut down by a person, he became mad and committed suicide. There is a small black stone statue on the outside veethy of the main Kathirgamam temple of this deathless Saint Babaji who introduced Kriya Yoga to humanity as well as Devayanai worship and a temple for her exists there now.

Kalyangiri Swami was responsible for Kathirgamam to become popular in India, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, He was called Muthulinga Swamigal in Lanka. After Kalyanagiri Swamigal, " Paalkudi baba" became popular. He was a Brahmin from Allahabad. Since he had the habit of drinking milk very often, he got the name Palkudi baba.

A king who had no children, prayed at Kathirgamam, promising that if a child is born to him, he will donate the child to the temple. A beautiful daughter by the name Balasundari was born to the king. The king took the daughter to Kathirgamam and left her there to serve God. She became a nun in the temple. The Kandyan king Rajasinghe came to know about the beauty of Balasundari and send a request for her to marry him. She refused the king's request to marry him. He ordered few of his soldiers to go to Kathirgamam, arrest and bring her by force to him. Balasundari prayed to God Murugan to save her. God fulfilled

her request. At that time British forces invaded the Kandyan kingdom, arrested the king and took him as a prisoner to Vellore in Tamil Nadu. The king ultimately died in Vellore. She lived until she became old and after her assistant, Mangalpuri Swamigal lived in Kathirgamam. There is a memorial for her in the temple.

During the British rule, an administrative officer who worked in the Badulla Kachcheri; as Justice of peace, suffered from a serious illness. He was worried that he did not get any promotion because of his illness. His sickness could not be cured. He prayed to God Kathirgamam and went to the temple. He met Paalkudi Baba and prayed explaining his sickness. While one day when he was talking with the devotees about the greatness of Kathirgamam God, a madman met him and said “when you return to Badulla Kachcheri, you will get a transfer order to go to North. As per the mad man’s prediction, he was transferred to the northern province, where he met an Ayurvedic physician and had treatment. His sickness was cured and became strong devotee of God Kathirgamam.

In my experience in Kathirgamam, when I went with my parents, sister and brother during 1950a's to fulfill a vow, the temple was crowded and there was no place to keep our baggage's and sleep. We were tired after traveling 350 miles from Puttalam, by Train, Bus, and cart and had no place to sleep. My father was a Murugan devotee as our house

in Jaffna house was closer to the Nallur Murugan temple. He prayed to Murugan of Kathirgamam.“ He cried saying “ Muruga, I have come to see you from a long distance with my family. Please do not leave my family alone. At that time an old man with holy ash and sandalwood pottu in his forehead, approached my father and said “Aiyah do you want a place to keep your things and rest? Come with me I will show you a room. You will be safe there” My father could not believe it. The old man disappeared after few minutes after getting him a room to rest. My father searched for him to thank him but could not meet him. He thought that it was Kathirgama Murugan who helped him.

Long ago there was sanctity in the temple. Devotees crossed the Magicka Ganga (river) on a hanging bridge. There were no big hotels. Ramakrishna mission provided resting place and free food for devotees. Many businessmen from south, provided rice and vegetables free of cost to the Mission. But political leadership upset the free service provided by the mission. Hotels were constructed. in due course, Liqueur and Non-vegetarian food were served. In 50's, devotees walked 11 miles and went by cart from Tissa Maharagama, a village west of Kathirgamam. But things changed, and bus service is now available. up to the door steps. It is the respect and love for him that is required by Kathirgama Murugan. Many Sitaras (Yogis) and great men lived, meditated and attained samadhi. there and great vibrational energy exists in that environment.

Sella Kathirgamam is a place where Ganesh temple is located 3 miles northwest of Kathirgamam by the side of a stream. As per the legendary story, Ganesh was instrumental in the Murugan Valli love affair and it is this place where Valli met the elephant when Murugan was courting Valli, Kumbuk trees provide the shade for the devotees.

In the Hindu tradition, vows play an important role in the relationship between the deity and the devotee. Though a child, Valli had made a vow that she would marry no man but Murugan himself. This is the core of the legend of Kataragama. In Sinhalese folklore Lord Kataragama also makes a solemn vow that he would ever remain at Kataragama to help and protect his devotees. Murugan's devotees are famous for making difficult vows in order to gain his grace. They pierce their cheeks with arrows and walk barefoot on hot coals. But strangely enough none of them seem to get hurt.

The story of their romance is most intriguing. Murugan knew of Valli's vow but he did not approach her in his own form but in a series of disguises. As we have seen in Kataragama temple there is no idol. Only the yantra is worshipped. Thus in this place Murugan is regarded as formless. Therefore whatever form or face he chooses to show is only a guise. His true devotee is expected to penetrate the disguise and realize that he is indeed formless. Due to his tricks and methods of teasing his devotees, the Lord of Kataragama, like Krishna is lovingly called a thief and a rogue!

Kataragama found Valli in the millet field and approached her as a handsome young hunter and proposed to her in a brazen attempt to make her violate her vow. She adamantly refused to succumb to his charms. Next day he took the form of an old Brahmin and tottered in front of her and begged for some food. She offered fruit and honey, which was all she had, but he said he needed water to wash it down. She agreed to show him the way to the well. On the way he asked her if she was not afraid of living in a field in the midst of the jungle all alone when the men were away hunting.

She said she was afraid of nothing except elephants. Immediately Ganesha appeared in front of them as an elephant and Valli clung to the old man and

begged him to save her. He said he would do so only if she agreed to marry him. She promptly agreed and he brought her back safely to her village. When her family saw them they rushed to attack Kataragama whereupon he changed himself into a tree. The Veddas proceeded to cut down the tree but at the very first blow, blood gushed out of the wound so the Veddas discovered his identity. They realised that he was Murugan, the god they had been worshipping for centuries so they joyously agreed to the marriage. Thus Kataragama and Valli lived happily together for many years.

In the meantime Tevayani was tired of her lonely existence and sent Kataragama's teacher who was known as Muttulingam Swami as well as a Muslim called Mohammed Navi, to search for her husband. They knew that he had gone to Sri Lanka so they followed him and eventually came to the region of the Veddas. However they were unable to locate him even though they wandered in the forest for a long time. They were on the point of giving up the task when Muttulingam Swami discovered that someone else had smoked the opium pipe that he had used and left on the hill the previous day. He knew immediately that only Kataragama would have dared to do such a thing. Once again they started searching for him even more earnestly and very soon discovered him. They insisted that he accompany them back to India. The thought of forsaking Valli was inconceivable, so he refused to go.

Instead, he persuaded his guru, Muttulingam to stay behind but the Muslim, Mohammed Navi returned to India and blurted out the whole story to Tevayani. She was determined to get her husband back and went post haste to Sri Lanka. She found Kataragama and pleaded with him to return to their home in India but he refused. So she decided to stay on with the Veddas. It appears that the Muslim, Mohammed Navi had also followed her. The Veddas accepted all of them and they lived amicably together till the end of their lives. When they died the Veddas built a temple for **Muttulingam Swami**

and a mosque for Mohammed Navi on either side of the temple of Valli. They also built a shrine for Tevayani.

Obviously the mosque was built in order to reconcile the two religions. Muslims are allowed to visit the shrine at all times except the time of the main puja, since Mohamed Navi was the one who had betrayed Kataragama. If any Muslim is found inside at that time, he is severely beaten. However at other times all castes and religions are welcome to Kataragama, which has become a Mecca for Muslims as well as a Kailasa for Hindus. Lord Murugan, in his form