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FESTIVAL OF SHEDDING THE SELF EGO

Festival of shedding our self ego.

Bharani festival of Kodungallur is one of the important festivals of Kerala. The town is situated near the Arabian Sea between the two major cities Thirsoor and Kochi. Kodungalloor has a very long history. It was the ancient capital City of Chera Empire. Today it has its own historical and cultural identity. The town has studded with many historical monuments like one of the oldest Shiva temple, Very first Mosque of India, India first Church where St.Thomas landed and palace spot of the Chera kings. Kodungallur was earlier known by the name "Musuri" with a natural harbor connecting ancient India to rest of the oldest civilizations.It was called as "Vanji" in ancient days.

Kodungallur may have lost its olden glory, but still is fresh with its famous legendary Kannagi's history. It still is a very important pilgrimage centre attracting thousands of people especially during the Bharani Festival influencing the spiritual evolution of many devotees.

The temple celebrates the 2 days annual festival in the summer. It is called " BHARANI UTSAVAM". This festival is one of the very old festival forms of southern India which reflects many Dravidian cultural aspects.

Bharani Utsavam:

Bharani is one of the 27 stars in Indian Astrological constellation. Usually war commence on this day because kings considered it as the star of victory. The star is dedicated to Goddess Badrakali. She is considered to be the ultimate primordial energy and Goddess of success. We can feel this energy in the devotees who shake swords in their fist with jingling bells in their waist to participate in the Bharani Festival.

The celebrating literature:

If a king kills 1000 elephants with soldiers in a war, he was celebrated with the special type of poetry by the great poets which is called as "BHARANI". Kings were also titled as " BARANI KONDAAN". This means "one who has achieved success on Bharani star day".

The temple also celebrates the same star to worship Devi Mahakali. What is the connection of King's war and Goddesses and who is killed here on the festival?

To seek answers, Let us travel across Kodungalloor town on the Revathy star day which is 2 days before Bharani day.

The temple of a noble woman:

Kodungalloor temple has been dedicated to a great noble and revolutionary woman Kannagi who lived before 2000 years.[give link to Kannagi]. The temple was erected by the Chera king Chenguttuvan and his queen Venmol. His younger brother Elango adikal wrote the historical epic of Kannagi as Chilappathykaaram.

The temple is shining with red oxide copper sheets. The roofs are tied with garlands and colorful long flags of many designs which are fluttering in the summer winds. The shrine is packed with 1000s and 1000s of devotes from all over the state and neighboring state Tamil nadu.

During kodungallur Bharani , the whole town is vibrant with activities surrounding the temple premises where one can encounter shops flooded with 1000's of merchandize, vendors selling delicious food items , loud speakers singing praise of the Goddess, street wallah's selling DVD's of Bharani dances and music about the temple. The local transport has been directed in different directions. Schools, colleges and offices enjoy local holidays.

There is a uniqueness of Kodungalloor Bharani Festival, where one notices that the devotees transcend deep into their Spiritual evolution by participating in the festival.

How Kodungalloor Bharani Festival differs from all other festival?

Other temple festivals in India focus on the temple and the primary deity of the temple. Where as in this festival the whole focus will be on the devotees but not much on the temple shrine and idol. The devotees transcend to a world of their "Aham", the inner Self through the unique rituals of the festival. The one who has gone deep in their Spiritual and can reveal to others the inner light are called as Velichappadu or Komaram (literally, revealer of light): The oracle is usually dressed in red and carries a sword and shield. Possessed by the spirit of the deity the oracle dances in frenzy at the festivals in this Bhagavathy temple.

Here in the festival, the Komarams wear a red saffron sari dressed in a different pattern. The devotee also wears brass bells, cymbals around the waist. They adorn their feet with beautiful bronze anklets and hold the long sword which looks like a curved sickle. Their hair will be falling to the shoulders; men also wear the same costume including extra ornaments to look like the Goddess.

All the spiritual rituals are oriented to shed our own body identity and identify with the True Self, Brahman. According to the Vedic creation theory, the un-manifest Spirit is represented as Male and the manifesting matter as female. The primordial energy manifesting the whole creation represented as mother Goddesses is the stepping stone to the ultimate realm of the un-manifest Brahman. Therefore to get to these primordial Goddess state, devotees especially men sheds their gender identity just by wearing the female costume symbolizing the Mother Goddess. They shed their body ego (maleness) by growing long hair, shaved face, and darkened eyes with kajal, reddish lips with lipstick.

Mean while women needs to shed their own self identity by transforming their position as daughters, mothers and grand mothers to Goddess who has to listen to many obscene songs without any sexual emotions which will be sang by any body in any number just before them. They give up their ego by wearing this costume which may even expose their breasts. Whether it is man or woman as a KOMARAM , they walk, run, dance, roll all along the temple and town in front of 1000s and 1000s of people shedding all their social identity . This is a big step in spiritual transformation. This is one of the highlight of the festival.

Four great events of the festival:

The spiritual formula given by the sanadhana dharma based on the Vedic lessons clearly shows the transformation of a sadhaka from the body to mind, then from mind to intellect and through awareness reaches the atman.

If we observe any ritual or festival in India the above said transformation will be always highlighted in various ways. But it is in Kondungalloor Bharani festival, the spiritual transformation has been very clearly exposed to us through 4 important rituals on Revathy and Aswathy days.

On Revathy day the Komarams will start gathering in gangs and reach the shrine. Slowly each group starts their rituals of singing and dancing in tune with the beats made by bamboo sticks. This "Thaanoro" unique rhythm is followed by all the groups attending the festival. This unique rhythm brings a meditative mood to the devotees who swing their body in a rhythmic dance step allowing them to keep their mind swaying to normal cud-chewing activity.

Usually the main Komaram will be a mother or aunt of a family with their husband and all other family members participate along with them singing these lyrics with sexual denotations. Here again the importance of women as the center of the family is indicated.

In Indian culture, it is very common to express feelings through songs. Whether it is romance, or death or birth all feelings are expressed through music. The rhythmic musical patterns relieve so much of psychological tension we build up in our minds. Bharani festival uses the same music to release the sexual passion deep residing in the minds of devotees along with breaking the false social face we put up.

Men challenge their Ego by worshipping the female figures of their family as Goddess in this festival. Equally giving an opportunity to women to self-realize their identity to Goddess through this ritual.

When the dancing ritual starts slowly the Komarams merge into the primordial universal energy and get transcended. They transcend the barrier of limiting body, mind identifying to the infinite source of cosmic energy by dancing and shaking the sword. They feel the cosmic energy in themselves reaching the higher state of trance. When they reach the higher state of Trance, they circumbulate the temple complex by which they connect themselves to the whole vibration of the earth and slowly reach the shrine of a small Goddess to whom paddy bran will be offered. This symbolizes the need of good food to our body to live a spiritual life.

Slowly the Komarams will be taken to a shrine which is dedicated to the Goddess curing viral infections. Pure turmeric powder and pepper will be offered to this Goddess. This indicates the need for a sadhaka to take care of the body without any disease.

Here the antimicrobial turmeric powder and pepper symbolizes the need for our mind immune from the infection of unwanted thoughts. Then the Komarams are directed towards the main entrance of the temple. Tall brass multi-layered lamps adorn the entrance of the temple. There the gangs offer the ghee or oil and light a wick. This symbolizes the inner light of the spirit.

Then they move around the altar where the red color cloth symbolizing the Spiritual energy outburst after the death of the Ego.

After this ritual the Komarams will reach the main entrance of the temple where they dance, scream, cry, shout, talk, and jump in ecstasy. Through this innocence of losing their social identity they merge with the higher Self.

Meanwhile the devotees who sing the obscene songs especially men shout and sing before the main deity. They even talk to the idol in all filthy words. This ritual is another important ritual of the festival. This ritual makes us the devotees feel free to express personal sexual emotions. By publically announcing one's hidden sexual imprints, they cleanse their mind to progress spiritually. This is the importance of the obscene singing in Bharani festival.

The greatness of this ritual is the freedom of cleansing the deep hidden sexual imprints of the mind is very well limited only to musical singing. No indecent sexual body gestures or actions are done during this festival, reflecting that if the thoughts are purged actions become automatically pure.

It is interesting that the Komarams do not sing the obscene songs. They stand as witness to the family members singing the songs. They use the rhythmic musical beat untouched by the lyrical content, transcend towards the higher state. They identify themselves to Kaali, the evil annihilating energy.

The dancing transcended devotees will reach a state by which they hit their forehead with their sword in hand bleeding themselves and losing consciousness of their body. They are encouraged to do it if they fail to bleed in the first time. Without bleeding they are not allowed to come out of the Trans state. Many items to hit the forehead with sword are allowed till one bleeds.

Immediately when the head starts bleeding they shout and scream releasing their whole inner energy and run around the shrine and reach the other entrance of the Shiva shrine. Shiva is the

ultimate Bhramam where as Goddess is the eternal energy. This link clearly shows the dual state of the bhramam and its expressed energy. It is the most important ritual for the Komaram to reach the Shiva shrine and offer again the Trans gestures. This symbolizes the transferring state of our self from the intellect to Bhramam level.

Finally the Komarams will be guided to the spiritual tutor – GURU. He just embraces the Komaram to his laps. Just by touch of his hands, Komarams come out of the Trans and hugs him. They also shouts and screams by which they express their joy of realizing the inner spirit. Then the spiritual Guru applies the turmeric paste ointment to the bleeding skull. There has been no case of infection or damage been reported.

The importance of the guru in the spiritual journey is very important. Guru alone can guide and makes our scattered energy for constructive purposes. In no other festival the physical presence of the Guru is obviously exposed.

In the Trans state the Komarams blesses the people and fore tell incidents of the future. Even after becoming normal, we can see the divinity, love and care for others by these great Komarams. We can see the motherly approach of Komarams with their gang. This shows the ultimate end of spirituality is to serve the world with true love as a divine mother.

Some devotees drink toddy to uplift their mind to the divine state. The difference between a drunker and devotee is very important. Drunker drinks to intoxify the mind and forget his vacuum in his mind. But a devotee drinks as means to be unconscious of the body and transcend to the higher Spirit.

On Aswathy day.....,

The day before Bharani falls the Aswathy star. On this day the crowd will be increasing slowly and people gather and wait near the main entrance and all around the shrine with the eagerness to observe the final important ritual of the festival.

This ritual is called ‘ KAAAVU THEENDAL’’. ‘Kaavu ‘means temple complex. ‘Theendal ‘means physical touch.

This festival connects the life of Kannagi and spirituality. Kannagi’s husband was punished because of the selfish royal gold smith. After his death only the calm Kanagi became aware and proved the justice in the royal court of Pandiya king in Madurai. After that she burnt the whole city.

Here every aspect is symbolized. Kannagi as a sadhaka. Her husband represents the Soul imprisoned by the mind. Mind is the Pandiya king who rules the matrix city of Madurai. He listens blindly to the royal gold smith – our self ego. When the sadhaka’s Kannagi become aware, by using the intellect she breaks the anklet to prove the inner existence of the parama purusha. Anklet is the symbol of body which is filled with the diamonds gem symbolizing the Paramathman. With out the gems an anklet is of no value. There is nothing without the Paramathman.

This is linked very clearly with the Kaavu theendal ritual. A representative of the royal gold smith community will be expected by the devotees to initiate the ritual. Before that few Krishnapakshies- Eagles will fly just at the top of the secret chamber. This is the symbol of the inner secret mind becoming aware at right time.

Immediately the gold smith will appear before the crowd and starts ringing a bell. This indicates the beginning of the inner battle between the soul and ego. Immediately few communities of the state who wear only white dress especially men holds a small stick and start running madly chasing the gold smith. They represent the enormous power hidden inside us to face the self ego. While they chase him, the devotees bang the whole shrine especially near the secret chamber

with their sticks and also throw them. This is the sign of becoming total aware about the ego and awakening the dormant inner spiritual energy in the inner depth of our consciousness.

The Komarams as Devi Mahakaali and other devotees in white dress just chase the gold smith for 3 times and complete the rituals. It says that Devi has removed the self ego and all her soldiers as devotees have also marched towards that spiritual battle.

So on the second day the sadhaka is uplifted further from mind level to intellect state and he or she enjoys the shedding of self ego and gets the bliss of self realization- Aham Bhramasmi.

After this ritual all the devotees worship the leader of Kodungalloor town and leave the place.

Other important aspect of the festival is throwing the offerings upon the temple roof. This denotes the shedding of materialistic attachments.

Kannagi's life teaches us many such spiritual concepts. She lived a very luxurious life till her wedding. But later she did not enjoy any pleasure like a normal rich wife. She has not even applied thilak, turmeric which are considered to be very important for an Indian wife. But today her entire shrine is smeared with turmeric paste and powder to celebrate her.

She did not wear any ornaments. But today her idol is decked with varieties of ornaments. She just gave away all her money to her husband's personal needs. Today her temple is filled with material abundance. She was isolated from her family. But today she has been surrounded and worshipped by plenty of her devotees.

When Kannagi and Kovalan entered into Madurai, the flags fluttered and asked them not to come into the city because of the horrible tragedy waiting for them. But today lot of Bharani flags is welcoming us to enter into the temple complex to enjoy the great bliss of spirituality.

Even now a revolutionary life of a woman continues to guide the spiritual life of thousands of devotees.

Posted by Madesh at [8:56 AM](#)