Haro Hara! The Kumbabishekam of Ilangaithalvu Murugamoorthy Kovil

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The exuberant 60ft and seven storey Raja Gopuram in monochromatic shades of dark and light yellow. To the right is the shrine dedicated to Goddess Muthumariamman, the guardian deity

Devotional music and chants reverberated through the air as the Kumbabishekam of the Illangaithalvu Murugamoorthy Kovil dedicated to Lord Murugan, in Araly North, Jaffna reached a powerful moment of religious fervour.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe and Swetha Rathnajothi
Photographs Menaka Aravinda, Geeth Viduranga and Varnan Sivanesan

God Murugan with his consorts Goddesses

Valli and Deivanai draped in silk

The Kumbabishekam is the most important milestone of a Hindu Kovil. It is the process of sanctifying the Kovil with cleansed or sacred water from the Kumbam (vessels) and thus consecrating the temple. The water, which is purified through Vedic rituals, is poured on the statues of the deities as well as on the kalasam atop the Gopurams and Vimanas, this is known as Abhishekam.

A small kovil had been located on the same site and initially the plan was to reconstruct the Raja Gopuram of the existing kovil. Yet, as the structures were old and small and facing the south-east direction it was decided by Thirukumar Nadesan, Custodian of the Kovil to demolish the entire structure and design and build anew. Hailing from a family, which has lived in Araly North for generations, he decided to rebuild the Kovil according to proper Hindu traditions and Vasthu Shastra, to provide a place of worship to his hometown. The statues of the deities were specially sculptured in Mahabalipuram. Sculptor Perumal Sthapati and architect Mallai Rajan are a father and son duo from India. Once preliminary masonry work was done, sculpturing and finishing were completed by 15 Indian craftsmen. The building phase entailed five years.

The massive wooden doors of the Kovil are a reproduction of the door at the Thiruchendur Murugan Temple in India. Narthenan Amarasingham and his uncle Paranjothi Varadarajah from Araly North, crafted this door within one year. The kodimaram (flagpole) was also made by them. Narthenan’s family have for five generations crafted temple doors and chariots, while his father Sinnathamby Amarasingham had built the first chariot for the old kovil in 1976.

The Raja Gopuram is 60ft in height and has seven levels. The gopurams in the North and South are 30ft and have three levels. All figures on the gopurams are hand-crafted and thus have perfectly detailed features. The son of the Custodian, Thirukumar Ayanaka Nadesan has been set the task to build the western gopuram. From the main door, the statues of Lord Murugan and his two consorts in the inner sanctum can be seen. The position was changed so that the Kovil faced the North-East direction. Thereby at sunrise, the morning rays would fall on the main statue of Lord Murugan, and his consorts Valli and Deivanai within the sanctum sanctorum or the Garbhagriha. These are special features only seen in this kovil in Sri Lanka.

The Kovil is resplendent in monochromatic tones of dark and light shades of yellow. The statues of the deities are in pure granite and the pillars of the inner hall are

embellished with hand-crafted sculptures of Yali (a mythical being that is half lion and half elephant) which are the protectors of God Murugan. The ceiling is simple yet elegant with the central motif of the zodiac chart atop the flag pole and single flower designs that enhance the spirituality of the temple. The statue of the peacock, which is the vahana of Lord Murugan faces the inner sanctum.



The interior of the kovil with yali pillars (mythical structures) and dwarakapalas (demi gods) lead to the inner sanctum. The ceiling displays floral motifs and a raasi kattam (zodiac signs) above the kodimaram (flag pole)

The statues of Lord Murugan and his consorts, Valli and Deivanai in the inner sanctum exude a sense of divinity and sacred power. Statues of God Ganesh, Goddess Durga and Gods Vairavar, Navagraha and Sandeswarar are also placed within separate shrines inside the Kovil. The shrine of Goddess Muthumariamman, guardian deity of the area is near the main entrance, outside the Kovil.

Prior to the Kumbabishekam, devotees are allowed to enter the inner most sanctum where they are able to worship the Lord Murugan and Goddesses Valli and Deivanai. As such it was a spiritual experience to be able to venture close to the deities in the inner sanctum. On the day before, in a ceremony known as Ennai Kappu, oil is anointed on all statues of the deities.

The elaborate rituals for the Kumbabishekam began five days earlier. The purpose is to infuse life into the new Hindu Kovil and create a profound religious site of great divinity and spirituality. The kumbam (vessel) is filled with water and special herbs. Coconut and mango leaves are place on the top. While the kumbam for Lord Murugan is in the centre, several other kumbam representing the number of deities in the kovil are placed around the centre. This is arranged in a place outside the kovil, known as the Yagasala, a make-shift structure with separate sections, containing space for the kumbam and fire hearth for the poojas. It is believed that the kumbam represent the deities in the kovil. Poojas are held in the morning and evening at the Yagasala, since poojas cannot be conducted within the kovil until the Kumbabishekam ceremony is held. The recitation of the prayers is to bring divine and spiritual powers to the sculptures of the deities. As such, the deities are said to possess powerful and good vibes that are passed on to the devotees who visit the Kovil. It is also said that the five elements of nature, known as Panchabutham – earth, water, fire, air and aether (akasha) are combined with the divine presence and the objects used during the pooja represent this bond. A rope tied to the Yagasala and inner sanctum represents the connection between God Murugan and the blessed water.



Devotees chant “Haro Hara” facing the sanctum

On the morning of the sacred Kumbabishekam, the Kovil environ has a sense of great religious power. As the proceedings begin devotees gather outside the Yasagala in deep veneration. It is through the prayer and mantras that divine presence is invoked within the Kovil. A special ritual is conducted where a vessel with sacred water is carried into the Kovil thrice and water is poured on the statues

within the sanctum sanctorum. This pooja for Lord Murugan is known as Vinba Chudhi. A unique instrument – Sirk Siruvam, similar to a ladle, is used when bringing water from the Yasagala, and is traced along the rope that connects the statue and the central kumbam. Each time the ritual is performed, devotees chant Haro Hara! Their voices rising with religious fervour, creating a powerful moment of spirituality. Sparsha Yudhi, where the statue of Lord Murugan is spiritually divided as Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra and then bathed with kumbam water, was then performed.

As the auspicious time drew close a procession of kavadi dancers, drums and nadeswarams accompanied the priests carrying kumbam, together with the Custodian, his family and devotees. The Kumbam with the sacred water was taken around the Kovil with much pride and honour as it represents the divine power entering the holy sanctum.

The ceremony gathered momentum as the devotional sounds reached a crescendo and the kavadi dance too quickened its speed with the tempo of the music. Chants were heard as the inner spirituality of each person rose to a great height. One by one the priests climbed the temporary stairs to the top of the numerous Gopurams and Vimanas. At the precise time, as the auspicious moment dawned the sacred water was poured on the kalasams atop the Vimana of the sanctum sanctorum, Raja Gopuram and all other gopurams and vimanams. Haro Hara! Haro Hara! The chants were loud and clear. Devotees rushed towards the falling water so that it splashed on them as this was considered to be a blessing.



At the auspicious moment, the kumbabishekam takes place. The blessed water is poured on the Raja Gopuram

Thereafter, water was poured on all statues of the deities, and a mixture of milk and curd. Then, the door of the main sanctum was closed while statues of Lord Murugan and his consorts were draped in beautiful silk and garlands. The Vel were placed on each statue as well. Following which devotees gathered to see the reflection of the statues in the mirror and seek blessings from Lord Murugan.

The Kumbabishekam rituals were conducted by the main priest Sivaram Subramaniam (Sivasami Shasthri) from the Thiruchendur Murugan Temple, India. K Vekavaneswara Kurukkal (Lavan Kurukkal), hailing from Araly North, from the Murugan Temple in Sydney, Australia together with 40 Hindu priests including 35 from India participated in the ceremony. Devotional songs, chants of ‘Haro Hara’ and the sound of the drums as well as nadeswaram rang in our ears, the moment

had been powerful and uplifting. We indeed felt blessed by the divine power of Lord Murugan at the Ilangaithalvu Murugamoorthy Kovil in Araly North.

