The Kovils of Captain’s Garden

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Sri Bala Selva Vinayaga Moorthy Devasthanam and Sri Kailasanathar Swamy Devasthanam, Captain’s Garden

Rising above the mundane surroundings of Maradana, the resplendent Gopurams of the Sri Kailasanathar Swamy Devasthanam and Sri Bala Selva Vinayaga Moorthy Devasthanam Kovil form iconic landmarks of Captain’s Garden.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe | **Photographs** Mahesh Bandara and Vishwathan Tharmakulasingham

The ancient statue of Lord Ganesh

Built during the latter part of the 1700s, the Kovils at Captain’s Garden, Maradana are believed to be the oldest in Colombo. The area had been an island with the waters of the Beira Lake surrounding it. Devotees had travelled by boat to reach the temples to worship and make vows. During the Dutch period Captain’s Garden was known as ‘Cilamagoda’ and was an area of great economic activity since the warehouses for cinnamon, pepper, coconut, oil and coir were located in this vicinity.

Today, the Beira Lake no longer surrounds the Kovils, but the railway tracks that are constantly busy with trains. Yet, the environs of the Kovils are peaceful and only the sounds of the poojas can be heard. The elaborately decorated Gopurams reflect the main deities of the respective abodes, Lord Shiva and Lord Ganesh. The interior is beautiful and spiritual, with sculptures and motifs depicting Hinduism and culture. The two premises are connected by a central courtyard where you can worship both.

The Kovil dedicated to Lord Ganesh, Sri Bala Selva Vinayaga Moorthy Devasthanam is brightly coloured with a ceiling of murals and sculptures. The Vimanam is made completely of granite and the sanctum holding the ancient statue of Lord Ganesh. It is believed that a Yendra (a copper plated inscription) has been placed below the statue of the God.

Chief Priest S Radha Krishna, whose father too was the Chief Priest until the age of 98, ensures that the sanctity of the Sri Bala Selva Vinayaga Moorthy Devasthanam is preserved and discipline is maintained.

The Avani Shathurthi, which is the festival to celebrate the birthday of Lord Ganesh will be on August 25. Grand poojas and a chariot procession within the temple premises will be held to commemorate this important occasion. The bells are tolled to signify the beginning of the pooja, devotees gather at both temples.



The golden statue of Goddess Kannaki Amman placed in a chariot

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Sri Kailasanathar Swamy Devasthanam, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva is somewhat larger with the Shiva Lingam placed in the sanctum. Statues of other deities have been placed around the Kovil in separate areas for worship. Also significant is the statue of Kannaki Amman in a chariot, which was brought to Sri Lanka specially from India. In Sri Lanka, Kannaki Amman is venerated as Goddess Pattini. Numerous poojas are held daily in worship of the deities.

The current Trustee of Sri Kailasanathar Swamy Kovil is M P M Shanmugaraja Chettiar. He ensures that the Kovil is able to function smoothly, upholding the customs and the rituals of Hinduism.

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The Kovils at Captain’s Garden are a place of worship not only to Hindus but other religions as well. People come in their numbers to bequeath to the Gods in prayer.

