

The Spiritual Splendor of the Nallur Temple

Posted on



The magnificent entrance to the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil.

“Haro Hara”, the unwavering chants of worshippers reverberate through Jaffna in August. The Mahotsavam of the resplendent Nallur Kandaswamy

Kovil is a spiritual convergence of the devout followers of Lord Murugan. It is a display of tradition and spiritual adoration like no other.

An elaborate pinnacle of gold glistens into view amidst the cloudless blue sky. The Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil is the resounding heartbeat of Jaffna, the capital of the Hindu faith in Sri Lanka. Radiating in the regal shades of red, white, and gold, the Kovil is evocative of Nallur's ancient status as the seat of royalty in Yalpanam. This is the abode of the Divine Child, Lord Murugan, a deity of many faces and names; Kandaswamy, Kartikeya, Subramanya, Shanmuga, and Skanda. The child of God Shiva and Goddess Uma, Lord Murugan's wives are goddesses Devasena and Valli. Armed with the Vel, the deity's divine vehicle is the peacock and, at times, the elephant. The most breathtaking sight is at the heart of the second court of the Temple.

Surrounded by the passage-ways lies the "Theertha Kerni," or the sacred pond with a series of steps leading down to its waters. Standing afoot of the pond at the south end, the placid waters reflect the sculptured inner Gopuram and the surrounding archways, mirroring the Temple's beauty. The Temple, one of the largest in the country, continues its expansion and provides ample space for large gatherings during festival times. The Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil was built thrice before. One of them was constructed by Shenbaga Perumal (Sapumal Kumaraya), who ascended to the throne of the Kotte Kingdom as King Bhuvanakabahu VI. However, the Kovil was destroyed during the invasions of the colonizers. Later, in 1734, Ragunatha Mappana Mudaliyar persuaded the Dutch administration to allow the Kovil to be rebuilt. The granite, kiln-brick shrine that he constructed encasing a holy Vel has transformed today.



The regal interior that leads to the inner sanctum.

The Mahotsavam, held from August to September has been a sight to behold.

The Nallur Kovil, which exists, is one formed by circumstances rather than traditional Hindu temple architecture. Over the past centuries, the descendants of Ragunatha Mappana Mudaliyar have honored his legacy by embellishing the Kovil with classical Hindu color and magnificent artistry. Especially in the last five decades, under the diligent guidance of the present and tenth custodian Kumaradas Mappana Mudaliyar, the Kovil has flourished.

The Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil is also the only Kovil in Sri Lanka where archana or personal pujas are offered at one rupee, making God accessible to all. While the Kovil practices every tradition of importance to the Hindu culture, the Mahotsavam, held from August to September, is the grandest and most venerated. It has been a sight to behold, but due to the current health guidelines due pandemic, huge crowds are restricted from congregating for the annual festival. The Mahotsavam commences with the Flag Hoisting Festival, after which processions are held daily, both night and day. On the tenth day is Mancham, where Lord Murugan and his consorts are paraded in chariots on the outer Prakaram. The 'Kailasa Vahanam' pageant on the 20th Day is outstanding, with a great chariot representing Mount Kailash in the Himalaya range. On the 22nd Day, the 'Orumuga' procession occurs, where the deity and his consorts are mounted on elaborately crafted horse chariots. Sapparam is one procession of great splendor with a towering chariot of almost 50 feet, while carrying the sacred Vel and the divine consorts, circumnavigates Nallur Kovil amidst Sanskrit devotional murmurs. Festivities climax on the 24th Day, the chariot festival. Lord Skanda, in Prakaram.

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jewelry are decked on the idols. Devotees bear this throne themselves. As the idol, radiating with the worship of devout followers, emerges from the main entrance of the Kovil, worshippers enter a trance of devotion, ringing the air with chants “Haro Hara” and delicate rose petals cascading from above. With the ongoing pandemic, the festive celebrations are conducted with limited access to the nation’s wellbeing. Theertham, the Water Cutting ceremony, takes place the following day, at the Temple Tank beyond the southern entrance. After the holy Vel is immersed in the water, the faithful shower in holy water outside. The Tirukalyanam (divine marriage) held the following evening heralds the fruitful conclusion to this festival. Throughout Mahotsavam, similar to daily poojas, adherence to time and tradition is strict. Thus, from its regal appearance to its practices, the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil exemplifies Shaivism or worship of God Shiva in a manner, which is quite unique to the island.



The shrine exuberates intricate details and artistry.



A view from one end of the Theertha kerni or the sacred pond.



Mahotsavam is an elaborate celebration of faith and reverence.