

Sri Mookambika Devi

If God is omnipresent and omnipotent, then why do people visit temples? The answer is simple, at least as far as the ancient great temples are concerned. Our forefathers who had them built were apparently endowed with spiritual equipment of an infinitely superior variety than ordinary mortals like us of the twenty first century possess. Using said spiritual equipment, they would find strategic spots on the planet where there was an excessive concentration of cosmic energy and construct temples there, so that lesser beings could visit the place and benefit from the positive or superlative (Even Hyperlative, in some places) vibes throbbing palpably in the atmosphere there. Which is why if an ordinary mortal like you or I were to buy a piece of land and construct a temple there, it just wouldn't be the same, which seems to be a fact sadly overlooked by many so called religious zealots from various religions who see strength in numbers rather than quality, who go around constructing places of worship at the drop of a hat here, there and everywhere.... cosmic energy or not.

Can a normal person acquire the sensibility to appreciate such cosmic energy?.....I honestly believe that the answer is a very emphatic Yes. This positive energy can emanate from places as well as persons. The simplest test for this is if one feels unaccountably relaxed, positive, peaceful and just GOOD in every way when one visits a place or is in the presence of such an individual, even in thought. Of all the places I have had the privilege of visiting during my travels, spiritual and otherwise, two stand out from the rest.....The Acropolis at Athens, from where I never wanted to leave....and a tiny little temple hidden in the forests of Karnataka.

Let us go back several thousands of years now. The time is so far back in the past that one really doesn't have an accurate date.....or even an accurate millennium, for that matter!(This is long, long before the Rama Avatar if that helps you to get things in some sort of perspective).

The Sage Kola had wandered around plains, crossed rivers, climbed hills and traversed dangerous forests in search of the perfect place to meditate and do religious rituals. Finally he landed up at an idyllic place deep, deep in the forest, surrounded by mountains, on the banks of a little stream with water that was clearer than crystal.

Things should normally have been perfect for him despite the fact that the place was teeming with wild animals.(The enlightened sages of those times, though carnivorous in their dietary habits, managed to co exist peacefully with nature in all its glorious forms and the very possibility of animals being put on the Endangered

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List some day hadn't struck their great minds at the time.) But trouble he did have, in the form of the Demon Kamhasura, who delighted in disrupting Kola's meditation in ways too gross to be printed. The patience of even Great Souls like Kola though vast, isn't infinite. And finally a day came when he simply couldn't take it any more. So he started praying and praying to all the Gods to come to his aid and to rid him of this pain in his saintly neck, Kamha.

But there was a tiny problem in that Kamha himself was a devout Thapasvi and consequently extremely well endowed in spiritual ammunition, so to speak. And to make matters worse, he had pleased Shiva so much with his Thapas that Shiva had given him the boon that no man could ever kill him. And thus began Women's Lib....all those years ago....in the forests haunted by Kamha, when Saint Kola started to pray for a Woman to kill destroy the horrible Asura that no man could. Kamha was quick in finding out about Kola's plans and started to pray to Shiva once again in his demoniacally efficient way.....This time, to seek the boon that no Woman could kill him either! By this time though, most of the Gods were on Kola's side. And when the moment came when Shiva Manifested Himself before Kamha, Saraswathi, the Goddess of expression sat on Kamha's tongue and rendered him mute.(Saraswathi's tricks in this line are legendary; the time when she similarly caused Kumbhakarna to sleep for eternity being another such celebrated instance).

Shiva smiled a pleased Shaivite smile and said to Kamha "I am pleased with your devotion again O Kamha. Tell me... what can I do for you this time? "But all Kamha could do was just gulp wordlessly. Shiva was a tad surprised, for normally the Thapasvis were quicker than US Missiles in asking for boons....and here was this Asura just staring at him mutely! So Shiva asked him again.....and again...why he was summoned from his blissful activities in the arms of Parvathi all the way from Kailasa if the bugger had nothing to Tell him. And Kamha remained desperately mute. So Shiva cursed him roundly and went off in a huff. It was celebration day for Kola naturally. And he in turn, wasted no time at all in invoking the blessings of ALL the Gods...not just Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Parvathi, but every single one from the Thirty Three CRORE Devas to come to his aid. And come to his aid, they did! And how!

The collective power of all the Gods manifested itself in the form of a woman....a Goddess...more glorious than anything anyone had ever conceived of till then:- Aadi Paraashakthi, the Primordial Female Force ! And She made short work of Kamha before he could utter a single syllable of protest. As she killed him when he was rendered mute...or Mooka in Sanskrit....she came to be called Mookambika.

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Soon after she killed Kamhasura....or Mookasura She disappeared into a rock on the ground, around which the present Mookambika Temple is built. The place itself was called Kolapuram....the place where Kola used to live....which has become corrupt over the years into Kollur.

During the time of Shri Rama, long before the Temple we now see was built, Lakshmana was wounded gravely in battle .And the ever faithful Hanuman was crossing the country with a flying leap, (Which was His specialty, being partly the son of Vaayu or the God of Air) carrying a huge big portion of the divine mountain Chandra Giri which had the two divine antidotes to cure Lakshmana (Sandanakarini and Mritha Sanjeevini) apart from sixty four other divine medicinal plants. During his flight however, fragments of this divine mountain fell here and there in some blessed spots in our country. And one such piece fell near the spot where Goddess Mookambika had manifested Herself. This still stands as a mini mountain and is called Kodashadri. Around the same time, Garuda landed up there to do a bit of meditation Himself because of the obvious concentration of cosmic energy present. He used water from the Divine stream originating at the top of the hill. As Garuda was also called Suparna this river came to be known as Souparnika. It flows happily to this very day, containing the beneficial effects of all the sixty four divine medicinal herbs from the hill, but as it seems to be the case with most divine rivers in our country, it gets horrendously polluted by hordes of visiting pilgrims, many of whom keep their noxious bodies unwashed like the cohorts of Attila The Hun, just to purify them in the divine waters of the Sauparnika without giving the slightest heed to the welfare of the river itself.

Centuries pass.....And a brilliant young man from Kerala is on a tour of the entire length and breadth of India.....on foot. Ever sensitive to places with an excess of divine energy, the youthful Adi Shankara is stunned by what he experiences at Kollur where just the divine rock exists at the time. During his sojourn there, the Divine Mother manifests herself in his dreams complete with four hands and a strikingly attractive face and demeanor and asks him to build an idol of Hers just as She appeared before him, for the benefit of those devotees who would find the idea of worshipping a mere rock, however divine, simply too abstract a concept to put effectively into practice. And he does so, giving us this supremely exquisite idol which still stands, smiling benignly on us, Her children. Further, he sets about organizing the various rituals and Pooja Vidhis of the temple which also continue mostly unchanged to this day.

The temple itself was constructed by the Samantha ruler Venkanna, nephew of Sankanna several centuries ago. Though the devotees are struck dumb...rendered

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Mooka, so to speak....by the beauty of the idol, the real power however, lies in the divine rock which gleams quietly and darkly in front. This rock is divided into two by a golden line. The left side represents Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and the right side, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Durga.

The rear end of the left side has a Go Padam (Cow's Foot)and the right side a Scar sustained by Shiva on his forehead during his battle with Arjuna in the form of Kiratha. This scar, in turn, is called Paartha Praharam.

The Shri Mookambika Temple is one of the Eighteen Great Devi Temples or Shakthi Peetams of the world, with the Shankari temple at Sri Lanka, the Madhavi temple at Gaya, the Bhadrakali temple at Gokarnam and the Vishalakshi temple at Kaasi being some of the others. An extremely powerful Shri Chakra was taken from this temple to Mysore by the ruler Krishnaraja Wodeyar and established in the celebrated Nimishamba temple. Speaking of which, brings us to the story of the Tiger from Mysore, Tippu Sultan's celebrated visit to the Shri Mookambika Temple. Tippu was traveling all over South India, systematically plundering Hindu temples .But when he reached the Mookambika temple he was so moved by the divine atmosphere there that he gave some money as an endowment and left the Goddess unmolested. In fact, as he offered his respects in the Muslim way during the evening Pooja, the evening Pooja came to be known as "Salaam"....and many old timers still refer to the evening Pooja as Salaam! A corollary to this tale is that Tippu apparently used to refer to Mookambika as "Mukadumbi".... implying.....(Hold your breath now!) if you please!...I personally find this particular story as quaint..... and improbable.....and a tad tasteless too, for some reason, as if Amrish Puri, the man famous in his role as Mugambo in the film Mister India, were to call the Divine Mother "Mugambi" for example.

The person in charge of the pooja karmas now is the head of the Ramachandrapura Mutt. This honour has been handed down generation to generation thirty four times now. The Tantris of the temple however are the charming family of Adigas. Long before hotels, lodges, restaurants and the like sprung up around the temple, these noble souls acted as hosts to the hosts of devotees that thronged the place. The present head of the Adiga Clan, Shri Narasimha Adiga, is a study in quiet dignity, scholarliness, devotion and charm. He laments the onslaught of commercialization of all things traditional and even....rather especially...spiritual, though things have remained creditably pristine at Kollur all these years. But for how long more?...He wonders sadly.

The number of illustrious personalities who have made the pilgrimage to Shri

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Mookambika temple over the years boggles the mind. The most illustrious of them is Lord Krishna Himself, who did His Saamba Vratam in the nearby Shukla Theertham where a Shiva Temple now stands. The painter Raja Ravi Varma's first stop when he left Travancore in search of fame and fortune was Shri Mookambika Temple....And what followed, of course, is history as we all know. The playback singer K.J.Jesudas openly acknowledges his phenomenal success completely to the blessings of Goddess Mookambika.

The Dance Legend Guru Gopinath offered his celebrated "Bhaja Govindam" for the first time....and the last time...at Kollur.

Many are the unfortunate people who keep wishing and planning to go to Kollur, but never make it, for one reason or the other. In fact ,because of this desperate need to get blessings of the Divine Mother, one finds Her name being used in places which, in reality have no connection with the Mookambika Temple at all whatsoever. The most celebrated of these myths is that for an hour every morning Mookambika Devi visits the Devi temple at Chottanikkara in Kerala, though the Goddess at Chottanikkara Herself is so powerful and glorious that She really doesn't need Endorsement from anyone else. But the myth continues, all the same.

The easiest way to get to Kollur from Kerala is via Mangalore. There are direct busses from Bangalore, Shimoga and other places too. One could travel by the Konkan Railway all the way to Kundapur too, which is very near the temple. The temple with arguably the Cutest Krishna in the world, Udipi, on whom the immortal song "Krishna Nee Begane Baro" was composed, is just an hours drive from Kollur, but that is another story.

The most crowded periods of the year to visit the temple would be during Navarathri, during the Utsavam which comes sometime in March/April starting on the Birthday of the Goddess (Her birth star being Moolam) and of course during the Mandalam time preceding Sankranthi, where virtually every single South Indian temple worth it's name becomes infested with literally millions of Ayyappa devotees from all the four major South Indian States.

During much of the rest of the year one can get surprisingly uncrowded and peaceful darshans, for such a famous place. Students of music and dance throng to offer their art at the Saraswathi Mandapam in the temple and to seek the blessings of the Divine Mother. Adventurous devotees take a trek up the startlingly beautiful Kodashadri Mountain. People offer Thiru Madhuram (A sweet

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preparation) to be kept in the sanctum sanctorum in the belief that night after night the Gods themselves come down and offer Pooja to the Goddess...and in turn, bless the Thiru Madharam too. In fact why don't you make the trip and experience for yourself the glory of Goddess Mookambika? But be warned though. It could easily turn out to be an addiction, as it has become for this writer and millions of others like him.

(Published in September 2005, Indian Express)