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Category : [February 1982](#)

Published by Anonymous on Feb. 02, 1982

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A Monastic Offers Insights into Life at a Traditional Temple/Monastery Complex During a Recent Muruga Festival

The following article was submitted to The New Saivite World by a monastic living at Kauai Aadheenam. Originally, the article was to simply convey news of Skanda Shasti at the Aadheenam, but as the monastic proceeded, it dawned on him that many readers wouldn't have the least idea of what Kauai Aadheenam is like, or how the monks live. Feeling inspired, and confident that Lord Muruga would approve, he broadened the scope of the article to include a description of life at Kauai Aadheenam from his perspective, while yet maintaining the original theme of Skanda Shasti. We hope you enjoy it.

At Kauai Aadheenam, a temple/monastery complex and the headquarters of Saiva Siddhanta Church, Saivite renunciate monastics live and work constantly in the sannidhya, the sublime spiritual aura, of Kadavul Hindu Temple. Day after day, one day blending into the next, is spent in the service of Lord Ganesha, Lord Muruga and God Siva. Each day begins at 6 A.M. in the Temple with a puja to Lord Ganesha, followed by satsang with Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniaswami. Then each monk begins his duties. Some monastics work primarily in the area of printing and publishing, spending their hours writing, editing, researching, typesetting or printing; others work in administration, handling correspondence, membership enrollment, mailings and business; others work in the physical areas of maintenance, gardening and groundskeeping; while still others are charged with caring for the Temple and seeing that the pujas are performed well and on time, as well as tending the cows, goats and birds. All of the monastics participate in performing puja in the Temple, and in the duties of cooking and cleaning. Throughout the day, one can see the monks performing their various duties, the swamis dressed in the traditional ochre robes, the yogi tapasvins in their yellow robes and the sadhaka in white. Western garb is worn, primarily, only for trips away from the monastery and for heavy physical work, such as carpentry and mowing the fields. The dynamic and loving presence of the Sat Guru; here, there and everywhere, keeps everything moving right along and each monastic "on his toes" and, perhaps, just slightly off balance. Pujas are performed every three hours,

around-the-clock by the monks on vigil. Vigils are scheduled in three or six hour shifts, twenty-four hours a day, so the Temple is never unattended. While on vigil, one does not leave the confines of the temple and is allowed to do religious work of any kind, such as inspired writing, meditation, prayer or reading scripture. Thus, in a fairly routine manner and in close accord with the ancient traditions of Saivite monasticism, life goes on at Kauai Aadheenam. Saivites of the world, I hope this article helps acquaint you with life at Kauai Aadheenam, for this Aadheenam belongs to the Saivites of the World; it is but one of the many wonderful treasures of our religion.

On Tuesday, October 27th, it rained unusually hard. Beginning in the morning, accompanied by thunder and lightning, the rain reached a tremendous intensity by afternoon. At about 3 p.m. several monks witnessed a rare type of lightning. Monks in different rooms, at the same moment, saw a bright flash of light right within the room. This was immediately followed by a crash of thunder. When the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled, on this day before Skanda Shasti, the thoughts of each monk turned to this Great God. In the words of Gurudeva, Lord Muruga had arrived!

The physical setting of Kauai Aadheenam is both beautiful and unique. Stepping out at the south-west side of the buildings one beholds a panoramic view sometimes remarked to be one of the most beautiful point, the land drops steeply down over 200 feet to the Wailua valley; thickly lined with tropical vegetation, through which the Wailua River cascades rapidly down its ancient route to the ocean miles away. Off to the right, the eye is drawn to follow the river upstream and enjoy the sight of water bounding through rapids, then plummeting over a small fall into a large pool below (in which the monks like to swim), which, one legend has, is a volcanic tube of unknown depth. Looking up and slightly to the left, the eye refocuses to view miles of sugar cane swaying gently in the breeze; then, gazing to the background, one is awed by the spectacular view of the mountain range, its sharp, craggy silhouettes against the sky. Towering among this mountain range is Mount Waialeali, sacred to the Hawaiian God Kane, a God known to us as Siva.

The Aadheenam property itself is covered with lawns and supports a variety of flowering shrubs and small trees, including plumerias and hibiscus, (both staple flowers for use in the pujas); as well as a variety of larger tropical trees including many banyons - some with branches spreading out one hundred feet in each direction - towering coconut and areca palms, mangos, monkey pods, eucalyptus and mokihanas. The abundance of trees sheltering the property keeps it cool and

lends a feeling of security and isolation. An idyllic stream, fed by a nearby reservoir flows through the property, widening out into two duck ponds. Mallard ducks, a variety of chickens, pigeons, peafowl and pheasants wander freely about, while caged parrots of several sizes and colors keep themselves entertained with verbal antics all day long. A large herd of fine, friendly Toggenberg goats and two cows, one Holstein and one Jersey, round out the farm and supply the monastery with milk for drinking, as well as for making yogurt, butter and cheese.

A little on the religious history of the land: research shows us that the ancient religion of the Hawaiian people was a deeply mystical one, having many similarities with the Saivite Hindu religion, including belief in the Gods and the inner worlds and a concept known as mana comparable to the Hindu concept of shakti or divine power. During the time when the great ancient Hawaiian kingdoms ruled Kauai, seven temples (Heiaus) to God Kane (Siva) were built along the Wailua River, symbolizing, we believe, the seven chakras within man. The seventh temple was situated near the top of Mount Waialeali. Even now, though the temples were destroyed in the 19th century and most of the threads of the religion have been lost, the ruins of these temple sites are regarded as sacred by the native Hawaiian people. Kadavul Hindu Temple is situated near the site of the fifth Hawaiian temple of the Wailua chain. Lord Muruga himself (known also to the native Hawaiians, though by the name of Ku) designated precisely where the newly acquired Lord Nataraja Deity was to be placed. In stunning fashion, he conveyed his designation to Gurudeva in a vision, by chinking his heavy Vel, point down, on the concrete steps of the building's main entrance. There Lord Nataraja stands today, the temple having been constructed around Him in conformity with His position. Visitors can sense the wonderful, mystical charisma of this sacred land, a land chosen by the Gods for their work, both in this present age and in the hoary past of this island. Throughout this holy six-day period of Skanda Shasti, each of the monastics will take some time out daily to worship Lord Muruga in the Temple, as well as attend the regular puja to Him at 6 p.m. Each evening, all will join Gurudeva for Satsang in the Temple to sing bhajans and enjoy readings about this Great God.

On one such evening, Gurudeva shared with the monks some thoughts on the meaning of puja. It was the evening of Guru Day, a day on which the Guru is specially honored, occurring one day during each phase of the moon. Two swamis had just completed a traditional Guru puja to the Holy Sandals. Gurudeva explained that the main purpose of the Guru puja is to help the devotee bring his mind into harmony with his Guru's mind - to bring his closer to his Guru. And, the same principal is true of all puja. "We do puja to Lord Ganesha to bring our mind into harmony with His mind; we do puja to Lord Muruga to bring our mind into harmony with His mind and we do puja to Lord Siva to bring our mind into harmony with His." What goes on in your mind, he explained, is more important than

anything else. If you are not thinking about the God and trying to attune yourself to his vibration as the puja is occurring, the puja won't help you. You must be sincere in your devotion to inspire the Gods and the Guru to help and bless you. You open the inner door to the Deity and to the Guru with your thoughts. "When you are doing the puja yourself," he stressed, "you must believe that you are actually feeding the God, and sincerely ask him to accept your offering; 'to please come and take just one mouthful, even if you are not hungry.' And if you are not thinking this way, you are just going through the motions. Then you are in Chariya, and because you are just going through the motions, or just sitting and watching a puja with nothing going on in your mind, or thinking about something else, pretty soon you stop coming to the temple, or you go because you feel you should." In Kriya Marga, you work to bring your mind closer to the Deity because you want to; because the Deity is a being you revere and love.

In Kadavul Hindu Temple, Lord Skanda is depicted in the form of Lord Shiki Vahana Subramaniam, the Lord sitting on his peacock. In his right hand, He holds a solid silver Vel, glistening brightly, a gift to the temple from Swami Jegannathan of Suruli Hills. During the 1981 India Odyssey, a group of eight pilgrims accompanied Gurudeva to visit Swami Jegannathan at his isolated cave dwelling near Palani Hills. Leaving Madurai in two taxis in the late morning, we drove for miles in the arid countryside, then reached a point where two jeeps awaited us to take us the rest of the distance, as the road was too rugged for the taxis. After a mile or so, we were warmly welcomed by the devotees of Swami Jegannathan, many of whom live in Madras. They had made elaborate preparations for the visit, surmounting the difficulties of bringing food and supplies to his remote abode. Our hosts were extremely kind and thoughtful. We found the setting most beautiful and refreshing; serene and mystical. Soon we were welcomed by Swami Jegannathan; a warm and friendly soul, bright and full of energy, and possessing a profound humility. We followed him to a spot where the mountain stream cascades over a granite rock formation, creating a natural shower, and were invited to bathe and refresh ourselves. Afterwards, we enjoyed a puja at a nearby cave shrine, then proceeded to Swami's cave. Having taken up the tapas of silence, Swami Jegannathan has not spoken for over 12 years. He lives a solitary and austere life, eats but one meal a day and meditates often in a small cave set aside for this purpose. Communicating by means of a small chalkboard, Swamiji described the Suruli Hills area as a land sacred to Lord Muruga, honeycombed with caves and blessed with the presence of great beings in the devaloka. When asked how he came to take the discipline of silence, and how long he intended to continue, he explained that the mauna tapas was given to him by Lord Muruga, and that the Lord would let him know when it should end. During the course of the visit, Swamiji asked if the Lord Muruga Deity in Kadavul Hindu Temple possessed a Vel. Hearing that He had no Vel, the Swami stated that he would like very much to supply one. A few days later, the beautiful Vel that the Muruga Deity of Arulmigu Kadavul Koyil now holds was delivered to Gurudeva in his room in Madras by Swamiji's

devotees.

Back on Kauai again, the rain is still coming down, giving the Garden Island its most thorough bathing in years. The major puja honoring Lord Skanda at Kadavul Hindu Temple was held yesterday, Skanda Shasti day, at noon, and was attended by Gurudeva and all the monastics living at Kauai Aadheenam, as well as, we are sure, a host of devas and Gods, including Lord Skanda Himself. The image of Lord Skanda was first bathed in oil, then in water, milk and yogurt. As the pujari dressed the Deity, the monks chanted bhajans, then the curtain was opened, revealing the Lord brightly clothed and decorated with abundant flower garlands, and the arati was performed. We thought of the millions of Saivites the world over who, on that same day, some at the same moment, were also worshipping Lord Skanda.