

Cherthala Karthyayani Temple

By

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Cherthala is a town near Aleppey. There is A Karthyaytani temple there. There is a story about this temple. It seems Vilwamangalam Swamiyar was returning after consecrating Ananthapadmanabha in Trivandrum to Guruvayur. He reached the present Cherthala and was taking rest below a Thambaka tree. He noticed several swans swimming in the several ponds in that place. Suddenly he saw a divine lady swinging in a swing, tied to the Thambaka tree. He recognized her as goddess Karthyayani and went near her. Then she jumped in a nearby pond. Though Vilwamangalathu swamiyar searched for her in the pond, he could not find her. The next day also he saw her in the same place and this time she jumped in to a second pond. This happened for six days. On the seventh day, the swamiyar caught hold of the hair of the Goddess and pulled her. He could only pull her head (thalai) up to her neck. Also several hairs which he was holding got uprooted. The seventh tank was full of slushy mud called Cher in Malayalam. Because of this incident the place was called Cherthala. (This being a great centre for coir manufacture was also called Shertalai by the British). The present statue has only the head visible. You can see these holes from which hairs have been pulled out. So after Abhisheka, this part is the water is mopped out by using a cloth. Also while doing flower offering to the Goddess, these parts are covered with cloth. It seems the swamiyar got angry with her because he was not able to catch her. So, commemorating the event in the month of Edavam (May-June), the people playfully abuse the goddess in a pooram festival.

The Goddess in the sanctum sanctorum is below the surface level. Outside the temple, there are separate temples for Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. The devotees hand over cock as an offering to the goddess Karthyayani. So you can find several cocks at this temple. Near the sanctum sanctorum of the goddess, there are separate temples for Ganapathy and Lord Dharma Sastha also. Just outside the temple is the place where Vilwamangalam Swamiyar found her in a swing.

It seems a gandharva was giving lot of trouble to the people around this temple. So the goddess requested Shastha to teach the gandharva a lesson. Lord Sastha went out side and killed the Gandharva. When he was returning to the temple, the Goddess asked him to stay outside itself so that he can protect the people. A separate temple was built there. The Sastha in this temple is called Kavayudhaya (he who has job of security or He who has a Kavayudha). He holds a mace in his hand. People who are in fear or are attacked by evil spirits make a mace of wood, colour it and give it as offering to Kavayudhaya.

The arattu (bath in tank) festival is celebrated in the month of Edavam (May-June) for eight days. Each day Goddess is dipped in a different pond and on the eighth day she is brought back to the temple along with Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva.

There are two very special and peculiar offerings at this temple. They are called Iratti and Thadi. Iratti is nothing but the Ghee Payasam with the double the quantity of jaggery. Thadi is made by the following method:-

Mix rice flour, Jaggery, and coconut along with powdered dry ginger and other spices. This is made in to a paste form tied in the sheath of areca nut and tied at both ends. Then

the sand is heated by burning sticks. A small depression is made. The above bundle is put inside and covered with hot sand. Again fuels such as coconut shells are burnt over it. This offering is made only if devotees desire for it.