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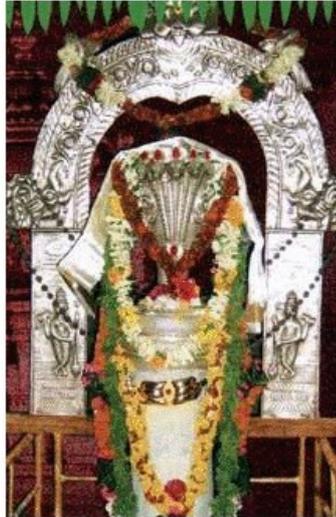
March 2011

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Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

On the shores of River Godavari in Andhra Pradesh is the famous place Draksharamam famously known as a Mukti Kshetra. (place that provides salvation) Our journey this month is to this place of salvation.

Draksharamam



Lord Bhimeshwara

Draksharamam is located 28 Km from Kakinada, 50 Km from Rajahmundry and 25 Km from Amalapuram. Throughout the length and breadth of the Sacred "Mother India", there are many pilgrim centers. From amongst them "Draksharama" is the one in the Southern India on the Eastern Bank of the River Godavari. It is colloquially known as Draksharama carrying the implied meaning as "Draksharama" meaning the Abode of Daksha Prajapathi - the Father-in-law of Lord Shiva and the beloved Father of 'Sati' the spiritual spouse of Lord Shiva.

The history of the Sacred Pilgrimage is exhaustively dealt in the 'Skanda Purana' of Sri Vyasa. To give a brief narration of the same the story goes thus. Once, Daksha Prajapathi decided to perform a Yagna. In pursuance of the same, he had been to Kailasa to invite Gods and Goddesses to sanctify his 'Yagna' and accept his hospitality. But when he had been there, Lord Siva was in his Court immersed in his spiritual splendour. But Daksha Prajapathi out of his ego of being the father-in-law of Lord Shiva, mistook the Lord's trance as indifference towards him. So, being put out at the indifference of his Son-in-law he came back without inviting the Lord and the Lady to his sacrifice.

Sati in her womanish nature requested Siva to permit her to attend the sacrifice at her parental home, even uninvited and have the pleasure of the performance and the association of her kith and kin. But Siva explained her, the tragic implications that she might have to face at her parental house and let her to at her own wish. But, when she actually stepped into her parental home, none greeted her or even just asked her a mutual exchange of her well-being. Then Sati was put out with the humiliation she had to face amidst her own blood and then and there, decided to give up her body instead of facing her beloved husband with a fallen face. So, she gave up her body then and there and fell down dead. Siva having come to know of the tragic end sent his son 'Veerabhadra' to boot down the ego of Daksha. Siva in his pangs of separation with Sati came down to her dead body and shouldered the corpse and danced the 'Pralaya Thandava'.

At this juncture, the Lord Vishnu, the presenting, force of Universe, sent his 'Chakra' to cut down the body of Sati and redeem the grief of Lord Siva. The Chakra came and cut the body of Sati into eighteen pieces which fell in eighteen parts of this 'Punyabhoomi' of ours and came to be known as 'Ashta Dasa Peethas' and out of these eighteen Sri Manikyamba of Draksharama is the Twelfth.

There are many mythological anecdotes scattered in many of the Sacred puranas about the 'Swayambhu' aspect of the Lord's existence here.

One of many is that Bhimanatha came down from Kailasa and settled here at the request of Parvathi herself who happened to be the daughter of Daksha. The historical aspect of the temple goes from the thirteenth century onwards. This temple is one of the "Pancharamas". This is the place where Dakshaprajapathi did the Daksha yagna. So this place derived its name as Draksharamam. This shrine is also famous as Mukti kshetra (that provides salvation). Poet Srinatha in his Bhimakhanda described the place as Dakshina varanasi, a place for Bhoga and Moksha. Bheemeswara in Draksharamam is believed to be worshipped by Gandharvas and Apsaras daily at night times.

There is story in vogue about the divinity of this place. Long ago Maharshi Vyasa with his disciples went to Varanasi as he was visiting all the holy places in the country. Because of some reasons he and his disciples could not get food in Varanasi. He lost his patience and threw the bowl on the earth and was prepared to

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curse Varanasi. Then Mother Visalakshi in the disguise of an old lady called him with his disciples to come to her house for lunch. She also advised him to be patient and warned that Lord Viswanatha may be angry for his deed. She provided Vyasa and his disciples proper places to be seated to have their lunch. His disciples were depressed as there was no smell of food or any indication of its presence.

When all arrangements were completed Mother Visalakshi came there and said "it is getting late, all of you sit for lunch". As soon as Mother uttered these words all the plates were full of tasty food materials; then all the disciples realized that the old woman was none other than Mother Visalakshi; all of them ate with satisfaction and were taking rest. Then Lord Shiva along with Mother Parvathi appeared before Vyasa Maharshi and was angry on him as he prepared to curse Varanasi. Lord Shiva ordered Vyasa Maharshi to go away from Varanasi. Maharshi Vyasa repented for his sin and was sad. Mother Parvathi blessed him and said that don't worry my son you go and stay in Draksharamam of South India. Then Vyasa Maharshi with disciples left Varanasi and visited all the holy places in the way. He met Maharshi Agastya. Agastya explained the divinity of Draksharamam.

It is said that Kartikeya, the son of Lord Shiva has killed the demon Tarakasura, on the request of the gods. The Shivalinga in the throat of this ardent devotee of Shiva, Tarakasura, is said to have fallen in five different places that became the "Pancharama Kshetras". They are Draksharama, Komarama, Ksheerarama, Bheemarama and Amararama. It is also said that the linga here was later installed by Vedavyasa. Rishi Bharadwaja came here to consecrate Bheemeswara swamy and wanted to bring river Godavari to Draksharamam for Abhisheka. He went to Godavari and requested her to come to Draksharamam. Godavari agreed to come with him to serve Bheemeswara Swamy. Then all the deities, yakshas, along with Indra came with them to see the Utsava of Bheemalinga Prathistha.

When they reached Draksharamam they were astonished to see Bheemeswara swamy already being worshipped. They wanted to know who was the person who did so before their arrival. Then Suryadeva (sun god) appeared before them and said that as they were coming with Godavari, it was delayed and the Shiva linga got settled by itself in right time. By seeing that I started to worship him, afterwards Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu also worshipped him. Sun god requested him to worship Lord Bheemeswara along with saptarishis. Then akasvani (words of divinity) also said that Maharshi Bharadwaja, you need not worry because you are as great as sun god as you brought river Godavari to Lord Bheemeswara. You along with your seven Maharshis place Pasupathas in this shrine. They would be famous as Asthamurthis. Bharadwaja Maharshi and saptarishis were happy and placed the pasupathas and worshipped them with saptarishis Godavari waters. Then this water was famous as saptarishis Godavari Theertha.

The Bhimeswara temple at Draksharama has two prakaras. The inscriptions here suggest that the temple was built by Bhima, the Eastern Chalukyan King of Vengi (9th -10th centuries), when his kingdom was under attack by the Rashtrakootas. The temple art thus shows the influence of a blend of sculptural traditions of Chalukya and Chola styles.

The temple has four entrances in the outer prakara each marked with a gopuram, facing the four cardinal directions. On the south is the entrance to the inner prakara, which is lined by a pillared two-storeyed verandah. The main temple is twin storeyed. Two flights of stairs lead us into the upper level of the sanctum. This has a pillared pradakshina on three sides and a Garbhagriha. Bhimeswara is enshrined in the form of a ten feet high Shivalinga in this Garbhagriha. Another feature of the temple is the narrow mantapam that is seen in the premises. Shiva's consort here is Manikyamba. The temple walls and pillars are decoratively carved with mythological figures.



Goddess Manikyamba

Here temple's East door is protected by Ma Nukamba. West door by Gogulamma. North side by Manda devi. South by Ghattambika. In the Draksharamam Dwadasa (12) teerthas are present. They are, Indreswara, Siddheswara, Yogeswara, Yameswara, Kaleswara, Veerabhadreswara, Brahmeswara, Kukkuleswara, Kapaleswara, Somanatheswara, Maheswara, Rameswara.



The temple

The temple

Legend has it that the Saptamaharishis (Seven Sages) to achieve the ends of their penance divided the akhanda (unbranched) Godavari river into seven different streams at Draskharama. Bharadhwaja, Viswamitra and Jamadagni streams known as Antarvahinies, were believed to have gone under ground. There is Sapta Godavari Kundam (Seven river pond) near the temple where the devotees bathe. Sivarathi attracts huge crowds of pilgrims.

Bheemeswara linga is 18 feet above the peetha. Shiva linga is of crystal texture. There are black stripes on the upper part. These are said to be the markings of the tiger skin worn by Lord Shiva when He was in disguise of a Hunter when he fought with Arjuna.