



## Glory of Bharath » Bharath Darshan

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,  
This month our sojourn is to the holy Gokarna in Karnataka where Lord Shiva is worshipped as Mahabaleshwara.

### Gokarna



Gokarna is a town in the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka state, India with a permanent population exceeding 25,000 (2001). It is a Hindu pilgrimage centre as well as a popular tourist destination. Gokarna is a temple town and is referred to in a number of Hindu historical literature pieces. The main deity is Lord Mahabaleshwara, a form of the Hindu god Shiva. Gokarna means Cow's Ear. It is believed that Lord Shiva emerged from the ear of a cow (Prithvi, the Mother Earth) here. It is also located at the ear-shaped confluence of two rivers Gangavali and Aghanashini.

### Mythology

Legends in the Sahyadri Khand of the Puranas indicate that the State of Kerala was reclaimed from the sea by the Warrior-Sage Parashurama who came from the North (of the Vindhya ranges) after his wanderings, in which he killed the Kshatriyas 21 times and threw his axe, the weapon by which he annihilated the Kshatriyas, into the sea, to prevent the erosion of the land stretching from Gokarna to the southernmost tip of India.

Gokarna is also mentioned in the Shrimad Bhagavata Purana as being the home of the two brothers Gokarna and Dhundhakari and the Bhagawat also gives details of the differences in their temperament, nature and exploits. The sthalapuranam of Gokarna then available in Tamil as it was a part of Tamil Nadu during Sangam times, has the following account. In order that Brahma who out arrogance arising out of his power to create the universe, sat for penance to redeem himself from curse of Shiva, lord Shiva appeared in front of him from the ears of a cow. So the place came to be known as Gokarnam or ear of the cow. This city was a part of Tamil Nadu as Konkanam, now corrupted as Konkan. The Sangam period writings refer to a class of chieftains going by names kocar and kilans, in charge of the region between gokarnam and present day Mumbai.

### History



The earliest history of the city is not known. Tamil saints like the Nayanmars Appar and Sambanthar from the 6th century CE praised the deity of Tulu Nadu in their hymn canon Tevaram. It is an established fact that Mayurvarma of the Kadamba kings brought Brahmins from Ahicchatra. A sect of Brahmins fled from the Gomantak to escape forcible conversions by the Portuguese and British and settled in and around Gokarna in the 15th century. It was part of the Sodhe and Vijayanagar kingdoms. Later, when the Konkan region - including Goa - was occupied by the Portuguese, it became part of their rule. A few temples were destroyed by the Portuguese in 1714 and then rebuilt later in the 18th century.

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### **Mahabaleswara Temple**

This Siva temple is said to be next in sanctity only to the Vishwanath Siva Temple in Varanasi. It is often called the Kashi of the South. Hindus come here to perform the death rites for departed ancestors. Tradition states that Lord Shiva was sent to Patalaloka by Brahma to undergo penance. He eventually returned through the ear of Mother Earth and blessed her with the name of Gokarna. Thus this place served Rudra as a womb. It is also known as Rudra Yoni and Adi Gokarna. As time passed, Rudra collected the essence (sakti) of all Brahma's creations as well as his own essence and created a golden deer with four legs, three eyes, and three horns. Eventually, the three horns (representing the three guna-avatars) were placed at Pushkar (Brahma), Shaligram (Vishnu), and Gokarna (Siva). These places are known as Siddhi Ksetras.



**Lord Shiva's Atmalinga**

Ravana desired to possess Siva's powerful horn-linga, also known as Prana-linga or Atma-linga, so he performed penance and received the linga in a box at Mount Kailash. Ravana then returned south with the linga on the condition that wherever he placed it, it would become permanently rooted. At the demigods' request, Lord Vishnu contrived a means to trick Ravana through Ganesh, disguised as a brahmachari. Eventually the Atma-linga was placed at Gokarna, rooted all the way through to Sapta Patala, and became known as Mahabaleswara.

The **Shri Maha Ganapati Temple** is dedicated to elephant-headed Ganesh. **Koti-tirtha Kund** is said to have been created by Garuda. There is a **Krishna Temple** here which is said to be where the Lord went to perform penance after killing Banasura. There is also a temple dedicated to Sri Venkateswara (Balaji). **Ram-tirtha**, is said to be where Rama, Sita, and Laksman visited after leaving Lanka. Lord Rama and his brother Bharata are said to have performed penance here. There is a beautiful temple on the hill overlooking the sea at this place.

**Our sojourn continues next month...Till then Sai Ram**