
.. shrI kapAlIshvarAShTakam ..

॥ श्री कपालीश्वराष्टकम् ॥

INTRODUCTION-

Shri Kapalishvara is the name of Lord Shiva who is the presiding deity at the ancient temple of Shiva in Mylapore, Chennai - the capital of the State of Tamilnadu. His consort has the name Kalpakambal. Ashtakam (अष्टकम्) means a poem consisting of eight verses. In this case the verses are in praise of Shri Kapalishvara. He is praised here with qualities referred to in the vedas, puranas and also as the Infinite Supreme Being. This shows that it is the Supreme Being that appears as Kapalishvara in the temple in Mylapore as any god in any other temple.

NOTE:-

The following symbols are used in the explanations that are given below.

(1) - SA :- Saiva Agama. (2) - SP :- Shiva Purana. (3) - SAN - Shiva 108 Namavali. (4) - SL - Shivanandalahari of Shri Shankaracharya. (5) - VS - Vishnu sahasranama. (6) - BG - Bhagavad Gita. (7) - SS - Siva sahasranama (From Padmapurana) with the commentary by late H.H. Sri Parasivendra Saraswati of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham.

The vedas (Taittiriya Upanishad, Anandavalli) declare that the Supreme Being is beyond reach of senses and mind. यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते । अप्राप्य मनसा सह । For this, reason His qualities cannot be adequately portrayed by anyone. The Shiva Mahimna stotram (22) puts this up in a graphic manner. The poet says that even if the blue mountain were to be a lump of ink powder, the ocean the ink-pot, the branch of the heavenly tree Parijata be pen, the earth itself the writing leaf, and by taking these Saradha the Goddess of Learning writes for eternity, even then His virtues cannot be fully described.

असितगिरिसमं स्यात् कज्जलं सिन्धुः पात्रं

सुरतरुवरशाखा लेखनी पत्रमूर्वी ।

लिखति यदि गृहीत्वा सारदा सर्वकालं

तदपि तव गुणानामीश पारं न याति ॥

The question then is, why should one take up the futile job of writing a stotram in praise of the Lord knowing full well that it can never be done satisfactorily? The same author of Mahimna Stotram provides the answer right at the beginning of the work.

मधुस्पीता वाचः परमममृतं निर्मितवत-

स्तव ब्रह्मन् किं वागपि सुरगुरोर्विस्मयपदम् ।

मम त्वेतां वाणीं गुणकथनपुण्येन भवतः

पुनामीत्यर्थेऽस्मिन् पुरमथन बुद्धिर्व्यवस्थिता ॥

He says that the Lord has given out the wonderful vedas which are sweet as the nectar. So, even the hymns composed by Brihaspathi, the learned guru of the devas will be insignificant to the Lord. This being so, I have ventured to praise You because the act will purify my speech.

Our puranas repeatedly say that chanting the Lord's names and singing His glories destroy one's sins. One need not worry about the level of his learning to start in this endeavour. Sage Narada pointed this out to Sage Vyasa and advised him to write about the glories of the Lord.

तद्वाग्विसर्गो जनताघविप्लवो यस्मिन् प्रतिश्लोकमबद्धवत्यपि ।

नामान्यनन्तस्य यशोऽङ्कितानि यच्छृण्वन्ति गायन्ति

गृणन्ति साधवः ॥BH(1-5-11).

The composition may be replete with faults. Yet, if each verse speaks of the Lord's glory, such a work alone will be liked by noble souls. They will hear it, sing it and repeat it to the listeners. Because of this reason scholars and poets continue to write hymns in praise of the Lord.

THE TEMPLE:-

The temple of Shri Kapalishvara is many centuries old. The Lord here has been sung by several Tamil saints known as Nayanmars. The famous composer Papanasam Sivan lived in Mylapore near the temple and was an ardent devotee of Kapalishvara. He had composed many songs in praise of the Lord and Devi Kalpakambal. Originally, the temple was situated on the sea shore. But it was badly damaged by tidal waves that battered the structure in the second half of the 16th century. It was later moved to the present location where a magnificent temple has come up. There is a large tank before the temple which is used for the float festival.

Being a major temple devoted to Lord Shiva all the important festivals associated with Lord Shiva are observed punctiliously. The temple is very popular and attracts a large number of devotees even on normal days. It includes locals and tourists from all over India and abroad too. The crowds are particularly heavy on weekends, Fridays, on important days such as pradoshams (on the Trayodashi days) and Sivaratri.

NOTE:-

In the passages that follow there may be statements that will appear to eulogise Lord Shiva as the Supreme Being and place other Gods on lower pedestals. These statements may cause some confusion or displeasure to some. There is no need at all for such feelings. Our puranas always resort to this kind of statements in which one form of God is praised as the Supreme Being and others are shown as an inferior to that particular deity. This is just to glorify that particular form. The intention is never to slight any deities. All puranas are particular in stating what is said in the vedas - that it is the one Supreme Being which appears as different Gods and in essence all are one and the same. The Lord says

clearly in Gita that He receives worship offered to God in any form.

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।
मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥BG(4-11).

We see in some movies that one actor plays the roles of the hero and also other characters. The hero frequently fights with others (played by same person). And finally some event reveals the fact that all of them are born to the same lady and are brothers. They hug each other in great joy and live happily ever after. Similarly, the one Supreme Being alone appears in various forms. So, essentially all forms depict the same Being.

LINGAM -

Shri Kapalishvara in the sanctum in the temple is in the form of a lingam. The form has esoteric significance. The word "lingam" means a sign or emblem that characterises an object. लिङ्गयतेऽनेन इति लिङ्गम् । The Agama texts, however, interpret the word to describe the Supreme Being from which the universe emerges (निर्गच्छन्ति) and into which it finally merges. लयं गच्छन्ति भूतानि संहारे निखिलानि च । निर्गच्छन्ति यतश्चापि लिङ्गोक्तिस्तेन हेतुना ॥The Supreme Being is without parts and form. (अरूप). However this form is not easily understood or suitable for worship by most people since they have intense attachment to their bodies. Krishna says this clearly.

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषा-मव्यक्तासक्त-चेतसाम् ॥
अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥BG(12-5).

Considering this problem that will face many, our shastras provide three concepts of the Lord. That is, sakala (one with form, rupa, like Nataraja, Dakshinamurty etc.,), nishkala (one without form, arupa) and sakala-nishkala (one with and without parts or specific form, rupa-arupa).The lingam belongs to the third category - a combination of form and formlessness. It is thus extremely suitable for worship. Its form is made of mantras and hence it is said that the Sivalinga is constituted of vidya or mantra deha. The three sections of the Shiva linga, namely the square base, the octogonal column and the upper part relate respectively to Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preservator and Rudra the annihilator.

ब्रह्मा विष्णुश्च रुद्रश्च त्रिखण्डमिति कथ्यते ।
ऊर्ध्वं तु शिवभागस्यात् विष्णुभागस्तु मध्यमः ।
ब्रह्माभागस्त्वधः प्रोक्तः शास्त्रज्ञैर्लिङ्गकुम्भयोः ॥

Thus the lingam represents the Supreme Being that embodies in itself the triad of gods. One of the names of Shiva is

लिङ्गरूपी - लीनमर्थं गमयतीति लिङ्गम् । तद्रूपी लिङ्गरूपी ।
अविद्यातिरोहित-जडप्रपञ्चस्य गमकत्वं प्रकाशात्मकस्य चैतन्यस्य,
तद्रूपी परमेश्वरः इत्यर्थः । तदुक्तं स्कान्दे -

सूतः:-

अथातः संप्रवक्ष्यामि शिवलिङ्गं समासतः ।

यस्य विज्ञानमात्रेण विमुक्तो मानवो भवेत् ॥

शिव एव स्वयं लिङ्गं गमकमेव हि ।

शिवेन गम्यते सर्वं शिवो नान्येन गम्यते ॥SS(653).

Now we will say a few words about some important days observed in the temple. These days may be divided into two types - festivals and vratams. Their purpose is the same, that is to make strong the remembrance of the Lord and bring us close to Him. Festivals like Deepavali and Dusserrah are marked by celebrations. The vratams, such as the Ekadasi and Shivaratri are marked by fasting, devotion, austerity and observance of vows.

PRADOSHAM: -

We are familiar with the story of the churning of the ocean by devas and asuras to obtain the Amrit or nectar. It is said that they used the mountain Manthara as the churning pestle and the snake Vasuki as the rope. The asuras held the snake near the head and the devas the tail portion. As they started churning the snake suffered intense agony and vomitted its venom. It was very potent and threatened to engulf the world. The devas ran to Lord Shiva and prayed to Him to save them and the world. Shiva, who is the embodiment of compassion took pity on them and consumed the venom. All the devas who gathered at that time felt immense relief and worshipped the Lord in gratitude without taking any food. This was the Ekadasi day. The Lord was pleased with their worship and distributed the Amrit to them. On the following day (that is, on the dwadasi) the devas finished their puja early in the morning and had their food. On the next day, that is on trayodasi, the Lord who was pleased with their devotion performed a dance in the evening. Devi Parvati was watching the dance along with the devas. This dance performance lasted for one yAma (याम) or three hours. The period came to be known as pradosham. This is a vratam and devoted exclusively for the worship of Lord Shiva.

If the pradosham falls on a Saturday then it becomes specially auspicious. The pradosham is auspicious as on that occasion all the gods and devas assemble to have the darshan of Lord Shiva and witness His dance. So, by visiting the temple on that occasion one can have the benefit of having the darshan of Lord Shiva as also all gods. Some verses from Shiva Puranam that talk about the glory of pradosham are given below. Rough translations of the verses are also given.

शंभुरेव तदा पूज्यो नान्ये विष्णवादयस्सुराः ।

यत्तत्र सर्वेऽपि सुरास्तिष्ठन्ति शिवसन्निधौ ॥

अतस्तस्यार्चनं पूजा कथागुणगणस्तवम् ।

तन्मन्त्रस्य जपञ्चैव कर्तव्यो मोक्षकांक्षिभिः ॥
दारिद्र्यदुःखतान्धानां एतद्विव्याञ्जनं स्मृतम् ।
ऋणार्णवनिमग्नानां उडुपोऽयं सुतारकः ॥

On that occasion (evening of pradosham day) Lord Shiva alone is to be worshipped, and not other devas like Vishnu. For, all of them are there in the presence of Lord Shiva. So, one who seeks liberation should do His puja, listen to stories that narrate His glories and chant His mantra. Those who are severely afflicted by poverty and sorrow will get relief by this. This will serve as a boat that will help those who are immersed in ocean of debts.

प्रदोषे पार्वतीनाथे महत्तन्वति ताण्डवम् ।
वाग्देवी वल्लवीन्धत्ते मृदङ्गं गरुडध्वजः ।
रमा गानकलां ब्रह्मा तालं वेणुं दिवस्पतिः ॥
सर्वे चान्ये सुपर्वाणः सेवन्ते तं महेश्वरम् ।
पुण्यक्षेत्रं समासाद्य महालिङ्गं निषेव्य च ॥
पञ्चकृत्वा नमस्कुर्यात् साष्टाङ्गं भक्तिपूर्वकम् ।
पांसूनां अङ्गलग्नानां एकैकस्य नमस्कृतौ ॥
दिव्यवर्षसहस्रं तु शिवलोके महीयते ।

During pradosha time Lord Shiva dances along with Parvathi Devi. Sarasvati Devi plays on veena. Vishnu plays on mridangam. Laxmi Devi sings and Brahma plays on cymbals. Indra plays on flute. All gods witness the glorious sight. One should reach a holy shrine and worship Mahalingam by prostrating to Him five times. By saluting thus one gets to live in Shivaloka for as many years as the dust particles that had stuck to his body.

दर्शनं वन्दनं लिङ्गप्रदक्षिणञ्च तर्पणम् ।
प्रदोषे ऋणमुक्तेः स्यात् भवतूलमहानिलः ।
भुक्तिर्मेथुनमभ्यङ्गं हरिदर्शनकीर्तने ।
व्यर्थात्लापं प्रदोषे तु वर्जयेद्द्वैदिको जनः ॥

Having darsan of Shivalingam, circumambulating It and performing tarpanam will pay off the five obligations one is born with. One should not indulge in eating, sex, oil bath, darsan of Hari and idle gossip during pradosham.

विष्णवर्चनं सदा कार्यं प्रदोषसमयं विना ।
तत्रापि नरसिंहं तु कीर्तयेद्दर्शयेद्बुधः ॥
एवं प्रदोषसमये पूजां कर्तुमशक्नुवन् ।
गत्वा शिवालयं पश्येत् भक्तोऽभक्तोऽतवा शिवम् ॥

One should worship Lord Vishnu always except on pradosham days. It is beneficial to have darsan of Lord Narasimha and worship Him on pradosham time. One who is unable to do puja etc., as said above during pradosham can get the benefit by having a darsan of the temple of Lord Shiva.

NOTE:-

It is said here that one should not have darsan of Vishnu on pradosham days but it does good to have darsan and worship Narasimaha. The reason is that Narasimha is Shiva only and not different from Him. The following quote from Nrisimhapurvatapani upanishad states this clearly.

ॐ ऋतं सत्यं परं ब्रह्म पुरुषं नृकेसरि विग्रहम् ।
कृष्णपिंगल-मूर्ध्वरेतं विरूपाक्षं शंकरं नीललोहितं
उमापतिं पशुपतिं पिनाकिनं ह्यमितद्युति-मीशानः--- ॥

SHIVARATRI.

The pradosham day occurring in the Magha month (11th in the Hindu calendar) is very special and is celebrated as Shivaratri. This is the day when Lord Shiva revealed His glorious form to the gods to show that He alone is the Supreme Being. He appeared to them in the form of infinite effulgence. He told them that they all can derive benefit by worshipping Him. Accordingly the gods offered special puja to Him. Lord Shiva was pleased with their worship. He added that the day will be known as Shivaratri and will be a very auspicious one.

दिनमेतत् ततः पुण्यं भविष्यति महत्तरम् ।
शिवरात्रिरिति ख्याता तिथिरेषा मम प्रिया ॥

Later the infinite form transformed Itself into a lingam. The Lord said that whoever fasts on that day or worships Him will get all that is good in this life and will escape rebirth. He also said that the lingam will get installed in all the temples and the place where the lingam appeared first will be known as Arunachalam. Aruna means red - the colour of the flame. Achalam means mountain. Shiva in this place is known as Arunachaleshvara.

भोगावहं इदं लिङ्गं भुक्तिमुक्त्येक साधनम् ।
दर्शन-स्पर्शन-ध्यानाज्जन्तूनां जन्म मोचनम् ॥
अनलाचल-संकाशं यदिदं लिङ्गमुत्थितम् ।
अरुणाचलमित्येव तदिदं ख्यातमेष्यति ॥

This have occurred in Tiruvannamali where the lingam in the temple is known as tejolingam (तेजोलिङ्गम्). The event is celebrated as an annual festival in that town. A big lamp is lighted at the top of the hill behind the temple to mark the event. Thousands of people gather to witness the light.

Shivaratri day is celebrated with great deal of fervour in Shiva temples all over the country. This is a vratam and so is marked by pujas, fasting and offering prayers throughout the night. After having bath one should

wear vibhuti, necklace of rudraksha beads, worship the Lord with bilva leaves, chant the sacred panchakshara mantra and visit Shiva temple and participate in the pujas that are done throughout the night. Fasting is prescribed as an aid to curb the wandering tendency of the mind so that it can concentrate on the job on hand - in this case the puja of the Lord. This is known to us for long. Shri Krishna mentions this in Bhagavad Gita (2-59).

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।

Some verses from the Shiva puranas that extol the important day are given here with rough translation.

माघकृष्णचतुर्दश्यां उपवासोऽतिदुर्लभः ।
तत्रापि दुर्लभं मन्ये रात्रौ जागरणं नृणाम् ॥

Fasting on the chaturdashi day in the fortnight following the full moon day in the Magha month (ie) on Shivaratri day is not something that is easily got by everyone. Still more difficult to get is the possibility of keeping awake during the night on that day.

अतीव दुर्लभं तत्र शिवलिङ्गस्य दर्शनम् ।

सुदुर्लभतरं तत्र पूजनं परमेशितुः ॥

It is very difficult to have darshan of the Shiva lingam. Still more difficult is a to get a chance to worship the Lord.

भव-कोटि-शतोपात्त-पुण्य-राशि-विपाकतः ।

लभ्यते वा पुनस्तत्र बिल्व-पत्रार्पणं विभोः ॥

Even in performing that worship to that omnipresent Lord the good fortune to offer bilva leaves to Him is got only by the fructification of good deeds done in innumerable births.

वर्षाणामयुतं येन स्नातं गङ्गासरिज्जले ।

सकृद् बिल्वार्चनेनैव तत्फलं लभ्यते नरैः ॥

What merit one earns by taking bath in the river Ganga for ten thousand years is got by worshipping Lord with the bilva leaves on Shivaratri day.

अत्रोपवासः केनापि कृतः ऋतुशतायते ।

रात्रौ जागरणं पुण्यं वर्ष-कोटि-तपोधिकम् ॥

Fasting on the night of Shivaratri is equivalent to performing hundred vedic sacrifices. Keeping awake on that night is superior to austerities performed in ten million years.

एकेन बिल्व-पत्रेण शिव-लिङ्गार्चने कृते ।

त्रैलोक्ये तस्य पुण्यस्य को वा सादृश्यमृच्छति ॥

Nothing in all the worlds equals the merit one earns by offering one bilva leaf to the Lord on that holy day.

अहो बलवती माया येन शैवी महातिथिः ।

नोपास्यते जनैर्मूढैः अतिमूर्खैरिव त्रयी ॥

OH! great is the power of maya. Ignorant people do not observe Shivaratri which is so glorious. This is just like the ignorant people not caring to study the vedas.

उपवासो जागरणं सन्निधिः परमेशितुः ।

गोकर्णं शिवलोकस्य नृणां सोपान-पद्धतिः ॥

Fasting on Shivaratri day, keeping awake during that night, visiting the temple of the Lord, the holy place of Gokarna constitute the steps for one to reach the abode of Lord Shiva .

THE SUMMER FESTIVAL:-

The summer festival (March-April) lasts for ten days. It attracts huge crowds from in and around the city of Chennai. We can have the darshan of the Lord riding on the bull Nandi on the fifth day. One of the Lord's name is ऋषभारूढः. The bull or rishabha (ऋषभः) represents dharma which showers all desired results like dharma. artha kama and also gives purity of mind that helps in pursuing moksha. The commentator says :- 'वृष सेचने'

वर्षणात् सर्वकामानां वृषभः, धर्मरूपतया सर्वकामप्रदत्वात्, तमारूढः; वृषभवाहनः इत्यर्थः ऽSAN(40). The Lord also has the bull as the mark in His flag. Because of this He also has the name वृषाङ्कः ऽSAN(39).. This shows the great importance the Lord attaches to dharma.

On the seventh day we have the car festival when He goes round the streets in a car. It is very popular and attracts huge crowds. It is said that one who can have the darsan of the Lord in the car will escape rebirth.

रथस्थं वामनं दृष्ट्वा पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते [The "car"

represents the body.

आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव च ।

बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च ॥

says Katha Upanishad (1-3-3).

The Self within the body is the charioteer, the one who rides in the chariot. The वामनः or dwarf mentioned herein refers to the Self, Supreme Being, the size of the thumb, who resides in the body, in the small chamber of the heart of everyone. The Katha Upanishad says this. (KU-2-1-12).

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो मध्य आत्मनि तिष्ठति ।

ईशानं भूतभव्यस्य न ततो विजुगुप्सते ॥

Even though the Self is all pervading, It is conceived as a dwarf residing in the heart to facilitate meditation on It.

Another important festival is the day when the 63 saivaite saints, known as Nayanmars are taken in a procession and the Lord follows His devotees. A popular Tamil poet Avvaiyar has said in one of her poems that a devotee of the Lord is greater than the Lord Himself as he has the Lord enshrined in his heart! This will remind us of what Sri Krishna told about His devotees to His friend Uddhava in the Uddhava Gita.

निरपेक्षं मुनिं शान्तं निर्वैरं समदर्शनम् ।
अनुव्रजाम्यहं नित्यं पूजयेत्यङ्घ्रिरेणुभिः ॥
(Srimad Bhagavatam-11-14-16).

He said that He invariably follows His devotees.

This festival is celebrated on the eighth day.

On the ninth day one can have the darshan of the Lord as भिक्षाटनः a mendicant going around the streets with a begging bowl. The question now arises as to why the Lord is reduced to state of nothingness? Puranas tell that Lord Shiva took on the role of a beggar with a dishevelled appearance to teach a lesson to some sages who were staunch adherents of the path of karma and ignored the higher path of jnana. They were proud of their achievements in this path that got them some supernatural powers also. The beggar was extremely handsome. On seeing Him many of the men and women in the ashram precinct lost their balance and started following Him. When the sages saw this they were furious. They cursed him and let loose some demons created by their spiritual power. But their attempts to harm the beggar utterly failed and they felt humiliated. They surrendered to the Lord.

The ten days festival concludes with the wedding of the divine couple (Lord Kapali and Devi Kalpakambal). The function is celebrated with great deal of enthusiasm by the people as they consider it as a marriage happening in their own house. Everyone brings presents to the "bride" and "groom" in the form of silk sarees and silk dhoties etc. Many offer pieces of jewellery. They also bring sweet and savoury items prepared specially for the occasion. Thus the marriage turns out to be a memorable occasion. After the function gets over the devotees are given prasada offered to the divine couple. The wedding signifies the union of the Jivatma and Pramatma who were never separate, but felt separated due to the veil of avidya or nescience. The Lalithasahasranamam describes Devi Lalitha as कामेश-वद्ध-माङ्गल्यसूत्र-शोभित-कन्धरा ।Devi's neck shines with the Mangalya thread tied by the Lord who, therefore has the name अम्बिकानाथः ॐ अम्बिकाया नाथः पतिः । इदं चार्थतः

श्रुति-प्रसिद्धं नाम ।¹नमो हिरण्य-बाहवे हिरण्य-वर्णाय
हिरण्य-रूपाय हिरण्य-पतयेऽम्बिका-पतये उमा-पतये पशु-पतये
नमोनमः ।

We also have the float festival (in January-February) when the Lord goes round the tank in a float. This symbolises the fact that the Lord Siva, like a boatman, goes in a boat or raft, scours the ocean of samsara and looks for people who are struggling in the ocean and seeking His help to come out of it. So Siva has these names .

संसारार्णव-मग्नानां समुद्धरण हेतुः -
संसारः जननमरणादिसमूहः स एवार्णवः, समुद्रः अपारत्वात्,
तत्र मग्नानां सर्वदा दुःखनुभवितृणां,
दुःखनाशकरप्लवादिरहितानां, समुद्धरणे,
तेषां दुःखनाशने हेतुः कारणं वेदान्तमहावाक्यजन्य-
वृत्त्यारूढः सन् संसरपाशविच्छेदकरत्वात् ॥
ज्ञात्वा देवं सर्वपाशापहानिरिति । श्रुतिः ॥SS(408) and
विषयार्णवमग्नानां समुद्धरणसेतुः -
विषयशब्देन विषयानुभवरूपसंसार उच्यते ॥ स एवार्णवः
समुद्रः विषयार्णवः, तस्मिन् संसारसमुद्रे महति,
अविद्याकामकर्मप्रभवदुःखोदके तीव्ररोगजरामृत्युमहाग्राहे
अनादावनन्तेऽपारे निरालम्बे विषयेन्द्रियजनितसुखलवलक्षणविभ्रमे,
पञ्चेन्द्रियोत्थतृणमारुत- विक्षोभोत्थितानर्थशतमहोर्मिणि,
महापातकाद्यनेकनिरयगते, *dvArvAErcrg* ॥ हाहेत्यादि-
कूजिताक्रोशनोद्धतमहार्णवे मग्नानां समुद्धरणे सम्यगुद्धरणे
सेतुरिव सेतुः ।

¹त्रिरुन्नतं स्थाप्य समं शरीरं

हृदीन्द्रियाणि मनसा सन्निवेश्य ।

ब्रह्मोडुपेन प्रतरेव विद्वान्

स्रोतांसि सर्वाणि भयावहानि ॥ इति श्रुतिः ॥SS(477).

This will bring to our mind the verse from the popular Karavalamba stotra where in Shri Shankaracharya beseeches Lord Laxmi Narasimha to extend His hand and pull him out of the fearsome ocean of samsara.

संसार-सागर-निमज्जन-मुह्यमानं

दीनं विलोक्य विभो करुणानिधे माम् ।

प्रह्लाद-खेद-परिहार-परावतार-

लक्ष्मीनृसिंह मम देहि करावलम्बम् ॥(१०) ॥

Every individual is struggling in the ocean of samsara, but does not know how to reach the shore. Also he does not have the ability to know

the means. In such a precarious situation the kindly acharya tells us that reaching out to the Lord is the only way. One struggling in the sea for a long time swallows the bitter water, feels weak and faint. In the same way one caught in the ocean of samsara takes in the poison of pleasures and pains through the senses and is befuddled. The acharya herein gently reminds the Lord that saving someone caught in the sea is not something new to Him. On an earlier occasion He had rescued Prahlada who was bound to a big slab of stone and thrown into the sea by saying प्रह्लाद-खेद-परिहार-परावतार [The kindly Lord is one who is capable of helping us to get out of samsara and administer the required treatment. He is renowned in the vedas as the foremost and devine physician. Shri Rudram says this. अध्यवोचदधि वक्ता प्रथमो दैव्यो भिषक्] Krishna says that He will lift up those who have exclusive devotion to Him from the ocean of samsara. Gita (12-7).

तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
भवामि न चिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचैतसाम् ॥

There is a separate temple inside the main temple for Devi who bears the name Kalpakambal. It is said that She took the form of a peacock and worshipped the Lord here to demonstrate the power of devotion. Peacock is called "mayil" in Tamil. Thus the place has come to be known as Mailai or as Mayilapuri and as Mylapore.

Kapali is one of Shiva's names. (No.24-Shiva 108 namavali). Kapala means a skull. Siva wears a garland of skulls. Each skull in His garland is said to be that of one Brahma, the creator god after Brahma's demise at the time of resolution or pralaya. Brahma is only the name of the post, like that of the President or the Prime Minister. When the post is vacated by the occupant another suitable person takes up the post and the work of creation continues. This period is known as कल्पkalpam. At the time of Kalpam, Shiva withdraws the creation within Himself and releases it at the beginning of the next Kalpa. Krishna says this in Gita-(9-7).

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रकृतिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।
कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥

Brahma has a very long life according to our calendar. We may get an idea about Brahma's longevity from the following figures. 360 human years = 1 year of devas. 12,000 years of the devas = The duration of 4 yugas. 2000 such periods = One day of Brahma. Brahma has a life of 100 years made of such days and is equal to 432 million years of mortals. Thus, it is very very long as per our reckoning. Still, Brahma has a finite life only, however long it may be. It has an end. So, every one, including Brahma, is absorbed by Lord's Prakriti and released again. Shiva wearing a garland made of skulls of Brahmas indicates that Shiva is beyond time, is eternal and lasts even after other lesser gods like Brahma who are in the grip of time meet their end. Shri Nilakanta Dikshita explains this in his Shivatattvarahasyam as follows. SAN(24).

कपालीति - कपालं ब्रह्मकपालं अस्यास्तीति कपाली । एतेन
अनेक-ब्रह्मात्यय-दर्शित्व-लक्षणं सनातनत्वमुक्तं भवति ।

Now we are faced with a peculiar problem. What can we ask of Kapaleeshvara, who Himself goes around with a begging bowl (kapalam or skull) in His hand? Shri Shankaracharya too faced this problem and had come out with an ingenious solution. He had seen that wandering beggers usuallu keep with them dogs, monkeys and such small animals. They make the animals do some simple tricks, entertain the people and collect alms. He says that he has a monkey called his mind that is very frisky, mischevous and uncontrollable. He beseeches the Lord to tie it with the cord of devotion and take it with Him. Please look at this entreaty that is addressed to Kapali.

सदा मोहाटव्यां चरति युवतीनां कुच-गिरौ
नटत्याशाशाखावटति ज्झटिति स्वैरमभितः ।
कपालिन्! भिक्षो! मे हृदय-कपिमत्यन्त-चपलं
दृढं बध्वा शिव भवदधीनं कुरु विभो! ISL (20).

Thus, the hymn that follows is about the Infinite Supreme Being who appears as Kapali for the benefit of devotees and who is none other than Lord Shiva. Devi Kalpakamba is His Maya shakti also known as Prakriti. The Supreme Being associated with maya is known as Ishwara or Maheshwara. This is said in the Svethasvaropanishad as: मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं तु
महेश्वरम् । Maya has names as Parvati, Shivaa, Uma etc. Shiva means
auspiciousness. SS(18). शिवो मङ्गलरूपः ।
निर्माष्ट-निखिल-दुःखानुषङ्ग-परमानन्द-रूप इत्यर्थः ।

So is also Devi Kalpakamba who has the name Mangala (meaning auspicious). The following popular verse from Saptasloki Durga says this clearly.

सर्वमङ्गलमाङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके ।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

Thus, by saluting them whose very names spell auspiciousness, one is bound to get all that is good in life here and hereafter. The following popular verse says this.

यः शिवो नमरूपाभ्यां या देवी सर्वमङ्गला ।
तयोः संस्मरणात् पुंसां सर्वतो जय मङ्गलम् ॥

The Kaivalyopanishad (7) says:-

उमासहायं परमेश्वरं प्रभुं
त्रिलोचनं नीलकण्ठं प्रशान्तम् ।
ध्यात्वा मुनिर्गच्छति भूतयोनिं
समस्तसाक्षिं तमसः परस्तात् ॥

that one, by meditating on the highest Lord who is allied to Uma, supremely powerful. three eyed, has a blue neck and tranquil reaches Him who is the source of all, the witness of all and is beyond darkness (ignorance or avidya).

This is said in the following verse also.

कल्पकाम्बा-कपालीशौ भक्तरक्षण-तत्परौ ।
तयोः अनुग्रहो यत्र वर्तते तत्र मङ्गलम् ॥

॥ श्री कपालीश्वराष्टकम् ॥

कपालि-नामधेयकं कलापि-पुर्यधीश्वरं
कलाधरार्ध-शेखरं करीन्द्र-चर्म-भूषितम् ।
कृपा-रसार्द्र-लोचनं कुलाचल-प्रपूजितम्
कुबेर-मित्रमूर्जितं गणेश-पूजितं भजे ॥ १ ॥

भजे भुजङ्ग-भूषणं भवाब्धि-भीति-भञ्जनं
भवोद्भवं भयापहं सुखप्रदं सुरेश्वरम् ।
रवीन्दु-वह्नि-लोचनं रमा-धवार्चितं वरं
ह्युमा-धवं सुमाधवी-सुभूषितं महागुरुम् ॥ २ ॥

गुरुं गिरीन्द्र-धन्विनं गुह-प्रियं गुहाशयं
गिरि-प्रियं नग-प्रिया-समन्वितं वर-प्रदम् ।
सुर-प्रियं रवि-प्रभं सुरेन्द्र-पूजितं प्रभुं
नरेन्द्र-पीठ-दायकं नमाम्यहं महेश्वरम् ॥ ३ ॥

महेश्वरं सुरेश्वरं धनेश्वर-प्रियेश्वरम्
वनेश्वरं विशुद्ध-चित्त वासिनं परात्परम् ।
प्रमत्तवेष-धारिणं प्रकृष्ट-चित्स्वरूपिणं
विरुद्ध-कर्म-कारिणं सुशिक्षकं स्मराम्यहम् ॥ ४ ॥

स्मराम्यहं स्मरान्तकं मुरारि-सेविताङ्घ्रिकं
परारि-नाशन-क्षमं पुरारि रूपिणं शुभम् ।
स्पुअरत्-सहस्र-भानु-तुल्य तेजसं महौजसं
सु-चण्डिकेश पूजितं मृडं समाश्रये सदा ॥ ५ ॥

सदा प्रहृष्ट-रूपिणं सतां प्रहर्ष-वर्षिणं
भिदा विनाश-कारण प्रमाणगोचरं परम् ।
मुदा प्रवृत्त-नर्तनं जगत्पवित्र-कीर्तनं

निदानमेकमद्भुतं नितान्तमाश्रयेह्यहम् ॥ ६ ॥

अहं-ममादि दूषणं महेन्द्र-रत्न-भूषणं
महा-वृषेन्द्र-वाहनं ह्यहीन्द्र-भूषणान्वितम् ।
वृषाकपि-स्वरूपिणं मृषा-पदार्थ-धारिणं
मृकण्डूसूनु संस्तुतं ह्यभीतिदं नमामि तम् ॥ ७ ॥

नमामि तं महामतिं नतेष्टदान-चक्षणं
नतार्ति-भञ्जनोद्यतं नगेन्द्र-वासिनं विभुम् ।
अगेन्द्रजा समन्वितं मृगेन्द्र विक्रमान्वितं
खगेन्द्र-वाहन-प्रियं सुखस्वरूपमव्ययम् ॥ ८ ॥

सुकल्पकाम्बिका-पति-प्रियंत्वदं मनोहरं
सुगूडकाञ्चिरामकृष्ण योगिशिष्य संस्तुतम् ।
महाप्रदोष पुण्यकाल कीर्तनात्शुभप्रदं
भजामहे सदामुदा कपालि मङ्गलाष्टकम् ॥ ९ ॥

कपालि तुष्टिदायकं महापदि प्रपालकं
त्वभीष्ट-सिद्धि-दायकं विशिष्ट-मङ्गलाष्टकम् ।
पठेत्सुभक्तितः कपालि सन्निधौ क्रमात्
अवाप्य सर्वमायुरादि मोदते सुमङ्गलम् ॥ १० ॥

इति गूडलूर् श्रीरामकृष्णानन्द यतीन्द्र शिष्य
श्री रामचन्द्रेण विरचितं
॥ श्री कपालीश्वराष्टकं सम्पूर्णम् ॥

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