

VAIKAM AND ITS FAMOUS TEMPLE

THE temple at Vaikam, dedicated to Mahadeva, is famous all over India and has attracted devotees from very ancient times. Situated on the eastern shore of the Vembanad Lake it is typical of the Kerala style of temple architecture. If you enter Travancore from Cochin you could travel to Vaikam either by backwater in a steam or motor launch or by road. From the landing place you could catch glimpses of the glittering golden flag-staff in front of the shrine.

The name of Vaikam became prominent in newspapers when a Satyagraha campaign was launched in 1924 to throw open the roads round the temple to the Avarna Hindus to whom they were closed. It was an humble enough demand to make but was the precursor of the movement for temple-entry which has come to such happy fruition in Travancore to-day.

Installed by Khara

The installation of the deity at Vaikam is attributed to the Rakshasa Khara. It is said that Khara, an ardent devotee of Siva, was doing *tapas* at the Chidambaram temple when Nataraja, pleased with his devotion, revealed himself to him and gave him three *lingams* enjoining him to install and consecrate them at such places as he deemed fit. Khara carried them one in his right hand, the other in his left hand, and the third tucked underneath his chin and pressed against the neck. He travelled southwards, but arriving at the place now called Vaikam felt the *lingam* in his right hand to be so unbearably heavy that he dropped it. When he tried to lift it up again he could not. Presently he heard a disembodied voice from the heavens tell him not to worry about the matter and ask him to install the

remaining *lingams* further south at places a league apart. Khara acted as the divine voice bade him do, and the places where he installed the second and third *lingams* are to day known as Ettumanoor and Kaduthuruthi.

The name Vaikam is the corrupted form of the original Vyaghrapadapuram or the city of Vyaghrapada, so called because the sage Vyaghrapada, a contemporary of Khara, and one of the greatest Siva Bhaktas worshipped the deity installed by Khara, till the end of his days when he attained final realization.

Construction of Temple

The temple at Vaikam is said to have been constructed by Parasurama who found the sacred *lingam* submerged in shallow water on the shore of the lake and selecting a piece of elevated ground, a few yards off, removed the deity to that spot and built a temple there. Parasurama is said to have stayed here for one whole year performing the ceremony of *Sahasrakalagam* and feeding daily a number of Brahmins. The tradition established by Parasurama at Vaikam of performing *Sahasrakalagam* and feeding the Brahmins daily is continued even to this day, the devotees defraying the expenses in satisfaction of vows previously made. The ceremonies which last 12 days and the sumptuous feasts that accompany them cost many thousands of rupees. Several *Sahasrakalagams* are performed by the Royal House of Travancore in the course of the year.

Sahasrakalagam

The *pooja* in connection with this ritual is performed by the *Tantri* (officiating priest) on the *mandap* in front of the *sanctum sanctorum*. He sits in front of a

golden pot surrounded by a hundred silver pots, all filled with holy water, and utters along with other learned priests sacred *mantras*. The pots are then taken into the *sanctum sanctorum* to the accompaniment of loud chanting of hymns, beating of drums and singing of songs and the water in them poured over the image. On the twelfth day of the *Sahasrakalasam*, *pooja* is conducted from morn till eve in the temple of Subrahmanya (Son of Mahadeva) at Udayanapuram, two miles north of Vaikam. A sumptuous feast is also held.

Ashtami Festival

The Vaikam temple is noted for two Ashtami festivals held annually, one in the month of Kumbhom (February-March) and the other in the month of Vrischigom (November-December). The latter festival is the more important and the last one came off on the 8th December. A vast concourse of pilgrims and devotees come to Vaikom to have *darshan* of Lord Mahadeva on the Ashtami day. These festivals are celebrated in commemoration of the fact that Siva appeared to the Sage Vyaghrapada and granted him the boons he desired, at day-break on the *Ashtami* or eighth day after full moon.

On the festival day the image of the deity is taken in procession on the back of a beautifully caparisoned elephant, while several elephants also magnificently caparisoned form an escort. The procession goes the usual rounds to the accompaniment of music, drums and cymbals. In addition to the procession, *bharata natya* and music performances are given and religious discourses held.

The Procession

At night a grand procession starts from the temple of Subrahmanya at Udayanapuram and joins the procession at Vaikam. Mahadeva and Subrahmanya, Father and

Son, meet and greet each other and then part, to meet again on the next Ashtami day.

The parting scene is a very impressive one. The two elephants bearing the images of the two Gods stand facing each other. A conch is sounded as the parting call and the elephant carrying the image of Mahadeva lifts its trunk on high as though in blessing. The two elephants then go one behind the other a few yards in the direction of Udayanapuram. The conch sounds once more and Mahadeva's elephant raises his trunk again, and does so thrice. It then returns while Subrahmanya proceeds to his own temple.

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of preservation and transport are not improved, it is probable that fish caught and frozen or canned on up-to-date lines elsewhere might find better sale in our highlands than our fish.

In his inaugural address, before the Travancore University Union, Sachivottama Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar observed that India had always lagged behind the nations of Europe and America by at least 50 years. He quoted the opinion of British scientists that if Britain were to maintain her position in the post-war world and carry out her plans for reconstruction and social betterment, scientific research and application of scientific knowledge should be promoted on a far bolder and more imaginative scale than in 1919—1939, and added that this applied with greater force to India. Sustained and strenuous efforts are needed to bridge the wide gulf that now separates us from other progressive nations and to keep us abreast of them in the keen competition that is ahead.

"Freedom from Want" implies the successful application of the best and the latest that science has revealed and experience has taught to all nation-building activities—industry, agriculture, education and public health.



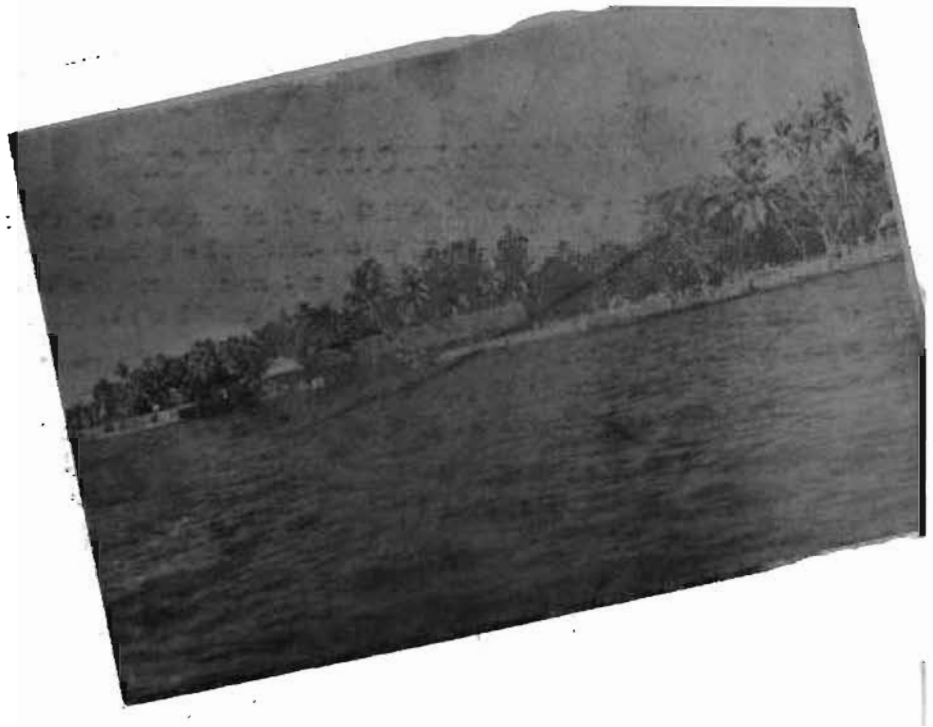
ASHTAMI CELEBRATIONS AT VAIKAM

Above is a picture of the procession from Udayanapuram. Below is the main entrance to the shrine of Siva at Vaikam.



VIEWS OF VAIKAM

In spite of restrictions on traffic several thousands of pilgrims from all over India witnessed the recent Ashtami celebrations at Vaikam. Beside is a view of the boat jetty, which handled a considerable volume of the pilgrim traffic coming via Brunnalam and Alleppey.



Below is a view of the western entrance to the Vaikam Temple.

