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Thimithi Festival

Thimithi also known as Theemidhi and Theemithi, is a very popular fire walking festival especially celebrated among Hindus. The festival is believed to have originated from Southern India, that is celebrated during the month of Aipasi (or Aippasi) of the Tamilian calendar. Legend has it that Draupadi had to prove her innocence and fidelity by walking barefoot over hot coals. This ceremony is a form of penance or thanksgiving in honour of the goddess Draupadi, heroine of Mahabharata.



The Hindu fire-walking festival is celebrated at Sri Mariamman Temple in October. Crowds pack the Sri Mariamman Temple on South Bridge road, to watch the barefoot Hindu devotees walk across a pit of red-hot embers without showing any signs of pain. Festival celebrations begin at 2am and the fire walking takes place at 5pm.

Legend

Draupadi is a heroine of the epic poem Mahabharata, a princess whose husband lost her in a game of dice with his cousin, Duryodhana. Lord Krishna came to her rescue, but to add insult to injury her husband questioned her purity when she was returned, so to prove her innocence she walked across burning coals.

It is in honour of Draupadi's courage that devotees subject themselves to a test of faith by walking barefoot across a four-metre red-hot coal pit. In defiance of the intense heat, firewalkers focus in deep concentration to complete the challenge miraculously unscathed. Fire walking is also regarded as a test of purity for Draupadi's devotees. It is said that if a devotee is not pure, he or she will fail the test and be burnt.

Celebrations

Thimithi is held in the month of Aipasi, which is between the solar months of October and November. The fire walking usually begins around 4am and a priest is the first to brave the long pit of embers, followed by other devotees. The ritual attracts several thousand participants and even more spectators, many of whom wait long hours to witness relatives or friends perform. After walking over the hot coals, the devotees wade through a pit filled with goat's milk, and then rub their feet with yellow powdered turmeric. The result is that the ground around the area of the temple is stained with yellow.

Events

According to the Gregorian calendar, it is celebrated in the months of October November. There are many events apart from the traditional coal walking ceremony that is performed during this festival of Thimithi. One of the very interesting parts of the Thimithi ceremonies is the enactment of scenes from Mahabharata by many devotees and drama troupes.

A grand prayer session is held to offer prayers to Periyachi, who is one of the most important deities of Meriyamman's community. This prayer session is especially to ask for the goddess's blessings so that no mishap occurs during the festival celebration.

Devotees also perform a grand wedding ceremony of Arjuna and Draupadi on this day. A night before the final day Thimithi festival, a red hot bed of embers is prepared that is kept hot throughout the Festival day. Generally, the ceremony of fire-walking stretches for about 4-5 hours.

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