



Dear Yagya Friends,

Every fall, we celebrate the nine nights of the divine mother; Navaratri. It is one of the biggest and most elaborate events that we organize and the priests in Kanchipuram invest extra time and effort to make this series successful.

The first three days are devoted to the powerful form of Durga (Kali) who destroys ignorance and removes obstacles to on-going success.

The second three days is devoted to Lakshmi who is the source of all abundance, light, and happiness.

The final three days are devoted to Saraswati, the goddess of enlightenment, wisdom, and learning.

The tenth day is celebrated as Vijaya Dashami - the day of victory which celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and enlightenment over ignorance.

Also, as a part of the program we perform the Suvasini/Kanya Puja; honoring women at various stages of life from young girls through adulthood as living embodiment of the divine feminine.

Enjoy the photos!

Ben Collins



Navaratri Yagya Series - Kanchipuram

Preparation and Ganesha Yagya



The first day of the Navaratri Yagya series is devoted to Ganesha, to remove all obstacles to the successful completion of the series. We decided to make 1008 offerings of fruit into the yagya fire. It is an impressive amount of fruit!



The Vedas consider fire (Agni) to be the link between earth and the heavenly realms. It takes a lot of wood to keep the yagya fire burning non-stop for ten days...and this is only the first delivery.



The variety of fruit that the priests obtained for the yagya is amazing.



Ganesha Yagyas are always happy and enjoyable to perform. Everyone is looking forward to the next 10 days.



The yagya program required a lot of wood, and the fire was still “eating” the fruit the next morning.



Each day begins with the Daily Yagya Program and the Rudra Abishekam. During the Navaratri series, we include a very large Chandi (Durga) yantra as seen in the upper right photo. A yantra is a geometric representation of the deity and is considered to hold and radiate the energy of the puja and yagya mantras.



The final hymns and mantras are sung at the end of the pujas and daily yagya and then it is time to begin the Chandi Havan.



We are fortunate to have two of the most senior pundits from the Shankar Mutt who supervise the recitations and who also spent extra time reciting the Vedas during each of the nine days. They are very strict and insist on every last detail being absolutely perfect.



After the Rudra Abishekam, a complete Chandi havan is performed with the recitation of all 700 verses of the Chandi Path (Durga Saptashati), which tells the story of Durga and which is also a long-form mantra. There are a huge number of offerings; flowers, coconuts, ghee, puffed rice, betel leaves, cloves, and various seeds, leaves, bark, sticks, and dried herbs.



The offerings are made continuously throughout the recitation of the Chandi Path mantra. The priests begin at 7 AM and conclude the havan between 1 PM and 2 PM for nine consecutive days. They return in the evening for an additional Chandi Path recitation and a recitation of the Lalitha Sahasranam.



The fire is always very dramatic, with the flames and smoke being fed by all the offerings.



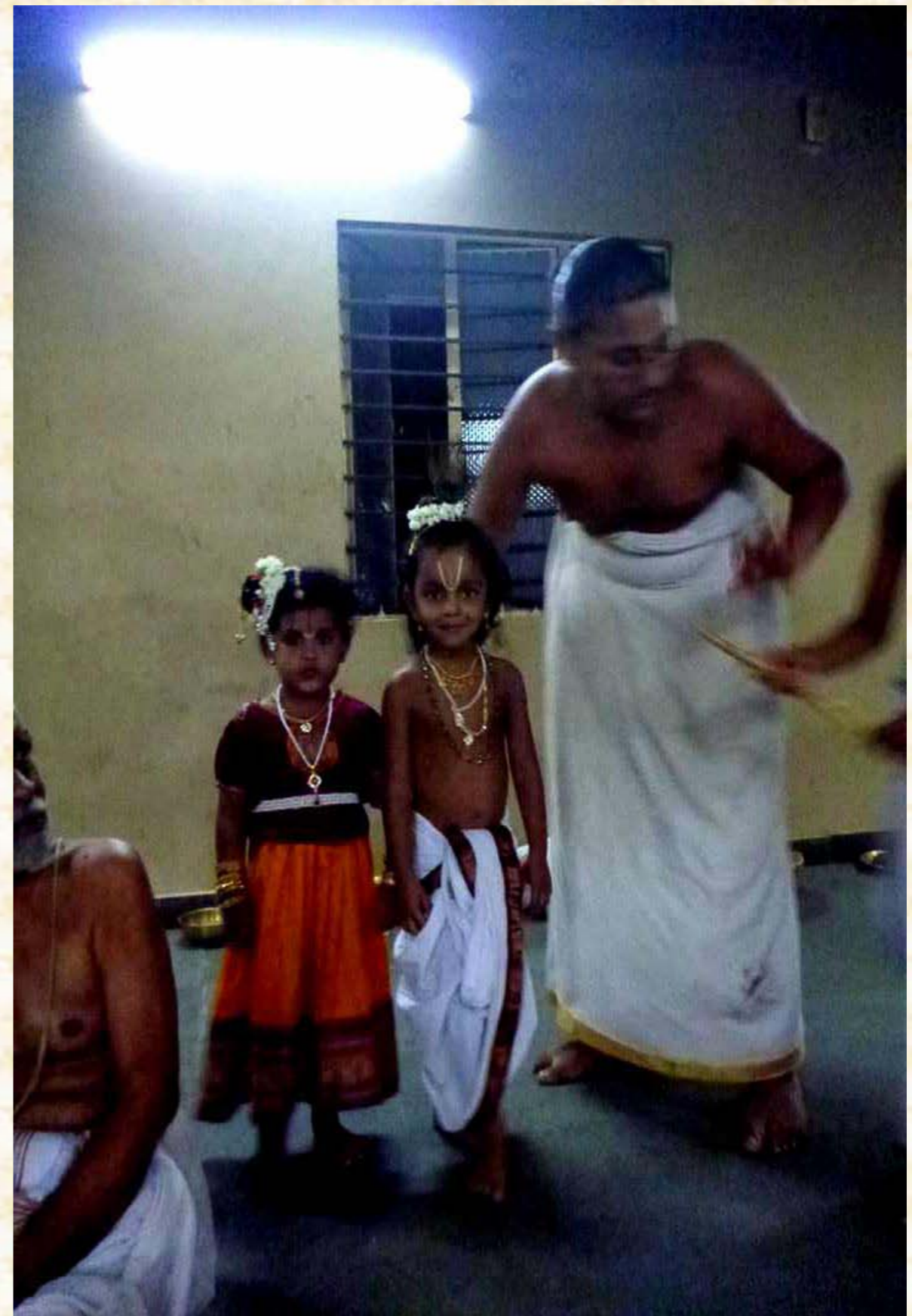
The final offerings at the conclusion of the Chandi havan are a nice end to a long day. Various ingredients are wrapped in a cotton cloth and then placed in the fire while the final mantras are recited. Here you can see the offering for each of the first eight days. The final day is extra elaborate, as you will see in the following pages.



The nighttime program includes a recitation of Lalitha Sahasranam, the 1000 names (mantras) of the most beautiful and gentle form of the divine mother. While this being chanted, Seetharam performs a milk and sandalwood abishekam on the big Chandi yantra.



Throughout the Navaratri program, the tradition is to offer special gifts to women, young and old, in recognition of the divine feminine within.



Everyone gets dressed up to receive their gifts and an enjoyable time is had by all.



On the last day, the preparations are more elaborate because there will be more frequent offerings as the Chandi Path is recited. Each year we make a special purchase of 108 specific ingredients so that the yagya is performed in the most traditional manner.



The final Chandi Havan looks powerful and inviting.





Traditionally, the final offering for Navaratri is a beautiful red silk sari which is fed into the sacred yagya fire.





*“Roaring repeatedly along the path of truth and dharma, may you shine as the banner of immortality.
May you send forth your voice while sages are chanting hymns of praise.”*

-Rig Veda