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CHENNAI CAMPUS

MYSTERIOUS TEMPLES IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION



India is a country of many religions and many a belief when it comes to worship! Idol worship in Hindu temples is common and normal; however, there are some strange and mysterious temples of India which stand out. Labelling India as a 'country of temples' won't be wrong. It is the only destination in the entire world that believes in the existence of 33 million gods and goddesses. You can calculate yourself that even if there are two temples dedicated to each god, how many temples we must be surrounded by! All these temples come with their own history, legend and mythology, while some of these have interesting mysteries associated with them. You will come across various unconventional temples where deities mensurate, and some temples even have exorcism rights! The strange mysteries surrounding these temples is what makes them interesting. Let's have a look at these.

Temples:

1. Malanada Duryodhana Temple:



The deities in temples are generally worshiped for their good deeds. How about if I told you, there is a temple in Kerala that worships the evil

Yes it is a fact! The Kaurava king (Duryodhana) and cousin of the Pandavas is worshiped at the Malanada temple.

Temples Legendary Connection:

As per the legend, a tired Duryodhana hot in pursuit behind the Pandavas stopped here. Being thirsty, he was fed water and food by an old man of the Kuruva tribe. Even though the old man was of a lower caste, Duryodhana hugged him and thanked him for his kindness.

Duryodhana promised the old man that he would return and meet him post the war of Kurukshetra. Although Duryodhana was killed during the battle; he still kept up the promise by coming in the old man's dream. Considering the affection shown by Duryodhana, the old man regarded him as God and began meditating near a banyan tree.

Apart from a platform, there exists no form of idol in the temple. Till date the priest of the temple is from the Kuruva tribe. Strange as it sounds today is the ritual offering to Duryodhana!

If you thought, this temple might be an exception – you are wrong as there exists another Duryodhana temple in the north of India (Garhwal). This temple is supposedly even bigger and has a different legendary tale! The inhabitants here believe they are the descendants of both the Pandavas and Kauravas.

The belief is, the ancestors of the inhabitants fought on the side of Duryodhana in the war of Kurukshetra. Hence by worshiping Duryodhana, they are indirectly respecting their ancestors!

2.Koothandavar Temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Koothandavar temple dedicated to Iravan/Aravan in Koovagam

Did you know about a temple in India where transgenders are welcomed and respected?

This temple is ‘Koothandavar temple’ in Koovagam village, Tamil Nadu; where an 18 day festival is celebrated in the months of April and May. During this time transgenders congregate at this temple. There is an interesting reason why, which is explained below...

Temples Mythological Connection:

Before the great war of Kurukshetra, Sahadeva the youngest of the Pandavas suggested a human sacrifice to be made to Goddess Kali. This sacrifice would impress Kali and ensure a victory over the Kauravas.

The Pandavas recognized its importance; however, they were not ready to sacrifice either their brothers or sons. It was then, Iravan (Aravan) the son of Arjuna’s fourth wife (Ulupi) came forward for the sacrifice. Being a son, this self-sacrifice was unacceptable to Pandavas and Krishna, but they finally agreed to Iravan. How

Preconditions set by Iravan:

1. To marry before his sacrifice
2. Watch the battle of Kurukshetra after his sacrifice
3. Die a heroic's death like a Kshatriya in the battlefield

The first precondition was tricky; as no father would agree to get his daughter married knowing her husband would die the next day. With no one ready; Krishna decides to take the form of 'Mohini' to marry Iravan.

Mohini marries Iravan thus fulfilling the first precondition set by Iravan. The sacrifice of Iravan takes place the next day; Mohini (Krishna) wails for her husband like a widow would before returning to his true form.

Because of the above legend, transgenders considered as a man in a woman's body play the role of the bride (like Krishna) in the Koovagam festival here. There is a pageant show to select the most beautiful transgenders to marry Iravan.

The last but one day (17th day) of the Koovagam festival covers the enactment of marriage whereby the transgenders dressed as brides are married to Iravan by the priest who ties the chain (mangalsutra) signifying a wedlock.

The final day (18th day) of the Koovagam festival covers the enactment of the sacrifice of Iravan. Post the sacrifice, the transgenders wail for their husband's death in a white saree by cutting their chain (mangalsutra) and breaking their bangles.

Krishna also addressed the remaining two preconditions set by Iravan:

- Placing the severed head of Iravan over the hill enabling him to watch the battle of Kurukshetra
- Reforming Iravan into a human to die a heroic's death battling demon Alambusha on the battlefield

3. Muthappan temple:



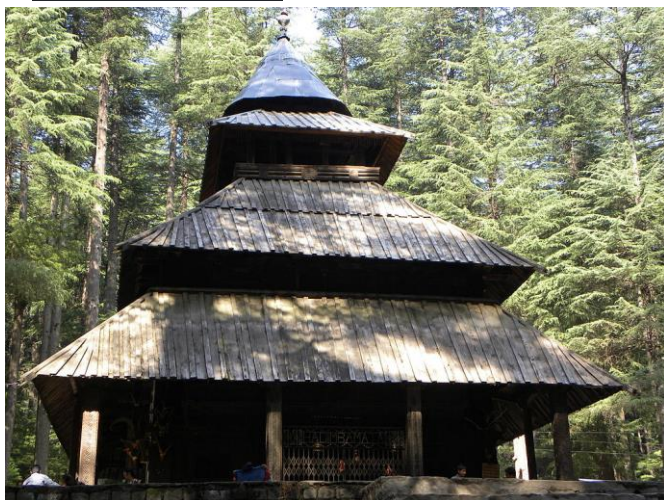
Mysterious Temples of India – Muthappan Temple in Kannur which doesn't follow Brahminical traditions

Located in Kannur district in Kerala, this temple is dedicated to Shree Muthappan considered to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva.

Interestingly Muthappan is always accompanied by a dog; hence you will see a couple of statues of dogs at the temple entrance. You can see dogs not only inside the temple but even in the main temple area!

Unlike other Hindu temples, this temple doesn't follow the Brahminical traditions. Devotees offer fish and toddy at this temple. This temple is open to people of all faith and religion. Devotees receive boiled green grams and tea in the form of prasadam.

4.Hidimba temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Hidimba temple dedicated to Bheem's wife in Manali

If you are visiting Manali, the 'Hidimba temple' is certainly one of the places of attraction which you must not miss. Built in 1553 by Maharaja Bahadur Singh, this wooden three-storeyed structure looks solid despite many centuries passing by. This temple has many sacrificial heads of animals such as goats, antelopes etc...

Temples Legendary Connection:

Like all other temples, there is a legend behind this one too! Escaping the assassination attempt by Duryodhana, the Pandavas walked into the Kamyaka forest where demons Hidimb and sister Hidimba resided. On learning about this, Hidimb ordered his sister to kill the Pandavas.

Hidimba transformed herself into a damsel to lure the Pandavas; however, she fell in love with the mighty Bheem! She put forward a marriage proposal to Bheem revealing her true identity and disclosed her brother's plan of having the Pandavas killed.

Bheem accepted the marriage request on one condition; that he would leave them after a child is born. The mighty 'Ghatotkacha' was born out of the wedlock and as agreed Bheem left.

Although being a demon, the local community consider Hidimba as a non-evil person as she protected the region; and hence a temple in her name.

5. Bonbibi temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Bonbibi Temple located in Sunderbans, West Bengal

Situated in a village in the Sunderbans, both Hindus and Muslims offer prayers in this temple. The communities residing here who collect crab, fish and honey hold Bonbibi in high regard. Unlike other temples instead of Brahmin priests, the Muslims and local forest dwellers read the holy script here.

Temples Legendary Connection:

As per the legend, the demon ‘Dokhin Rai’ took the form of a tiger terrorized humans and fed on them. The tigers and spirits of the forest followed him and troubled the villagers. Allah then sent Bonbibi and her brother Shah Jongoli to the island to protect the people from the tigers.

Bonbibi once saved a local shepherd ‘Dukhe’ from the clutches of Dokhin Rai. She agrees not to kill Dokhin Rai after he agrees to stop letting tigers kill humans. Due to the belief that Bonbibi can save people from tigers, she is considered as the Goddess of the forest!

Local dwellers pray at the Bonbibi temple before venturing into the forest to collect honey or fish. The belief is; Bonbibi will protect them from the clutches of the tiger and ensure the safe return. Bonbibi is often seen sitting on a tiger (Dokhin Rai) with her brother Shah Jongoli and Dukhe beside.

6.Harsiddhi temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Harisiddhi temple built by Jagadu Shah, a Jain merchant

Located 30 kms from Porbandar enroute Dwaraka, this temple is one of the 51 Shakti Peethas in India. Dedicated to Goddess Durga and Kali; ‘Harisiddhi temple’ is the ancestral deity to various communities.

Temples Legendary Connection:

As per the legend, Krishna prayed to Goddess Amba (Durga) for her blessings to defeat the demons led by Jarasandha. After defeating the demons, in its recognition Krishna built this temple for ‘Goddess Amba’ on top of the hill. This temple is where the Yadava community rejoiced on the killing of Jarasandha. No form of worship is permissible in the temple anymore.

Jagadu Shah – the Jain Merchant

Jagadu Shah, a Jain merchant by profession traded in spices, cotton and grains. He had many ships which traveled to Africa, Arabia and Persia as a part of the trade. As the temple was located on the hill overlooking the creek; the belief was whenever the eyes of Goddess Amba fell on his ships that passed by, they would be wrecked or burnt. Because of this Jagadu lost many ships and he went on to fast in the temple for many days to appease the Goddess. On the Goddess making an appearance, Jagadu requests her to descend the hill. The Goddess agrees to the request on one condition that he sacrifices a buffalo at every step! This was much against the tradition of Jainism but he still goes ahead. On falling short by a few steps, he ends up sacrificing himself and family. Jagadu’s devotion impresses the Goddess and she brings him back to life. She gives him a boon that he will remain associated with the temple for ever. In 1300 AD Jagadu set up the temple at the bottom of the hill; as per the boon along with the idol of the Goddess one can see the idol of Jagadu as well .

7.Nishkalank Mahadev temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Nishkalank Mahadev Temple where Pandavas prayed to Lord Shiva, Bhavnagar PC: Kaushik Patel

Located at about 25 kms away from Bhavnagar at Koliyak beach lies the ‘Nishkalank Mahadev temple’.

Dedicated to Lord Shiva and located in the sea; the high tide submerges the temple and emerges when the water recedes in the low tide.

There are 5 Swayambu lingas with Nandi’s (bull) facing it over the platform. This temple dates back to the period when the Pandavas defeated the Kauravas in the battle of Kurukshetra. It is still a mystery how the platform with lingas have weathered the test of time. Located 2 kms in the sea, the devotees can reach the temple by either boat or by walk.

Temples Legendary Connection:

As the legend goes, the Pandavas were under a lot of distress after killing their relatives (Kauravas) in the Kurukshetra war. To seek forgiveness, Krishna hands them a black cow and flag. He asks the Pandavas to follow the cow until both the cow and flag turn white. Krishna also advises them to offer penance to Lord Shiva post which.

As advised by Krishna the Pandavas keep following the cow. After walking many days, the cow and flag finally turn white at Koliyak beach. As suggested, the Pandavas offer penance to Lord Shiva asking for forgiveness. Impressed with their devotion, a Swayambu linga appeared in front of each Pandava. Due to this, this temple gets its name as ‘Nishkalank’ meaning pure, clean of any guilt; with ‘Mahadev’ being another name for Lord Shiva. Devotees arriving at the temple platform wash their hands and feet at the Pandavas pond before visiting the shrines.

8.Karni Mata Temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Karni Mata Temple in Bikaner, Rajasthan where rats are considered sacred

Located near Bikaner, this temple is famous for the thousands of rats that roam around the temple. Built in marble and in Mughal style; one must visit this temple before sunrise or after dusk to see the rats in action!

The devotees come and feed the rats milk, grains, sweets and coconut shells kept in large plates. They keep the offerings at the corners of the temple where the rats flock.

Eating food nibbled by rats is holy! It is also holy if a rat goes over your leg or if you see a white rat – who are only 4-5 in number. Killing a rat invokes a severe penalty; the penalty being a silver or golden rat offering!

Temples Legendary Connection:

This temple dates back to the 14th century and dedicated to Karni Mata; considered an incarnation of Goddess Durga. On the death of her step-son (Laxman), Karni Mata requests Lord Yama (the God of death) to reinstate him back to life. Yama refuses to do so; however impressed by her devotion he agrees to reincarnate Laxman and all of Karni Mata's sons as rats! Hence rats are considered holy, fed well and respected in this temple.

9. Bullet Baba Temple:



Mysterious Temples of India – Shrine dedicated to a Bullet Motorcycle located about 50 kms from Jodhpur

People in Southern India worship vehicles and tools on the festival of Ayudh Pooja. The custom being to respect the instruments that matter in our life.

That said, how does a temple for a motorcycle sound? Very strange isn't it?

Located 50 kms from Jodhpur, this temple has the Bullet Enfield motorcycle cased in a glass. People stop by and offer bottles of alcohol, garlands, threads and bangles.

Temples Legendary Connection:

As per the legend, the local leader's son – Om Singh Rathore met with an accident when his motorcycle hit the tree. The accident being fatal, Om Singh Rathore also known as *Om Banna* passed away. The police confiscated the motorcycle only to find it back in the exact spot the next day!

Thinking it's a prank, the police emptied the petrol tank and chained the motorcycle. To their surprise, it was found unchained and in the same spot where the accident happened.

On learning about this miracle, the villagers built a shrine for the bullet motorcycle and its owner. Motorcyclists and drivers who pass the shrine stop by and pay respect by either offering liquor or sprinkling it on the statue of Rathore.

Women pray to Om Banna asking him to protect their husbands when they are on the road. They instead offer bangles, threads and colourful cloths.

LEARNING OUTCOME

Upon completion of this research project, I learned a lot about mysterious temples in India. This is one of the wonderful projects that I have done so far.

India is the land of 64 crore god and goddesses, with a multitude of holy cities and shrines of spiritual gurus to a motorcycle. Here, temples can be found at every step of the way, but only some of them are odd, strange, weird or unusual in one way or another. Some of these mysterious temples of India are famed because of their unconventional deities, some because of their exorcism rites, and some because they are more than 2000 years old.

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