

# Mangalagiri

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I seek blessings of Lord Krishna and His devotees for successfully completing the task of writing this small article about the holy place called ‘Mangalagiri’. Currently my spiritual journey is going through a lot of turbulence. Although I have acquired some theoretical knowledge about spiritual teachings, I find myself totally unsuccessful in applying it in my day to day life. In such a situation, it is really hard to find the complete satisfaction and peace in one’s life. I think Lord Krishna saw my awkward situation and mercifully decided to give me a glimpse of a hundred percent spiritual experience. This golden opportunity came to me when devotees of Lord Krishna invited me for a pilgrimage to Vijayawada, Mangalagiri and Machalipatnam.

Out of these holy places, Mangalagiri is a home of two very ancient temples of Lord’s half-man-half-lion incarnation Narasimha. Historical events that took place in Mangalagiri do not date back just to few hundred or few thousands of years. Like many other holy places in India, the history of this place goes back into the ancient times of the *Satya Yuga*<sup>1</sup>. The only source of authentic information about the events hidden so deep in the past are the ancient historical records of India collectively known as *Purana Samhita*, organized in eighteen main books and many smaller books. The description of Mangalagiri can be found in the books such as *Skanda Purana* and *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*. In the following paragraphs, I will try to tell you about how this hill came into existence and how Lord Narasimha appeared on this hill.

In the *Satya Yuga*, there was a prince named ‘Hrishya Shringi’. His father, king Pariyatra, was very displeased with the prince because of his physical deformities. To get rid of his deformities, the prince decided to secretly leave home and perform penances. The prince chose a holy place called Pradita Ashrama on the banks of Krishna river to perform austerities. When the king came to know about his son’s odd behavior, he decided to bring the prince back to home. When the prince realized that his father is coming for him, he composed many prayers to please their Lordship Lakshmi-Narayana and requested them to appear before him in the form of Lakshmi-Narasimha. Pleased by the prayers of Hrishya Shringi, Lord Narasimha and mother Lakshmi awarded their presence to the prince. The prince requested Lord to stay in this place eternally to bless others. For the same purpose, the prince transformed himself into an elephant and then into the hill which is now Mangalagiri. Since then Lord Narasimha along with mother Lakshmi stay there. As prince Hrishya Shringi composed many songs (*Stotra*) to please the Lord and convince Him to reside in this place, this hill is also called as Stotradri. When we look at this hill, we will see that it has a shape of a sitting elephant.

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<sup>1</sup>According to Vedic time, four ages named Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga(the current age) appear one after another in the cyclic manner. The time duration of the Satya yuga is 1,728,000 solar years. The last Satya Yuga started 3,893,000 years ago and ended 2,165,000 years ago.

Another important event that took place on this hill is the death of demon Namuchi by the *Sudarshan Chakra*<sup>2</sup> of Lord Narasimha. Demon Namuchi was a cruel son of sage Kashyapa. He undertook the performance of the great austerities in order to become powerful. Due to his penance, the huge amount of heat and fire started to flow out from his body. The living entities as well as demigods were disturbed by this fire. When the chief of the demigods named Indra went to Brahma<sup>3</sup> to solve the problem created by Namuchi's fire, Brahma agreed to appease Namuchi by granting him a boon in order to stop his austerities. When Brahma appeared before Namuchi, Namuchi asked that he should not be killed by anything that is either dry or wet. Brahma had to grant this boon. After becoming almost immortal in this way, demon Namuchi started to harass demigods. As demigods could not harm Namuchi in any way, all of them took shelter of Lord Vishnu and requested Him to devise a way by which Namuchi could be killed.

Lord Vishnu assured the demigods and told them that when proper time arrives, he will make sure that Namuchi is killed. He also asked Indra to destroy Namuchi's army. Then Lord Vishnu, in his form of Narasimha dipped his *Sudarshan Chakra* into foam (which is considered neither dry nor wet) and gave it to Indra. Lord Narasimha Himself was present at the center of *Sudarshan Chakra*. Indra sent this *Sudarshan Chakra* to kill the demon. When Namuchi saw Lord's weapon coming to kill him, he gave up his physical form and went into a cave for protecting himself. *Sudarshan Chakra* followed Namuchi into the cave and killed him.

After killing the demon Namuchi, Lord Narasimha was still in extremely angry mood. All the demigods were fearful of this form of Lord Narasimha. To please the Lord and calm Him down, demigods offered a pot of nectar to Lord Narasimha. Lord Narasimha drank half of the nectar and was satisfied. At that time, Lord Narasimha told the demigods that in *Satya Yuga*, He will drink half of the nectar offered to Him. In *Treta Yuga*, He will be satisfied by drinking Ghee. In *Dwapar Yuga*, He will be satisfied by drinking milk and in *Kali Yuga*, he will drink half of the *panakam*<sup>4</sup> offered to Him. As currently Kali Yuga is going on, Lord Narasimha drinks thousands of liters of *panakam* every day at Mangalagiri. Because of this reason, the name of Lord Narasimha at Mangalagiri is Panakal or Pana-Narasimha.

The temple of the Pana-Narasimha is situated on the slopes of Mangalagiri. Lord Narasimha is situated in His deity form in the innermost chamber of the temple. Only the face of the Lord is manifested here. The face of the Lord is of metal. Behind His face, there are symbols of conch (*Shankha*) and wheel (*Chakra*). Few dim lights enlighten this small chamber. Before entering the temple, we can purchase the pot of panakam for offering. The priest in the temple allows only few people to see the Lord at a time. We can stand very near to the Lord when the priest is pouring the *panakam* into Lord's mouth using conch shell. The priest can understand when the Lord is satisfied by drinking the *panakam*. When Lord is drinking the *panakam*, we will not hear any sound of water hitting anything. The *panakam* goes into Lord's mouth as if there is no bottom and mysteriously disappears. The remaining drink is given back to the

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<sup>2</sup>One of the weapons of Lord. *Sudarshan Chakra* has a shape of a disc with one thousand spokes. It is not just an ordinary weapon, apart from having a great power, it has a conscious personality.

<sup>3</sup>The secondary creator of the universe. He is born of Lord Vishnu and given all the primary ingredients to carry out further development of universe. Each universe has one Brahma.

<sup>4</sup>A sweet drink consisting of water mixed with jaggery (cane sugar), camphor, cardamom and black pepper. Tastes awesome.

devotees as *prasadam*<sup>5</sup>. Even though there is sweet water everywhere in the temple, it is very interesting that we will not find a single ant or fly inside and in the area of the temple.

From the temple of Lord Narasimha, there are few steps going up the hill which lead us to the shrines of Lakshmi Devi, Lord Venkateshwara as well as Hanuman. Mangalagiri is a special place of Hanuman who is the great devotee of Lord in His form as Ramachandra. After the battle of Ramayana was over, Lord Rama asked Hanuman to stay at Mangalagiri and after obtaining blessings, stay in this world till the end. Therefore Hanuman is maintainer and guardian (*kshetrapalaka*) of Mangalagiri. On the left side of the shrine of mother Lakshmi Devi, we will find a cave. This cave is a secret way to the caves of Undavalil but currently the cave is very dark and it may not be possible to reach the other end of the way through this cave. In the ancient times, the sages used this way to regularly visit Krishna river for taking the holy bath.

When we reach Mangalagiri, we notice a huge *gopuram*<sup>6</sup> at the base of Mangalagiri. This *gopuram* belongs to another temple of Lord Narasimha which is situated in Mangalagiri town. Before going up the hill we can visit this temple. During the times of Mahabharata, Pandava brothers visited Mangalagiri when they were in exile. Because the form of Lord Narasimha situated on the slopes of Mangalagiri was *ugra* (very angry) and less accessible to people in general, they established another temple of Lord Lakshmi-Narasimha at the base of Mangalagiri so that people can very easily worship the Lord. Therefore this temple is more than five thousand years old. The outer parts of the temple as well as eleven story high *gopuram* were constructed by later kings and administrators. The deity of Lord Narasimha with Lakshmi Devi in this temple is very beautifully decorated with ornaments as well as the garland of 108 *Shalagram Shilas*<sup>7</sup>. There is another separate shrine of Lakshmi Devi established by the King of Vijayanagar, Krishnadevaraya, who was disciple of the great spiritual master Ramanujacharya. This form of Lakshmi Devi is extremely beautiful and well decorated.

There are around six hundred steps leading to the temple of Pana-Narasimha on Mangalagiri hill. On this stairway, we can see a shrine which displays the footprints of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who visited Mangalagiri during His south India pilgrimage in year 1512. It is said that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu ecstatically offered many prayers to Lord Narasimha on Mangalagiri. These footprints are established by Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur in honor of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Another interesting place to see on Mangalagiri is a Milk Tree. This tree is considered to be non-different from the great sage Narada Muni. The history behind this tree is as follows. When a king name Shashibindu was visiting the different holy places, he met Narada Muni on Mangalagiri. During their meeting, the king told sage Narada that he is tired of running behind worldly pleasures and is seeking transcendental happiness. Narada Muni advised the king to perform austerities at Mangalagiri and the king agreed. The queen considered the instruction given by Narada Muni to be ill-advise. She became furious and cursed the sage to become a Milk Tree (*Kshira Vriksha*) on the hill within the easy reach of devotees, so that it can bless women at its sight with property, children and also purify them of sins committed

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<sup>5</sup>Spiritual food. Food taken after first offering it to the Lord.

<sup>6</sup>Tall ornate towers that mark the entrances of the temple, especially found in south Indian temples.

<sup>7</sup>The sacred stone which is considered as a direct form of Lord Vishnu.

out of ignorance or oversight. Sage Narada did not take it as a curse but as a blessing. He blessed the queen with a happy life with her husband as well as a thousand children. Even today, thousands of women visit and worship this tree for begetting nice children.

There are three things about Mangalagiri which are of geological importance. First, when the *Sudarshan Chakra* of Lord killed demon Namuchi in the cave, a blood that began to flow turned into a stream called Raktakalya. This stream spread into the surrounding area turning the soil's color into red. Today we can see this red soil surrounding the temple. Secondly, it is believed that the hill of Mangalagiri was once a volcano and different offerings to the deity of Lord Narasimha have prevented the volcanic irruption. Lastly the sitting elephant shape of the hill as explained previously with reference to prince Hrishya Shringi. The Mangalagiri is considered as a part of Eastern Ghats of India.

Mangalagiri literally means an auspicious hill. This name is given to this hill because Lord's pleasure potency Lakshmi-Devi performed penances on this hill. This hill is also known as Muktyadri which literally means a hill which grants salvation even to the sinners. Even the chief demigod Indra has advised the residents of heaven to do penance here in order to get liberation from the material bondage. It is said that demigods still attend this temple to offer their own worship to Lord Narasimha. For this reason, the temple is open from morning to afternoon. It is believed that demigods start their worship after noon. Sometimes the priest who opens the temple in the morning finds evidence of this.

My visit to Mangalagiri was a very pleasing exchange of happiness with other devotees. Members of Bhaktivedanta Institute of Bangalore requested me to attend the 76th *Vyaspuja celebration*<sup>8</sup> of His Holiness Bhaktiswaroop Damodar Maharaja (aka Shripad Maharaja) in Mangalagiri. On Friday, 6 December 2013, we first took a bus from Bangalore to Tirupati and then a train from Tirupati to Vijayawada. We reached Vijayawada on Saturday afternoon. Devotees in Vijayawada had arranged a vehicle to take us from Vijayawada to Mangalagiri. In Mangalagiri, we found that our guest house was situated just in front of the huge gopuram of Lakshmi-Narasimha temple. After having bath and lunch, we went to Lakshmi-Narasimha temple to have a wonderful *darshan*<sup>9</sup> of Lord Narasimha and Mother Lakshmi. We also visited a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva which situated nearby.

Next day (Sunday) was full of different activities. In very early morning at 4:30 am, we went to Iskcon Radha-Shyamasundar temple in Vijayawada. After attending a beautiful morning *Aarati*<sup>10</sup> there, we returned to Mangalagiri and went uphill to see Lord Pana-Narasimha. An amazing group of devotees was performing *Sankirtan*.<sup>11</sup> When the temple priest arrived, we had a wonderful and close *darshan* of Lord Narasimha. After drinking *panakam*, and visiting the shrines of Hanuman as well as mother Lakshmi, we came downhill, all the way singing Lord's holy names. Then we attended the Vyaspuja celebration. This celebration consisted of offering worship and words of glorification to the spiritual master and it ended with a wonderful lunch feast. In evening, we visited an orphanage named Shree Krishna Chaitanya Vihar in Vijayawada and performed *Sankirtan* with children. It was my first visit to an orphanage.

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<sup>8</sup>Celebration of spiritual master's birthday by his disciples. This occasion is celebrated even after physical disappearance of the spiritual master.

<sup>9</sup>Seeing the deity in the temple and offering obeisances.

<sup>10</sup>Worship of Lord in the temple by using items such as incense, flowers, lamp, cloth and fragrant liquids etc.

<sup>11</sup>Loudly singing Lord's holy names in group.

On Monday, after taking blessings of Lakshmi-Narasimha in the morning, we left for Machalipatnam which is the home of Lord Panduranga (Krishna).

I have heard that Lord's form as Narasimha is very angry by nature and He expects His devotees to be very strict in following spiritual discipline. But I have also heard that in this fallen age of *Kali*, in which most of the people are not able to follow a proper spiritual discipline, the same Lord Narasimha gives up His angry mood and blesses even those like me who are full of faults. I consider myself very lucky to get blessings of the Lord who resides in Mangalagiri. The spiritual atmosphere of Mangalagiri is very conducive for one's spiritual well-being and its history gives us a faith in our ancient culture. I thank Lord Narasimha, who always blesses and protects His devotees, for allowing me to visit His house in Mangalagiri. I pray to Lord that no matter what happens in my life, let me always remain His humble servant, let me always remain in the company of His devotees.

*Om Tat Sat*

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1. Spiritual India Handbook, Stephen Knapp, Jaico publishers, 2011.
2. [www.mangalagiri.net](http://www.mangalagiri.net)

## **Note**

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Table 1: Article history

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