

3. Ardhanareeswaram

Scene-1:

Owing to sage Kapila's curse, the souls of the by-gone forefathers of Bhaghiratha, the noble one of the Sagara Dynasty, are prevented from reaching the heavens. In order to enable them to reach the heaven, Bhaghiratha goes to great and austere lengths to invoke the heavenly Ganga. Following the lines of traditional dance drama presentations, Ganga introduces herself with a Patra Pravesa Daruvu and exits.

Pleased with the sincerity and steadfastness of Bhaghiratha's penance, Brahma and the other Devas appear before the descending Ganga. The Ganga which is so very all encompassing could wipe out the lofty mountains and dense jungles, causing severe turmoil on the earth.

The Devas, suggest to Bhaghiratha that Lord Shiva is the only competent being in the three worlds who possesses the power to cease the rush and gush of the descending Ganga. After asking Bhaghiratha to resort to winning Shiva's grace and good-will, Brahma and the others take leave.

Scene-2:

In the eternal abode, amidst the lofty peaks of mount Kailasa, Lord Shiva is seen engaged in Thandavam accompanied by his devotees, the Pramadhaganas. Invoking the divine Ganga, Bhaghiratha's chanting of prayers catches the attention of Shiva, who reminds himself of his fond feelings and attractions for Ganga. With an intention to fulfill Bhaghiratha's long cherished dream, of immortality for his forefathers, Shiva proceeds forward to meet Ganga who rushes forth in greater expectancy to reach out to her beloved Shiva and Gangaavataranam takes place.

Scene-3:

Lord Shiva, the ocean of compassion, takes Ganga, who is flowing forth in the form of mighty waves, and places her in his matted locks of hair. This great act of Shiva wins the praise of one and all. Bhaghiratha then humbly requests Shiva to release Ganga to finish her assigned task. Consequently, the Ganga that emerges from Shiva's locks gets divided into seven streams. Three streams: Pavani, Hladini and Nalini flow eastwards, while three others: Suchakshu, Sita and Sindhu flow northwards. The remaining one stream follows Bhaghiratha and directs its course over his ancestor's piles of ashes. Therefore enabling them to attain their desired status in Heaven.

Scene-4:

Meanwhile, Gowri, the consort of Lord Shiva, is seen in the company of her companions to whom she pours out her heart, saying that Lord Shiva, by placing Ganga on his head, has caused her unimaginable insult. After going to Shiva, Gowri's friends reveal to him her agony and agitation. Parameswara, explaining to the adamant Gowri his numerous reasons of placing the Ganga in his locks, receives a deaf ear. Gowri, learning of Shiva's marriage to Ganga, becomes extremely indignant and infuriated. Nonetheless Nandi, Bhrunji and the Pramadhaganas approach Shiva and offer their salutations to him. Gowri, totally shaken and shattered by this sight and the wedding of her beloved Shiva and Ganga, leaves her abode of Kailasa and proceeds to perform penance.

Scene-5:

age Gauthama, in his hermitage, is seen educating his pupils in to the intricacies of the Upanishads. Gowri, a picture of sorrow and humiliation, enters and expresses her displeasure at Kailasa where Lord Shiva humiliated her by placing Ganga on his head, and because Shiva's

devotees did not acknowledge her presence, and bowed and prayed solely to Shiva. Gauthama sympathizes with her, and consoles her by explaining the innocence of Shiva's actions. He places Ganga on his head only to serve Bhaghiratha's purpose and he explains that Ganga is only a very pious lady and not his mistress. He compares this act of Shiva to that in the past when the Lord swallowed the dreaded poison for the protection and preservation of mankind. The sage then suggests the Kedaareswara puja to relieve her of her pain and bestow peace and happiness. Gowri, convinced, performs the puja with heart-felt devotion. Shiva appears before her and acquiesces to her by granting her half of his being. Gowri, repenting for her indifference, accepts the left half of his body with pleasure.

Scene-6:

MeNandi, Bhrungi, Pramadhaganas, Brahma and other divinities offer their salutations to the divine couple-- Parvathi and Parameswara. Then enters ARDHANAREESWARA in the authentic dance drama tradition. The celestials perceive the glory and magnificence of the ARDHANAREESWARA form, which is symbolic of the concept of non-duality or Advaita. They partake in the dance with the Lord and become recipients of his grace and blessings.

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