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INDIA

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Meet Karthikeyan, a third-generation priest

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In the Kaviri delta of South India is Azhagaputhoor, a peaceful village with a small temple over 1,000 years old. Inside, a young priest chants Sri Rudram. It is surprising to see such a young priest doing puja to the Gods. Mr. Kannan from Nachiyar temple, who insisted I visit this temple, told me about this young priest, Karthikeyan, and his devotion. Karthikeyan is a third-generation priest of this temple. Karthikeyan's grandfather, Sri Sundara Gurukkal, was a Vedic scholar who worshiped at the Azhagaputhoor temple for 40 years—his son Ramalinga Gurukkal, for 30 years. As a child, Karthikeyan went to the temple with his father and helped with the pujas, conducting festivals, special pujas and learning everything he could from his father.

Before becoming a priest, Karthikeyan studied at Annamalai University in Chidambaram. He was awarded a bachelor of commerce degree and a diploma in computer operations. When his father passed away, Karthikeyan had to decide whether to work in the city or worship as a priest. It was not an

easy choice for him. After some deliberation, he chose to remain in his village to worship Lord Muruga. He doesn't feel that it's a sacrifice, though being a temple priest in a remote village is not lucrative by any means. He believes it is a privilege to be attached to Azhagaputhoor temple.

The temple has some agricultural land, but unfortunately in the beginning, the farmers didn't pay their rent to the temple. Karthikeyan cleaned the temple and did pujas three times a day and started telling everyone about the temple's glory. He talked about this rare form of Lord Murugan, or Karttikeya, who holds the conch and disc in his hands—usually the markings of Lord Vishnu. He also praised the beauty of Dhakshinamurthi, Lord Siva as the teacher. Word spread and devotees started coming. Now, every day people come from all over to worship Lord Muruga. Karthikeyan's ambition is to renovate this beautiful temple by the end of 2001, with the help of the Gods and ardent devotees.

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