



Thanumalaya Swamy Temple – A Glance

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ABSTRACT

The Thanumalayan Temple, also called Thanumalyan temple is an important Hindu temple located in Suchindram in the Kanyakumari district of TamilNadu. It is one of the 108 Shiva temple revered by Kerala Hindus, even though this temple is in TamilNadu. Thanumalayaswami temple is also called as Suchindrum temple is also called as Suchindum temple 'Thanumalyan the name means Thanu-ShivMal-Vishulayan brahma. This is a 1300 year old temple, it is believed to be located on the places where Indian got purified the name suchi means purify.

Introduction

Suchindrum is a Panchayat town in Kanyakumari district in the Indian state of TamilNadu. It is an important pilgrim center and the site of the famous Thanumalyan temple. There is an Anjaneya, statue which stands at 22 feet and is carved of a single granite block. It is one of the tallest statues of its type in India. Suchindrum is a temple town situated in the southern most district of Kanyakumari in TamilNadu. Suchindrum is a temple situated in the southern most district of Kanyakumari in TamilNadu. It is 11km from Kanyakumari city and 7km from Nagercoil town 105 km from adjacent Tirunelveli district and approximately 81 km from Trivandrum city. The town of Suchindrum is renowned for the Thanumalyan temple and was an important citadel of Travancore.¹

History of the temple

Suchindrum temple is approximately 1300 years old. The temple construction took place over an extended period of at least six hundred years, so parts of the temple date back to the late 8th century. While others are 15th century. The earliest lithic records of Suchindrum belong to the 9th century.² The current temple was built in the 17th century and is famous for its sculptures. It was previously controlled by the Nambudiris, one of the main Nambudiri families called the Thekkumon Madan. The main deity of the temple is lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma in a single form called Sthanumalyan.³

It is interesting to note that during the reign of Aayilyam Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore, a lottery scheme was introduced in 1875 A.D. to raise funds for rebuilding a portion of the temple and a sum of over Rs. 40,000 was realized up till the time. Kanyakumari became part of Tamil Nadu, the Suchindram temple was under the administration of the Travancore Kings.⁴ Travancore at that time had its main temple at Padmanabhapuram, which was Vaishnavite. The Nanjil Pillais and other Community members in Nagercoil were primarily Shavities probably due to influences from the Chola, Chera and the Pandya kingdoms before the advent of Travancore Kingdom. One of the unique aspects of Suchindrum Temple in the presence of deities from all the religious sects are Vaishnava, Shaivite and local Tamil cults like Amman and Kandan.⁵

There are many legends associated with the temple. Anasuya, the wife of Atri Maharishi was famous for her Chasity and her devotion to her husband an embodiment of a Hindu wife. She could perform miracles by sprinkling the "Paathatheertham" (water with which she washed her husband's feet) to bring rain to a parched earth or to transform objects to her desire. When the three deities, goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswathy and Parvathy heard through sage Naradha the powers of earthly women they wanted to test her Chasity.⁶ They approached her husbands lord Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to test Anasuya's devotion to her husband. The three moorthys transformed into three old mendicants and went to the heritage where anasuya was living and sought alms from her. When Anasuya was about to serve them food they told her that they had taken a vow whereby they could not accept alms from a person wearing cloths. As it was a sin to refuse alms to mendicants she prayed to her lord and sprinkled a little "Paathatheertham" on the three old beggars. They were all immediately transformed into babies and throwing off her cloths she offered them food.⁷

The goddesses learning what had happened pleaded with Anasuya to grant them "maankalya biksha" (gift of married life) and to give them back their husbands. Anasuya showed them the three babies. The deities ran to the cradle and picked one baby each. Anasuya then prayed to her lord to restore them back to their original form to and be hold.⁸ Lord Sri Vishnu was in Lakshmi's embrace, Siva in Parvathy's lap and Saraswathy with Brahma. They accepted that Anasuya's fame as the chastest women on earth was justified. Thus the moorthy came to be represented by the Lingam at Suchindrum, the bottom represents Brahma, the middle represents Vishnu and the top Shiva.⁹

This is another lore associated with this temple. Once Indra was infatuated with Ahalya, the wife of Rishi Gautama. One night he came to the hermitage where Gautama was living and crowed like a cock indicating the approach of dawn. Rishi Gautama thinking that dawn was imminent awoke from his sleep and went to the river for his ablutions prior to commencing his prayers. Realising that it was too dark for dawn and too early for morning to break dawn and too early for morning to break he returned to his hut. In the meantime Lord Indra took the physical appearance of Rishi Gautama, approached Ahalya and satisfied his desire.¹⁰ Rishi Gautama returning from the river was enraged when he saw his wife in another man's embrace and cursed the man's entire body be covered with yoni (the female organ) and his wife Ahalya to become a statue of stone. Lord Indra in order to get rid of this curse went to Gananaya and prayed to the three Moorthys to rid him of this curse. When he was rid of his curse form he built a temple and installed the Lingam to represent the three Moorthy Thanu-Maal-Ayan and the name of the place came to be known as Suchindrum.¹¹

The Thanumalyan temple also called Sthanumalayan temple is an important Hindu temple located in Suchindram in the Kanyakumari District of TamilNadu, India. It is one of the 108 Shiva temples revered by Kerala Hindus, even though this one temple is in TamilNadu. The Thanumalyan temple is of importance to both Shaivite and Vaishnavite sects of Hinduism, as the name Stanumalya denotes Trimurtis "Stanu" means Siva, "Mal" means Vishnu, and the Ayan means "Brahma".¹²

The place got the name of Suchindrum from the Sthala Purana. Hindu mythological legend has it that king of devas, Indra got relieved of a curse at the place of the main Linga in the temple. The term "Suchi" is Suchindrum is believed to have derived from the Sanskrit meaning that the stands for "purity".¹³ Accordingly Lord Indra is supposed to visit the temple for performing "Andhajama Pooja" or worship, at midnight every day. Thirumalai Nayak and the Travancore Maharajas, under whose administration the temple remained till Kanyakumari's merger with TamilNadu.¹⁴

Sculpture

Suchindrum temple is unique in the whole of India in that it is dedicated to three different deities represented by one image in the sanctum and is called Sthanumalyan Kovil. The temple is rich in sculpture and architecture and a visitor to this temple is amply rewarded with the sight of such exquisite art of hundreds of years old. The entrance tower of the temple is visible from a distance as it rises majestically for 134 feet.¹⁵ The face of the tower is covered area in front of the main entrance and the entrance itself is about 24 feet high with a beautifully carved door. There is only one corridor running along the outer wall of the temple with many shrines and mandapams scattered in the inner area. This temple attracts both Vaishnavites and Saivites in large numbers.¹⁶

The temple has quite a few sculptures and art. In the "Alankara Mandapam" adjacent to the northern corridor there are four large pillars each formed by a group of smaller pillars all carved from a single stone. Two of these large pillars have 33 smaller pillars and the other two 25 each. There are the famous musical pillars. Each of these smaller pillar produce a different musical note when tapped.¹⁷ Unfortunately these pillars are surrounded by iron grills to prevent vandalism. Stem out of the "Alankara Mandapam" and you come face to face with a gigantic figure of Hanuman. The figure is 18 feet high and depicts "Visuvaroopam" There are other carvings and sculptures on every pillar and panel throughout the temple, which are a feast to the eye and the imagination. The town along with Kanyakumari was part of Travancore.¹⁸ The current temple was renovated in the 17th century and is famous for its sculptures. It was previously controlled by the Nambudiris, one of the main Nambudiris families called the Thekkumon Madan. The main deity of the temple is Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu and Brahman is a single form called Sthanumalyam. This 17th temple is famous for its architectural grandeur. The seven story white gopuram is visible from the distance. Its 40 m façade is covered with sculpture of Hindu deities.¹⁹

Importance of Thanumalya Swami Temple

The temple is an architectural achievement, known for its quality of workmanship in stone. There are four musical pillars carved out of single stone, and which stand at 18 feet (5.5m) in height, these are an architectural and design highlight of the temple grounds. They are in the Alankara Mandapam area, and they emit the sounds of various musical notes when struck. There are an additional 1035 pillars with carvings in the area known as dancing hall. There is an Anjanaya (or Hanuman) statue which stands at 22 feet (6.7m) and is carved of the single granite block. It is one of the tallest statues of its type in India.²⁰ It is also of historical interest that this statue was buried in the temple in 1740, fearing an attack by the Tipu Sultan and was subsequently forgotten. It was rediscovered in 1930, and subsequently restored for viewing by the then Devaswom Board Commissioner Raja Seva Praveena Sri M.K. Neelakantha Iyer of Kottarathu Mothom, Moncompu. There is also a Nandi statue, made of mortar and lime, which is 13 feet (4m) tall and 21 feet (6.4m) long, it is one of the biggest Nandi statues in India.²¹

Festivals

There are two important festivals, one is Markazhi (December/January) and the other Chiththirai (April/May). During the Markazhi festival, on the 9th day the deities are taken out in procession around the streets on three festival cars. The 10th day car festival celebrated in this temple during between December and January every year attracts crowds of thousands of people. Another festival known as Teppam is celebrated during between April and May every year. The Sanskrit work Suchindrastalamahatmya gives a full fledged legendary account of the origin and development of this temple.²²

Timings of Suchindrum Temple

In darshan timings of Suchindrum temple are from 4.30 to 11.30 morning. The temple again opens for darshan in evening at 5p.m and closes at 8.30 p.m.²³

Architecture of Suchindrum Temple ,

Suchindrum Temple of Kanyakumari is known not only for its religious significance but also for its alluring architecture. Its structural excellence allures everyone. The temple has a white Gopuram of seven stories with its portico adorned with finely sculpted images of various deities. This 134 foot high Gopuram appears all the more astonishing as light rays fall on it, presenting a fine example of the architecture styles of South Indian temples. To the right side, there is huge temple tank, water from here is used for temple activities.²⁴

Major attractions of this temple are the four musical pillars with a height of 18 feet. These pillars have been carved out of a single granite stone. Located in the area of Alankara Mandapam, these pillars when struck create various musical notes, presenting exceptional example of architecture. The temple has a dancing hall as well as with around 1035 beautifully carved pillars. The presiding deity, Sthanu (lord Shiva) Mal (Lord Vishnu) and Aya (Lord Brahma) are in the Sanctum Sanctorum, there is a shrine for Lord Vishnu, the idol of the Lord has been made by combining eight different kinds of metals. On to the right side, there is shrine of Lord Rama and goddess Sita, while on the left side in the shrine of Lord Ganesha. On the front, there is Navagraha Mandapa.²⁵

The massive idol of Lord Hanuman at a height of 22 feet, is sure to allure every devotee here. The statue has been carved out of single granite rock. The state of Lord Hanuman, which is one of the largest statues in India, was kept hidden in the temple as attacks from Tipu Sultan were feared. Later in the year 1930, it was found and was subsequently restored to its previous glory.²⁶

Conclusion

The tallest is the eastern tower, with 11 stories and a height of 44 metres (144 ft). The temple has numerous shrines, with those of Sthanumalyan and that of Hanumar being the most prominent. The present masonry structure was built during the Chola dynasty in the 9th century, while later expansions are attributed to Thirumalai Nayak and the Travancore Maharajas. The temple is maintained and administered by the Dharmapuram Aadhenam. The temple is said to have been built around 3000 years ago by Parashurama, and is also one of the Shakthi Peethas that are spread across various locations in the country.

End notes

1. The Hindu, (English daily) "History of Suchindrum Temple" 24th January 2020, p.10-11.
2. Padmanabhan, S., *Kumari Mavatta Kovilkal* (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1969, p.48.
3. *Ibid.*
4. The Travancore King Aayilam Thirunal Report 1895, np.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Kartikayan, S., *Suchindrum Koil Sthala Varalaru*, (Translated in Tamil), 2016, pp.5-20.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. The Report Thanumalyan Swamy Temple 1964, np.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. The Structural Report of Thanumalyan Temple 1988, np.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Inscription wall on Thanumalya Swamy Temple
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Suresh, S., Thanumalya Swamy Temple Theepa Thiruvilza Malar, Suchindrum, 2015, pp.3-4.
23. Time Board of Thanumalya Swamy Temple.
24. Inscription wall on the Thanumalya Swamy Temple.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*