

Shivaite Temples in Tiruchirappalli An Over View

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Abstract

Many religions are followed by the people around the whole world. Saivism is one of the famous religion that is followed in India and few parts of the world. Saivism begin the pre-historic period oriented with Indus Valley Civilization. This paper comprises the origin, traditions and customs of the saivism and temples of the saivism in Tamil Nadu especially Tiruchirappalli District.

Key Words : Saivism, Shivaite Temples, Vedic Culture

Shaivism or Saivism is the name given to a group of religious traditions which regard Lord Siva, also spelled as Shiva, as the highest Supreme Self or Brahman and worship Him accordingly. It is considered to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, sect of Hinduism, whose antiquity is said to be rooted in the pre-historic traditions of Ancient India, dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization (5000 BC) or even earlier. Followers of Saivism are popularly known as Saivas or Saivites.

The early Vedic Indians worshipped an aspect of Lord Siva, known as Rudra, whom they both feared and revered. In the later Vedic period some Upanishads emerged, such as the Svetasvatara Upanishad and the Katha Upanishad, in which Lord Siva was depicted as the highest Supreme Brahman. It was also the period during which the Vedic religion underwent a radical transformation where by Vaishnavism, Saivism and Shaktism rose to prominence and the ancient Vedic deities such as Brahma, Indra, Agni and Varuna yielded their place to Vishnu, Siva and Shakti.

By the time the Puranas were composed, Lord Siva was recognized as a part of Hindu Trinity and His worship became popular in many parts of the Indian subcontinent. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mention Lord Siva as a prominent Hindu god. Credit goes to the Saiva Puranas, which were composed mostly in the early Christian era, in making Saivism a popular religious sect. Of the 18 Puranas originally composed, six were Shaiva Puranas, namely Siva Purana, Linga Purana, Matsya Purana, Kurma Purana, Skanda Purana and Agni

Purana. The Agamas are the most authoritative works on Saivism. They deal with the methods of ritual worship and contemplation of Lord Siva.

Many prominent rulers of ancient India such as the Kushanas, the Guptas, the Barasivas, the Satavahanas and the Cholas were ardent worshippers of Siva. The Barasivas played an important role in preserving many ancient traditions of Saivism, at a time when Buddhism was on the rise. Apart from the Indian sub-continent, Siva was also worshipped in other parts of the world such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia and Indonesia.

Lord Siva's connection with ancient fertility cults is well documented. Followers of Siva regard Him as the "Father God" and Shakti as the "Mother Goddess". There are indications that the Indus people probably used fertility symbols resembling a prototype of the present day Sivalingam in their religious rituals. But we do not know whom they actually worshipped using the fertility symbols. The earliest archaeological evidence of Sivalingam dates back to 2nd Century BC, but we have reasons to believe that the practice was prevalent in ancient India centuries back that. Outwardly, the Sivalingam is a sexual symbol depicting the union of male and female genital organs. Symbolically it represents the involvement of the Soul and the Supreme Self with Nature or Prakriti.

There are many sub-sects within Saivism. While they all acknowledge Lord Siva as the Supreme Deity, they differ from one another in respect of other details such as the modes of worship, nature of Brahman, the nature of individual soul, the relationship between the two, the nature of reality and the means to liberation. These schools of Saivism primarily fall under one of the three schools of Hindu philosophy, namely Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita. Of the few sects that survived the vicissitudes of time, the following five are the most prominent

1. Pasupata Saivism
2. Kashmiri Saivism
3. Siddha Saivism
4. Gorakhnatha Saivism
5. Vira Saivism

The temples of Siva are located all over the world, but the most prominent among them which house the 12 Jyotirlingas are located in India. The 12 Jyotirlinga temples mentioned in the Sivapurana are:

1. The Somnath temple,
2. The Mallikarjuna temple at Srisailam,
3. The Mahakaleswar temple at Ujjain,

4. The Omkareshwar temple at Omkareshwar,
5. The Kedarnath temple in the Himalayas,
6. The Bhimashankar temple in Maharashtra,
7. The Kashivishwanath temple at Varanasi,
8. The Triambakeshwar temple at Nasik,
9. The Baidyanath temple at Deogarh,
10. The Nageshwar temple in Dwaraka,
11. The Ramalingeshwar temple at Rameswaram and
12. Grishneshwar temple near Ellora caves

The Nayanars of southern India were poet saints who played an instrumental role between 6th and 8th century AD in popularizing the devotional worship of Siva among the rural people. Through devotional singing and public display of religious fervor, they preached the path of devotion to Siva as an effective means to spread their message of divine love and surrender to God and inculcate among people the habit of religious worship and ethical living. Their activities also helped in containing the influence of Jainism and Buddhism in southern India and reviving the Vedic tradition. The Saiva tradition lists 63 Nayanars. Prominent among them were Kannappa, Karaikkal, Sundarar, Manikkavachakar, Nambi Andar Nambi, Sekkilar, Appar and Sundarar. Their compositions are preserved in such works as Tirumurai and Tevaram. Apart from them, Lakulisa, Vasugupta, Gorakshanath and Basavanna were some of the religious teachers, who played a prominent role in ensuring the continuation of Saivism as a major religious sect in the Indian subcontinent.

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Thiruvanaikal, Jambekeswaram is a famous Shiva temple in Tiruchirapalli, in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. The temple was built by Kocengannan, one of the Early Cholas, around 1,800 years ago. It is located in the Srirangam island, which has the famous Ranganathaswamy temple. Thiruvanaikal is one of the five major Shiva Temples of Tamil Nadu representing the Mahābhūta or five great elements; this temple represents the element of water, or *neer* in Tamil. The sanctum of Jambukeswara has an underground water stream and in spite of pumping water out, it is always filled with water.

It is one of the 275 Paadal Petra Sthalams, where all of the four most revered Nayanars have sung glories of the deity in this temple. The temple has inscriptions from the Chola period.



Formation of 'Appu Lingam' (Parvathi's penance)

Once Parvati mocked Shiva's penance for betterment of the world. Shiva wanted to condemn her act and directed her to go to the earth from Kailasam to do penance. Parvathi in the form of Akilandeswari as per Shiva's wish found Jambu forest to conduct her penance. She made a *lingam* out of water of river Cauvery under the Venn Naaval tree and commenced her worship. The *lingam* is known as Appu Lingam. Siva at last gave *darshan* to Akilandeswari and taught her Siva Gnana. Akilandeswari took *Upadesa* facing East from Shiva, who stood facing west.

The legend of the name 'Thiru Aanai Kaa'



The second precinct of the temple with pillars sculpted during the Nayak period.

There were two Siva Ganas 'Malyavan' and 'Pushpadanta'. Though they are Shiva Ganas they always quarrel with each other and fight for one thing or other. In one fight 'Malyavan' cursed 'Pushpadanta' to become an elephant on earth and the latter cursed the former to become a spider on earth. The elephant and the spider came to Jambukeswaram and continued their Shiva worship. The elephant collected water from river Cauvery and conducted ablution to the *lingam* under the Jambu tree daily. The spider constructed his web over the *lingam* to prevent dry leaves from dropping on it and prevent sunlight directly falling on it. When the elephant saw the web

and thought it was dust on *lingam*. The elephant tore them and cleaned the *lingam* by pouring water and the practice continued daily. The spider became angry one day and crawled into the trunk of the elephant and bit the elephant to death, killing itself. Siva, in the form of Jambukeswara, moved by the deep devotion of the two, relieved them from the curse. As an elephant worshipped Shiva here, this place came to be known as Thiru Aanai Kaa. Later the name 'Thiruaanaikaa' become 'Thiruvanaikaval' and 'Thiruvanaikovil'. In the next birth, the spider was born as the King Kochengot Chola and built 70 temples and this temple is the one among them. Remembering his enmity with the elephant in his previous birth, he built the Shiva *Sannathi* such that not even a small elephant can enter. The entrance on the sanctorum of Jambukeswara is only 4 foot high and 2.5 foot wide.

Legend behind king's red eyes

There was a story behind the king's red eyes - When he was in his mother's womb the palace astrologer predicted a sacred time to give birth to enable the new born's well being. The queen went into labor early, before the time predicted by the astrologer. The queen hence told the servant to hang her upside down for the time to come so that she could have a wise and virtuous son who could head the kingdom righteously. This waiting time inside the womb made the baby's eyes red. After becoming the king, he build the temple for Siva and Goddess Akilandeswari in the name of Aanaikka later days it changed to Thiruvanaikovil.



The stone Vibudi Prakara, which extends for over one mile, is two feet thick and over 25 feet in height.

As per Fergusson, the temple surpasses the Srirangam Ranganathaswamy Temple in architectural terms, which were both constructed at the same time. There are five enclosures inside the temple. The massive outer wall covering the fifth precinct, known as the *Vibudi Prakara*, stretches over a mile and is two feet thick and over 25 feet high. Legend

maintains that the wall was built by Shiva working with the laborers. The fourth precinct contains a hall with 796 pillars and measures 2436 feet by 1493. It also has a small tank fed by perpetual springs. The third enclosure is 745 feet by 197 surrounded a wall 30 feet high. This area has two *Gopurams* 73 and 100 feet tall, a coconut *thoppu* and a small water tank. The second enclosure is 306 feet by 197, a *Gopuram* 65 feet high and several small shrines. The inner most enclosure measuring 126 feet by 123 has the sanctum.

The sanctum sanctorum is a square structure, found independently situated at the center of the innermost enclosure. There is a vimanas on the roof of the sanctum. The structure is open on three sides, with a shallow moat separating it from the circumambulatory path of the innermost enclosure. The *sthala-vriksham* or holy tree here is the White Jambuka, *Syzygium samarangense*, found growing along the south-eastern wall of the sanctum sanctorum. The trunk of the tree is protected by a walled structure. The western side of the sanctum, from where the deity is viewed, is continuous with a large closed hall, the Mukha Mantapa, containing four-pillars and housing a bronze idol of Nandi.

The Mukha Mantapa has a large, ornate western door gilded with silver that forms the principal entrance. There are two additional entrances to the Mukha Mantapa on the southern and North Eastern sides as well. A set of three steps descend down to the level of the sanctum sanctorum from the Mukha Mantapa. The deity is viewed through a stone window that forms an integral part of the western face of the sanctum sanctorum. The window has nine viewing apertures, believed to represent the Navagraha. There is a panel in bas-relief over the window depicting the *sthala puranam*: The Jambuka tree growing out of a meditating sage's head on the extreme right; the *linga* of Jambukeswarar under the tree; a spider and an elephant worshipping the *linga* along with the Goddess Parvati who stands to the left of the *linga*. The sanctum sanctorum is divided in to the Ardha Mandapam or Antaralam and the Garbha Griha where the deity of Jambukeswarar is housed.

Entrance in to the Sanctum is through a small door on the southern wall, about 4 feet in height. The Ardha Mantapa is about 4 feet X 4 feet and contains an idol of Goddess Parvati on the right side of the door to the Garbha Griha. Devotees are admitted in groups of six in to the Ardha Mantapa during sevas like Abhishekam or on payment of a small fee. The Garbha Griha is a wider structure compared to the Ardha Mantapa. At the center, the Brahma Sthana, is the self-manifested *linga* of Jambukeswarar. The upper conical part of the *linga* is of the color of

copper, where as the yoni-bhaga or the pedestal is of black granite. A brass ring is seen at the point of attachment of the linga to the pedestal. The height of the linga is about 3 feet from the floor of the sanctum. The Garbha Griha and the Ardha Mantapa are unadorned from the inside, the only source of illumination within the sanctum being ghee lamps. A stream of water is said to emerge from the linga, which is usually demonstrated as the soaking wet clothes in which it is draped. The water flow increases significantly during the Monsoon. The main deity of the temple is Jambukeswara, representing the element water. Jambukeswara is depicted sitting under a Jambu tree, which grows over a small stream that engulfs the deity during the rainy season. The temple is also considered the abode of goddess Akilandeshwari, one of the forms of the goddess Parvati. The greatest of works related to this temple include Tiruvanaikaval and Kilvelur Akshyalingaswamy temple.

Goddess Akilandeshwari's Shrine

The temple's idols are installed opposite to each other - such temples are known as *Upadesa Sthalams*. As the Devi was like a student and Jambukeswara like a Guru in this temple, there is no *Thiru Kalyanam* conducted in this temple for Shiva and Parvathi, unlike the other Shiva temples. The *sannathy* of the goddess Akilandeshwari and the sannathy of Prasanna Vinayaka are in the shape of the *pranava manthra* called "Om". It is believed that the Amman in the temple was in deep anger hence during one of Adi Sankara's visit he installed the Prasanna Ganapathy idol right opposite to her Sannathy and installed a pair of Sri Chakra thaatanakas to reduce her anger.

The image of Ekapadtha Tirumuthi, the trinity of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, is present in the temple, which can be seen only in Thyagaraja Temple, Tiruvottiyur.^{1,2} There are lot of inscriptions from various Chola kings from 11th - 12th century indicating grants to the temple.



A Lingam inside the temple

The temple was widely expanded by Hoysala king, Someswara, the son of Vira Narasimha. During 1236-37 CE, he built a lot of shrines namely Vallaliswara, Padumaliswara, Vira Narasingeswara and Somleswara evidently named after his grandfather Ballalla II, grandmother Padmaladevi, father Vira Narasimha and aunt Somala Devi. The 7-tiered *RajaGopuram* is also believed to have constructed by the Hoysala king. There are separate shrines beyond the temple compound namely *Aadhi* haing a typical structure as the main shrines. The temple and its pagodas were subject to frequent conquest between French and English forces between 1751 and 1755 CE. The temple has been widely maintained by Nattukottai Chettiars during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Religious significance of the temple

Pancha Bhoota Sthalam refers to the five Shiva temples, each representing the manifestation of the five prime elements of nature - land, water, air, sky, fire. *Pancha* indicates five, *Bhoota* means elements and *Sthala* means place. All these temples are located in South India with four of these temples at Tamil Nadu and one at Andhra Pradesh. The five elements are believed to be enshrined in the five *lingams* and each of the *lingam* representing Shiva in the temple have five different names based on the elements they represent. In the temple, Shiva is said to have manifested himself in the form of water. The other four manifestations are Prithivi Lingam at Ekambareswarar Temple, Akasa Lingam at Thillai Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram, Agni Lingam at Annamalaiyar Temple and Vayu Lingam at Srikalahasti Temple.

Gallery





Notes

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