

Historical Importance Of Navagraha Temples - A Study

Dr. K. ALAMELU

Assistant Professor in History,
Department of History, D.G. Govt. Arts College (W),
Mayiladuthurai

For believers in astrology and the influence of planets over individual destiny, Tamil Nadu is a great destination. Indian astrology is determined by the planetary position of nine planets in a geocentric orbit.¹ *Navagrahas* simply mean nine planets and there are nine temples located in Tamil Nadu representing each. All of them are located within sixty kilometres radius around **Kumbakonam** in **Thanjavur District**.² Tamil Nadu is the only state where the temples dedicated to the nine celestial bodies are located in such close proximity.

Sl. No.	Planet	Temple
1.	Surya (Sun)	Suryanarkoil
2.	Chandra (Moon)	Tingaloor
3.	Chevaai (Mars)	Vaitheeswarankoil
4.	Budhan (Mercury)	Tiruvenkadu
5.	Guru (Jupiter)	Alangudi
6.	Shukran (Venus)	Kanchanoor
7.	Shani (Saturn)	Tirunallar
8.	Raahu	Tirunageswaram
9.	Kethu	Keezh Perumpallam

SURYANAR KOIL (SUN)

Situated 21 kilometres from **Swamimalai** in the Thanjavur District is the **Suryanarkoil** built by king **Kulotunga Chola-I** in the year 1100 A.D.³ This temple is dedicated to **Surya** - Sun God. *Surya* is known as the giver of health, success and prosperity. Every year in mid-January, the harvest festival is celebrated as thanks giving and to honour Surya.

TINGALoor (MOON)

Though there is ambiguity about when this temple was built, historians agree that it must have been in existence before the beginning of the *Bhakti* period in 7th century A.D. Dedicated to Moon⁴ (*Chandra* in Sanskrit and *Thingal* in Tamil) a visit to this temple is said to grant a comfortable and long life. In astrology, *Chandra* is the planet that removes stress and sorrow.

VAITHEESWARAN KOIL (MARS)

Within the **Vaitheeswaran koil**, there is a special shrine dedicated to **Ankarakan** or *Chevaai*⁵ (Mars). The belief is that land offering prayers to **Ankarakan** will bestow valour, victory and strength. While entering the temple, devotees first go

to the **Siddhamrita tank**. The water is said to have curative properties for various skin ailments. There is also a widespread belief that a visit here would remove obstacles which delay marriages.⁶

TIRUVENKADU (MERCURY)

There is a reference to this temple in the **Valmiki Ramayana**. Hence it is believed that the oldest part of the temple is more than 3000 years old. Dedicated to **Budhan** (Mercury) this temple in **Tiruvengkadu**⁷ makes up the last of the **Navagraha temples**. **Budhan** is said to bestow wisdom and intellect.

ALANGUDI (JUPITER)

This is regarded as a **Gurustalam**⁸ (Abode of Jupiter) where **Lord Dakshinamurthy** is held in great reverence. The shrine attracts a large number of devotees, when Jupiter transits between zodiac signs. This place abounds with innumerable legends that colour and meaning to Hindu mythology and divinity. For instance, **Dakshinamurthy**⁹ is said to have preached to the Devas who had swooned under the impact of the poison that came out of the churning of the milky ocean. **Parvathi**, the consort of Lord Siva, is said to have been reborn on the banks of

Amrita Pushkarini within the temple precincts before being reunited with Lord Siva.

KANCHANOOR (VENUS)

The temple is associated with **Sukran** (Venus) and is maintained by the **Madurai Adheenam**.¹⁰ It is located in a quiet hamlet of **Tiruvaavaduturai**. This temple is also referred to as ***Palaasavanam, Bhrammapuri*** and ***Agnistalam***. **Bhramma** is said to have been blessed with a vision of Siva's marriage with Parvathi here. Devotees visit to pray for the well-being of their wives.

TIRUNALLAR (SATURN)

This is the only temple that is dedicated to **Lord Shani** (Planet Saturn) when the planet **Saturn** transits between zodiac signs, literally millions throng this shrine.¹¹ The legendary king **Nala** is said to have been relieved of his afflictions which were due to the malefic influence of **saturn**, after worshipping here. Of the numerous *teertams* (tanks), the ***Nala teertam***¹² is the most important one. By bathing here, it is believed that one is washed away of all kinds of misfortunes and afflictions.

TIRUNAGESWARAM (RAAHU)

This is a vast temple dedicated to **Lord Raahu**, one of the nine celestial bodies of the Navagrahas. According to legends, it

is believed that the mythological serpents ***Aadiseshan, Dakshan*** and ***Kaarkotakan*** worshipped Siva here.¹³

KEEZH PERUMPALLAM (KETHU)

This is an ancient Siva temple, where **Kethu** and the other planetary node of the nine celestial bodies worshipped Siva. **Raahu** and **Kethu** are associated with the legend of the churning of the milky ocean.¹⁴

END NOTES

1. A. Donald Mackenzie, **Indian Myth and Legend**, (New Delhi : Sona Publications, 1971), pp. 35-38.
2. K.R. Krishnamurthy, **Cultural Developments in the Chola Period**, (Annamalai Nagar : Annamalai University Publications, 1966), pp. 15-19.
3. F.R. Hemingway, **Madras District Gazetteers : Tanjore**, (Madras : Govt. Press, 1906), pp. 65-72.
4. L.S.S. O' Malley, **Hinduism The Religion of the Masses**, (Jodhpur : Scientific Publishers, 1985), pp. 39-44.
5. **Vaitheeswarankoil Stalapuranam** (Tamil), (Vaitheeswarankoil : Dharmapuram Mutt Publications, 1999), pp. 1-6.
6. **Ibid.**

7. **Tiruvengkadu Stalapuranam** (Tamil), (Tiruvengkadu : Devasthanam Publications, 1992), pp. 2-5.
8. **Alankudi Stalapuranam** (Tamil), (Alankudi : Temple Publications, 1999), p. 1.
9. F.H. Gravely and C. Sivaramamurti, **Illustrations of Indian Sculptures mostly Southern**, (Chennai : Govt. Museum Publications, 1999), p. XXXVII.
10. **Kanchanoor Stalapuranam** (Tamil), (Madurai : Madurai Adheenam Publications, 1994), pp. 1-4.
11. C.V. Narayana Ayyar, **Origin and Early History of Saivism in South India**, (Madras : University of Madras, 1974), pp. 152-154.
12. **Tirunallar Stalapuranam** (Tamil), (Karaikal : Devasthanam Publications, 1998), pp. 2-3.
13. **Thirunageswaram Stalapurmanam** (Tamil), (Thirunageswaram : Tirukoil Publications, 1997), pp. 2-4.
14. David Dean Shulman, **Tamil Temple Myths**, (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 399-404.