

Lord Siva Worship and its Temples in Thiruvannamalai with Special Reference to Lord Mallikarjunaswami at Holy Parvathamalai – A Historical Study

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A man throughout the world is to live always on hope and faith in God. At every stage in his life, he has to encounter many risks, dangers and challenges. Totally engrossed in his routine he does not realize that a superior unseen force takes care of him and the entire humanity; that benevolent beneficent and bountiful force is called God. Such of those who repose trust in him and seek, His protection will be saved, while others will get tossed about in life, but they too, one day, are sure to realize that the Almighty alone can be their savior.

In the all religion the sacred places or sacred building like Temple in Hindus, Church's in Christianity and Mosque in Muslims, are one of the major importance to the peoples. In that way Hindu temples played an important role, they are not only centers of religious activity, but also serve as the focus for the social and cultural activities of that surrounding peoples. From ancient times till the present day Indian culture and what is nowadays called the Hindu religion have been one and the same reality. The South Indian people also followed that beliefs and the practices in daily.

The evolution of the South Indian temple is the result of a long process of development which spreads over several centuries. The temple is invariably associated

with Gods, had, at one time, no connection with them. God's were worshipped in the form of trees. This was the most primitive form of worship known to the original inhabitants of the land. The temple had its origin elsewhere. It originated in certain religious practices connected with the worship of the spirits of the dead, which were supposed to cause famines, epidemics and other calamities. The primitive people dreaded them as much as they believed that these ghosts were unhappy and troubled men, unless they were properly treated by them. It was, therefore, considered necessary to propitiate them by offering them gifts. Moreover, the fear induced the men to take precautionary measures to protect themselves from the attacks of these spirits. An important step they adopted was to circumscribe the sphere of the malignant activity of the spirits in a magic circle of stones built around the graves where they were generally believed to hover. This led to the formation of a new cult, the most prominent feature of which was the worship of graves and tombs surrounded by stone-circles. These became the nuclei around which grew up temples in course of time.¹

The origin religion of the Dravidians consisted of the worship of ancestral spirits and village Gods. It was considerably modified by the contact of the Dravidians with the Aryans. As a result of Aryan invasions of South India, the Dravidian religion was completely aryanised. The Gods of the two races united together and formed a single hierarchy. The temples which were connected with the primitive Dravidian religion became the centres of the reformed religion. The Aryan Gods became thenceforward the principal residents of the Dravidian temples.²

“Everyone is a Hindu” says Dr. Radhakrishnan, who strives for truth by study and reflection by purity of life and conduct, by devotion and consecration to high ideals, who believes that religion rests not on authority but on experience”.³ Following the decline of Buddhism and Jainism Brahminical religion shot into prominence which lacked homogeneity. It gave birth to various sects including Saivism and Vaishnavism. These sects had been admitted within the orthodox fold but still they retained their main characteristics as distinct entities.⁴

Saivism was firmly established in Dravidian country, with its characteristic piety in the sixth century, which consisted on many “Mandalams”. One among them was the Tondaimandalam. It consisted of twenty-four “Kottams”; of them one was Plakuntre Kottam which included the present day Polur taluk.⁵ A ruler who belonged to the Sangam Age was King Nanna, who ruled this region with Chenganma⁶ (it is now called Chengam) as his capital. He was a devotee of Sri Nilakanteswami and has built a temple atop the Parvathamalai.⁷

The temple is the divine abode of Lord Mallikarjunaswami and his holy consort Goddess Bramarambikai.⁸ It is note-worthy that the Lord and His consort at the famous Srisailam in Andhra Pradesh also bear the same Divine. There are idols dedicated to Lord Vinayaka, Valli-Deivayanai Sametha Arumuganar, Veerabhadra, Durga, a Rishi and his Dharmapatni in the temple.⁹ Holy Shivarathri is the most sacred festival celebrated here, apart from the monthly ‘Pournami’ days.¹⁰ King Nannan is supposed to have built a fort also on the hills, only the debris of which is seen now. Midway to the top are ruins of a “Rani Kottai” whose history is not available.

Parvathamalai is accessible from either (South) then Mahadevamangalam in the East or from Kadaladi in the South West. Thrisulapuram, refers to this hill as Thrisulam, as from a distance it looks like Lord Shiva's trident. The towering majestic Parvatha Malai in Polur taluk of Tiruvannamalai District is the holy abode of Maha Siddha Purushas. It covers an area of 5500 acres. It takes a 24 kilometers, eight-hour trek across hugged, mostly barren rural terrain to go around the hill. The vertical height is estimated at 4000 feet, though the journey to the top may take four to six hours. It is said that about 108 caves in the hill range, were the Siddha Purushas live.¹¹ The only source of water is the Simha Chunai well or Karpoora pond near the top. Every handful of soil here is supposed to hold a sacred Linga.

One of the ten Tamil idylls Malaipadukadam of the Sangam Age refers to this hill as "Naviramalai".¹² The author of the poem describes the hill as a dense bamboo growing area. It refers to "Naviramalai" as the divine abode of "Kariyaundakkadavul" "Karai" in Tamil means black and refers to the blue-black poison which Lord Nilakanteswara swallowed. So has come the name "Karai Yunda Kadavul", which has been mutated in due course as "Karikanda Easwaran". The presiding deity in the Sapta kshetras along the left bank of river Cheyyaru flowing not far from the hill. South Malikarjunam, Srisailam, Parupadam, Siddha Sailam, South Kailayam, Naviram, Palkunrakottam (a name of Polur region) are other names top the hill.

The hill is a store house of rare herbal plants. The Mahavilvam tree has five, seven, nine petals which are precious offerings in Siva worship. It is said that there is a tree whose leaves have a mango flavor and eating it makes one free from hunger and

thirst. Kari Nelli, Kari Umathai, Karumthulasi, Karum Noohili, Chinna Surungi, Pei Viratti, Aal Mitatti are some of the herbal plants supposed to be here. “Mani” is a herb, which when chewed, will give one a rare sensation of floating in the air.¹³

There is an inspiring story related to the herbs here. The most celebrated Gugai Namasivayar in Tiruvannamalai once came here with his disciple also named Namasivayar. On reaching the Simha well, the cool water reservoir, the Guru left his disciple there to cook food for them and went upto the temple for worship. The disciple needed a ladle to stir and sample the rice being cooked. He broke carefully a twig from a tree nearby, from which were hanging white serpents. As he stirred the Guru might chastise him, he threw away the twig and gulped all the food himself. Then he started preparing food again for his master. On return, the Guru found there a young man instead of his disciple. On enquiry, the rejuvenated disciple narrated to his Guru the whole story. The Guru eagerly sought for the tree and twig of Kari Neli, but in vain. They had vanished. The obedient disciple vomited some of the black food. The Guru partook it and he too became young.¹⁴ Then he realized it was the Lord’s Leela.

In the night, the Guru and disciple performed “Abhishekam” to the Lord and also had the rare “Dharshana” of many Siddhas Purushas worshipping the Lord at midnight. The elated Guru, sensing the divinity in his disciple, christened him as “Guru Namasivayar”.¹⁵ Poondi Mahan has also referred to the presence of Siddha Purushas at the hill.¹⁶

Thus the holy Parvathamalai is an inspiring peak from which one has Dharasan of holy Arunachala hill, the Sampathgiri Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Perumal Swamy temple at Polur.¹⁷ On every Pournami (Full Moon) day and the first date of every Tamil month, many devotees round the hill and some climb up to offer worship to the Lord.¹⁸

The many hour climb is hazardous and challenging. One has to negotiate step rocks almost crawling and cross deep valleys bridged by precariously hanging iron chains and holding on to iron crowbars riveted to rocks. The ascent is amply rewarded as blissful Dharsan awaits them. Blessed are the souls that visit the Parvatha Hill.

Parvathamalai which is situate near Kalasapakkam at Thenmagadevamangalam. It has several herbal trees and other lofty Vilva trees on the top of the hill the famous Mallikarjunaswami Siva temple is situated. The rock statues, temples, mandapas are very sacred. The Mallikarjunaswami temple is renovated recently with the cost of two crores. Electrical, drinking water and other basic facilities are provided for the benefit of the devotees. The people use to believe if they perform girivalam of the hill on Sunday, they will be free from debt. The people of Polur taluk use to perform girivalam in the month of Margazhi in large number. The Hindu saint Kanchi the Sankarachariyar participated in the sacred function and blessed the people.¹⁹

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