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HINDU TEMPLES IN THENI DISTRICT

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Abstract

The life of the vast majority of Hindus in India is centered around temples even today. Temples were built for different purposes. Being a visible emblem of the religion, philosophy and ethics of the people, the temple played a role far more vital than any other institutions. Veerapandi Gowmariamman temple is situated on Theni to Thekkady road. It is a very famous temple in Theni district and it attracts a large number of devotees and tourists. Saturn or Saneeswarar is the main deity worshipped in Kuchamur. In this temple Lord Sani is present in splendid isolation bereft of the other planets. The main shrine in Devathanapatti is Mungilanai Kamatchiyamma Temple which is situated on the banks of river Manjal. In this temple the doors to Sanctum Sanctorum are never opened and all the Poojas are offered only to the portals. Mother Goumari Amman blesses Her devotees from this temple on the southern bank of Varaha River. The sitting posture of Ambica ensures the fertility of the land, farm yields and mango production in particular, it is believed.

Key Words: Religion, Philosophy, Temples, Devotees, Worship.

Introduction

The life of the vast majority of Hindus in India is centered around temples even today. This is true not only of life at the individual level but also at the social level. The fabric of socio-cultural activities of the Hindus is made up of the warp and woof of religious beliefs and rituals. Music, sculpture, painting, dance and a host of performing arts, besides architecture, Vaastu shashtra, astronomy and astrology owe their origin to the institution of the temple. The temples in South India are the only ancient religious institutions that have retained their importance and popularity down through the ages. Patronized both by the royalty and the public, they have preserved the age-old traditions and have fostered arts of different kinds in a remarkable way. Temples have been installed according to Agama Sastra based on mythology. The Sthalapuranam, legendary history of sacred places has given the particular significance of each temple with the chronology of the distinguished divine persons who performed miracles and conducted penance in the temple.

Formation of Theni District

Theni District has been formed after bifurcation from erstwhile Madurai District as per G.O.Ms.No.679 Revenue Department Dated: 25.17.1996. Consequent on the bifurcation, one new Revenue Division with headquarters at Uthamapalayam and two new Taluks at Theni and Bodinaickanur were also created with effect from 01.01.1997. Dr. K. Satyagopal IAS was the first Collector for Theni District. Consequent on the formation of the new District, Theni Municipal Town has been upgraded as the Taluk and District headquarters from 01.01.1997. The district known for fertile lands under river Periyar irrigation, popularly known as 'Cumbum Valley'.

Physical Features

Theni District bound on the North by Dindigul District, East by Madurai District, South by Virudhunagar District and West by Kerala State. Theni district is in the Southern part of Tamil Nadu. It is one among the tourist delights and destinations surrounded by the western ghats with it ubiquitous green stretches of cultivated lands and tea gardens. Theni District lies at and 780 30'00" of East Longitude.

The history of any area is in large measure influenced by its geography. The hills, forest and rivers of the district play an important role in shaping and moulding the culture and character of the people. Based on the physiographic characteristics the district is categorized into three natural divisions.

The fertile Cumbum Valley in Uthamapalayam Taluk.

Hilly Region (Periyakulam, Bodinaickanur and Andipatti Taluk)

Plain Regions (Theni Taluk)

It is one among the choicest tourist delights and destinations with a delightful mixture of tourist attractions such as Dams, waterfalls and countless pilgrim centres. The level tracts of Theni Taluk, Bodinaickanur Taluk and some portions of



Andipatti Taluk are watered by Mullai Periyar river System. The level tracts of Periyakulam Taluk are Watered 25 percent by Varaga nathi and 75 percent by Manjalar dam and Sothuparai dam.

Arulmigu Gowmariamman Temple, Veerapandi

Veerapandi Gowmariamman temple is situated on Theni to Thekkady road. It is a very famous temple in Theni district and it attracts a large number of devotees and tourists. This temple was built by the Pandiya King Veerapandi during 14th century. Every year during the month of May Veerapandi festival is celebrated for 8 days. It is 7 kms. from Theni and 83 kms. from Madurai. Every Year Annual festival is being celebrated during the Tamil month of chithirai (English month May). The first Tuesday of Chithirai month the installation of "Holy Post" is being performed to denote the commencement of festival. From that day onwards special poojas are being performed for 21 days. From the fourth Tuesday of chithirai month the Annual festival will be celebrated for eight days. From the fourth day of the festival i.e., from Friday the temple car with Goddess Gowmari is being drawn in procession for four days. During the time of festival-days everyday thousands and thousands of devotees are gathering, worshipping and receiving the blessings of the goddess Gowmariamman. The special feature of the festival is offering of firepots (Agnichatti) thousands and thousands by the devotees.

Arulmigu Saneeswarar Temple

Saturn or Saneeswarar is the main deity worshipped in Kuchanur. In this temple Lord Sani is present in splendid isolation bereft of the other planets. Here he is known as Kuchanooran.

The Temple is located at Kuchanoor near Chinnamanur of Theni District on the bank of main channel of River Surabhi. The Chief deity Saneeswaran in the man God and its Genesis was on it own and not created (Suyambu). In all temples Saneeswaran in either of Navagraha or he remain in separate sannithi.

Where as in kuchanoor the Lord exists as prime deity Saneeswaran is other wise called as "Kuchanooran" King Dinakaran ruled "Kulinga" country with its capital Mainagar.

His son chandravathana through astrology predicted that his father was suffering for seven and a half-years, which could be overcome by praying Lord Saneeswaran Chandravathanan ventured into forest, created Lord Saneeswaran's image out of iron and started praying Lord Saneeswaran. Impressed by his devotees's prayer before him at Kuchanoor where the present temple is located.

This is the only temple in India which is mean solely for Saneeswara Bhagawan situated at Kuchanoor. 20 Km south of Theni. The temple at Thirunallar in Pondy is having only a separate Sannidhi for Saneeswarar. In Kuchanoor Saneeswara Bhagawan is said to be a Suyambu (Self appeared idol). In front of this temple the perennial river Surabi flows which carried the waters of Periyar river and Suruliyaru. Every year the festival is being celebrated during the Tamil month "Adi" on every Saturday of the week.

Arulmigu Gowmariamman Temple, Periyakulam

Mother Goumari Amman blesses Her devotees from this temple on the southern bank of Varaha River. The sitting posture of Ambica ensures the fertility of the land, farm yields and mango production in particular, it is believed. It is also believed that those affected by chickenpox would be cured if they worship Ambica after a dip in the Varaha River and consume the Theertha offered in the temple. Mother Goumari Amman is facing east in this Periyakulam temple mentioned as Kuzhandhai Managar in the Tirupugazh hymns. She is the guardian deity of the place. Also this is one of the famous Mari Amman temples in southern districts of the state. People also offer cocks and hens during festival days to realize their wishes.

Two hundred years ago, Mother Mari Amman was in a jungle place as a swayambu east of Periyakulam. The canal nearby overflowed due to heavy rains then. Crops were submerged in floods. People were put to untold sufferings. People prayed to Mother Mari Amman for protection. Mother appeared in the dream of a devotee and said that Her facing the opposite direction instead of towards the place caused these sufferings. People of the place immediately took steps to set right the jungle area and migrated to the other direction. With the blessings of Mother, they became happier. They built this temple and called Her Mother Gowmari.

Ten day Aani festival in June-July and Navarathri in September-October are the festivals celebrated in the temple. Daily one time Puja and two time Pujas are followed in the temple on Tuesdays and Fridays. Mother Kali Amman graces from a separate shrine in the Prakara. Lord Vinayaka in the temple is praised as Lord Kanni Moola Vinayaka. Sweet pudding -



Sarkarai Pongal is offered as Nivedhana to Ambica. People use to tie yellow thread on the holy Arasamaram tree for wedding boon, tie cradles seeking child boon, offer salt and pepper for curing pimples in faces and perform special Pujas for good farm yields. Devotees offer garlands of lime fruits, perform milk and special Abisheks. Those profiting from good farm yields offer grains, vegetables and fruits, tonsure and do Angapradakshinam, carry milk pots and fire pots and light Mavilakku a lamp made of a paste of rice flour and ghee.

Sri Rajendra Chozheeswarar Temple (Balasubramaniam temple) temple

Sri Rajendra Chozheeswarar Temple is a very big temple in Theni district. Though Lord Shiva is the presiding deity in the temple, it is more popularly known as Balasubramaniam temple. Lord Shiva, Mother Ambica and Lord Muruga grace the devotees from this single temple. Lords Nataraja, Ekambareswara, Jambukeswara, Dakshinamurthi, Juradeva, Bhairava and Vishnu, Sun and Moon with their consorts, Saptha Kannikas, planets Rahu and Ketu grace the devotees from separate shrines in the prakara. Speaking volumes of the skill of Chola temple architecture, the pillars have the sculptures of Agora Veerabhadra, Rudra Thandavamurthi, Manmatha and Mother Durga.

Greatness of Temple

The temple is on the banks of River Varaha considered as sacred as the holy Ganga. There are two Marudha trees-one male and the other female on the river bank. It is also called Brahma theertha. Lord Muruga graces the devotees with His six merciful faces accompanied by His consorts Valli and Deivanai. Lord Rajendra Chozheeswarar and Mother Aram Valartha Nayaki bless the devotees from their respective shrines with separate flag posts-Kodimaram each. As the temple was built by Rajendra Chozha, in popular terms, this is called Big Temple. The signs of the 27 stars and the 12 zodiac signs are shown on the roof of the Peacock Mandap opposite Lord Muruga shrine. As the shrine of Lord Mrutyunjaya also is in the temple, many celebrate their 60th and 80th birthdays here.

During his rule of this region, Rajendra Chozha went for hunting on a day. He saw a swine feeding its cubs. The king shot an arrow on the Mother pig leaving the cubs in distress. Lord Muruga appeared before the little ones, fed them with milk and quenched their hunger. To repent for the sin committed by leaving the cubs in hunger and to make the mercy of Lord Muruga known to all, the king built this temple.

Chithirai Thiruvizha in April-May; Vaikasi Vishakam in May-June; Aadi Pooram in July-August; Thai Poosam in January-February, Aipasi Skanda Sashti in October-November; Tirukarthikai in November-December and Panguni Brahmotsavam are the festivals celebrated in the temple.

Sri Mavoothu Vellappar Kovil, Theppampatti

This Temple is dedicated to Lord Muruga. It is very popular in Aundipatti Taluk. Daily a lot of devotees have a holy visit to this temple from all parts of Theni and Madurai Districts. This holy shrine is situated in the foot steps of Varusanadu hill range. Nestling among the hills the temple is atop surrounded by natural vegetation. The Tamil New Year (Chitrai) is celebrated here in a grand manner. On all important Hindu auspicious days, thousands of pilgrims visit here and worship Lord Muruga. It is 4 kms. from Theppampatti 21 kms. from Aundipatti and 36 kms. from Theni. Arulmigu Poolanathiswarar Temple, Cinnamanur

This Temple Located in Chinnamanur which was formerly known as "Harikesarinallur" and it was mentioned in "Tholkappiyam". This ancient Temple Situated on the banks of the Mullai river.

Arulmigu Mungilanai Kamatchiyamma Temple, Devathanapatti

The main shrine in Devathanapatti is Mungilanai Kamatchiyamma Temple which is Situated on the banks of river Manjal. In this temple the doors to Sanctum Sanctorum are never opened and all the Poojas are offered only to the portals. The special Poojas are performed in the evening to the accompaniment of local musical instruments. It is a spectacular audio - visual feast. The important festivals in this temple are "Masimagam", "Sivarathiri" which falls in the Tamil month of Masi. This temple is 3 kms from Devathanapatti and 27 kms away from Theni.'

Arulmigu Suruliandavar Kovil (Suruli Falls)

The main attraction of Suruli Andavar Temple, dedicated to Lord Muruga which is located at 3 kms from the bus stand, a difficult walk in a small narrow path one can reach Suruli Andavar Temple. It is a holy land and one of the Popular pilgrim Centers. On the Tamil Chitrai (April/May), Taipoosam and on all important Hindu auspicious days thousands of pilgrims worship Lord Muruga.



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Conclusion

Temples in proper form have come into existence in India only long after the Vedic period. They were constructed strictly in accordance with Agamas and Silpasastras. They were intended to represent the body of human being in which the soul resides in the same way as they represent in a far wider context, nature in which God resides. According to great sages like Tirumular, our body is the temple par excellence. It is temple in motion. Tirumular states as follows:

"Ullam perum koil unudambu alayam
Vallar piranakku vai gopura vasal
Thella therintharkku seevan sivalingam
Kallappulan ainthum kalamani vilakkey"

Pati, pasu and pasam are the three realities accepted by Saivism. Among them god is conceived in three forms namely rupam, arupam and ruparupam. Sivalinga represents the transcendental aspect of Lord Siva. Various views are there about Sivalinga but alternatively it represents the formless aspects of Lord Siva.

Temples were built for different purposes. Being a visible emblem of the religion, philosophy and ethics of the people, the temple played a role far more vital than any other institutions. The great builders and artists sought self expression through conformity to tradition rather than originality of the expression.

End Notes

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