

## **Thiruvithancode Sreeneelakantaswamy Temple (Sree Mahadevar)- Historical Enquiry**

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### **Abstract**

*Kanyakumari District is denoted with the ancient temples. The temple is either for Lord siva or Lord Vishnu with different names and incarnations. In each village there is a temple. They constructed the temples for their worship and for the worship of public. Thiruvithancode are located at distance of 54km from Trivandrum. This area once commanded historical and art of generalship. The temple dedicated to Sree Mahadevar situated here bestows great honour on it the status of a pilgrim centre. The past glory of this temple still continues to hold it as one of the twelve sivalayams of erstwhile south Travancore where heavy crown of devotees in during sivaratri in the month of February/March. Like the majority of its counterparts in and around the area, this temple claims an existence of many thousands of years. Its puranic foundation helps to substantiate this fact.*

**Keywords:** *Devaswom, Thiruvithancode, temple, sivalay, puranic, Srikovil, Pooja, Travancore*

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## Introduction

The place name Thiruvithancode has its own significance. It is believed that Thiruvithamcore or Thiruvithancoor was derived from the term *Thiru Vaazhum Codu* meaning the *code- land, Thiru- prosperity, Vaazhum- reign*. Another historically important derivation invites the reader to take a peep into the past. Thiruvithancode when split up reads as Thiru-Aathan- codu, the domain of the illustrious Athans. Aathan is identified as the hereditary title of the Chera rulers. This acts as additional evidence that even before the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This region was the seat of Ay rulers and then capital of Venad after the decline of the Chera Empire. In olden times the kings Venad used to come here and to Valvechagostam before assuming rulership, to take an oath that they would rule justly and well. Though almost all famous temples of South Travancore and rest of the Venad had considerable relation with Thrippappoor Swaroopam, even later on, this temple must have been of such significance in the scheme of affairs as to warrant the assumption to the kingship of Adithya Varma in 1544 A.D., at this Sree Mahadevar Temple, Thiruvithancode. A place is said to have been constructed nearby. The temple preserves an ornate swing, which reminds us the royal days of the Travancore kings.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate history of Thiruvithancode Mahadevar temple
2. To sketch puranic traditions of Thiruvithancode Mahadevar temple
3. To analyse structure of Thiruvithancode Mahadevar temple
4. To sketch the poojas of Thiruvithancode Mahadevar temple

## Research Methodology

The methodology adopted in the present study is analytical, descriptive and interpretative reflection. In the preparation of the present study the following sources including both *primary* and secondary sources.

## Historical Importance of the Temple

The temple is situated in three acres of land, and it faces to the east. Actually, there are two temples standing in line and a little apart from one another when they are viewed from the front. The main one is ofcourse dedicated to Shiva and the other in the south, to Maha Vishnu. Till the large temple tank was dredged a couple of years ago, its water was clear, but thereafter, the surface has become fully covered with a type of green moss.

As is common to most south Indian temples, here too a lofty boundary wall encircles the complex. The main entrance and parts of wall carry many engravings of *Sree Hanuman* in different models, as well as other designs. Fronting both temples,

stand this copper enclosed *Dhwajastambhas* with the *Sapta Rishies* seated around them. The Sree Mahadevar temple is entered through an exceptionally large Belikkalapura which possesses many pillars apart from the big *Belikkalu*. An inscriptions on the wall of this hall conveys that it was put up during the reign of Maharja Bala Rama Varma(1798-1811). Impressive granite figures of girth and height including two *Dhwarapalakas* at the entrance of the Belikkalapura, Bhishma and Karna on the outer sides and the engraved inner pillars each carrying some deities captures the attention of the devotees. One pillar with a *Ganapthy* sculpture has been singled out and wick is daily lit here.

The *Nalambalam* contains within it a grand *Srikovil*. The big granite *Yali* on the raised northern platform of the idanazhi is of special note. He has a stone ball inside the mouth which is too big to be taken out. It would have been carved from inside the *Yali* mouth itself and can be rolled about. Such type of expertise is seen in quite a few temples as examples of excellence in stone craftsmanship.



The Srikovil is situated at a good elevation. It is made up of granite, large, rectangular in shape and three chambered. The srikovil of this temple consists of Garbhagraham and a room in front built in granite. The former has a Sikharam and the later in terraced. The *Garudamandapam* is also a terraced granite structure. There is a *Prathakshinavazhi* round the Srikovil and the Garudamandapam has terraced roof. The floor round the Garudamandapam is paved with granite. Long, solid, spaced granite sleepers connect the outer periphery to the lower level of the sanctum roof. Being placed at intervals, they facilitate the movement of light and air. In the first enclose, dignified granite Nandi faces his master residing within the innermost recess. Two granite Ganapathy idols are also present here and, as is usual, they sit facing to the east. The main idol is a *Sivalinga* believed to be the original *Rudraksha* deposited by Bhima which immediately got converted into a suyambhu Sivalinga. Unlike the usual Suyambhus which are granite, all the twelve including this Rudraksha, having possibly rough uneven surface. A Silver *Anki* of Mahadever

is constantly is issue.



The rectangular roof of the granite sanctum is massive and plastered over with lime and mortar. Inscriptions are found engraved on the northern and southern walls of the *Srikovil*. Though not specially outstanding, they portray Ugra Narasimha, Sri Krishna with the cowherd denizens on the top level of the northern areas and Narasimha blessing Prahalada, Devi and Nataraja. A point of note is that there is equal or more emphasis on the Vaishnava themes despite the fact that the consecration was by a Saivite sage intolerant to Vishnu indicating a possible construction of the built up areas.

In the Nalambalam, to the left of the srikovil and at a distance away, within a long railed enclosure array the Panchaloha idols of Nataraja, Madura Meenakshi with lotus bud in hand and Kariakkal Ammiyar. This old Brahmin lady, a committed devotee of Siva, is seen here playing the cymbals for Nataraja Nrirta. Vashya Ganapathy who receives considerable attention due to his special nature as dispenser of boons, is carved on an outside pillar.



Both the Shiva Vishnu temples follow the Malayalam tradition of worship. Daily the three main *pooja* viz., *Usha pooja*, *Ucha pooja* and *Attazha pooja* are performed, so also three Sribalies. The *Utsava* runs simultaneously in both temples for ten days during in the month of December or January. The idols ride on elephant

back for the processions. The two families belonging to Nelluveli- Athiyara and Manalikkara are the two families holding to trantra here. This temple closes a little earlier than the normal run of Mahakshetras, the timing being from 5 to 10 A.M and from 5 to 8.00 P.M., the temple is open for a longer time during festival and other important days.



A deviation to the set pattern is evident in the placement of the Vishnu temple which is located to the right of Siva instead of the left. Opinions vary regarding its age investing it with equal or later origin when compared to the Siva temple. It is less majestic than its neighbor, however, its own stature is established by that it operates as an independent temple possessing its own *Dhwajastambha* and *Belikkalu* both standing exposed in the ground. At the entrance to the *Vishnu temple*, the place of the *Dhwarapalakas* is occupied by an unusually fierce Hanuman with long side teeth and a big Garuda. Both are well built and stand looking at each other instead of facing the east. The small entrance hall has no significant artistic features worth mention, unlike in the Siva temple. The *Nalambalam* is multipillared carrying many engravings. Apart from the inner portion of the ceiling which offers a lotus carpet, the *Namaskaramandapa* is unadorned. As in the Siva temple. Here also the rectangular *Srikovil* connects the corresponding areas of the *Nalambalam* with spaced granite sleepers. The stone sanctum while smaller in dimension when compared to the main temple, yet offers ornate walls and roof. The four-armed standing idol of Mahavishnu in dark granite possesses exceeding charm of features. Few are the icons which can command such beauty of appearance and serenity of emblems. Its texture is said be as smooth as silk. The usual emblems- Chakara, Sankhu, Padmaand Gada are appropriately displayed in the hands.

Another extraordinary feature is seen on the exterior of the two temples. All around the outset of both structures stand rows of granite pillars, sixty-four of

them, with a sculpted *Deepalakshmi* on each. Though from the front, both temples appear distinctly different, the southern western and northern sides run as one with the *Deepalakshmi* pillars following in succession. Back entrances are provided, but they appear as a continuation of a single unified structure and not as separate temples. A notably unusual aspect of these *Deepalakshmis* is that they offer infinite and at times startling variety.

### Special Rituals

There are special *pujas* on the stars of Thiruvathira, Thiruvonam and Aayilyam every month

Festivals

Sivaratri (March)

Chithira Kodiyetta Peruvizha (April/May)

Sivalaya Ottam (February/ March)

Thiruvathira Maholsavam (December)

Annual festival (December)

### Conclusion

In short, Thiruvithancode Mahadevar temple is best examples for temple monument in (south Travancore) Kanniyakumari. The past glory of this temple still continues to hold it as one of the twelve sivalayams of erstwhile south Travancore.

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