

A View Of Suchindrum Thanumalayan Temple's Car Festival

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Abstract

The Car festival (ratha yatra) has its related spiritual and religious sentiment from a fervent devotee to a common man. This spirituality is an integrated expression of sacred as well as spiritual consciousness that comprise the foremost aspect of our civilisation and heritage. It is indeed an integral part of our remote traditional antiquity. Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu has emerged as one of the most popular travel destinations in India. Culture of this district reflects the life of the people and the way they celebrate various fairs and festivals. The district has so many famous ancient temples and this particular work is aimed at studying the significance of Suchindrum temple and its Car Festival. Suchindrum is situated in the banks of river pazayar and the presiding deity is Sthanumalayan.

Introduction

Tamil Nadu is one of the grandest museums of temple and a multi-religious society¹. Temples are one such means of preserving the memory of our ancestors. Kanyakumari festivals are essential parts of the culture of Kanyakumari, reflecting the religious way of life and practices of the resident population. Throughout the year, the district experiences a series of colorful, festive events, offering insight into the diverse cultural activities of the land. In fact, different types of Kanyakumari festivals infuse new life and hope into the minds of the natives, who are almost exhausted, struggling with the daily drudgeries of life.² Temple worship is a very important aspect of India's cultural heritage. A structure of the temple resembles a cave, which the worshipper penetrates in order to approach the most holy place. Its vertical dimension is like a mountain, which suggests the ascent to enlightenment and deliverance³. There is a well coordinated science of invoking and installing the divine power in a deity in the temple. The Hindu religious belief is that when man is in the presence of the divine, there should be nothing to distract his eye and that God shall reveal himself to his

devotee gradually⁴. This spiritual technology is based on the vedantic knowledge of the manifestations of the phenomenal universe and the human life from the supreme reality the Brahman.

Etymologically, the word 'Ratha' in Sanskrit means 'to move'. Hence, 'Ratha' or the chariot, refers to the vehicle for movement. The journey from the temple to any other place in the name of Yatra (tour) is an indivisible element of worship in Hinduism. These ritual journeys of the deities may involve the short circumambulation around the temple and the uniqueness of the Car Festival lies in the involvement of the presiding deities in the journey, being accompanied by the representatives. An attempt has been made in this article to study the importance of Sthanumalaya temple Car festival in Suchindrum. The Sthanumalaya temple in the Town Panchayat of Suchindrum is dedicated to the god Sthanumalayan, and it is one of the largest and most popular Siva temples in South India.

Study Area

Suchindrum is a town panchayath about 14 km from Kanyakumari. Suchindram temple is distinctive in the entire country because it is dedicated to three different deities representing one idol in the form of linga in the garpagraha and is called Sthanumalayan (Sthanu-Shiva; Maal-Vishnu and Ayan-Brahma) kovil. The temple is rich in sculpture and architecture. The holy place is situated in the banks of the river Pazayar and is surrounded by thick vegetation and paddy fields. Suchindrum is having a favourable agro-climatic condition to grow crops such as paddy, banana, coconut and cloves.. The temperature ranges between 22.6° and 32.1° Celsius. May and June are the hottest months.



Legendary Origin (Sthala Purana)

Suchindrum stands for the place where Lord Indra attained purification from the committed sins. Suchi in Sanskrit means 'being purified'. Lord Indra once happened to see the beautiful Agalya, the wife of sage Goudhama muni. On seeing her, Indira became restless and craved for her. He made a plan to be with her. Indra went to the asramam of Goudhama in the form of a cock and crowed like a cock at night. The sage thought that it had dawned and went to bath. Indra took the form of the sage and entered the asramam. The sage understood everything due to his powers and he cursed Lord Indra. Indra was not able to suffer the humiliation brought about by the curse and he seeked immediate redemption. He came to 'Gnana Aranya' as this place was then called and offered worship to Lord Shiva. Relieving Indra of his curse, Lord Shiva granted him of his wish that the place where he attained purification should henceforth be called 'Suchindrum'.

There is also another story that depicts that the trimurthys with their consorts came to visit Athri maharishi's asramam which as located in gnana aranya, they wanted to check the chastity of Anushya devi, the wife of Athri. Anushya by the strength of her chastity made converted the three deities as new born babies. The consorts of trimurthys requested anushya for their original form. Hence Suchindrum is the place where Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva regained their original form.



Lord Indira's penance



Anushya devi's power of her chastity

Sthanumalayan Temple

The architecture of this temple is of great excellence that this ancient temple represents one of the foremost and richest among the South Indian Shrines. On seeing from a

distance the temple tower makes a attractive picture. The main Gopuram is a marvel of construction and stands majestically 134 feet high. It is well proportioned and gradually tapers upwards .The Shrine is large rectangular in shape and having wide corridors on outer edge. The corridors are decorated with pillars containing beautiful stone sculptures and ceiling with beautiful paintings. The presiding deity is in the form of Shivlinga. There are many supporting deities. The devotees confront Lord Dakshinamoorthy first on entering the temple. The holy place Suchindrum is thought as the spiritual conurbation of Kanyakumari district. In this temple Dakshinamurthy is given great importance of place⁵.

In almost all the temples in Tamil nadu, Lord Vinayaga is worshipped first. But in Suchindrum temple, Lord Dakshinamurthy occupies the first place. There are separate small shrines for Lord Vinayaga, Lord Muruga and Lord Sastha. The navagrahas are seen in the ceiling of Vasantha mandapa along with their zodiac signs. Lord Vishnu is given position adjacent to the main shrine. A beautiful Hanuman statue towering 5.48 m is installed in the north eastern corner of the temple.

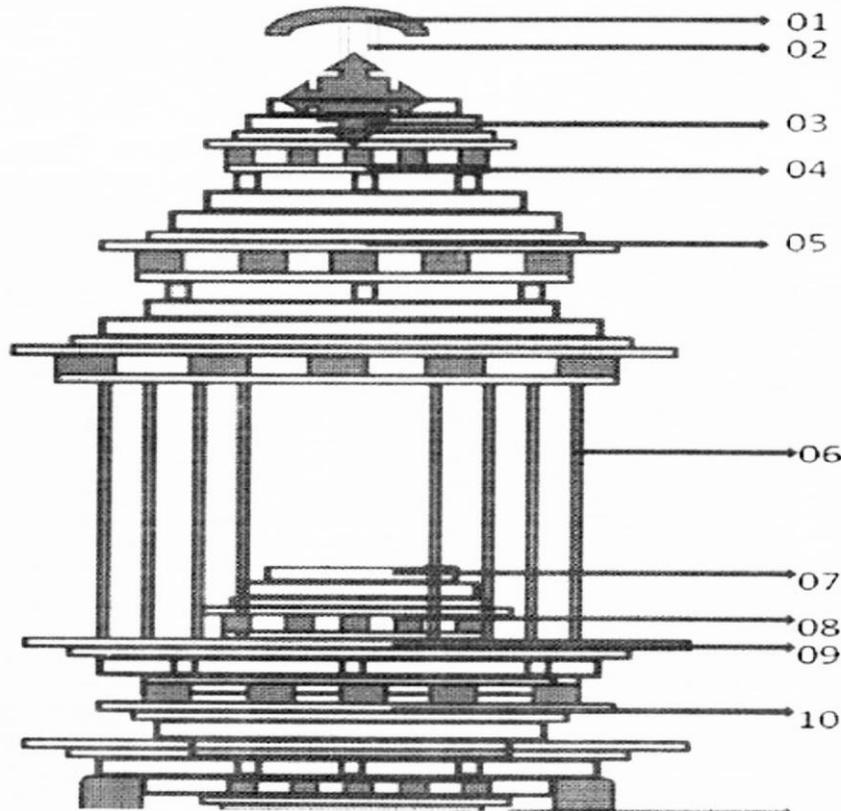
Main Deity	Sthanumalayan
Godess	Aramvalartha thai
Sthala vriksham	Kondrai tree
Theertham	Pancha theertham or prabancha theertham
Mode of agamam	Tantric
Dwajam	Two (for shiva and Vishnu)
Other name	Siveendram ,Gjanaranyam
Mandapa	Kulasekara,Alankara and Vasantha mandapa
Significance	Musical pillars



General Structure of South Indian Temple car

The construction of temple chariot derive its form that resembles the life cycle of a man from birth to death. There are five suthurams (formulae) for designing a car namely bala, kumara, raja, virutha and maruna. These are essentially step by step processes involved in

making the car that may follow any one of them. Most and majority of the cars will be following the rajasuthuram mode of production. Rajasuthuram mode is especially meant for the longevity and happiness of the people of the land.



(Source: reply to FCR statement of case /2013)

- 1 Therkombu
- 2 Kalasha
- 3 Kabodagar (plate)
- 4 Gandam (supportin elements)
- 5 Alankara thattu
- 6 Kalgal (legs)
- 7 Peetam
- 8 Devasthanam
- 9 Vistharam
- 10 Sirpangal

Some Famous Car Festivals

The Car Festival of god Jagannath, Puri, is known all over the world because of the involvement of huge devotees under the wheels of the massive car that grew around it. The car festival of Puri is one of the most spectacular religious festivals of India⁶. The Chariot of Lord Jagannath is known as Nandighosham. It has 16 wheels and the colour of the fabrics that cover the roof of the Chariot are red and yellow. The Car Festival of the great Siva

temple of Bhubaneswar in Orissa, is held during spring months.⁷ In South India, the procession path for the car is relatively longer and the car is taken in the streets and return to the temple the same day. In the Nagaraja Temple at Nagercoil, the car festival is celebrated during the Tamil month of 'Thai' (January- February). People from different parts of the district gather in the car festival of the Nagaraja temple. Sri Boothalingaswamy Temple is located in Boothapondai. Lord Siva is the deity of this temple. The place is famous for its Car Festival during the Tamil month of 'Thai' (January- February). "Aadi Pooram" festival celebrated in the Andal Temple. After early morning special pujas, the presiding deities, Sri Rengamannar and Goddess Andal are taken in decorated palanquins to the car.⁸ The Aazii ther of Thiruvarur is the biggest chariot in Tamil Nadu weighing 220 tonnes and towering 96 feet. The car festival of the Natarajar temple, Chidambaram is organized as a part of the Ani Thirumanjanam festival, attracting a large number of devotees from various parts of the State.

Suchindrum Car Festival

The Sthanumalayan Temple is of extreme importance to both the sects of Hinduism i.e Shaivaites and Vaishnavite because the deity itself exists as trimurthy in a single linga. The festival of the Sthanumalayan Temple falls mainly in the Tamil month of Margazhi (December- January) for ten days ⁹.On the festival days, the deity is taken in procession on the streets.

Day	Name of the Festival
1	Hoisting the festival flag in dwajasthambam
2	Puspha vimana vahanam
3	Makkal Mar sandippu
4	Paranki Narkaali
5	Panchamoorthi Dharshanam
6	Indira Vahanam
7	Kailasa parvadham
8	Chidambareshwara Vahanam
9	Car Festival
10	Arudra Dharshan

On the ninth day, car festival takes place. The temple cars in suchindrum display the beautiful and great quality of carving on wood .The most important part is that, it showcases many scenes from the puranas and agama sashtras .There are four chariots in the suchindrum temple namely

1. Swamyther – dedicated to lord shiva (Ulsava murthy)
2. Amman ther – dedicated to the goddess of the temple

3. Pillayar ther – dedicated to lord Vinayaga and
4. Indiran ther – dedicated to lord Indira.

Swamyther is the biggest chariot of the temple. This car has totally six stages and towers around 18 meters. This car is considered to be around 350 years old and is made by the wood of Illupai tree and teak. Swamy ther is an outstanding example that explores how good the ancient craftsmen were. Wood carving is an ancient craft of the country and as in practice even before the stone sculpture was taken up. Rig Veda also mentions that carpenters from South India were experts in making chariots. During the festival, the car is usually decorated with silk clothes, flowers and plantain trees to give a beautiful and mammoth look. In the middle portion of the car, the idol of the presiding deity will be kept in a special platform called as devasthan peetam and it is believed that the procession of the temple car removes the sins of the people and gives nourishment in all sorts of life.



Amman ther is the second tallest chariot that towers around 13 meters. This car was made of mavilangu and teak wood. This ther is dedicated to aram valartha amman who was born in a small village called Therur and because of her intense tapas, she became goddess of the temple. This amman ther was presented to the temple by the people of Therur. Amman ther is dragged only by women. The pillayar car was made by King Moolam Thirunal and this car towering 9 meters was dedicated to Lord Vinayaka. The smallest car of the temple is Indiran ther and it stands 4.5 meters tall. Silpasatras gives the idea that the worship of idols made of stone, wood and metals like bronze leads to liberation from the cycle of birth and death¹⁰. The worship of many gods can be traced back to the culture of Indus valley

civilization¹¹. In Tamil Nadu there are large number of idols made of bronze can be seen in many temples¹².

The devotees every year drew the three cars or chariots of Lord Ganesa, Swamy and Amman. Lakhs of people join in dragging the thick hard rope of the chariot on the procession route¹³. Elephants are usually used to carry the timber which is used as grip for the wheels and to give the chariot, a momentary kick. Thus the car presents a festive look¹⁴. In the early morning, the idols of Lord Shiva, His consort Goddess Aram Valartha Thai and Lord Vinayaka, after abhisekha will be brought to the cars. After special pujas and deeparadhana, the gigantic car carrying the deities will be dragged. The car halts at various places to enable devotees to offer worship.

Conclusion

The car festival at Suchindram Sthanumalayan Temple during the months of December/January attracts large number of people from Kanyakumari District and different parts of India. The temple is very famous and popular among the devotees. The architecture of this temple is of great excellence that this ancient temple represents one of the foremost and richest among the South Indian Shrines. On seeing from a distance the temple tower makes a attractive picture. Prayers of devotees for marriage, progeny etc are fulfilled by the Lord. Devotees who visit this temple and sincerely worship the deities are sure to be blessed by the grace of the Almighty.

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