



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF ADI THAPASU AND CHITHIRAI FESTIVAL OF SRI SANKARA NARAYANA SWAMY TEMPLE IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

KEY WORDS: Adi Thapasu, Chithirai Festival, Special worship

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe the Adi Thapasu and Chithirai festival of Sri Sankaranarayana Swamy Temple in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. The people of Tirunelveli district follow a tradition of Panchasthala starting from Sankarankovil. The Sankaranarayana swamy temple is Chief among the Panchasthalas'. The other four temples are Dharugapuram (water), Karivalamvandanallur (Fire), Thenmalai (Wind) and Devadanam (Earth). Sankara Narayana Swamy temple is situated on the Western end of the town and is surrounded by four car streets. The temple is housed at an extent of 4.50 acres. It is a celebrated 'Sivasthala' for doing penance. Adi Thapasu and Chithirai festivals are very famous in Tirunelveli region.

Introduction :

Festivals are an integral part of socio - cultural and religious activities of the people. To the Hindus festivals are an expression of their piety'. It is natural that the Hindus offer their thankfulness to the maker of all things, and their chosen method of thanks giving is to perform festivals in his honour'. Festival is also considered as Sirappu Vazipadu (Special Worship). They are celebrated in the temples by following the rules of the agamas. Traditionally these festivals commence either on a Nakshtra (Natal Star) or titi (Tirtha titi). Festivals exceeding twenty one days are known as mandalotsava and ten days are known as Bramotsavam'. Pooja is the worship of God or Goddess following certain formalities and by offering of Pooja which is of two types. They are Athmartha Pooja (personal pooja) which is normally performed at home. The Parartha pooja (pooja for the whole of universe) is of two types. Nithya pooja and Visesha (special) pooja performed at temple only'.

Festivals

Festivals occupy a prominent place in the life of the people. They are occasions of public rejoicing and merriment, and they served to relieve the people of the humdrum monotony of everyday life. The festivals performed at Sankaranarayanasmwy temple are classified as follows.

- Day festival,
- Weekly festival,
- Monthly festival and
- Annual festivals

Chithirai Festival

Chithirai festival lasts for 48 days. It is celebrated as detailed below

Sl.No	Thirunal	Days
1.	Ammachiyar Thirunal	5
2.	Ayyanar Thirunal	5
3.	Vinayagar Thirunal	5
4.	Subramanyar Thirunal	5
5.	Muthualmoover Thirunal	3
6.	Chandra sekarar Thirunal	7
7.	Nayagar Nachiyar Thirunal	10
8.	Patha sekarar Thirunal	5
9.	Chandigeswarar Thirunal	3
	Total	48 ¹⁷

Of the 48 days the first five days are Ammachiar festival (i.e.) one of the guarding deities on the northern side. The next five days are Ayyanar festival i.e. one of the guarding deities on the southern side of the town. On the fifth day the Sivaharier gets anugnai (permission) to perform Brahmtsava from king Ugrapandya. On that day the bronze idol of the king will be taken on procession.

The next day (usually on the Panguni uthira day) the Dwoja Arohana or the flag hoisting in front the Sankarlingaswamy shrine for Vinayaggar is performed. The festival of vinayagar lasts for five days. The next five days of the festival is performed for Sri

Subramaniya. The following three days of the festival is Bhaktotvasam. That is the festival of moovar mudaligal (Sambandar, appar, Sundarar). Then for the next seven days Chandrasekara utsavam is celebrated. On the seventh day the swamy (Chandrasaekara) will go to Perunkottur and shall bring earth for Mrith sangiranam (taking earth for growing seedling as Mulaipaligai) from the place where the elephant plugged on the earth. There is a mandapam and a small statue of the elephant besides a small statue of the king. A small temple of Thirukottai Ayyanar is also there. The swamy is being received by the then Zamindar of Alagapuri who is a Rettakudaiar (possessing the honour of the temple with two umbrellas) special poojas are also offered there. Now as the Zamin ceased to exist, the descendants of t he Zamin undertake in a very small scale.

Then follows the Nayagar Nachiyar festival or chithirai perum thiruvizha for the next ten days (i.e.) on the return of Sri Chandrasekara swamy from Perumkottur with the flag hoisting for the main festival. On this occasion Aseervatham (Blessing) will be done. The specially of Aseervatham is that the priest blesses as 'Sarave Jana Sukhino Bavanthu' (All world be happy and peaceful). This blessing is unique in its nature. On the tenth day i.e. on the Chitrapournami (full moon) day the Dwaja Avarohana (Lowering the flag) will be done. Theerthavari¹⁹ is celebrated on this day.

Adi Thapasu Festival

Adi thapasu festival is the most important festival celebrated in this temple. It is celebrated for fifteen days. Of these fifteen day celebration, the noted event is the eleventh day auspicious Thapasu katchi which is shown in the month of Adi on Utrada star day which falls on the full moon day.

Astronomical Significance of the Month Ashada or Adi

In the month of Adi the sun enters the zodiacal sign of cancer (karkataka). This is the beginning point of Dhakshinayana. The sun moves from north towards south direction i.e. towards the dark region Dhakshinayana is considered as inauspicious because the day is shorter than the night. During the month of Adi, the Acharyas stay at one place for performing sathurmasya viratha (fast)²⁰. Throughout Tamil Nadu people celebrate the first day of the Tamil month Adi. The heavy wind which bellows during this month brings diseases so people worship Amman to be rescued from disease.

All the festivals of this temple are associated with religion, while the Adi Thapasu festival is associated with both religion and culture. It is also associated with local, regional and communal. It is celebrated with gaiety and rejoices. Men and women participated with enthusiasm. Women in particular adorned themselves with their best clothes and ornaments on that occasion. Various communities residing in and around this town actively take part in this festival. The celebration includes the performance of Vedic sacrifices, poojas and decoratitons to Swamy and Ambal.

Adi Thapasu festival starts with flag hoisting or Swaja Arohana. It is hoisted in the Golden Kodimaram siutates in front of the Gomathy

Amman shrine. This flag hoisting ceremony is being performed by the Kammavar Naidu community²¹.

First Day Festival

On the first day the deity Sri Gomathy reaches the mandapam of Maravar community in the evening and special poojas are performed there. The decorated deity with valuable ornaments will be taken on procession along the car streets. The deity then reaches the temple.

Second Day

The deity Sri Gomathy will be decorated and taken on procession. All the expenses are borne by the temple for morning procession. In the evening the decorated deity will be taken to the mandapam of Yadhava community and they will offer special poojas. After that, the deity will be taken on procession on Khamadenu vahana.

Third Day

The deity Sri Gomathy will be decorated for Sivalinga Abishekam on the morning of the third day of the Adi Thapasu festival. The decorated deity will reach the Mandapam of Illathar community belonging to twenty four villages and they offer special poojas. After the poojas the deity will be taken on Simaha vahana.

Fourth Day

On the fourth day also the deity Gomathy will be decorated for Sivalinga pooja and it reaches the mandapam of sengunther mudaliar community. Special poojas are offered by them. Then the deity will be taken on Vrushaba vahana.

Fifth Day

By reciting Tamil marai, the deity will be decorated in the morning. In the evening the deity is received by the washer man community in their mandapam. Special poojas are offered there after the poojas the deity will be seated on a silver plated chapparam and will be taken on procession and reaches the temple.

Sixth Day

The sixth day decoration will be 'Yogasana' and Athmartha pooja²² is performed in the morning. In the evening the deity reaches the mandapam of Sri Sankaranlinga Thevar. There special poojas are offered and then the deity comes on a palanquin in procession.

Seventh Day

On the morning of the seventh day the deity Gomathy is decorated for "Go samrakshana". This decoration is a signification of the story of sthalapurana which states that Devakanyas (ladies) accompanied Sri Parvathi to this 'Punnaivanam' and therefore Sri Parvathi is called Sri Gomathi or Avudai in Tamil. In the Evening the deity reaches the mandapam of Senai Thalaivar of thirty six villages. Special poojas are offered at their mandapa.

Eighth Day

On the eighth day morning the deity Sri Gomathy is decorated for veena ganam²⁴. In the evening the Barber community enjoys the privilege of offering special poojas at their mandapam. They the deity comes out of the mandapam on a decorated Khamadenu vahana.

Ninth Day

Car festival is celebrated in the morning of the ninth day festival. The Tellugu Chettiar community reserves the right to perform special poojas to Sri Gomathy Ambigai at their mandapam. Then the deity reaches the temple on Kamadhenu vahana.

Tenth Day

Mulaipaligai accompanies Sri Gomathy on the morning procession of the tenth day. The Vaniga vaisiya community makes it their claim to offer special poojas to the deity at their mandapam in the evening. The deity rides on Vrushabha Vahana in the procession.

Eleventh Day

The place of 'Thapasu Katchi' has the decorated masagiri* pandals. The time for 'Thapasu katchi' is fixed on reading the auspicious stars and lagans²⁶. The memorable 'Thapasu katchi'

receives our attention. On reaching the Masagiri' Sri Sankaranarayana stays there. The deity Sri Gomathy goes round the swamy three times and stays at the masagiri especially made for her. Then the traditional exchange of garlands occurs. On the third time the deities are adorned with garlands and 'Parivattam'. The simultaneous Camphor 'Harathi' takes place. At this auspicious hour it is told that two Garudas fly over the place. According to the temple administration it is estimated that at about two lakhs of pilgrims congregate the occasion.

Twelfth Day

On that day morning the deities are not brought on procession but in the evening the deities Sri Gomathy and Sri Sankaralingaswamy reach the Hindu Nadar uravinmurai mahamai mandapam. There special pooja are offered and then in the night it reaches the temple. Following this Unjal festival is celebrated for three inside the temple²⁷. Sri Sankaralingaswamy and Sri Gomathy are offered abishekam and special pooja. On the third day of the Unjal Utsavam the oil offerings are made to Sri Gomathi. This bears the name Ennai Kappu Utsavam. With this ceremony the Adi thapasu festival comes to an end.

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2. A.V. Jeyachandran, Madurai Temple Complex, 1985, p. 207-209.
3. Exanth Rannde (ed.) Temple India, Vol. X, Madras, 1981, p. 168.
4. Chockalingam, Alayangalin Utporul Vizhakkam, Book II, p. 211.
5. Sri Sankaranarayana Swamy temple Natkurippu, p. 10.
6. Theerthavari means distributing theertham to devotees.
7. Interview with S.N.A. Ramasamy pattar, dated 5.8.2017
8. Interview with Chinachamy the leaders of the Commavar Naidu Community, dated on 26.11.2017
9. Athmartha Pooja - Pooja to god who dwells the human mind or soul.
10. Veena Ganam - Pleasing Sri Siva by playing Veena * Masagiri - a panddal without roof arrangement is donated by T.P. Chidmbaram pillai trust, Tirunelveli.
11. Personal Interview with C. Sankara pattar, temple priest, dated on 4.8.2017.
12. Thinakaran, Tamil News Paper dated on 10.08.2013, p. 16.