



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

## History

# STRUCTURE OF SRI SANKARA NARAYANA SWAMY - GOMATHIAMMAL TEMPLE SANKARANKOVI A STUDY

**KEY WORDS:** Lord Sankaranarayanan, Gomathiamman Shrine, Structure

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## ABSTRACT

### Introduction :

The aim of this paper is to highlight the Structure of Sri Sankaranarayana Swamy Temple situated at Sankarankovil in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. Sankarankovil a municipal town is situated 120 kilometers South West of Madurai city and 55 Kilometers North West of Tirunelveli town the district headquarters. 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). The ardent devotees of Siva used to go on foot to all these. Panchasthalas' and worship on Mahasivatrithi day.

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. It is here that Sri Paramasiva blessed SriUmadevi with His revelation of 'Sri Sankaranarayana Roopa'.

There is in reality only one supreme deity. God is one - people may call Him by different names. To some he may be Brahma, to some Vishnu and to some Siva, but they are really all one. But sometimes the worshippers of these various forms forget this and they engage in sectarian quarrels. To avoid this and to emphasize the oneness of god, this synchronize came into being-the combination of Hari (Vishnu) Hara (Siva). In a sculpture of Harihara the right half is Siva and the left half is Vishnu Lord Siva is worshipped in different forms of them, Harihara is the one. The left half (Vishnu) carries the wheel conch or mace. The other is in kataka pose near the thigh. Right half (Siva) - boon giving attitude, trident or sword or drum or rosary or battle axe or skull cup.

Vishnu half wears kirita crown and makara earrings. Siva half wears jata crown with moon crescent, serpent earrings in right ear. Siva's vehicle Nandi (Bull) is sculptured on the right and Vishnu Garuda (eagle) on the left. The two legs of harihara are straight without bends.

In the beginning this temple was known by the name Sankarankovil. Later the image of Narayana was introduced i.e. in one figure 'Hari and Hara' was depicted, and then Sankarankovil became Sankaranainarkovil. As it is a sthala of the oneness of 'Siva and Vishnu it stands for religious reconciliation.

We can see the image of Ugramapandya and Manikirivan on the right and left Pillar situates in front of the temple respectively. In course of time the king built the mandapam and outer walls of the temple. It was built at the extent of 4 acres and 50 cents.

### Gopuram

The significant feature of the temple of the pandiya period is the dominance of the monumental gateway or gopura at the entrance to temple which dwarfed the viman over the central Sanctuary. The temple conspicuous by its goupura for many miles around boasts of great antiquity.

This temple contains four gopuras of which two are of very small size, one in the western gate and the other one in the North. On the eastern side there are two gopuras, one in front of the swamy Shrine and the other in front of the Amman shrine.

The main entrance of the temple itself is Gopuram i.e. the swamy gopura. It is 125 feet in height and nine storeyed. On the roof there are 9 huge kalasas which representing the 9 storeyed. This huge gopura is a landmark of this town visible to a radius of seven miles. The length of the gopura in North South direction is 56 feet, east west 15 feet and kalasa at the top has 7 feet 4 inches in its height.

The Gopura in front of Amman Shrine is smaller when compared to the swamy gopura. Here Goddess Gomathi is repeatedly shown in the form of either performing pooja in front of a Linga or doing

penance. She is either seated or standing with folded hands in front of Dhakshinamoorthy. The sikhara is circular in shape.

### Parts of the temple

The temple complex consists of three main shrines. One dedicated to Siva and the other to Gomathi Amman and the third one to Sankaranarayana all the three facing east. Each has an "Ardhamandapa", and "Mugha Mandapa" in front of them. The entire structures in each case are surrounded by pillared 'Prakara'. On the northern side there is a Nataraja shrine facing south. The entire construction, including Siva, Amman, Sankaranarayana, Shunmugar and Nataraja shrine are connected by a Mahamandapa. There is an Utsava Mandapa in front of the Amman shrine. There is a huge gopura in front of the Siva shrine. In between the gopura and the Mugamandapa of the Siva shrine, there is a Nandi facing the Siva shrine. There is "Dvijasthamba" in front of Nandi. Behind Nandi situates the "Pali Beeda". The entire campus is enclosed on four sides by huge walls called "Mathils".

This temple was not built at one time Maravarman Sundrapandya I had built the Siva and Amman Shrine in a modest scale. His successor Maravarman Sundrapandya II added the Mahamandapa. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century the gopura was built by konerinmai kondai Kulasekkara Deva.

### The Siva Shrine

Siva shrine situates in the western side of the temple. It is located in front of the main entrance. It is made of stone the vimana above the shrine is a simple two tier structure and the sikhara is a octagonal in structure. The vimana is built of brick and mortar and dressed with stone.

### Amman Shrine

The Amman of this temple is very popularly known as Gomathi Amman or Aavudaitthai. In the entire pandya region her popularity is unique and unparalleled. The nature of devotees' offerings to this temple deserves a special study. All the folks firmly believe that prayer to Gomathi immediately wards off ghosts, relieves one from any poisonous bites, and bestows children to the barren women and so on.

Everyday replicas of a snake, scorpion, and centipedes made of silver and at times of gold are put into the "Hundial" of this temple. Offerings of the replicas of the limbs like the eyes, feet, hands or at times a replica of the whole body made of silver are put into the 'Hundial' in large numbers. This Amman shrine situates in the North side of the temple.

### Sankaranarayana Shrine

Sankaranarayana shrine was built in between the Siva and Amman shrine. The temple consists of two main parts; the larger occupied by the lingam, the emblem of Siva, and the smaller by the goddess Gomathi Amman. Between the two a third small shrine has been

inserted for Narayana but the building did not lend itself to this addition; for while the lingam and the Amman may, as is usual be viewed from the main entrance through a continuous vista of doorways, so that the humblest worshipper may do homage from the street, it was found impossible to give the God Narayana similar accommodation. He has therefore walled in and has no gat way. Instances of temples which, according to tradition at least, have been converted from the worship of Siva to that of Vishnu are not uncommon; the great temple of Tirupathy and Perumal temple of Srivilliputhoor may be quoted. In Sankaranarayanakovil the attempt, which we may perhaps ascribe to the era of those ardent Vaishnavites, the king of Vijayanagar, was met, it would appear that already the temple contained both Gods.

### Shunmugar Shrine

Sri Shunmugar shrine situates, north east corner in front of the Amman shrine. The paintings of the Six Padaiveedu are depicted on both sides of the walls. A bronze statue of Shunmugar in a standing posture is installed there with his two lower arms. He shows his abhya with his right and "Varadha" with his left. He carries a vajra in his upper right and Sakthi Ayudhna or vel (Lance) in his upper left arm. He is standing erect in Samabhanga posture flanked by his two consorts, Valli on His left and delivayanai on His right.

### Nataraja Shrine

Nataraja and his consort might belong the early part of 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In this temple Nataraja shrine locates on the Northern side of the prakara. A bronze imag of Nataraja in the Anandha Tandava pose is enshrined in this structure. Here Nataraja has His right foot planted firmly on the back of crouching Muyalakan and lifting His left leg. He has an enigmatic smile on His face. The entire figure is surrounded by a "Prabha Mandala" carrying flames. This anandhatandava is being witnessed by four persons, the foremost is Goddess Parvathy. The other three witnesses are sage Patanjali, sage Vyagrapada and saiva hymnal Poetess Karikkaammaiar. Karaikkalammaiar is shown as a figure playing symbols and witnessing the dance.

### Srichakra

Srichakra is installed, in front of the Amman shrine, by the Srilasrivelappa Thesiga swamygal X of Thiruvadudurai. Devotees by sitting on the chakra pray Gomathy for the cure of their diseases. In case of bodily pain a dab of rice flour on a leaf is placed on the part affected; a hallow is scooped out in the paste and in it ghee is poured; the gee is set alight, and when it has burnt itself out, the cure is complete.

### Durgai Amman Shrine

This shrine is on the northern side of Sankaralinga swamy shrine. It faces towards the south. By pouring gingerly oil into the squeezed lemon, womenfolk lit lamps in front of the shrine on every Tuesday and Friday with the belief that this will hasten the marriage of young ladies and also would give relief to married ladies from Rahu and Khedu thosam (something inauspicious) and leads to a happy married life

### Navagrahas

This temple has a separate pedestal for Navagrahas, the divine personification of the nine planets of the Hindu astrology. They are the sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Ragu and Kethu. Saturn who is believed to be the cause of human miseries attracts the greatest crowd on Saturdays, a day supposed to be especially scared to him. When compared to the popularity of the Navagrahas in other temples, their worship is not very popular in this temples, because of the unshakable faith the devotees have for Gomathi Amman of this temple.

### Thiruchuttu (Adi Holy Round)

It is a circling movement of the devotees, which means going around the outerpragara of the three main shrine of this temple. During Adithapasu festival days the devotees of Gomathi have the habit of going around the outerpragara of three main shrines for hundred and eight times. This hundred and eight round is to start from the first day of the Adithapasu festival. As to their

convenience and ability they will complete eight or twelve (or any numbers) rounds per day. By this way they complete hundred and eight rounds before the eleventh day of Adithapasu vision. (i.e.). They will complete hundred and eight rounds within eleven days. By doing this, devotees believe that their wishes, wants and desires will be fulfilled by the Goddess Gomathi.

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