



## ARDHANAREESWARAR TEMPLE AT TIRUCHANGODE – A HISTORICAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Tiruchengode is the pride of Tamilnadu because the first of Gandhi Ashram was started here under the able guidance of Rajaji. The construction of ashram has brought this little town into limelight and become well known all over India. In ancient days it was called 'Tiru Kodi mada senkundram'. The hill is slightly red in color. So it is called Sengundram red hill. Kodi means flags. Flags for Lord Murugan, lord Shiva and Adikesava Perumal are different. So the name was Tiru Kodi mada senkundram. It is a part of region; once ruled by kings like Valvil Ori and Kumanan. Both of the Kings were known in Tamil history for their valor and Philanthropy. This small town comes under Namakkal district' the town is very near to Erode just 20 Kms away in terms of distance. River Cauvery is the main source of supply of drinking water to the town. This rural town is slowly earning an enviable place in the field of education. This research paper explains the history of Ardhanareeswarar temple.

### KEYWORDS

Ardhanareeswarar Temple, Tiruchengode.

### INTRODUCTION

Tiruchengode is the pride of Tamilnadu because the first of Gandhi Ashram was started here under the able guidance of Rajaji. The construction of ashram has brought this little town into limelight and become well known all over India. In ancient days it was called 'Tiru Kodi mada senkundram'. The hill is slightly red in color. So it is called Sengundram red hill. Kodi means flags. Flags for Lord Murugan, lord Shiva and Adikesava Perumal are different. So the name was Tiru Kodi mada senkundram. It is a part of region; once ruled by kings like Valvil Ori and Kumanan. Both of the Kings were known in Tamil history for their valor and Philanthropy. This small town comes under Namakkal district' the town is very near to Erode just 20 Kms away in terms of distance. River Cauvery is the main source of supply of drinking water to the town. This rural town is slowly earning an enviable place in the field of education. This research paper tries to explain the all aspects of ardhanareeswarar temple.

Tiruchengode has many references in puranas, like Thevaram and Silapathikaram. In Silapathikaram, Ilango adigal referred Tiruchengode as "Chengodu " and that "it has numerous holy ponds and enjoys popularity and prosperity". This Siva temple is in Tiruchengode in the vicinity of Erode and Salem in Tamil Nadu. A motorable ghat road is available to go to the top of the hill and one can reach the temple by bus or car. Another way to reach the temple is to alight 1200+ steps to the top of the hill.

### HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE

Once Lord Vishnu, Lord Brahma, Indra and sage Birungi went to Kailash to worship Lord Shiva. They were directed towards Lord Shiva by his Vahana, Nandhi. Everyone first had a darshan of Lord Parvathi and then proceeded to Lord Shiva. But, Sage Birungi directly marched to Lord Shiva. Parvathi Devi, annoyed by his act, sucked the flesh from the Sage's body to stop him proceeding, but the sage forwarded. Lord Shiva recognized this drama of Parvathi and blessed Birungi with a third leg. After the departure of the Sage, Lord Parvathi appeased Lord Shiva about her penance. After Lord Shiva's approval, Parvathi Devi along with her crew went to a hilltop and performed the same. As a result of this penance, she demanded a will for getting a portion for her in Lord Shiva's sacred body thus granting the devotees for an integrated worship, which was granted by Lord Shiva. This led to the manifestation of half men and half women depiction Arthanaareswarar. Thus Lord Parvathi took up the left side and rest right by Lord Shiva. This signifies the creation of this manifestation.

It is also believed that long ago there held a battle between Adishesan and Vayu to prove their mighty powers. This resulted in devastating disasters and the then sages gave an idea to them.

Accordingly, Adishesan has to cling to Mount Meru with his hood and Vayu has to release him by his valour. But the former succeeded. Vayu, out of anger, stopped the air as a result all living beings fainted. Sages convinced Vayu to release his hold. By the sudden release of air by Vayu lead the top of the mountain with the head of Adishesa, thrown into earth on three places with flesh and blood and making it red and thus the name *Chengodu*. There is a 60 ft long snake carved on the hill, and hence the name as *Nagamalai*. Sambandar composed the Tiruneelakandapathigam here, to help rid fellow travellers of an affliction. Saint Arunagirinathar has also composed Thirupugazhon Lord Subramanya here. Muthuswamy Deekshitar has sung of this shrine in Ardhanareeswaram in Kumudakriya.

### STRUCTURE OF THE TEMPLE

Ancient walls, mandapams and sculptured pillars (now in a state of disrepair) add to the awe that this temple perpetuates, on top of the hill. The motorway and the renovated Rajagopuram are of recent origin. True to the name Nagagiri, there is a 60 ft long snake carved on the hill.

Although the sanctum faces the West, entrance to it is from the South. A majestic image of Ardhanareeswarar adorns the sanctum. There is a water spring at the foot of the image which is said to have been divinely manifested (Uli Padaa Uruvam). There are inscriptions here from the times of Parantaka Chola, Gangaikonda Chola, the Vijayanagar & Mysore Kings and the Nayaks. The **Tiruchengottuvelavar** shrine (to Subramanyar) attracts a number of pilgrims.

### LEGENDS

Adi Kesava Perumal, enshrined here, instructed Gowri on the Kedara GowrieVratam which she performed to unite with Shiva as Ardhanareeswarar. One of the 64 manifestations of Shiva - the man-woman form with Parvati constituting the left half of Shiva. A battle of strength between Adi Seshan and Vayu, saw the former clinging tightly to Mount Meru and Vayu using his might to blow it away. The latter succeeded in blowing it away to Tiruchengode and the blood spilled by Adishesan colored it red. Kamadhenu is said to have obtained 5 hills from Shiva, of which this was one; hence this hill with 2 stories of its origin, with rocks colored both red and yellow represents the masculine and feminine aspects of the Ardhanareeswara manifestation of Shiva.

### ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

On top of the hill, the massive Gopuram consists of 5 tiers is on the north side of the hill. The compound wall of the temple is 260 feet length from east to west and 170 feet length from north to south. The main shrine is for Lord Shiva known as Maathoru Paagar and

the Ambal his consort is known **Baagampiriyaalammai**. The image of the main deity is 6 feet in height, the right half of the image as male and left half of the image as female. Hence the main deity is also known as Ardhanareswarar. Subramanya known as Chengottu Velar is located on a flat surface atop the hill. This Chengottu Velar shrine is on the back side of the main sanctum sanctorum. There is a Theertham in this temple is called **Sangu Theertham**. Although the sanctum faces the West, entrance to it is from the South. There is a water spring at the foot of the image, which is said to have been divinely manifested "**Uli Padaa Uruvam**". There are many mandapams on the way for people who alight steps to take rest. The sculptures found in the mandapam in front of the Chengottu Velar shrine are of intricate designs and workmanship. "Artha Jaama Pooja" the late night worship service is considered to be of importance in this shetram. New moon days are also considered to be special events. The annual festival is celebrated in the Tamil month of Vaikasi.

### ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN

Since the sanctum of Gajamukha Pillayar is located at the southern end and that of Arumuga Swami is at the north end, the first step toward the temple is located at the left side of the hill. And this place is called as Malaiyadivaram. To the south of the first step is Vinayakarand on the north is Arumugar. Thaili Mandapam is very near to the first step. On the west of it lies the gigantic Nandhi in 7 feet length and 4 feet height. It looks at the Raja Gopuram, Upto this past the mountain is called Nandhi Malai. This is called as Basavan Temple. The part of the mountain above this is called as Naga Hills. And there we can see the sculpture of a Five Headed Adishesan.

### ARUBADAM PADI / SATHYA VAKKU PADI

Beyond this point after crossing some Mandapas, one has to cross special steps called Arubadam Padi (60 steps) or Sathya Vakku Padi (steps of truth) praised by the saint ArunagiriNadhar. And among the 1200 steps these 60 steps are considered to be the most important ones. The 60 steps of Sathya Padi is of same order and so there footsteps stands as a good example for the architectural excellence of Tamilians. In Olden days there 60 steps were believed by the people to solve, unsolvable cases and to know the reality in cases relating credits and bargains. The respective men are told to promise their statements on the 60th step and it is believed that the people will only say the truth while standing on the 60th step. It is said that even the Supreme Court at Chennai has accepted the statements that were declared by the people, standing on the 60th step.

### STHALA VIRUKSHAM

Then follows many mandapams and beyond them the thing that comes to our sight in the temple of the Majestic Ingara Pillayar facing towards the north. Following one could visualise the majestic sky scrapping RajaGopura. This is the Historical Raya Tower [Raja Gopuram] and it is true that the age of this tower is above Four hundred and thirty two years. The sculptures with intrinsic designs inside this temple stand as the best example for its sculptural beauty. The main door in 16 feet talks to us about the various myths as sculptures. Eluppai Tree stands as the Sthala Viruksham the tree of the temple on the north side.

### FESTIVALS

Throughout the year the temple authority conducted to festival in the Tamil months, Tiruchengode's major Festival is the Sengottuvelavar Car Festival known as **Vaigasi Visakam** (Celebrated during the Tamil month of Vaikasi- April-May). The Festival is celebrated for 15 days, with separate cars carrying sengottuvelavar, arthanareeswarar and many small lords. This festival is very famous among the nearby surrounding towns and villages. Three worship services are offered each day. The late night worship service (Artha Jaama Pooja) is considered to be of importance here. New moon days are also considered to be special. Moliapalli annamar swamy temple is located 15 km from thiruchengodu.

### 12 MONTHS FESTIVALS

**Chithirai** - Chitra Purnami (April -May), **Vaigasi** - Visaga Ther-Thiruvizhala(May-June), **Aani** - Natarasar Thirumanjanam(June-July), **Aavani** - Vinayagar Chadhurthi(July-August), **Purattasi** - Manikovil Kethra Gowri viratham and Navarathiri(August-September), **Ippasi** - Periyamariamman Kovil Thiruvizha and Kandar Sashti- Surasamharam (October-November), **Karthikai** - Karthikai Deepam(November-December), **Margazhi**- Aaruthra Darisanam (December-January), **Thai** - Padithiruvizha(January-February), **Masi** - Masimagam Vizha,Sivarathri (February-March), **Panguni** - Uthira Vizha(March-April).

### KUMBAPISHEGAM

This temple was under the control of HRCE from 1975. It was believed that during 17th century, the king Mariraseshthiran started Kumbabishegam. After Hundreds of years, the temple was renovated and Kumbabishegam was performed under the supervision of member of Legislative Assembly, Tiruchengode Thiru.Sampathkumar on 2014 May 2015.

It has gone unique sculptures which projects the artistic skills of the ancient sculptures. It is one of the best examples for ancient architecture. This temple is also famous for its architectural and sculptural delicacies and beauties. Words cannot adequately describe the elegant and intricate carvings of the manifestations of the lord found in huge pillars in rows in front of kumareswar shrine. The terraced roof has a series of stone chains with a numerously petalled lotus at the centre. The pillars are slightly aslant, symbolic of a devotees desire to overcome the ego and merge with the supreme.

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