



பாண்டியன் கோவில் கலைகள் தமிழ் ஆய்விதழ்

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Six Holy Temples of Lord Muruga

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Abstract

The six holy temples (Arupadaiveedu) comprise six Lord Murugan temples in Tamil Nadu. It represents the principal shrines dedicated to Lord Muruga who is the deity of war and wisdom. The sacred sites are Thiruparankundram, Thiruchendur, Palani, Swamimalai, Thiruthani and Pazhamudircholai. Each temple commemorates Lord Muruga's divine and war exploits. Thiruparankundram is carved in rock that celebrates Muruga's celestial marriage with Indiran's daughter Deivanai. Thiruchendur is a coastal temple that marks his victory over the demon Surapadman. Palani is a hilltop shrine. It venerates Muruga as the ascetic Dhandayuthapani who embodies renunciation. Swamimalai is the place where Muruga expounded the meaning of 'Om' to his father, Lord Shiva. Thiruthani symbolises sacred union through Muruga's marriage to Valli and Pazhamudircholai is amidst the Azhagar Kovil forests and it reflects his wisdom through the interactions with saint Auvaiyar. These temples are in a Tamil architectural pattern that features tall gopurams, sculpted pillars, and natural settings that enhance their spiritual aura. Festivals like Skanda Sashti and Thaipusam draw multitudes of people with many days of rituals ranging from solemn worship to extreme penance like kavadi bearing, palkudam, pathayathirai, etc. These shrines preserve Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage linking mythology, art and the devotion of people. Pilgrimage to these six temples transcends the ritual and represents a transformative journey of enlightenment with Muruga's grace. Nevertheless, this article elicits the six holy temples of Lord Muruga in a nutshell.

Keywords: Six Holy Temples, Lord Muruga. Tamil God, Tamil Worship.

Introduction

Lord Muruga in Tamil has also been known as Kartikeya, Skanda and Subramanya in India. He is a prominent deity in Hinduism and is particularly revered in Tamil Nadu, India and Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. Lord Muruga is the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati and the brother of Lord Ganesha. He is known as the God of war and victory. In Tamil Nadu, there are six temples dedicated to Lord Muruga and they are collectively known as the "Arupadai Veedu" (six temples).

Every Hindu wishes to swim across the ocean of birth and attain God's holy feet. We call this as attaining mukti. The word mukti is a Sanskrit word. Detaching (vidupaduvadhu in Tamil) oneself from the traps of human life is mukti. The word vidu (taking leave) then became veedu (freedom). Having been released from worldly desires, he may live in the physical body while being free in spirit. He is no longer drawn by delusion. This person is called Jeevan Muktan. Escaping is referred to as veedu. (Rama)



These six temples hold immense spiritual significance and catch the attention of countless devotees daily. These temples are spread across Tamil Nadu and are believed to symbolise various aspects of Lord Muruga's war and victory over evil. This paper brings out a brief scrutiny on the history, mythology and unique features of these six sacred Murugan shrines.

Six Holy Temples

There are six holy temples raised in the places where Lord Muruga empowered justice against the injustices of the evil Asuras. They are in Tamil Nadu, India.

Arupadaiveedu refers to the six abodes of Lord Murugan showing the six different forms of Murugan pertaining to the six different events that took place in his life. The six abodes are Thiruparankundram, Thiruchendur, Palani, Swamimalai, Thiruthani and Pazhamudircholai. (Jayarts)

Image 1. Muruga in Six Temples



Let us ponder over the six holy abodes of Lord Muruga and see their importance.

1. Thirupparamkunram Murugan Temple

Thirupparamkunram Murugan Temple is located near Madurai. It is one of the oldest and most significant of the six abodes. According to legend, this is where Lord Muruga married Deivanai, the daughter of Indra who is the king of the heaven. The temple is carved out of a hill and showcases exquisite rock-cut architecture from the 6th century.

According to legend it was here that Lord Muruga wed Teyvayanai, daughter of Indra, after his victory over Soorapadman and the asuras. The temple built on the northern side of the hill at an elevation of about 300 feet from the foot of the hill has a 150 foot tall gopuram of seven tiers over its entrance. The main sanctum carved into the rock enshrines a well chiselled form of the Lord. Also hollowed within the rock are many mandapams with carved pillars, platforms, and other shrines with decorative relief and carvings on all surfaces. (Nirmala Ramachandran)

Lord Muruga is depicted with his consort Deivanai. The temple's unique feature is its sanctum sanctorum which is a cave cut sculpture out of the rock.

2. Thiruchendur Murugan Temple

Thiruchendur Murugan Temple is situated on the sea shore at Thiruchendur. This Temple is known for its gigantic beauty and mythological significance. It is believed that Lord Muruga defeated the demon Surapadman at this place.

He came down to South India in a great fury and became a warrior. In many ways, he was an unmatched warrior. He went about conquering many lands in the south, but he did not conquer to rule. Because he felt his parents had been unjust to him, he wanted to create justice. He was like an activist or a



revolutionary. So wherever he thought he saw injustice, he went about waging war. In his great anger, every small thing that he saw felt like a great injustice, and he slaughtered many people. He fought battle after battle and went down south. (Sadhguru)

The temple stands as a testimony to Tamil Nadu architecture with its tall gopurams (temple towers) and intricate sculptures. Thiruchendur temple is unique because it is located on the seashore unlike other hill temples. The annual Skandasashti festival commemorates Muruga's victory over Surapadman and it attracts thousands of devotees at the time of festival.

3. Palani Murugan Temple

Palani Murugan Temple is on the top of Palani Hill. Palani Temple is one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in South India. According to mythology, Lord Muruga retreated to Palani after losing a divine fruit to his brother Ganesha.

According to mythology, the origin of the temple is based on the story when Lord Shiva offered a mango as a prize to the son who encircled the world first. Lord Muruga set off at great pace on his peacock, while Lord Ganesha went round his divine parents indicating that they were the universe, and thereby won the prize Mango. Lord Muruga in his frustration, clad only in a hermit's garb and carrying the staff dandam left Mount Kailasa for the South. His divine parents tried to dissuade him saying "Palam Nee", which in Tamil means "Thou art the fruit of all wisdom and knowledge" (hence the derivation of Palani). He was not appeased and took up residence at Tiruvavinankudi and later moved to the top of the hill. (Nirmala Ramachandran)

The deity here is depicted as a youthful ascetic, Dhandayuthapani holding a staff. Thaipusam festival is the important festival of the temple. The devotees undertake rigorous penances, lie Pathayathirai, Vel kuthudhal and carrying Palkudam and Kavadis.

4. Swamimalai Murugan Temple

Swamimalai Murugan Temple is located near Kumbakonam. It is renowned for its association with the legend of Lord Muruga imparting the meaning of the Pranava Mantra "Om" to his father Lord Shiva.

Once when Brahma, the lord of all creations was proceeding to Kailasa, the ever-playful child Lord Muruga asked him for the meaning of the Pranava OM. When Brahma admitted his ignorance, the Lord imprisoned him. With Brahma imprisoned, all creations came to a standstill and the devas prayed to Lord Siva to get Brahma released. When Muruga insisted that the imprisonment was a just punishment for the ignorance of Brahma, Lord Siva asked him whether he himself knew the meaning of the primordial Pranava OM. Lord Muruga said that he knew the meaning of OM and can expound it to the latter only if he can accept him as guru and listen to the exposition as a devoted disciple. As Lord Siva acceded to the request of Lord Muruga and heard the exposition of OM as a disciple, the place came to be known as Swamimalai and the presiding deity as Swaminathan. (Arulmigu Swaminatha Swami Temple, Swamimalai)

The temple is built on an artificial hill and devotees have to climb 60 steps to reach the temple. Each represents a year of the Tamil calendar. The presiding deity is depicted as



Swaminathan who is the divine teacher. The temple's architecture reflects Tamil Nadu architectural pattern with carved pillars and big gopurams.

5. Thiruthani Murugan Temple

Thiruthani Murugan Temple is located on a hill. It is where Lord Muruga is believed to have married Valli, a Kurava tribal girl.

Tiruttani constitutes one of the six Padai Veedu shrines of Skanda (Lord Subramanya), and it represents the site where Subramanya stayed after destroying the demon Surapadman. Tiruttani is said to be the place where the Lord Subramanya married Valli - one of his two consorts. (Śrī Subrahmanya Swāmi Kovil, Tiruttani)

The temple is significant for its serene surroundings and panoramic views. Devotees have to climb 365 steps to reach the temple. It symbolise the 365 days of a year. The deity here is portrayed with Valli and Deivanai. It highlights the harmonious aspect of his divine life. The temple celebrates major festivals like Panguni Uthiram and Skandasashti with dedication.

6. Pazhamudircholai Murugan Temple

Pazhamudircholai Murugan Temple is in the dense forests of Azhagar Malai near Madurai. Pazhamudircholai Murugan Temple is the last of the six abodes. This temple is associated with numerous legends that Lord Muruga tested the devotion of his followers.

Pazhamutircōlai is mentioned as the sixth of Lord Murugan's Āru Patai Vidukal, the six holiest Murugan shrines described by Cankam poet Nakkīrar in his poem Tirumurukāruppatai....

Though the sthala is of ancient origin, the temple as in existence today was constructed only recently. From days of yore Vel has been worshipped as the moolavar or main deity. The idol of Lord Muruga in a standing posture has a single face and four hands with Valli and Teyvayanai on both sides. The Vel made up of stone is of special significance and is worshipped with a great veneration by devotees. (Palamutircōlai)

At here, Lord Muruga is enshrined along with his consorts Valli and Deivanai. The natural beauty of the temple adds to its mystical allure. The temple is also connected with the poet-saint Avvaiyar, who had a divine encounter with Lord Muruga here and got blessed with reality of life. Lord Muruga blessed her with the ultimate knowledge with his words of wit.

Conclusion

Thus, the six temples of Lord Muruga (the Arupadai Veedu) evince the spiritual and cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu. Each temple has its unique history, myth, architectural splendour and offers an insight into the profound devotion to Lord Muruga. The devotees who visit these temples do not think it as a simple pilgrimage but a journey towards spiritual enlightenment by the grace and blessings of Lord Muruga in their lives.

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