

## **LORD SHIVA TEMPLE AT ACHALPURAM – THE LORD WHO BLESSES WITH MARRIAGE & MUKTI**

Achalpuram is a sacred place which is located south east of Chidambaram in Tamilnadu. While proceeding from Chidambaram to Sirkali, there is a bridge at Kollidam. Crossing the bridge, there is a turning to the left which leads to the Shiva Temple.

One can see an impressive structure with Saint Tirugnana Sambandar and his consort Poornambigai in the traditional wedding attire engraved as a sculpture. There is also a separate shrine inside the temple for the divine couple. Usually they say “Kama” or desire is required for two persons to get married while its absence leads to Mukti. Here in this temple two diametrically opposite matters fructified at about the same time, which is the special significance of this temple.

Thirugnana Sambandar was a divine saint poet and a Saivite apostle who lived in Tamilnadu in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. He was a child prodigy who lived for just 16 years. He composed around 16000 hymns in praise of Lord Shiva. His compositions provide the philosophical foundation for Saiva Siddhanta Phylosophy.

Sivapada Hridayar of Sirkazhi prayed to the Lord for the boon of a son who would establish the greatness of Saivism in Tamilnadu. The Lord answered his prayer and accordingly Tirugnana Sambandar was born to Sivapada Hridayar and Bhagavathiyar. Their family was devoted to Saivism at a time when Jainism and Buddhism were the popular religions in Tamilnadu.

When Thirugnana Sambandar was three years old, his parents took him to the temple tank and kept him on the river bank safely while they took bath. The child started crying and the Goddess appeared before the child. She fondled the child and suckled him with the Milk of Wisdom. When the parents came, they noticed a few drops of milk in the child’s mouth whereupon the child started singing a song. This is the famous “Thodudaya Seviyan”, the first song in the Thevaram. It was then that the child came to be known as Thirugnana Sambandar. The entire collection of songs he composed came to be known as Thevaram.

Information about Tirugnana Sambandar comes from Periyapuram, the holy book of Saivites. Thirugnana Sambandar and his father used to visit

several temples and the former used to compose songs in praise of Lord Shiva. In two places, dead persons were resurrected by Thirugnana Sambandar. Such is the efficacy of his compositions. The mantra which is extolled by Saint Thirugnana Sambandar is the Namasivaya mantra which is pronounced as “Om Namah Sivaya”.

About this mantra, Sambandar’s words translated by John Cort are as follows:

It guides to the good path all those who melt with love and flow with tears as the chant it.

It is the essence of the Four Vedas

Chant our Lord’s name say “Hail Siva”.

Achalpuram is a place near Sirkazhi which blesses a person with both Marriage and Mukti. We know the four Purusharthas are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Kama is required for marriage. Absence of Kama leads to Mukti. So Achalpuram is a place which leads to Mukti through fulfilment of desires. One need not get the wrong impression that only at the fag end of life when one has become desireless, one needs to go Achalpuram. One can go anytime and rest assured that their wishes will be fulfilled and attainment of Mukti is certain. It is believed that Tirugnana Sambandar attained Mukti in Moolam star in the Vrishaba month (May – June). Thirugnana Sambandar’s life is a pointer to the fact that invocation of the Lord will lead to his blessings and if done with utmost sincerity, one will reach Him.

Though Thirugnana Sambandar undertook several trips, it was during his seventh trip, that he reached Achalpuram. In olden times the Lord here was known as Nallur Perumaan and this place was known as Nallur Perumaanam. At Achalpuram, the Lord is supposed to destroy all sins and confer Mukti.

It is said that Thirugnana Sambandar’s parents thought that if their son were to remain unmarried, society would blame them for not locating a suitable match. When his parents broached this subject with him, he reluctantly agreed. But his mind continued to be fully focused on Lord Shiva. Sambandar, even by birth and also due to the encounter with Goddess Parvati, was an enlightened Soul. He had plans, not just for his Mukti but also for his consort and the guests at his wedding. He agreed to marry Poornambigai, not just because she was good looking or for any other reason but because he wished to use her as a tool for a greater purpose. At the time of marriage

Poornambigai was 14 years old. She was also pious by birth and even compelled her parents to send her to Varanasi, where she spent time with her Guru. It was the Guru who guided her to marry Thirugnana Sambandar. She too had been thinking of getting married and when the Guru revealed Sambandar's plan, she readily agreed to the marriage proposal. Even at the time of marriage Sambandar had a large following and over 3000 guests came to attend the wedding.

Going round the sacred fire, Sambandar took a vow to serve the Lord, while at the same time was thinking of attaining union with God. At that time Goddess Parvati is believed to have appeared on the scene and distributed Vibhuti to all those present there included Sambandar, his wife Stotra Poornambigai and three other Nayanmars (Neelanakka Nayanar, Neelakanta Yazhpanar, Muruga Nayanar) besides all the other guests who had come for the wedding. The Lord Shiva appeared as a Jyoti (Eternal Flame) and everyone present got merged with that light. It was at this juncture, Sambandar sang his last pathigam (*Kadhalagi Kasindu Kanneer Malgi*)

This event happened in Moolam Star in the Tamil month Vaikhasi (Rishaba month, May - June). Because Goddess Parvati came and distributed Vibhuti, in this temple she is known as Thiruveenneetru Umayammai or Vibhuti Kalyani. In this temple only Vibhuti is distributed and no KumKum. A separate Vibhuti prasadam is given at the Amman Shrine. Parvati is regarded as the Universal mother, Achal and hence this place is known as Achalpuram. Sage Kakabhujandar refused to place his feet on this place considering it so sacred and decided to walk on his head and 2 hands. According to Sthala Puranam, Lord Muruga had a vision of Kailash in this place and he circumambulated this temple thrice. Hence worshipping Lord Shiva, Parvati and Muruga here will bring to fruition all desires.

River Ganga is supposed to have worshipped the Lord at the entrance. There is a marriage hall adjacent to the temple and interestingly enough it is named as Thirugnana Sambandar Kalyana Mandapam.

The architecture of this temple is quite different from other temples. There is a 100 pillared mantap in the outer prakaram. There are 11 temple tanks of which the major one is the Panchakshara Theertham. The temple was built in the period of the Imperial Cholas. Contributions were made by Rajendra Chola I, Kulothunga Chola I, Raja Raja Chola III and Maravarman Parakrama Pandyan.

Before the main mantap, to the right there is a separate shrine for

Thirugnana Sambandar and Stotra Poornambigai.

There is a shrine here for Rina Vimochanar in the form of a Linga. Here one has to worship on Monday, to get rid of debts. When we worship here, we get cure for all ailments. It also gives freedom from debt, wealth and for women longevity of their spouses.

A painting of Sambandar's wedding adorns the temple's arch. Overall the temple architecture is quite pleasing and reminds one of the glorious kingdoms of earlier centuries.

<b>Moolavar</b>	Sri Shivalokath Thyagaraja Swamy, Sri Perumanamudaya Mahadevar
<b>Ambal</b>	Sri Venneetru Umaiyammai, Sri Swetha Viboothi Nayaki
<b>Theertham (Holy water)</b>	Panchakshara, Brihu, Ashwa, Vasishta, Athiri, Jamadagni, Vyasa and Mirukandu Theerthams
<b>Sthala Vriksham (Sacred Tree)</b>	Vilvam tree
<b>Pathigam (Hymn) rendered by</b>	Saint Thirugnanasambanthar

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