

THE SACRED HISTORY OF SRI MUNNESWARA



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Sri Munneswaram Devasthanam
Munneswaram, Chilaw.



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RAMA WORSHIPS SIVA AT MUNNESWARA

THE sages dwelling at the penance-grove Naimisaranya, discovered to be the most suitable spot for self-modification by Lord Brahma, the world creator were engaged in performing a yaga on the bank of Komathie river. When one day, sage Sutha who had been blessed with the bountiful grace of Bagwan Vyasa, the great ornament among ascetics and erudite in the Vedic lore, paid a visit to the spot. He was attired in bark-garments rudhraksha and holy ash adorned his body. On his arrival the sages fell at his feet with folded arms. After offering their prayers and accomodating him with a seat they said most politely, "Swami, Let us be blessed with hearing the great and sacred History of Sri Muneeswarā Temple," and they again bowed in obeisance. The sage was greatly pleased and casting a benevolent look, began to speak, "Listen O ! Sages, This temple was erected by Lord Brahma to be worshipped by Him with the selfless purpose of giving salvation to all beings belonging to this earth. The greatness of this temple is beyond exaggeration. It gives salvation at the very thought, sight and hearing the name of it. Listen in detail to its significant history.

"Sri Rama the son of the great Emperor Dasaratha who ruled over Ayodhi, after having defeated and killed the mighty Ravana set out accompanied by his beautiful spouse Sita, his younger brother Lakshmana, and soldiers to his motherland. While he was journeying in his air-chariot Brahmahatti which had appeared as a result of Ravana-Samhara, followed Rama. But as Rama approached Sri Muneeswara Temple the Brahmahatti left him. Sri Rama was astonished and as he stood pondering over this marvel, the glimmering Kopura of the Temple. The Sacred Bath and the flower garden became visible to him. Sri Rama at once came down to earth and stepped out of the palanquin. Steeped in piety he was for a moment inactive; his hairs were on ends ; his body melted ; his hands went up above his head folded together. Accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana he dipped himself into the sin-expurgating and soul-elevating lake. The both gave him new vigour and his mind effervesced with unalloyed joy. Coming to the adytum of the temple, with uplifted hands he offered poojas to Lord Munnainatha and His consort Vadiyambikai. Tears of joy ran down his cheeks as he uttered, "Gracious Lord of Eternal Bliss, the Saviour of the helpless." Lord Siva with Parvathy mounted on the Ox and surrounded by the Rishis appeared before Sri Rama, whose joy, then, knew no bound. "Lord of my life, Fountain of Mercy, Benefactor of the destitute," prayed he in faltering terms as tears streamed down, "Invalidate the Brahmahatti that sticks to me." Lord Siva whose pleasure it is to give whatever desired, spake, Listen Sri Rama, To avert Brahmahatti you should enshrine three sivalingas after your name, each at the three sacred cities of Ceylon, viz, Muneeswaram, Ketheswaram, and Koneswaram and also one at the Sethu banks." Sri Ram who danced with joy as he heard these words begged Siva to spot the site in Muneeswara where he could consecrate the Sivalingam. Lord Siva was moved to compassion directed Rama to find the temple at Manavari on the north of the river Mayavan aru (Mi-oaya) and to enshrine the linga naming it after the latter and vanished. Over-joyed with the effluence of Siva's grace Rama sought the spot and propitiating Vishvakarma (the architect of the gods) got a temple erected. On the sacred Wednesday synchronous with the second day of the wax-moon fortnight in June he enshrined the Swarnalinga (golden one) at Muneeswara and consecrated it with the water of the sacred river Mayavanaru. At Koneswaram, he enshrined the Raupiya linga (silver) on Friday the second of the wax-moon fortnight in the same month and at Ketheswara, the Ratna linga on sunday the seventh of the same period in the same month. He then proceeded to Sethu, where he enshrined the Saikatha linga (sand) on Wednesday, the eighth of the same period and month, whereby he set at naught the evil influence of Brahmahatti got himself consecrated at Ayodhi and held the sceptic righteously as the sole emperor.

"Therefore, Listen O ! Sages, those who bathe in the sacred Mayavanaru and offer worship to Lord Muneeswara and Vadiyambikai will have their ideals, accompanied on earth, and eventually attain the lotus feet of Lord Siva."

SAGE VYASA WORSHIPS SRI MUNESWARA

"Listen O ! dwellers of Naimisaranya," continued sage Sutha, "The penance sustaining rishis, who lived in the Duvaparayuga were performing a yaga at the foot of the Himalayas. At that time Vyasa paid a visit. The rishis were all happy and falling at his feet with folded palms, requested Vyasa most humbly to enlighten them whether Lord Siva or Vishnu was supreme.

On hearing these words Vyasa was vexed and irritated as if melted lead had been poured into his ears. Raising his right hand he thundered, O ! rishis, you lisp as if you are unlettered in the Vedas. Are you yet to learn that the Lord Absolute, the great Deliverer is none other than Lord Vishnu whom the four scriptures extol as the Supreme being in undisputable terms. The rishis were thunderstruck at this profanation and thought it best to request Vyasa repeat the same at the shrine of Kasi. Falling on his feet again they said, "Swami, we beseech you to come over to Kasi and prove the supremeness of Vishnu. The presumptuous and haughty Vyasa readily conceded. He had a dip in the sacred Ganga, adorned himself with Thūlasi-garland and other Vaishnainsignia, went to the shrine surrounded by thousands of disciples chanting hymns, and raising his right hand above his head as he had done before said, "Just as there is no scripture above the Vedas, so there is no being above Lord Vishnu, who is therefore the Lord of Absolute" Nandhi the bovine-headed steward of Siva who was wrath personified at the sacrilegious abuse of Vyasa cursed him thus, "Let thy hand that went high to declare the supremacy of Vishnu remain raised for ever," and Lo ! it remained so. Lord Vishnu, meanwhile, appeared there and said unto Vyasa, "Understand O ! Rishi, I am the Lord of the universe, but I pay homage to Siva since he is my Lord and he has no master above him." Then infusing Vyasa with the panchatchara and bidding him practise Moksha-sadhara, through the chanting of it. He vanished. Sage Saraka and his train who had been witnessing all these were convinced and happy that Siva was the Supreme Lord.

Muni Vyasa after worshipping Visvanatheswara, the Non-dual, the Bliss incarnate and the destroyer of the three mounts with his intercelial eye went to the shrine of Nandhi and craved apology for the vireverance he had committed and entreated him to devise a means of exonerating himself from the sin of infancy. Nandhi was pleased at his repentance and told him that the only way of destroying the sin was performing Sivalinga pooja. "Sins committed at various places," said he, can be dispelled by a dip in the Holy rivers, and these that are done in Holy places, may be averted by pilgrimaging to Kasi. Brahma found that the sins committed at Kasi cannot be done away with by worshipping any temple on earth founded for individual absolution. He had in mind the welfare of the world as a whole and therefore established a shrine for worship, that could give absolution for all. This temple is found on the coast of Cape Comorin the south of Rameswaram, the north-west of Kataragama and on the south-west of Trincomalee. This temple where Siva resides with pleasure, bestows worshippers with whatever they desire, is often referred to as Kailasa, stands unique among the Ceylon temples and is known by the name of Muneeswaram. Since this is the only shrine that is capable of destroying sins committed at Kasi, I bid you go there purify yourself with a bath in the Holy river worship Lord Siva and obtain His benison.

Sage Vyasa was highly pleased at these words and expressing his gratitude for acquainting him with the knowledge of the greatness of the temple and accompanied by the retinue of his disciples set on a pilgrimage to the famous temple. Approaching it he viewed with reverence, the magnificent Kopura and the awe-inspiring Vimana of the temple and then entering the streets on either side of which were palatial buildings of golden lustre reached Mayavanaru (Mi oya) where in he purified himself with a wash. He found a penance-abode after his name on the book of Mi-Oya and resided there for a short time, during which he narrated the glorious history of Mayavanaru and Muneeswara temple to disciples who gave him the title Sithamuneeswara. Circumambulating with great piety and solemnity, the holy waters on the south-east, south, south-west, west, north-west and north known by the names Sivatheertha, Vinayaka theertha, Dwashda theertha, Bairava theertha, Ksheerakunda theertha, Vishnu theertha, and Thurka theertha, respectively he bathed in them. Then lying prostrate, he rolled himself round the temple worshipped the Kopura, entered the sanctum, cleansed

himself in the sanctified, ill-averting, carthatic spring sunk by Sula Pani for Lord Siva's consecration and bowed in supplication before Gods like Vinayaga. Thereafter he went to the adytum of Lord Munnainatha seated with his consort Sri Vadivambika and prayed to them uttering these words in utter supplication, "O ! Lord, Fountain of mercy, be gracious enough to dispel the Sin of desecration that had been the result of my delution." "Good beside you son," spake Siva moved to mercy. Down cast thou be not ; Enshrine a Sivalinga with the name Vyasesa, (meaning : the Lord of Vyasa) and be blessed with whatever you desire by worshipping the same." Vyasa who felt eclastic and exalted and accomplishing the task prescribed by Siva, took rest at the abode of Siththas, when spake one of the disciples, one day to Vyasa, "Let us be acquainted with the solemn history of Mayavanaru. The rishi conceded and began to narrate. "In the days of yore the rishis and their wives of the hermitage-grounds called Tharukavana grew so insolent that they forgot to worship Lord Siva and Vishnu. Siva moved to pity decided to despel their ignorance, said to Vishnu, 'Impersonate yourself as mohini and curb the arrogance of the rishis by enticing them with your beauty' and he got on himself the form of a rude to captivate the rishis' spouses. Vishnu in the form of mohini desired intercourse with Siva and the latter consenting Hari Hara was born of the two. This is the shrine of Lord Hari Hara. On Vishnu's request that he should be blessed with this blissful communion for ever, Siva said, 'Change yourself into a river and be flowing here ; I will meet you annually on the full moon-day of August. Henceforth the river flows with the name Mayavanaru. Mayavan is one among the many names devoting Vishnu. Prayers offered and rituals performed on the banks of this river have ten million times the value of those done anywhere else. No other Holy river stands rival or superior to this. Offerings given to dead ancestors on the banks of this river are very much loved by them. The sanctity of this river is too great to be caught in words," concluded Vyasa and went to his penance-abode with his devout disciples."

"O ! residents of Naimisaranya, it is no mean task for people like me to sing the glory of this famous temple. Only rishis like Nanthideva are capable of doing it," spake Sutha.

KING KULAKKODAN WORSHIPS MUNEESSWAR

King Kulakkodan the son of Vararamadeva Maharajah, the descendant of the renowned king Manu Neethi Kanda Chola, ruling in Thiruvarur over the vast Chola empire in the Indian sub-continent, came to Ceylon in the 512th year of Kaliyuga and built the Koneswara temple. Hearing the greatness of Sri Muneeswara temple, he went there renewed the shrines and clearing the mire in the wells and tanks known as Sithamirtha and Sivathirtha, built steps for them. Then inviting his Guru Nilakanda Siva Acharyar, his spouse Visalatchi Ammal, his children and Brahmins resplendant in the Vedas, performed the Kumbabisheka (Consecration ceremony) of the temple on an auspicious day.

Thereafter, for the performance of daily religious rituals and conducting social functions he brought from Madura, Karaikkal, Tiruchirappalli, Coodalur and Marungoor people of different occupation like Brahmins, Velalas, merchants, smiths of iron, tin, and gold, carpenters, sculptors, flutists, oil-merchants, pall-bearers, cuisiners, spinners, weavers, woodcutters, barbers, washermen, fishermen, potters, and drummers. Settling them with endowments of land for cultivation he enjoined them to do their functions properly and righteously. He led a peaceful and pious life thenceforth.

In order to supervise the services of these people, he brought from Madura a prince named Thaniunnappoopalam, a descendant of the moon-god and consecrated him the ruler of Muneeswaram.

He summoned the citizens of Muneeswaram and instructed them to observe the rules regarding the payments of taxes required for the conducting of festivals and other religious ceremonies. He cleared the land of about ten square miles in area, around Muneeswaram and entrusted it to the people for cultivation, the product of which he directed should go to the temple. He further enjoined them to supply from looking after those lands, betel, arecanuts,

plantains, milk, butter, ghee, and rice ; He built oil reservoirs on the south eastern corner of the Kopura, and directed chieftains to fill those wells with oil squeezed from castor and gingely, and supply oil regularly to the temple. He originated a beautiful flower garden also. Having accomplished these he summoned the people of Munneswaram to a conference which he addressed thus : Let me proclaim to you the details of the architectural and ecclesiastical undertakings, I have realised by the grace of Sri Nalla-Vinayagar, Sri Muneswara, Sri Vadivalaki Ammai and Suntharashanmuga. I shall also let you know the different works assigned to the service men."

Then turning to the priests he said, "Listen O ! priests, the seeds of Vedas and the storehouse of true knowledge, deign to consider my humble words. It is indeed a greater virtue to administer the daily religious observances so as to invoke the blessings of God who is beyond the group of the senses, immanent and transcendent bliss-incarnate, love-effulgent and all-pervasive, than to found or renovate a shrine.

Hence illuminate the temple with eleven thousand lamps. Illceme the adytum, where with his consort resides Siva, the ever refulgent with thousand lamps using ghee, sprinkles rose-water perfumed with musk and civet. Burn incense off and on. Dedicate to Lord Vinayaga oblation of six bowlfuls of rice in silver vessel, to Lord Suntharashanmuga, twelve bowlfuls in vessels of five metals. Then dedicate to Lord Munnainatha and His escort Vadivalaki Ammai in diamond studded gold vessels, rice with curries of six different plates, milk, sugar candy, fruits and other liquid foods. Obsecrate Him then to accept the offerings. Offer poojas with the display of heraldic armorial bearings." He enjoined the priests to offer poojas in the manner heretofore described thrice a day, failing which he warned them they would fall into the Inferno. Then advising Thaniyunnappoopala Maharajah to conduct the affairs vigilantly, returned to the Chola country, after worshipping Lord Siva with Vadivambikai, and obtaining His Lord's benison.

Then, king Thaniyunnappoopalan, the descendant of the moon-god on the order of king Kulakodan divided the land belonging to the temple into sixty-four villages. He chose twelve velalas gave the title of Chandrasekara Mudaliar to the first, Paddankaddi Korala to the second and Aththu Korala to the rest. He settled the first two in Muneeswaram and enjoined that they and their successors should be in charge of conducting the festivals. Settling the rest ten in the villages Pampala, Pakalapiramanathaluva, Kokavil, Thampakal Suravala, Pallama, Thahampava, Mandalana, Minikula, and Ugampitiya, he enjoined them to collect the income from the villages for the temple and to impel the people to provide the necessary supplies needed during the festival days.

He settled some of the Ahampadi Velalas in the villages Eliveddy, Kakapalli, Manvari, Karaveddi, Kanangaddy, Ehalapramanathaluva, Moongilvedduvam, Vilaththava, Mandalanai, Veerakompanthaluva, Pirappankuli, Ollithaluva, Maruthankulam, and Thithikada. These were directed to do service by way of collecting flowers, weaving garlands, sounding conches, husking rice, cleaning vessels and lamps, sweeping and washing the compounds around the shrine and putting up pandals.

The Pandarams who were made to reside in Pandariyamoolai were ordered to include their services, works like lighting lamps, chanting hymns, preparing Holy ash etc. The sculptors settled in the south of the temple were required to make repairs when necessary, in the temple buildings. The supply of ironware needed for purposes like chariot-making was entrusted in the hands of the blacksmiths settled in the villages Karaveddi and Vankathanai. The carpenters in Vankathani, had to make chariots.

The repair of vessels were given in the hands of tinsmiths settled in Balakulam and Chilaw. The drummers and the temple girls were settled in Chilaw and Munneswaram, the former had to play instruments like pipe and drum and the latter had to perform dances.

(For details see Thompu) He enjoined the potters in Vatakamula to supply bricks and tiles necessary for building ; the lime-merchants in Maraveli to supply lime for plastering and white-washing walls during festival times ; the Kaikolars in Munneswaram and Chilaw to furnish cloth and thread to the temple and clothes to the priests ; the wood-cutters in Bahagagama and Poonakari to provide wood and oil squeezed from gingily and castor ; the Thimilais in Thimilai to ferry across Mi-oya the people on either side of the river and supply ropes to draw chariots ; the Chanas in Manakulam to hold torches and Alavaddam during festivals decorate the temple and compound and to supply coconuts cadjans etc ; and the garland-weavers in Muneeswaram to supply garlands. The dhobies who were divided into four groups and settled in Munkanthaluvai and Sempukkatti were asked to supply clothes for the making of torches, spread clothes on the temple grounds, decorate the roofs with clothes and to supply clothes for other offertorial purposes. The Parayas settled in Veerapandya were required to drum-beat on festival days and to proclaim through drum-beating the ceremonies to the people.

KING PARAKRAMA BAHU VI WORSHIPS SRI MUNEESWAR

One day in the 38th year of his reign after consecration, King Parakrama Bahu VI. the descendant of the great Sri Sangabo, who was ruling over Ceylon from his capital Jeyavarthanapura was seated in his throne amid the pomp and pagentry and in the company of his courtiers, when he chanced to hear the history of Muneeswara. Inviting the saint-dwellers of the temple he learnt in detail the sacred sage of the shrine. He accomplished the renovation of the temple, made donation of lands to the temple and priest and directed that a monthly allowance be made from the government coffers for the daily performance of poojas. He made an inscription of his services in detail on the tenth day of the lunar month of October in the year 1369 of Salivagana era corresponding to 1448 A.D.

DONATION AS FOUND IN THE COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION

King Parakrama Bahu bearing the title Kalikala Sarvanja Panditha in the year 2060 of the Buddhist era corresponding to 4519 of Kaliyuga and to 1517 A.D. in order to dispel the disease caused by lightning, came to Muneeswaram temple and having got himself cured of the disease by worshipping Lord Vishnu, donated as is found in the copper plate inscriptions, the villages with Mala Ela on the east, the threeboundry stones in Mathambai on the south, Manamanthodda canal on the west and the canal running into Muneeswara on the north as boundaries.

KIRTHI SRI RAJASINGA WORSHIPS MUNEESWARA

Kirthi Sri Rajasinga who was ruling over Kandy from his capital at Kundasala learnt of the greatness of Sri Munneswara and of its destruction by the Portuguese. He invited sculptors from south India for the reconstruction of the temple. He made arrangements for the daily performance of rituals and poojas and donated by writ in copper plate dated the 14th day of August 1675 of the Salivagana era corresponding to 1753 A.D. Blessed with the bountiful merry of Lord Muneeswara he led a peaceful and happy life.

BRAHMA SRI KUMARASAMY KURUKKAL WORSHIPS SRI MUNNESWARA

Brahma Sri Kumarasamy Kurukkal was the renowned son of the famous Sri Nagendra Kurukkal, the descendant of the Kausika clan of the saiva Brahmin in Kanchipuram of Thondaimandalam belonging to the Chola country. He was well-versed in the Puranas and Ithihasas, an erudite scholar in the sciences of astrology, mathematics and sculpture, a linguist and a literateur. While he enjoyed the connubial felicity with his spouse Suntharambal, he also enjoyed the renown of being the priest incumbent, portificating the ceremonies of enshrining images in temples and inaugurating festivals.

Meanwhile he was blessed with a son, who appeared to be the embodiment of pulchritude, the very personification of pelf and the incarnation of Vedic Lore. The child was named Muthusamy Kurukkal and was brought up amidst showers of love, caresses and adoration.

But the domestic happiness of the priest was moaned by the attack of a disease that could not be dispelled by any drug. Pilgrimage to different temples proved to be of no avail, for the body was waning gradually, and the priest writhed under mental agony. One night Lord Munneswara appearing in his dream, instructed him to go over to Sri Munneswara where his disease would be dispelled. The priest's joy knew no bounds when he considered that he was blessed enough to have a vision of the Lord whom even the Vedas were yet to realise. Pilgrimming to Sri Muneeswara he supplicated himself at the feet of Lord Siva and Vadivambikai and stayed there for a few days, when his disease faded away, till he got back his normal health. He undertook at his own expense the renovation of the Arthamandapam (Sacrarium) and the Mahamandapam (Chancel) of the temple accomplished it in the year 1798 and performed the consecration ceremony in the same year, Enjoining the temple priests to conduct poojas six times a day, for which he made endowments, he lived happily everafter, by the grace of Lord Almighty.





