



Manimekalai Prasuram



Pilgrimage to Thirukoneswaram



v. varathasuntharam

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WITH BEST WISHES

for a

HAPPY & PROSPEROUS

NEW YEAR - 2006

from

Your ever loving Uncle

PR. [unclear]

01-01-2006

Pilgrimage to Koneswaram

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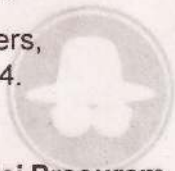
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Felicitation

The publication of a book on Koneswaram under the title "Pilgrimage to Koneswaram" is certainly a commendable effort.

As President of Konesar Paripalana Sabai, I am really happy. Since the author V. Varathasuntharam is a friend of mine, I am greatly over-joyed. I must say it is a great contribution to Koneswaram and more so to Saivism.

This book brings out the legends behind the great temple. It contains the mythology relating to the temple. It highlights the antiquity of the temple. It further propounds the religious significance of the temple.

In conclusion, I congratulate the author for his earnest effort to bring varied aspects of this historic, holy temple in one book. May Lord Konesar shower His blessings for this endeavour.

Konesar Paripalana Sabai
Trincomalee.

M. K. Sellarasa
President.



This book is dedicated
To my maternal uncle,
Cum father-in-law,
Late Mr. R. Sivasubramaniam,
My mentor and guide,
Who had been a tower of strength
In my hours of crises,
who had been a great solace
In my hours of despair,
who helped everybody
That crossed his path
who had been a devotee of
Trincomalee Pathira Kali
all his life!

- *Author*

Pilgrimage to Koneswaram



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in my hours of despair,
who helped everybody
that crossed his path
who had been a devotee of
Bhakti and Patanjali.

- Author

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அகில இலங்கை இந்து மாமன்றம்

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PREFACE

Saint Thirumoolar referred to our Country as “Sivaboomi” in his great mystical work “Thirumanthiram”.

Trincomalee which is said to be a corrupted version of ‘Thirukonamalai’ is a sacred city of worship for Hindus.

‘Thiru’ means ‘sacred’, ‘Kon’ means a king or god. ‘Malai’ is mountain. Thirukonamalai is the holy mountain from where Lord Shiva has been blessing us for several Centuries.

The Encyclopedia Britannica says : “The town (Trincomalee) was one of the first Tamil settlements in Ceylon” (Vol. 22. Page 477).

Dr.Paul E. Pieris, an eminent historian of repute, had recorded :- “Long before the arrival of Vijaya there were in Lanka five recognized Isvarams of Siva which claimed and received adorations of all

India. These were Tiruketheeswaram near Mahatiththa, Munceswaram dominating Salawatta and the pearl fishery, Tondeswaram near Mantota, Tirukoneswaram near the great Bay of Kottiyar and Naguleswaram near Kankesanturai”.

According to the historical records this Temple was first built about 3300 years ago.

When attempts are being now made in this country to change and rewrite the history by racists, erasing the antiquities of Thamiz race and Hinduism Mr.V.Varathasuntharam a son of the soil of ‘Thirukonamalai’ has come forward to render a yeomen service to our community by writing this book in English. It will reach various parts of the world and make the greatness of this Temple known by many people.

The talented author has really made a deep study of the historical aspects of Thirukoneswaram. When we have a number of books written and published in Thamiz we find it difficult to identify the persons who can now write in English on religious topics. Thus Mr.Varathasuntharam’s work is an outstanding one.

Mr.Varathasuntharam’s contribution by way of this book is commendable from another angle too. We

have now a large number of expatriate Thamilars who have emigrated to various other parts of the world and their children are deprived of acquiring knowledge of our history because of their lack of knowledge in Thamilz. Therefore this book will be a valuable addition to the literature required by such younger generation. They should know the glory of this great Temple which is one of the two Temples in Sri Lanka on which 'Thirumurai' Stanzas have been sung by the leading Saiva Saints including Sampanthar and Appar.

I on behalf of the Hindus of this country wish to commend the author for his splendid work and pray to Shri Sivagamisamedha Shri Nadarajapperuman to shower all His blessings on him to continue this noble service to our community.

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The author is greatly obliged to retired Public Servant Mr.Nagarasa Kanapathipillai, dedicated to the service of Lord Siva and whose yearning is pilgrimage to Holy Shrines in Sri Lanka and India, for providing us with his photographs of Koneswaram and its deities that beautifully adorn the cover page of this book.

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

Let me, in all humility, say at the outset that my long time longing to pen the antiquity, glory and sanctity of Koneswaram has become a reality. That thirst has now been quenched by the grace of Lord Konesar.

Koneswaram is a sacred shrine that I have been worshipping since my childhood. Nostalgic memories of my being at the Swamy Rock throughout the Holy Night – Sivarathry – observing the fast and watching the sunrise at dawn during the Thiruvembavai festival in the chilly month of Margaly flood my mind.

My thanks are due to Mr.Kandiah Neelakandan, President of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress and Mr.M.K.Sellarasa, President of Konesar Paripalana Sabai for their kind sentiments in their messages.

I owe special thanks to Manimekalai Prasuram and specially to Mr.Ravi Thamilvanan for having published five of my books and another book compiled by my wife Vilvaranee. My first acquaintance with Mr.Ravi Thamilvanan and his wife Mrs.Valli Thamilvanan was when my wife and I met them at the Kamban Festival in Colombo. Thereafter our ties have become stronger over the years.

Please permit me, Dear Readers, to digress a while at this juncture, to strike a personal note! During my childhood, since my father Mr. Vethanayagam was transferred from pillar to post serving in Colombo, Trincomalee, Kurunegala, Ambalangod and Kandy during his tenure of office as a clerical servant, I was brought up by my mother's elder sister, Sivagamy amma and her younger brother Sivasubramaniam and his wife Balmbgai. I grew up with them, and since the demise of periyamma and periyamama, I have grown old with their noble spirit. The great values that they cherished, that they lived for, that moulded us in our formative years are even today the beacon light that guides us in the midst of the fever and the fret of the world, despite the passage of time.

It is in all earnestness and in awe that I dedicate this book to that finest gentleman - Sivasubramaniam.

This book is a humble effort to bring to light the great legends of the temple, to formulate the mythological references, to address our minds to the relevant inscriptions, to highlight the antiquity of the temple to praise the reverence in which the temple has been held throughout the annals of the history of the shrine on the hillock-all in one book.

"The apparent multiplication of Gods is bewildering at the first glance, but you soon discover that they are all the same god. There is always one uttermost god, who defies personification. This makes Hinduism, the most tolerant religion in the world; because its transcendent god includes all possible gods".

That was Bernard Shaw on Hinduism. We are proud inheritors of that great religion that has been handed down to us by our forefathers since very early times.

Hinduism, is in fact a way of life. Let us tread along that holy path to enjoy peace, harmony and bliss by going on pilgrimages to holy shrines.

V.Varathasuntharam.

*No. 25, 36th Lane,
Colombo - 06,
Sri Lanka.*

The apparent multiplication of Gods is bewildering at the first glance, but you soon discover that they are all the same god. There is



Pilgrimage to Koneswaram

1

The battle axe

Hindu new year, that falls in the month of April brings joy to Hindus since it is the day that tolls the dawn of another year, a day on which we take stock of the past year, a day on which we take new decisions for the ensuing year.

But, for the Hindus of Triconamalee the New Year brings mixed feelings of joy and sorrow. They feel sad at the thought that it was on the New Year Day of 1624, that the Portuguese destroyed and desecrated the venerated temple of Koneswaram.

It was the darkest day in the annals of the history of Koneswaram.

According to legends and according to recorded history, on the New year day of 1624, while the chariot festival was in progress at the temple and while the statues of Lord Siva and Parvathy were taken in a procession in a chariot, the Portuguese soldiers and sailors disguising themselves as Brahmins and acting on the orders of their commander Constantine de Sa entered the holy temple, looted enormous wealth gold, brass, copper, silks and jewels, slaughtered ardent devotees and ultimately destroyed the magnificent temple of Koneswaram that stood majestically on the ascent of the Swami Rock overlooking the ocean.

Some concerned devotees had probably removed certain statues from the temple premises and either buried them under the ground or kept them safely at a far away place.

A site plan of the then temple prepared by the Portuguese prior to the destruction of the temple was traced at the National Library at Lisbon in July, 1952 sequel to strenuous and earnest efforts of late Dr. W. Balendra for which the Hindus of the world are highly indebted to him.

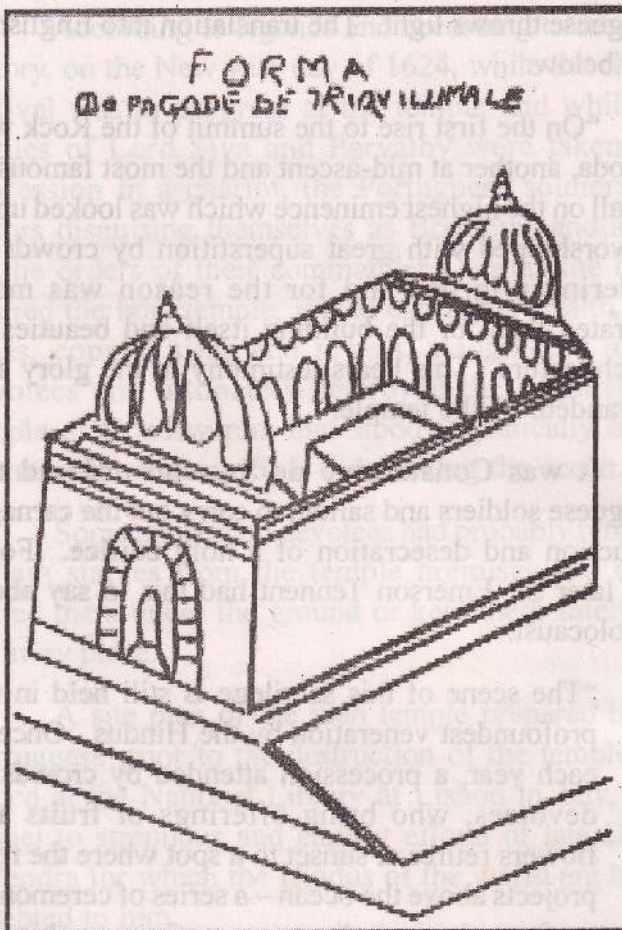
An English translation of Rodrigo de Sa's description of the three temples that had existed at the site prior to the devastation of the temple by the

Portuguese throws light. The translation into English is given below:

“On the first rise to the summit of the Rock was a pagoda, another at mid-ascent and the most famous of them all on the highest eminence which was looked upon and worshipped with great superstition by crowds of wandering pilgrims and for the reason was more celebrated than for the building itself and beauties of its architecture” This bears testimony to the glory and the grandeur of the temple.

It was Constantine de Sa who ordered the Portuguese soldiers and sailors to carry out the carnage, destruction and desecration of a holy edifice. Forty years later Sir Emerson Tennent had this to say about the holocaust.

“The scene of this sacrilege is still held in the profoundest veneration by the Hindus. Once in each year, a procession attended by crowds of devotees, who bring offerings of fruits and flowers retires at sunset to a spot where the rock projects above the ocean – a series of ceremonies performed – including a mysterious cracking of a coconut against the cliff and the officiating Brahmin concludes his invocation by elevating a brazen censer above his head filled with



A sketch of the ancient Koneswaram temple despatched by Portuguese commander Constantine de sa to the king of Portugal prior to destroying the temple.

inflammable materials, the light of which as it burns is reflected far over the sea”

After the holocaust, carnage and plunder of this great, holy shrine, within a short span of six years, Constantine de Sa, the cruel hand behind the dark episode, and his men numbering two thousand and nine hundred were destroyed to a man while entering the jungles around Badulla in an attempt to conquer the Kandyan Kingdom.

The villain paid a heavy price. Not only did the Portuguese commander and his men pay a price, but also the Portuguese ruler under whose banner this heinous atrocity was committed had to pay a greater price!

Yes, the Portuguese domination tottered after the destruction of the Konesar temple and the regiment finally gave way to the Dutch.

Referring to this nefarious conduct of the forces, Rodrigo de sa, son of Constantine de Sa, made the following observation almost as an apologia for his father's profanity.

“It is true that philosophers do not condemn nor pronounce judgement on things by their results but only by the causes and beginnings because the former are due to fortune or rather

Providence which governs and disposes all things according to its will but the latter are formed by man's own reason and begun according to the care he takes as to the best means to bring about success."

This observation by Rodrigo de sa a worthy son in fact echoes the conscience of the Portuguese people.

The train of events that ensued the dark episode and the above comment of Rodrigo de Sa, reminds me of a commandment of King Kullakottan who renovated the temple prior to the destruction.

வீறாக என்மரபோர்க்கு ஈயாமல்
கோணை விமலற்கு ஈந்தேன்
பேறான பெரியோரே இதற்கழிவு
நினைப்பவர்கள் பெட்பு நீங்கி
நீறாகப் போவரிது நிச்சயம் நிச்சயம்
கோணை நிமலர் ஆணை.

In English this is rendered as follows:

"I have made endowments to this temple without sharing it with my kith and kin. It is certain that whosoever intends harm to this venerated shrine shall be reduced to ashes"

Is it a commandment or is it a prophecy?" – I wonder.

But let me say this with every word at my command and with all the might I can marshal, that when Adharma (wickedness) prospers and Dharma (Righteousness) decays, the battle axe in the hand of Lord Konesar sets out in motion to preserve Dharma.

Pilgrims on the Swami Rock learn not merely a lesson of history but a great philosophic truth of Cause and Effect.



2

A miracle

The minds and memories of pilgrims at the Swamy Rock are inundated with the miracles of Koneswaram hailed as the Rome of the Orient and venerated as the 'Kailas of the South' by the Hindus of the world.

A singular miracle that stands out in my memory is the emergence of the ancient statues of sacred Koneswaram after a long spell of three hundred and twenty five years. This occurred in the early fifties when I had still been a teenage student at Ramakrishna Mission Hindu College, Trincomalee.

The workforce of the Trincomalee Urban Council was digging a public well at Division 10 to provide drinking water to the town dwellers. As these workers were digging the ground, they heard a sound as their pick axes struck something underneath. They were stunned.

“What could it be?” – they wondered.

“In the early forties during the world war, when the Japanese dropped bombs in the vicinity of the natural harbour, none of them fell on the dwelling areas and the populace was saved from a great calamity due to the grace of Lord Konesar. Could this, therefore, be an unexploded bomb’?” – This was the apprehension of a worker.

“During the war, the people who fled the town in fear might have put their jewellery in boxes and concealed them underneath. This could then be one such metal box.” – This was the anxiety of another worker.

“Trincomalee is a sacred land, a Linga Boomy, where it was said there could be a Siva lingam at every inch of land I am sure it is a Sivalingam.” – Thus observed a pious worker.

So the workers struck the earth with their tools with great caution and with a sense of piety. To their great amazement, they excavated three statues at a depth of only three-feet. When these statues were discovered the standing and seated Siva and the standing Parvathy were found buried with the base down and the head downwards.

They were the statues of Lord Somaskanda Siva, His consort Mathumai Amman and

Chandrasekara. It was on the memorable day of July 27, 1950. Three other statues, Lord Ganesha, Parvathy in a seated position, a Trisulam (Trident) and Hamsa bird had been unearthed only a few days prior to that in close proximity.

In the early part of the year 1952, these sacred statues of yore were taken in a procession throughout the length and breadth of the island of Ceylon for dharshan by the people of all religious faiths. People who flocked all along the route in thousands for dharshan of the statues made contributions of cash in the denominations of one cent and five cent coins amounting to an aggregate of Rs. 35,000/- towards the cost of the construction of a simple temple on the Swamy Rock to install these statues.

Finally these statues were enshrined at Koneswaram temple on February 23, 1952.

This day was chosen as the most auspicious day according to Hindu Calendar to instal the statues. As the preparations for the ceremony were on, a sad news arrived.

The shocking news was that King George VI had passed away peacefully in his sleep in England. As his daughter had been away on a tour abroad, the swearing in ceremony of the new heir to the throne

was delayed. So, it so happened that on the day that these idols were installed, there was no king in the isle of Ceylon.

It is appropriate, here to quote an observation made by Dr.W. Balendra in his lecture under the auspices of the Royal Asiatic Society chaired by Lord Soulbury, the then Governor of Ceylon. Here is his observation:

“There was no king in the island of Ceylon on that auspicious day. It may be a coincidence or it may be ordained.”

However, it is the affirmed belief of the Hindus of Trincomalee, that the emergence of these statues of yore promises them a bright future - peace with honor – despite the visissitudes of life.



3

Statues of yore

Pilgrims at the Swamy Rock overwhelmed by piety and curiosity endeavour to view the size, shape and the sculpture of the unearthed statues of yore in order to ascertain the period to which they belonged, the country of their origin, their architecture, the legends behind them and their religious significance.

At a glance, we see that Lord Siva and his consort Mathumai are seated on two separate cushions. Siva in a seated pose measuring 1', 8½" x 10," has four arms. Siva holding an axe in his right hand signifies the destruction of the wickedness in man, while the deer in His left hand refers to the impermanence of life and the deception that are overcome by him. The lower left hand is in the Kataka pose whereas the lower hand on the right offers us protection saying, "Why fear when I am here?"

It is said that Lord Siva is three eyed, the third eye being the eye of wisdom that looks beyond what is reached by mortal beings.



Goddess Mathumai Lord with Somaskandar

The ear ring on the right ear of Siva is known as Kalal (கழுல்) a man's ear ring-while the ear ring on his left ear is called Thodu (தோடு) the traditional ear ring of a woman.

They – Thodu and kalal – represent the Arthanareeswara Vadivam (அர்த்த நாரீஸ்வரர் வடிவம்) which means that Siva's right represents the man while His left denotes the woman – the half male and the half female concept of life. The biological concept is that both male and female hormones are inherent in each person. This is confirmed by the concept of animus and anima.



Ancient statues that were unearthed in the fifties.

There is a pottu between the two eyes of Siva, he wears a necklace of berries around his neck. The thread, he wears, runs over the left shoulder and under the right arm. There is a bracelet around the stomach.

The Madumai Amman, 1', 4" x 8", weighing 50 lbs is seated on a cushion. The standing Parvathy, 1', 8" x 7", weighing 30 lbs, has a necklace Thali (தூலி) tied with a gold thread.

The Ganapathy bronze, 8" x 10½", weighs 65 lbs. An expert opinion of this statue runs as follows:

“Trincomalee Ganesh is the most outstanding bronze casting of this type available today. The gold content is high and this bronze is certain to arrest the worldwide attention of students of Hindu art in metal owing to the superb technique adopted in casting the sixty five pound weight of gold and copper in one piece. It is the work of consummate skill on the part of the sculptor who performed the casting.”

Trisulam – The three - pronged weapon 1', 7" x 8" weighing blbs and of the Pallava style of the tenth century signifies the destruction of the ego with its threefold desires of body, mind and intellect.

Annam – Hamsa is the figure of a bird, 30cm high and is a temple lamp top. This bird is a vehicle of Siva's consort. It is a bird that runs a little distance on the earth before it takes off which symbolizes that man can lead a good life on earth and then take a flight to divinity.

According to experts on the subject, all the finds belonged to Koneswaram and had remained buried for centuries.

They had been concealed underneath the earth by the devotees to save them from the vandalism of the Portuguese rulers who destroyed the temple.



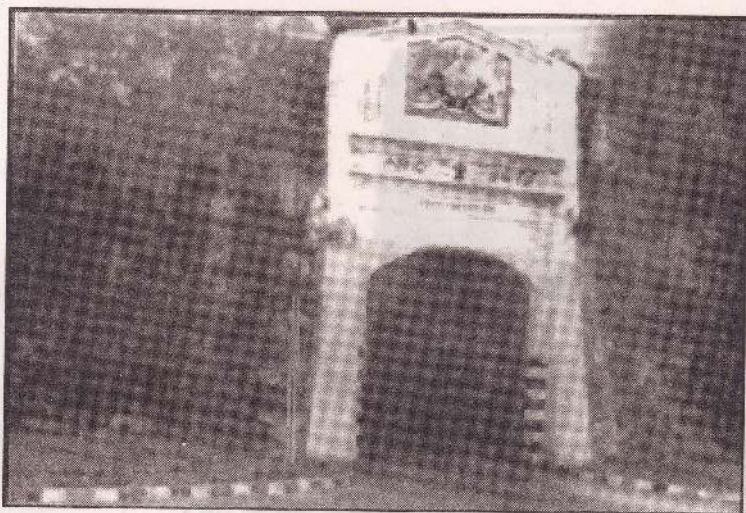
4

The fish ensign

The sight of two fish ensigns on the fifteen-foot pillar on either side of the arch at the entrance to Fort Frederick arrests the attention of each and every pilgrim to Koneswaram.

These fish ensigns, are in fact, standing monuments of the antiquity of Koneswaram. While revealing the antiquity of Koneswaram, the fish ensigns also remind pilgrims of goddess Amman whose eyes are akin to those of the fish for she cares for us with mother's love.

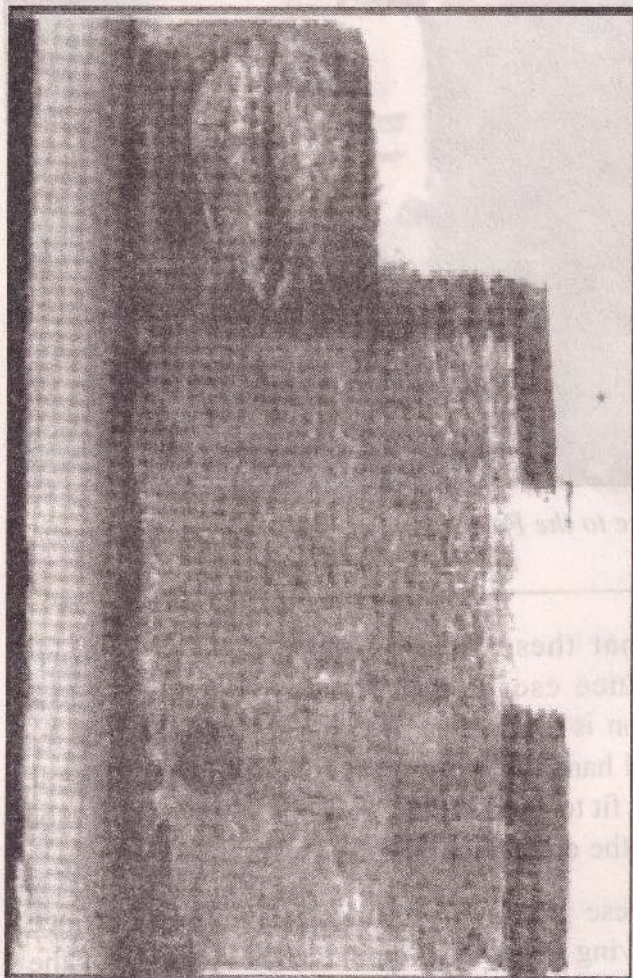
These two pillars that are placed on either side of the arch belonged to the Koneswaram temple that was destroyed by the Portuguese. After the destruction of the temple, the Portuguese who built the fort with the ruins of the temple had placed these two pillars of the temple at the very entry to the precincts of the temple.



Entrance to the Fort Frederick built with the pillars of the destroyed temple.

That these two temple pillars of historic significance escaped the fury of the Portuguese domination is a miracle. It is but Providence that the very cruel hands that demolished a magnificent temple thought it fit to choose these two out of the debris to be placed at the entrance of the fort.

These pillars are of historic significance since the engraving of the fish emblem, the insignia of the Pandyan kingdom is referred to in an inscription known as Kudumiyamalai Sasanam (கூடுமியாமலை சாசனம்). It



Fish ensigns on the pillar at the entrance to Fort Frederick

is held that the inscription belonged to 13A.D. whereas certain others maintain that it belonged to 16 A.D.

According to Kudumiyamalai Sasanam the fish emblem found on the pillars were engraved by Sadaya Varman Veerapandiyan (சுடையவர்மன் வீரபாண்டியன்)



5

The prophecy on an inscription

The prophecy engraved on the inscription on a pillar at the very entrance to the Fort Frederick through which pilgrims wend their trek to the Swami Rock on the ascent baffles historians and scholars.

What is unique about this inscription is that it was an intelligent forecasting of a future event. It refers to a prophecy related to Koneswaram. Another significance is that it speaks about the contributions King Kullakottan made to Koneswaram.

The traditional version of the inscription is as follows:

முன்னே குளக்கோட்டன் மூட்டுந் திருப்பணியை
பின்னே பறங்கி பிடிக்கவே - மன்னா கேள்
பூனைக்கண் செங்கண் புகைக்கண்ணன் போனபின்
மானே வடுகாய் விடும்,

The English rendering of this stanza by Codrington is given below:-

The Portuguese shall take the holy edifice built by Kullokottan in ancient times. O! king hearken! after the cat's eyed, the red eyed one and the smoke eyed have gone, the figure will be that of the Northerner (ie. Telugu)

This prophecy on the inscription has not only baffled historians and scholars but also evoked such a great interest that they had deciphered the inscription and provided us with varied versions.

The following is the version given by the Portuguese commander Constantine de Sa who destroyed the temple:

“When I went there to make this Fort, I found this written on the pagoda among many writings which were there, one which ran thus:-

....has caused the pagoda to be built. Nevertheless the time shall come when the Nation of the Frangis shall destroy it and there shall be no king in the island of Ceylon who shall rebuild it anew.”

It is therefore clear that the event of the destruction of the temple was found engraved on a pillar of the temple - thus it is considered a prophecy.



6

Rama at Koneswaram

Rama, an avatar of Lord Krishna, on his pilgrimage to Koneswaram, prostrated at the shrine craving to Lord Konesar to rid him of Brahmahati Thosham (பிரஹ்மஹத்தி தோஷம்) a sin that had befallen on him for annihilating Ravana, a great devotee of Lord Siva.

According to the related Puranams, Rama stood before Lord Siva at this shrine with tears in his eyes and prayed earnestly for redemption and at last his prayers were answered.

Having become aware of this from Thakshana Kailasa Puranam and Thiru Konasala Puranam, the pilgrims on the Swamy Rock beg Lord Siva with great fervour that they too be ridden of their sins.

Rama is a symbol of Perfection. He was an exemplary son, an ideal brother, a true husband, an earnest friend, and a kind-hearted individual who

blessed several persons that crossed his path. He symbolised a combination of human and divine qualities.

Having killed Ravana, Rama crowned Ravana's brother Vibishana as the king of Lanka, but the trauma of Brahmahathi thosham - the sin of slaying a devotee of Lord Siva tormented him.

So, Rama went on a pilgrimage to the sacred Koneswaram, prayed earnestly for redemption from this sin. He took steps to put up shrines for Siva, Parvathy and Durga in Koneswaram.

According to Thakshana Kailasa Puranam, the work on the construction of the temples began on the first Monday of the waxing moon in the month of Vaikasi. It was Vashistar who designed the images.

Lord Siva at Koneswaram responding to the earnest prayer by Rama commanded "The Brahmahati Thosham shall not befall on you."

Thereafter, Rama made another prayer to Lord Siva at Koneswaram on behalf of all of us. His prayer on this hillock can be summarised in the following words:

“I yearn earnestly that in as much as my sins are dispelled by you, may the sins of every devotee that worships at this sacred shrine also be dispelled.”

ஐயனே என்னை நீங்காது
 அடைந்தீடு பிரமச் சாயை
 பொய்யென அகலச் செய்தாய்!
 ஓங்கும் இத்திரிகோணத்தின்
 எய்திநிற் பூசித்து என்போல்
 இறைஞ்சுவார்க்கு எந்த நாளும்
 பொய்யுறு பவங்கள் தீர்த்து
 வீடு அருள்செய்ய வேண்டும்

(திரிகோணாசல புராணம்)



7

Ravana at Koneswaram

Ravana, a great devotee of Lord Siva worshipped at the shrine in Koneswaram. It was at this shrine at Koneswaram that he sang the sama veda music, pleased the ears of Lord Siva and his consort and thereby regained the word and the Kodeesa lingam.

Ravana was a great warrior who got the blessing - "Thou shall not be killed by anyone" - from Lord Siva. As a result of his great penance he got this boon.

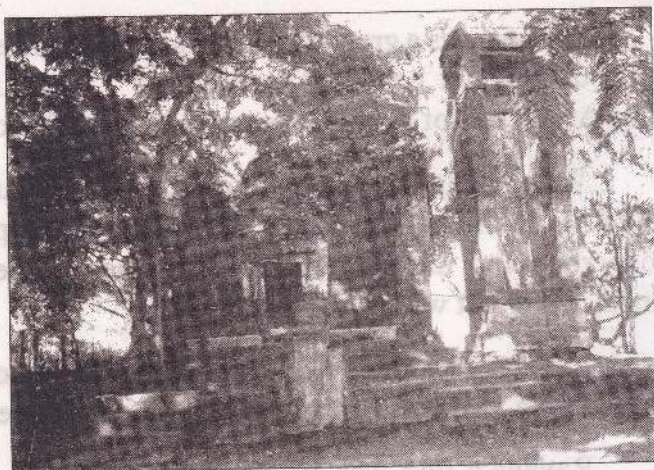
When Hanuman, the messenger of Rama, arrived in Lanka, he was astonished at the happy, prosperous and the contented life of the people of Lanka. So, great was Ravana's reign.

Ravana's mother, Kaikesi, too was a devotee of Lord Siva. So was Ravana's wife Mandotharee.

Ravana's flag was Veena in gold colour. He was an ardent follower of agamas. He derided the



Ravana in the Raja Gopuram



Ganesha Temple at Kanniya hot wells



Hot springs at Kanniyai dug by Ravana to perform last rituals to his mother.

performance of vedic rites and yagams with animal sacrifice. He propounded and practised agamic traditions. Saivism was the professed religion in his kingdom. Saivaite saints Sampanthar, Navukarasar, Suntharar and Manicavasagar, known as four great

Nayanmars, hailed Ravana as a great devotee of Lord Siva in their garlands of hymns.

According to Thakshna Kailasa Manmiam, Ravana found that his mother pounded rice daily, made a lingam out of the rice flower, performed Siva Pooja and then abandoned it in the river - Mahaveli ganga.

In order to relieve his mother of this strenuous task, Ravana proceeded to Kailas to obtain a Siva Lingam from Lord Siva. He did great penance and obtained the lingam which he lost on his way back.

When Ravana proceeded a third time to Kailas, Vishnu, in the disguise of a brahmin, told him that there was a Siva Lingam in Koneswaram. On hearing this Ravana came to Koneswaram and prayed that he be bestowed with a Siva lingam. Since there was no response from Lord Siva, he attempted to lift the mountain. Lord Siva placed his foot on Ravana's head gently and consequently Ravana could not succeed. Thereafter Ravana sang the sama veda hymns pleasing the ears of Lord Siva and earning his admiration. Finally, Ravana obtained his boon at Koneswaram.



8

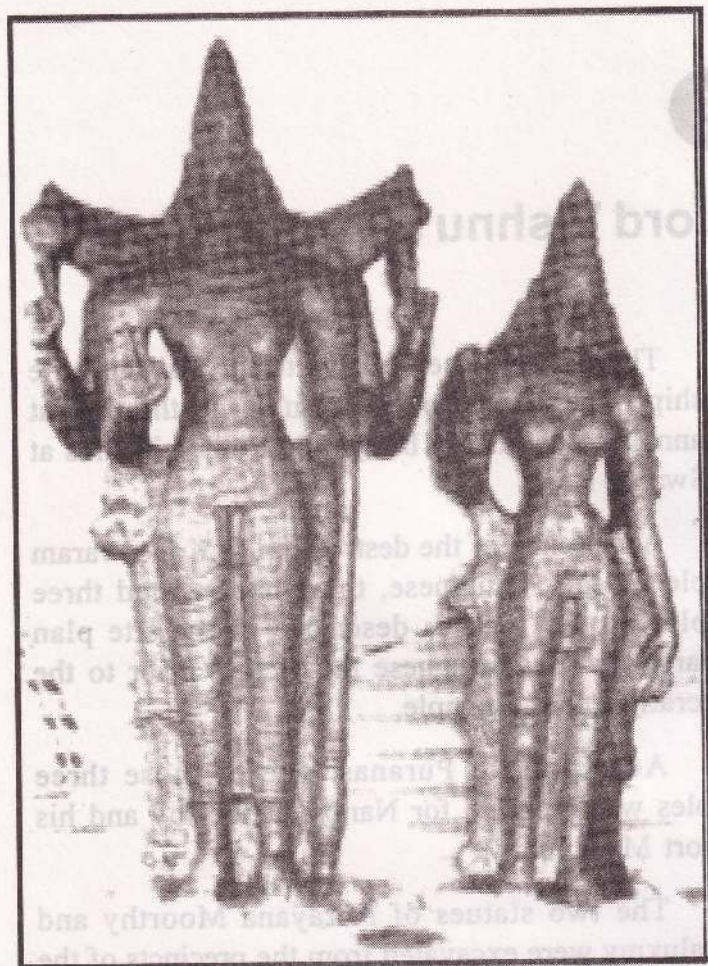
Lord Vishnu at Koneswaram

The co-existence of Saivaite and Vaishnavaites worship at the sacred Koneswaram Shrine throughout the annals of its history brings joy to the pilgrims at the Swamy Rock.

At the time of the destruction of Koneswaram temple by the Portuguese, there had existed three temples on the rock as described in the site plan prepared by the Portuguese themselves prior to the desecration of the temple.

According to Puranas, one of those three temples was a shrine for Narayanamoorthy and his consort Mahaluxmy.

The two statues of Narayana Moorthy and Mahaluxmy were excavated from the precincts of the Fort Frederick during the British regime. According to the Puranas, these two statues belonged to the temple of Narayana Moorthy and Mahaluxmy which



The ancient statues of Lord Narayanamoorthy and goddess Mahaluxmy unearthed in the precincts of Fort Frederick.

king Kullakottan erected. This indicates that the worship of Siva and the worship of Lord Vishnu have co-existed in Koneswaram since early times.

According to Thakshna Kailasa Puranam, Vishnu took the fish Avatar - Matcha Avatar - in Koneswaram sequel to a request by Lord Siva and consequently it was Lord Siva who named Koneswaram as Machcheswaram.

According to Hindu thought, Lord Vishnu is the Protector. He lives on a thousand headed serpent on the Ocean of Milk, signifying the consciousness deep within us. The white ocean of milk is the pure heart, while the serpent represents the mind and the thousand heads its thoughts.

The head of the serpent, which is turned inward, suggests that we should go inward and enjoy peace and bliss. His consort Mahaluxmy is at his feet.

The crown of Vishnu has great sanctity as it refers to his sovereignty. At all Vishnu temples, after the pooja is over, the priest places the crown over the head of every devotee to bless him or her.

There is a lotus flower in one hand of Vishnu. It has a deep philosophical meaning, signifying both physical and spiritual nature. Though the lotus stems

from the mud, it brings forth a lovely flower, making it vividly clear to us, that one can be spiritual in thoughts and deeds while being engaged in mundane life and that we can reach perfection irrespective of worldly life. The important quality is detachment.

It is said that the thousand - petalled lotus is the seat of perfection. The conch in the hand of Lord Vishnu is a beacon call for higher thinking and nobler life.

Let us listen to that call within!



9

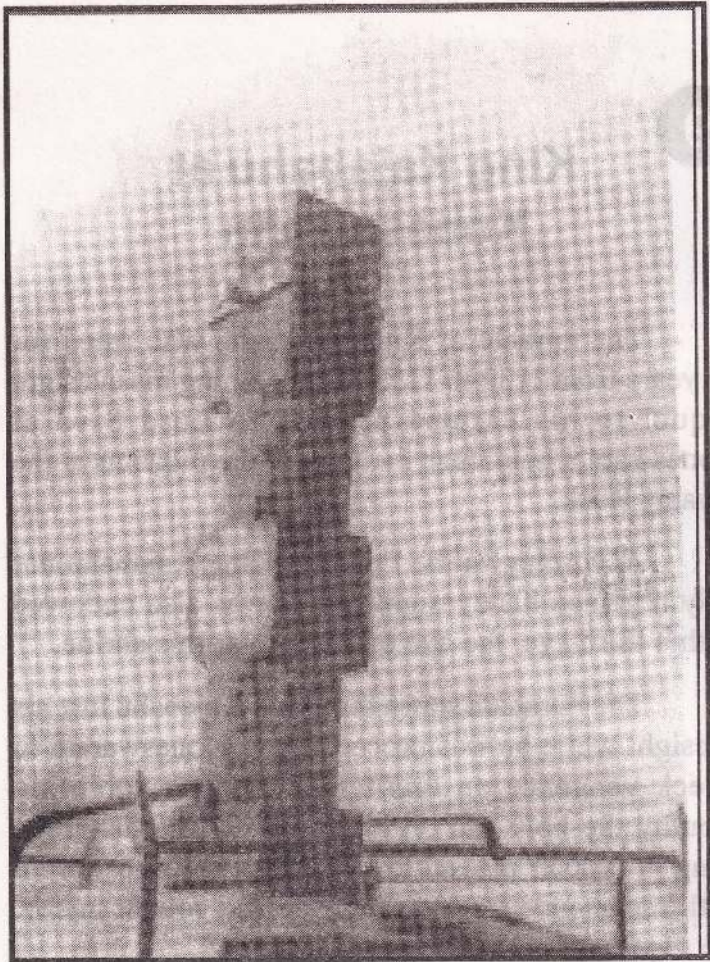
King Kajabahu at Koneswaram

The miracle of King Kajabahu who ruled for 21 years from 1132 to 1153 AD regaining his eyesight sequel to his earnest prayers to Lord Siva at Koneswaram heightens the faith of the pilgrims at the Swamy Rock.

According to the Puranas, King Kajabahu not only regained his eyesight but he was also endowed with a third eye, the eye of wisdom at this shrine.

The Puranam states that King Kajabahu lost his eyesight while he was proceeding to Koneswaram to wreck vengeance on this temple. Later anointing vibuthy the holy ash on his forehead, the disturbed King in despair prayed to Lord Siva at Koneswaram with repentance for his vengeance and sought mercy. He regained his eye-sight.

Initially, he regained his eye sight on one eye, on his way to Koneswaram and this village was called



A pillar of the ancient temple belonging to Pallava period being placed at the Swamy Rock to light the Karthigai Theepam.

Kanthalai (கண் + தழை). In Tamil the word Kann (கண்) means eye while Thalai (தழை) means gain or flourish. Kanthalai means the regaining of eyesight. This village is still called Kanthalai.

He regained the eyesight on the second eye on reaching a place in very close proximity to Koneswaram. It is called Sinna Kanthalai.

King Kajabahu showed great interest in Hinduism. He appointed priests to conduct the six poojas uninterruptedly each day at this shrine. He made special endowments for the regular conduct of annual festival at the temple.

King Kajabahu had spent his last days in a Hindu atmosphere in Kanthalai. Pathini Amman worship which was brought by King Kajabahu is still prevalent in the village of Mallikai Theevu in Mutur.



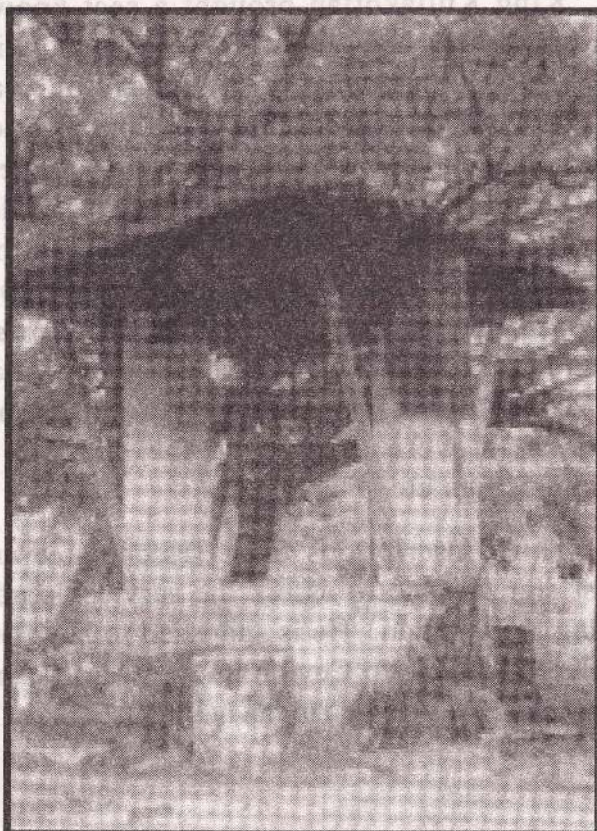
10

King Kullakottan at Koneswaram

Pilgrims on the Swamy Rock recall with a sense of gratitude the great service rendered by King Kullakottan for the reconstruction of Koneswaram temple in early times.

It is interesting to note that King Kullakottan's first visit to Koneswaram was a pilgrimage. The contribution of Kullakottan to this temple was manifold since he built a temple, a Kopuram, a mandapam and a tank named Bavanasa Chunai. He made endowments of agricultural lands, and constructed a reservoir for the irrigation of the cultivable lands.

King Kullakottan assigned the task of maintaining the accounts of the temple to Thanaththar (தானத்தார்) the task of plucking flowers, making garlands, lighting lamps etc to Variappan (வாரியப்பர்)



The spring named Pavanasa Chunai

the task of administering Thirukonamalai to Vannipam (வண்ணிபாடம்) and so on. Families from Marunkoor, Karaikal and Sinthu Nadu in South India were brought and settled at Koneswaram for various purposes.

King Kullakottan brought a sect known as Othuvar (ஓதுவாரி) and settled them at Samboor village (சம்பூர்). The inhabitants of the village of nilavelly (நீலாவெளி) were assigned administration. The people of the village of Thiriyai (திரியாய்) were assigned the task of sending thread and oil to light a thousand lamps at the temple. The sandalwood logs required for the performance of yaga and pooja were to be supplied by the villagers of Kattaiparichan (கட்டைப்பறிச்சான்). Fruits for the temple were to be supplied by villagers of Senaiyur (சேனையூர்). The villagers of Kuchchaveli (குச்சவெளி) were to provide the temple with ceremonial figs etc.

Three inscriptions from Trincomalee are of utmost significance to assess the services rendered by King Kullakottan. He is supposed to have been a subruler who came to Ceylon in the twelfth century. His real name was Cholagangan hailing from the Chola dynasty.



11

Antiquity of Koneswaram

The origins of Koneswaram, according to geologists and mythology date back to early legendary era, when there had been an oceanic bed upheaval (பிரளயம்) around 306 BC in which the earliest temple of Koneswaram was submerged.

It is in that belief that even today the first and foremost pooja of the temple is performed on the Swamy Rock projecting over the sea. The officiating priest faces the direction in which the original temple is believed to have been engulfed and offers the pooja to the holy shrine underneath the sea. This pooja is called Malai Poosai (மலைப்பூசை)

According to mythology, the ancient temple had existed during the period of Ravana which is reckoned as 6000 B.C. for both Rama and Ravana had worshipped at this sacred shrine.

According to historians, Koneswaram had existed long before the arrival of Prince Vijaya (483

- 445 BC) in the island. This is the considered view of historian Dr. Paul Pieris which is cited below:

“Long before the arrival of Vijaya, there were in Lanka, five Ishvarams of Siva which claimed and received the adoration of all India. These were Thiruketheeswaram, which was near Mahathirtha, Munneswaram dominating Salawatte and the pearl fishery, Thondeshwaram near Mantota, Thirukoneswaram near the great bay of Kottiyar and Naguleswaram, near Kankesanthurai.”

Pali chronicles refer to the existence of ancient Koneswaram temple in the early period. The Mahavamsa refers to Hindu temple at Trincomalee.

Saint Thirugnanasampanthar of the seventh century had sung a garland of hymns on Thirukoneswaram. Saint Suntharamoorthy of the ninth century had sung in praise of this temple. Arunagiri Nathar of the fifteenth century had composed Thirupugal on the glory of Koneswaram.

It is befitting; here, to quote from “The Temporal and Spiritual conquest” written in the Portuguese language and translated into English by historian S.G. Perera.

“The Pagoda of Trinquilimale was at this time, the Rome of the Orient and more frequented by

pilgrims than that of Raman coir near shoals of Chilao and that of Canjavarao, two days journey from S. Thome and Fripite and Tremel in Bisnagar and Jeganatim Orixa and Vixante in Bengali”

In his vivid expression of the sanctity, glory and antiquity of the shrine on the hillock, the historian expresses a forthright view that this holy shrine was comparable to the venerated Hindu temples of Ramesvaram, Thirumalai (Thirupathy) and Jeganath in Orissa.

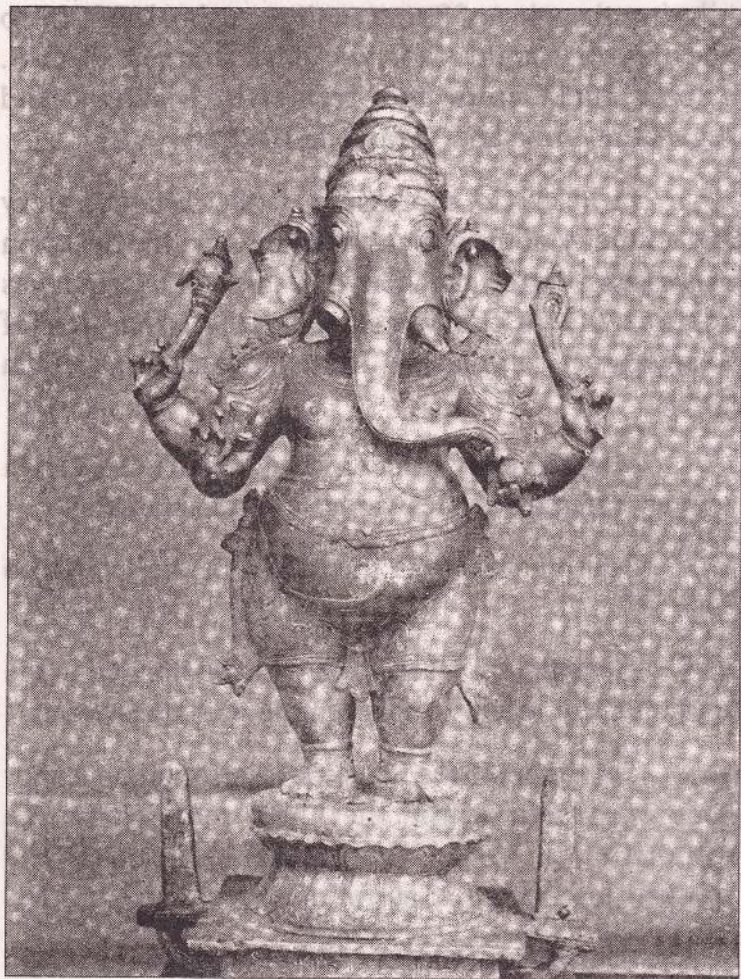
Manankerny inscription of the eleventh century refers to Koneswaram as Konamamalai.

Codrington traces the origin of the temple to 2590 BC.

The Nilaveli inscription which belonged to the tenth century refers to this temple as Koneswaram.

Then there is the Sanskrit inscription on a door jamb excavated within the Fort Frederick by the authorities in 1945. An English version of the Sanskrit inscription is as follows:

“Hail prosperity! In the year Sambhu Puspe (i.e. one thousand one hundred and forty - five) Saka era, when the sun was in the mansion of aeris. Hasta



Ancient statue of Pillaiyar at Koneswaram.

being the constellation (in conjunction with the moon) and the point of the ecliptic at the horizon (lagna) being aries, the illustrious Codanga deva, having arrived in the unconquerable lanka the forehead ornament of the earth at Gokarne”

It is held that Codanga deva mentioned in the inscription is a reference to Kullakottan in 1223 AD. These pillars found in the precincts belonged to the Pallava period. Gokarne is a reference to Koneswaram.

Nilaveli inscription which refers to Koneswaram is considered as an important record relating to the antiquity of Koneswaram as it mentions the name “Thirukonamalai” (திருக்கோணமலை) This inscription of fourteen lines belongs to the tenth century. This inscription found in the Pillaiyar temple at Nilaveli in considered to be one of the ruins of Koneswaram temple. It mentions that around 1700 acres (250 வேலி நிலம்) of land were donated to Koneswaram temple.



12

Saint Sampanthar's hymns on Koneswaram

Thirugnana Sampanthar, Thirunavukarasar, Suntharamoorthy, and Manicavasagar are four great crusaders of Saivasim who composed religious hymnology that came to be known as Thirumurai.

These great saints set out on foot on their pilgrimage to the Hindu temples and sang hymns in praise of Lord Siva as a result of which there are special shrines, where the statues of these saints are installed in a standing pose in most of the temples.

Of all these four great saints, Sampanthar enjoys greater significance for he was the first to sing the glory of Lord Shiva and the first to have attained godhood. His hymns comprise the first three parts of Saivaite hymnology known as Thirumurai. The saivaite epic, Peria Puranam written in verse by Shekkilar denotes 1256 stanzas and a voluminous section to narrate the glory of Saint Sampanthar.

In fact there is a belief that Saint Sampanthar was an avatar of Lord Murugan.

Sampanthar commenced singing the glory of Lord Shiva at a very tender age of three for he had been gifted with divine powers at birth and the first line of the first stanza that he blossomed forth was Thoduudaya Seviyan (தோடுடைய செவியன்).

His odyssey from Thirukalathy to Rameswaram for dharshan of Siva shrines resulted in his composing 4181 stanzas on 110 sacred shrines of worship.

Although Sampanthar's deep seated longing was for the dharshan of Lord Siva and alighting on His Lotus feet, he had been a great lover of Tamil language, so much so that he called himself "Thamil Gnanasampanthan."

Saint Sampanthar was the crusader of the Bakthi Movement that paved the way for renaissance of Saivism in South India in the seventh century to preserve the entity of Saiva Siththantha Philosophy.

Having reached Rameswaram, standing on the shores, Sampanthar sang the glory of two Hindu shrines across the seas in the island of Ceylon namely Thirukoneswaram and Thiruketheeswaram. Poet

Shekilar in his narration in verse reveals that Saint Sampanthar's initial inclination was to sing the glory of Koneswaram.

In his stanzas on Koneswaram, Sampanthar portrays Koneswaram as a densely populated land, economically viable and presided over by Lord Konesar. The relevant line is: “குடிதனை நெருக்கிப் பெருக்கமாய்த் திகழ்ந்த கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.”

He proceeds that in the sea shore of Koneswaram there was marine wealth such as gems, pearls and sandalwood. He also refers to the onslaughts by alien culture. In addition, there are ample references to Hindu mythology in his stanzas. In the last line of each stanza on Koneswaram, he refers to Lord Konesar as “Konamamalai Amarnthare” (கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே). Here are some references to the stanzas in English.

“He who dwelleth on Konamamalai where the roaming ocean replete with the sandalwood that is found on its banks and bits of black akil and precious stones, pearls, splashes - is the peerless one who is accompanied by the sounds of the rows of Kalal and the anklet and half of whose body is shared by the maid of the mountain and who rides a sacred bull.”

“Konamamalai whose population was vast where the waves were dashing against the shore furiously”

“Konamamalai where the huge sonorous waves carried on their crest pearls gold and shells from the treasure troves of the sea bed and heaped them on the beach.”

“Konamamalai where a temple with a pond (spring) was surrounded by the sea”

Konamamalai where in the garden luxuriant creepers tall and spreading jasmine bush “Madavy,” “Punnai”, “Vengai”, and Champuk trees interspersed with “Mullai” were in abundance.



13

Thirumoolar on Koneswaram

Once there was a touching scene at Saththanoor, a small hamlet in a sylvan surrounding on the banks of the Kavery river in Tamilnadu.

The cowherd in that green grassland refrained from running about and grazing in glee. Instead, they stood still around a corpse with remorse on their countenance and with tears welling in their large eyes as though they were mourning the demise of their good shepherd, Moolan.

A great sage who was passing by was greatly moved by this sorry and stirring sight due to his abundance of love. This sage had great divine powers even to enter from one body to another. As he could not bear the sight of the suffering of the dumb cowherd the sage laid his body concealing under a tree somewhere and moved into the body of Moolar, the cowherd's shepherd.

The good grazier arose. The delighted cowherd grazed the green pasture and returned to its fold at dusk. But the sage in the body of the shepherd was in a dilemma. He could not find the body that he had hidden under a tree. It was a forlorn hope that he could enter his own body again. So he had to lead the rest of his life in that body.

It was this Moolan that bestowed the great religious work Thiru Manthiram to us in 600 BC. He is popularly called Thirumoolar, who came from Kailas and meditated under a Bo - tree at Thiruvannamalai.

In his great religious work, Thiru Manthiram, Thirumoolar refers to Koneswaram as Thekkanam (தெக்கணம்) in one of his stanzas.

பூதல மேரும் புறத்தான தெக்கணம்
ஓதும் இடைபிங்கலை ஒண்சுமுனையாம்
பாதி மதியோன் பயில் திருவம்பலம்
ஏதமில் பூதாண்டத்து எல்லையின் ஈற்றே (2748)



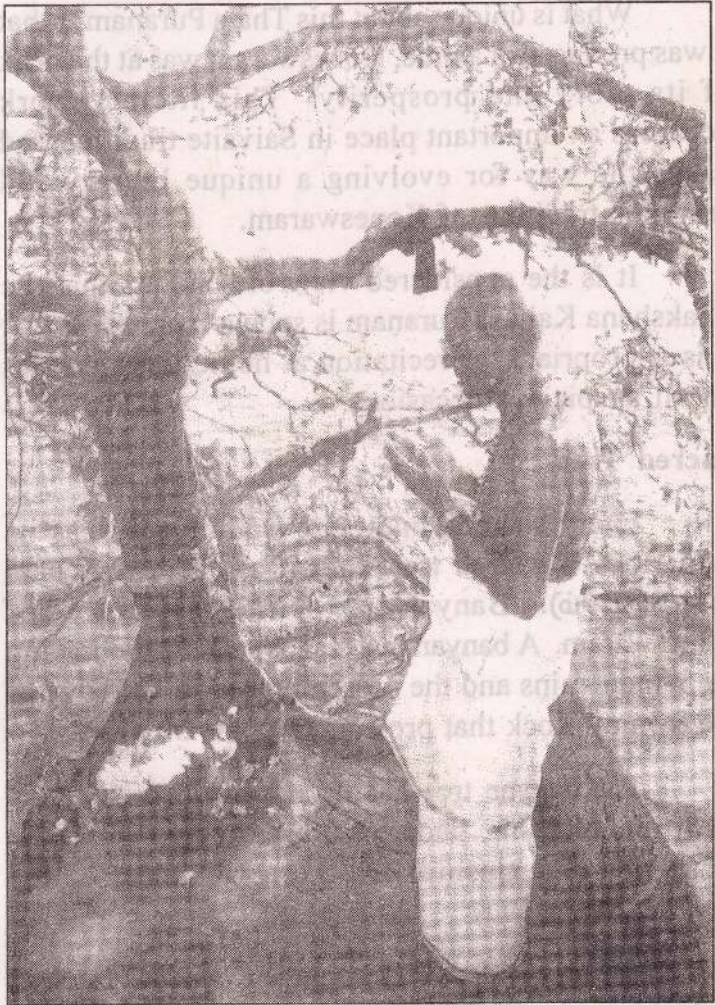
14

Sacred puranam and sacred tree of Koneswaram

It has been a great unbroken tradition of the Hindus from ancient times that all sacred sites have a special sacred text known as Thalapuranam (தலபுராணம்) singing the glory of the shrine and also a sacred tree - Thala Virutcham (தல விருட்சம்) for each sacred site.

Pilgrims at Koneswaram read the sacred text of Koneswaram and learn the glory of the shrine. Thakshana Kailasapuranam, the sacred text of Koneswaram, was composed by Singai Segarasasegaran upon a request by his Guru Sivarasapandithar.

Although this Puranam is an adaptation of a literary, religious work in Sanskrit, it contains references to contributions made by King Kullakottan and King Kajabahu. It also illustrates philosophic and religious thoughts found in Mahapuranam.



Swamy Rock

What is unique about this Thala Puranam is that it was produced at a time, Koneswaram was at the peak of its glory and prosperity. This literary work occupies an important place in Saivaite tradition and paves the way for evolving a unique literary and religious tradition of Koneswaram.

It is the considered view of scholars that the Thakshana Kailasa Puranam is such a sacred text that it is appropriate for recitation at homes and temples on all auspicious occasions.

Sacred Tree

Every sacred Hindu site traditionally has its own flora, a sacred tree known as Thalaviritcham (தலவிருட்சம்). Banyan tree is the sacred tree of Koneswaram. A banyan tree stands steadfastly braving the winds, rains and the scorching sun of the edge of the Swamy Rock that projects over the blue sea.

The banyan tree has its significance in Hindu tradition blessing people with extended families, close ties and kinship like the aerial roots of the banyan tree.

Young maidens pay homage to the banyan tree to be blessed with happy marital life. It is said that Brahma himself took avatar as banyan tree. Lord

Vishnu lies on the leaf of a banyan tree and enjoys yogic sleep. Sathiyavan - Savithry prayed the banyan tree and got back her dead husband. Banyan leaf is one of the five leaves that are sacred. Since the figs of the banyan tree are used to perform yagas, the banyan tree is hailed as a yaga tree (யாக மரம்).

The scene of Thakshinamoorthy, Lord as guru, seated under a banyan tree, teaching through the medium of silence to his four disciples - Sanaka, Sanatana, Santhana and Sanath Kumara - at his feet is depicted on the southern wall of the sanctum sanctorum of every Hindu temple.

That, precisely, is the significance of the banyan tree, the sacred tree of Koneswaram. It is relevant to note here that even today the first and foremost pooja - malai poosai - at Koneswaram is performed under the banyan tree at Swamy Rock.



15

Significance of the names Koneswaram

Isvaram is a sacred site of Lord Siva. Thirukoneswaram (திருக்கோணஸ்வரம்) means a sacred hillock of Lord Siva. This venerated place is also called Thirukonamalai (திருக்கோணமலை) and Thirikonamalai (திரிகோணமலை) meaning three-sided sacred hillock.

It is also known as Thenkailai (தென்கைலை) which means South of Kailas. Kailas in the Himalayas is a very ancient and venerated site of Siva worship.

Another name for Koneswaram is Kokarnam (கோகர்ணம்). Fragmentary Sanskrit Inscription found by the military authorities in Fort Frederick in 1945 refers to Koneswaram as Kokarnam. A hymn by Thirunavukarasar nayanar refers to it as follows in Tamil.

கால்களாற் பயனென்கறைக்
 கண்டனுறை கோயில் கோலக்
 கோபுரக் கோகர்ணஞ் சூழாக்
 கால்களாற் பயனென்!

In such a context it is implied that the mention of the word “Kokarnam” in the sanskrit inscription at Fort Frederick is obviously a reference to Koneswaram.

Saint Thirugnanasampanthar of the seventh century praised Koneswaram as Konamamalai (கோணமாமலை) in the last line of each of his stanzas in his hymns on Koneswaram. Sekkilar who produced a great Saiva Epic Periyapuram in the twelfth century uses the term Mannukonamalai (மன்னுகோணமலை). A saivaite saint Umapathy Sivachariyar of the fourteenth century called this place as Konamamalai (கோணமாமலை) in his work Kalivenba (கலிவெண்பா).

Saint Arunagirynathar of the fifteenth century calls Koneswaram as Thirukonatha Malai (திருக்கோணாதமலை) meaning that it is hillock where wealth never diminishes. In the eighteenth century, Koneswaram was called Machcheeswaram (மச்சீஸ்வரம்) or Machchendra Parvatham.

Trincona, Trequimalee, Trinkenmali, Trincoenmalee, Trinikili Male, Tringo Male, and Trincomalee are other names for this place.

According to my Tamil teacher Kalaka Pulavar late Mr. P. Sivasegaram, the name Thirukonamalai is a derivation from Kunamalai (குணமலை). The word Kuna in Tamil means east. Kunamalai, therefore stood for the hillock in the east.

It is also relevant in this chapter to address our minds to the fact that most of the hamlets in the Trincomalee district bear names that bring out their association with Koneswaram directly or otherwise.

In the ancient Koneswaram temple, there were a thousand lamps lit everyday with the thread and oil supplied by the village Thiriyai (திரியாய்) - the word thiry in Tamil means thread. The oil supplied for lighting the lamp was Illuppenai (இலுப்பெண்ணெய்). In order to gather seeds they had planted a large number of Illuppei trees in this village. It is a coincidence that the thala virutcham (தலவிருட்சம்). Varatha Vinayagar temple in Thiriyai village in Kattukulla pattu is illuppei tree.

Kullakkottan ordained that the Dravidian veda be sung in the temple by special singers. These singers, known as othuvars, were provided with lands in kottiyar pattu in honour of their services. It is said that having received their share of the lands, these singers expressed their satisfaction as 'Sampoornam' and thereby this village got the name Sampoor (சம்பூர்)

The flowers, most of which were jasmines, needed for daily pooja were obtained from a village in Kottiyar Pattu. This village is even now called Mallikai Theevu (மல்லிகைத் தீவு) Mallikai is the Tamil version of jasmine flowers.

The village from which the sandal logs (சுந்தனக்கடடை) for the daily pooja were procured was Kattai Parichchan village (கடடைப் பறிச்சான்)

The village that provided the ceremonial figs (குச்சு) for the yaga at Koneswaram was called Kuchchaveli (குச்சவெளி) The village where Rama let his bow rest after the war in which he defeated Ravana was called Villuntry (வில்லூன்றி).

The village where king Ravana dug six springs to perform the last rites for his mother after her demise is called kanniyai (கன்னியாய்).

The village where king Kajabahur regained eyesight in one eye is called Kanthalai (கந்தளாய்) and the place where he regained the eye - sight in the other eye is called Sinnakanthalai (சின்னக் கந்தளாய்)

An area in the Triconamalee town is called Manankerny (மானாங்கேணி) since there was a small tank constructed by King Kullakottan to serve the purposes of Koneswaram.



16

Worship at the temple

All pilgrims to Koneswaram, initially pray at the sight of Raja Kopuram, the tower of the temple, for the saying goes “Kopura dharshan is Kody Punniyam” (கோபுர தரிசனம் கோடி புண்ணியம்) meaning that praying the temple tower is a great blessing.

Since music, culture and religion are part and parcel of our lives, beautiful architecture adorns the Raja Gopuram. It depicts our religious beliefs and our cultural heritage. Raja Gopuram is an integral part of any Hindu temple.

When one looks at a Saivaite temple, one realises that the temple resembles the human body. The sanctum sanctorum (moolasthanam) is the head. Artha Mandapam the neck, Maha Mandapam the chest, Stapanam mandapam the stomach, Stampa Mandapam section below, Sabha mandapam the thighs, the first entrance the knees, Vasantha Mandapam the lower legs and the main entrance - the feet.

The temple appears as a man lying on his back placing the head on the west with the feet stretched to the east:

Saint Thirumoolar in singing the glory of a temple compares it to the human body.

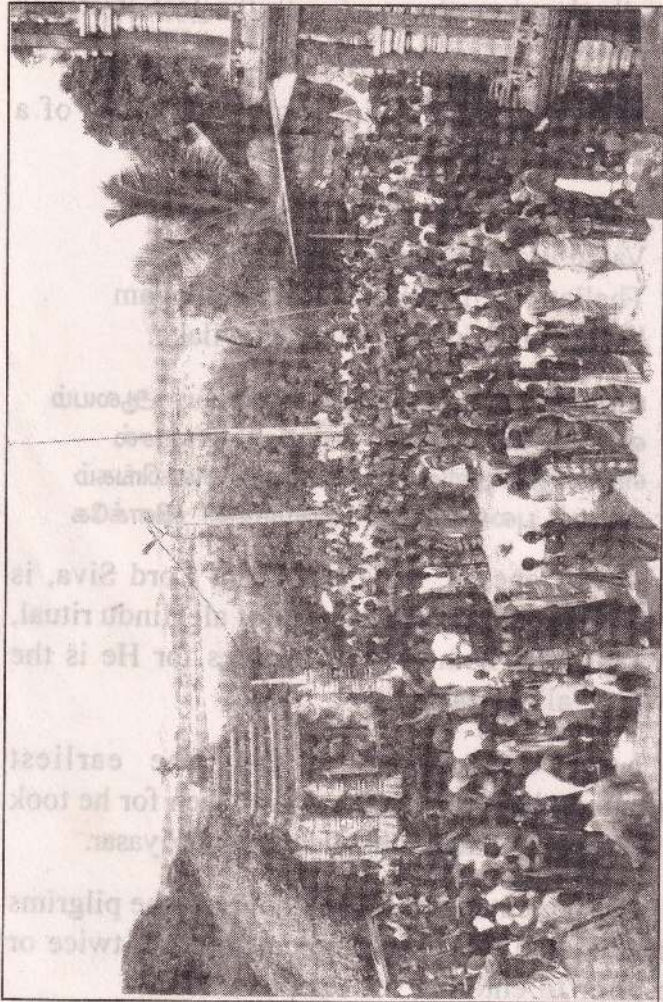
Ullam perunkoil unudambu alayam
Vallat Pranarku vaikopura Vasal
Thellath thellivarku seevan Sivalingam
Kalla pulanainthum kalamani vilake.

உள்ளம் பெருங்கோயில் ஊனுடம்பு ஆலயம்
வள்ளற் பிராணர்க்கு வாய்கோபுர வாசல்
தெள்ளத் தெளிவார்க்குச் சீவன் சிவலிங்கம்
கள்ளப் புலனைந்தும் காளாமணி விளக்கே

Lord Ganesha, the first son of Lord Siva, is worshipped at the commencement of all Hindu ritual, whether it be at homes or in temples for He is the remover of all obstacles.

Lord Ganesha is in fact the earliest stenographer that the world has ever seen for he took down the epic Mahabaratha dictated by Viyasar.

Having entered the Rajagopuram, the pilgrims circumambulate the temple precincts once, twice or thrice prior to entering the temple.



Chariot festival at Koneswaram



The First Flag Hoisting Ceremony at Koneswaram Temple

Then there are flag staff the sacrificial altar where we annihilate our ego and desires and ultimately surrender ourselves totally to Lord Siva. Then, there is the bull the vehicle of Lord Siva, The bull represents the soul.

The flag staff (கொடிமரம்) The bull (நந்தி) and the altar (பலிபீடம்) respectively represent the Lord (புதி) the soul (பசு) and bondage (பாசம்)

The furthest is the sanctum sanctorum (மூலஸ்தானம்) where the main deity Siva Lingam is installed. All devotees anoint the holy ash - vibuthy - (கிருநீறு) on their foreheads. Vibuthy represents the impermanence of life and reminds us to go inwards and realise god.

Saint Thirignanana Sampanthar has sung a garland of hymns known as Thiruneetru Pathigam (கிருநீற்றுப் பதிகம்) portraying that vibuthy represents Lord Siva himself. Vibuthy is the greatest wealth.

Sai Sathya Baba alleviates the sufferings of human beings by smearing vibuthy on them. Baba cures several ailments by applying vibuthy. Baba showers great boons on us with vibuthy.

In this millenium, Baba portrays the glory of vibuthy to his devotees belonging to various linguistic

groups professing diverse religious faiths living across the seas and continents. Baba extols the greatness of vibuthy in the following words:

“In the Brihad Upanishad, ash or vibuthy is equated with prosperity and one’s spiritual splendour. As a talisman, containing a divine secret. It also destroys danger and protects the one who wears “Sai” ornament of purity. It is a silent messenger of detachment and renunciation, teaching the most elementary step of one’s sadhana.

•Vibuthy also has got an aspect of Immortality, which makes it a fit offering for worshipping god.

Flowers offered during worship will fade away, leaves will dry up, fruits, will decay in course of time and water will breed germs if left standing for any length of time. Only vibuthy remains unchanged as it is the final result of the five elements of creation.

It is our desires which have to be reduced to ashes and vibuthy is symbolic of this renunciation and detachment.”



17

The presiding deity at Koneswaram

It is with great piety that the pilgrims on the Swamy Rock worship Siva Lingam, the presiding deity installed in the sanctum sanctorum of Koneswaram temple.

The symbol of Siva is Siva Lingam. It portrays Siva - Sakthy. Siva Linga worship that had existed during the Indus Valley Civilization and the Vedic Age represents the form and the formlessness of God. It is explained that Siva Lingam portrays the form of God because it has an oval shape. Siva Lingam depicts formlessness since it has neither a head nor a limb.

Maha Sivarathiry Fast - the glorious night dedicated to Siva - reveals the concept of Siva Lingam. The legend behind this fast is that once there was a quarrel between Brahma, the Creator and Vishnu, the Protector, as to who was great. In order to resolve

this dispute between the Creator and the Protector, Lord Siva revealed Himself as a great column of light emerging from the depthless bottom and infinite ascent and instructed that whoever found the top and the bottom could be declared great.

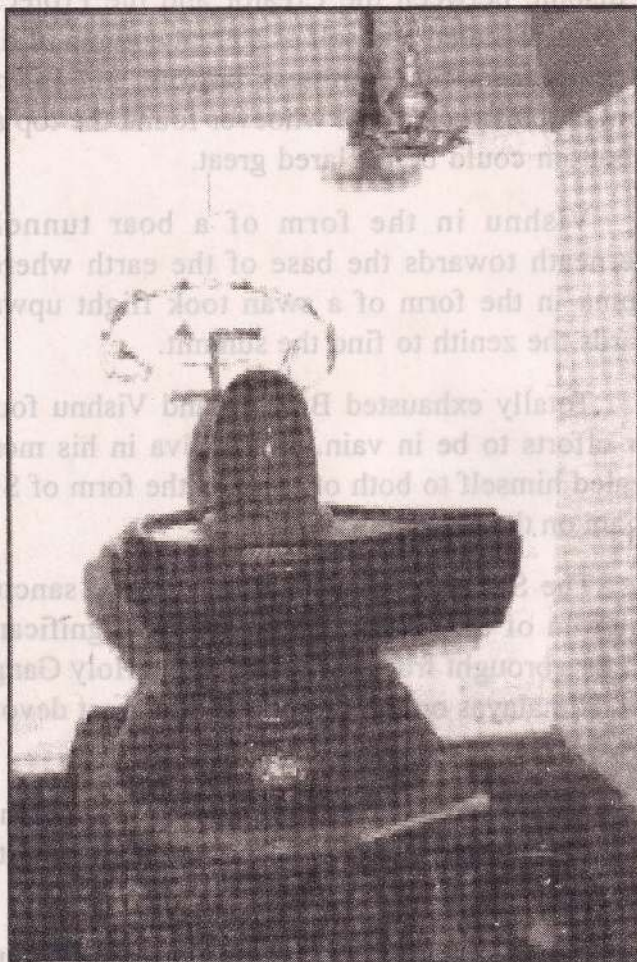
Vishnu in the form of a boar tunneled underneath towards the base of the earth whereas Brahma in the form of a swan took flight upward towards the zenith to find the summit.

Totally exhausted Brahma and Vishnu found their efforts to be in vain. Lord Siva in his mercy revealed himself to both of them in the form of Siva Lingam on the Sivarathiry Day.

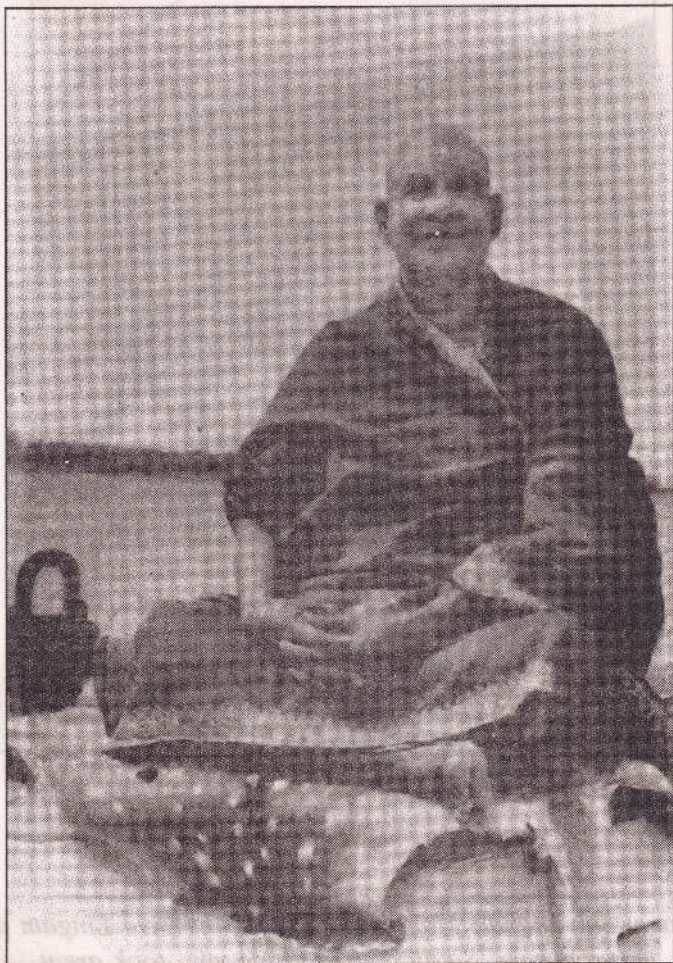
The Siva Lingam enshrined in the sanctum sanctorum of this temple has a special significance for it was brought from the banks of the Holy Ganges in the Himalayas on the initiatives of a great devotee Sathu Seevaratnam,

Another significance of this Siva Lingam is that it was blessed by Swamy Sivananda in the Himalayas.

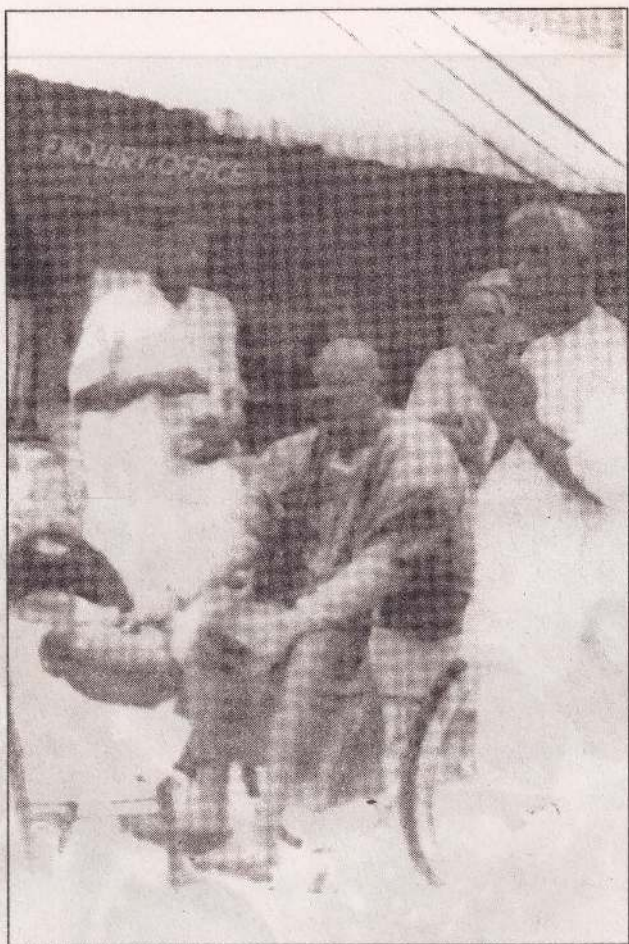
It is befitting here to discuss about Swamy Sivananda Maharishy. He was born in a small village of Pathamadu in Thirunelvely District in Tamil Nadu.



Siva Lingam, the presiding deity at the sanctum sanctorum of the present Koneswaram temple



Swamy Sivananda



Swamy Shivananda Maharishy blesses the Siva Lingam at Koneswaram. Sathu Seevaratnam who took great initiatives is also seen in the photo

His deep seated longing for spirituality made him give up his medical profession in Singapore, renounce the material life and proceed to the Himalayas, where he met his guru Swamy Vishvananda Saraswathy who ordained him Sanniyas in the Paramahansa tradition. Dr. Kuppusamy was named Swamy Sivananda by his guru. Swamy Sivananda established the Forest University in the Rishikesh and founded the Divine life Society.

We are well aware that Sai Baba produces Lingam from within himself on Maha Sivarathiry Night. Sai Baba explains the significance of this in the following words:-

“It is not possible for you to understand the Divine and gauge its potentials or know the significance of its manifestations. In order to bear witness to the fact that Divinity is amongst you, it becomes necessary for me to express this attribute of mine. Otherwise the atmosphere of hatred, greed, envy, cruelty, violence and irreverance will overwhelm the good, the humble and the pious.

The Lingam is the symbol of the Beginningless and the Endless or the Infinite. Its shape is like a Nirrakar. “Li” stands for Liyatha meaning that in which all names and forms merge; and “Gam” stands

for Gamayatha meaning that towards which all forms proceed.

Siva Lingam is the fittest symbol of Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Lord. Everything starts from it and everything is subsumed in it."



"It is not possible for you to understand the Divine and gauge its potentials or know the significance of its manifestations. In order to bear witness to the fact that Divinity is amongst you, it becomes necessary for me to express this attribute of mine. Otherwise the atmosphere of hatred, greed, envy, cruelty, violence and revenge will overwhelm the good, the humble and the pious.

The Lingam is the symbol of the Beginningless and the Endless or the Infinite. Its shape is like a Nivartan. "Li" stands for Lijaytha meaning that in which all names and forms merge; and "Gam" stands

18

Thiru Konasala Saiva Mutt

In as much as Saiva Mutts numbering eighteen have propagated Saivaism throughout the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu since early times, there had existed a Saiva Mutt at Koneswaram prior to the Portuguese period to profess and propound Saivaism and to develop Tamilian thought and studies. This Saiva Mutt was called Thiru Konasala Saiva Mutt.

This Saiva Mutt had been functioning at Sinna Thoduwai Pillaiyar temple on the outskirts of the Trincomalee town. About six centuries ago, Thirukonasala Saiva Mutt had rendered yeoman service to Tamil language and Saivaism by conducting studies, discourses and even producing literary and religious works.

In Tamil Nadu there are eighteen Saiva Mutts serving the great cause of Saivaism. They are Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam, Tharumapura Atheenam, Thirupananthal Kasi Thirumadam, Sooriyanar Kovil

Atheenam, Thondai Mandala Atheenam, Madurai Thirugnanasampanthar, Atheenam, Kuntrakudy Thiruvannamalai Atheenam, Senkol Atheenam, Thulavoor Atheenam, Verlankurichy Atheenam, Nachiyar Kovil Atheenam, Varany Atheenam, Vallalar Atheenam, Sorkapura Atheenam, Agama Sivaprakasar Atheenam, Thayumanava Swamigal Atheenam, Neelapaddy Atheenam and Rameswara Atheenam. The founders of these Saiva Mutts were Santhana Kuravars.

While four celebrated Saiva Saints - Samaya Kuravars - namely Sampanthar, Suntharar, Manicavasagar and Thirunavukarasar sang garlands of hymns known as Thevara Thirumurai (தேவார திருமுறை), Santhana Kuravars produced Sashstras (சாத்திரம்) as a result of which Saiva Sithantha Philosophy developed and Saiva Mutts were founded in South India.

Since, these Santhana Kuravars always remained in Saiva Mutts and preached the faith, they are always depicted in a seated pose in pictures. In as much as, hymns of Saiva Saints are sung at temples, the Shastras of the Santhana Kuravars are recited at Saiva Mutts.

Thiru Konasala Saiva Mutt was situated at Sinna Thoduwai Pillaiyar Temple where a madam, a small spring and a sumaitangy are found even today.

The launch of a literary and religious work “Konamalai Anthathy (கோணமலை அந்தாதி) at Konesvaram shrine about five hundred years ago adds to the glory of Koneswaram and the pilgrims at the Swamy Rock are greatly impressed with it.

Anthathy is a kind of Tamil verse wherein the last word in the last line of a stanza appears as the first word of the first line of the following stanza. That precisely is the tradition of composing anthathy verses.

A poet by the name of Pulavar Arumugam, who resided at Thiru Konasala Saiva Mutt situated at Sinna Thoduwai Sithy Vinayagar temple composed this great literary and religious work “Konamalai Anthathy”.



19

Guardian Deity Pathira Kali

Oh! Pathirakali!

You are the source of the warmth of the sun
and the chill of the moon!

Your ears listen to our woes!

Your bow-like eye-brows destroy the evil in
us!

Your lovely eyes shower grace on us!

Your soft hands preserve THARMA!

Your broad shoulders bear the burden of our
sins!

Your lotus feet are the anchor of our very life!

You are our Mother who clothes us when we
are naked!

You are our Mother who satiates us when we
are thirsty!

You are our Mother who heals us when we are sick!

You are our Mother who is our Home when we are homeless!

You are our Mother who is our Companion when we are lonely!

You are our Mother who is a great Solace in our despair!

You are our Mother who is a great joy for us to share!

Thus pray the pilgrims at the Pathirakali Amman temple opposite the green meadow in the heart of Trincomalee town.

This Amman temple is considered to be the foremost of all the Kali Amman temples established along the boundaries of Koneswaram during the rule of Chola Kings in Ceylon. There is a guardian deity Kali in the northern boundary of Sithamparam in Tamil Nadu, known as Thillai Kali. Likewise, there is a guardian deity Pathira Kali Amman Temple in Koneswaram.

The stone inscription on a pillar of the temple points to the antiquity of the temple. Another stone inscription at the temple bears the date of January, 1879 and refers to a donation by one Sambulingam.

The discovery of a Kali Amman statue placed in a pot is a milestone in the annals of the history of the temple. According to scholars, the shape and copper content of the statue resemble the Kali statues that had been in the temples of Tamilnadu during the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

The annual festival known as mahotsavam of the Kali Amman temple falls in the month of Panguy. The festival commences with the hoisting of the flag of Kali Amman at the flag post on the first day. The hoisting of the flag depicts creation.

At the auspicious hour when the flag of Amman is unfurled by the officiating priest to the accompaniment of music and amidst the cries of "Arohara" and "Kali Achchi" an awesome bakthy - devotion - and solemnness pervade the air.

Another aspect of the annual festival is the chariot festival, which depicts destruction of ego and desires.

An outstanding feature of this Annual festival is the water-cutting ceremony that illustrates the cleansing ourselves of our sins. It has been the age old tradition of this water cutting ceremony to take the sacred statue of Amman along several roads and the procession finally leads to the sea-shore that lies

in the stretch of sands extending from the clock tower to the Fort Frederick.

The statue is placed in the sea-shore where the ceremony is performed facing the Swamy Rock at Koneswaram. At the sea-shore is a sea of devotees of all ages, of all walks of life and of all races.

The lion, which is said to be the king of the animal kingdom is the foremost vehicle of Amman. On hearing the roar of the lion, the entire forest is shakened and all animals become tame. Likewise when Amman rides the lion, wickedness is destroyed, the wicked are transformed.

There is a legend behind the wooden lion vehicle at this shrine. The ship which was carrying this vehicle from south India was anchored in the Trincomalee seas. But, later when the crew wanted to sail, the ship did not budge. After the perturbed crew prayed at the Pathira Kali Amman Temple, made a vow and handed over the wooden lion vehicle to the temple, the ship sailed off.

The pious devotees who pray Ambal seeking earthly pleasures, pay obeisance to Lord Konesar seeking moksha (liberation).



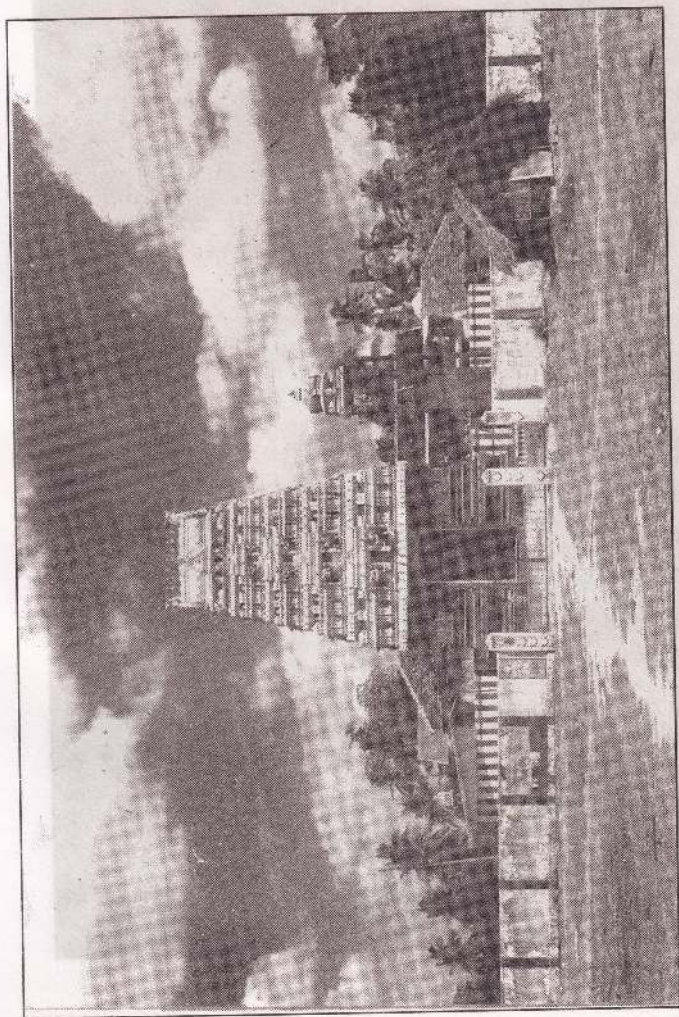
20

Athy Konanayakar

The pilgrims at the Swamy Rock proceed to a paddy producing agricultural hamlet, Thampalakamam, sixteen miles off Trincomalee along the Colombo - Kandy Road in order to pay obeisance to an ancient statue of Koneswaram, venerated as "Athy Konanayakar", that has been installed and worshipped there following the destruction of Koneswaram temple by the Portuguese.

As the pilgrims enter the small, green, quite village of Thampalakamam, they witness oxen grazing and lying in the muddy waters on either side of the road.

Since an ancient statue is enshrined here, since the religious traditions of early times are still observed in this temple, since the procedures laid down by King Kullakottam are still adhered to here



Athy Konanayakar Temple Thampalakamam



Athy Konanayakar

in this temple, this is referred to as "Athy Konanayakar" while his consort is Hamsagamanambikai.

The temple, which is mainly of stone construction, is surrounded by a circumambulatory or pradhakshna patha enclosed by a brick wall beyond which there is an outer prahara. The presiding deity is Siva Lingam.

The Rajagopuram at Thampalagamam, which is 36 ft by 27ft in dimension at its base, is relatively a recent construction. But the temple seems to have been established in the 17th century. The Kopuram, an embellished tower of Thampalakamam is by local standards, a large structure with five storeys.

The rituals and worship at the temple of Thampalakamam are conducted in accordance with the injunctions of the Mahutakamam. The annual festival commences on Ani Uttaram and lasts for eighteen days. There are some features of the annual festival, which are peculiar to the temple. Duties to be performed at the temple during the annual festival are assigned by custom to various groups of people living in the Trincomalee district.

The Bard (புலவனார்) who recites sacred hymns at the temple comes from the village of Sambur

(சம்பூர்) The craftsman who paints the image of the Nanthi on the flag to be hoisted at the flag staff (கொடித்தம்பம்) comes from Killivetty (கீளிவெட்டி) The Kappukattiyar (காப்பு கடடியார்) the man who has to wear the sacred thread in the form of a bangle on his arm and reside in the temple premises from the commencement of the festival until its conclusion is from Kattukulampattu in the Muthur division.

The Kathirkama Swamy festival conducted annually at this temple is of special significance. On this occasion, a casket placed on a couch (மஞ்சம்) is taken round the courtyard on a procession. There is usually a large congregation of devotees at the temple on this occasion. Some of them resort to the temple for the purpose of fullfilling their vows. Large groups of devotees engage in the performance of Kavadi and join the procession ahead of and behind those carrying the casket. There are others who perform the Anka-Pratakshinam (அங்கப்பிரதட்சணம்) by rolling their bodies clockwise along the circumambulatory.

The Kathirkama Swamy festival is non-agamic in nature and origins. It represents the convergence of the cults of Siva and Murukan on the one hand and the compromise between the agamic and non-agamic modes of worship on the other. Besides, in this

festival conducted in one of the principal Saiva temples in the island, the overriding influence of the religious traditions of Kathirkamam is evident.

A traditional ritual with the performance of which the temple of Thampalakam is associated is Thirukkulathu Velvi (திருக்குளத்து வேள்வி) the sacrificial offering in connection with the sacred Kantalay tank. As a ritual, it is said to have had its origin under Kullakottan, who is celebrated in legend and tradition as the founder of Kantalay tank. He is said to have made arrangements for the regular propitiation of all the principal deities venerated by the inhabitants of the region and whose images were installed on the banks of the reservoir.

The Thirukkulattu Velvi was essentially a ritual conducted by agriculturalists with the objective of obtaining a regular and regulated supply of water, through divine intercession, from the Kantalay tank, a massive reservoir considered to be beyond the means of control by ordinary mortals. It has become a tradition among the farmers of Thampalakamam to make vows for rain when their paddy fields require water or make a vow for sunlight when the fields are starved of adequate light or when their crops perish on account of excessive rains.

The Thirukkulattu Velvi is essentially a community ritual in which the Brahmin elites do not figure prominently. The leading role is played by the Karyappar, the Principal Manager of temple affairs who prepares a basket of palm leaves and fills it with items required for the ceremony. He then places it on his head and proceeds along a jungle tract to the temple of Pillaiyar at Umirikkatu and rests there during the night. On the following day, which happens to be a Friday, people from villages go to this temple in the jungle and assemble there. They are led in procession by the Kariappar to the temple of Thampalakamam with the accompaniment of traditional music. Once they have arrived at the temple, the basket is placed in front of the Athy Konanayakar and it remains there throughout the following night. It is covered with a second silk shawl while remaining in that position.

Thereafter it is taken to the Kantalay tank by the Kariyappar for the performance of rites. At a selected site on the embankment, rice is cooked in large quantities of milk obtained from herds of cows roaming loose in the surrounding plain by the Marikkarar (மரிகாரர்) a special category of people so called on account of this function traditionally assigned to them. The Ponkal is offered as matai, "mass offering" to the deities. They

also refer as a part of the matai, a thousand betel leaves, a thousand areca nuts and a thousand flowers.

Once in twelve years, this rite is observed on a magnified scale and the offerings are proportionately multiplied in quantity. An interesting aspect of this ritual is the display of implements such as knives, axes, crow-bars and other agricultural implements stored up in the temple in wooden casket called Narayanan Pettakam. This casket is carried from the temple to the site where the ritual is conducted, at the time of its commencement.

The assimilation of non-agamic and local cults found in the Trincomalee region into the fold Saivism is indicated by the affiliation which the temple of Thampalakamam had with the shrine of Pathni Amman at Palampottaru a locality in the jungle tract between Thampalakamam and Trincomalee on the main Colombo-Kandy road. A stream issuing from the Kalmuttiyan reservoir flows past the site of this shrine and joins the sea at Kappalthurai.

The image of Pathni belonging to the shrine is usually lodged in the Thampalakamam temple. The ritual at the Pathni Amman temple is conducted, once annually, on a Monday in the month of Vaikasi (May-June). On this occasion a large number of pilgrims go

in procession starting from the Pathirakali Amman and Mariamman temple and congregate at the Palampottaru shrine.

Meanwhile the image of Pathni is taken in procession from Thampalakamam by pilgrims to the shrine in the jungle where it is the centre of attraction, being the principal object of veneration and worship. The ponkal and offerings made to the deity mark the culmination of a daylong festival. At the conclusion of the festival in the following morning the image of Pathni finds its way back to its usual abode.

The New Moon Day in the month of Adi, known as Adi Amavasai (ஆடி அமாவாசை) is traditionally observed as a holy day by Saivaites. It is a special occasion for religious activities at the temple of Thampalakamam. The image of Athy Konanayakar is taken by pilgrims in procession to Kankai Thurai (கங்கைத் துறை) for the water cutting ceremony. Pilgrims and other pious devotees, who traditionally observe the fast on that day, assemble in large numbers since the previous evening and participate in religious and cultural activities in Akkashthiya Stapanam. A major event in the agenda here is the recital of Thirukkaracaipuranam (திருக்கரசை புராணம்) a medieval Talapuram on the ancient shrine.

The services in respect of maintenance, daily routine activities and festivals have been assigned to different categories of persons called Thollumpalar (தொழும்பாளர்) on the basis of old custom and they have been assigned allotments of land for the performance of their duties. These allotments are distributed amidst paddy fields over a vast area in the district. Such allotments are known as strips (கீற்று) in some cases while in others they are referred to as field (வயல்). Those who perform the recital on the nataswaram have allotments called Kullalkaran Keetru (குழல்காரன் கீற்று). The drummers hold allotments called Mellakaran Keetru (மேளகாரன் கீற்று). The garland-makers have assignments referred to as Malaikattu Keetru (மாலைகட்டு கீற்று). The Brahmin priests and some other functionaries have allotments called vayal (வயல்).



21

Thirukarasaiyampathy

On hearing the glory of Thirukarasaiyampathy in Muthur and its Hindu traditional ties with Koneswaram, the pilgrims are inclined to visit the Sivan temples there in order to pay their obeisance.

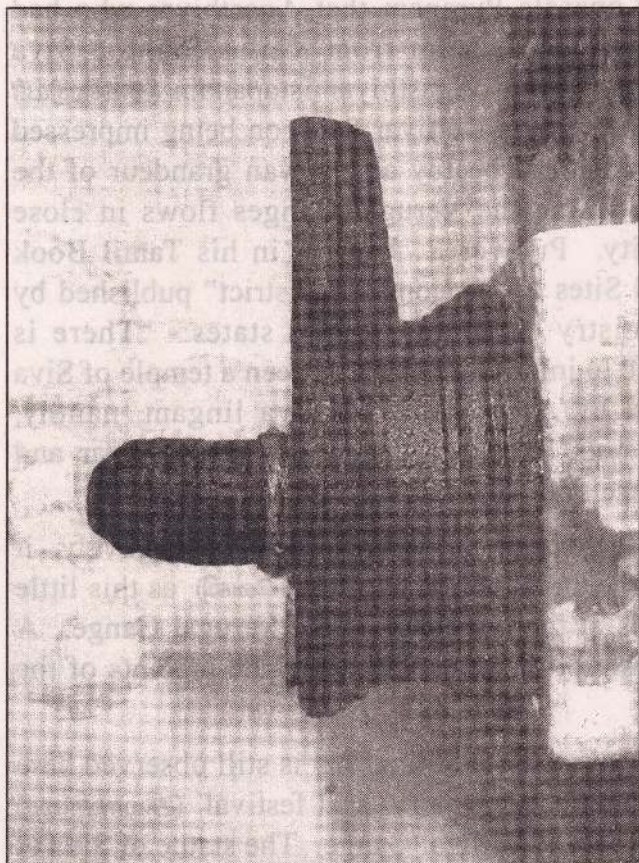
There had existed a few Siva temples in Thirukarasaiyampathy (திருக்கரைசையம்பதி) in Muthur as revealed by legends, puranas, chronicles and inscriptions. These Siva shrines that had enjoyed a close affinity with Koneswaram were destroyed presumably due to the flooding of Verugal Ganges (வெருகல் கங்கை).

The great Siththa Agasthiyar presided over the first Tamil Sangam. His glory is referred to in several Puranams of different era. His origin dates back to the ancient Dravidian period and Rig Veda period. Many slogas are sung in praise of this Siththa in Sanskrit. As he emerged from a pot, he is named Kudamuny and Kumbamuny. It is the ardent belief of certain sects that Siththa Agasthiyar still exists in Pothigai hillock at Kuttralam.

It is revealed in Thirukarasai Puranam and Thiru Konasala Puranam that Agasthiyar who had entoured Koneswaram from Kailas found a Siva Temple known as Agasthiyar Istapanam (அகஸ்தியர் ஸ்தாபனம்) in the Kottiyar Pattu on being impressed with the natural beauty and sylvan grandeur of the village, where the Verugal Ganges flows in close proximity. Pulavar R. Vadivel in his Tamil Book "Sacred Sites in Trincomalee District" published by the Ministry of Hindu Affairs states:- "There is evidence to infer that there had been a temple of Siva founded by Agasthiyar. A Siva lingam, nanthy, Palipeedam, Subramaniyar, Agasthiya Thevar and Pillars are still found in the vicinity.

There is another Siva Temple at Kanguvely - it is so named (கங்குவேலி - கங்கைவேலி) as this little hamlet is at the boundary of the Verugal Gange. A stone inscription is also found in the precincts of the temple.

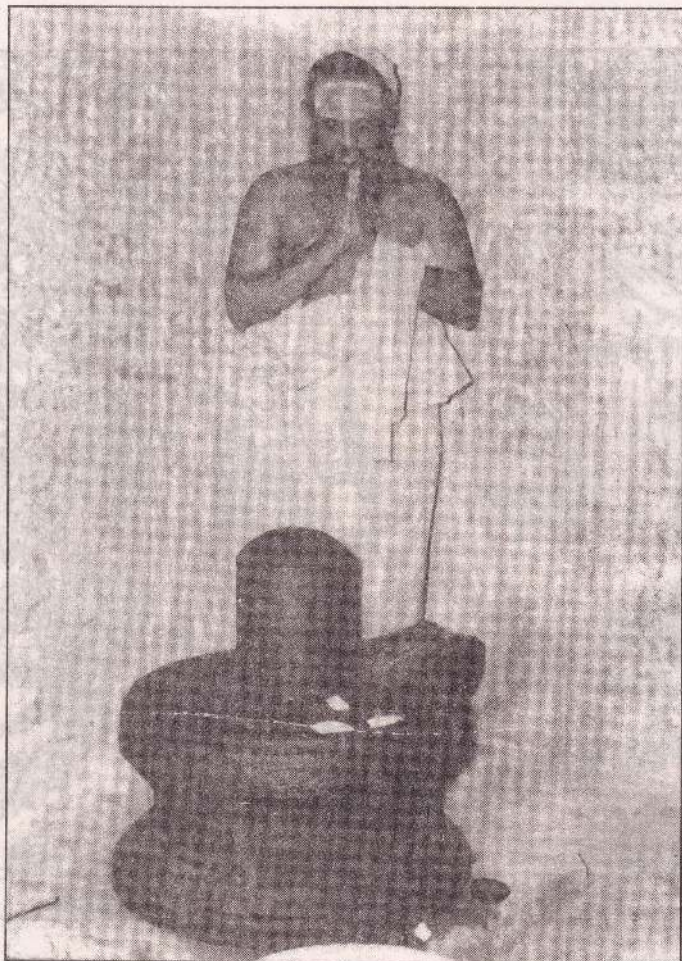
An ancient tradition that is still observed here in the conduct of the amavasai festival (அமாவாசை) on the banks of Verugal Gange. The statue of Siva at Athy Konanayakar temple at Thampalakamam is brought to the venue on the banks of Verugal Gange for special poojas throughout the night. Fire walking is a special event at this festival.



Siva Lingam at Agasthiyar Stapanam



Agastyar Kumbamuni



Kundrakudi Adigal at Thirumangalai Sivan Temple



Temple Bell of Thirumangalai Temple

Another striking feature of this festival is the recitation of the ancient Thiru Karasai Puranam at this congregation of devotees in keeping with the age old tradition of reciting Kantha Puranam at Murugan temples and the recitation of Preunkathai at Pillaiyar temples.

Thirukarasai Puranam sung in praise of Lord Siva installed in Agasthiyar Isthapanam belonged to the 18th or 19th century. It has four chapters namely Ilangai Charukkam (இலங்கைச் சருக்கம்) Gangai Charukkam (காங்கைச் சருக்கம்) Isthapana Charukkam (ஸ்தாபனச் சருக்கம்) and Pooja Charukkam (பூசைச் சருக்கம்).

Although the name of the author is unknown, it is believed that the poet belonged to Thirukonasala Saiva Santhanam. The first and foremost stanza sung in praise of the Guru states that the poet was a disciple of Umaphathy Sivachchariyar. This Puranam comprises 155 stanzas.

It is revealed in the Puranam that Agasthiyar was blessed with the dharshan of the holy wedlock of Lord Siva with Goddess Umathevy at Koneswaram.

The following Tamil stanza in Thirukarasai Puranam amply illustrates how gladdened the Siththa was at this dharshan.

ஆணவம் முதல் மூன்றும்
 அடக்கிய மேலோராலும்
 காணுதற் கரியதெய்வக்
 கடிமணக் கோலந்தன்னை
 ஏழ்நிலை வரைப்பும் உய்ய
 ஏழையேன் கண்வாழக்
 கோணமலையில் காட்டிக்
 குறைதீர்த்தவனே போற்றி!



22

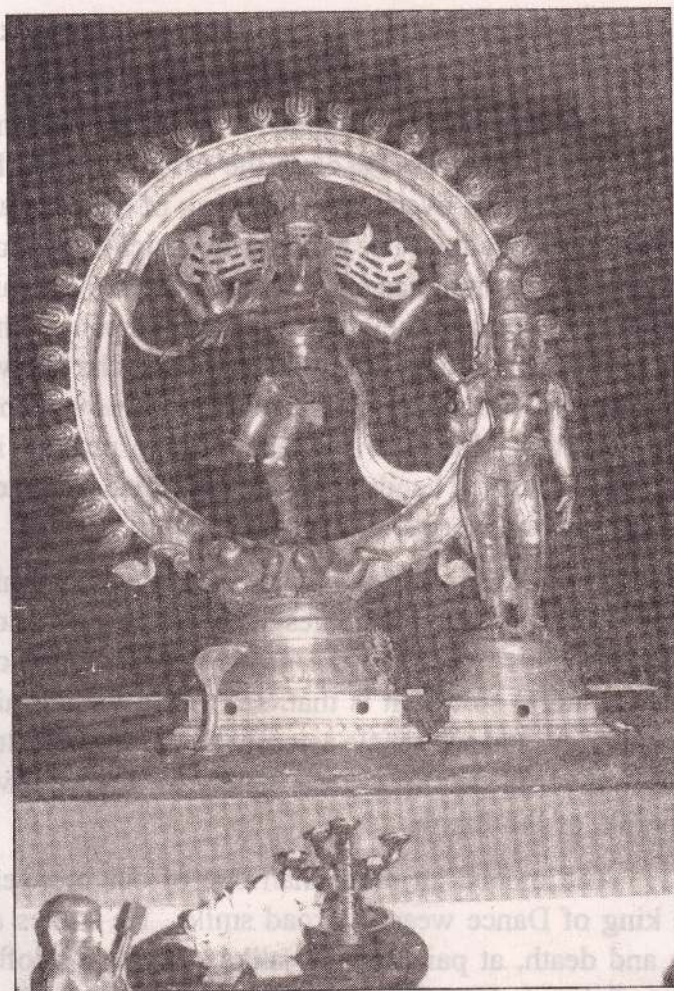
Dancing Nataraja at Koneswaram

Poojas performed at the separate sub-shrine dedicated to the worship of Lord Nataraja evoke great interest among the pilgrims at Koneswaram temple.

They pause for a moment at the sub-shrine to gaze upon the dancing pose of Lord Nataraja. The right foot rests on a dwarf, a demon but what is of significance is that there is not an iota of evidence of agony on his face due to either the weight or the swiftness of the dance.

There is a smile on Lord Nataraja's face. His locks of hair hold the river Ganges - the everflowing Ganges is stationary by His grace. He wears the crescent reminding us of that He would give us salvation.

The drum in His upper hand signifies creation and evolution. The right depicts protection promising us His grace. His raised left foot belonging to His consort promises us benefaction.



Lord Nataraja and Sivagamy Amman at Koneswaram.

In order to explain the significance of the dance of Nataraja, let me quote the words of Grousset :-

“Whether he be surrounded or not by the flaming aureole of the Thiruvasi (திருவாசி) the circle of the world which He fills and oversteps - the King of dance is all rhythm and exaltation. The tambourine which he sounds with one of His right hands draws all creatures into his rhythmic motion and they dance in His company. The conventionalized locks of flying hair and the blown scarfs tell of the speed of this universal movement, which crystalized matter and reduces it to powder in turn. One of His left hands holds the fire which animates and devours the worlds in this cosmic whirl.

One of the god's feet is crushing a Titan, for “this dance is danced upon the bodies of the dead, yet one of the right hands is making the gesture of re-assurance (abhayamudra) so true it is that, seen from the cosmic point of view and sub specie aeternitatis the very cruelty of the universal determinism is kindly as a generative principle of the future.

And indeed on more than one of our bronzes, the king of Dance wears a broad smile. He smiles at life and death, at pain and joy alike. From this lofty point of view, in fact all things fall into their place, finding their explanation and logical compulsion Here, art is the faithful interpreter of the philosophical concept.

The very multiplicity of arms, puzzling as it may seem at the first sight, is subject in turn to an inward law, each pair remaining a model of elegance in itself, so that the whole being of the Nataraja thrills with a magnificent harmony in his terrible joy.”

The serenity on the face of the Dancing Nataraja is all pervading. A saivaite saint hails that if he were blessed with His dharshan of Dancing Nataraja, he would yearn even to be reborn.

குனித்த புருவமும் கொவ்வைச்
செவ்வாயிற் குமிண் சிரிப்பும்
பனித்த சடையும் பவளம்போல்
மேனியிற் பால்வெண் ணீறும்
இனித்த முடைய எடுத்த
பொற்பாதமும் காணப் பெற்றால்
மனித்தப் பிறவியும் வேண்டுவதே
இந்த மாநிலத்தே

Kuniththa Puruvamum Koffaich

Seffayid kumin siripum

Paniththa sadaiyum pavalampol

Meniyir palvenneerum

Iniththa mudaiya eduththa

Porpathamum kanap pettral

Maniththap piraviyum ventuvathe

Inththa manilaththey!



23

Maha Sivarathry

There are special festivals and fasts for Siva. Somawara fast, Thiruvathirai fast, Umamaheshwara fast, Sivarathry fast, Kalyana Sunthara fast, Soola fast, Rishaba fast and Prathosha fast are some of the festivals of Siva. The first and foremost among them is Sivarathry fast.

Maha Sivarathry is a special festival at Koneswaram. There is a special, significant pooja at midnight on that day since, Siva as Lingodbhavamoorthi, makes His appearance at midnight. The following words of Jagadguru Sankaracharya throw light on the significance of Maha Sivarathry festival:-

“The Lord who performs the illuminating dance appears in the form of Lingodbava moorthy on Sivarathry to shower His grace on us. It is our duty on that day to fast, to keep vigil and worship Him at midnight with atleast one leaf of bilva tree. There is a saying that no intelligent dog will touch its food on Sivarathry day.

There is also a story of how a hunter received the grace of Isvara by even unintentionally worshipping Siva with bilva leaves on this night. The story goes that a hunter who was pursued by a tiger climbed up the nearest tree. The tiger stationed itself under the tree to catch the hunter as soon as he came down.

Lest he should fall asleep and tumble down the tree, the hunter engaged himself in plucking the leaves of the tree one by one and throwing them down. It so happened that the tree on which the hunter found safety from the tiger was a bilva tree and the bilva leaves which he plucked and dropped down, fell one by one on the top of a Siva Linga installed under the tree. Even for this act of an unintentional worship, the hunter was blessed by Isvara.

Let us also spend Sivarathry in fasting keeping vigil and worshipping Siva, particularly at the time He assumed the form of Lingodbhavamoorthy and earn His divine grace.



24

Kantalay Sivan Temple Thenkailasam

Pilgrims that entour Koneswaram wend their way to Kantalay Sivan temple, hailed as Then Kailasam (தென்கைலாசம்) about thirty miles off Trincomalee town on Colombo – Kandy Road.

The affinity of this temple with Koneswaram is revealed in an inscription discovered in close proximity to the temple among the ruins of dilapidated Saiva Temple. It reads as:- “To the God of Sri Vijayaraja Iswaram, otherwise called Then Kailasam of Kantalay, otherwise called, Sri Vijayaraja Chathurvedi Mankalam.

One inscription is dated 10th year of Prince Chola Ilankeswara Thevar. Referring to a Tamil slab inscription from Palamottai, S. Parnavitarana states in the following words:

“Probably Kantalay became a center of Hindu influence during the period of Chola rule in the eleventh



Siva Lingam and Pillaiyar at Kantalay Sivan Temple.

century; and the Sinhalese kings who succeeded the cholas maintained the Brahmins and patronised their shrines...

The present Kantalai Sivan temple was renovated and reconstructed in 1960 on the initiatives of the Hindus of the village. Recently, they held the kumbabishekam of the temple.

It is befitting to acknowledge our thanks to Professor S. Pathmanathan for his zeal and dedication in finding ancient Tamil inscriptions and in interpreting

them on the basis of his knowledge and expertise. I quote him below:-

“Archeological remains of Hindu temples attached to the Brahmadeya have been found at some sites in and around Kantalay. Some remains of a medieval Saiva temple and other buildings were found at the center of a field at Peraru colony at Kantalay.

Among the objects of archaeological and antiquarian interest found at this site were two headless images of Hindu deities, a Sivalinga and an avutaiyar, which were collected from the debris of a ruined building and subsequently lodged in a shed.

In the reign of Vijabahu I, the temple of Siva at Kantalay had two names. Tenkailacam and Vijayaraja - isvaram. The first of these names presupposes some connection with Koneswaram which had as one of its names Tenkailacam (Dakshina Kailacam) and the second name provides an indication of the fact that the temple was renamed after Vijabahu during his reign. It would appear that Tenkailacam was the earlier and original name of this temple. It may therefore be assumed that the temple of Tenkailacam was established by persons who had a deep veneration for the temple of Tenkailacam at Kokarnam and were closely associated with it.

The saiva temple called Vijayaraja Isvaram was one of the principal religious institutions at Kantalay, which had become a centre of Hindu influence in medieval times. It was found within the limits of the Brahmadeya called Vijayaraja Chaturvedi mankalam. Both the temple and the brahmadeya, which had their origins in the earlier period, were named after Vijabahu 1 during his reign. The two institutions seem to have interacted closely and it would seem that they enjoyed royal patronage during the 11th and 12th centuries. Kantalay is described as Vijaraja Caturvedimakalam in the Tamil inscription from Palamottai, dated in the 42nd year (A.D. 1097) of Vijabahu 1."



25

Keralite lad ordained in Koneswaram

That a young lad from Kerala in South India with great yearning to renounce the world came all the way to Koneswaram, did great penance day and night for years in secluded caves at the Swamy Rock and was ordained Sannyasa heightens the glory of this shrine, makes it more vibrant with divinity and attracts pilgrims from many parts of the country and from foreign lands.

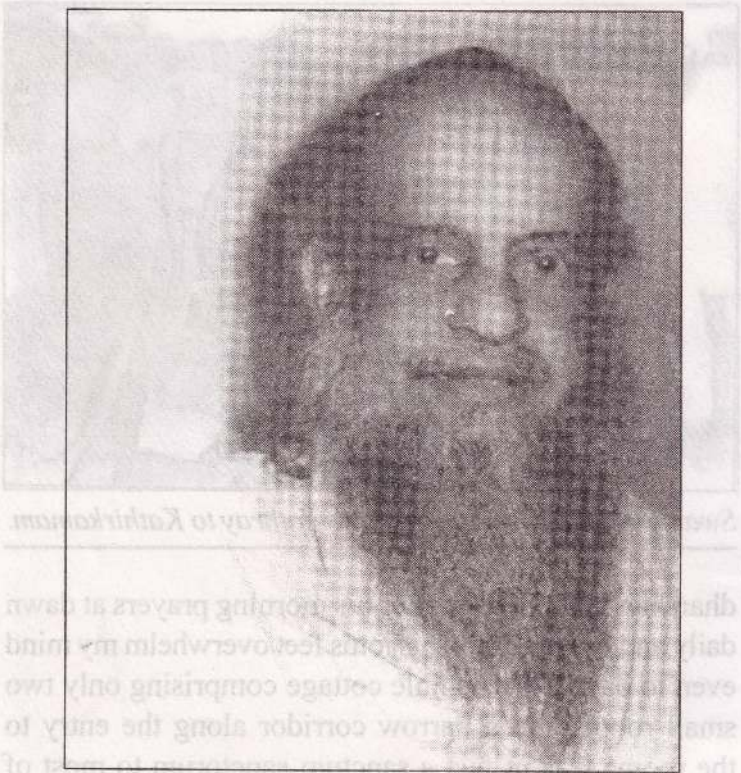
This lad was none other than Swamy Gangatharanantha who lived amidst the Hindu populace of Trincomalee, and had been the shepherd that guided their destiny in their desperate hours, when they felt orphaned. He had been a great spiritual strength to them until he attained Samathy.

Nostalgic memories of my learning yoga exercises at his feet in his humble cottage in the North Coast Road, Trincomalee, in the fifties and having his



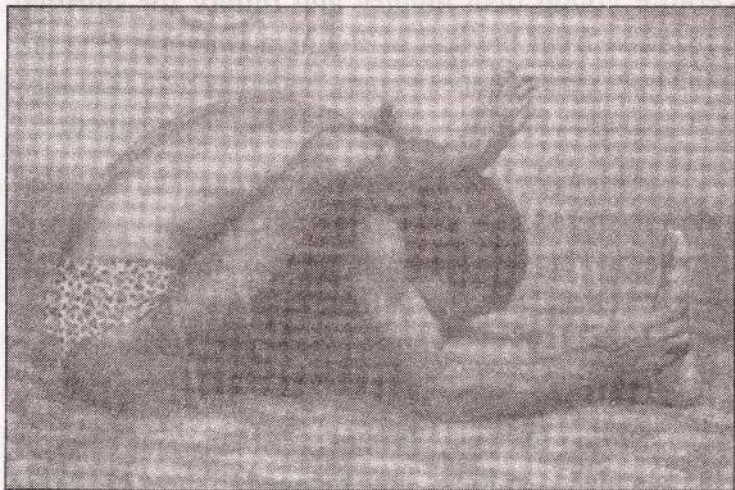
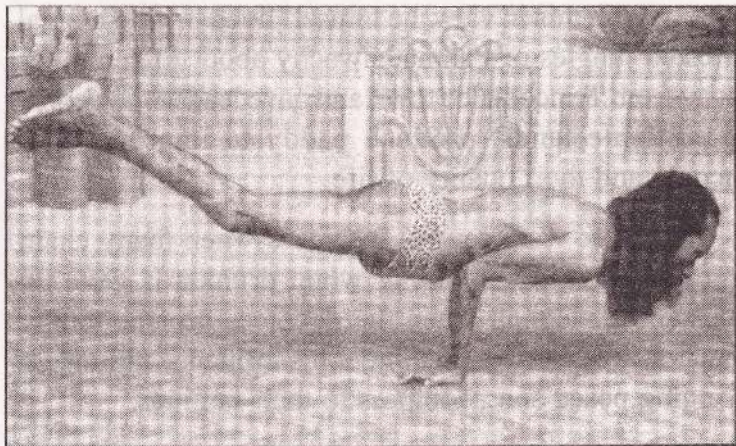
Swamy Gangatharananda Patha Yathray to Kathirkamam.

dharshan immediately after his morning prayers at dawn daily and prostrating at his lotus feet overwhelm my mind even to day. That humble cottage comprising only two small rooms and a narrow corridor along the entry to the rooms was in fact a sanctum sanctorum to most of us in our younger days. His spiritual powers were so over powering that even the plants that he tended stood majestically vibrating his divinity. I know how deeply Swamijy was irked by twin adversaries - poverty and unemployment - from which sections of Hindus suffered immensely and by the resultant conversion to other religious enamoured by the offer of money and



Swamy Gangatharananda

other favours by interested groups. He was strongly committed to the idea that the best way to deal with this type of religious fanaticism was to alleviate poverty and to provide employment to these unfortunate people.



Yoga exercises by Swamy.

With this in view, he himself lived in wild animal infested jungles of Panmathawachy about fifteen miles away from Trincomalee town and gave lead to the people to cultivate lands, produce paddy to improve their income and their quality of life.

There were several instances when many chain smokers gave up smoking, when drunkards gave up consuming alcohol, when the devotees became totally transformed after coming under his influence ultimately bringing peace and happiness to their families.

It is interesting to note how Providence led this Keralite young man hungry and thirsty for spiritual realization from the soil of Punniya Bhoomy, Bharath to the holy shrine Koneswaram, hailed as Siva Bhoomy, to do penance, spiritual sadhana and to be ordained.

Although this handsome youngman had travelled widely to sacred sites from Rishikesh to Kanniya kumari in India, the land of the seers, none of them fascinated him to dwell and practise spiritual sadhana. It was finally the venerated abode Koneswaram that quenched his intense thirst for spiritual realisation and liberation.

During his early days of spiritual wanderings in religious places in India, he happened to meet his Guru Santha Giri Baba. It was this great seer who initially conveyed the great glory of Koneswaram. The seed sown

in his mind in his formative years of spiritualism, sprouted and anchored him in Koneswaram to be ordained and to be our shepherd until he attained his samathy. Let me wind up this chapter quoting some lofty sayings of Swamy Gangadharananda:-

* Recitation of sacred formula and so on performed without inner purity do not bestow any benefit even in the smallest degree. It can turn out to be a mere drama and a contrivance to deceive ownself as well as others.

You are offering water and food at the proper time to God who has neither hunger nor thirst. You are providing separate residential facilities to One who is capable of residing in a pillar or even in a tiny fibre. If you dedicate this same sensitivity to your fellow human beings who live in utter helplessness and devoid of any human right, that will be the best offering to the Almighty.”



26

Satchithanantha Saraswathy Matajy

A charming lady from Trincomalee driven by an irresistible urge to renounce the world proceeded to Holy Kailas and was ordained Satchithanantha Saraswathy Matajy by Swamy Sivananda Maharishy in the early fifties. She is an old student Trincomalee St. Mary's convent. She had been on the tutorial staff of Colombo Presbyterian College prior to her becoming a sannyasi.

On returning from Kailas, she invested all her wealth to found an ashram in Uppuvelly in a plot of land owned by her. It was named Sivananda Thapovanam Swamy Sivananda being her Guru.

As a clergy, she spent several nights and days at Koneswaram doing penance as she was convinced that the Swamy Rock is vibrant with divine influence.

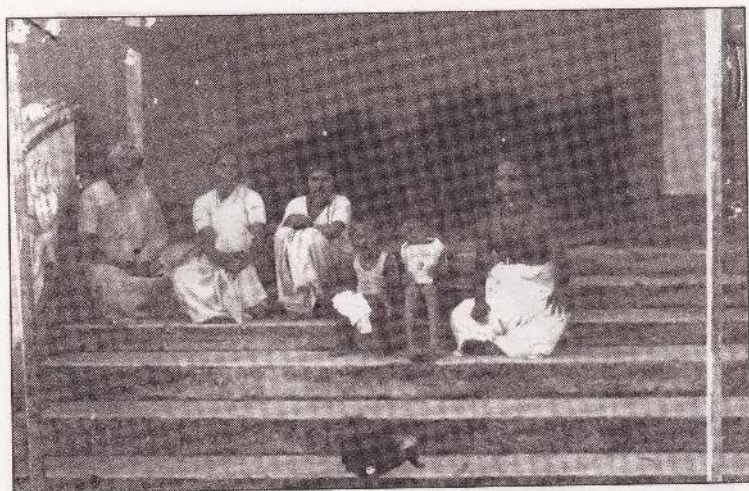
It is befitting to cite a few lines from an English verse on Matajy composed by her devotee Kumaralakshmy Kumarasinkam.



Matajy with her Huru Swamy Sivananda Maharishy.



Swamy Sithanantha Saraswathy Maharaj with Matajy.



*Sachithanantha Matajy with his disciples Ghanthy
Master P. Kandiah and his wife Rasanayaky at
Koneswaram.*

"The Trincomalee saint with great heart
 who ignited one and all with her spiritual glow
 The saffroned - clad gentleness
 Brought the fragrance of
 Her Divine Master
 To a verily mundane land
 Bequeathed her spiritual wealth
 To carry on the divine work
 Her maiden name
 Mistress of Wealth
 Selvananayagi!

The cosmic factors
work with purpose
And place the crown of Love
That entwines creation
On a worthy head
whose head and heart
spinning Dharma's wheel
Unfolding the Truth
Unfolding the Self
Loving to serve
Serving to love
Spiritual Blossoms
Thus the spiritual Lineage
Curves its way
Across the mundane expanse.

The Sivananda Thapovanam - the ashram at Uppuvely - currently celebrating its fiftieth year is a standing monument of Satchithanantha Saraswathy Matajy's sacrifice and service.



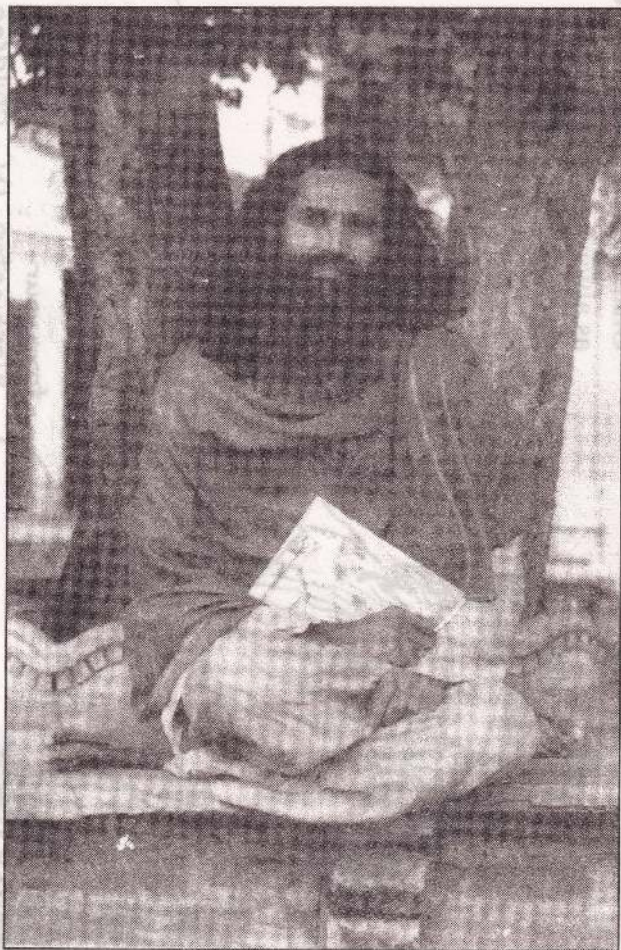
27

Swamy Satchithanantha Yogy

Swamy Satchithanantha Yogy resided at the Sivananda Ashram and strived earnestly for the spiritual upliftment and moral rearmament of the people in Koneswaram.

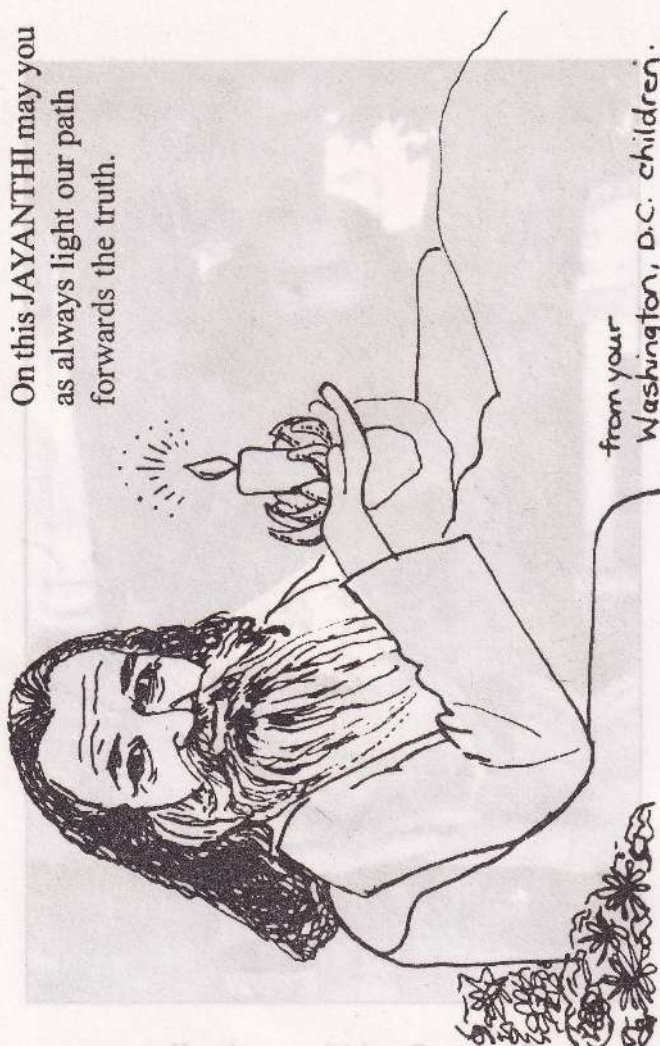
Yogy Satchithanantha was a master of yoga, a world spiritual teacher "Truth is one, paths are many" - was his motto. He created an interest in yoga amidst the youths in Koneswaram. He was very moved that a section of the Hindus were barred from entering the temple. He revolted against such indignation and discrimination against a helpless section of the community. On an appointed day in the fifties, he led the harijans to enter every Hindu temple in Koneswaram.

Yogy Satchithanantha expounded lofty thoughts couched in a simple but lucid style that appeal not only to the intellect but also to the heart. Yogy



Swamy Satchithanantha Yogy.

On this JAYANTHI may you
as always light our path
forwards the truth.



from your
Washington, D.C. children.

Satchithanantha founded the "Lotus" temple in the United States of America, to extend his services to the west. This temple is committed to yoga ecumenical service. It is interesting to note that it was in Koneswaram in the year 1953 that he conceived this novel concept - a nice altar with a big light in the middle where people of different faiths sit around and worship in their own traditional way.



28

Kuntrakuddy Adigalar at Koneswaram

That Kuntrakuddy Adigalar, a highly respected Saivaite Swamy, the head of Kuntrakuddy Saivaite Mutt spent hours meditating at the Swamy Rock on every visit to Trincomalee speaks of the divine vibrations in that secluded spot.

Adigalar's discourses in flowery language professing progressive thoughts on Saiva Sithantha Philosophy were so persuasive that the Hindus, particularly the youth, flocked around him under the banner of "Arul Nery" that he professed. Adigalar, the 45th Guru Maha Sannithanam of Kuntrakuddy Atheenam founded by Theivasigamany Sivachchariyar had close ties with the Saivaite traditions of Sri Lanka.

It was Kuntrakudy Atheenam that bestowed the title of "Navalar" on Arumuganavalar of our country. Swamy Gnanapiragasar who fled from country unable to bear the abominable sight of the atrocities of the Portuguese led spiritual life in Kuntrakuddy Atheenam. Thampiran Arumugam of Sri Lanka dwelled in Kuntrakuddy Atheenam and wrote copious notes for the

first 234 stanzas of Periya Puranam. Sarasanamuthu Swamy of Jaffna lived a spiritual life at Kuntrakuddy Atheenam.

It was Kuntrakuddy Adigalar who was the first to have flouted the orthodox custom that barred heads of Mutts from crossing the seas and visited Sri Lanka. Imbued with the zeal to propagate Saivism, Adigalar took this bold step of crossing the seas to bless the Saivaites living abroad with his gracious presence.

Whenever he visited Trincomalee, he toured the interior remote Tamil villages such as Verugal, Samboor and Killiveddy and prayed at the ancient sacred Hindu temples. He even visited the remote Kankuvely village and prayed at the Siva Shrine in a dilapidated condition.

Once when he visited Trincomalee, people were clearing the bushes in the outskirts of the town with a view to found a settlement and he named it "Anbuvally Puram" (அன்புவழி புரம்) meaning a gateway to love. This settlement is a densely populated village, today.

Adigalar was interested in relating the rituals at Hindu temples to real life. He wanted the rituals to have an immediate meaning to the people.

A populace intermingling with the kovil and a kovil serving the devotees was Adigalar's goal.



29

May his tribe Increase

About Ben Adhem, a poem that I learnt as a teenager, depicts a lover of fellow human beings, whom God blessed.

In this poem lover sees an angel writing a list of the names of persons who love god. Anxiously he inquires from the angel whether his name is in the list. Abou was disappointed when the angel replied in the negative.

Thereafter Abou cheerfully but in a low soft voice suggested to the angel to include his name in the list of persons who love their fellow beings.

The following night was significant. The angel displayed a list of the names of persons whom god loved and Abou's name was the first and foremost.

Here are the relevant lines of the poem by Leigh Hunt:-



And with a look made of all sweet accord,
answered, "The names of those who love the Lord", "and
is mine one?" said Abou "Nay, not so"

Replied the angel.

Abou spoke more low,

But cheer by still and said

"I pray thee then,

Write me as one

That loves his fellow men"

The angel wrote and vanished.

The next night,

It came again with a great wakening light, and
showed the names.

Whom love of god had blessed.

And lo!

Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Love for one's fellow beings is really love for
god Love is god. And god is love. It is true love that
expects no rewards. This love transcends boundaries of
caste, class, race, language and religion.

Let us, therefore, see god in the radiant smile of the needy, the sick, the hungry, the naked and the homeless. Let each one of us be an "Abou Ben Adhem".

Let me wind up quoting the words of Sathya Sai Baba on Universal love : -

"There is no path to god except through love.

Love is expansion, inclusion, mutualisation.

The individual has to be universalized, expanded into Vishvaswarupa."



30

Thirugnana Sampanthar's hymns Konamamalai Amarnthare

1. Niraikalal aravam silamboly alambum
Nimalarneerany thirumeny
Varaikelu mahalor pakamap punarntha
Vadivinar Kodiyany vidaiyar
Karaikelu santhum karakit pilavum
Alaparum kanamany varantriy
Kuraikadal otham nithilam kolikum
Konamamalai Amarnthare.
2. Kadithena vantha karithanai yuritha
Avury menymet porpar
Pidiyena nadaiyal peivalai madanthai
Pirai nuthal avalodum udanayk
Kodithena katharum kuraikadal soolnthu
Kollamum nithilam sumanthu
Kudithanai nerukky perukkamai thontrum
Konamamalai Amarnthare.

3. Panithilanth thingal painthalai nagam
 Padarsadai mudiyidai Vaithar
 Kaninthilanth thuvarvait karikai pagamaga
 Munkalan thavar mathinmel
 Thanitha peruruva vilathalal naganth
 Thankiya meruven silaiyak
 Kunithathor villar kuraikadal soolntha
 Konamamalai Amarnthare.
4. Palithilang kankai sadaiyidai vaithup
 Pankudai mathananai podiyagi
 Vilathavan theyvenda munkodutha
 Vimalanar kamalamar pathar
 Thelithumun Aratrunch Selungadal tharalam
 Semponum ipiyum sumanthu
 Kolithuvan thiraikal karaiyidai serikum
 Konamamalai Amarnthare.
5. Thayinum nalla thalaivarentru adiyar
 Thammaddy portrisai pargal
 Vayinum manaththum maruvy nintragala
 Manpinar kanpala vedar
 Noyilum pinniyum tholilarpal neeky
 Nulaitharu noolinar gnam
 Koyilum sunaiyum kadaludan soolntha
 Konamamalai Amarnthare.

6. Parinthunan manathal valipadu maany
Thannuyir melvarum kootraith
Thirinthida vannam uthaithavark karulum
Semmayyar nammyai yaludaiyar
Virinthuyar mauval mathavy punnai
Vengai vanserunthy senbakathin
Kurunthodu mullai kodividum polilsool
Konamamamali Amarnthare.
7. Unavailable
8. Eduthavan tharukai illithavar viralal
Eththida aththamam peru
Thodduthavar selvam thontriya pirapum
Irappariyathavar velvy
Thadduthavar vanapal vaithathor karunai
Thannarul perumaiyum valvum
Kodduthavar virumpum perum pugalalar
Konamamalai Amarnthare.
9. Aruvara thorugai ventalai enthy
Aganthorum Paliyudan pukka
Peruvarai yuraiyum neermayar seermaip
Perungadal vannanum piraman

Iruvarum ariya vannam oleriyai
 Uyarntavar peyarntha nanmatkung
 Kuruvarai nintrar kuraikalal vanangak
 Konamamalai Amarnthare.

10. Nintrunnum samanum irunthunum therum
 Nerialathana purankoora
 Ventru nanchunnum parisinar orupal
 Mellialalodum udanakyth
 Thuntrumon Pauva maualum Soolithu
 Thanthuru thiraipala mothy
 Kuntrumon kanal vasam vanthulavum
 Konamamalai Amarnthare.

11. Kuttramilathar kuraikadal soolntha
 Konamamalai amarntharai
 Kattrunar kelvy kaliyar peruman
 Karuthudai Gnanasampanthan
 Utra senthamilar malai eerainthum
 Uraipavar ketpavar uyarntor
 Suttramumahyth tholvinai adaiyar
 Thontruvar vaniddai polinthel.

1. நிரைகழல் அரவம் சிலம்பொலி யலம்பும்
 நிம்லர் நீறணி திருமேனி
 வரைகெழு மகளோர் பாகமாப் புணர்ந்த
 வடிவினர் கொடியணி விடையர்
 கரைகெழு சந்தும் காரகிற் பிளவும்
 அளப்பருங் கனமணி வரன்றிக்
 குரைகடல் ஓதம் நித்திலங் கொழிக்கும்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
2. கடிதென வந்த கரிதனை யுரித்து
 அவ்வுரி மேனிமேற் போர்ப்பார்
 பிடியன நடையாள் பெய்வளை மடந்தை
 பிறைறுத லவளொடும் மடந்தை
 கொடிதெனக் கதறும் குரைகடல் சூழ்ந்து
 கொள்ளமும் நித்திலஞ் சுமந்து
 குடிதனை நெருக்கிப் பெருக்கமாய்த் தோன்றும்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
3. பனித்திளந் திங்கட் பைந்தலை நாகம்
 படர்சடை முடியிடை வைத்தார்
 கனித்திளந் துவர்வாய்க் காரிகை பாகமாக
 முன் கலந்தவர் மதின்மேல்
 தனித்த பேருருவ விழித்தழல் நாகந்
 தாங்கிய மேரு வெஞ்சிலையாக்
 குனித்ததோர் வில்லார் குரைகடல் சூழ்ந்த
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே

4. பழித்தினங் கங்கை சடையிடை வைத்துப்
 பாங்குடை மதனனைப் பொடியா
 விழித்தவன் தேவிவேண்ட முன்கொடுத்த
 விமலனார் கமலமார் பாதர்
 தெளித்துமுன் அரற்றுஞ் செழுங்கடல் தரளம்
 செம்பொனும் இப்பியும் சுமந்து
 கொழித்துவன் திரைகள் கரையிடைச் சேர்க்குங்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
5. தாயினும் நல்ல தலைவரென் றடியார்
 தம்மடி போற்றிசைப் பார்கள்
 வாயினும் மனத்தும் மருவிநின் றகலா
 மாண்பினர் கான் பல வேடர்
 நோயிலும் பிணியும் தொழிலர்பால் நீக்கி
 நுழைதரு நூலினர் ஞாலம்
 கோயிலுஞ் சுனையுங் கடலுடன் சூழ்ந்த
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
6. பரிந்துநன் மனத்தால் வழிபடு மாணி
 தன்னுயிர் மேல்வருங் கூற்றைத்
 திரிந்திடாவண்ணம் உதைத்தவர்க் கருளும்
 செம்மையார் நம்மை யாளுடையார்
 விரிந்துயர் மெளவல் மாதவி புன்னை
 வேங்கை வண்செருந்தி செண்பகத்தின்
 குருந்தொடு முல்லை கொடிவிடும் பொழில்சூழ்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
7. பாடல் கிடைக்கவில்லை.

8. எடுத்தவன் தருக்கை இழித்தவர் விரலால்
 ஏத்திட ஆத்தமாம் பேறு
 தொடுத்தவர் செல்வம் தோன்றிய பிறப்பும்
 இறப்பறி யாதவர் வேள்வி
 தடுத்தவர் வனப்பால் வைத்ததோர் கருணை
 தன்னருள் பெருமையும் வாழ்வும்
 கொடுத்தவர் விரும்பும் பெரும் புகழாளர்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
9. அருவரா தொருகை வெண்டலை ஏந்தி
 அகந்தொறும் பலியுடன் புக்க
 பெருவராயுறையும் நீர்மையர் சீர்மைப்
 பெருங்கடல் வண்ணனும் பிரமன்
 இருவரும் அறியாவண்ணம் ஒள் எரியாய்
 உயர்ந்தவர் பெயர்ந்த நன் மாற்குங்
 குருவராய் நின்றார் குரைகழல் வணங்கும்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.
10. நின்றுணுஞ் சமணும் இருந்துணும் தேரும்
 நெறியலாதன புறங்கூற
 வென்று நஞ்சண்ணும் பரிசினர் ஒருபால்
 மெல்லியளொடும் உடனாகித்
 துன்றுமொன் பெளவ மெளவலுஞ் சூழ்ந்து
 தாழ்ந்துறு திரைபல மோதிக்
 குன்றுமொன் கானல் வாசம் வந்துலவும்
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரே.

11. குற்றமில்லாதார் குரைகடல் சூழ்ந்த
 கோணமாமலை அமர்ந்தாரைக்
 கற்றுணர் கேள்விக் காழியர் பெருமான்
 கருத்துடை ஞான சம்பந்தன்
 உற்ற செந்தமிழார் மாலை ஈரைந்தும்
 உரைப்பவர் கேட்பவர் உயர்ந்தோர்
 சுற்றமுமாகித் தொல்வினை அடையார்
 தோன்றுவர் வானிடைப் பொலிந்தே.

திருச்சிற்றம்பலம்



From the author's pen

1. Glimpses of Thirukoneswaram
2. காளி ஆச்சி
3. ஆச்சி நீ காளி (கவிதை)
4. திருக்கோணேஸ்வரத் திருத்தல யாத்திரை
5. சாயி வந்தனன்! வாழ்வு தந்தனன்!
6. அம்பாள் செய்யும் அற்புதங்கள்
7. மகாத்மா காந்தியின் மகத்தான சீடர்
8. Pilgrimage to Koneswaram



About the Author

Author Vedhanayagam Varathasuntharam, a son of Thiriconamalle soil, is a retired teacher of English. He had served on the tutorial staff of Trincomalee Ramakrishna Mission Hindu college, Kanchimadam Maha vidhyalaya, Trincomalee, Colombo Anurudtha Maha vidyalaya and Uduvil Girls' College (further education) Jaffna

He had been freelance journalist of the sun Dhinapathy Sinthamani He had been journalist of the Island news paper serving as Trincomalee correspondent, Northern correspondent, and Colombo correspondent, since its inception until 2000

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He has authored several books on religion. He had also composed 101 Stanzas in Tamil on Trincomalee Pathrakali Amman for recitation.