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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### SHIVA TEMPLES IN KONGU REGION – A STUDY ON AVINASI TEMPLE

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#### Abstract

Religion begins in an elementary form by worshipping their ancestors, natural elements, mothers, trees and so on. As far as Tamil land is concerned various forms of worships were practiced by the people. Early Tamil literatures like Ahanānūru and Puraṇānūru refers to the worship of various form of Gods and Goddesses. Ancestral worship was followed in the form of megalithic monuments such as Dolmens, Dolmenoid cists, Hero stones, Menhirs, Sati stones, etc. India is a country of rich culture, heritage, history and lots of mystery. It is a country of temples, a religious country that believes that there are over 33 million gods and goddesses. A few temples in India have some astonishing mysteries connected to them. For instance, Lord Shiva temples, visited by pilgrims from across the world are full of unsolved mysteries. In this article, the researcher has discussed about the Avinasi temple located in Kongu Region.

**Keywords:** Shiva Temple, Kongu Shiva Temple, Avinasi, Kongu Region, God Shiva

#### Introduction

According to the belief of the Hindu religion, *Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh* are considered to be in the highest place among all the gods and goddesses or in other words, according to the belief of the Hindu religion, the place of these three gods is considered at the top in Hinduism. But even among these three deities, if anyone's highest place is considered in the Hindu religion, it is of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is called the *creator of the Hindu religion*. Shiva is also known by many other names such as *Mahadeva, Vishwanatha, Maheshvara, Shankara, Shambhu,*

*Rudra, Hara, Mahadeo, Mahasu, Mahesha, Trilochana, Devendra, Neelakanta, Subhankara, Trilokinatha, and Ghrneshwar.* In this article, we will be talking about some famous and important temples which are dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Avinasi also called Tiruppukkoliyur was included in Kuda Kongu in early days. In all literary works the name Avinasi or Avinasi is found mentioned often. A greater part of the western part of the Avinasi taluk was included in Punganikka Nadu, a part of Vadaparaisara Nadu. Avinasi was linked with Perur in the western side of Kongu by a highway called the

Rajakesari Peruvali, which is referred to in the inscription. It linked Perur, Avinasi etc in the north of Noyyal. Nallaru was the river that flowed from the upper regions of Tirupukoliyur. This place was sung by Sundaramurti Nayanar. The name 'Pukkoliyur' has been attributed to the place Avinasi on account of the swallowing of a boy by a crocodile. The expression Avinasi literally means the indestructible. The Tevaram hymns refer to the expression Vinasi and Avinasi meaning destructible and indestructible. In the Tevaram hymns Sundaramurti Nayanar has sung ten verses in praise of Lord Siva in Avinasi. The fourth verse mentions the episode of the crocodile swallowing a child. He prays to Lord Siva to give back the child which was swallowed by the crocodile and finally succeeded. He praises him in *Tevaram* through the following lines:

*Erran marakken elumaikkum emperumanaiye  
Urrayenr- unnaiye ulkukinren unarndu  
ullattal Purradarava pikkoliyur Avinasiye  
Parraga valven pasupatiye paramati.*

A similar legend narrates the recovery of the lingam from a fish. According to this, Gurunatha Pandaram was a staunch devotee of Avinashiligeswarar and he did Siva puja regularly. Due to heavy rain the tank bund was in spate at the breaking point. So, the officers who came to the dam to avoid the floods with numerous workers arrogantly ordered the Pandaram who was performing the Siva puja at that time on the tank bund to move away. As Gurunatha was deeply involved in his Siva puja, he did not hear their orders. At this the officers ridiculed him as a false saint and threw the lingam into the tank. Gurunatha Pandaram performed severe penance for days and nights together to get back his sacred lingam. Lord Siva instigated a divine fish to spit out the lingam from its mouth in front of the devotee. Thus, Gurunatha Pandaram felt extremely happy at the restoration of the lingam. These two incidents, restoration of the boy from the mouth of the crocodile and spitting of the lingam by a fish have been depicted in a stone carving on a side of the lamp pillar in front of the main *Avinasi Appar* temple.

The inscriptions of the Kongu rulers like Vira Narayana, Kulottunga Chola, Vira Chola, Vira

Rajendra, Sundara Pandya, Vira Pandya etc, mention this place Avinasi and the deity enshrined the temple as *Avinasialudaiyanayanar*. A record of Rajakesarivarman, Vira Pandya dated 1274 A.D. specifically refers to the inclusion of Avinasi in the division of Vadaparisara Nadu. Pukkoliyur is found mentioned in one of the records of Sundara Pandya from Avinasi dated in 1296A.D. in connection with the construction of a temple dedicated to Sundaramurtinayanar. The place Tirupukoliyur wherein the temple of the deity Aludaiyanayanar has been enshrined is found mentioned in an epigraph of Vira Ballala dated 1322 A.D.

Avinasi is referred to as Dhakshina Varanasi, i.e., Dhakshina Kasi in contrast to the Utara Kasi that is the present Varanasi. In the imprecatory portion of this record the banks of the sacred river Ganges is referred to. This indicates the northern Kasi lying on its bank. Utara Kasi has been always held in high esteem right from the ancient period. Except for a general stream called Nallaru which rises from the upland of Annur and flows through the ancient Pukkoliyur or Avinasi no other bigger river is known from the records. In all probability, the term Dhakshina Varanasi has been mentioned by the composer of the record in order to attach more importance to the place of the worship of the deity Siva called *Avinasilingam*. It is to this deity enshrined in the form of linga, gifts had been made by the merchants during the period of Vira Nanjaraya Udaiyar dated 1497A.D.

Another record of this Vira Chikkaraya Udaiyar dated 1508 A.D. registers a gift of land to the same god of Dhakshina Varanasi. So, this new name continued to have been coined to the place during the reign period of Ummattur chiefs of 15th and 16th centuries A.D. Tenpalli was the name attributed to a portion of Avinasi, where in the bund of a tank, a temple dedicated to Sundara Nayanar was built by the Pandya king Sundara Pandya. The *Devadana* village to the deity Avinasialudaiyanayanar called Tenpallinattam alias Sitagaragandanallur was carved out during the time of Vira Ballala, the Hoysala king. It may be inferred from this that Tenpalli was close to Tirupukoliyur the other name of Avinasi. This inscriptional evidence proves the historicity of the temple and the place.

## ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The place Avinasi is referred to in the inscriptions of 12th, 13th and 15th centuries as Avinasi only. Subsequently, during the reigning period of Umattur chiefs Vira Nanjaraja Udaiyar and Vira Chikaraya Udaiyar dated 1498 A.D. -1499 A.D. and 1508 A.D. respectively; the place was called *Dakshina Varanasi*. The reference to the Kasitirta and the Ganges well has gained currency on account of the sanctity and the importance they have attained as second to the original Varanasi which is also called Kasi in the north. On account of the location of the place to the south of Uttarakasi, the name Dakshinakasi has been coined to the present place called Avinasi. This information is known from the inscriptions of the Umattur chiefs found engraved on the loose slabs set up in the north of the Goddess shrine.

In 1292 A.D. during the period of Kongu Pandya king Sundara Pandya provisions were made to meet the expenses to install the *door-jamb*. Additions have been made in this temple during the period of Krishnaraja Udaiyar of the Udaiyar family of Mysore, 1756 A.D. Dalavay Devaraya, an agent of the above king who was governing this part of the country is stated to have carried out the renovations of the temple at Avinasi including the *mandapas*, *gopura*, *prakara* wall and paving the floor.

### The Goddess Shrine

The goddess shrine faces east and the image of the Goddess enshrined here is called as *Brihat Karunambigai*. There are inscriptions on the walls and the *adhishtana* of the Goddess shrine. The earliest reference to the Goddess *Perungkarunai Chelviyar* in the *Tirukkamakottam* in the temple of *Avinasialudaiyar* is found mentioned in the record of Kongu Chola king Vira Narayana dated 1140 A.D. - 1141 A.D.

The *Chandikeswara* shrine is seen on the northern side between the central shrine and *antarala*. The entrance gateway has the *gopura* which consists of *pitha* and *upapitha* with usual attributes like *upana*,

*padma*, *jagati*, *vritta kumuda*, *kantha* and *galapadas* with miniature shrines decorated with pilasters *kapota* with kudu arches. Over and above the base the *upana*, *jagati*, *vritta kumuda*, *kantha* and *galapadas* are seen. The walls are decorated with niches crowned with *sala sikharas* and *kumbha panjaras*. The entrance gate is decorated with medallions containing ornamental relief and *sala panjara* figures.

## AVINASHI LINGESWARAR TEMPLE, AVINASHI

The Avinashi temple is believed to be the first among the seven shivastalams of Kongunadu.

It is also known as the Karunaiyaathaal temple. The temple's construction is connected to a legend based on Sundaramurthi Nayanar. The 'Moovendargal' Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas have made huge bequest to this Temple. Avinashi is part of the ancient Kongunadu which now comprises the districts of Coimbatore, Salam, Dharmapuri, Karur and Palani. This Place of Great historical importance was known as Thirupukkaliyur in the ancient times. Avinashi temple is located on the Chennai Cochin NH47 highways.

The Tamil saying goes – Kasiyil Vasi Avinashi meaning that what the devotee derives by worshipping in Kasi-Varanasi, he/she derives half of the benefits by worshipping Avinashilingeswara in Avinashi. Lord Avinashi Appar, Lord Bhairava and the holy water-Theertham- are brought from Kasi. Bathing in the Kasi well in the temple on new moon day-Amavasya brings manifold benefits to the devotee. There will be no interval closing of the temple on new moon days.

### HISTORY OF AVINASI TEMPLE

The temple was constructed by the king of Kongu chola, The Pandyas, Hoysalas and the king of Mysore. The renovation process was done by Krishna Raja Udayar of Mysore in 1756. The temple went through a dry period of no recognition for the next 150 years until 1919, when an 'Ashta Bandhana Maha

Kumbabishekam' was organized. In 1954 Ten Thevaram songs were inscribed into the marble stones by the Thirupanandal Kashi Mutt. Renovation of the temple was again carried out in 1959 by the department of the archaeological works. In 1970 the temple administration was transferred from the Archaeological department to the HR and CE department. In the same year, the 2.95 acres of land over which the temple was located was handed over to the government. Sundara Swamigal of Siravai Adhinam completed the main tower work and in 1980 a mahakumbabishekam was organized. A fire accident led to the damage of the cars in 1990. A new car was built and came under use in 1993. A five-stage tower was constructed in the same year due to the efforts of Pollachi. Thiru. N.Mahalingam. A special shrine was built for Sundaramurthi Nayanar in 1996. Under the Tamilnadu Government's Temple town development scheme, the east gate construction and other activities were carried out in 1999-2000.

### **Temple Structure**

The east facing shrine of Avinashi Lingeshwarar is located on the banks of Nallar River. A Deepasthambam can be seen in front of the temple which is carved of single stone. The lower part of this 70 foot post bears the carvings of lord Ganapathy, Sundaramurthi Nayanar and the rebirth of a boy from the mouth of a crocodile. This Deepasthambam (Post) is a unique feature in all the ancient temples of Kongunadu. A 30 pillars hall built by the King of Mysore, Udayar in the year 1756 is located in front of the Deepasthambam.

### **Main Tower**

The Main Tower (Raja Gopuram) of this temple is nearly 100 feet height and one of the biggest towers in the Kongunadu. This tower was first built during the period of Kongu Pandian Sundarapandian (1285 - 1300). Later it was reconstructed by the King of Mysore. In the year 1860, the tower was damaged by the lightning and totally demolished by the district administration.

1. *A.R.E*, No.579 of 1893.
2. *A.R.E*, Nos.175, 183,186 of 1909.

### **Holy Water**

The holy water points located in this temple are

- Kasi Gangai Theertham
- Theppakulam
- Nagakakannigai Theertham
- Thirunallaru
- Thamaraikulam
- Iravathathurai

### **Holy Tree**

The temple history reveals that the holy tree of this temple was a mango tree. Now the Amman deity is located under a Padhiri tree. This temple is also called as Vilvavanam as the premises was once surrounded by a large number of Vilvam trees.

### **Halls**

The 30 pillars hall located in front of the Theepasthambam was constructed by king Udayar of Mysore, in the year 1756. As we enter through the seven-stage tower, we can see the Navavanga hall. The deities present in this hall are Orthuvathandava Moorthy, Alankattu Kaliyammai, Veerabathirar and those of who built this particular hall. This hall was raised by the efforts of Kavayapalayam China Kaliyappa Gounder and Periya Kaliyappa Gounder. Thirukalyana hall (wedding hall) is located adjacent to the main shrine. The celestial wedding of the lord will be celebrated in this hall during the month of Chithrai. The newly built Vasantha hall can be found opposite to the wedding hall.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, it is mainly focussed and described on Avinasi Temple located in Kongu Region. The details and comments on the various aspects of the worship and divinity and the temple culture of Avinasi Lingeshwarar temple. The historical, architectural, sculptures and Pūjas and rituals in the various temples have been brought to light.

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