

Sri Thiruvagapura

MAHA KSHETRA MAHATMYA

SRI MAHA VISHNU

MURTHIRAYAM

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Introduction

Thiruvegapura Mahadeva Temple enshrines Gods of Gods. Lord Mahadeva along with his consort Goddess Sri Parvati and Paramananda swaroopa, Lord Mahavishnu. Lord Shankaranarayana - who manifested when Shiva and Vishnu, merged into one, firmly establishes the non-duality of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, is the third equally important deity in this legendary temple of more than 3000 years.

The temple has all characteristics of a great temple. The government of Kerala is very proud and even present it as an ideal example of a Kerala temple complex.

The temple is an excellent instance of high-end Vastu-vidya of ancient India and one can feel the history through the architecture of the temple. It is like being back in dawn of time.

History

Long ago, Thiruveggapura was known as Ashokapuram - a place where no shoka or sadness prevailed, The land was surrounded by holy rivers on three sides with serene greenery in the middle.

The worship here started more than 3000 years ago.

In the past the temple had many local temples and many farms which acted as subdivisions.

Initially it was owned by Raja Pramukhs and later passed to the Family Azhvanchery Thambakkal who have been the applet authorities of Brahmins. From him it came to 11 Brahmin families of Thiruvegappura. At present 5 families are remaining.

The tantric Vrittis of Tiruvegappuram Mahakshetra are now performed by the Namboothiris of Kaladi Padinjhaaredath Mana. Shri Shankaracharya recognized the peculiarities of this place and transferred the responsibility to them.

Architecture

The *Kuthambalam* in this temple is an example of the *Kuthambalams* in Kerala. *Kuthambalam* means temple theatre, it is a closed hall for staging.

Though not huge, this *Kuthambalam* is one of the most beautiful sculptures built in accordance with *Natyashastra* and architecture. The *pradistha* of *Nandikeswara* is at the center of *Natyamandapa*, who plays *Mrudungam* for *Nataraja* dance.

Therefore, it has the sanctity of a shrine. This *Natyamandapa* is used only for olden method of telling stories and playing drama (chakyar kooth and koodiyattam). Another interesting fact on this *Koothambalam* is the complete absence of echo or the reflected sound. The inner roof of *Koothambala* gleams with the grandeur of rare and magnificent carvings. The yearly Srimad Bhagavata Saptaha is conducted in Koothambalam. Bhajanas and namajapas are also done almost daily in the Koothambalam.

Another significance of the temple is the peculiarity of architecture affirming its close association with Yajnasamskara - or the connections with Vedic rituals.

The circular shape of the *sreekovil* of Lord Shiva's shrine, is same as the *Havaneeyagni* of *Thretagni*, the semicircular shape of Lord Shankaranarayana's shrine resembles the *Dakshinagni* (Anvaharam) of *Thretagni* and the square shape of Lord Vishnu's *sreekovil* reminds the shape of Garhapatyagnikunda

of *Threthagni*.

The *Aajyahuthi* done in the *Agnikunda* at the northern part of Lord Shiva's *sreekovil* on *Ashtamivilakku* day, reminds the *Vasordhara* conducted in Yajna.

Another *Agnikunda* situated at the north of the southern *Agrashala*, is at the exact place where *Marjaleeya Kunda* is placed, where homas for ancestral rites are conducted. This is at the southern part of the *Sreebhoothabali* path, path for *Pradakshina*. Homas are conducted on *Ashtamivilakku* day and for *Shivaratri* in this *agnikunda*.

The *Vigraha* worshipping era came after the era of *Yajnasamskara*. The ancients might have designed the architecture of this temple to suit both methods. This suggests the antiquity of the temple that might date back to even *Dwapara Yuga*.

It is noteworthy that even without conducting any Yajnas, the *Brahmans* of *Thiruvegapurra*, enjoyed the same status of *Karmmis* who conduct great Yajnas. Hence *Vedopasana* and *Annadana*, a part of Yajna, are considered as supremely significant.

The structure of (pooja) worship is based on the yogic principles, which starts in *Krita Yuga*. Outside of the sanctum in front of every idol is a *dhvajam* (flag) and on the top is the sign of each Deity. It is rare to find a temple with three and moreover with an equal importance. The pillar of the *dhvaja* represents *Kundalini* power. *Utsava* is the period during which the *kundalini* power is enlightened. All 3 deities has got in *Utsava* special poojas.

However, the whole architecture is designed according to *Vastu Shastra*, the science of civil engineering.

Another peculiarity is the big *kundam* which is used for *Asthami*, when 10 liters of Ghee are directly poured from the *Abhishekam* into the sacred fire. This *kundam* placed next to the sanctum of the *Shivalingam*, has 3 m depth and a diameter of 1,50 m.

In the year 1988-2000, a well could be constructed inside the temple. It greatly simplifies the tasks of the temple.

Still today the temple retains its Vedic grandeur. This demands a lot of maintenance.

The two *Agrasalas* behind are under construction to rebuild the complete temple structure.

Murthys

Mahavishnu

According to the known legends, the ancient sages who passed through this land found this place suitable for sadhana and created the shrine devoted to Lord Mahavishnu. The sages experienced strong Vaishnava energy in this place, finding the place reverberating with Vaishnava chaithanya, they decided to invoke and enshrine it in the form of four handed Mahavishnu as it is seen till this day. The shrine of Lord Mahavishnu is undoubtedly the most ancient of the three.

Mahadeva

Lord Vishnu's vehicle, Garuda - the king of birds, got afflicted with the debilitating disease called *kshaya*, when he carried Mount *Manthara* during *Palazhimadhana* - the great churning of Ocean of Milk. Garuda being the magnificent eagle, was also tormented with several skin diseases as he ate snakes. He asked Lord Brahma for a way to eliminate his ailments. Seeing Garuda in terrible pain, Lord Brahma, filled with compassion, went to *Gaya*. He took two *Shivalingas* from the River *Phalgu*, and established one each in *Adityapura* and *Ashokapura*.

In *Ashokapura* the Shivling was secured on the southern part of Vishnu temple, near River *Kunthi*. Lord Brahma advised Garuda to perform *Abisheka* and prayers to Lord Shiva on the *Shivling* at *Ashokapura*. Garuda, following the advice of Lord Brahma, brought the *Shivling* and placed it at the temple's northern end, where there is a *kund* at present. Hence, according to astrologers, the *kund* is considered as *Srimulasthan* and protected as such. Garuda earned blessings of Lord Shiva by observing the ascetic deeds as per Lord Brahma's direction.

Garuda's health and strength was restored by observing penances in this temple. Hence, even today, it is seen that, anyone who takes bath in River *Kunthi* and performs *bhajana* of Lord Mahadeva, chanting the *Panchakshari* mantra is cured of ail diseases and blessed with good health and strength by Lord Shiva. Garuda, while flying back was so strong and fast, that his wings slightly hit the *Shivling*. The *Shivling* bent a little, and even today it stays bent. As, this was the place where Garuda flew at great speed, this place came to be known as *Thiru- Vega- pura*. *Thiru* stands for holy, *Vega* means fast and *pura* means city.

Shankara Narayana

After many years, *Sree Shankaracharya*, came to *Thiruveggapura* during his spiritual tour all over India. He was very pleased to see Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu in the same temple. *Shankaracharya* established the temple of *Shankaranarayanawami* in the middle of Lord Shiva's and Lord Vishnu's shrines to affirm the non duality of Shiva and Vishnu. This was not only for establishing the *Advaita Siddhantha*, but also for overcoming the lack of progenies suffered by the people during that time.

Ganesha, Dakshinamoorthi and Nandikeshwara

To the south of Lord Shiva's shrine, are the shrines of the upadevas - Lord Ganesha, Lord Dakshinamoorthi and Lord Nandikeshwara.

Thripuranthaka and Shastha

A shrine for Lord *Thripuranthaka* - another form of Lord Shiva is enshrined outside the *nalambola* at the Southwest corner of *Pradakshina* path. At the immediate southern part of this, is the shrine for Lord *Shastha*. Lord *Tripuranthaka*, who is called *Erinjupuranthaka* by devotees, resides as the caretaker of the temple and the whole village. The divine presence of Lord *Tripuranthaka* is experienced by many, on every event regarding the temple.

A local legend is that, some bandits came to attack during *Mappila Lahala* time. Seeing a huge army on the banks of River *Thootha* they ran away without crossing the river. The army that they saw was an illusion created by Lord *Tripuranthaka* to protect the temple and village from the atrocities of the bandits. Several temples were looted and destroyed during this time, but this temple was free of any such events.

Poonthanam and Temple

The famous devotional poet, Poonthanam is said to have lived and studied here for twelve years. Lord *Guruvayurappan* gave *divyadarshan* to Poonthanam here and a square rock is kept above the southern wall remembering the incident. Offering prayers in this space is considered equivalent to praying at *Guruvayur* by entering through the Northern passage.

Murthysankalpa

Lord Mahavishnu

The northern Lord of this place, Lord Mahavishnu, is imagined here in the form of *Avatharavishnu*, as he appeared in front of *Vasudeva* and *Devaki* during *Srikrishnavathara*. It is according to the verses in *Srimad Bhagavatha* starting with « *thamad bhutham balaka mam bujekshanam* »

Lord Mahavishnu is imagined wearing a golden crown adorned with rare jewels, forehead as beautiful as the moon of sharathkala, curls wavering over it in soft wind, eyes exquisite like the petals of lotus, attractive shapely nose, glistening *kundalas* on ears, cheeks reflecting the glitter of *kundalas*, beautiful lips. The Lord's neck adorned with *vanamala*, *Kausthubha* jewel gleaming on chest, hands adorned with *katakasootras*, carrying *Panchajanya*, the divine conch, *Sudarshana* chakra, *Kaumodaki* and Padma-lotus. Waist adorned with golden chain. Wearing golden yellow silk, golden anklets worn over legs beautiful than red lotuses.

The Lord Mahavishnu here, grants all good boons to devotees who pray to him.

Peethambaram, kara virajitha sankha chakra,
Kaumodhaki sarasijam, karuna samudhram,
Radha sahayam athi sundara mandahasam,
Vathaleyasam anisam Hrudhi bhavayaami

Meaning: 1 meditate in my heart, the one who wears golden yellow silk on his body, the one who holds Kaumodhaki and Lotus, the one who is an ocean of compassion, the one who helps Radha, the one who has the most beautiful smile-the one and only Vathalayesha-Lord Sri Krishna.

Lord Shiva

Thekke Thevar- or the Lord of South - is done in three forms in this temple. In the morning the sankalpa is done as lord Dakshinamoorthi- God of every Knowledge, the great Guru. In the

afternoon, Lord Shiva is imagined in the form of Lord Paramashiva- the God who destroys all sins and negativities, bestowing every goodness, happiness and joy. In the evening, the sankalpa is as God of Gods, Lord Mahadeva with Goddess Sri Parvati, Lord Ganapathy, Lord Subrahmanya and Bhoothaganas.

Abhisheka is performed on the Shivling at morning, afternoon and evening which is a rarity. Abhisheka performed in the evening with sacred conch, has special greatness.

Goddess Sri Parvati resides in the back side of Lord Shiva's shrine. Devotees meditate on Sri Parvati standing there for all goodness in life.

Shloka offered by a *Pandit* - great learned person - *Sri Vadakkeppat Narayanan Namboodiri*

« Prathuthpthanargharathna prakaravilasithe
Rathnasiinhasanagre samvishtam dhyananishtham
Himagirithanayaanvaasitham phalaanethram
Thapthasvamaprakashamdhruthaparashumruga
Baalasheethaamshumaulim
Bhakthyaashokaalayesham saka/amunivrutham
Bhavaye nee/akandham »

Meaning: I meditate upon the Lord Neelakanda - one with blue neck, one who is seated on the golden divine *simhasana* adorned with jewels, meditating, with Sri Parvati, one who has eye on forehead one who glistens like molten gold, one who holds axe and deer, one who is adorned with moon on head, one who destroys the sadness of devotees and one who is surrounded by great sages.

Pranāma shloka of Lord Shiva

« Shivam shivakaram shaantham
Shivathmaanam shivathamam
Shivamargapranetharam
Pranathosmi sadashivam »

Meaning: Forever, I bow to the ever auspicious one, Shiva,
Who is the creator of all goodness, who is ever peaceful, who is the essence of auspiciousness, who is the most auspicious, who shows the path to all auspicious things, who is eternally auspicious.

Shankaranarayana

Sri Shankaracharya swami, the proponent of Advaita, enshrined Lord Shankaranarayana in the middle of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. Lord Shankaranarayana is called *Naduvil Thevar* which means, Lord of the Middle, by the devotees.

The right side of Lord Shankaranarayana shines with Shailva chaithanya and left side shines with Vaishnava chaithanya. The right part has all the forms of Lord Shankara- Matted hair, head adorned with moon, forehead with holy ash, peaceful eyes glistening softly, beautiful lips, happy serpent on neck, holding axe and skull on hands, wearing elephant skin, another serpent on legs.

The left part of Lord Shankaranarayana has all the forms of Lord Narayana- Golden crown adorned with rare jewels, black eu ris playing in soft wind over the forehead, half of the gopi chandan, eyes radiating compassion and joy, ears adorned with kundalas embedded with precious stones, glistening cheeks, beautiful neck adorned with vanamala and Kausthubha, hands adorned with golden jewellery holding Panchajanya- divine conch and Kaumodaki. Wearing golden yellow silk, feet like red lotuses adorned with golden anklets.

The form of Lord Shankaranarayana blends the sankalpa of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu.

Lord Shankaranarayana is meditated for attaining spiritual knowledge and moksha.

Thus this Sankara Narayanaswamy is the embodiment of the idea of combining Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

Festivals

During the year 2 major festivals are taking place at the temple.

For almost 50 years, the ***Srimad Bhagavata Saptah*** has been held here in Koothambalam every year without interruption. This week was started by the devout Kolpuram Namboothiri. Later many devotees recited Srimad Bhagavata in this great temple.

For every evening pooja will be drawn a kalam picture. This is a special art of Kerala for sacred ceremonies. One artist of Kalam will offer his talent. Everyday a picture is drawn according to the evening ceremony and it will be wiped out afterwards. Incorporating the Kerala Kalam art in such a way with the daily poojas of the festival is unique. Each drawing is unique and serves as the basis for the poojas.

Bhagavata Week was organized as it is still today and made Srimad Bhagavatam popular throughout India.

At the end of the Srimad Bhagavata Saptah, on Ashtami Villaku will take place the very special Ayyahuti Yajna. 10 liters of Ghee will be used for Abhishekam on the Shivalingam and hence directly conducted into the big Havan on the North side of Shiva's shrine.

To ensure the continuity of enjoyment of Devotees, three meals per day are provided during the whole Saphthamam.

According to calendar, some days after Shivaratri (in the month of kumbham feb/march) will take place ***Utsava***. The hoisting of the three flags in front of each Deva is the start of the festival. It also symbolizes the rising of Kundalini.

The Festival lasts for 8 days and is a big festival with music and singing. Celebrations are held on the village sidewalk, its sound fills the whole atmosphere.

During the festival all kinds of temple arts and performances are practiced.

It was briefly interrupted in 1982, but resumed in 1995 thanks to the efforts of the faithful. Since 1995, food is now distributed daily during the festival.

On the day of *Pallivetta*, after the hunt, the *Panchavadyam* brings the *Nadana* to rest with the sound of

instruments. On the last day, a procession goes to the banks of the western river and with heavenly joy and devotional singing of the devotees, celebrates their return.

Now after Shivaratri and till the end of the 8-day festival, the inner part of the temple is sanctified with great tantric rituals.

Offerings

During the whole year special days for each idol are celebrated at the temple.

Shiva and Parvati

Certain days are deemed auspicious for Lord Shiva. *Mahashivaratri* of the month *Kumbha*, *Ashtami Vilakku* of the new moon phase of the month *Vrishchika*, *Thiruvathira* star day of all months, the first Monday of each Malayala month and *Pradosha* days are considered extremely significant for Lord Shiva.

Shivaratri

- On the *Mahashivaratri* special *Poojas*, *Abhishekam* *Sribhoothabali* accompanied by elephants, *Deeparadhana* are offered to lord Shiva. Lighting of all lamps in the *Vilakkumadam* five special *Poojas* performed by *Thanthri* himself and *Pradakshina* with *Vilakkachara* at night are also done for *Mahashivaratri*.

The highly auspicious *Kazchasheeveli* used to be performed previously at night. Nowadays it is being performed in the evening according to the wishes of devotees.

After *Kazchasheeveli*, several cultural programs are conducted on stage outside of the temple. *Thayambaka*, *Keli* performances are also enjoyed by the devotees during this time.

- *Ashtami vilakku* or Lighting the lamp on *Ashtami*

The eighth day of new-moon phase in *Vrishchika* month is celebrated as *Ashtami vilakku*. On this day, after *Deeparadhana* in the evening, *Navakam* pooja is performed on Lord Shiva's mandapa, and the melted ghee for *Abhisheka* is prepared with several mantras: *Sri Rudram* and *Chamakam*. This energized ghee is called *Aajya* according to the Vedic terminology. *Abhisheka* is performed for Lord Shiva in the middle of special pooja with this ghee. The ghee flowing out after this exceptional *Aajya Dhara*, is directed into a *homakunda* lighted with the fire of logs from seasoned jackfruit tree, on the Northeast part of *Srikovil*. The fore is that, ecstatically dancing *Shivabhoothas* drink this ghee. The remaining ghee after *Abhishekam* is experienced to be a divine medicine and devotees take it with great fervor.

Offering the logs from seasoned jackfruit tree into the *homakunda*, imagining it as *samith* (*chamatha*), is considered very auspicious. This is done by Brahmins for the well being of all.

Thereupon, *Abhishekam* is performed for Lord Shiva with tender coconut water, which is the favorite of the Lord. *Nivedya* and *Balithooval* are also done after *Abhishekam*. Another homa is done at the northern *homakunda* of the southern *Agrashala*. *Homam* is performed in this particular part which is the *Sreemootasthana* only on *Mahashivaratri* and *Ashtami vilakku*. Special poojas of *Ashtamivilakku* are done before the *Athazhapooja* and then the celebrations of *Ashtamivilakku* reach to an auspicious conclusion.

After the *Pradoshapooja* of *Trayodashi* that immediately follows *Ashtamivilakku*, the holy ashes

from the aforementioned *homakunda* is taken as *Prasadam*. Consuming and wearing the holy *bhasma/vibhoothi*, is a divine medicine for pacifying, *Apasmaram* (epilepsy), *Unmadam* (mental troubles) and destroying the negative energy created by *Yakshi*, *Pishacha*.

Thiruvathira of Dhanu month

- The *Thiruvathira* day of *Dhanu* month is considered special for Lord Shiva, here. In the morning, Lord Shiva accompanied by Devi Shri Parvati, in the happy form of ecstatic couple in eternal love, is believed to be present here, pouring their blessings, especially to women. Lord and Devi Shri Parvati glowing in beautifully divine form, shower their grace upon the women who come for *darshan* after *vratha* and dedication. This exceptional *darshan* famous as *Ardra Darshanam* and the pooja called *Aardra* are found to be fortunate for the devotees.

In olden days, *Thiruvathira* celebrations included, Vedic rituals (*vedavikruthi prayoga*) such as *Vaaram*, *Jata* and *Ratha* accompanied by *Annadhanam*. Nowadays, Namaskara is performed in the southern *mandapa*.

Lord Mahavishnu and Lord Shankaranarayana also were offered *Vaaram* on *Thiruvonam* star-day and *Uthram* star-day, respectively. In those days too Namaskar instead of *Vaara* is performed. Everything is being done to restart all the religious and Vedic ceremonies in a proper manner.

Somavara

- First *Somavara* or the first Monday of every Malayalam month is deemed lucky for offering prayer to Lord Shiva and Devi Shri Parvati. It is for acquiring happy marriage and joyous & prosperous family life for everyone, The *Somavara darshan* is typically done in the evening offering prayers to Lord Shiva with Devi Shri Parvati

Specific poojas with special *Nivedyam* are performed to gain long and happy marriage life. These poojas are done by Thanthri himself with chants of *Vedic suktas* and doing *Pushpanjali*. This invokes good fortune.

Pradosha

- Every *Pradosha* day is celebrated with special poojas and *Abhishekam* with tender coconut water for Lord Shiva and Devi Shri Parvati. During *Pradosha pooja*, Lord Shiva is imagined in the form of Lord Nataraja, dancing with Devi Shri Parvati.

Special days for Vishnu

- As in Guruvayur, on the day of Ashtami Rohini in the month of Singham, there are special pujas to Vishnu and special offerings of butter, milk and palpayasam.
- Wednesday in the month of Sagittarius is a very special day for Kuchela Day and Vishnu. This day is celebrated to commemorate the day when Lord Krishna sent his devotee and friend Sudama, a Kuchela Brahmin, with omnipotence.
- For every Ekadashi, Vishishya Vrischikamasa is white and Ekadashi is in Sagittarius.
- Apart from all this, the eternal Vishnu darshan during the month of Vaishaka is very excellent. Here it is known that Vishnu used to worship the month of Tiruvanna in earlier times.

Shankaranarayana Swamy

It is considered important for Sankara Narayan. The puja is very special with a special offering called Payasam, which is known for its efficacy. Worshipped by Advaitacharya Shankaracharya Swami and as Advaitamurti as Saiva Vaishnava Samyukta, one attains ultimate spiritual peace by worshipping this deity. Moreover, ignorance is eliminated. This leads to self-knowledge. Vedic worship is the main focus of this gnostic idol. Varam etc. and Annadana are very auspicious.

Other special days

Special Maha Ganapati Havan and Parthika Ganapati Pooja are held daily during the month of Karkitaka, Cancer

The 16th day of Karkidakam is celebrated as **Aushadsevadina**. On this day medicine (Koduveli) is given as Prasad to all devotees who come for healing. For this special Prasadam, medicinal ghee is enriched with various Vedic mantras and then offered at the feet of Lord Vishnu. A medicine prepared in this way is very powerful.