

= Annamalaiyar Temple =

Annamalaiyar Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to the deity Shiva , located at the base of Annamalai hills in the town of Thiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu , India . It is significant to the Hindu sect of Saivism as one of the temples associated with the five elements , the Pancha Bhoota Stalas , and specifically the element of fire , or Agni . Shiva is worshiped as Annamalaiyar or Arunachaleswarar , and is represented by the lingam , with his idol referred to as Agni lingam . His consort Parvati is depicted as Unnamulai Amman . The presiding deity is revered in the 7th century Tamil Saiva canonical work , the Tevaram , written by Tamil saint poets known as the nayanars and classified as Paadal Petra Sthalam . The 9th century Saiva saint poet Manikkavasagar composed the Tiruvempaavai here .

The temple complex covers 10 hectares , and is one of the largest in India . It houses four gateway towers known as gopurams . The tallest is the eastern tower , with 11 stories and a height of 66 metres (217 ft) , making it one of the tallest temple towers in India . The temple has numerous shrines , with those of Annamalaiyar and Unnamulai Amman being the most prominent . The temple complex houses many halls ; the most notable is the thousand @-@ pillared hall built during the Vijayanagar period .

The temple has six daily rituals at various times from 5 : 30 a.m. to 10 p.m. , and twelve yearly festivals on its calendar . The Karthigai Deepam festival is celebrated during the day of the full moon between November and December , and a huge beacon is lit atop the hill . It can be seen from miles around , and symbolizes the Shiva lingam of fire joining the sky . The event is witnessed by three million pilgrims . On the day preceding each full moon , pilgrims circumnavigate the temple base and the Annamalai hills in a worship called Girivalam , a practice carried out by one million pilgrims yearly .

The present masonry structure was built during the Chola dynasty in the 9th century , while later expansions are attributed to Vijayanagar rulers of the Sangama Dynasty (1336 ? 1485 CE) , the Saluva Dynasty and the Tuluva Dynasty (1491 ? 1570 CE) . The temple is maintained and administered by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu .

= = Legend = =

In Hindu mythology , Parvati , wife of Shiva , once closed the eyes of her husband playfully in a flower garden at their abode atop Mount Kailash . Although only a moment for the gods , all light was taken from the universe , and the earth , in turn , was submerged in darkness for years . Parvati performed penance along with other devotees of Shiva . Then her husband appeared as a column of fire at the top of Annamalai hills , returning light to the world . He then merged with Parvati to form Ardhanarishvara , the half @-@ female , half @-@ male form of Shiva . The Annamalai , or red mountain , lies behind the Annamalaiyar temple , and is associated with the temple of its namesake . The hill is sacred and considered a lingam , or iconic representation of Shiva , in itself .

Another legend is that once , while Vishnu and Brahma contested for superiority , Shiva appeared as a flame , and challenged them to find his source . Brahma took the form of a swan , and flew to the sky to see the top of the flame , while Vishnu became the boar Varaha , and sought its base . The scene is called lingodbhava , and is represented in the western wall at the sanctum of most Shiva temples . Neither Brahma nor Vishnu could find the source , and while Vishnu conceded his defeat , Brahma lied and said he had found the pinnacle . In punishment , Shiva ordained that Brahma would never have temples on earth in his worship .

= = History = =

The present masonry and towers date back to the 9th century CE , as seen from an inscription in the structure made by Chola kings who ruled at that time . Further inscriptions indicate that before the 9th century , Thiruvannamalai was under the Pallava Kings , who ruled from Kanchipuram . The

7th century Nayanar saints Sambandar and Appar wrote of the temple in their poetic work , Tevaram . Sekkizhar , the author of the Periyapuram wrote that both Appar and Sambandar worshiped Annamalaiyar in the temple . The Chola Kings ruled over the region for more than four centuries , from 850 CE to 1280 CE , and were temple patrons . The inscriptions from the Chola king record various gifts like land , sheep , cow and oil to the temple commemorating various victories of the dynasty . The Hoysala kings used Tiruvannamalai as their capital beginning in 1328 CE . There are 48 inscriptions from the Sangama Dynasty (1336 ? 1485 CE) , 2 inscriptions from Saluva Dynasty , and 55 inscriptions from Tuluva Dynasty (1491 ? 1570 CE) of the Vijayanagara Empire , reflecting gifts to the temple from their rulers . There are also inscriptions from the rule of Krishnadeva Raya (1509 ? 1529 CE) , the most powerful Vijayanagara king , indicating further patronage . Most of the Vijayanagara inscriptions were written in Tamil , with some in Kannada and Sanskrit . The inscriptions in temple from the Vijayanagara kings indicate emphasis on administrative matters and local concerns , which contrasts the inscriptions of the same rulers in other temples like Tirupathi . The majority of the gift related inscriptions are for land endowments , followed by goods , cash endowments , cows and oil for lighting lamps . The town of Tiruvannamalai was at a strategic crossroads during the Vijayanagara Empire , connecting sacred centers of pilgrimage and military routes . There are inscriptions that show the area as an urban center before the precolonial period , with the city developing around the temple , similar to the Nayak ruled cities like Madurai .

During the 17th century CE , the temple along with the Tiruvannamalai town came under the dominion of the Nawab of the Carnatic . As the Mughal empire came to an end , the Nawab lost control of the town , with confusion and chaos ensuing after 1753 . Subsequently , there were periods of both Hindu and Muslim stewardship of the temple , with Muraru Raya , Krishna Raya , Mrithis Ali Khan , and Burkat Ullakhan besieging the temple in succession . As European incursions progressed , Tiruvannamalai was attacked by French Soupries , Sambrinet , and the English Captain Stephen Smith . While some were repelled , others were victorious . The French occupied the town in 1757 , and the temple along with the town came under control of the British in 1760 . In 1790 CE , Tiruvannamalai town was captured by Tippu Sultan , who ruled from 1750 ? 99 CE . During the first half of the 19th century , the town along with the temple came under British rule . From 1951 , under the provision of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act , the temple has been maintained by the Hindu Religious and Endowment Board (HR & CE) of the Government of Tamil Nadu . In 2002 , the Archaeological Survey of India declared the temple a national heritage monument and took over its stewardship . Widespread protests and litigation with the Supreme Court of India , however , led the Archaeological Survey to cede the temple back to the Hindu Religious and Endowment Board .

= = Architecture = =

= = = Complex and towers = = =

The temple is situated at the bottom of the Annamalai hills , and faces east , lying over 25 acres . The walls on the east and west measure 700 ft (210 m) , the south 1 @, @ 479 ft (451 m) , and the north 1 @, @ 590 ft (480 m) . It has four gateway towers , the gopuram , on its four sides . The eastern tower , the Rajagopuram , is the tallest in the temple . The base of the Rajagopuram is made of granite , measuring 135 ft (41 m) by 98 ft (30 m) . It was begun by king Krishnadevaraya (1509 ? 29 CE) of the Vijayanagara dynasty , and completed by Sevappa Nayaka (1532 ? 80 CE) . The inscriptions indicate that the tower was built at the behest of Sivanesa and his brother Lokanatha in 1572 CE . The south tower is called Thirumanjangopuram , and the west , Pei Gopuram . Ammani Ammal , a Sanyasini , built the north tower which carries her namesake . Raghunathabhyudayam and Sangitha Sudha , both Nayak scriptures , also describe the towers . The Tanjavuri Andhra Raja Charitamu mentions that Krishnadevaraya built the tower and the outer precincts of the temple . The temple has a total of five precincts , each of which holds a huge Nandi , the sacred bull of Shiva . Towers include the Vallala Maharaja Gopuram and Kili Gopuram , or

Parrot Tower .

= = = Shrines = = =

The main shrine of Annamalaiyar faces east , housing images of Nandi and Surya , and is the oldest structure in the temple . Behind the walls of the sanctum , there is an image of Venugopalaswamy , an incarnation of Vishnu . Around the sanctum , there are images of Somaskandar , Durga , Chandekeswarar , Gajalakshmi , Arumugaswami , Dakshinamoorthy , Swarnabairavar , Nataraja , and Lingodbhavar ? the last an image of Shiva emanating from lingam . The Palliyarai , the divine room for resting deities , is located at the first precinct around the sanctum . The shrine of his consort , Unnamulai Amman , lies in the second precinct , with Amman depicted in a standing posture . Sambantha Vinayagar , the elephant god shrine , is located to the north of the flagstaff and the Bali peeta , or platform for sacrifice . To the south of the thousand @-@ pillared hall , there is a small shrine for Subramaya and a large tank . Pathala Lingam , the underground lingam , is the place where Ramana Maharshi (1879 ? 1950 CE) is believed to have performed his penance . The shrine of Sivagangai Vinayagar is present in the northern bank of the Sivanganga tank .

= = = Halls = = =

There is a sixteen pillared Deepa Darshana Mandapam , or hall of light , in the third precinct . The temple tree , Magizha , is considered sacred and medicinal , and childless couples tie small cradles to its branches in obeisance . Vedas write that the mast of the temple separated the earth and the sky during creation of the universe . The Kalyana Mandapam , the marriage hall , is in the south @-@ west of the precinct , and is built in Vijayanagara style . A stone trident is present in the outer shrine of the temple in open air , and has protective railings like a sacred tree . The Vasantha Mandapam , meaning the Hall of spring , is the third precinct , and contains the temple office and Kalahateeswarar shrine . The fourth precinct has an image of Nandi , Brahma Theertham , the temple tank , the Yanai Thirai Konda Vinayaga shrine , and a hall with a six @-@ foot @-@ tall statue of Nandi , erected by Vallala Maharaja .

Inside the doorway of the first tower and the fifth precinct , there is a thousand @-@ pillared hall built during the late Vijayanagara period . Krishnadevaraya constructed the hall and dug the tank opposite to it . The pillars in the hall are carved with images of yali , a mythological beast with body of lion and head of an elephant , a symbol of Nayak power . The Arunagirinathar Mandapam is located to the right of the Kalayana Linga Sundara Eswara Mandapam , and the Gopurathilayanar shrine is to the left of a broad flight of stone stairs that lead up to the Vallala Gopuram .

= = Worship and festivals = =

The temple priests perform the pooja (rituals) during festivals and on a daily basis . Like other Shiva temples of Tamil Nadu , the priests belong to the Shaivaite community , a Brahmin sub @-@ caste . The temple rituals are performed six times a day ; Ushathkalam at 5 : 30 a.m. , Kalasanthi at 8 : 00 a.m. , Uchikalam at 10 : 00 a.m. , Sayarakshai at 6 : 00 p.m. , Irandamkalam at 8 : 00 p.m. and Ardha Jamam at 10 : 00 p.m. Each ritual comprises four steps : abhisheka (sacred bath) , alangaram (decoration) , neivethanam (food offering) and deepa aradanai (waving of lamps) for both Annamalaiyar and Unnamulai Amman . The worship is held amidst music with nagaswaram (pipe instrument) and tavil (percussion instrument) , religious instructions in the Vedas read by priests and prostration by worshippers in front of the temple mast . There are weekly rituals like somavaram and sukravaram , fortnightly rituals like pradosham and monthly festivals like amavasai (new moon day) , kiruthigai , pournami (full moon day) and sathurthi .

The temple celebrates dozens of festivals throughout the year . Four prime festivals , the Brahmotsavam , are celebrated yearly . The most important of these lasts ten days during the Tamil month of Karthikai , between November and December , concluding with the celebration of Karthikai

Deepam . A huge lamp is lit in a cauldron , containing three tons of ghee , at the top of the Annamalai hills during the Deepam . To mark the occasion , the festival deity of Annamalaiyar circumambulates the mountain . Inscriptions indicate that the festival was celebrated as early as the Chola period (from 850 CE to 1280 CE) and was expanded to ten days in the twentieth century .

Every full moon , tens of thousands of pilgrims worship Annamalaiyar by circumambulating the Arunachala hill barefoot . The circumambulation covers a distance of 14 kilometres (8 @ . @ 7 mi) , and is referred as Girivalam . According to Hindu legend , the walk removes sins , fulfils desires and helps achieve freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth . Offerings are made in a string of tanks , shrines , pillared meditation halls , springs and caves around the hill . The circumambulation continues during the rest of the month . On the day of yearly Chitra Pournami , the full moon of the Tamil calendar , hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come from across the world to worship Annamalaiyar . Five temple cars , called ther , with wooden carvings , are used for the procession .

Tiruvoodal is another festival celebrated during the first week of the Tamil month Thai at mid @ - @ January of every year . On the morning of Maatu Pongal , between January 15 and 16 , Nandi is decorated with garlands made of fruits , vegetables and sweets . The festival deities of Annamalaiyar and Unnamamulai Amman are taken out of the temple to Tiruoodal street to enact the oodal (or love tiff) between the two in the evening .

= = Religious significance = =

The Annamalaiyar temple is one of the Pancha Bhoota Stalams , or five Shiva temples , with each a manifestation of a natural element : land , water , air , sky or fire . In Annamalaiyar temple , Shiva is said to have manifested himself as a massive column of fire , whose crown and feet could not be found by the Hindu gods , Brahma and Vishnu . The main lingam in the shrine is referred as Agni Lingam , and represents duty , virtue , self @ - @ sacrifice and liberation through ascetic life at the end of the Agni kalpa .

Aathara Stala are Shiva temples which are considered to be personifications of the Tantric chakras of human anatomy . The Annamalaiyar temple is called the Manipooraga stalam , and is associated with the Manipooraga chakra . Manipooraga is the chakra of spiritual ignorance , thirst , jealousy , treachery , shame , fear , disgust , delusion , foolishness and sadness .

= = Saints and literary mention = =

Tirugnana Sambandar , a 7th @ - @ century Tamil Saivite poet , venerated Annamalaiyar and Unnamulai Amman in ten verses in Tevaram , compiled as the First Tirumurai . Appar , a contemporary of Sambandar , also venerated Annamalaiyar in 10 verses in Tevaram , compiled as the Fifth Tirumurai . As the temple is revered in Tevaram , it is classified as Paadal Petra Sthalam , one of the 276 temples that find mention in the Saiva canon .

Manickavasagar , a 9th @ - @ century Tamil saint and poet , revered Annamalaiyar in his writing , describing the deity as " AnnAmalai " . He composed the Thiruvempavai in the Tamil month of Margazhi at the temple . Arunagirinathar was a 15th @ - @ century Tamil poet born in Tiruvannamalai . He spent his early years as a rioter and seducer of women . After ruining his health , he tried to commit suicide by throwing himself from the northern tower , but was saved by the grace of god Murugan . He became a staunch devotee and composed Tamil hymns glorifying Murugan , the most notable being Thirupugazh .

The western world learnt of Tiruvannamalai during the mid 20th century , through the work of Ramana Maharishi (1879 ? 1950 CE) . The cave where Ramana meditated is on the lower slopes of the Annamalai hills , with the ashram further down at the foothills . The basement of the raised hall inside the temple has the Patala Lingam , where Ramana attained supreme awareness while ants devoured his flesh . The place is also called a Mukthi Sthalam , meaning place of salvation , and saints like Seshadri Swamikal , Gugai Namachivayar and Yogi Ramsuratkumar have been associated with the temple .