

**GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS**

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# Temples around Ramanathapuram

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Our country abounds in temples and holy shrines. India has been the cradle of spirituality for millennia, long before the people in other regions of the world thought about such matters as religion, ethics or dharma. The great epics Ramayana and Mahabharatha are filled with details of holy places situated throughout the length and breadth of India. Because Hinduism is pantheistic, there was not only religious tolerance but the tenets of other religions were welcome. The history of Ramanathapuram area is traceable to the Ramayana period. The ruler of this area was called Sethupathi, meaning the lord of the bridge or pass appointed to give protection to the pilgrims passing through here. The ruler accommodated different religions within his kingdom and instituted grants of land, gold and other amenities to shrines of other religions also. Thus grant had been made for the 'dharga' of Abil-kabil (Abd and Cain, sons of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman of genesis) at Rameswaram; the church at the place of martyrdom of Fr. de Britto at Oriyur; for the 'dharga' of Sulthan Syed Ibrahim Vali at Ervadi and for several other places of worship in the district.

Above all, the district gets the most important place in the Hindu pilgrimage route of the country. The rulers of Ramanathapuram have donated 49 villages for the maintenance of choultries, mutts etc. at Kasi (Varanasi). The pilgrimage to Kasi traditionally commences or ends at Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram district. Therefore the Rameswaram Temple, which is one of the 12 jyothilinga temples in the country, is most revered by Hindu pilgrims, next in importance only to Kasi. The rulers of this district were called the protectors of the pilgrims and provided facilities to the pilgrims for travel

and stay converging to this place from all parts of the country and abroad. Information about the Rameswaram Temple and some of the easily accessible but important temples of this region are given here.

## Rameswaram Temple

According to legend, the idol of Sivalinga in the Temple was installed and consecrated by Sri Rama after the battle in Sri Lanka in which Ravana and his relations were conquered. The idol was made of sand by His consort, Sita. Therefore the linka is known as Ramanathaswami. Pilgrims visiting Kasi and taking bath in the Ganges River there complete their pilgrimage by taking Ganges water from there and doing abhishekam to Sri Ramanathaswami. Hindus consider it the duty to visit Kasi and Rameswaram atleast once in their life time.

The temple is another symbol of the hoary South Indian temple architecture. The immensity of its size is awe-inspiring, especially considering the fact that the nearest stone quarry is away at about 150 km from here. The dimensions of the Temple are 865 ft east-west and 657 ft north-south. There are two big ornamented towers on the eastern and western entrance of the Temple. The outer corridors are famous as the longest ones in the world measuring 640 ft east-west and 400 ft north south. The outer prakara is made up of 1200 sandstone pillars of 30 ft height beautifully sculpted on the Dravidian architecture style.

Pilgrims usually take bath in the sea and also in the 21 wells (theerthams) situated around the Temple. Taking bath in the sea and the 21 wells is believed to rid the bather of disease and expiate sins.

The place called Dhanushkodi is 20 km away from Rameswaram where the waters of Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay join together. According to legend, the Adhi Sethu, the bridge to Sri Lanka constructed by Sri Rama was broken here by the bow of Sri Rama at the end of the war. This place is considered very holy and a bath in the sea at this place is considered a must.

There is a Devi Temple known as Nambunayaki Amman Temple at a distance of 3 km from Rameswaram. The theertham near the temple is called Sarvaroga Nivarani and is believed to cure chronic diseases. On the way to Dhanushkodi, there is the Sri Kothanda Ramaswami Temple where Vibheeshana did saranagathi (surrender) to God. These two temples are worthy of a visit as part of the pilgrimage.

Rameswaram is well connected by road and rail to all parts of the country. There are several lodging places, choultries, guest cottages near the Rameswaram Temple. A visit to Rameswaram and the Temple would certainly enhance good health and mental peace.

### **Uppoor Temple**

Uppoor is situated at a distance of 30 km north of Ramanathapuram. Legend has it that Sri Rama, during his journey towards Sri Lanka in search of Sita, visited this place and performed pooja to Lord Ganesh in the Temple here, to obviate any hurdles in the journey and for the success of the mission. The temple here is small and has the shrine of Lord Ganesh who is believed to remove the hurdles in the endeavours of the devotees visiting this Temple.

### **Navapashanam**

In the course of his journey towards Sri Lanka, Sri Rama is said to have stopped at the place called Devipattinam. Here he installed the idols of Navagrahas in the form of nine stone pillars in the sea and consecrated them. Because the idols are in the form of stone pillars, this place

is known as Navapashanam (meaning nine stones). All pilgrims going to Rameswaram visit this place and offer prayers to the Navagrahas. Devotees who believe in astrology, converge here on all days throughout the year to do poojas and havens to mitigate the malefic effects in their horoscopes.

There is a Temple for the Devi Lokanayaki Amma in this place. The Devi is considered Swayambu, giving the name Devipattanam to this place. The Devi has devotees throughout the country who make it their duty to visit the Temple atleast once a year.

An old Temple of Sri Jagannatha on the seashore at Devipattinam along with the Chakra Theertham has been rebuilt recently. The Sri Thilakeswara Swami Temple in the middle of the village is also very old. The Lord here is believed to grant all boons to the devotees, especially progeny to childless couples.

### **Thiruppullani Temple**

The next point of visit to pilgrims to Rameswaram is the Thiruppullani Temple. Thiruppullani is situated at about 8 km near Ramanathapuram. The bridge to Sri Lanka, built by Sri Rama and his army originates here and it could be seen in the sea at about a kilometer from the shore submerged in the waters. It is said Lord Sri Rama came here and waited for the sea to abate so that the bridge could be formed. As the sea did not abate, Sri Rama was lying in contemplation in Khus (dharbha) grass. Therefore this place is known as Dharbhasayanam. The 'king of the oceans' came in front of the Lord and offered all facilities for the construction of the bridge. The presiding deity of this Temple is Adhi Jagannatha, who was propitiated by Lord Rama himself.

All pilgrims going to Rameswaram make it a point to visit this Temple and offer prayers. There is a huge Aswatha tree in this Temple, which is considered very holy. It is believed that the bark of the tree, taken as a medicine, would cure infertility and other ailments.

This Temple is at a distance of 10 km from Ramanathapuram. This Temple is known as Adhi Chidambaram, because, it is believed that Lord Shiva performed His cosmic dance first here and then only at the Chidambaram Temple. This Temple is said to be nearly 3000 years old. There is a sabari tree in the Temple which is also considered as old as the Temple. Lord Shiva gave darshan here to saint Manickavachakar in the form of a Sahasta Lingam.

The form of Nataraja performing the cosmic dance is considered to embody creation, protection and salvation to the devotees. The main deity in this Temple is the Nataraja made of precious Maragatha stone. The idol is about 5' in height, made of a single Maragatha stone embodying Devi and the ornamental halo (Thiruvasi) around the idol and is said to be most valuable. The idol is kept covered with sandalwood paste throughout the year; the paste is removed only once on the Arudhra Darshanam day (in the month of January) and the idol could be seen without sandalwood paste covering only on this day. Abhishekam is performed on this day to the idol and then sandalwood paste is applied again on the same day. The festival of Arudhra Darshanam attracts huge crowd of devotees to this temple.

### **Nainarkoil Temple**

Nainarkoil lies about 30 km west of Ramanathapuram. The Temple here is several centuries old and is hallowed by tradition. It is said that one of the generals in the army of Malik Kafur visited Rameswaram Temple with his dumb daughter and prayed there for a cure of his daughter. Lord Ramanathaswamy appeared in his dream and ordered him to proceed to Nainarkoil Temple with his daughter. On offering prayer at that Temple, the daughter was cured of her dumbness and shouted 'en-aiyane' (my lord). So the deity here was known by the name Nainar. The Shiva idol in this Temple is facing west which is his Vamadeva form and

throughout the year and offer all kinds of agriculture produce with the faith that this brings prosperity to them for the entire year. Those who visit this Temple are said to be relieved of Rahu dosham.

### **Sri Rajeswari Temple**

Sri Rajeswari is the family deity of the Ramanathapuram kings. This Temple is situated inside the Ramanathapuram Palace. The idol which is of 2 ft height is made of gold, has been installed and consecrated some 400 years back. A Mahameru is installed in front of the deity and all poojas are performed to this Mahameru. The rulers of Ramanathapuram have composed several songs on the Goddess out of their utmost devotion.

### **Pamban Swami Temple**

This Temple is situated at Pirappanvalasai about 20 km east of Ramanathapuram on the Rameswaram Road. Pamban Swami was a saint devotee of Lord Muruga. He was born near this place in the year 1850 and was the ardent devotee of Lord Muruga. As he wanted to perform penance to have dhasan of Lord Muruga he got a chamber of 6 cft of dimension constructed and entered the chamber got it closed and plastered and remained inside offering penance for nearly 40 days. At the end of the penance the lord appeared before him and ordered him to visit his holy shrines in the country. He did so composing 6666 songs in praise of god and performing many miracles during the so journ. After getting repeated darshan of God, he attained Samadhi at Chennai at the age of 83. The place where he first did penance is Pirappanvalasai where the idol of Mayuranathaswami (Subramanya) was installed in the year 1950 by the disciple of the saint. The temple is located at a serene spot, devotees go to the temple by walk from far off places and stay in the temple for few hours to get peace of mind.

## Vellai Pillaiyar Temple

The Pamban Bridge was constructed across the Pamban Channel in the year 1990 providing road link from the Mainland or Rameswaram Island. But most of the travellers using the bridge may not notice the small temple of lord Ganesh situated at the western end of the bridge. The temple is more than 400 years old having been installed there by the Ramanathapuram ruler. The deity is said to protect all the travellers proceeding on pilgrimage to Rameswaram and to fulfil the desires of the devotees visiting the temple.

## Sri Thayumanaswami Temple

This Temple is situated in Ramanatha-

puram itself and is constructed at the place of samadhi of saint Thayumanavar, a jivan-muktha hailing from Tiruchirapalli (Samadhi in the year 1659 AD) The temple and surrounding tapovanam give peace and succour to the devotees visiting it and is a good place for doing sadhana.

There are many temples in and around Ramanathapuram which are hallowed by tradition and granting relief from sufferings to the believers. The existence of these temples in this arid region of the country and drawing devotees from all parts of the country is proof of the cultural and spiritual greatness of the rulers and the ruled.