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## RATHNA SABHA OF LORD NATARAJA IN THIRUVALANGADU, TAMIL NADU

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**Abstract:** Thiruvallangadu is one of the thirty eight Saivite sthalams in Tamil Nadu. It is also called as Vadavanam and Vata Aranyam which is at a distance of sixty four kilometres from Chennai in the Chennai-Tiruvallore - Arakkonam road, or by train but the alighting point is about five kilometers from the village passenger trains and suburban trains half at this station bearing the name of the village'. The name 'Thiruvallangadu' might perhaps be derived from the words 'Alam' and 'Kadu' former in Tamil means 'Banyan tree' while the latter word refers to 'forest' and as it was customary to affix Thiru especially to a religious centre, 'Thiru' was affixed to Thiruvallangadu<sup>2</sup>. This place was therefore, a forest of banyan trees.

**Keyword:** Thiruvallangadu , passenger trains , suburban trains , inadvertently.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The local tradition has it that there was a great forest of banyan trees and Goddess Kali, who made it her abode was very fierce and Lord Shiva himself had to come to quell her ferocity. A sage, Sunanda had experienced a great desire to see the Lord Shiva dance and prayed that he might be vouchsafed that vision. Lord Shiva directed him to this forest of banyan trees to await it. He accordingly repaired to that place and engaged himself in penance, awaiting the grace of the Lord Shiva to present himself as the great universal dance. So completely lost was he in trance that he was covered up by anthills and formations of earth and above his head there was a luscious growth of reeds, almost looking like matted hair sprouting up. On an occasion, the snake King Karkotaka, adorning Lord Shiva as bracelet, inadvertently spurted poison on Shiva's hand<sup>3</sup>. This incensed the Lord Shiva who cursed him to be born on earth and await his pleasure till he presented himself at Thiruvallangadu to give a vision of his divine dance to Sage Sunanda.

Harassed by the wicked demons Nimba and Sumbha celestials and mortals, sages and even animals and birds appealed to Devi, who in her infinite graces created from the dark ends of her eyelashes, a terrific power in the form of Goddess Kali, who was ordered by her to destroy them. A host of companions, as frightful as Goddess Kali herself, sprang forth to accompany Goddess Kali soon the demons were killed. But Goddess Kali herself became a terror in that forest, which she made her home, forbidding the entry of any into her territory, Karkotaka who had descended on earth as a sage and was performing penance along with Sage Sunanda, in that very forest had no happy time there<sup>4</sup>.

At the intercession of Sage Narada, Lord Shiva agreed to quell the fury of Goddess Kali and came down from Kailasa to Thiruvallangadu, the abode of Goddess Kali. It was now time that he gave the vision of his divine dance to the long threatened him with dire consequences, if he did not

quit her area in the forest, but later came to an understanding with him that he could fight and establish his right. It was mutually decided that the battle of dance, a contest dear to both would be the most appropriate Goddess Kali followed Lord Shiva who proceeded ahead to choose the best place for arranging the stage for dance, which he pointed out at the spot where now stands the temple at Thiruvallangadu<sup>5</sup>. As dance required suitable orchestral music and Goddess Kali demanded it.

Lord Shiva provided it in a trice as at his merest wish, there were all the celestials around him, including Brahma, Vishnu, Indra, Yama, Chandra, Kubera, Agni, Vayu and other. The Shivaganas of Lord Shiva, the eleven Rudras, the twelve Adityas and others were these Nandikesvara, Bhringi, Banasura, Kumbhodara, were also among the spectator. Lord Shiva graciously called up the sages Karkotaka and Sunanda, of whom the latter was named by him Munjikesa, on account of the reeds that grew over the anthill on him<sup>6</sup>. With celestial musical accompaniments commenced the safer aspect of dance, tasya, in which Goddess Kali really excelled and she almost claimed victory as her movements were as graceful as Lord Shiva. In his anxiety, not to spill Ganga or scatter the moon, stars and flowers on his jatas, Lord Shiva's movements of the head were rather mild, which gave Goddess Kali an opportunity to claim victory. But now Lord Shiva commenced the tandava dance, in this particular case what is known and specially associated with Thiruvallangadu, the Chanda Tandava, terrific tandava dance<sup>7</sup>.

The time beat of Brahma and the drum beat of Vishnu and Nandi, the vocal and instrumental music, including the Vina and flute, by various celestials, Kinnaris, Naginis, etc., rent the sky. Lord Shiva shot up one of his legs and lifted up a hand to reach it. In his eight hands, he held the axe, the snake, the parrot, the drum, the trident, the garland of bells, the skull cap. One of the hands kept in the attitude of

protection, and the other in dandahasta attitude. The violent movement of his hands, spread all around, hit and scattered the stars in the sky, the eight snakes and the equal number of elephants that eternally lift up the universe, the seven oceans and the seven sacred mountains almost shrieked, rocked and surged in fright at the terrific, pace of the Chanda Tandava of Lord Shiva<sup>8</sup>. At the request of the gods, Devi herself had to appeal to Lord Shiva to lessen the pace of his dance in order to avert any calamity to the universe, like its getting reduced to the five elements by the ferocity of his dance movements graciously so and blessed the rishis, particularly Munjikesa and Karkotaka. Out of modesty Goddess Kali could not lift up her leg link Lord Shiva and now that she was humbled the Lord Shiva graciously announced that Goddess Kali was second to none except himself in dance and gave her a very honourable place, close to him, as the next greatest dancer after him<sup>9</sup>.

It is said that this place was one of the important sthalas, where Lord Shiva (Nataraja here) displayed the Urdhava Tandava had a dance competition with the Goddess Kali and defeated her in it. This temple was consecrated for Lord Shiva Vata Aranyeswarar with his consort Vandarkuz hali Amman. In addition to the Brahmotsavam, all other festivals are also celebrated. These festivals are attended by thousands of devotees from all the surrounding villages and from Chennai city as well. On Pradosham days, several devotees from all the surrounding villages and from Chennai city as well worship the Nandhi here<sup>10</sup>.

A large size beautiful Nataraja idol in the form Urdhava Tandava, as already mentioned, has been erected here along with a Kali idol. The most interesting feature of the temple is the rectangular shaped room, always closed, behind the sanctum which contains the Nataraja idol. It is firmly believed that the 'Chidambara Rahasyam' i.e., the Holy secret is preserved here. Nobody dares open this room<sup>11</sup>. It is informed that a few of those who tried to find out what is inside, out of curiosity, met with fateful consequences. For the maintenance of the temple, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Pallavas, the Vijayanagar and the Saluva kings donated properties<sup>12</sup>.

Several inscriptions are found on the walls of temple. The temple has some copper plates and sasanams. But for the inscriptions of the place and the famous Thiruvallangadu copper plates which are now preserved in the Government museum, Chennai, a clear and cogent history of the Chola dynasty could not have been possible at all<sup>13</sup>. The Nayanmars Thirugnanasambandar, Thirunavuk karasar, Sundarar and Manickavasagar, Arunagirinathar and Karaikkal Ammaiyar all made hymns on this place. Karaikkal Ammaiyar attained moksham at the feet of the Lord here<sup>14</sup>.

It is a place rich with ancient legends and historical associations. Karaikkal Ammaiyar, who was one of the 63 Nayanmars, assumed the form of a demon went on a pilgrimage as far as Kailasa and rolled back here all the way on her head and finally took refuge under the feet of the Lord of Dance here. The chief deity of this temple is called Devar Singapperumal or Alangattu Adigal<sup>15</sup>. The place is adorned with the Rathna Sabha and it was reputedly here that Lord

Shiva performed the dance of Urdhava Tandava and subdued Goddess Kali.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar's Thiruvallankattu Tiruppatikankal have won wide fame and approbation. Thiruvallangadu in the Tondai Nadu is the seat of a Lord Shiva shrine of repute. The three Tevaram hymnists – Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar had visited this holy place and sung in praise of the Lord Shiva. Karaikkal Ammaiyar has dealt with Urdhava Tandavam in several places and her songs help us to have some idea of this mode of dance.. Sacred Alankadu is the hollowed spot, where Lord Shiva dances, while Kalal and Cilambu make jingling sounds and the raised leg twists where ransacking the universe and the dance itself spits fire<sup>16</sup>.

In movement, there is life and in silence there is death. Is there anything in the universe which does not react while the Lord Shiva dance? Which does not move when the Lord Shiva moves? Tirumular has said appropriately "With the All-knower dancing, the many worlds tremble and shake". The entire universe is on the move due to the great speed with which the Lord Shiva dances. With jungle and ocean, heaven and earth, incessantly moving in space thanks to the Lord Shiva's dance it is the essence for the existence of the world<sup>17</sup>. There is hardly any need to emphasise that but for elliptic movement, only darkness will prevail.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar was deeply engrossed in the dance of Lord Shiva and lost herself completely in painting a vivid picture of the stage where the Lord Shiva dances. The stage here 'being the cremation ground and its environments and the ghosts keeping company with the great Lord. We are able to get an idea of the saints deep attachment to the dance of the Lord Shiva, without which the universe cannot function, from not only the Thiruvallankattu Mutta Tiruppatikankal, which describe in detail the Lord Shiva dance as viewed by a commentator-cum-participant but also from the Irattaimanimalai and Arputattiruvantati<sup>18</sup>. The content and nature of the latter works of Karaikkal Ammaiyar reflect her nature mind and depth of knowledge in expanding the mystic and cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. Later day iconographers should have drawn profusely from and profited by these verses of Karaikkal Ammaiyar to explain the motif of the dance of the Lord Shivas.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar's vision and assessment of the Lord Shiva's dance reflects her devotion and attachment to the Lord Shiva as the Dancer. In the cremation ground on the outskirts of Thiruvallankadu, Lord Shiva dances, the Kalal and the anklets on his legs producing a musical and jingling sound. While Lord Shiva dances all the worlds keep symphony with him, whirling, rotating and evolving. The eight directions make up his clothes. His three eyes are the sun, the moon and the fire. His matted and dense locks of hair are golden in colour and bright. The venue of the dance is the burning ground of the dead. From these dances have evolved the icons of the dancing Lord Shiva or the King of Dance or Lord Nataraja<sup>19</sup>.

The pride of place, not only amongst the Nataraja bronzes of the Madras museum, but also many others adoring the museums of the world and in worship in the temples of the Tamil country, goes to the Thiruvallangadu Nataraja. Rightly, it is so. Connoisseurs of art all over the

world are in the know of it. It is just over half life size. The almost spider like lithnesses and attenuation of the limbs gives it a very gay and graceful appearance, by no means so apparent in the other example (Velankanni) which is somewhat heavy by comparison. The Thiruvalangadu Nataraja is a perfect piece of rhythm. The Lord Shiva who is beauty incarnate, Adum Alakan as Karaikkal Ammaiyyar would describe, stands on an oval base. In the planted foot where the souls get respite and the lifted foot bestowing grace can be seen the cilampu anklet<sup>20</sup>. The finding of the research has reveal that Rathna Sabha at Thiruvalangadu is one among the famous Five Divine Sabhas of Lord Nataraja in Tamil Nadu.

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