



The twelve jyotirlinga are Somnath in Gujarat, Mallikarjuna at Srisailam in Andra Pradesh, Mahakaleswar at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh, Kedarnath in Himalayas, Bhimashankar in Maharashtra, Viswanath at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Triambakeswar in Maharashtra, Vaidyanath at Deogarh in Jharkand, Nageswar at Dwarka in Gujarat, Rameshwar at Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu and Grishneshwar at Aurangabad in Maharashtra.



## SRISAILAM

*This article is a researched article and borrows heavily from printed and electronic encyclopedias as well as material provided by our panel of research scholars, astrologers, academics and pundits.*

### Introduction

Srisailam is a holy town situated on the banks of River Krishna, in Nallamala Hills of Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh and is considered to be as ancient as the Lord Shiva temple of Kashi Vishvishvanath in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Among the celebrated pilgrims who have worshipped here are Lord Rama and Sita in Tretayuga, the Pandavas in the Dwarparayuga, and Adi Shankaracharya in Kaliyuga. The Nayanars Sambandhar, Appar and Sundharar have sung onepadhikam each on the Lord of Srisailam. (See box The Nayanars for more information about the Nayanars)

Srisailam is the ancient abode of Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy and Goddess

“इतिहासैकैकारात्तद्विज्ञेत्वा, पुनर्जन्मानविध्यते”

“There will be no rebirth after one sees the Srisaila Sikharam”

Brahmarambha, Shiva and Parvati respectively. Srisailam (in Rayalseema), along with Draksharamam (in coastal Andhra) and Kaleswaram (in Telengana) gave the name TrilingaDesam to ancient Andhra Pradesh. Trilinga is said to be the origin of the word Telegu.

The presiding deities of this kshetram Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy is one of the twelve Jyothirlingas and Goddess Bhramaramba Devi is one of the eighteen Mahasakthis and both of them are swayambhu (self-manifested.) The unique feature of this kshetram is the combination of Jyothirlingam and Mahasakthi in one campus, which is very rare and only one of its kind. The antiquity and origin of God Mallikarjuna Swamy and Goddess Bhramaramba Devi is not known but there is a common belief in vogue that this holy kshetram exists from times immemorial.

(For meaning of Theertham and Kshethram see box)

Srisailam is believed to be as important as Varanasi, for it is only at each of these two great Saivaite shrines that one can see the Jyotirlingam and the Mahapeetham of the Devi together at one place.

### Pilgrims and Worship

The worship at Mallikarjuna Linga is of the most cosmopolitan type. In some places, women are forbidden to worship in Shiva shrines. At some other places, no one except the priests can enter the 'garbhagriha' Here the deity is accessible to each and every devotee and anybody can go into the sanctum sanctorum of Mallikarjuna, touch him and perform Abhishekam and Archana himself to recitation of Mantras by Archakas without caste or creed or religion.



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One peculiar custom in this temple is that every pilgrim should mildly strike his head against the lingam because the presiding deity is considered to be deaf. The pilgrims have to announce their presence at the shrine in this manner, which is locally called "Cheviti Mallaya". Many other record their presence at the "Sakshi Ganpati" temple where there is a black idol of Lord Ganapati. This idol is assumed as the witness (Sakshi) Ganapati for the visit of the travelers to this place.

Some of the pilgrims from Karnataka visiting Srisailam consider Brahmarambha as their daughter and Mallikarjun as their son-in-law.

**Srisailam benefits from a dramatic site overlooking the deep gorge of the Krishna river, some 200 meters below, known locally as "Patal Ganga". Without a dip in its waters a pilgrim's trip to Srisailam is considered incomplete. In the early days it was an arduous task of step descent and ascent to reach "Patal Ganga" and come back. However, the trip has now been made easy by an excellent motorable road that goes up to the bathing ghats .**



Gold Plated Shikhara Of Srisailam

#### The Temple

Though Mallikarjuna is known to have been worshiped since time immemorial, the present monument was built during the 14th -15th century. Early inscriptions speak of how rulers of different dynasties like the Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Kakatiyas and Vijayanagar rulers were ardent devotees of Lord Mallikarjuna and enriched the shrine in terms of construction and other gifts.

The original structure of the temple was built in the 12th century by the Western Chalukyas of Kalyani. The temple has enjoyed the especial patronage of the emperors of Vijayanagara, several of whom personally visited the site. The outer walls which are nearly six feet wide and twenty feet tall and which make the temple resemble a fort, were constructed in 1412, during the Vijayanagara period. Sri Krishnadevaraya visited the shrine in 1516

on his way back to Hampi from his triumphant wars with the Gajapatis of Kalinga (Orissa). The Rajagopuram in the east of the temple was built by him.

In later years, Maratha ruler Chatrapati Shivaji is said to have visited Srisailam in 1667 AD known to have constructed an 82-foot tall gopuram in the northern end of Srisailam temple, popularly known as Shivaji Gopuram. He also kept a permanent garrison on the site for its protection and made all the necessary arrangements for the maintenance of the temple. (The Shivaji Gopuram collapsed on 4th October this year due to heavy rain. It will now be re-built)

The Srisailam temple looks like a large fort and is known for its wealth of sculptures. There are rows of sculptures on the walls, giving one the impression of a gallery. Then



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there are a large number of bass reliefs, which are a symbolic representation of the various legends. A sculpture of sage Bringi standing on three legs is noteworthy. The sage was cursed by Goddess Parvathi to become a skeleton because he was worshipping only Shiva. The Lord pacified Parvathi and gave the sage one more leg to stand.

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The Temple, surrounded by a fort wall on all sides with four gopurams occupiesa area of 2,79,300 Sq.ft and isone of the largest holy shrines in Andhra Pradesh.

### Shakti

Srisailam is not only a great center of Saivism but also Shaktism. Shakti is worshipped at Srisailam in the form of Brahmarambha. When Lord Bhrahma was



Steps leading down to Patalganga

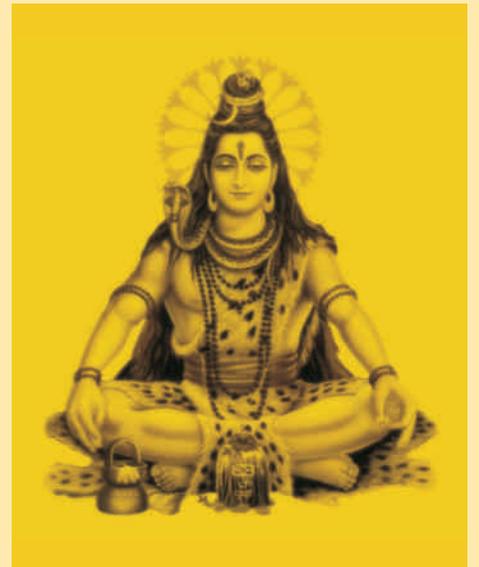
tired after creating the universe, he performed a yagna to please Shakti and Shiva. Goddess Shakti emerged, separating from Shiva and helped Brahma in the creation of the universe. Then Brahma decided that one day Shakti would be given back to Lord Shiva. Therefore, Daksh (son of Bhrahma) performed several yagyas to obtain Shakti as his daughter in the form of Sati. It was then decided that Sati was brought into this world with the motive of getting married to Shiva.

However, due to Lord Shiva's curse to Bhrahma that he would not be worshiped and also his fifth head was cut off due to his lie in front of Lord Shiva, Daksha started

hating Lord Shiva and decided not to let Lord Shiva and Sati get married. But Destiny has its own fate, series of incidents happened due to which Sati got attracted to Lord Shiva and finally one day Lord Shiva and Sati got married. This marriage only increased Daksh's hatred towards Lord Shiva.

One day, in Satya Yuga, Daksha performed a yagna with a desire to take revenge on Lord Shiva. Daksha was angry because his daughter Dakshayani also known as Sati had married the yogi God Shiva against his wish. Daksha invited all the deities to the yagna except Lord Shiva and Sati. The fact that she was not invited did not deter Sati

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Lord Shiva



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from attending the yagna. She expressed her desire to attend the yagna to Shiva, who tried his best to dissuade her from going. Shiva eventually relented and Sati went to the yagna. But Sati, being an uninvited guest, was not given any respect at the yagna. Furthermore, Daksha insulted Shiva. Sati was unable to bear her father's insults toward her husband, so Dakshayani (the other name of Sati meaning the daughter of Daksha) invoked her yogic powers and immolated herself.

Enraged at the insult and the injury, Shiva destroyed Daksha's sacrifice, cut off Daksha's head, and later replaced it with that of a male goat as he restored him to life due to the prayers of all demi gods and Brahma. Still immersed in grief, Shiva picked up the remains of Sati's body, and performed the Tandava, the celestial dance of destruction, across all creation. The other Gods requested Vishnu to intervene to stop this destruction, towards which Vishnu used the Sudarshana Chakra, which cut through the corpse of Sati. The various parts of the body fell at several spots all through the Indian subcontinent and formed sites which are known as Shakti Peethas today.

The Ashta(8) Dasa(10) Shakthi Peetha Stotram by Adi Shankara lists 18 such locations which are often referred to as Maha Shakti Peeths. Of these 18 Shakti peethas 5 are located in south India. One is at Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu where Kamakshidevi is worshiped and the other four are in Andhra Pradesh. They are at Alampur, Pithapuram, Draksharamam and Srisailam. The deities here are known as Jogulamba, Puruhutika Devi, Manikyamba and Brahmarambha respectively.

According to Hindu mythology Brahmarambha the Brahmari Shakti has taken the shape of Shatpadi (bee) to kill the demon Arunasura. The faithful claim that you can still humming sound of bees from the back wall of the Brahmarambha temple. ■



The Shiv Lingam at Srisailam

### The Nayanars of South India

The Nayanars of south India lived between 6th and 8th Century AD. They were poet saints who spread the awareness of Siva and Saivism expressing their intense love and devotion by visiting various parts of the country and singing devotional songs in public at holy places, temples and pilgrim centers. They also countered the growing influence of Buddhism, Jainism and Vaishnavism through their discourses and compositions, rendered not in Sanskrit but in Tamil the language of the common people. Saiva literature records the names of 63 Nayanars, a few of whom were women.

The Nayanars came from different backgrounds, from the highest to the lowest strata of society, including the caste of untouchables. The most prominent Nayanaras are considered to be Appar, Sambanthar and Sundarar. In 11th century Nambi Andar Nambi composed Tirumurai, in which he recorded the lives of all the 63 saints. It has immense historical and spiritual value and considered as an important text of Saiva canon.

### Theertham and Kshethram

In south India holy places are referred to as either "kshethram" or "theertham".

If a certain place is considered holy because of its deity and the temple present there, it is called a "Kshethram". There may be a river or pushkarni (tank) existing at that place, apart from the temple. Taking a dip in that river or tank may also be a practice prevalent in that place. Yet, it is the darshan of the deity at that place that is the central purpose of visiting that place and not the dip in the tank or river.

If, in a certain place, there is a river or a lake or pushkarni (tank), and, if the place is considered holy because of that water body, then it is called a "Theertham". There may be a temple existing near the a river or a lake or pushkarni but it is holy only to take a dip in that river or a lake or pushkarni and that is the central purpose of visiting that place and not the darshan of the deity in the temple that may or may not exist there, then such a place is called "Theertham" Examples for such places are Prayag, Pushkar, Rameshwaram, Koombakonam, Dwarka, Kashi...