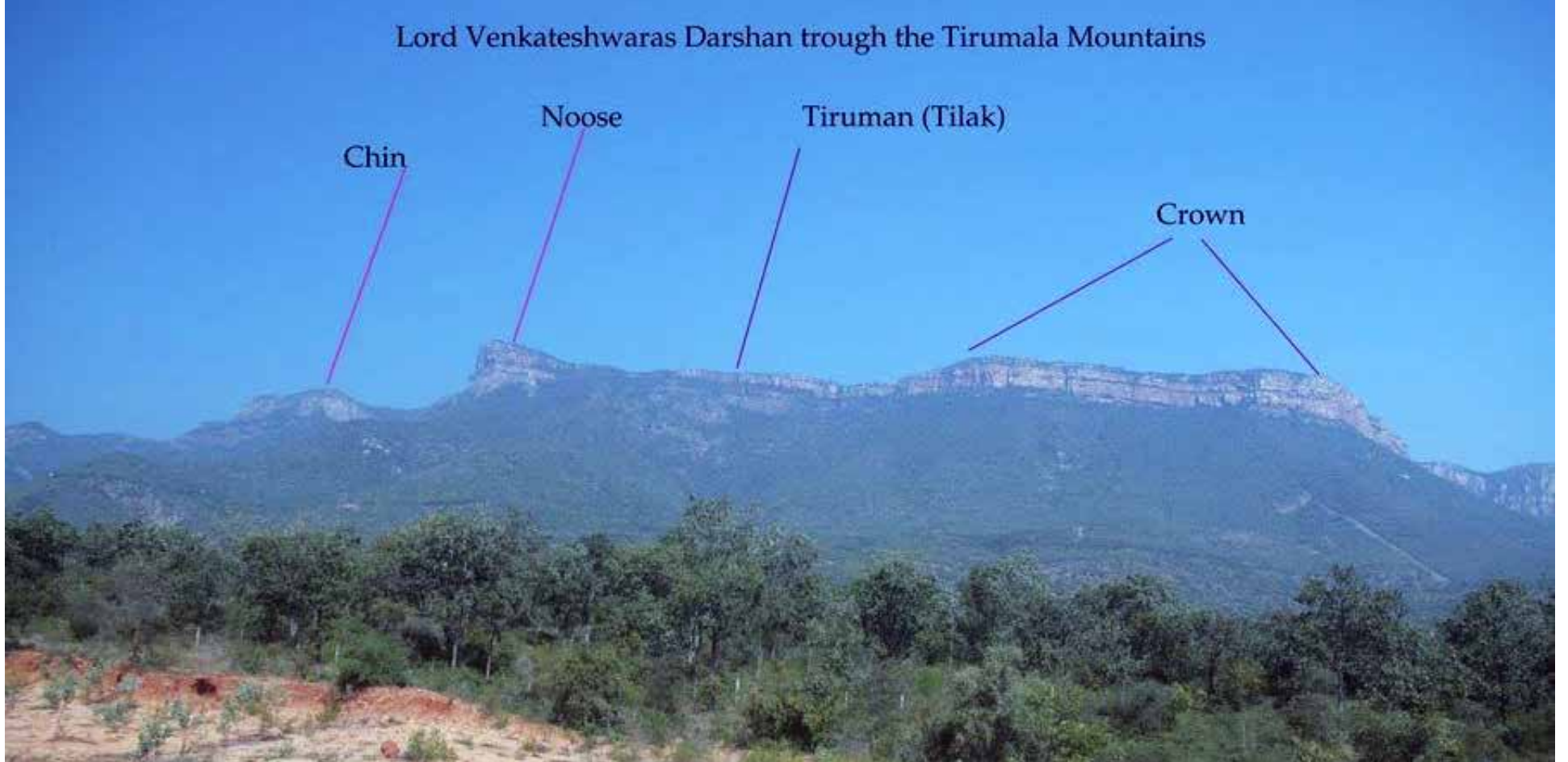




SPECIAL FEATURE

LORD VENKATESWARA, THE BENEVOLENT BEACON ON SEVEN HILLS

Compiled by Kidambi Raj



- Tirumala Hills side view as Lord Venkateswara's Face

Introduction

Tirumala and **Tirupati** are places well-known all over India. Sri Venkateswara, the presiding deity of Tirumala or Vengadam, is revered by lakhs of people all over the country. The chief centres of pilgrimage in this region are Sri Venkateswara's temple on the Tirumala hill, the shrine of Sri Govindaraja in the town of Tirupati and the shrine of Sri Padmavathi situated in Tiruchanur. Of minor temples, mention may be made of the Kapilesvara temple at Kapilathirtham, the Lord Rama temple in the town of Tirupati and the Parasaresvara temple at Jogi-Mallavaram. Of the three important centres of pilgrimage in this region, Tirumala is the oldest and its deity finds mention in Tamil literature as early as BC. References to Tiruchanur are found about the beginning of the ninth century AD. Tirumala is located 980 m (3,200 ft) above sea level and covers an area approximately 26.8 sq. km. (10.33 sq. miles).

The special significance of Lord Venkateswara temple at Tirumala lies in the fact that it is perhaps the oldest religious institutions in the world where unbroken religious worship is being carried on. According to the available recorded evidence, for over 1,300 years, it is a temple attracting more pilgrims than any other temple in India, and is held in veneration by more devotees than even **Lourdes of France** and the celebrated **cathedrals of Spain and Portugal**. The average number of visitors to the temple now is about 40,000 to 50,000 daily and its daily income, derived wholly from offerings is close to about 40 Million \$ US approximately. A visit to this great pilgrim centre is a rare spiritual experience. It is this divinity, which pervades this area not only in the temple precincts, but in the entire town which has an irresistible magnetic attraction to the millions who come from far and near, mindful of the difficulties involved in the journey to just have a darshan of the Lord, may be for just a few seconds.

The very mention of the word Tirupati creates in, many a divine feeling. The Lord of the seven

hills is the Lord of the universe. He is the light of the world. This holy temple is popularly known as **Bhuloka Vaikuntham**. It is perhaps the richest of the temples in the world. The entire town of Tirupati as well as Tirumala has an eternal floating pilgrim population.

Tirupathi Town and the significance and descriptions of Tirumala Hills

Tirupati is a small municipality. A devotee wishing to worship Lord Srinivasa has to first reach this town. It is well connected by train, bus and by air. On arriving at Tirupati, the pilgrims have reached the foot of Seven Hills, and at the top, namely Tirumala, where Lord Srinivasa resides. Tirumala is 14 kms. from Tirupati. Tirumala is a hill range, which is part of the Eastern Ghats. It has seven principal peaks, each of them having separate names and **sthalapuranas**. The seven hills are, **Vrishabadi, Anjanadri, Neeladri, Garudari, Seshadri,**



- Vishnu as baby Balaji floating on a fig leaf in waters (Pralaya)

Narayanadri, and Venkatadri. On the hill Seshadri in Seshachalam is located the Tirumala temple and the entire area (range) is named after the peak. The puranas compare Tirumala range to a **serpent**, which is lying down. **Srisailem temple** is located on the **tail** of this serpent. The **Ahobila Narasimha temple** is situated in the **middle**. **Sri Venkateswara temple** of Tirumala is regarded as the **head** of the range. The Sri Kalahastheswara Swamy temple at Srikalahasti is the mouth of this reclining serpent.

1. **Vrishbadri – Hill of Nandi, Vahana of Siva**

In Krithayuga, near Thumbura Theertha in Tirumala there lived a demon name Vrushabahasura who was devotee of Lord Siva and before dying as a mark of his attaining salvation at this place he asked Lord Siva to name this hill with his name and thus this hill was named Vrishabadi.

2. **Anjanadri – Hill of Lord hanuman**

Kesari, the king of Varanas (monkeys), married Anjanadri. They were childless for many years. So, Anjanadri went to a hill near **Akasa Ganga** and did penance for several years. Later Vayu (wind god) gave a fruit to Anjanadri. As a result of eating that fruit given by Vayu, she gave birth to Lord Hanuman. As Anjanadri did penance on this hill it is called as Anjanadri.

3. **Neeladri – Hill of Neela Devi**

Neeladevi is the third Consort of Lord Vishnu. The Veda Sings the glory of Goddess Neela in Neela Suktam. The first devotee who gave her hair to God is Neela Devi. Lord Srinivasa named this hill by her name as Neeladri.

4. **Garudari – Hill of Garuda, the Vahana of Lord Vishnu**

Garuda (Vahana of Lord Vishnu) prayed to Lord Vishnum to atone his mistakes and Lord was pleased by his prayers and came before

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- The sacred hill of Tirumala - Early 20th century picture

him. He asked Lord Vishnu to allow him to come back to Vaikuntham. Lord Vishnu told him that He would be coming as a Swayambu on the Seven Hills and asked him to stay there in the form of a hill and named it as Garudari.

5. *Seshadri – Hill of Sesha, the Dasa of Lord Vishnu*

The most important peak among the Saptagiri is Seshadri. Seshadri is named after Adishesha, the divine Serpent on whom Lord Vishnu rests.

6. *Naryayanadri – Hill of Narayana (Vishnu)*

Narayana Maharshi did penance to see Lord Vishnu and Lord Vishnu was pleased by his prayers and appeared before Maharshi and Narayana Maharshi asked Lord Vishnu to give him a boon, so that the hill will be popular with his name. So, this hill is called by his name as Narayanadri.

7. *Venkatadri – Hill of Lord Venkateswara*

Lord Srinivasa resides on this Hill. The sacred temple of Sri Venkateswara is located on the seventh peak, Venkatadri and lies on the southern banks of *Swami Pushkarini*.

Besides those, there are other names to hill and they are: *Vaikunthadri* for it was brought from Vishnu's heaven, Vaikuntha; *Simhachala*, because it was here that Vishnu took His Narasimha form for killing the demon Hiranyakasipu; *Varahadri*, as it was the home of Varaha; *Srisaila*, for it was the home of Goddess Sri (Lakshmi); *Anandari or Kidadri*, for it was the site of Vishnu's divine sport; *Pushkaradri*, where the red lotus grew in plenty on the hills; *Gnanadri*, for it confers knowledge on the devotees; *Chintamani*, since it grants the object of one's desire; *Teerthadri*, after many sacred watering spots which are situated here; *Dharmadri*, for Dharmadeva, the God of Righteousness who performed penance on the hill; *Kanakadri*, where gold and precious stones were once found; *Nilagiri*, for the Vanara chief Nila, who once lived here.

The Sacred Tank and Holy Waters

Tirumala hill is a vast area dotted with peaks from which rise the lakes and waterfalls. Of these, 108 are believed to be sacred and associated with various epic characters and miracles of Lord Venkateswara.

Swami Pushkarini

Swami Pushkarini was Vishnu's tank in Vaikuntha and was brought to the earth by Garuda for Vishnu's use. It is the sacred tank in front of the temple in Tirumala. This is regarded as equivalent to the Ganga and other scared rivers. A dip in the tank cleanses the bathers of all sins. The performance of the daily rites or even occasional rites on the banks of the Swami Pushkarini is



- The original image of Sri Venkateswara as seen in the sanctum sanctorum in 1954

said to cure deformities of the body and ensure the avoidance of all types of hell. It grants the wishes of those who bathe in it. Like the hill, all the tanks and lakes in Tirumala are sacred and known as **Teerthas**. There are *seventeen* teerthas whose waters are believed to combine in the Swami Pushkarini.

Legends about Tirumala and its God

There are numerous collections of legends and stories about Tirumala and its God. These are to be found in many Puranas. All these have been collected and edited in a book entitled the *Venkatachala Mahatmyam*. An early inscription from Tirumala mentions that a Venkatachala mahatmyam was read in the temple before the Deity. The printed work contains extracts from the *Varahapurana*, *Padmapurana*, *Garudapurana*, *Brhmandapurana*, *Markandeya purana*, *Harivamsa*, *Varianapurana*, *Brahmapurana*, *Brahmottarapurana*, *Adityapurana*, *Skandapurana* and *Bhvisyottarapurana*.

Worship Sri Venkateswara Swamy by Non-Hindus



- Tirumala Hill with the Temple in the centre

Lord William "Chalipandili"

A high-level official of the British Government, Lord Williams had a chronic disease, which could not be cured in spite of expert medical treatment. On the advice of one of his subordinates, he took a vow that he would visit Tirumala. To his surprise, he got miraculous relief from his illness after visiting Tirumala and so created he a charity called *Lord Williams Chalipandili* (Drinking water shed) where the pilgrims can quench their thirst. This charity is being continued even to this day, as a permanent measure.

Sir Thomas Munro "Munro Gangalam"

Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras presidency who was suffering from acute pain in stomach, which could not be cured by medical treatment and to his astonishment got complete relief from his chronic stomach pain, created an endowment to offer one big *Gangalam* of rice prasadam (*Pongal*) to the Lord every day to fulfil the vow taken by him and then to distribute the said Pongal prasadam free to all the devotees during *sarvadarshanam*. The charity was called *Munro Gangalam*. The endowment of Sir Munro is being continued by the TTD even to this day.

Muslim devotees of Sri Venkateswara Swamy

According to legend Babi Nancharamma, a staunch muslim devotee of Lord Venkateswara also worshipped Sri Venkateswara Sway varu. Another muslim devotee had given offerings of 108 flowers made of gold each weighing about 23 grams. These flowers are used during *Astadala Pada Padmaradhana* (an arjitha seva).

Lord Vishnu comes to Venkatadri Hill

According to the *Bhavisyottara Purana*, Vishnu remained on Venkatadri for the first three yugas, Krita, Treta and Dvapara. At the beginning of the present yuga, the Kali yuga, he decided to leave for Vaikuntham, His Heaven, with His Consort Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity. But Sage Narada and Brahma both felt that while Vishnu remained on earth, people were pious and meritorious and so wanted Him to continue to live on earth. Accordingly, Brahma raised a tamarind tree on Venkatadri

hill, beneath which he formed an anthill. Narada was instructed by Brahma to bring Vishnu back to Venkatadri, to reside in the anthill.

Narada went to the banks of the river Ganga where the rishis (great sages) were performing religious rituals. He asked them to whom they would dedicate the fruits of their prayers. The rishis discussed the matter, but could not arrive at a decision. They therefore requested Bhrgu rishi to meet with the three main Gods, Brahma, Siva and Vishnu and decide as to who should be the recipient of the fruits of their prayers.

After visiting all three Gods, Bhrgu was quite pleased and gratified so much with Lord Vishnu, that he returned to the banks of the river Ganga and informed the other rishis that they should pray to Lord Vishnu for salvation. Meanwhile, Lakshmi was very angry that Vishnu had pacified and apologized to the rishi who had kicked Her abode on Vishnu's chest. She therefore decided that She would no longer live on His chest but go to *Karaveera Kshetra* (Kolhapur in Maharashtra) and reside there. The unhappy Vishnu then left Vaikuntham and returned to Venkatadri, and lived in the anthill.

Lord Varaha rescues the Earth

For over eight thousand years, Surya, the Sun God, belched fire, burning the hills and forests to ashes. There was no rain, so the holy sages left the earth and sought refuge in the heavens. Then Vayu the wind blew with all his might for many years till huge clouds were formed, which rained incessantly and caused great flood. The earth sank into the *Pathala Loka*, the nether world, where she remained for thousand yugas. It was the pralaya, the primeval flood, which submerged the entire earth under water. On the huge sheet of water, Lord Vishnu lay on a *fig* leaf as the eternal child, *Vadapatrasaayi*. Seeing the plight of the Mother Earth at the bottom of the waters, Lord Vishnu in the form of a White Boar, descended into the nether world to search for Her. The evil demon attacked Him and they had a long and violent battle, at the end of which Varaha destroyed the demon with his mighty tusks. He then lifted up Mother Earth on His tusks and emerged from the waters. Placing a foot on the divine snake Adishesha, with Mother Earth on His tusks, He dazzled the whole world with His majestic appearance. The holy sages recited the hymns from the ancient books of wisdom and knowledge, the Vedas and requested Lord Varaha to bring Mother Earth back to Her original glory. Varaha re-established Mother Earth, delineated the limits of seven seas (*sapta sagaras*) and requested Brahma to recreate life on earth. To protect His devotees, He decided to live on earth and asked Garuda, His vehicle (the man Eagle), to bring the devine hill Kridachala, an extensively natural hill with lofty peaks, embedded with gold and precious stones and which resembled, Adishesha in shape from Vaikuntham, His heavenly abode, to establish his new home on earth. It is the same hill that is called Seshadri hill.

Varaha selected a location, which was 960 kms. South of the river Gomati 80 kms. west of eastern sea (Bay of Bengal) and adjoining the Swarnamukhi river. Here Garuda brought Kridachala, a sacred hill 48 kms. Wide and 480 kms. long. As its shape resembled Sesha, Lord Narayana's thousand-headed snake, it was called Seshadri. Varaha occupied a temple on the western side of the sacred pool, the Swami Pushkarni. But His appearance with the tusks and weapons was so frightening, that Brahma and the Gods, the *Saptarishis* (seven sages) and other celestials prayed to Vishnu, requesting Him to assume a more peaceful form and live on the hill to protect His devotees.

Thereafter, the supreme, lotus-eyed Vishnu, holding the *Shankha* (conch), *Chakra* (discus) and



SPECIAL FEATURE

Gada (mace), descended to the Seshadri hill, with Bhudevi (Mother Earth) and Lakshmi (the Goddess of Prosperity), the two aspects of the Supreme Mother Goddess, by His side, He settled under the divya Vimana (dome) to grant the prayers of the devotees.

In north India Lord Venkateswara is known as Balaji, because when the world was immersed under the waters, Vishnu as a newborn child, floated on a leaf on the waters. He is Narayana, the Creator, De-



- Swamy Puskarani, the sacred tank of Tirumala

stroyer and the Refuge. Another meaning for Balaji is Universal Mother.

Srinivasa turns into stone – Origin of the stone image

With the progress of Kaliyuga, the world plunged into chaos and evil. Lord Srinivasa announced that with the chaotic rule of the human race in Kali yuga, He no longer wished to talk directly to the unworthy, and therefore become a stone statute and communicate only with His devotees. Saying this, He transferred Himself into a statue, now the stone icon of Sri Venkateswara on Tirumala Hill.

Songs of the Azhwars on Lord Venkateswara

The Azhwars (the Vaishnava saints) of Tamil Nādu, have sung extensively about the Lord of Vengadam. With the exception of only Thondaradippodi Azhwar and Madhurakavi Azhwar all the Azhwaras have sung in His praise. The first three, Poigai Azhwar, Butat Azhwar and Pey Azhwar, all lived in the early years of the 8th century and sang of the Lord of Vengadam. The Thiruvoimozhi of Namazhwar, who lived in 798 AD and is considered to be the greatest of the Azhwars, contains several stanzas describing Lord of Vengadam. While the existence of the temple is not known, the hill was held in high esteem as the annihilater of sins.

Some of the not so commonly known facts about Lord Venkateswara of Tirupathi

1. The amazing thing about the earthen lamps that are in the sanctum sanctorum, is that, these lamps have never been put off and no one knows the time when these were lit up. All that is known is, that they have been burning for hundreds of years and will continue to do so.
2. Tirumala temple is visited by about 50 thousand to one lakh of pilgrims daily. On a festival or a special occasion, like the Brahmotsavam, the number of devotees goes up to 5 lakhs making it the most visited holy place in the world.
3. At Tirumala temple, the flowers offered to Lord Venkateswara during the morning worship are not thrown out of the **Garbha Griha** (Sanctum Sanctorum). Instead, they are thrown into the waterfall that flows behind the rear side of the idol. Interestingly, the discarded flowers can be seen at **Yerpedu**, 20 km. from Tirupathi.
4. **Kulasekhara** (one of 12 Azhwars), was a King and who eventually renounced his royal

responsibilities and proceeded to Srirangam, the bastion of Vaishnavism. It was there, that he composed his most famous work **Mukundamala** (Garlands of hymns for Mukunda), part of Perumal Tirumozhi. He spent large part of his later life in Tirupati. He had made a humble request to the Lord, to transform him to a stone threshold in front of the Lord in Tirupati. The stone step between the Garbha Griha and the Sayana mandapam is called the **Kulasekhara Padi**, in honour of Kulasekara Azhwar. His request to the Lord in the Perumal Tirumozhi goes like this: **Peyarai yentakku yaavarum yaanum oru peyanai evarkkum idhu pesi yen.**

5. The Tirumala temple is located at the height of 3,200 ft., and the surroundings are cool. Irrespective of this fact, the idol of Sri Venkateswara remains at a temperature of 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Every morning, after the bath ritual, droplets of sweat appear on the idol of Sri Venkateswara. On Thursdays, when the priests remove the ornaments of the idol for a holy bath, it is said that they come off with a sensation of warmth.
6. The idol of Lord Venkateswara is adorned daily with **Pachai Karpooram**, a derivative of Cinnamomum camphora tree. It is known to be a highly volatile substance that leads to cracks and fissures on a stone. But not so in Lord Venkaeswara's case. The idol at Tirupati is resistant to the volatile chemical reactions of the substance even when it remains smeared with it most of the time.
7. The idol of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala temple has real hair on it. The authorities say that this hair has never entangled and is silky smooth. It is a mystery as to how an idol has real hair.
8. You will find a hill in Tirumala that features a natural rock formation in the form of Garuda, the Vehicle of Lord Venkateswara.
9. The offering of **Laddu** to the Lord and Tirumala and then distributed to the devotees started in 1715. It was called then as **Manoharam**. Yes, it is true! Tirupathi Laddu has a GI (Geographical Indicator) patent, which is only granted to identify a product as having specific provenance. The Laddu Prasadam at Tirupati is arguably the first of the offerings at any place of worship to be recognized as an intellectual property, in this case, of the Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam (TTD), that manages the temple.
10. At Tirumala temple, every year, once during the Tamil month of **Aani** (Mithuna – June-July), on **Telugu New Year** (Yugadhi) and on **Deepavali** day, Darbars are held. During the Darbar in the month of Aani, is when the Income and Expenditure report is submitted to Lord and is assumed to have His blessings and it is on that day that all newly appointed Administrators, Archakas, all take their oath of

office. This kind of special event is done only at the Tirumala temple.

11. At one time Vilva leaves were used for Archana to the Lord on Fridays. Subsequently it was changed and now Vila leaves are used for archana for the entire Tamil month of **Markazhi** (Dhanus – December-January). This is the only Vaishnavite temple where Vila leaves are used for archana to a Vaishnavite deity.
12. Thallapakkam Annamayya had composed 32,000 keerthanas on Lord Venkateswara.
13. Tirupathi Venkateswara holds the record for being the richest as well as the most visited temple of India. The shrine receives offerings from devotees in cash, jewels, gold, silver, property deeds and Demat share transfers and the per day offering is around 22.5 million. The Gold covered Salagrama mala that is adorned on the Lord weighs 12 kg. and needs three archakas to put it on. Another jewel called **Surya Katari** weighs about 5 kg. Lots of rare and precious stones, precious jewelleries and ordinary jewelries are constantly on a daily basis are being offered by the devotees. They get accumulated so fast that, they neither have the space to store them nor the time to put them on the Lord, that they advertise in the news media and auction some of the items once a year.
14. The Sthala Vriksha of Tirumala temple is Tamarind Tree.
15. The Vaikunta Ekadasi festival is celebrated at Tirumala temple, but there is no opening of the Swarga Vaasal like at all other Vaishnavite temples because it is the Bulokha Vaikuntham.
16. The estimated minimum cost of one Abhishekham in a day for Lord Venkateswara is at least One lakh and fifty thousand rupees.
17. The silk dress Swami wears is 21 arms-length long and weighs around 6 kg. The upper body of the idol is covered with a saree and the lower body is covered with a dhoti. Devotees who want to offer a dress (Vasthrams) to Lord Venkateswara at Tirupathi, have to wait for at least ten years for their turn. They have to submit an assigned sum at the temple office towards the cost of the dress which is made in a special village by weavers who need to bathe thrice daily and refrain from alcohol and non-vegetarian food. Every Friday 15 such garment offerings are accepted by the temple office, and currently, there is a decade long wait in place for the offerings.
18. At Tirupathi Venkateswara temple, every morning begins with an Abhishekham ritual. There are various items used for the Abhishekham, including saffron, a variety of flowers and fragrances. Interestingly, the saffron used in the ritual comes from Spain, Kasturi comes from Nepal, Punugu from China and specific fragrance material from Paris, France. This isn't it! Sandal paste is prepared afterwards for the ceremony on a golden plate. The Abhishekham can be witnessed every morning from 4:30 to 5:30 AM and soak oneself in the opulence of this revered temple in South India.
19. It is believed that Goddess Lakshmi does live in the heart of Sri Venkateswara, literally. According to the priests, during the Nija Roopa Darsanam on every Thursday, the idol is decorated with white wood paste. After the paste is



- Sri Venkateswara

SPECIAL FEATURE



taken off, the imprint of the Goddess is left.

20. Sri Ramanuja established the Nithyanushtaana Puja Kainkaryam routine at Tirumala Temple.
21. Since the devotees cannot just withstand the powerful radiation emanating from the eyes of the Lord, the eyes are covered on most days except on Thursdays when the size of the white mark is relatively smaller enabling the devotees, glimpse at Lord's eyes to an extent.
22. The idol of the Lord appears to be standing in the middle of the sanctum sanctorum from outside, whereas, the idol is actually slightly towards the right-hand corner of the Sanctum sanctorum.
23. At the main gate of the temple, one could find a stick. According to the legend, the stick was used by Ananthazhwar to beat the Lord when they were children. During this, one day the Lord got hit on His chin and blood oozed. Since then, the ritual of applying Chandan on Lord's chin came into existence.
24. The entrance of the Tirumala hills has a rock formation which appears to be like a serpent hood. The distance of this formation is same as the height of the main idol. This is called as *Silathoranum*.
25. Another fact about the hills is, one of the hills have the face of the Lord. It appears as if he is sleeping and one can actually see His face.

Details of Daily worship at Tirumala Temple

The worship at Tirumala temple is done strictly according to the *Vaikhanasa Agama*. According to the Bhavisthyottara purana, Vaikhanasa Rishi is said to have admired the playful leelas of Lord Krishna in Dwapara Yuga and did Tapas to obtain the darshan of Lord Krishna. The legend goes that Lord Krishna appeared before him and instructed him to worship Lord as Srinivasa who manifested Himself in a hill in Venkatachala and that one Rangadasa would help him locate and then worship the Lord. The Rishi did accordingly and became the first person to worship the Lord at Tirumala. Hence in this temple, to this day, worship is conducted according to Vaikhanasa Agama.

The temple is virtually open throughout the day and in the night with only a gap of an hour or two in the night between the Ekantha Seva and the early morning Suprabhatham. The timings of the various sevas change from day to day depending upon the crowds that throng the temple city. The most common Sevas and timings are as follows:

Suprabhatha Seva – (3am to 3.30am)

Suddhi – (4.30am to 5am) – After the **visvaroopadarsanam**, suddhi is done in the sanctum sanctorum when the previous day's flower decorations of the Dhruva Murthi are removed and the vessels required for the Puja etc. are cleaned. Meantime, water for the next puja comes from **Akasa Ganga** and the members of the Tirumala Nambi family alone are permitted to bring this water.

Thomala Seva – (5am to 6am) – Ajitham, meaning Darshan of the Lord on a payment to the temple.

Sahasranamaarchana – (6.30am to 7.30am)

Naivedya or the first bell – (7.30am to 8.00am),

followed by second archana.

Sarvadarsanam – (8am to midnight)

Ekanta Seva – This is last ritual is in the night, also called as Rathri Pooja.

Visesha Sevas on selected days of the week in Tirumala

Monday – Chatuh Kalasa Visesh Puja (Puja with 14 kalasas) Of these 14 kalasas, seven will have, gingelly oil, curd, ghee, akshata, dabha and panchagavya and the remaining seven kalsas will contain Suddhodaka (pure water).

Tuesday – Ashtadalapada Padmaradhana – here during the puja, the 108 golden lotuses each weighing about 23 gms. Offered by a muslim devotee are offered at the holy feet of the Lord with the uttering each of the 108 names of the Lord.

Wednesday – Sahasrakalasa Abhisheka – This special puja is observed after Saattumurai in the morning.

Thursday – Tirupavadai Seva and Pulangi Seva – Every Thursday, after the morning puja, the dhruvamurthi is divested of all ornaments, flowers etc. He is dressed only in a dhoti and uttariyam. This process is called *sadalimpu*, which means loosening or removing. The *thirumankappu* and *kasturi* are also reduced in width to one thin line and this is the only occasion when one can have *Netra Darsanam*, as otherwise the deity sports a wide namam which almost covers half the eyes. This sadalimpu ritual is therefore a preparatory ritual for the Abhishekham the next morning as otherwise it would be an onerous and long task if all the ornaments and clothing were to be removed just before the Abhisheka.

Friday – Abhishekam for the Mulavigraha – It was during Krishnadevaraya's time (from 1517 AD) that the Friday Abhisheka became a weekly ritual. On this day, this Abhisheka is an arjitha seva.

The Relevance of Sri Venkateswara to-day

Sri Venkateswara has stood at Tirumala since the dawn of civilization, to save His devotees from the evils of Kali yuga. History cannot explain or record the power and capabilities of the God, the temple and the hill.

We live in a world of change, where values are threatened all the time, where people are questioning their role and purpose in life and even the necessity of life itself. Young people are desperately trying to retain their ideals, to prevent cynicism taking over their lives. That is where Lord Ven-

kateswara comes in. Here are a few of areas of His relevance to-day:

Triumph of good over evil

Whenever Dharma is in danger, Vishnu manifests Himself on earth to rid the world of the evil. For instance, as Varaha, Vishnu destroys the evil demon Hiranyaakshaa, who steals the knowledge of truth as it is documented in the Vedas and settles on the sacred Tirumala Hill. As Venkateswara, He destroys evil demons who threaten the existence of Dharma. The demons represent the negative forces and actions which prompt us to deviate from the path of righteousness. The destruction of evil and the triumph of good is central to all religions, particularly Hinduism. Lord Venkateswara is a role model for us all.

Triumph of hope

He is omnipresent and omnipotent, transcending barriers of time and space. He represents the triumph of hope. As long as there is hope in human heart, there is no place for despair.

Triumph of faith

He is a focus for faith. Their total faith in Him creates miracles, for there is nothing as potent as faith. When Mother Earth sinks into the nether world at the time of great flood, She does not lose faith, for She knew that Lord Venkateswara would come to



- Vajra kavacha, a jewelled covering presented by King Krishnadevaraya

rescue Her and which He did.

Humility

When the devotee shaves off his or her hair, it is an act of humility, to affirm that he or she has abandoned his or her ego and is humble before the Lord. He teaches us that one is never too high to be humble.

Charity

Humility leads to charity. Nearly all the wealth of the Tirumala temple goes to support education for

the young and the welfare of the sick and the handicapped. Lord Venkateswara stands on Tirumala collecting money to *repay* a debt. What is this debt? He collects the money from the *haves* and helps the *have nots*, through the many charities and educational institutions run by the Devasthanam.

Respect for the earth and nature

As Varaha, Vishnu rescues the Earth from the evil demon. The story of Sri Venkateswara and His marriage with Sri Padmavathi is a celebration of our wonderful earth, her very existence and her bounty and represents the fusion of the earth with the divine. Religion teaches to respect all creation and the bounties of nature.

Values

In a fast-changing world, where values and beliefs change almost daily, where people and situations are often not what they appear to be, Lord Venkateswara represents a rock of stability and security of unchanging definitions of right and wrong, good and bad.

The message

Lord Venkateswara gives every human being the opportunity to lead a better life, the right to hope and keep faith. He teaches us the difference between the right and wrong, humility and pride. He helps us to help the less fortunate and to give back to nature at infinitesimal fraction of what she has given us. Finally, He assures us, that it is never too late to repent and ask for forgiveness, that even the most wicked sinner can change for the better.

It is all summed up in the following mantra;

Venkatadri samam sthaanam

Brahmaandae naasti kinchana

Venkatesha samo devo

Na bhooto na bhavishyati

Meaning: There is no place equal to Venkatadri in the whole universe; A God equal to Venkatesa has never been nor will be.

Mangalasanam to Lord Venkateswara

Sriyahkaantaaya Kalyaanandhaye

Nidhayerthinaam /

Sree Venkata Nivaasaaya Sreenivaasaaya Mangalam //

Meaning: May auspiciousness be to Sreenivaasaa, who is the Lord of Lakshmi (who is) auspiciousness (who is), a treasure-trove of supplicants and (who) dwells on Venkataachalla!!

Mangalaasana Pari-

ah Madacharya Purogamaih /

Sarvaisccha Purvairachaarya Satkrtyaastu

Mangalam //

Meaning: May auspiciousness be to Sree Venkateswaraa, who has been worshipped by my teachers and their early teachers and all those devoted to reciting this Mangalaasasanam!!



- Sri Padmavathi Thayaar at Tiruchanur



- Sri Venkateswara with Sridevi and Bhudevi - Bronze utsava murtis