

# Pilgrimage To Denkanikottai

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## 1 Introduction

Denkanikottai is a place of the Betrayaswami temple. Lord Betrayaswami, to whom this temple belongs, is a form of Lord Krishna which looks exactly like Lord Balaji in Tirupati. The temple is ancient and the history related to this place is found in *Skanda Purana*. The temple of Denkanikottai is not at all crowded by huge mass of people like other famous temples in India. Denkanikottai is a beautiful and calm place which can very easily impress anybody, especially a serious spiritualist.

Denkanikottai is situated 25 kilometers away from Hosur. Hosur is around 40 kilometers away from Bangalore. Denkanikottai can be reached by a bus from Hosur and Hosur is accessible from Bangalore by bus as well as by train. This place can be visited from Bangalore as a one day trip. The temple of Betrayaswami is situated around 2 km away from the bus station. This 2 kilometer stretch is an enjoyable walk on the small road surrounded by houses and some very big and beautiful trees.

## 2 Ancient History of Denkanikottai

There are eight chapters of the Skanda Purana which describe the glories of this place. The Yaksha brother of Kubera's maternal grandfather, whose name was Maharnavan, underwent a rugged penance for achieving the blessings of Brahma. When Brahma was impressed by Maharnavan's penance, he gave Maharnavan the boon of deathlessness. However, excited by this new strength, he started harassing the devatas (celestials) and turned their abodes into rubble. He did this with such a determination that he was given a nickname 'Deva Gandakan' meaning the harrier of the devas.

Many many years ago, when this area was covered with very dense forest, Kanva muni was performing austerities at this place. Once Deva Gandakan decided to harass him as well. When Kanva muni found himself put into trouble by Deva Gandakan, he requested Lord Venkateshwara (Balaji or Krishna) to save him. Hearing the plea of his dear devotee, Lord decided to teach Deva Gandakan a good lesson. He appeared at this place in the guise of a hunter. He called for Lord Rama in order to learn Dhanurvedya (archery) and procure weapons needed to defeat the daemon. Deva Gandakan had this ability to come alive from his own blood when his blood would be spilled from his body on the ground. So the Lord called for mother Durga to drink the blood of daemon Deva Gandakan. After this preparation, the Lord engaged in the battle with Deva Gandakan. Deva Gandakan also, confident about his immortality, charged the Lord but the Lord hit him and severely wounded Deva Gandakan. The *Yaksha* then achieved not only

redemption but also realization. He then requested the Lord that the place be named as Denkanipuram in memory of this incident. Kanva muni was also blessed with a *Darshan* of the Lord Venkateshwara who accepted the name 'Betrayaswami' which means the Lord as a hunter.

### 3 The Temple and Surroundings

A five tiered gopuram of the ornate Hoysala style of architecture rises over the eastern entrance of the temple. The temple itself sits on one acre of land. A wall that surrounds it is 244 feet long and 204 feet wide. In front of the temple is the Swami Pushkarini Lake that is 220 feet square.

The main deity of Lord Betrayaswami is at the center of the temple complex. This deity is same in appearance as that of Lord Venkateshwara who resides in Tirumala hills (Lord Tirupati Balaji). The deity is very beautiful and decorated with flowers and many ornaments. The deity of Lord Betrayaswami is accompanied by Sridevi and Bhuedi at His sides. They are also very beautifully decorated. The temple of Lord Rama along with Lakshmana, mother Sita and Anjaneya is situated on the left hand side of Lord Betrayaswami. There is a separate shrine of Anjaneya inside the temple complex. This Anjaneya (Hanuman) is quite big in size.

There are other shrines in the hallways of this temple, which include Venugopala with Rukmini and Satyabhama, shrine of Alvars and a separate shrine of Ramanujacharya.

While the battle was going on between the Lord and Deva Gandakan, some of his blood was spilled at the spot where Kanva muni was performing austerities. A tree stands at that spot now and, according to local tradition, even if that tree has been cut again and again, it grows again. This tree is today inside the temple wall just behind the small shrine dedicated to Kanva muni.

When the Lord was done with Deva Gandakan, he was still filled with rage and anger. To calm down the Lord, mother Saundarya Valli took her birth in nearby village. Lord very much liked Saundarya Valli and He was married with her. The temple of Saundarya Valli is situated at the right hand side of the Lord inside the temple complex. The village in which mother Saundarya Valli took her birth is situated to the south direction from the temple, behind the coconut trees. The original deity of the Lord, who was filled with rage, is smaller in size and very Ugra (angry). This deity is kept in separate room inside the main temple hall and is not available for Darshan. Local tradition is that whoever touches that deity burns with fire.

The northern gate of the temple is called Swarga Dvara (A gate to heaven). This gate is normally closed. It is opened only two times in a year, once on Sankranti day and once more on Ugadi day. On these days, there is a festival in the temple and Lord's 'Utsav Murti' travels through this door. One who passes through this door goes to heaven (Swargaloka) after death.

### 4 Our Pilgrimage

On 17 June 2012, I started from Yeshwantpur at 8:00 am and reached Majestic after half an hour. There I joined with Nagaraj and had breakfast. Then we went to Attibelle in

BMTC Volvo bus. The bus fare was 70 rupees and we preferred one day gold pass (90 rupees). From Attibelle, we took bus to Hosur (time taken = 25 to 30 minutes, bus fare 6 rupees). From Hosur we took bus to Denkanikottai (time taken = 1 hour, bus fare 10 rupees). While returning we followed the same pattern reversed. One can directly go to Hosur or Denkanikottai by boarding a bus at K.R Market in Bangalore. We did not know this at that time.

We reached Denkanikottai at around 12:30 pm and started walking towards the temple. Local people told us the way to the temple and it is pretty straight forward. Along the way we saw some very big Pimpal trees. The surrounding area is covered by houses, farms, bushes and occasional water pond. We reached temple by 1:00 pm. The temple was closed at that time and we came to know that it would open at 2:00 pm. One family group of devotees and some other devotees were already present there, waiting for Lord to give *Darshan*. They were chanting Holy names of the Lord and singing devotional songs and we joined in with them. We also started enquiring about the book which will give detail information about the place, but were not fortunate enough to find one.

At 2:00 pm sharp, the doors of the innermost chamber of the temple hall were opened. The Lord was still behind the curtain. The temple priests then started chanting *vedic* hymns and finally we had the beautiful Darshan of the Lord. The Lord was then worshipped with lamps, flowers, fruits and many other sacred items along with *vedic* chanting and ringing bells. Nobody was allowed to have closer look at the Lord at this time. When the *arati* of the Lord was complete, priests closed the curtain and all of us went to the temple of Saundarya Valli Devi. There mother Saundarya Valli also was worshipped in a similar way. After the *arati* of Devi was complete, we were allowed to go near Her and pay our humble obeisances. She is very kind to allow devotees to have her Darshan from closer distance. Then again we came back to the main temple hall of Lord Betrayaswami. Curtains were removed and this time priests personally asked the names of all devotees present there and prayed to Lord on their account. This time Lord also allowed closer *darshan*. The priests then blessed everybody by giving them *Tulasi* leaves, *teerthamrita*, *kumkum* powder and lamp offered to the Lord. Many people offered donations at this time.

Then we all took our seats outside the temple hall and the priests served us lunch *prasadam*. *Prasadam* was served on banana leaves and consisted of four different kinds of cooked rice. It was extremely delicious. One can not forget the spiritual taste of sweet rice made in pure ghee for the pleasure of the Lord.

## 4.1 Visit to Narasimha Temple

We were fortunate enough to meet Mr. Ramamurti, an elderly but very enthusiastic and cheerful person along with Mr. Jayapal, a kind and generous resident of Denkanikottai. They told us so many things about this place and about the Lord. After taking some pictures of the temple, all four of us decided to go to Gavi Shree Laxmi-Narasimha temple which is located at 2 kilometers to the east of Lord Betrayaswami temple. History of this temple is as follows.

This temple is more than 5000 years old. In Dwapara Yuga, Pandava brothers along with their wife Draupadi had to undergo an exile from their kingdom. During their exile, Arjuna used to carve deities of the Lord Krishna in his many incarnations. Once during

their exile, Pandava brothers were staying at this place which was covered with very dense forest. There Arjuna carved the deity of Lord Narasimha inside the underground cave. After some time Pandava brothers left this place.

During Kali Yuga (current age which started around 5000 years ago and will last for 4,27,000 more years), a king named Dharma was ruling this area. During one of his hunting expeditions, he found this ancient cave and decided to go inside thinking that he might get a prey. When he reached inside the underground cave, he saw the deity but could not identify whose deity it was. Kanva muni was residing nearby. King then went to Kanva muni and told him about his discovery and asked for guidance. Kanva muni came to visit the cave and using his mystic powers, he could know all about the deity. Kanva muni told king Dharma that the deity belonged to none other than Lord Narasimha who had appeared in Ahobilam (in Andhra Pradesh) during Satya Yuga to kill daemon Hiranyakashipu and protect his dear devotee Prahlada. He told that the deity was carved personally by Arjuna and asked the king to worship the deity by performing Vedic Yagnyas (fire sacrifices). King Dharma conducted the sacrifice under the guidance of the *muni*. When Lord Narasimha was pleased with the king, he appeared to the king and told him to ask a boon. King Dharma then requested Lord Narasimha to reside here in this place along with Lakshmi Devi. Lord granted king's request and Lakshmi Devi also appeared at the place along with the Lord.

Today one can find an underground cave inside the temple in which Lord Narasimha resides with Lakshmi Devi on his lap. There is another deity of Lakshmi Devi inside the cave. On the pillars of the temple are carved various incarnations of the Lord. On some distance outside the temple wall, there is a stone marked with lotus feet of the Lord. Until recently, this temple was not accessible. People used to avoid coming into this area due to dense forest and the fear of big snakes as well as wild elephants. But recently the place was cleared and the stairs were constructed to reach the temple which is situated on the hill. The ancient temple complex itself, which was partially destroyed during Muslim rule, was renovated with its new Gopuram and wall. One can see a collection of pictures of these developments kept inside the temple complex. Also in memory of big snakes found during the reconstruction of the temple, a small sanctuary dedicated to these snakes is built. We came to know that when Lord Betrayaswami defeated Deva Gandakan, one of his feet was near the Narasimha temple and other foot was near Betrayaswami temple.

## 4.2 Other Temples

On the way towards Shree Laxmi Narasimha temple there are two more temples. One is dedicated to Draupadi, the wife of Pandavas. The other is dedicated to mother Mariyamma who has not allowed the roof to be constructed on the top of her temple. She prefers to reside inside the walls but without the roof.

The temple of Durga Devi, who drank the blood of Deva Gandakan is situated in the Denkanikottai village itself. It opens only on Tuesdays and Fridays.

We also came to know that there is an underground hidden passage which connects Shree Laxmi-Narasimha temple to Betrayaswami temple, another connecting Denkanikottai to Hosur, and another connecting Hosur to Srirangapatnam.

## 5 Conclusion

After a brief visit to the home of Mr Jayapal, we headed back to Bangalore. During our return journey we revised what we had learnt during our first holy expedition in south India. When I reached my room in IISc at 10:15 pm in night, I found myself thinking about the questions which were still unanswered. Where Kanva muni went after leaving Denkanikottai? How were the Lord Betrayaswami's dealings with mother Saundarya Valli and temple priests? Did Ramanujacharya visit this temple during his travels? If yes, then what happened when he visited the temple in 11th century? Where I will find the Sanskrit text of Skanda Purana which describes all these incidents? Will I ever find these eight chapters given that the Sthala Puranas are becoming rare these days and generally excluded from the standard printed editions of the Puranas? ... These and so many other questions keep us anxious. We will try to get them answered during our next visit to Denkanikottai. Govinda!

## References

1. Spiritual India Handbook by Stephen Knapp, Jaico Publishing House, 2011, Pg 268.
2. Interview with mister Jayapal.
3. Interview with mister Ramamurti.
4. Interview with temple priest of Gavi Shree Lakshmi Narasimha Swami temple.

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## Notes

1. Present age is called Kali yuga. Its total duration is 4,32,000 solar years. Before this was Dwapara yuga which lasts for 2\*(Kali yuga duration). Before that was Treta yuga which lasts for 3\*(Kali yuga duration). Before that was Satya yuga also called as Krita yuga which lasts for 4\*(kali yuga duration). Set of these four ages is called one Divya yuga. One thousand such sets make up one day of Brahma. Same is a night of Brahma. Brahma lives for 100 such years, one year containing 360 days of Brahma. So life of Brahma is very very long and same is the life of this universe. At the beginning of the universe, Brahma is born on the huge lotus flower which sprouts from the navel of Lord Vishnu who resides in the nether regions of the universe. Then Lord gives Brahma all the elements and ingredients required to carry out the secondary creation of the universe.

2. There are eighteen main Puranas (Historical accounts) one of which is Skanda Purana. Puranas are part of vedic literature and composed by Vyasadeva who is again the incarnation of the Lord for the purpose of writing such literatures for the benefit of people in the Kali yuga. Previously, before Kali yuga started, the knowledge was transfered orally and written books were not required because of very good memory of the people in those ages.
3. Although there are many incarnations of Lord like Narasimhadeva, Vyasadeva .... who appeared for different purposes and appear to have different personalities, there is no really difference between them. Incarnations and their activities are always mentioned and predicted in the authorized scriptures and so incarnations are always identified by their symptoms given in the scriptures. Although there are many incarnations, they all have originated from the same original supreme personality of godhead, whose spiritual body is full of eternity, knowledge and bliss and who resides in Goloka Vrindavan which is outside this material realm and beyond impersonal brahman.