

HISTORY OF MUTTS IN CHENNAI DISTRICT – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Chennai, originally known as "Mudhiras", was located in the province of Thondaimandalam, an area lying between Penna River of Nellore and the Ponnaiyar river of Cuddalore. The capital of the province was Kancheepuram. Thondaimandalam was ruled in the 2nd century by Thondaiman Ilam Tiraiyan, who was a representative of the Chola family at Kanchipuram. It is believed that Ilam Tiraiyan must have subdued the mudhiras, the original inhabitants of the region and established his rule over Thondaimandalam. Today, modern Chennai, formerly known as Madras is a large cultural, commercial and industrial centre, and is known for its cultural heritage and temple architecture. Chennai is the automobile capital of India, with around forty percent of the automobile industry having a base there and with a major portion of the nation's vehicles being produced there. Chennai is also referred as the Detroit of South Asia. It is a major manufacturing centre. Chennai has also become a major centre for outsourced IT and financial services from the Western world. Owing to the city's rich musical and cultural traditions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have included Chennai in its Creative Cities Network.

Keywords: modern Chennai, commercial and industrial centre, thondaiman.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chennai, originally known as "Mudhiras", was located in the province of Thondaimandalam, an area lying between Penna River of Nellore and the Ponnaiyar river of Cuddalore. The capital of the province was Kancheepuram. Thondaimandalam was ruled in the 2nd century by Thondaiman Ilam Tiraiyan, who was a representative of the Chola family at Kanchipuram. It is believed that Ilam Tiraiyan must have subdued the mudhiras, the original inhabitants of the region and established his rule over Thondaimandalam. The modern city of "Chennai" arose from the British settlement of Fort St. George and its subsequent expansion through merging numerous native villages and European settlements around Fort St. George into the city of Madras. While most of the original city of Madras was built and settled by Europeans, the surrounding area which was later incorporated included the native temples of Thiruvanmiyur, Thiruvotriyur, Thiruvallikeni (Triplicane), Thirumayilai (Mylapore) which have existed for more than 1000 years. Thiruvanmiyur, Thiruvotriyur and Thirumayilai are mentioned in the Thevarams of the Moovar (of the Nayanmars) while Thiruvallikeni in the Nalayira Divya Prabhandhams (of the Alvars).

2. HISTORY OF SRI AHOBILA MATAM

Ahobila Matam is a Sri Vaishnava religious institution established 600 years ago in a place called Ahobilam by Srimad Athivan Satakopan. He was originally known as Kidambi Srinivasachar. He was a student under Gadikasadam Ammal in Kanchipuram. One day, the Lord of Ahobilam, Sri Lakshminrisimha, appeared in Srinivasachar's dream and instructed him to come to the temple town of Ahobilam. After consulting with his Acharya, he proceeded to Ahobilam.

At Ahobilam, the Lord himself initiated Srinivasachar into Sanyasam (monasticism) and gave him the title, "Satakopa Jeeyar". (Later, Lord Athippiran of Azhvar Thirunagari added the title Van and Nammazhvar added the title Athi. Thus the Jeeyar came to be known as "Athivan Satakopan".)

Then, one of the nine Nrisimhas of Ahobilam called Malolan jumped into the hands of Athivan Satakopan (see picture on the right) and ordered him to travel the length and breadth of the country. Thus began the institution called Sri Ahobila Matam and the travels of Lord Malolan to village after village so that devotees get a chance to undertake Panca Samskaram and perform Bhara Nyasam at the lotus feet of the Lord.

The travels thus started 600 years ago continues to this very day. Successions of forty-five ascetics known as Azhagiya Singar have headed Sri Ahobila Matam. They have all taken Lord Malolan to the people. The unique tradition of the Lord traveling to the houses of His devotees continues. The present Jeeyar, who is the 45th in succession, has travelled the length and breadth of the country several times.

SRI AHOBILA MATAM AND SRI VAISHNAVAM

Sri Vaishnavam is the true religion of the Vedas drawing authority from the Prastana Thiraiyam, namely, Upanishads, Brahma Sutra, and Bhagavath Geetha. In addition to the Prastana Thiraiyam, Sri Vaishnavas consider the Tamil hymns of twelve saints called Azhvans as equal in authority to that of the Vedas. These hymns are called the Dhivya Prabhandham. The teachings found in Dhivya Prabhandham are completely consistent with the teachings of the Prastana Thiraiyam. Therefore, Sri Vaishnavas consider the Dhivya Prabhandhams to be equal in status to the Vedas. For this reason, Sri Vaishnavas are called Ubhaya Vedantis. After the period of the Tamil Saints called Azhvans, the Dhivya Prabhandham was lost. During the 9th century C.E., Sri Nathamuni retrieved them by the grace of Nammazhvar and re-established Sri Vaishnavam. For this reason Sriman Nathamuni is considered the first Acharya of the modern era. In the line of Acharyas that followed, Sri Ramanuja is considered the greatest. Among his many achievements the commentary he wrote for Brahma Sutra, called "Sri Bhashyam," is considered by many to be the best.

Among the Acharyas after Sri Ramanuja, Sri Vedantha Desika and Sri Manavalamuni are considered preeminent. After the time of these two great souls several Sri Vaishnava religious orders were established for the purpose of following the teachings of the great line of Acharyas.

Among the organizations that follow Sri Vedantha Desika as the torch bearer of Sri Ramanuja's teachings are Sri Parakala Matam, Srividya Ahobila Matam, Sri Pundarikapuram Andavan Ashramam, and Sri Srirangam Andavan Ashramam. Among these the oldest is Sri Parakala Matam founded by one of the disciples of Swami Sri Desikan. Sri Ahobila Matam is the second oldest in this line.

OUR MISSION

- Strengthen the Acharya (Pontiff) - Sishya (follower) connection between our beloved Acharya Srividya Azhagiya Singar and His Holiness' sishyas around the world.
- Support the science and arts educational institutions that cater to needy students.
- Preserve the ancient temples and sustain the rich vedic culture. Our organization facilitates this by:
- Helping sishyas approach Sri Matam to undergo SamAshrayanam and perform Bharanyasam.
- Informing sishyas about the status of the various projects (temples and educational institutions) undertaken by His Holiness in India and help raise funds for these projects.
- Arranging tele-upanyasams so that people around the world can listen to HH's divine words of wisdom.
- Informing sishyas on HH's sancharam (tour) information and publishing recordings of these events in India.
- Organizing Dolothsavams for Sri Navaneetha Krishnan of Sri Matam in the United States.
- Providing financial support to build educational institutions, hire well qualified instructors and granting scholarships to students.

3. RAMAKRISHNA MUTT CHENNAI

Swami Vivekananda's days of wandering throughout India ended when he reached Chennai in January 1893. His young, enthusiastic disciples in Chennai were primarily responsible for his historic participation at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Throughout Swamiji's four-year-long stay in the West, he kept in close touch with his followers in Chennai. Swamiji was given a grand reception on his return from the West in February 1897. During that period, he stayed for nine days at the Ice House (now Vivekanandar Illam). When his devotees in Chennai requested him to start a permanent center in the city, he readily agreed and deputed his brother disciple, Swami Ramakrishnananda, to initiate the Order's activities in southern India.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was a great thinker, an erudite scholar, a forceful speaker. Above all, he was a God-realized saint. He not only founded Sri Ramakrishna Math in Chennai but was also responsible for spreading the movement throughout parts of southern India. The various activities that the Math carries on today were initiated by the great Swami himself.

According to Swami Vivekananda's wishes, Swami Ramakrishnananda arrived in Chennai in March 1897. He stayed at a rented house in Triplicane for a few months. Then he came to the Ice House. The Math was based at the Ice House up until the end of 1907. Then it shifted to Mylapore, to a building constructed on a plot gifted by Sri A. Kondiah Chettiar, a close devotee of the Math. Surrounding plots were acquired in subsequent years. Due to structural damage to the existing building, another building was constructed and this building was consecrated by Swami Brahmananda, the first President of Ramakrishna Order, in the year 1917. This remains now as the 'Old Temple'. Apart from the fact that the Math in Chennai was founded by Swami Ramakrishnananda, who lived here for a long time, the Math was also sanctified by the visits of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, Abhedananda and Vijnanananda, all direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

ACTIVITIES OF MATH

EDUCATION

- Girls Higher Secondary School
- Primary School
- Vivekananda Book Bank

MEDICAL

- Medical service to poor patients
- Leprosy Rehabilitation

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- Women Welfare, Medical Help and Kids Education at Meyyur
- Nursing Assistant Training

CULTURAL

- Bala Mandir
- Vivekananda Sanskrit Course
- Vivekananda Youth Forum

RELIEF WORK - SPIRITUAL

- Worship and Celebrations
- Bhajans and Chanting
- Lectures and Interviews
- Spiritual Retreat and Japa Yajna

4. SHRI RAGHAVENDRA SWAMY MUTT

Shri Raghavendra (Sri Raghavendra Tirtha) (c.1595–c.1671) was a Hindu scholar, theologian and saint. He was also known as **Sudha Parimalacharya** (Sudhā Parimalācārya). His diverse oeuvre include commentaries on the works of Madhva, Jayatirtha and Vyasa-tirtha, interpretation of the Principal Upanishads from the standpoint of Dvaita and a treatise on Purva Mimamsa. He served as the pontiff of the Madhvacharya Mutt at Kumbakonam from 1624 to 1671. Raghavendra was also an accomplished player of the Veena and he composed several songs under the name of Venu Gopala. His tomb at Mantralayam (Brindavana) attracts thousands of visitors every year.

LIFE OF SWAMY RAGHAVENDRA

Raghavendra was born as Venkatanatha in the town of Bhuvanagiri, Tamil Nadu into a family of musicians and scholars. His great-grandfather Krishnabhatar was a tutor to Vijayanagara king Krishnadeva Raya and his father Timmanacharya was an accomplished scholar and musician. After the fall of Vijayanagara empire, Timmanacharya migrated to Kanchi with his wife Gopikamba. Venkatanatha had two siblings: Gururaja and Venkatamba. Venkatanatha's education was undertaken by his brother-in-law Lakshminarasimhacharya, after the early demise of his father and he was subsequently married.

According to Raghavendra Vijaya, his triumph in debates at Thanjavur attracted the attention of Sudhinda Tirtha, the erstwhile pontiff of Kumbakonam mutt. Though initially uncertain about the prospect of renunciation, Venkatanatha relented to Sudhinda's demands and was ordained as a monk in 1621. After the death of Sudhinda Tirtha in 1623, Venkatanatha succeeded him as the pontiff the mutt and took on the name Raghavendra Tirtha. He undertook a pilgrimage visiting places including Udipi, Kolhapur and Bijapur. He received grants from Dodda Kempadevaraja and settled down in the village of Mantralayam, which was presented to him by the Governor of Adoni. In 1801, while serving as the Collector of Bellary, Thomas Munro is believed to have come across an apparition of Raghavendra. He died in 1671 and his mortal remains are enshrined in Mantralayam. Traditional accounts report that Raghavendra asked his tomb (Brindavana) to be built around him as he entered into a state of samadhi. He was succeeded by his disciple Yogeendra Tirtha.

WORKS OF SWAMY RAGHAVENDRA

Forty works have been attributed to Raghavendra. Sharma notes that his works are characterised by their compactness, simplicity and their ability to explain the abstruse metaphysical concepts of Dvaita in understandable terms. His Tantradipika is an interpretation of the Brahma Sutra from the standpoint of Dvaita incorporating elements from Jayatirtha's Nyaya Sudha, Vyasa-tirtha's Tatparya Chandrika and the glosses by Vijayendra Tirtha. Bhavadipa is a commentary on Jayatirtha's Tattva Prakasika which, apart from elucidating the concepts of the source text, criticises the allegations against Madhva raised by Appaya Dikshita and grammarian Bhattoji Dikshita. Raghavendra's expertise in Purva Mimamsa and Vyakarana is evident from his works on Vyasa-tirtha's Tatparya Chandrika, which runs up to 18,000 stanzas. He wrote a commentary on Nyaya Sudha titled Nyaya Sudha Parimala. Apart from these works, he has authored commentaries on the Upanishads, first three chapters of Rig Veda (called Mantramanjari) and Bhagvad Gita. As an independent treatise, he has authored a commentary on Jaimini Sutras called Bhatta Sangraha which seeks to interpret the Purva Mimamsa doctrines from a Dvaita perspective.

IN CULTURE OF SWAMY RAGHAVENDRA

Raghavendra Tirtha has been eulogised by Narayanacharya in his contemporaneous biography Raghavendra Vijaya and a hymn Raghavendra Stotra by Appannacharya. Outside the confines of Dvaita, he is regarded as a saint known for preaching the worship of Vishnu regardless of caste or creed.[13] Hebbar notes "By virtue of his spiritual charisma, coupled with the innumerable miracles associated with him, the pontiff saint may very well be said to possess an independent and cosmopolitan cult of his own with his devotees hailing not only from all walks of life but from all castes, sects and even creeds as well". His humanitarianism is evident in the devotional poems composed in his honour by Vijaya Dasa, Gopala Dasa and Jagannatha Dasa. Raghavendra has also seen representation in the popular culture through Indian Cinema.

5. SRI SANKARA MUTTS, WEST MAMBALAM, CHENNAI

West Mambalam is one of the oldest localities in Chennai and is situated in the middle of the city. Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam's branch is located in Easwaran Koil Street. The Sankara Matam acts as a hub of spiritual and dharmic activities.

A few years back, with the Blessings of Their Holinesses Jagadguru Pujyasri Jayendra Saraswati Shankaracharya Swamiji and Pujyasri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Shankaracharya Swamiji, the deity of Devi Kamakshi was installed in Srimatam. Regular pujas are offered to Devi Kamakshi. During auspicious occasions like Navaratri, special pujas are performed.

A monthly Vidwat sadas (a seminar of scholars involving in discussions/presenting papers on the purport of different Saastraas in chaste Sanskrit language) is conducted by the Kamakshi Mandali at the Matam. Special Vidwat Sadas is conducted during Sankara Jayanthi celebrations every year. A go-shala in the backyard of the Sankara Matam provides shelter to cows. A Telugu Mahasabha functions from the Matam. Jataka Parivartana is also done. Musical concerts, bhajans, pravachans and several such programmes are conducted regularly with active participation of devotees.

6. GAUDIYA MISSION - HISTORY

Sri Visva Vaishnav Raj Sabha is the historic name of an association of persons who seek to practice all time service of the Absolute Personality, as taught by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and to preach and propagate His teachings. The association was founded by Srila Jiva Goswami during the 16th century A.D. with Srila Rupa Goswami as its first Patraraj or President. When the religious firmament of the word was over-clouded with misconceptions of the true nature of religion and the world was hastily running towards utter materialism and Leading into the depths of atheism, Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode appeared on the scene to save the situation by re-establishing the pure and eternal religion of loving service of the Supreme Lord. The Sabha was revived by Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode in 1886 A.D. and is at present, popularly known as Gaudiya Mission. The followers of the doctrine of Achinta-Bhedabheda (inconceivable simultaneous existence of distinction cum non-distinction) as propounded and preached by the Supreme Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu are known as GAUDIYAS and the mission founded by them is known as GAUDIYA MISSION, The Mission represents the genuine teachings of Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and intends to promote the spiritual welfare of all souls and to assist them in the study of the philosophy as propounded by Him.

Gaudiya Mission, an ancient missionary organization propagandizes the message of Lord Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The process of pure devotion through practice was preached at the Mission under the guidance of Srila Jiva Goswamipad in the name of "Visva Vaisnav Rajsabha" in 16th century, and Srila Rupa Goswamipad was its first president. Suddenly with pace of time it lost its influence. At about 200 years later Srila Bhakti Vinode Thakur, the own person of Sri Gaur Sundar revitalized Vaishnava religion and re-established the 'Rajshabha' (congregation) in 1886. With the inventiveness and assistance of some self-realized souls like Srila Jagannatha Das Babaji and Srila Gaura Kishore Das Babaji he discovered and safeguarded the original birth site of Sriman Mahaprabhu, preserved various ancient literature on Suddha Bhakti (pure devotion) and composed songs of unalloyed devotion, and he became successful in bringing a renaissance in the Bhakti cult. Srila Bhakti Vinode Thakur's contribution is countless but the greatest one is Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada, who later became most worthy successor and son of Srila Bhakti Vinode Thakur. Gradually with course of time he transformed Srila Bhakti Vinode Thakur's dreams to reality by preaching and spreading the message of pure devotion in the entire world as propagated by Mahaprabhu.

Dynamic efforts of Srila Prabhupada, Visva Vaisnava Rajsabha' transformed to Sri Gaudiya Math and gradually to Gaudiya Mission during the time of Srila Bhakti Prasad Puri Goswami Thakur (Sri Ananta Vasudev Prabhu). At a very early time span Prabhupada extended the list of Maths to 64 across India and abroad by his energetic preaching on the process of unalloyed devotion. After he receded from the view and as per his will Srila Bhakti Prasad Puri Goswami Thakur (Srila Acharyadev) became the next Acharya of Gaudiya Mission. Srila Acharyadev motivated the mass by his unmatched practice of pure devotion. As per his dictum Srila Bhakti Keval Audulomi Maharaj became the next Acharya. He remained Acharya for a prolonged period and kept the flow of pure devotion uninterruptedly. After Acharyadev the Acharya lila was enacted for the interim period by Srila Bhakti Pradeep Tirtha Maharaj. After Audulomi Maharaj, Srila Bhakti Srirup Bhagvat Maharaj (Acharyapad) became the Acharya. After Acharya lila Srila Bhakti Suhrud Paribrajak Maharaj is carrying forward the divine perceptual line and preserving the flow of pure devotion till date.

SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICE AND ACTIVITIES

Social activity relates to a number of concepts in the social science and philosophy. There are many social activities of Gaudiya Mission. They organize medical camps in many places in West Bengal and abroad in every month. Mobile distribution of medicine and free medical aid camp is one such special initiative of Gaudiya Mission. Many charitable

hospitals and dispensaries are maintained at here. Gaudiya Mission para-Vidapeeth research institute is keen to spread the learning of Gaudiya Vaishnava culture and its humanitarian outlook of the people without any restriction. There are many research activities have been done like awareness programme, organizing workshops, research on manuscriptology and organizing seminars and conferences. Different types of workshop have been arranged by mission on Indian model philosophical analysis, Vedanta epistemology, new concepts of relations etc. Gaudiya Math also arrange a vocational training like (Incense stick packing, floral arrangement) for poor women come of very poor family. Educational activity is also include in their lists of social activities. Gaudiya mission has set up family type biogas plants for meeting the cooking energy needs of its different centres in rural areas of the country along with making enriched organic fertilizer availability for crop cultivation. The rehabilitation centre of old-aged of the society has been set up at Gaudiya Mission with an idea to take care of the old men and women who had given their best to the service of the family. Free food to the poor, aid to victims of natural calamities and other social services have been arranged by mission. Free distribution of cloths are being organize between poorest section of the society is very kind social activity of Gaudiya Mission. They also involve them for development of Leprosy asylum and Gosalas.

SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES

Traditionally, spirituality refers to a religious process of re-formation oriented at the image of God as exemplified by the founders and sacred texts of the religious of the world. There are many spiritual activities of Gaudiya Mission like their daily programme which begins from 4:00 a.m. with prabhati kirtan, mangal arati, temple parikrama and end with sandhya arati and spiritual discourses at 9:30 p.m.. Spiritual initiation also be a part of their spiritual activities. The Gaudiya vaishnava calendar is full of festivals and the mission observes them with reverence. The Gaudiya Math celebrate many festivals like Lord Jagannath Snanyatra, Urjabrata Utsava, Ramnavami, Dol Yatra, Chandan Yatra, Rath Yatra, Sri Annakut, Sri Govardhan puja, Sri Radha Ashtami etc.. They also organize many spiritual awareness programmes for many years in many places like Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Allahabad, Lucknow, Ranchi, Assam and many more.. Parikrama is one of their main spiritual activity. Vrindaban Dham Parikrama, Sri Nawadwip Dham Parikrama, Sri Kshetra Dham Parikrama etc. are included in their list. The fundamental objective of Gaudiya Mission is to spread the philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism throughout the World and in practicing and propagating the gospel of the divine love as advocated by the revealed vedic authorities, Upanisads, Bhagavata, Gita and other scriptures and propagated by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

7. CONCLUSION

Today, modern Chennai, formerly known as Madras is a large cultural, commercial and industrial centre, and is known for its cultural heritage and temple architecture. Chennai is the automobile capital of India, with around forty percent of the automobile industry having a base there and with a major portion of the nation's vehicles being produced there. Chennai is also referred as the Detroit of South Asia. It is a major manufacturing centre. Chennai has also become a major centre for outsourced IT and financial services from the Western world. Owing to the city's rich musical and cultural traditions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have included Chennai in its Creative Cities Network.

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