

VIVEKANANDA ROCK MEMORIAL KANYAKUMARI : A CENTRE OF TOURIST ATTRACTION

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Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari attracts a large number of tourists from all over the world. As its name implies, it is essentially a sacred monument, built by the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee to which **Sri Mannath Padmanabhan** was President and **Sri Eknath Ranade**¹ was organising secretary. The Executive Committee members were drawn from different states to commemorate the visit of **Swamy Vivekananda** to '*Sripada Parai*' during 24th, 25th and 26th December 1892 for deep meditation and enlightenment.² From very early times, this rock has been regarded as a sacred one. In Puranic tradition, it has been known as '*Sripada Parai*' meaning the rock, that has been blessed by the touch of **Sripada** (feet) of the Goddess.³

South east of the Kumari Amman temple, in the mid sea, lies the twin rocks popularly known as the "**Vivekananda rocks**". The rocks are separated from each other by a distance of 220' with a cluster of stones protruding from the sea in between them. Of the two rocks, the smaller one is near the shore, but without good flat surface upon it. The major rock which has a spacious level top at an altitude of 55' was, therefore chosen by Swami Vivekananda for meditation.⁴ This rock is hence known as the **Vivekananda rock**. With a considerable size and elevation and situated at a distance of about 450 yards from the tapering end of the main land, the rock provides an ideal and unique vantage point to visitors, desirous of having a darshan of our sacred land spread up to the Himalayas.

On the rock, is a projection similar in form to a human foot and a little brownish in complexion, which has traditionally been revered as a symbol of "**Sripadam**". According to legend, it was on this rock, that **Goddess Kanya** did *Tapas*.⁵ It is believed that the original

Kumari Amman Temple was on this rock or somewhat near it and that the rock itself was a part of the main land and turned the rock into an island, with the result that the old temple had to be rebuilt on the present site. The rock has been venerated by Sakthi worshippers through the ages as a place of great spiritual efficacy for doing "Sadhana".⁶ This might be the reason for **Swami Vivekananda** to have an urge to reach this place, plunging into the sea, riding over the surging waves and swimming a distance of about 500 metres, in quest of the highest *Dhyana*. In his deep communion with the **Divine Mother**, he attained the cherished fruit of his years of prayer and meditation. He received illumination, the highest experience of spiritual realisation.⁷

It was in the fitness of things that in memory of that great event in Swami Vivekananda's life, people all over the nation aspired to raise at that spot a grand memorial. The memorial for which **Thiru. S.K. Achari** of **Devakottai** is the **Sthapathi**⁸, is a blend of all the architectural styles of India, was inaugurated on 2nd September 1970, by the then President of India **Sri. V.V. Giri**. The financial assistance for the construction of the Memorial came from all the states in India⁹ to a tune of Rs. 1.5 crores and the Government of Tamil Nadu put up break-water wall on the shore facilitating erection of Jetty platforms and shelter for vessels to berth at the rock at a cost of Rs. 4.25 lakhs.

The memorial consists of two main structures.¹⁰

- (i) Vivekananda Mandapa
- (ii) Sripada Mandapa

Vivekananda Mandapa

This 180' - 11½' x 56' Mandapa consists of

1. **Dhyana Mandapa** - meditation hall with six adjacent rooms.
2. **Sabha Mandapa** or assembly hall including Pralima Mandapa (statue section), two rooms, a corridor and an open Prakara round the Sabha Mandapa.
3. Mukha Mandapa (portion) and
4. The front entrance steps with two rooms and a corridor below the steps.

Sripada Mandapa

It is a square hall which consists of

- (1) Garbha graham (sanctum sanctorum)
- (2) the inner Prakara
- (3) the outer Prakara
- (4) the outer Prakara all around.

Both the Mandapas are so designed that the vision of Swami Vivekananda in the statue would be seen direct towards the *Sripadam*.¹¹

New Vivekananda Mandapa

The newly constructed Vivekananda Mandapa was dedicated to the youth of India by Swami Ranganathananda at Vivekanandapuram on 6th September 1988.¹² A huge granite statue of Swami Vivekananda is installed in the exquisite mandapa constructed in black and red granite stones. The samadi of late Eknath Ranade, founder of Vivekananda Rock Memorial in the front and a beautiful terrace garden behind adorn the mandapa that stands in a pool of water.

Vivekananda Kendra

After raising a national memorial to Swami Vivekananda at Kanyakumari, and dedicating it to the nation on 2nd September 1970, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee resolved to establish and run a service mission named "Vivekananda Kendra" with headquarters at Kanyakumari.¹³ The Kendra has before it "*Service to Humanity*" as its sole motto. The Kendra's membership is open to every one having the inner urge for selfless service irrespective of colour, creed, sex, community or way of worship. It strives to establish its units all over the country and abroad with the aim of attracting persons with the urge to serve the humanity and to mobilise them for various tasks of human welfare, after equipping them with necessary training. The Kendra also trains from among the youth, a special cadre of workers with a view to build up a non-monastic order of dedicated life workers pledged to life-long services for being deployed in needy areas to work for the economic, social, cultural and spiritual well being of the people.¹⁴

The Vivekananda Kendra (i) maintains the rock memorial in the mid sea and a 100 acre campus called '**Vivekanandapuram**' with residential and other facilities for pilgrim tourists. It also maintains the new **Vivekananda mandapa**.

- i. It trains laymen all over India in yoga, and yoga teaching, conducts yoga therapy camps, yoga therapy teacher's training courses and yoga research.
- ii. It brings out the monthly magazine **Yuva Bharathi** and half yearly magazine **Vivekananda Kendra Patrika**.
- iii. It has taken up a large scale rural development programme in Kanyakumari District.
- iv. It runs schools, free dispensaries, mobile dispensaries, youth programmes, cultural programmes, industrial training etc.

Hundreds and thousands of pilgrim tourists who visit Kanyakumari also visit the Vivekananda Kendra, and enjoy the scenic beauty of the beach. Thus, apart from the spiritual pilgrimages to temples, churches and mosques, tourists also want to enjoy the architectural styles of Dravidian culture. Tamil Nadu has been considered as the 'jewel of the south'. A land of palaces, forts, memorials, art galleries, museums, libraries, buddhist and jain centres, palces of archaeological and historical significance and so on, Tamil Nadu is one of the celebrated tourist destinations which attract more number of tourists. The 'Gate way of South India', Tamil Nadu is an archives of ancient legacy and cultural attainments. Among the cultural attainments, mention must be made about the classical dance of Bharatanatyam and the unbroken tradition of Carnatic Music, both vocal and instrumental which is sung and practised by number of men and women all over the state Tamil Nadu has so many things to offer to the pilgrims and tourists from within the state as well as those coming from abroad.

END NOTES

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