



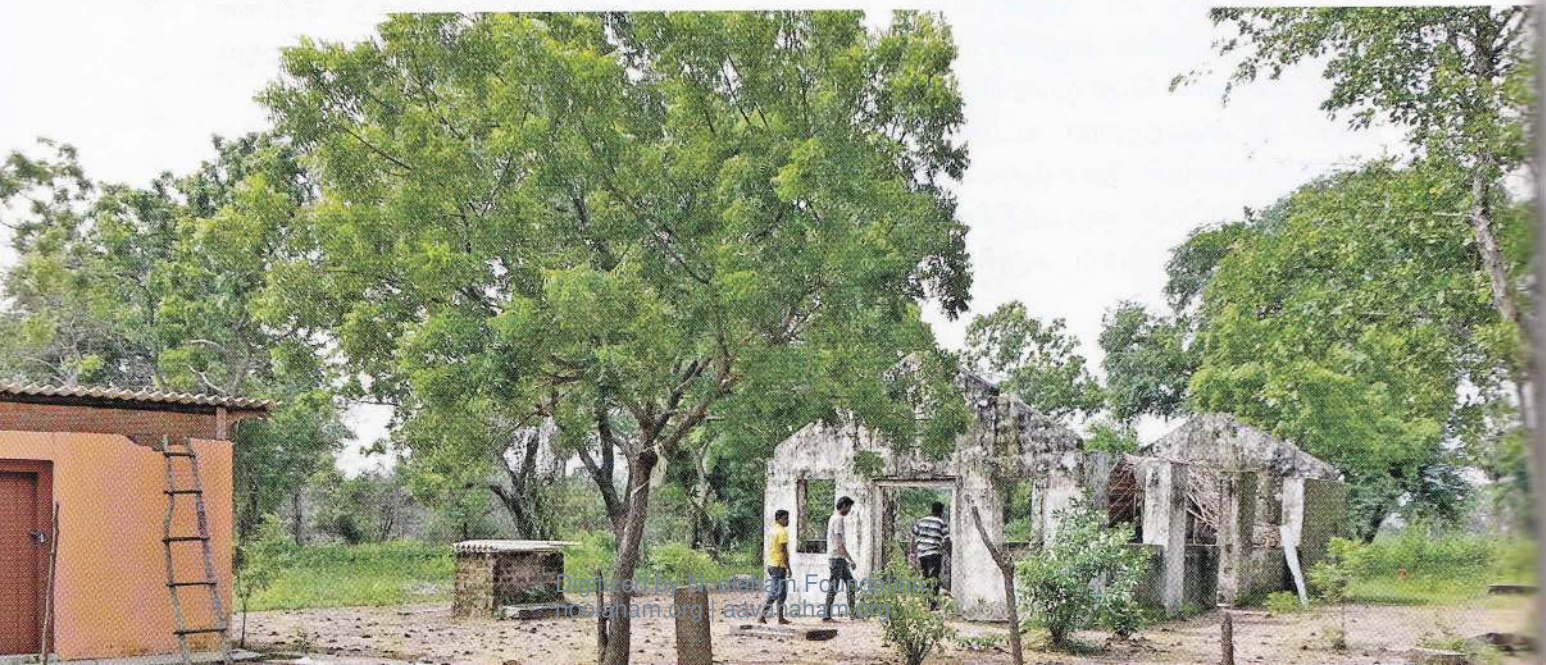
# Sage Agasthiyar in Koneswaram, Ketheeswaram

**V.Varathasuntharam**

Two Ishwarams in Sri Lanka, Thiru Koneswar-  
am and Thiru Ketheeswaram, which are hailed  
as holy shrines over which hymns are sung by  
Nayanmars, are revered places for the reason  
Sage Agathiyar had blessed them by setting his  
feet there, conducting prayers and rituals.



*Temple in dilapidated condition*







*Ancient sanctum sanctorum*



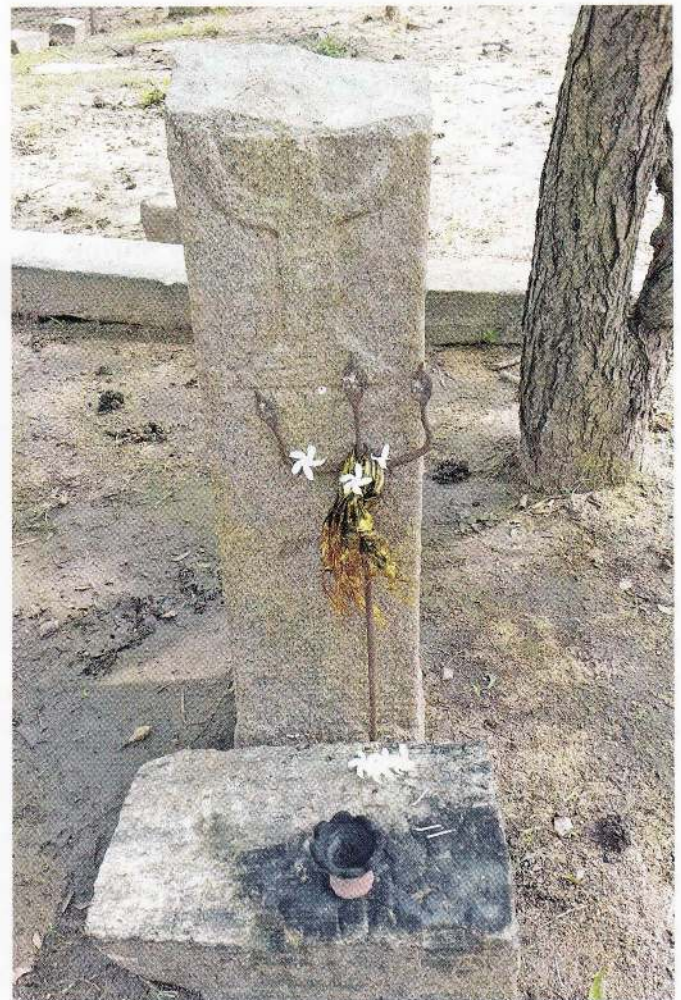
*Agasthiya Lingam*

Sage Agasthiyar is one of the eighteen Sittas. In Ramayana Rama talks about Agasthiyar's ashram in the forest and tells his brother about Agasthiyar's greatness. Mahabaratha talks about Agasthiyar in detail. Agasthiyar is hailed as the Father of Tamil Grammar. Many treatises on varied branches of sciences such as medicine, pharmacy, astronomy and even surgery are attributed to Agasthiyar. His guru is Lord Siva. His Samadhi is Anandasayana. It is said that he had twelve disciples.

Once, Devas and Rishis proceeded to the Himalayas to view the celestial marriage of Lord Siva to Parvathi. Consequently, due to their weight, that portion of the earth dipped and the South of the earth went up. Lord Siva, visualizing a catastrophe, gave a directive to Sage Agasthiyar to visit the South to maintain the earth's balance. That, in brief, is the tale of poet sage Agasthiyar coming to the South.

### **Thirukoneswaram**

During this journey to the South crossing the Vindya Mountain range, Sage Agasthiyar had come on a pilgrimage to Thiru Koneswaram and Thiru Ketheeswaram. The period of his visit to these Ishwarams has been reckoned as the 8th or



*Thrisoolam pillar*





*Palavi Theertham*

9th century BC. This contributes to indicate the antiquity of the two Ishwarams in Sri Lanka.

On his spiritual sojourn to Koneswaram, Agasthiyar had founded a Siva temple in Kanguveli in Kottiyapura Pattu according to legends such as puranas and chronicles. It is also supported even by an inscription called Kankuveli Sasanam. It is believed that the temple, he founded was in Thirumangalay. This Siva shrine, is, therefore called Agasthiyar Sthapanam. It had enjoyed a close affinity with Koneswaram. Remains of a Sivan temple are found here. These ruins are a Sivalingam, Komuhi, Palipeedam, fragments of images made of stones, and pillars. They had been found in the year 1980 amidst the jungle.

According to historians, these ruins had been observed by Jacques Fabrice Van Sendedn, who had served as Dutch Governor in Trincomalee. He had visited the site in the year 1786. He had also found an inscription, which he deciphered with the help of officials who served under him. It is said that the inscription belonged to the 14th century since it is inscribed in the characters of that period. There is reference to Vanniyanars, atappar of seven villags, designations of persons functioning etc.

It is revealed in Thirukarasai puranam and Thiru Konasala puranam that Agasthiyar, who had entoured Koneswaram from Kailas, founded a

temple for Siva known as Agasthiar Istapanam in Kottiyar Pattu on being impressed with the natural beauty and sylvan grandeur of the village, where the verugal Gange flows in close proximity.

Saiva Pulvar R . Vadivel in his Tamil Book "Sacred Sites in Trincomalee District" published by the Ministry of Hindu Affairs states: " There is evidence to infer that there had been a temple of Siva founded by Agasthiar. A sivalingam , nanthy, Palipeedam, subramaniyar, Agasthia, Thevar and pillayars are still found in the vicinity." The inhabitants of Kanguveli, Kilivetti and Malligatheewu in the Kottiyar Pattu had later found a Siva shrine in the area about two hundred years ago."

'An ancient tradition that is still observed here is the conduct of the Amavasai festival on the banks of Verugal Ganga. The statue of Siva at Aathy Konanayakar temple at Thampalakamam is brought to the venue on the banks of Verugal Ganga and special poojas are performed throughout the night. Fire walking is a special event at this festival.

Another striking feature of this festival is the recitation of the ancient Thiru Karasai Puranam at this congregation of devotees in keeping with the age old tradition of reciting Kantha Puranam at Murugan temples and the recitation of Preunkathai at Pillaiyar temples.

The Thirukarasai Puranam sung in praise of Lord



Siva installed in Agasthiyar Isthapanam belonged to Thirukonasala Saiva Santhanam. The first and foremost stanza sung in praise of the Guru states that the poet was a disciple of Umapathy Sivachariyar. This Purnam, which belonged to 18th or 19th century, comprises 155 stanzas.

It is revealed in the Puranam that Agasthiyar was blessed with the dharshan of the holy wedlock of the Lord Siva with goddess Umathevi at Koneswaram. The following Tamil stanza in Thirukarasai Puranam amply illustrates how thrilled the Siththa Agasthiyar was at this dharshan.

ஆணவம் முதல் மூன்றும்  
அடக்கிய மேலோராலும்  
காணுதற் கரியதெய்வக்  
கடிமணக் கோலந்தன்னை  
ஏழ்நிலை வரைப்பும் உய்ய  
ஏழையேன் கண்டு வாழக்  
கோணமலையில் காட்டிக்  
குறைதீர்த்தவனே போற்றி!

Let me give an English translation of this stanza in Tamil.:

Oh! Lord Konesar

Thou blessed me at the sacred Koneswaram  
hillock

The Tharshan of divine nuptials which even Liberated souls freed from three bonds had not been granted.

### Thiruketheeswaram

Later, Agasthiyar had undertaken a pilgrimage to Thiruketheeswaram, which was then called Thwadapuri, according to Dakshnana Kailasa Manmiam. The main objective of his visit was to gain Thavasithy, a great blessing from Siva. Agasthiyar, on reaching this holy place, made ab-lutions in Palavi Theertham. Palavi is, therefore, bestowed with sanctity. He engaged in religious rituals in Thiruketheeswaram and chanted prayers to Lord Siva, the presiding deity.

He describes the sacred place as Thwaddapuram and hailed the consort of Siva as Gowrie Amman. It is an ardent belief among followers of Siththa cult that Agasthiyar lives eternally. Following is the translation of Sanskrit sloka, an out-burst of his inner soul paying homage and hailing Lord Siva at Thiruketheeswaram and His Consort Gowry Amman:

“ Dweller of Kailas Mountains, Consort of  
Mother,

Gowri Easawara! Resident of Thwadapuram.”



Sivalingam,  
Pillaiar, Nanthi,  
Palipeedam,  
Subramaniyar  
Asthiradevar

