CONCEPT OF GOD IN THE FORM OF SIVALINGA

2.1. SIVA LINGAM

Generally much misunderstanding prevails about the Siva Linga. The common belief is that it represents the phallus; but it is doubtful if the ancients had such a conception. There is no conclusive evidence to infer that the worship of the phallus prevailed in India even among the uncivilized tribes. Macdonell, however, lays it down categorically that the cult was in existence in the Vedic period. “A symbol must have been used, as at a later period, in the phallus worship which was known by the occurrence in two passages of the word ‘Sisna Devah’. ‘Those who have a phallus for their deity’. Such worship was, however, repugnant to let the Sisna Devah, approach the sacrifice and he is said to have slain the Sisna Devah, when he won the treasure of the hundred - gated fort. In the post Vedic period, the phallus or linga becomes symbolical of Siva’s generative power or linga become and its worship is widely diffused even at the present day”.

The word Sisna Devah is explained by Sayana as meaning “those who sport with the Sisna, i.e., unchaste men” and he quotes Yaska as his authority. ‘Durga, the commentator of the Nirukta, gives the same explanation, and he proceeds to examine other Vedic compound works ending in Devah; and, after arguing elaborately for and against Sayana’s
meaning, concludes thus: - “However interesting it would be to find a proof of the existence of a phallic worship among the aboriginal tribes contemporary with the Vedic Rises, it must be confessed that the word Sisna devah does not supply this evidence”. In spite of the correct and impartial analysis of the position by Muir, R.G.Bhandarkar says, “Notwithstanding all that is said about the matter, my own belief is that the persons here referred to were really some tribe of the aborigines of the country who worshipped the phallus⁴”. But that is only a statement of his own belief. One cannot accept it without further evidence. Beyond these two allusions there is no mention of the worship of the phallus any where in Vedic, Upanisadic, or Brahmanic literature.

The word ‘Linga’ occurs in some places in the Upanisads, but in a different sense. For example, the cosmic Purusa is described as a linga’ in Katha upanisad⁵. The meaning is that he does not have a distinguishing mark. This same description appears in the Svetasvatara Upanisad. In the period of the Mahabharata, Mahesvara or Rudra must have been completely identified with the cosmic Purusa by Siva worshippers. He was regarded as ‘the cause of causes’⁶. The meaning of the phrase will become clear from the opening verse of the Svetasvatara Upanisad. There ‘time’ (kala), ‘inherent nature’ (Siva – bhava), ‘necessity’ (niyati), ‘chance’ (yardrccha), ‘the elements’ (bhuta), ‘the womb’ (yoni), ‘male person’ (purusa) are considered causes. Isa (Rudra) is considered as cause of these. He is identified with one who rules over these causes⁷. He is identified with the
‘one who rules over these causes’. Being thus regarded, Isa becomes necessarily inconceivable. “It is conceived of, knows it not. It is not understood by those who say they understand it not.” Not being conceivable Isa could not be worshipped. Yet the mind will not be satisfied without worship, and so, something representing Mahesvara or Siva came to be worshipped. That was the linga or the characteristic mark of Siva. But Siva was ‘a – linga, without a mark’. Hence, its mark was the mark of ‘a – linga’ or ‘indistinguishability’ or ‘imperceptibility’ as a form.

Those who conceived of Siva as the cause of cause or the cosmic Purusa believed that everything else, including Brahma and Vishnu had a form. Siva alone is formless or in other words ‘all – formed’. Being possessed of all forms and having no form of its own, there is nothing in the three worlds, male or female, embodied or disembodied which is not pervaded by Siva. Every form that is worshipped in the form or ‘linga’ of the all – formed Siva. Likewise even a form – less think that is worshipped in the mark, or the linga, of the formless Siva; for Siva alone is really formless.

Hence it is that Upamanya says ‘We have not heard that the linga of any other is worshipped by the gods. Declare if thou hast heard, what other being’s linga except that of Mahesvara is now worshipped, or has formerly been worshipped by the gods. He whose linga, Brahma and Vishnu and thou (Indra), with the deities, continually worship is therefore the most eminent’.

It was to represent this double idea of the ‘all – formed’ and ‘form – less’ that the Siva linga (which is believed wrongly by some to represent the phallus)
was chosen, and it become the object of worship. The description of the cosmic Purusa, as it appears in the Purusa Sakta hymn\textsuperscript{11} and in the Svetasvatara Upanisad\textsuperscript{12} applies equally to the Siva linga also; e.g., ‘The Purusa has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. It has a hand and foot on every side, on every side an eye and head and face, it has an ear everywhere in the world’.

The hemispherical top of the Siva linga consists in reality of thousands of heads, each of the size of a point. The sides of the cylindrical figure are equally true representations of the thousands of eyes, hands and faces. The circular bottom is similarly representative of a thousand feet; the semicircular top, resembling the visible horizon, is truly symbolical of the universe which surrounds of earth on the all sides\textsuperscript{13}. Though the image has thousands of hands, feet and eyes, it still has ‘no foot or hand or eye or ear’\textsuperscript{14}. Thus the Siva linga is the closest possible approximation to the cosmic Purusa with whom Mahesvara was identified by the devotees of Siva. This explanation is borne out by several passages in the Linga Purana, e.g.

\begin{quote}
“A – lingo linga mulam tu avyaktam lingam ucyate,

A – lingah Siva ity ukto lingam saivam iti smrtam”\textsuperscript{15}.
\end{quote}

The Supreme Being who has no characteristic marks is the source of characteristic marks. Imperceptibility is spoken of as the mark (of Siva). The linga (the Siva linga) is remembered as pertaining to Siva\textsuperscript{16}. The meaning of
linga as the differentiating mark (and not as the sex – mark) is evidenced by a verse in the Linga Purana which runs thus:-

“Pradhanam prakrtis – ceti yadahur lingam uttamam –
Gandha varna rasair hinam sabda – sparsadi – varjitaṁ”\(^{17}\).

“The foremost lingam which is primary and is devoid of smell, colour, test, hearing, touch, etc., is spoken of as Prakṛti (Nature)\(^{18}\). When it is remembered that the cause, where by the universe is seen as different from the Supreme indivisible being, is Maya or illusion, and that one should know that Prakṛti is “illusion or Maya”\(^{19}\) the meaning of the word ‘linga’ appearing in the above verse will become clear. The word is used as synonymous with Prakṛti, the first thing which differentiated itself, e.g., separated itself from the infinite and indivisible thing known as Siva to Saiva devotees. When this initial differentiation was effected, the whole world got to be differentiated also. Necessarily it should have its distinguishing characteristics. That mark of distinction attaching itself to the world is spoken of the Saiva devotee as the linga –

“Vigraho jagatam lingam, ailingadabhavat svayam”\(^{20}\)

That is, “the image (form) of the world created itself from the indistinguishable (a – linga)”\(^{21}\). Here we have another instance to show that the Siva worshipper’s conception of the linga was something different from that of the phallus. Since both Prakṛti and the universe got their ‘linga’ or characteristic marks of differentiation from Siva Himself, every object in the
universe is spoken of as being marked with the linga assigned to it by Mahesvara (who is assisted in this by his consort Uma).

The staunch Saiva devotee Upamanya is unwilling to regard Vishnu, or Brahma, or Indra, as the Highest, and so speaks sarcastically about them. “Since prajah or created beings bear neither the mark of the lotus (Brahma's), nor of the discus (Vishnu's), nor of the thunderbolt (Indra's), but are marked with the male and female organs (the distinguishing marks of human beings) – therefore offspring is derived from Mahesvara”²². The implication is that none of the three gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Indra, is capable of conferring upon mortals their characteristic marks. They are themselves only subjected to creations like human beings. Their own functions and characteristic feature have to be determined by Mahesvara. They are swayed by Prakrti, and so they are (spoken of by Upamanya as) the worshippers of the linga, which the Prakrti is said to be (according to the Linga Purana quitted above).

It is in the above manner that Upamanya’s remarks have to be understood; otherwise they would become meaningless. If it is believed that the ‘linga of Mahadeva’ was the phallus of Mahadeva, then it would appear that Upamanya was of opinion that Mahadeva’s form was that of a human being. There is no proof of that. The presumption is in favour of the view that the gods have shapes different from those of human beings just in the same manner in which the shape of man is different from that of a worm or an insect. Again, if the lingam is understood to mean the phallus, why should
Mahadeva’s lingam alone be the object of worship? Any god’s lingam would serve the purpose as well. Further, in the passage appearing in the Mahabharata, Upamanya says that all beings, in the three worlds, movable and immovable are marked by Mahadeva’s lingam. That means that the mountains, rocks, and rivers, fire, wind and lighting, and everything else which cannot be classified as either male or female, have the mark of Mahadeva. The phallic idea will not apply here.

Thus it is impossible to understand the lingam as meaning the sex-mark. The reason why this wrong notion crept in was that in the Sanskrit language the word ‘linga’ has also the meaning of the male sex – mark. But it is clear that it is a derivative meaning. Since the male organ happens to be the distinguishing mark of the male, the word came to have that meaning. But that fact should not be allowed to mislead us in understanding the meaning of the Siva linga.

Mr. K.R. Subramaniyan says that “phallic worship was the primitive form of Siva worship and un – Brahmanical and un – Vedic in origin with its roots in the neo – lithic times”23. Again he holds that linga is the symbol of the ancestor in ancestry worship24. He arrives at these conclusions after an elaborate process of reasoning for establishing the first that the Nagas were phallic worshippers, and secondly that the phallic cult “was closely connected with ancestor – worship and the snake – cult”25.

We may grant that the Nagas might have been worshippers of Siva. For, they form one group of the subjects of Siva, who had to acknowledge
Ganapati or Siva’s son as their immediate overlord. It is also just possible that there were in other lands some who were worshippers of the phallus. But it is wrong to confound the phallic cult with Siva worship because the phallus had nothing to do with Siva lingam.

The fact that we find the serpent enveloping the Sivalinga installed in different places is a proof enough, perhaps, to show that who reverenced the Nagas as their ancestors were also at the same time reverencing their ancestors’ god, Siva. Thus there is, absolutely no need for confusing either phallic worship with Siva Linga worship, or with ancestral worship.

Mr. T.A.Gopinatha Rao says that the linga was only the phallus\textsuperscript{26}. But when we remember that the almost innumerable Siva lingas of our land are all of a common shape having not even the slightest resemblance to the phallus, a few exceptional ones in the three places above mentioned need not at all be taken seriously to affect our general conclusion. Let it be conceded also that the few exceptions may really belong to a phallic tribe; this, however, has no bearing on the nature of Siva and Saivism.

2.2. Structure of Siva Linga

Most prevalent icon of Siva and virtually found in all Siva temples, Siva Linga is a rounded, elliptical, an-iconic image that is usually set on a circular base or Peedam. According to some scholars the Peedam represents Parasakti, the manifesting power of God.
Siva Lingas are usually made of stone that may either be carved or naturally existing - suyambu, such as shaped by a swift-flowing river. Siva Lingas may also be made of metal, precious gems, crystal, wood, earth or transitory materials such as ice. Some scholars say that transitory Siva Linga may be made of 12 different materials such as sand, rice, cooked food, river clay, cow dung, butter, rudraksha seeds, ashes, sandalwood, darbha grass, a flower garland or molasses. The Sivalingam is generally mounted on a circular or quadrangular receptacle called the Auvudaiyar. This pedestal is designed so as to drain off the water offered during ablution ceremonies.

The bottom of the pedestal represents Brahma, the octagonal middle represents Vishnu and the upper circular portion represents Siva. The upper portion of the Sivalingam may be of various shapes, cylindrical, elliptical, umbrella shaped. Images may also be (rarely) carved on a Sivalingam.27

2.3. KINDS OF LINGAM

1. Sama kandam - Siva pagam, Vishnu pagam and Brahma pagam are all equal propositions.
2. Varthamanam – Varthamanam means Vishnu pagam exceeding all part over the Brahma pagam and also Rudra pagam exceeding one part over the Vishnu pagam.

3. Saivathitheiyam – means Vishnu pagam and Brahma pagam are equal and also Rudra pagam exceeding the other two.

4. Thiriracigam means total height of the linga is divided into nine parts other parts have been made equal proposition\textsuperscript{28}.

### 2.4. TYPES OF LINGA

Siva is worshipped in the symbol of Linga. The chief image in the central of a Siva temple is, in a large majority of instances, Lingas are broadly divided into two classes, namely, the Chala - lingas and the Achala lingas that are movable and the immovable Lingas. The large and heavy stone Lingas which are set up in the central shrines of Siva temples are Achala lingas\textsuperscript{29}.

#### 2.4.1. Chala lingas

The Chala lingas are divided into Mrinmaya (these made of earth), lohaja (of metals), ratnaja (of precious stones), daruja (of wood), sailja (of tone) and Kshanika lingas, (those made for the occasion and disposed of immediately after there is over)\textsuperscript{30}.
2.4.2. Achala lingas

The achala lingas are classified under nine heads, namely, the Suyambu, the Purva, the Daivata, the Ganapatya, the Asura, the Sura, the Arsha, the Rakshasa, the Manusha and the Bana lingas. Of these, the Suyambu belongs to the uttamottama (most superior) variety of the uttamamadhayama (middling superior) variety; whereas the Asura, the Sura and Arsha lingas belong to the uttama adhama (lowest among the superior) variety. The Manusha lingas belong to the madhayamadhama (middling among the inferior) variety.

The most authoritative of all the Saiva Agamas, the Kamikagama states that the achala lingas are divided into six classes, the Suyambu, the Daivika, the Arshaka, the Ganapatya, the Manusha and the Bana lingas.\(^{31}\)

2.4.3. Suyambu linga

The suyambu linga is one which rose up and came in into existence by itself and had existed from time immemorial. A Suyambu linga is considered as sacred that it is above all the rules laid down in the Agamas for him other classes of Lingas.\(^{32}\)

2.4.4. Daivika linga

The Daivika lingas are recognized by their characteristic shapes. They may be of the shape of a flame or resemble a pair of hands held in anjali pose; they may have rough exterior with elevations and depressions, deep hollows and scars resembling tanka (chisel) and trisula (trident).\(^{33}\)
2.4.5. Ganapa lingas

The Ganapa lingas are those set up by ganas. They are of the shape of the fruits of cucumber, citron, wood – apple or palm.

2.4.6. Arsha lingas

The Arsha lingas are those set up and worshiped by Rishis; they are spheroidal in shape, with the top portion less broad than the lower portion\(^3\).\(^4\).

2.4.7. Manusha lingas

The Manusha lingas are the largest number of achala lingas. They are set up by human hands. They are sculptured in accordance with rules laid down in the Agamas. The Manusha lingas consist of three parts, namely, the lowest square section known as Brahma bhaga, his middle octagonal section known as Vishnu bhaga and the top of circular portion called the Rudra bhaga\(^3\)^5.

The Mukha linga is one of the varieties of Manusha lingas and distinguished from all other Lingas as it bears one or more human faces sculptured on it.

2.5. FORMS OF SIVALINGA

In Saivism, Siva, the supreme and immanent reality, of His own volition becomes the determinate for the sake of the salvation of millions of soul. The determinate forms of Siva are three, namely Sakala (form), Nishkala (formless) and Sakala Nishkala (form and formless)\(^3\)\(^6\).
2.5.1. Sakala (form)

In the Sakala aspect, Siva manifests Himself in Man’s bodily form. The forms, such as, Natarajar, Anugrahamurtis, Samharamurties, Chandrasekaramurtis are Siva’s different Sakala forms. In Sakala, Siva is worshipped in the embodied form\(^3\). 

2.5.2. Nishkala (formless)

Siva alone is glorified as Nishkala. He manifests Himself in the form Linga in Nishkala aspect. In Nishkala, He is worshipped in the Linga form.

2.5.3. Sakala Nishkala (form and formless)

It is the state of blended togetherness of Siva’s Sakala and Nishkala form. In this aspect, Siva is worshipped in ‘Mukalinga’ (mixture of Sakala and Nishkala) form\(^3\). 

Broadly speaking linga is of two kinds namely Andalinga which means the world and Binda linga which means the human body according to Tirumandiram\(^3\).

2.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIVA LINGAM

The non anthropomorphic Linga form of Siva is seen in reverence in all temples all over the sub continent. The Lingam is a symbol. It is a symbol of that which is invisible and yet omnipresent. It is hence a visible
symbol of the Ultimate Reality which is present in us (and in all objects of creation).

The Sivalingam denotes the primeval energy of the Creator. It is believed that at the end of all creation, during the great deluge, all the different aspects of God, find a resting place in the Lingam; Brahma is absorbed into the right, Vishnu to the left and Gayatri into the heart. The Sivalingam is also a representation of the infinite Cosmic Column of fire, whose origins, Vishnu and Brahma were unable to trace.

2.7. SIVA LINGA AS A PHALLIC SYMBOL

Hinduism conceptualizes Brahman, the supreme power, as having three main roles: that of God the Creator, God the Preserver and God the Destroyer. This trinity is represented iconically by the deities Brahma, Vishnu and Siva respectively. Thus, it is Siva, the destructive form of the Almighty, who is represented by the Lingam or Phallus, which is manifestly the creative or generative power of Man. This points to an origin of the tradition of using the Lingam as a divine symbol that is utterly sublime in its philosophical underpinnings.

The form of the Siva Linga serves to further emphasize this inference. The base of the Lingam is the Yoni also known as ‘Parasakti’⁴⁰. The upright
portion of the Lingam is shown as being protuberant through the yoni, and the two forms have a unified structure. Thus, the Lingam represents the very instant of creation, or rather of regeneration, when the perishable and eventually destructible Old renews and regenerates itself in another form, the New that is to come.

Lingam is the symbolic form of the Godhead. Lingam means that in which this Jagath [creation] attains laya [mergence]; that into which this Jagath goes (gamyathe). The three gunas [primordial qualities] are represented by the three-tiered Peetha [platform]; the Lingam above symbolises the goal of life. Lingam means “a symbol,” the symbol of creation, the result of the activity of the three gunas and of the Brahman [Supreme Reality] which permeates and gives it meaning and value. The worship of the Lingam must be done with faith in its symbolic significance.

Scholars say that the interpretation of Siva Linga as an abstract form of God is also consonant with philosophies that hold the notion that God may be conceptualized and worshipped in any convenient form. The form itself is irrelevant, as the divine power that it represents is all that matters. Scholars thus say that Sivalinga represents the formless Nirguna Brahman or the formless Supreme Being.
2.8. THE SACRED SIVA LINGA

The sexual symbolism of Tantra, like the subject of sexuality in general, has always engaged the human mind. The modern mind seems to be obsessed with it. Many people into Tantra, as well as most of the scholars who write on it, seem unable to move beyond the physical suggestions of these symbols to their spiritual indications. This has kept the study and practice of Tantric Yoga at a superficial level in which its deeper cosmic and creative energies remain latent.

There is an inclination to reduce the Siva linga and Sakti yoni, the two main Tantric symbols of ascending and descending forces which are often represented by upright conical stones for the Siva linga and ring stones or basis for the Sakti yoni - to merely the male and female sex organs, which is but one of their representations, and their erotic glorification. There is the tradition of Tantric sexuality of mithuna which uses sacred sex as part of Yoga practice. But it is not only practice of Tantric Yoga and when done is integrated into a much larger array of practices.

Other Siva lingas are associated with gold or crystal, the light powers in the metal kingdom. The Siva linga is often described in terms of light, crystal or transparency. Siva himself is said to be pure light or light in its primal indifferentiated state, Prakasha matra.
2.9. SIVA LINGAM - A GLORIOUS WORSHIP

Siva lingam is the holy symbol of Lord Siva that is considered quite sacred and worshipped with devotion and piety by the devotees. The Sanskrit word lingam means symbol, so Siva lingam means symbol of Siva. It is considered the foremost sacred symbol for saivaites and has been worshiped for ages. The Puranas like Sivamahapuranam talks about the superiority of linga worship. (The Indus valley excavation is an example for the presence of this worship in olden times) 43

God is formless, attribute less and omnipresent. This state is called arupa (formless). For the benefit of the pashus, He took the form of Siva lingam which is neither form nor formless but is a symbol. This symbol of Him is called aruparupam (formless form). He took many forms out of His mercy to bless all, which are called rupams. Saivaite worships the God in all these three states. The oldest form that the formless God took namely the Siva lingam is called sadasiva murtam and is worshipped in the altar of His abodes (temples). The forms that He later took which are called Maheswaramurtam and they are worshipped in the outer circles in a temple.

This Siva linga worship is superior since it makes the worship simple because of the form while maintaining the truth that God is not having any definite form. There are lot of marvellous principles behind the Siva linga worship which could be found in detail in standard scriptures.
Sivalinga literally means the body of Siva. Next to the symbol of AUM, it is perhaps the most potent, powerful and popular symbol in entire Hinduism. In almost all the Siva temples, worship is generally made to Sivalingas only. Very rarely we come across his images in the sanctum sanctorum of any Siva temple. A Sivalinga is usually a round or cylindrical and protruding object. The cylindrical part is held firmly by a circular base.

Sivalinga is a phallic symbol, representing the male and female sexual organs in a state of conjugal bliss. Mentally it symbolizes the union of mind and body. Spiritually it represents the union between Purusha and Prakriti, the highest principles of the manifest universe.

The Sivalinga is also the symbolic representation of the Supreme Self. It is verily Maheswara Himself, the Highest Self and the Lord of the universe. In this aspect it has three parts. The lower part represents Brahma. The middle part, which is octagonal in shape, represents Vishnu. The upper part, which is cylindrical in shape, represents Rudra and is also called Pujabhaga since it receives the actual offerings of milk and other substances.
2.10. PANCHA BHUTA LINGAM

The following forms or forces of nature are worshipped in their primal form only without any special idols representing them.

Sarva :- Bhoomi Linga, of Kancheepuram, in Tamil Nadu. It is in Siva Kanchi Kshetra, where the Lord is in the form of Kshiti Linga in the Ekambra tree (Aamra (Mango in Sanskrit) tree, which yield only one fruit in a year). Parvathi worshipped this form first. There is no Abhisheka performed with water at this shrine and jasmine oil is used instead. The Devi’s name here is Kamakshi. All the desires of the devotees are fulfilled with her gracious eyes.

Bhava :- Jala Linga, of Thiruvanaikoil, (Jambukeswaram) in Tamil Nadu. This temple is located on the outskirts of Trichy, where Lord Jambukeswara is seated and showers all his blessings to his devotees. This Kshetra is called Jambhukeswara Kshetra, also known as Jala Linga. The devotees can see from the outside of Garbhagraha the water bubbles coming out from Palipedam. There is a Jambu tree, which is the oldest and the biggest. The legends say Lord Siva wanted to stay here along with the Jambu tree. So the devotees treat this tree as sacred as the Lord.

Rudra:- Agni or Thejo (Divine Light) Linga, of Thiruvannamalai, in Tamilnadu – Arunachaleswara. In Thiruvannamalai, Lord Siva is seated in
the form of Thejolinga. The whole mountain appears to be a Linga. As a result of Parvathi’s great penance, a sharp spark of fire came from Arunachala and took the shape of Arunalinga.

**Ugra:** Vayu Linga, of Sri Kalakhasti, in Andhra Pradesh. The Sri Kalahasteeswara temple is situated on the banks of Swarnamukhi River in Sri Kalakhasti. Spiritually elevated souls only can see that there is a strong wind blowing around the Linga. Bhakta Kannappa Nayanar’s story is connected to this temple. Even animals got salvation by worshipping this Lord. Three animals – Cobweb (Sree), Kala (snake), Hasthi (elephant) prayed to God with utmost faith and devotion and attained Moksha. One can see the symbols there on the Siva Linga even today.

**Bheema:** Akasha Linga, of Chidambaram, in Tamil Nadu. This Kshetra is on the banks of Cauvery. We don’t see any Murthy in the temple Garbhagraha. The puranas speak of this Kshetra very highly. No one can see the Lord’s Murthy, excepting the highest spiritual souls. There is a space in the Garbhagraha and many Abharanas are decorated and the devotees assume that the Lord is seated there. A very beautiful Nataraja murthy is in outer Garbhagraha for worship and for the satisfaction of the devotees.

The cult of linga worship evolved from two basic principles—the cult of the pillar and phallic worship. The cult of the pillar seems to be primarily
based on the concept of the Axis of the Universe, which is indestructible and eternally spiritual and which represents cosmic columns in the corridor of space and time. The eternal quest of early thinkers concerned the realization of the existence of one god. This led to the principle of Divine Support responsible for the sustenance of the Universe.

2.11. ORIGIN OF SIVALINGA WORSHIP IN THIRUVANNAMALAI

At Thiruvannamalai, the hill is piously believed to be the Linga. The hill is known as Arunamalai (red hill). The hill as Linga has legendary basis. Several millions of years ago, when the earth was young and the Himalayas did not yet exist, Arunachala was already there\footnote{47}. About the origin of the hill the following legend is found in Puranas. This happened in the remote past, when the Gods roamed freely on the surface of the planet. Many years ago, before our forebears existed, during the first Kalpa of the world, an egotistical argument arose between Brahma and Vishnu, as who was the greatest.

Brahma the creator and Vishnu the sustainer were once disputing, each claiming to be the supreme Lord. Steeped in ignorance, they were shouting at each other and a terrible fight ensued between them which plunged the entire universe into confusion, put all living beings to great distress. When Lord Siva saw this, He was filled with compassion and spontaneously understood that this happened due to their delusion. He
decided to make them overcome their delusion and suddenly arose as a column of effulgent light that reached infinitely into the sky. Amazed at seeing this, they called out, “What is its source? By what power does it shine? Where are its limits?” Vishnu then said: “Brahma! This is the touchstone which has made its appearance to test us both. We shall regard as superior he who finds either its beginning or end”. Brahma agreed to the test. So Vishnu took the form of a boar and began to dig the ground to find the base of the column. Brahma took the form of a swan and disappeared into the sky hoping to reach the summit of this column of fire.

Millennia elapsed while Vishnu penetrated even more the other worlds until he admitted the evidence of his incapacity to find the base or the origin of the column and decided to return to the surface of the earth. As for Brahma, riding his swan (Hamsa), he had risen swiftly, but however high he flew the column rose before him. At that juncture, a pandanus flower dropped from the head of Siva and enquired where from it was falling. The flower replied that it was falling from the head of Siva. Immensely delighted with these words, Brahma requested the pandanus to bear witness and along with it came to Siva’s presence. He boldly declared that he had brought a flower from the head of Siva as proof. The pandanus flower nodded its head in unison to the falsehood of Brahma.

Immediately Lord Siva manifested Himself from the midst of the column. In a dazzling light He blessed Vishnu, telling him that He would be his foremost devotee and assuring him of His utmost love. Siva cursed
Brahma that he would never be honoured with a temple in future, and that might be the reason why temple was not dedicated to Brahma. The pandanus flower too, had its share of punishment for its false witness. Siva banished that flower from His adornments and that is why that flower is not used for worship or adorn Siva.

After this, Brahma and Vishnu begged Siva to diminish the effulgence of this pillar and to the form of a mountain so that the passage way of Devas, Danavas and Gandgarvas who move about in mid – air, would no longer be hindered by too much brightness. The downward movement of Vishnu represents Tamasa Guna and the upward movement of Brahma indicates Rajasa Guna. But, God cannot be realised through these Gunas. He can be known only by Sattva Guna that is philosophy of this Puranic story. 

This mountain was thereafter called Sonachala (Arunachala) which would thus constantly bring blessings to devotees. And on the request of Vishnu and Brahma, He took the form of a Linga on the east side of the mountain so that they might worship, do ritual, water libations and swing the light in front of Him. It is how; the mountain with the Lingam came into being. The Lingam in Thiruvannamalai is Suyambu linga. The Suyambu linga is one which rose up and came into existence by itself and had existed from time immemorial. A Suyambu linga is considered as sacred that it is above all the rules laid in the Agamas for the other classes of Lingas. This happened when Dhanus (the moon) was in the constellation of Ardra (orion) in the month of Kumba (December) millions of years ago.
And the legend hold that as a token of gratitude and worship to Siva, Brahma and Vishnu had a remarkable temple built at the foot of the mountain. It is one of the biggest temples in South India. Sacred tanks were dug that bear their respective names. They are even said to have bathed there and worshipped the Lord according to the ritual instructions given in the sacred texts. All their wishes are said to have been fulfilled. One of these wishes was to build a town that was to be called Arunapuri (powerful mountain)\textsuperscript{55} as well as with very beautiful gardens.

The esoteric meaning of this legend is as follows: To be blessed with true knowledge, there should be a complete destruction of the ego. Supreme truth cannot be attained so long as selfishness lingers. And Thiruvannamalai stands beautifully illustrating this philosophic aspect. Vast learning and immense wealth stir up one’s ego. Brahma by his intellect and Vishnu by his wealth grew jealous and it induced them to claim superiority and when they failed to perceive the crest and root of Lord Siva, they realised the greatness of Siva, thus getting rid of their ignorance. In short, they realised the supreme truth. There is another subtle moral woven into the legend of this place. While a showmanship magnificence of wealth admits its inefficiency in the end, ego born of literary superiority does not only refuse to admit its inadequacy, but also schemes to cancel the defects. Hence, our ancients have beautifully presented these facts to enable us to grasp its philosophic import. These have also been incorporated in one of the sixty – four plays (Leelas) of Siva\textsuperscript{56}. 