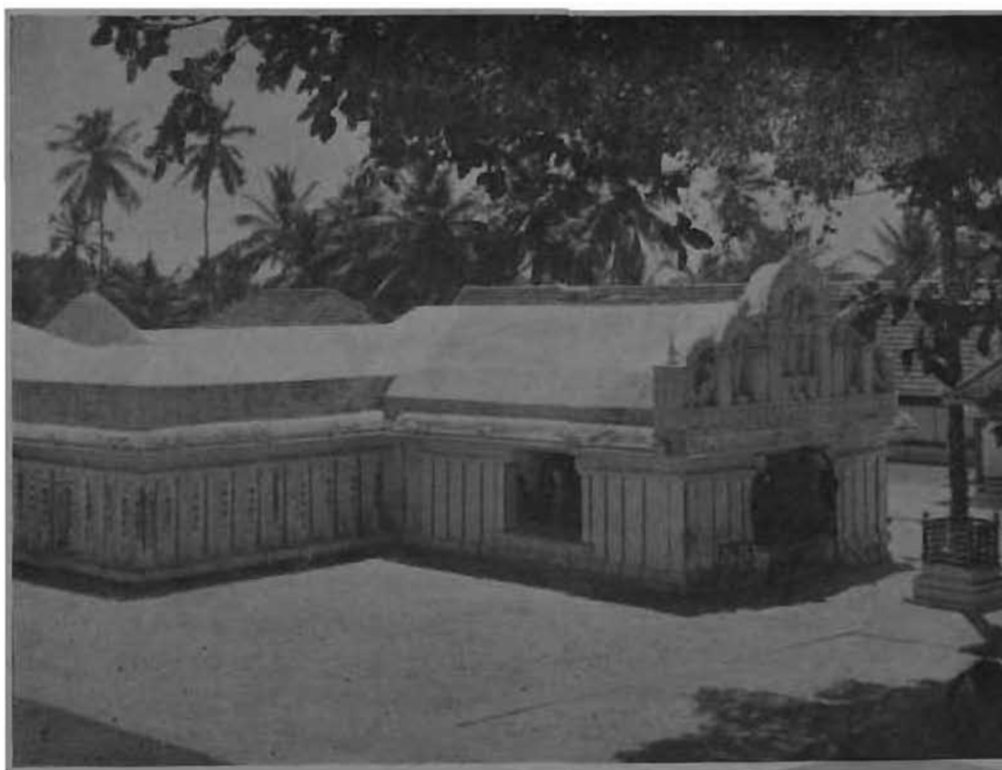


WARKALAI—GAYA OF THE SOUTH

ABOUT half way between Trivandrum and Quilon and approached from either place by road, rail or canal is Warkalai better known as Janardanam, ideally situated on a piece of cliffy headland, overlooking a strip of surf-beaten

Vaikunta, to pay his respects to Lord Vishnu. The sage was playing as usual upon his *veena* and producing rapturous melodies. Lord Vishnu was so enthralled by them that he followed the sage all unseen, as he wended his way to the



Temple of Janardana, Warkalai

beach. Dominating the whole scene high on a hill-top is the temple of Janardana (Lord Vishnu) from whose name the place derives the appellation of Janardanam.

The tradition behind the origin of the temple at Warkalai is well worth relating.

Brahma's Curse

It is said that the sage Narada in the course of his wonted perigrinations round the fourteen worlds—once went to

abode of Brahma, his father. Brahma, observing Vishnu behind his son, prostrated himself before the Lord. The latter, however, realizing his rather delicate position suddenly vanished leaving Brahma in the somewhat ridiculous condition of doing obeisance to his own son. The situation was so tickling that the *Navaprajapatis* or nine attendant gods of Brahma burst out laughing. This ill-timed hilarity infuriated Brahma so much that he inflicted on them a terrible curse. They were to lose their

godhead and descend to the earth as mortals to undergo the miseries and the cycle of births and deaths mortals are heir to.

Narada to the Rescue

Narada, however, came to the rescue of the *Prajapatis*. He counselled them to do penance and propitiate Vishnu at a spot on earth he would indicate by throwing his *valkala* or garment of bark. The place where the *valkala* fell is identified as the spot in front of the present temple at Warkalai, the name Warkalai itself being said to be a corrupted form of the word *valkala*. The *Navaprajapatis* constructed a temple near the spot indicated by Narada, consecrated it to Janardana and there practised penance to be absolved of the curse that lay on them.

The present temple at Janardanam is, however, not the one built by the *Navaprajapatis* although the idol is said to be the one originally consecrated by them.

Pandyan King's Dream

The original temple was washed away by the sea and nothing was known about it for a long, long time. And then, it so happened that a Pandyan King pursued and harassed by the ghost of a Brahmin he had killed, came to Warkalai in the course of his pilgrimages to holy places to get rid of the evil spirit, and there found relief. On his consulting wise men and astrologers, he was advised to build a temple to replace the one which had been washed away by the sea. The temple was soon under construction. One night the King had a strange dream in which a celestial being appeared before him and told him that on the next morning he would find some flowers floating on the sea at a particular spot and that if search were made

there, the original idol consecrated by the *Navaprajapatis* would be recovered.

The dream proved true in every detail. Fishermen were engaged to dive and discover the idol at the spot indicated by the floating flowers and soon it was brought to the surface. The right arm which was broken was attached to the body with gold leaves.

The Trance

An auspicious hour was fixed for the installation and consecration of the idol in the new temple and everything was got ready when lo! at the appointed time the assembled persons fell into a trance and found, when they recovered their senses, that the idol had been installed and the consecration ceremony performed. It is believed that Brahma himself came down to earth and consecrating the idol, vanished.

The Pandyan King who was now free from his ghostly affliction stayed on at Warkalai for some time more. He liberally endowed the temple and after entrusting its management to a body of trustees returned to his native country. During the reign of Umayamma Rani the management of the temple was taken over by the Government.

Equal to Gaya

Janardanam is resorted to by pilgrims and devotees from all over India, as it is deemed equal to Gaya in point of religious importance.

The beach at Warkalai is of holy significance. Stretching from north to south in the form of the segment of a vast circle it is a picture of beauty to behold. The surf-line forms the chord of this segment while all along the curve the cliffs of Warkalai rear their towering heights. From the bowels of these cliffs gush forth three sacred springs

respectively known as the *Chakra Theertham*, *Papanasa Theertham* and *Janardana Theertham*. In addition to their sanctity these springs possess wonderful curative properties and persons suffering from rheumatic and skin diseases find great relief by bathing in them.



Cliffs of Warkalai

A Dutch Bell

There is in the Warkalai temple a bell in daily use which has a very interesting story behind it. It appears that many years ago, a Dutch ship which was sailing south was suddenly becalmed opposite the temple of Janardana. For weeks together there was not a breath of wind. The ship's captain who on coming ashore, was told of Lord Janardana's omnipotence, approached the temple priest and told him, half in faith and half in despair, that if a wind blew to fill the sails and send him on his voyage he would make of the ship's bell an offering to the Lord. The priest had no doubt at all and said that if the captain did as he promised a wind was sure to blow. That night a wind arose and the ship was enabled to continue in its course. And the captain, true to his vow, sent the bell to the priest and ever since it has been in use in the temple.

The Tunnels

No visitor to Warkalai can afford to miss the experience of visiting the mighty tunnels that have been bored through the cliffs to complete the line of canal and backwater communication between the northern and southern parts of Travancore. Opened in the seventies of the last century the bigger

of the two tunnels is 2364 feet long and cost the Government more than 17 lakhs of rupees.

Two miles from the temple of Janardanam is situated the Sivagiri Mutt established by the late Swami Sri Narayana Guru, a great Yogin and socio-religious leader and reformer, who, born in the Ezhava community more than 75 years ago wrought out of it a dynamic force. One in the line of the great prophets and seers of the world, Guru Sri Narayana preached the universal doctrine of "One Caste, One Religion, and One God." The Sivagiri Mutt was built in 1904 and here the great teacher gave up his mortal coils in 1928.

Great Sanatorium

Fraught as Varkala is with religious and spiritual significance it is great as a sanatorium too, and this aspect of its importance is finding increasing recognition. Visitors could be accommodated in houses on the cliffs overlooking the sea and they could have all the advantages of sea air, sea bathing and outdoor life. And to these they could add the benefit of any Continental spa or watering place by bathing in and drinking of the waters of the perennial fountains that spring from the bosom of the cliffs.