

Historical Manument Koranganathar Temple in the Musiri Region, Tamilnadu, India

Dr. V.P.Thangavelu M.A;M.Phil;Phd.

*Associate professor in History {Retired}
PG and Research Department of History
Arignar Anna Government Arts College Musiri, Trichy dt. Tamilnadu.*

Abstract: *Srinivasanallur Koranganathar Temple - Etymology of the Koranganathar Temple - Koranganathar Temple Plan and Architecture - Main features of the Architecture.*

Key: *Koranganathar Temple – Srinivasanallur - Sikhara – Mahandramangaam - Talicceri or Vartamanaceri – Kulanayakam – Kanakkam.*

I. Introduction

The Temple is the house of God and a place of worship. It was the most beneficent institution of medieval India, and its activities touched the life of the people at many points, enriching and ennobling their lives. It was chiefly a place of worship offering comfort and solace to the faithful who believed in a good life here below and hoped for salvation in the life to come.

Temple was a centre of learning in medieval times. Schools and colleges were located in the temples. Endowments were made to maintain teachers and students in the premises of the temple. Sometimes hostels were attached to the temples to attend to the creative comforts of the members of the educational institutions. Provision was made for the study of the Vedas, the Vedangas, the Tiruppadiyam (Devaram) and the Tiruvoyamoli.¹

The Temple was the home of music and the fine arts. Music and dancing were mainly devotional in character, and these were meant to glorify god and sublimate man.² Often kings came to temples to offer their worship. Each king had his favourite tutelary deity (Kulanayakam) and such temples received special benefactions. Kings came to temple to celebrate their coronation; such halls of coronation were called Rajasabhas. The hundred and thousand pillared halls at Chidambaram were used as coronation halls by the Cholas and the Pandyan kings.³

Temples in medieval period also served as a meeting place for the village assemblies. The village assemblies met and election to local bodies and committees were conducted in the premises of the temple. The holding of such meetings in the sacred precincts of the temples gave a moral fervor and a spiritual tone to their deliberations. None dared to speak the untruth or do an evil deed in such holy surroundings.⁴

All the temple activities were directed towards the promotion of the welfare and happiness of the community. K.A. Nilakanda Sastri, in his book the Cholas, mentions about the role of the temples in these words “As landowner, employer and consumer of goods and services, as bank, school, and museum, as hospital and therefore in short, as a centre which gathered round itself are in the art of civilized existence and regulated them with the humaneness born of the spirit of Dharma, the medieval Indian temple has few parallels in the annals of mankind”.⁵

II. Srinivasanallur Koranganathar Temple

Koranganathar temple at Srinivasanallur is a landmark to the Early Chola art and architecture. Srinivasanallur is about 8 k.m. (6 miles) from the west of Musiri. There are five temples in the village. They are Koranganathar Temple, the Viswanathaswami temple, (within which situated the Pattabhiraman shrine), the Lakshamana Narayana Perumal, Ramanathaswami Temple and Mariamman Temple.⁶ Among these temples, the most important was Koranganathar temple. It was built by Parantaka I, “who took Madurai and conquered Ilam” (Ceylon).⁷ It is a temple of modest proportions and has a simple design. Koranganathar temple at

¹ S.R. Balasubramanyam, Early Chola Art, Part-I, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), p.23.

² Ibid., p.24.

³ Ibid.

⁴ R.K. Das, Temples of Tamilnad, (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 2001), p.xxi.

⁵ K.A. Nilakanda Sastri, The Cholas, (Madras: University of Madras, 1955), p.654.

⁶ S.R. Balasubramanian, Op.cit., p.100.

⁷ Rangacharya, The Topographical list of Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency, (Madras: Government Press, 1919), p.1526.

Srinivasanallur is the important temple of the development of Chola style. The main shrine has appearance of double storey because of the cornice in the middle. There is Antarala in front supported by four pillars. Along the project niches in the middle of exterior walls, the value of plain space is a notable feature.⁸ The Chola style of temple architecture reached its Zenith during the reign of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. The main centers of activity of early Cholas were Srinivasanallur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram. It was a medium sized temple.

III. Etymology of the Koranganathar Temple

There is a popular story, which is accepted and repeated by the scholars, that the temple was built by a sanyasin, and before the shrine was consecrated, he found a monkey (korangu) at the top of it, this being considered a bad omen, it was deserted.⁹ But the inscription and walls of this temple which range nearly over 200 years from the days of Aditya I to those of Kulottunga I (21st years 1091 A.D.) attest to the continuity of the worship of this deity and endowments made to it during this long period.¹⁰ Hence the story is unworthy of evidence.¹¹ The desecration if any and the neglect should be due to other causes. It should have been at a later stage about 12th century. A.D.¹²

According to the local inscription, the deity enshrined in this temple is called Thirukurakutturrai-Perumanadigal situated in the brahmandeya village of Mahendramangalam.¹³ Srinivasanallur should have been included in the Pallava kingdom during the reign of Mahendravarman I, and seems to have been in the past called Mahendramangalam evidently after this Pallava Ruler of the seventh century A.D.¹⁴ who is said to have seized, "the country of the Cholas embellished by the daughter of Kavera (river Cauvery) whose ornaments are the forests of paddy fields, and where are found brilliant grows of area". Close to this village, there is even now, a hamlet called Mahendramangalam.¹⁵

Korngunathar Temple's overall length is fifty feet from the ground and cornice of the Mandapa and Garbhagraha.¹⁶ Sixteen feet, the cella which has the appearance of being double storeyed an account of a cornice at its middle height is 12 feet, square inside and entered by an Antarala borne on four pillars. A projecting nine in the middle of each of the three free sides of the Garbhagraha and the recessed on either side of it, accommodate Portrait sculptures, which were of about half life size and of such high relief as to appear almost in the round.¹⁷

IV. Koranganathar Temple Plan and Architecture

The Temple of Koranganathar at Srinivasanallur was built probably during the reign of the Parantaka I (907-949).¹⁸ Its peculiar name is due to a local legend which records that on completion; it was defined by a monkey (korangu) and thus was never consecrated. Consisting of a pillared hall, or sanctuary or Vimana, its total length is 50 feet occupying a rectangle, 25feet by 20feet and the latter a square of 25feet side. The height of the tower or sikhara is 50 feet while the cornice of the mandapa measures 16 feet from the ground. A small hall having 4 pillars comprises the interior, with a vestibule and passage beyond leading to the square chamber of 12 feet side.¹⁹

An inscription of the 2nd year of Rajakesarivarman, which may be assigned to Rajaraja I, registers the tax free lands belonging to the temple and allots their income for various requirements of the temple, at the instance of Araiyan Acharakanta Brahmahirajan.²⁰ The mulparished of Mahandramangaam (Srinivasanallur) appointed a committee (Variyam) for this purpose. And with the help of the committee and the accountant (kanakkam), they arranged the services of food offerings ghee, and the maintenance of the priest, who offers worship.²¹

This is dvitala (two storyed) temple. The garbhagriha is square 26 ft 8 inches (8.13m) side outside and 8ft (2.44m). square inside. There is an antarala projecting 4 feet 4inches followed by the Ardhmandapa. The plinth 5ft. 2 inches high has plain and kumudam mouldings surrounded by a yali frieze. The Ardhmandapa is a square measuring 22 feet (6.71m) side and is 16ft.(4.88m) high and the central shrine with the Vimana is 50ft.high, from the ground level. The Vimana is now of brick and plaster. Most of the early Chola temples were

⁸ Ibid., p.1526.

⁹ S.R. Balasubramanian, Op.cit., p.100.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.101.

¹⁶ K.A. Nilakanda Sastri, Op.cit., p.705.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Percy Brown, Indian Architecture, (Bombay: Manas Publications, 1959), p.84.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ ARE, No. 596 of 1904.

²¹ S.R. Balasubramanian, Op.cit., pp. 101-102.

structural stone temples. We wonder if this is an exception, as at present only the portion of the Garbhagriha upto the cornice is of stone, or a latter renovation after a probable collapse of the original stone structure.²²

On the outer walls of the Garbhagriha, there are three main projecting niches (Devakoshtas). Brahma is in the north niche. Dakshinamurti is in the south; and the western is now empty. Sculptures of chauri-bearers and Gods or Aspires of exquisite workmanship are found installed in the recesses on each side of the Devakoshtas. The Toranas over the niches have wonderful decorative designs. The Torana of the western niche has a figure of Narasimha and there should have been some form of Vishnu in the western niche. There are two empty niches in front of the Ardhamandapa where Dvarapalas should have been housed. Also the two niches on the outer wall of the antarala now empty should have housed Lord Ganapati and Durga.²³ The garbhagriha, the antarala and the ardhamandapa are orgined and integral, and the oldest inscription of Aditya I is found on the base of the south wall of the ardhamandapa.

V. Main features of the Architecture

They were brilliantly chiseled excellent sculptures. They were in the temples built by the Cholas. The kottams are the symbolic of the Gods. Among them some statues of the kings and queens are also found. Sculptures of the most elegant ladies with bottleneck waist are the most excellent artistic creations of the best sensuous mind. These are the evidences of Cholas attainment of the pinnacle of the art of sculpture. The Dwarapalakas sculptures have claimed the world's sincere and impartial admiration.²⁴

VI. Conclusion

With the same vigour and prestigious status as landlord and the centre of learning and fine arts, the temple continued to be a place of attraction even during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The same old administrative set up in the temple existed. The Stanikas were the temples trustees, looked after the overall administration of the temple. The religious affairs (srikariyam) were carried out by a group of servants called parisanam. A large number of religious oriented people lived in the temple premises.

In the Vaishnavite temples a group of jiyars (achariyar) well versed in Vaishnavism lived. They lived in separate quarters, called tirumalihal adjoining to the temple compound or in front of the temple. They were seated in a mutt called peedam. These jiyars were fostered by temples but at times they also made donations to the other temples. Apart from the jiyars, there lived a large number of Vaishnavite families (Vainavar) rendering service to temple. They were experts in composing devotional verses. The Vedic hymns, Tiruvaimoli, Tiruvasaham and Devaram were sung in the temples in times of prayers.

Temple slaves (devaradiyal or devadasi or cottu pendir) lived near the temples, for performing dance and music programmes in favour of the prime God in the temple to which they belonged. They received paddy as their means of subsistence. Their inhabitation called 'talicceri' or 'vartamanaceri' was adjoining the temple.

Apart from dancing performances, they took active part in the important ceremonies in the temple. In some temples the rituals with the concept of fertility were allowed only to be performed by the devadasis. This might be for the reason that, the prospect or benefit from a particular work would be more replete as initiated by a woman consecrated to a God, than when initiated by an ordinary woman, while the symbolized fertility in a woman is the basic sanction in the belief.

In the temples of Brahminical gods, Brahmins only enjoyed the right of priesthood (pujari). In the Vaishnavite temples the priesthood has been called bhattar. The bhattar was appointed exclusively for performing daily services (pujai) and some festival ceremonies. He was not a jiyar and never expected to go for religious discourses or debates. He was practically confined within the sanctum sanctorum. Apart from these, he was supposed to accompany the king or the dalavai, throughout the temple when they came to worship. Each priest must perform the work allotted to him according to the time table without other assistance. For his work, he received salary both in cash and in kind. Bhattar 'pangu' was the paddy share to which he was entitled. He could also take one fifth part of the monetary offerings, surrendering the rest to the temple treasury.

Apart from these socio-religious aspects, the temple had the functions as an institution of charity. It commanded a great respect in the society. The political and wealthy people out of reverence and devotion made many offerings in cash and in kind. Some leaders made endowments in their name and entrust it to the temple to serve the purpose of the endowment for which it was made. Choultries are of this type, which were fostered by the temples by the income from the lands endowed to the temple. Cattirppadi was the paddy due that the choultries got from the temples. In these choultries the pilgrims and tapasvins, who frequented the temple were fed. This practice of feeding appears to be one of the regular features of temple management in those days. Apart from the choultries, religious institutions like mutts and ashrammas were also fostered by the temples.

²² Ibid., p.102.

²³ Ibid., p.103.

²⁴ R. Nagasamy and M. Chandramurthy, Temple Arts of Tamil nadu, pub. Archaeological Department Tamil nadu, 1976, pp-62-63.

Some mutts were practically under the care and control of the temples. And some were maintained by the individuals through endowments made to the temple. These land endowments to the religious institutions and matters connected with them were also given tax free as in the case of Devadhanam and Tiruvidaiyattam.

For the performance of various ceremonies in the temple, different halls (manadapam) were built around the sanctum sanctorum. Common people and political leaders contributed their labour and wealth for the construction of the various compartments of the temple. Wealthy communities like the Cettis and Pillais spent their money for the construction of halls in front of the sanctum sanctorum (muhamandapam), halls for the temple mast (kodimandapam) and huge gateways (gopuram) People gave rice from the stock in their houses, and the money got by selling it was used for meeting the expenses of the construction of the temple. In some other places the people took the responsibility of supplying anyone of the raw materials like granite stones, mortar, bick, etc. for the construction of the temple. In this way the society contributed to the development of the centers of worship whereas the temples contributed for the development of spirituality, charity and fine arts in the society.

In Musiri Region, there are number of temples situated in and around. These temples are of historical importance. Some of the temples are found on the hill - tops, on the Kauveri river banks. It was found that the godly element was actively at working places of natural beauty. The early temples of Musiri Region were built with perishable materials like brick, wood, stone and thatch.

Bibliography

- [1]. ARE, 373, 374/1919.
- [2]. ARE, 651/1919.
- [3]. ARE, No. 596 of 1904.
- [4]. Balasubramanyam, S.R. Early Chola Art, Part-I, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966).
- [5]. Das, R.K. Temples of Tamilnad, (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 2001).
- [6]. Mukkudal Pallu, v.139. In Mukkudal near by the Vishnu Temple a choultry once existed by the charity of this temple now remains desolate and defunct.
- [7]. Mukkudal Pallu, v.28. Pidam is like a mutt where the head of the religious people live. This may be compared with Hindu religious headquarters like Kanchi Kamakoti Pidam, Madurai Atinam, Tiruvaduthurai Atinam and so on.
- [8]. Nagasamy, (ed.), "Kannappa Muthaliyar", in Tirukoilkalum Kalvettukkalum, Papers of the Seminar on Inscriptions, (Madras: Malar Velieedu, 1966).
- [9]. Natarajan, D. "Religious and Charitable Endowments", in Nagasamy, (ed.), Tirukoilkalum Kalvettukkalum, Papers of the Seminar on Inscriptions, (Madras: Modern Publishers, 1966).
- [10]. Nilakanda Sastri, K.A. The Cholas, (Madras: University of Madras, 1955).
- [11]. Palaniappan, The Great Temple of Madurai, (Madurai: Prakash Publications, 1970).
- [12]. Percy Brown, Indian Architecture, (Bombay: Manas Publications, 1959).
- [13]. R. Nagasamy and M. Chandramurthy, Temple Arts of Tamil nadu, pub. Archaeological Department Tamil nadu, 1976.
- [14]. Rangacharya, The Topographical list of Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency, (Madras: Government Press, 1919).
- [15]. SII. Vol. II, Part II, No.62. Once a political chief namely Mallappa Nayak ordered the people of a particular village called Puliur to supply stones for the construction of a Mandapam for a Amman shrine in that village. As a regard for their contribution, they got the right for a share in the offerings to the deity.
- [16]. William Taylor (ed.), Oriental Manuscripts, Vol. II, (Madras: Government Press, 1835).