

History of Karunellinathar Temple in Tiruthangal, Sivakasi – A Study

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ABSTRACT

Temples are found everywhere in Tamil Nadu from large monumental structures to small stone buildings, each having a certain significance and greatly influencing the lives of the people who regard the temple as a place where they could be close to god. Studded with complex architecture, variety of sculptures and rich inscriptions, the temples remain the very essence of the culture and heritage of Tamil land with historical records dating back to at least 3,000 years. The existence of temples during the Sangam age is borne out by literature. The age of temple could be determined from the architectural features exhibited by it, as well as from references to it in ancient literature. Stone inscriptions found in most temples, throw a lot of light on the history, and on the patronage extended by various rulers. Karunellinathar Temple of Tiruthangal, Sivakasi is a rock-cut cave temple constructed in Dravidian style of architecture. This temple is dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva and is accepted to have been worked by Gurukalathirayan during the Pandyan rule in 13th Century A.D. Karunellinathar temple is a well-known and popular religious place as well as tourist attraction. Still, this wonderful historic temple needs Tourism Department of Tamil Nadu Government to make intensive campaign to promote among the people of India as well as foreign countries. This not only creates more awareness worldwide about our history of culture, art and architecture but also generate revenue to the public and government.

KEYWORDS: Inscriptions, Mandapa, God and Goddess, Rituals, Pujas, Festivals

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Construction of temples, installation of idols, renovation, preservation and conduct of rituals and festivals are deep rooted and are important aspects of Indian culture. People believe that the idols made of stone or metals or wood are not just images of the gods, but they are the symbols of the omnipresent blessing to all the beings in the universe as benign God. Thus the temples are not mere buildings, but their structures imply innumerable philosophical meanings and messages. India is a land of intense spirituality and religious faith reflected in the profusion of temples present in this subcontinent. Temples are found everywhere in India from large monumental structures to small stone buildings, each having a certain significance and greatly influencing the lives of the people who regard the temple as a place where they could be close to god. Temples are the visible symbols of earth's prayer to heaven. Temples are the great teachers of piety to all classes of people.

Home to the ancient Pallava, Pandya and Chola dynasties and still the stronghold of Hinduism in the south Tamilnadu has a wealth of temple architecture unequalled perhaps in the entire world. The vibrancy of these 'living' temples is amazing one is quickly aware of the central place that devotion to the spiritual aspects of life plays in people's everyday lives here. Throughout the Tamilnadu there are many magnificent temples are standing tall telling the skills of our ancestors loudly.

Thiruthangal is municipality in Virudhunagar district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The Karunellinathar Temple is believed to be built by Pandyas. The temple had a number of inscriptions indicating information related to the gifts offered to the temple. It is located in 5 kilometers away from the industrial town of Sivakasi which is known as "Kutti Japan". The town of Sivakasi is famous for its printing, match-works and fireworks industries.

I. METHODOLOGY

The available sources for the study could be broadly classified into Primary and Secondary sources. Primary source consists of inscriptions, archival records, foreign accounts and literary sources. The secondary sources include the published works. The data gathered from the available sources are subjected to intensive examination to analyze the aspects that pertain to the topic. In order to describe the historical developments and to establish their interconnections, a chronology-based narration is used. Then, critical analysis a very handy tool that helped to resolve the task undertaken and brings out the intricacies of the problem. Interpretation of data leads

tocriticalanalysisofthesubject-matterunderstudy.

Objectives of the Study

The basic aim of the study is to understand the History and Art & Architecture of Karunellinathar temple in Tiruthangal.

- i. The study attempts to analyze the historical background of Tiruthangal, Sivakasi.
- ii. The study aims to trace systematically the history of Karunellinathar temple.
- iii. The study intends to critically examine the Art & Architecture of Karunellinathar temple.
- iv. Finally, the study also aims to sketch the Poojas and Festivals of Karunellinathar temple.

1. History of Tiruthangal

In inscription mentioned Tiruthangal as 'Tiruthangaal', Big rock hill was located in Tiruthangal. One of the legends says that, when Thirupathi Narayanar went for Srivilliputhur Andal Marriage ceremony he was stayed at this rock hill, then reached Srivilliputhur. After that this place was known as Thiruthangal. Many core stone tools like orumunaiarupan, irumunaiarupan, piraivadivakaruvi were found in western side of this place. From these evidences the people were started to live in Tiruthangal before 10,000 years ago. Thus, Tiruthangal was an important place for archaeological and historical sites in Tamil Nadu.

2. Karunellinathar Temple

Karunellinathar temple is a rock cut cave temple. This temple is devoted to Hindu God Shiva. This temple is located in Thiruthangal, the town of Sivakasi. With reference from inscription Thiruthangal was a Devadana Brahmadeyam in Karunilakudinadu of Sri Pandya nadu. This bramadeyam was controlled by sabha known as 'Mulaparushai'. Irrigation was developed by Nindranarayanaperari and Devendravallabhaperari in and around Thiruthangal. Shiva is idolized as Karunellinathar that is represent as Linga and Parvathi was depicted as Chokki Amman. Sri Karunellinathar Swami Temple is situated in the middle of Thiruthangal. There were two Amla trees in temple. Amla means nelli in tamil. The temple was called as Irunellinathar. Later this temple called as Karunellinathar.

3. Art and Architecture of the Temple

The temple is located on a mound and in front of the garba griha there are different halls namely the Artha mandapa, Maha mandapa, Prahara mandapa, Vasantha mandapa. It also has a Nandhi statue and a pillar bearing the temple flag. Towards the left side of the sanctum is located a Goddess Meenakshi statue with a separate Garba Griha, Artha mandapa and Maha mandapa. The Garba Griha is built on a platform which in itself holds various spiritually powerful objects. It is built using black stones which are piled up and covered with spiritual powders of various kinds. While entering the temple, one can see the walls adorned with various deities who are believed to protect the temple. Further the Garba Griha is surrounded by short pillars. Vinayakar, Subramaniya Swami, Bhairavar and Chandikesavar are the other deities found in this temple.

The main God located inside the garba griha takes a square shape similar to the ones in Avudaiyar temples. Goddess Meenakshi looks beautiful with two hands and a beautiful face. Towards the south of the temple is located the statue of Dhakshanamoorthi and towards the North Goddess Durga statue is located. Apart from this, in the south corner a Vinayagar statue, in the North corner a Murugan, Valli and Deivanai statue and in the North east a Bhairavar statue adorns the temple. Also, at the entrance statues of Vinayagar and Murugan add beauty to the shrine. Every Thursday the devotees of Dhakshanamoorthi offered Sundal Malai and Mulai flower for worships the God. On that day special abhishekam and pujas for Guru Bhagavan of Dhakshanamoorthi. The big image of Nataraja and Sivakami looks beautiful and enrich the temple with artistic excellence.

The North side of the Karunellinathar temple Valli, Murugan and Deivanai statues are located. During Thaipusam and Surasamharam the special poojas were celebrated in this Murga statue. The art and architecture of the temple was based on Pandya's and Nayaks style. The Arthamandapa, Mahamandapa are decorated with beautiful sculptures and miniature paintings.

As additions were taken up in temples, the sculptures art got beautiful and nice. The pillars in the mandapas are adorned with images of deities. The beautiful panel in the Karunellinathar temple exhibits the sculptures of Ayyanar and yali with their consorts. The paintings are found in the passage in and around the temple of garbhagriha, the mandapas of arthamandapa and mahamandapa. The themes are on Saivite legends. Theme dresses are colorful with artistic designs. The eyes are large and faces long. The primary colors are used like white, red, brown, blue and green.

4. Inscriptions of the Temple

There are two inscriptions are found in this temple. The scriptures written in the stones of the temple make it clear that this temple was built in 13 A.D when King Sundarapandian was ruling the state. The scriptures further add that this temple was built by a person named Gurukulatharaiyan. Also, towards the south side of the arthamandapam a stone scripture belonging to the age of King Sundarapandian-I and towards the north side of Maha mandapa a stone scripture of Nayakars make this temple historically significant. In both these scriptures a phrase 'Karunilakudi Nadu Thiruthangal' has been written and also further study reveals that this temple was built during King Sundarapandian's reign and was maintained during the rule of Nayakars.

A praising song about Gurukulatharaiyan of Poongamil Garden is found in the stone scriptures. And it also indicates that he was the person who was behind the construction of the temple. It is to be noted that the first two lines of the song can also be seen in the stone scripture of Nellaiyappar temple. This inscription mentioned that Gurukulatharaiyan had prevented Shiva from becoming a Bhiksatana to beg for his daily bowl of bali, by instituting a special service and making provisions for food offerings to the temple.

An another inscription in the north wall of the central shrine of the Shiva temple, dated 17-18th Century A.D issued in the reign of Kumarappa Nayaka records an endowment of ¼ share of the UdaippanKulam village after purchasing it, for the purpose of conducting puja expenses of both Shiva and Amman.

5. Pujas and Festivals

The rituals are performed four times a day. Each ritual is named as:

- Kalasanthi at 9.00am
- Uchikalam at 12.00pm
- Sayaratchikala at 6.00pm
- Ardhajamam at 8.30pm

Each ritual celebrated with abhisheka, Alangaram, offering food that is known as neivedhiyam and deeparathanai to God Shiva. These rituals were started with recited the song of Om Nama Shivaya. After the prayer, the devotees of Shiva got prasatham.

The Somavaram puja is celebrated on every Monday and Tuesday. The Somavaram puja is conducted for Shiva on Monday at 7.30 P.M. and special puja for Muruga on Tuesday at 7.30P.M.

Brahmostavam is the important festival of this temple. During the New Moon(Ammavasa) and Full Moon(Pournami) day of every month is conducted in Karunellinathar temple. On this occasion the devotees of Shiva follow full day fast and break the fast in the evening 6 P.M. The special puja is conducted on that day. Another important puja is observed during Prodhosam in every month. It is celebrated twice in a month which is called Theipirai and Valarpiraiprodhosam. In this day the followers of Shiva organized a special puja in the evening 4P.M. On this occasion the devotees of Shiva follow full day fast and break the fast in the evening. The special abishekam are celebrated for 63 Nyanmars on their birthday stars during the day of prodhosam.

Thai Amavasai, MasiAmavasai and 108 Sangabhishekam are the yearly pujas celebrated in this temple. During this occasion special abishekam, neyvedyam of milk, fruits and Pongal etc to the Karunellinathar of Shiva statue and prasadam is given to devotees of Shiva.

Other important pujas are Rudra Homam, AvaniAmmavasa, 1008 Sangabhishekam celebrated in Karunellinathar Temple. The devotees of Shiva believes that with the prayer of Shiva get rid of their sins. Chitra festival and Shivarathriare the famous festival of the Shiva temple. These festivals are celebrated grandly. Then 1008 Sankaraabishekam and 108 Sankarabishekam are the main pooja of the Karunellinathar temple.

Tamil Nadu is also popular as 'land of temples' for its grand temples that are architectural masterpieces. These Tamil Nadu temples are standing testimony to the rich Dravidian art and culture. Each temple showcases a distinctive style, built by Chola, Pallava, Pandya, Nayak and Vijaynagar rulers, who were great patrons of art and architecture. South India is famous for various ancient temples, which attract number of devotees to pay their obeisance.

Thiruthangal is an old city located inSivakasi. In the middle of Thiruthangal Sri Karunelinatha Swami Templeis located and on the other side Ninra Narayana Perumal Temple is a famous Vishnu temple and can be reached from that temple on the hillock. The temple is believed to have been built by Gurukulathirayan during the Pandyan regime in 1233 CE. The architecture, poojas and festivals of Karunellinathar rock-cut cave temple in Tiruthangal, Sivakasi is greatly in-line with other temples in Tamil Nadu in terms of Dravidian style of construction, architecture and rituals like other temples in Tamilnadu.

Karunellinathar temple is a well-known and popular religious place as well as tourist attraction. This temple needs Government of Tamilnadu to take care of proper maintenance and to make intensive campaign to promote tourism among the people of India as well as other parts of India. This not only creates more awareness worldwide about our history of culture, art and architecture but also generate revenue to the public and government.

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