



KALAMEGHAPERUMAL TEMPLE, TIRUMOHUR – A STUDY OF ITS HISTORY AND ART

Prof. T. Ramaswamy

Former Professor and Head, Department of Ancient History, School of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:

Tirumohur – Pazhayana Chief – Madurai Kanchi – Tirumangai Alwar – Manavala Mamunigal – Divya Prabhandam – Narasinga Perumal – Ardhamandapa – Mukhamandapa – Adhithana – Prakara – Dvarapala – Nithya Neivedhia – Rajagopuram –

Susbequent on the development of Bhakthi movement in the 7th Century A.D. a number of Saiva Temples started emerging prominently in the Tamil Country. One such temple is the Kalameghal Perumal temple at Tirumohur near Madurai. Under the Sangam Age, the Pazhayana Chief ruled this area. This is found expression in the Sangam classics such as Madurai Kanchi, Padirrupattu and Ahananuru. Number of smaller shrines was constructed for Andal, Ranganatha Perumal, Hanuman, etc, inside the extensive temple complex. Each and every shrine is a miniature of the Kalameghaperumal temple. Besides the main deity, a number of subsidiary deities in the form of sculpture and icons are found inside the temple. It serves to the common people for the purpose of religion and art. It will continue to serve to the posterity as a treasure house.

INTRODUCTION

History and Mythology intertwined each other in the evolution of any religious centre in India. Tirumohur is one such small centre located approximately at a distance of 10kms northwest of Madurai. The village Othakkadai gives a clear direction to Tirumohur at a distance of 2.5kms on the road leading to Tiruvathavur, the birth place of Manickavachakar, one of the four Saiva saints. Tirumohur is said to be the place where Lord Vishnu assumed the form of Mohini and distributed the **amirtham**. So it is called Mohanakhethram, which is later on corrupted into Mohiniyur, Mohiyur and lastly with its prefix 'thiru', Tirumohur (1). It is said that one Kalamegham lived here and was blessed with poetic skills by the blessings of Lord Vishnu and so the temple came to be called after his name.

UNDER SANGAM AGE

Tirumohur was the headquarters of one chieftain called Pazhayana by name under the sangam age. The Pazhayana Chief was assisted by a group of warriors, who were called as Kosars. When the Mauryas invaded and attacked the area, the Kosars helped Pazhayana in driving away the Mauryas. The sangam classics such as **Madurai Kanchi**, **Pathirrupattu**, and **Ahananuru** throw light on the events (2). The Alexandrian visitor Ptolemy mentions about a place called Mogur by name. So Tirumohur might have been an important city during the Sangam period.

During the period of Alvars, Tirumohur became an important Vaisnava centre. It is referred to in the hymns of

Nammalvar and Tirumangai Alvar. Nammalvar sang 11 **Pasurams** in praise of Lord Kalameghaperumal and Tirumohur in his **pasuram Tiruvaimozhi** (3), where as Tirumangai Alvar composed verses in six **Angas** of Nammalvar. He glorified and sanctified Lord Kalameghaperumal and compares Tirumohur with Azhakar Koil (4). Between 15th and 17th Century, **Acharyas** dominated the centre. Manavala Mamunigal one of the **Acharyas** was responsible for bringing back the lost Divya Prabandam. Another **Vaisnava Acharya**, Azhagiya Manavala Perumal Nayanar has written a work called **Acharya Hridayam** or the heart of the preceptor in 234 sutras. The 182nd **Sutra** is devoted to Tirumohur kalameghaperumal. Azhagiya Manavala Dasan, one of the Acharyas and a devotee of Tirumohur Kalameghaperumal, has written a composition on Lord Krishna.

KALAMEGAPERUMAL TEMPLE

It is one of the Eighteen (18) **Divya Desams** situated in Pandyanadu. Tirumohur is famous for its **sthala, murti and tirtha**. It has two constituent temples, one is the Narasinga Perumal temple at Othakkadai, and the other one is Vedanayaka Perumal temple at Kodikkulam, the former temple is attached to the Mountain called Yanamalai. Kalameghaperumal temple is situated on the road leading from Othakkadai to Tiruvathavur. The temple is facing east. The Prime God is called Kalameghaperumal and the Goddess is called Mohanavallithayar. In addition to the main shrine, there are separate shrines dedicated to Mohanavallithayar, Chakkarathalwar, Andal, Navaneethakrishnan, Ranganatha

Perumal and Hanuman. The extensive temple spread over an area of 2.55 acres. The temple has two **Prakaras**. The main shrine is enclosed in the inner **Prakara**, while the outer **Prakara** encloses the shrines of Renganatha, Hanuman and the remains of chakkrathalwar shrine.

KALAMEGAPERUMAL SHRINE

The shrine for Kalameghaperumal is the principal shrine of the temple complex. The shrine has **garbhagriha**, **ardhamandapa**, **mukhamandapa** and in front of it the **Garuda mandapa**. Both sides of the **Garudamandapa** is seen a flight of steps leading to **mukhamandapa**. Similarly there are steps on both sides of the **ardhamandapa** and **mukhamandapa**. These types of steps are found in the Tanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram temples of the Chola period. The Madurai Kallazhagar temple also has a similar plan. The Vimana of the main shrine has **adhithana**, **prasthara**, **giriva**, **sikhara** and **stupi**. The **adhithana** is seen on the high platform, which has **upana**, **padma**, **kantha** and **kapola**. The outer wall of the **garbhagriha** on its western and northern sides has a **devakostha** panels. The bottom of the Vimana is square in shape. At the four corners of the Vimana, there are **Karnakudus** in which **Salas** are seen in the centre. The images of Vishnu, Trivikrama and Narasimha are found on the **Salas** and **nacikudus** one over the other on the Southern side; Vishnu, Lakshmi Narayana are all in standing posture on the western side. On the top of the **Sikhara** there is a **stupi**, which is the symbol of its completion. The outer base of the **Mukhamandapa** has **Upapitha** over which the **adhithana** rests. The **adhithana** has **upana**, **padma**, **jagathi**, **tripattakumudha**, **kantha**, **patti** and **vedhi**. On both side wall of the **Mukhamandapa**, there are nine **devakosthas** and ten pilasters. The **Yali** freeze intercepted with elephants, devotees etc are seen on the Prahara of the temple. Lord Kalameghaperumal, his consorts Sridevi and Bhudevi are seen in standing posture. The **antarala** or the **ardhamandapa** is also square in shape. At the entrance of this **ardhamandapa** there are **dvarapalas** one on each side. The **mukhamandapa** is rectangular which is supported by four rows of pillars, each row containing nine pillars leaving a central passage. The central row of pillars is adorned with lion motifs over the **Pushpa Podikai**.

During the 16th Century under the Vijayanagar empire, Tirumohur was also brought under their control. The **vimana** of the temple was raised over the **garbagraha** and **mukhamandapa**. By 1551 AD two inscriptions of their rulers are found on the temple. Of these two inscriptions one of the inscriptions, throw light on the grant of the village Manakuzhi of Kalavelvinadu and the surrounding villages to Lord Kalamegaperumal as Tiruvidaiyattam as per the orders of the King to Timmappa Nayaka. Another inscription referred to the same grant as made by the Lord himself. An inscription found at the **adhithana** throw light on the income derived from the **tiruvidaiyattam** villages to be used for the purpose of **nitya neivedhyas** to the Lord (5)

The **Garudamandapa** is supported by 10 pillars forming a rectangular space in its centre. These pillars stand testimony to the finest art of the Vijayanagar period. The Ramayana theme of Rama and Sita is found on the Southern side of **Garuda** Shrine where Rama is embracing Sita with his right hand and holds the bow in his left hand. Another Pillar on the Northern side has Lakshmanas sculpture holding bow in his left hand and an arrow on the right hand. A sculpture of **Manmatha** is also shown with the bow of sugar candy in the

left hand and an arrow of flowers in the right hand (6). Shrine for Mohanavalli Thayar has a square cella, a square **ardhamandapa**. The **adhithana** of **garbagraha** and **ardhamandapa** depict **Upapitha**, **Upana**, **Padma**, **Jagathi**, **tripita kumudha**, **Kantha**, **kopota** and **Vedhi** starting from the bottom, as in the case of the Kalamegaperumal shrine. On the outer wall of the **garbagraha** on both sides found four pilasters and three **devokosthas**. The sixteen side shaft exhibits the characters of pilaster throughout its length.

Chakkarathalwar Shrine:-

This shrine is a recent addition to the temple. The shrine is a square cella without any architectural features from the base to **Prasthara**. The shrine covers the space provided by the six round supporting pillars on the northern side. Provision is made at the rear side of the shrine to have a look of Yoga Narasimha.

The Andal shrine is another important shrine located on the northern **Pradakshinapada**. It stands on a high platform and has plain walls on its sides. It has a square cells and a rectangular **ardhamandapa**. The **Vimana** has a square base and a round **sikhara**. The image of the Andal is seen at the centre of the **devakosthas** is an interesting feature of the temple.

The Navaneetha Krishna Shrine is situated on the North-Eastern side of the first **Prakara**. It is built on a rectangular mandapa over a raised plinth. The Mandapa is supported by three rows of pillars, each row having five pillars on the north-east side. Conspicuous absence of any architectural design is seen on the cella. The image of garuda guarded by one lion on each side of the **Vimana** is another notable feature of the shrine.

In between the two Rajagopurams, the Kampathadi Mandapa is located. This mandapa is supported by 40 pillars in four rows and each row consists of 10 pillars. The **dhvajasthamba** was erected between the third and fourth row of pillars. The architectural style confirms that it belongs to the 17th and 18th centuries. The pillar embodies many divine miniature sculptures at the rectangular base. The central pillars bear the sculptures of Marudhu brothers, the rulers of Sivaganga during the 18th century. Similar sculptures are also found in the temples of Kalayarkoil and Kunrakudi (7).

ANJANEYA SHRINE

The influence of Ramayana cut deep into the South from very early days. The images and temples for Rama are almost found in all the temples in the Tamil Country. As a result the shrine for Anjaneya is found in Tamil Nadu and this temple is not an exception. The shrine is found near the Southern enclosure wall of the second **Prakara**. The **garbagraha** of this shrine is square and the **ardhamandapa** is rectangular in shape. The Vimana is **nagara** in style and on the top of it found a round **Sikhara** with the images of Anjaneya at the centre.

Keerapathinather shrine might have been added during the 13th Century under the rule of the later Pandyas at the north-east corner of the outer **prakara**. This shrine is also finding a reference in Nammalvar's devotional song. The shrine is situated in a mandapa which has a high plinth and is reached by a flight of steps, as in the case of other mandapas of the temple. On these side steps, there are elephant sculptures as dragging the entire structure.

SCULPTURES AND ICONS

South Indian Temples are abode of a number valuable sculptures and icons. These sculptures made in different stones and metals being worshipped for thousands of years. The sculpture of the principal God Kalameghaperumal is represented in the standing posture with four hands. His two rear hands hold **Chanku** and **Chakra**, whereas his two front right hands is shown in **abhayamudra** and the left holds **katha**. He is flanked by Devi's on both sides holding lotus flower in the left and **tolahasta** in the right. In addition to this main sculpture, there are a number of sculpture in the form of images are found in the temple. They Lord Narasimha, St. Ramanujar, Andal and Navaneethkrishnan. The image of Pallikandaperumal is also seen in the temple datable to 13th Century. There are more than hundreds of images of Pallikandaperumal found in India (8).

Inscriptions of the Pandya rulers belonging to the period of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya I (1251 – 1271 AD), Maravarman Kulasekara Pandya I (1268-1311 AD) and Jatavarman Sundara Pandya (1304-1319 AD) are found on the southern side of the outer **prakara** of the temple. These inscriptions refer to Tirumohur temple as “**Thenparappunattu Tirumohur Ninraruliya Parama swamykal koil**”. These inscriptions issued during the reign of King Maravarman registers a grant of Sirukunrattur of Chenkudimadu as tax free land for the building works of the temple. This place is now identified as Chenkunrapuram in virudhunagar taluk. Another inscription belonging to the eight regnal year of Konerinmaikondan records similar grant of land at Alodupattam Chaturvedimangalam for the temple works. It refers to the following taxes – **kadamai, antharayam, ponvari, viniyokam, vasalperu, vettippattam, panchupili, thattarpattam, idaivari, ervari, enavari, erisneenpattam**. Another inscription of the same king registers the grant of the village Veeranarayana Chaturvedimangalam created by the partition from Thenur and Tiruvedakam of Baganur Kurram (9).

Maravarman Kulasekara Pandya's inscription issued during his fortieth regnal year (1308 AD) refers to the renovation work of Arulmigu Vedanarayana Perumal temple situated at Thungavana by one Sundara Pandya Cholakkonar. The inscription issued during the eight regnal year of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya states about the construction of Tiruvali Alwar (Chakkaratthalwar) by an officer of the king Kalaemgham alias Gangeyarayar (10). The inscription found at the southern part of the shrine of Pallikanda Perumal registers the grant of the village **Kunthavai chaturvedimangalam** as **devadava** and the income accrued from the village should be used for the preparation and distribution of **prasada** to the Brahmins at the times of the **Tirukkalyana Utsava** during the month of **Markazhi** and during the procession of the Lord for parivetta.

CONCLUSION

The Bhakthi Movement beginning from 7th Century A.D. had influenced the different ruling dynasties to promote religion and temple construction and renovation activities in the Tamil Country. The Kalameghaperumal is one such temple, starting emerging from the Sangam Age. This is reflected in the different **Padigam** of the Alwars. The significance of the temple is realised from time to time and it attracts lots of devotees. As a result, the temple grown from simple structure to complex structure and well structured temple administration. The temple is a treasure house of art, architecture and sculpture to be passed on to the posterity.

REFERENCES

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2. *Madurai-K-Kanchi, lines 507-510, Pathirrupattu verse 44 lines 10-17, Akananuru, verse 251, lines 7-13.*
3. *Azhakia Manavala Perumal, Acharya Hidayam, Sutra 58*
4. *Sundaram and Vedachalam, op.cit., P. 35.*
5. *ibid, PP. 39-40.*
6. *ibid, PP. 39-40.*
7. *ibid, PP. 30.*
8. *Ratan Parimoo, Sculptures of Seshasayi Visnu, P. 1983.*
9. *S.S.M. Sundaram and V. Vedachalam, Op.cit., P.37.*
10. *ibid, PP. 38.*
11. *ibid, PP. 39.*