



KOTHANDARAMA PERUMAL TEMPLE – MADURANTAKAM

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Abstract

The temple is considered as the dwelling place of God. The word 'Temple' is derived from the Latin word "Templum" is a structure usually built for the purpose of dedicated to religious or spiritual activities. Like that the word 'Architecture' derived from the Latin word 'Architectura', and the Greek word 'arkhitekton' (architect) is the process and product of planning, designing and constructing physical structures. On the whole the Hindu Temple Architecture reflects a synthesis of arts, belief, values and the way of life cherished under Hinduism. This paper elaborately dealt with the architecture of a prominent Vishnu temple, 'Kothandaramar Temple' which is located on Madurantakam in Kanchipuram District. However, a systematic analysis has been made here under to study deeply on this temple, its origin and its architectural features, sculptures and bronzes. They are arranged chronologically based on the inscriptions.

Key Words : Temple. Madurantakam, Kodandarama Perumal, Rama , Sita, Chola, lithic record , mandapa

INTRODUCTION :

The Kothandaramar Temple is located on Madurantakam, Kanchipuram district. In the epigraph of Chola king Parantaka I, the temple was called as Ayodhya Perumal Temple and God as Ayoddipperumal.¹ At present the temple is called as Eri-Katha Ramar Temple (i.e., 'The one who protected the tank').²

PLACE NAME STUDY

Originally Madurantakam was known as *Vaghularanyam* which means forest of sweet smelling Vahula blossoms. *Madu+rantakam*, the village which had the boundaries of giving pleasing happiness to heart because of sweet smelling Vahula blossoms, so the village is called as Madurantakam. Another view related with the name Madurantakam is “It is a spot possessing springs that spout water as sweet as nectar”.³

It is also construed that Madurantaka was the one of the title of Chola king Parantaka I, it was named after him as *Madurantakam*.⁴ Yet another view is that village was named after Madurantaka Uttama Chola. However the occurrence of seventh regnal year lithic record of Parantaka I⁵ at Kothandaramar Temple at Madurantakam ensures that the village was named after Chola King Parantaka I, whereas Madurantaka Uttama Chola lithic record is not found in the temple.

LEGEND

In one of the incarnation of Vishnu, he is appeared on earth as a human being in name of Rama. He was the eldest son of king Dasaratha of Ayodhya, he was about to be coronate when his stepmother invoked a boon given by the king and had he exiled. According to our epic *Ramayana* Rama's stay in the forest; the abduction of his beautiful young wife Sita by the demon king of Sri Lanka, Ravana; Rama's victory against the demon in Lanka and the rescue of his wife. Rama then assumed the throne of Ayodhya, which is in North India. There are many deeds he performed on the path from Ayodhya to Sri Lanka and his return from Sri Lanka to Ayodhya.

According to the legend connected with this temple, Lord Rama visited the hermitage of sage Vibhandaka during his exile. The sage requested him to return there on his way back to Ayodhya. When he was returning home on his *Pushpaka Vimana*, it land at this place, to Rama's puzzlement. Sita remained him of the sage's request. Lord Rama's landing from the carriers, lending a hand to Sita to help her down. This is the rare sight that one can see that Rama holding Sita's hand in this temple. This vision is called *hastavalambana* (i.e, hands held together). Thus the temple is called as Ayodya Perumal Temple in ancient period which is evidenced from the inscriptions and presently it is called Kodandarama Perumal temple which is the other name of Ayodhya Perumal.⁶

Another legend connected with this temple is the *Brahmaputras (son of Brahma)* asked Lord Vishnu how to achieve salvation. He gave them an image of himself in the form of *Karnakaramurthy* (All merciful) and advised them to meditate upon it at a place called *Vibhandakasram in Vaghularanyam*, which is the modern Madurantakam. As obeyed, the *Brahmaputras* installed the image of Karunakaramurthy in the hermitage of Vibhandaka, who attained salvation after worshipping the image. This took place in *Krita yugam*. Thus the idol of Karunakaramurthy is seen in the *garbhagarha*.⁷

INSCRIPTIONS

The Kodandarama Perumal temple consists of five epigraphs, belongs to the Chola period. The earliest inscription assigned to Parantaka I.⁸The lithic record of Parantakadeva dated in the seventh regnal year, on the south wall of the Kodandarama shrine at Madurantakam registers a gift of land to the temple of Ayodha Perumal.

The inscription dated in his third regnal year of Rajakesarivarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin kulottunga Chola Deva on the west wall of the central shrine in the Kodandarama Perumal Temple at Madurantakam refers to the gift of areca nut garden for maintain two lamps.⁹

Another inscription on the north wall of the central shrine in the Kodandarama Perumal Temple pertaining to Parakesarivarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Vikrama Choladeva dated in his ninth regnal year mentions about the gift of money.¹⁰ Yet another inscription of Vikrama Choladeva dated in his seventh regnal year records that four *padagam* of temple land has been brought under the cultivation by a certain lady for providing offering to god Tiru-Ayoddipperumal.¹¹

Finally a lithic record on a beam of the *mandapa* in front of the Amman shrine states that the Amman (Thayar) shrine in the temple is gift of Lionel Place, the Jahir collector of the East India Company.¹²

The Components and Architectural Features of the Temple

The kodandarama Perumal Temple facing towards east. The temple comprises *garbagraha*, *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, *gayathri mandapa*, *mukhamandapa*, *dwajasthampa*, *balipitha* and *gopura* in an axial line. There is a separate shrine for Goddess Janakavalli and Goddess Andal.

The square *garbagraha* is adorned with Kodandarama Perumal bearing bow, accompanied with his consort Sita and lakshmana in standing posture. The bronze images of Lord Rama, Karunakara, Sridevi and Bhudevi is also seen in the *garbhagaraha*. The *garbagraha* is followed by empty *ardhamandapa*. The entrance of the *ardhamandapa* is flanked with two *dwarapalakas* on either side. The *ardhamandapa* is followed by *mahamandapa* lead to the pillared verandah or inner *prakara*. The *mahamandapa* is followed by pillared *mandapa* called as *Gayathri mandapa*. The *Gayathri mandapa* is followed by open pillared *mukhamandapa* enshrined with Garudalwar in standing posture with anjali hasta facing towards god in the *garbagraha*. Open pillared *mandapa* is followed by *dwajasthampa* and *balipitha* and leads to the *prakara*. South east corner of the *prakara* is adorned with temple office, shrine for Chakrathaalwar, shrine for Vedantha Desikar, shrine for Alvars. Southern side of the *prakara* leads to the *nathavanam* (garden) adorned with *Vasantha mandapa*. The south western corner is adorned with separate shrine for Goddess Janakavalli Thayar with *garbagraha*, *ardhamandapa* and pillared *Mukhamandapa*. The north western corner of the *prakara* is adorned with shrine for Andal with *garbagraha* and *ardhamandapa*. *Sthalaviriksha* tree (Vaghula tree) and small four pillared *mandapa* where Ramanujar was given *Pancha Samskaram* (initiation) by his teacher Periyambigal is seen closer to the Andal shrine. The north eastern side of the *prakara* is adorned with shrine for Periya Nambi, Lakshmi Narashimar and *mandapa* which leads to the main entrance with five tiers *gopura*. The temple is surrounded by highly raised *madhil* adorned with Garudalwar on the four corners. The temple tank is situated outside *gopura*. *Vahana mandapa* is seen eastern side of the temple entrance. There is shrine for Anjaneya in the south eastern corner of the temple tank.

Janakavalli Thayar Shrine

The note worthy feature of the place is the Madurantakam Tank which is constructed across the river *Kiliyar* which rises in the hill at Wandewash. Formerly there were two tanks and they were converted into one large tank by Lionel Place, collector of the Chinglepet district in 1796. During the period 1795-1999, a British officer named Colonel Lionel Place, was the collector of Chinglepet district, who had witnessed the devastation caused by two breaches to a huge water tank that still existed in Madurantakam. With an area of 13 square miles and depth of 21 feet, the length of the tank bound is 12,960 feet. As it is rain fed, the danger of a beach become all too real during the monsoon season. Coveting to take preventative action in 1798, collector Place decided to be prepared campaign in Madurantakam to handle an emergency. During his campaign, he happened to see a large collection of granite and other stones in the precincts of the Rama Temple, he

immediately instructed his subordinates to use them to strengthen the tank walls. Hearing this the temple priest explained him that the stones were actually meant for building a separate shrine for Goddess Janakavalli Amman, but work had not start since there was a lack of funds. On hearing this Collector then asked in jest, “Why does your Lord, who is not able to save the tank each year, need a separate shrine for his consort?” The priest replied that the Lord “always answered a prayer from the heart”. Soon after, the Collector left was saying that he definitely would not be wanting in prayers to the Lord. Such was his desire to save the tank.

The rain came and filled the tank to the brim, and a breach seemed imminent. That night the worried Collector camped near the tank, hoping that the walls would hold. Suddenly he saw an astonishing sight that two warriors bearing bow and quiver of arrow, guarding the tank. The British Collector Colonel Place, went down on his knees and prayed, he become conscious that the figures were none other than Lord Rama and his brother Lakshmana. When those who were accompanying him saw him on his knees, they rushed to his side assuming he was ill. After a while the vision disappears and the rain stopped. He described the amazing sight he had seen, to the village people. And then Colonel Place took it upon himself to build a shrine for Goddess Janakavalli Amman.

Thus Lord Rama in Madurantakam came known as “*Eri katha Ramar*” and the temple as “*Eri katha Ramar koi*”.¹³ This is inscribed as the inscription on a beam of the *mandapa* in front of the Amman shrine.¹⁴

Ramanuja Pancha Samskaras

This is the place where the great vaishnavite saint Ramanuja was received initiation by his Guru Periya Nambigal. On the death of Sri Alavandar in Srirangam, saint Periya Nambi went towards Kanchipuram in search of Ramanuja to appoint as the successor. It so happened that two meet at Madurantakam. It was under the Vaghula tree that Periya Nambi initiated Ramanuja the five sacraments called *Pancha Samskaras* or *Samasranyanam* called *Mantropadesam* (divine syllable) namely *Taapam* (branding the conch and discuss on the shoulder), *Pundram* (donning the Lord’s feet on twelve parts of the body), *Naman* (submitting to the guru), *Mantram* (learning sacred ‘strings’ of words and uttering them) and *yagam* (doing pujas to the God everyday). At present there is a four pillared *mandapa* in this temple under Vaghula tree where Ramanuja was given *Pancha Samskaram*. Thus is temple is also called as “*Dvayam Vilindha Tirupathy*”.¹⁵

Pujas Festivals

The major festival of the temple is the Ramanavami festival, which commemorates the birth of Rama. *Ani Brahmastavam* celebrated during the month of Aani (July-August) and *panchasamskaram* festival to commemorate the sanctification of Ramanuja.¹⁶

Sculptures

Kodandarama Perumal, Sita and Lakshmana

The sculptures of Kodandarama Perumal, Sita and lakshmana are enshrined in the *garbagraha*. They are standing in *padmapitha*. *Kritamakuta* decorates their head. Kodandarama and Lakshmana bearing bow in their left hand and arrow in their right hand. Kodandarama is accompanied with his consort Sita by holding her left hand. Sita holds parrot in her left hand and right hand is in *lola hasta*.

Dwarapalakas

The entrance of the *ardhamandapa* is flanked with two *dwarapalakas* on either side.

Dwarapalaka on the southern side stands in *dwibhanga* posture. The *Kritamakuta* adorn his head. Off his four hands, the upper right *Chakra* and left holds *Sanka* and the lower left palm is placed on the *danda* and the lower right is in *susi hasta*. His legs were firmly footed on *patra pitha* He wears *kuntalas* in his ears, *haras* in his neck a thick *Yajnopavitha* passes through his knee. The wide opened eyes and the protruding teeth present a ferocious look.

The northern *Dwarapala* also stands in *dwibhanga* posture. His head is adorned with *Kritamakuta*. Off his four hands, the upper right *Chakra* and left holds *Sanka* and the lower right is palm placed on the *danda* and the lower left is in *susi hasta*. His legs were firmly footed on *patra pitha* He wears *kuntalas* in his ears, *haras* in his neck a thick *Yajnopavitha* passes through his knee. The wide opened eyes and the protruding teeth present a ferocious look.

Bronzes

Karunakara Perumal, Sridevi , Bhudevi

The bronze images of Karunakara Perumal, along with his consorts Sridevi and Bhudevi are enshrined as *uttchava* deities. The bronze image of Perumal is standing in a *samabhanga* posture on *Padmapitha*. He is wearing *kritamakuta*. His Lower right hand is in *abayahaasta* and left in *varadhahasta*. The upper hand holds *sanka* and the upper left hand holds *chakra*.

Sridevi and Bhudevi were enshrined in standing posture on *Padmapitha*. They wear *kritamakuta*. Their one hand is in *lola hasta* and other bears flower. They were decorated with ornaments.

Kodandarama Perumal, Sita, Lakshmana

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To conclude , this Sri Kothandaramar Temple is one mile away from the Madurantakam railway station. King Uthama Chola alias Mathirantakan, the predecessor of Raja Raja, the Great gave away the village as a gift to Brahmins for reciting the Vedas. It is, therefore, known as Madurantakam Chaturvedi Mangalam. The temple should, therefore, have -been in existence even then, The name of the deity is Sri Kothandaramar and His consort is Sri Janakavalli Thayar. The temple for Thayar was, however, built only in 1798 by Col. Lionel Place who was then the Collector of Chingleput. The story as to how a European District Officer built a Hindu temple is very interesting. It is as follows : "There is a big irrigation tank in this village which irrigates about 3,000 acres of land. Every year due to heavy rains, there were breaches in the tank and the flood waters damaged the crops; during 1795-1798 A. D. the Collector of Chingleput decided to take suitable steps to prevent such breaches. In 1798, he camped at Madurantakam with the Engineers of the Public Works Department in the rainy season. During his rounds, he came to the temple. He received a warm welcome from the residents and the temple authorities and was invited to see the temple. After removing his shoes he went inside the shrine; he saw heaps of stones being kept in its precincts. When questioned, Inc Archakar of the temple replied that they were collected for building a separate shrine for the consort of Sri Rama and that on account of damage to crops, the villagers have been unable to give donations for this purpose. On hearing this, the Collector challenged that if their God Rama would prevent breaches in the tank, he would himself build a separate temple for Sri Janakavali. Later, he returned to the Travellers Bungalow. On the said night

and next day there were heavy and continuous rains. To satisfy himself that the Public Works Department authorities had made proper arrangements to prevent breaches, he walked along the tank bund.. When he was near the sluice where breaches usually occurred, he saw two divine persons with bows and arrows guarding the bund. At once he threw down his hat and umbrella and knelt down and prayed to the Lord. As his followers did not see the divine vision, they thought that Collector Place had slipped and fell down. He proclaimed that he had a vision of Sri Rama and Lakshmana guarding the tank's bund. There were no breaches that year. Collector Place kept up his promise and arranged to build a separate temple for Sri Janakavalli. Even now one can see a slab on the wall of Sri Janakavalli with an inscription citing the charity of Collector Lions Place. The temple possesses both antique and modern jewels. It owns 080 cents of wet lands. Poojas are performed twice daily. A fee for abishekam and celebrating Uthsavam is levied. 'Kalyana Uthsavam' in the month of Panguni is the main festival of the temple. About 500 people from neighbouring villages attend it. An Executive Officer appointed by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board is in charge of its management. There are also five trustees.

END NOTES AND REFERENCES

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