



ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF TEMPLES IN MELMANGALAM

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Abstract

Melmangalam is a small village situated in the bank of Varaha river 5 Kms to the east of Periyakulam, Theni district. The village was adorned with nine inscriptions. In lithic records the village was spotted as “Nithavinotha Chaturvedimangalam”, “Mudivalangu Pandya Chaturvedimangalam”, ‘Chaturveda Sundara Mangalam’. At present it embellished with the name of Melmangalam. Melmangalam is dotted with three ancient temples, Mayapandieswarar Temple dedicated to Siva and another two temples named Ranaganatha Perumal Temple and Naduvittriiruntha Perumal dedicated to Vishnu. In this article a systematic analysis has been made to study deeply on the temples origin and their architectural features.

Key Words:

Chaturvedimangalam, Bramadeya, sthalapurana, lithic record, garbagraha, Ardhamandapa, mahamandapa, Mukamandapa, Thirthavaari mandapa, nandi ,Balipitha,Prakara.

Introduction

Melmangalam is a small village situated in the bank of Varaha river 5 Kms to the east of Periyakulam, Theni district. The village was adorned with nine inscriptions belonging to Later Pandyas such as Maravarman Sundara Pandya – I, Maravarman Kulasekhara Pandya I, and Jatavarman Virapandya I , which throw illuminating light on the historical vicissitudes, through which this region has passed. In lithic records the village was spotted as “Nithavinotha Chaturvedimangalam” , “Mudivalangu Pandya Chaturvedimangalam”, ‘Chaturveda Sundara Mangalam’. The village was named after the surname of Chola King Rajaraja I as ‘Nithavinotha Chaturvedimangalam’. In the 13th century A.D., it was known by the name “Mudivalangu Pandya Chaturvedimangalam” named after the surname of Maravarman Sundara pandya I, The village was also called as ‘Chaturveda Sundara Mangalam’ for the reason that the Brahmans who well-known the four Vedas were lived in this village. Later this village was partitioned into Kilmangalam (east) and Melmangalam(west) . It is surmised that the area situated in the upper portion of the village, came to be known as Melmangalam and lower portion as

Kilmangalam which at present called as Jayamangalam. At present it embellished with the name of Melmangalam. All the names of the village ensure that the village was a brahmadeya (land donated to Brahmans who recite Vedas) settlement in the ancient period.

A study of the development of the Hindu art and architecture constitutes a fascinating aspect of South Indian Culture. The temples at Melmangalam are not an exception to this aspect. Melmangalam is dotted with three ancient temples, one dedicated to Siva and another two dedicated to Vishnu. These temples are arranged chronologically here under.

- Mayapandieswarar Temple
- Ranaganatha Perumal Temple
- Naduvittriruntha Perumal

However, a systematic analysis has been made here under to study deeply on the temples origin and their architectural features. Temples are devoid of Bronze images and the stone images which adorn the devakosthas have been studied systematically.

Mayapandieswarar Temple

Mayapandieswarar Temple is situated at east side of Melmangalam village. This Siva temple belonged to the Later Pandya Period.

History of the Temple

According to the sthalapurana of the temple, the place and the temple is associated with Epic period. The demons disturbed the meditation of the Rishi's so they went and prayed with Vishnu. As a result Vishnu fight with the demons, finally he used his weapon chakra to destroy the demons, so they ran into the opened house of Biruhu Rishi as asylum where his wife was inside and waiting for his husbands return. The Chakra followed the demons and destroyed them along with the wife of Biruhu Rishi. On his return to home the Biruhu Rishi saw the ashes of his wife and understood what was happened and he came to know that Vishnu was responsible for the death of his wife. By infuriate Biruhu cursed Vishnu to born as a human being and undergo the sufferings of a man who lost his wife. Accordingly Vishnu suffered like ordinary man on the abduction of Sita by Ravana. On the way of search of Sita, Rama got the contact of Sugriva and his men of monkey race. The place associated with this event is believed to be the place at the foot hills of Western Ghats known as Kurangani. Sugriva's brother vaali to defend himself from the enemies is believed to have linked with Sivalingam near Pothigai hill ranges. This place was called as Batlakundu in Tamil Vathalakundu in Telugu.

According to the legend Sri Rama met sage Agasthya who was in meditation and seeks resolution to overcome from the miseries. Agasthya suggested him to go to Melmangalam and worship Lord Mayapandisvara and his consort Birhanayagi seek his blessing through penance. Siva appeared in the form of Dakshinamurthy and preached him sathrusamhara recitation and vanished. After the completion of ten incarnations, Vishnu prayed to Siva. Siva blessed him and advised the sage Biruhu to give his daughter Parkavi into marriage with Vishnu. It is believed that even today on the second day of the Tamil month Thai, goes to her father Biruhu house with great love and affection and gets the blessings and precious gift from her father. She returns riding on an elephant gifted to her by her father in a possession along the street. On that particular day Amman Idol is decorated and taken in possession in the street.

Inscriptions

The outer wall of Garbhagraha and Ardhamandapa engraved with inscriptions. The temple has five epigraphs, among which four belonged to Sundara Pandya and one belonged to Vikrama Pandya. The lithic records referred to this temple as 'Mayanamariieswaram' in the name of Maya Pandya. It denoted that there is existence of Matha called 'Aanmai Alakiyaan Madam' and it also refers the land donation. Another lithic record of Sundara Pandya mentions the gift of land for conducting festivals like Tiru Margali Tiruvathirai in the temple. It denoted the names of the patrons who constructed the pillar in the temple. Moreover, it further mentions that the temple entrance was made by Thennan Vilavadarayan, a member of Sabha.

Architecture

The temple faces east and it had the architectural features like garbhagraha, Ardhamandapa, mahamandapa leads to inner prakara, open pillared Mukamandapa, Thirthavaari mandapa, nandimandapa and Balipitha in an axial line and leads to the outer Prakara. The northwest corner of the outer Prakara is adorned with separate Amman Shrine. The square Garbhagraha is adorned with suyambu linga namely Mayapandieswarar followed by plain rectangular ardhmandapa. The entrance of the ardhmandapa is flanked with Dwaraplakas. The pillared mahamandapa leads to the inner prakara. The centre of the mahamandapa is adorned with Nandi and balipitha facing west towards the Linga. The south east corner of mahamandapa is adorned with madapalli at present it was used as a store room, the south east corner of the mahamandapa is enshrined with Vinayaga and the north east corner of the mahamandapa is enshrined with Lord Muruga along with his consorts Valli and Devayani. The north is enshrined with Chandikesvara and there is a raised platform enshrined with Bronze image of Nataraja and Sivagami amman.

The North West corner is with Bairava and Navagraha. The open pillared mukhamandapa is adorned with ganesa on the south side similar to that of Nilakanteswara temple at Kulapuram. The Outer prakara consist of four pillared Thirthavaari mandapa, four pillared nandimandapa and balipitha. The four corners of the main shrine are adorned with two nandi along with bhutagana in the middle. There is a separate shrine dedicated to Periyannayaki Amman facing towards east. It consists of square garbhagraha, plain Ardhamandapa, four pillared mahamandapa and six pillared open mukhamandapa and Nandi in an axial line. Both the Main shrine and Amman shrine is surmounted by raised madhil. The temple components consists of upapitha with adhithana, Pithi, Prastaram, griva, sikhara, and stupi. The adhithana consists of the following parts viz, Upana, Jagati, kumuda, pattigai, Kanta and vedi. Above adhithana wall portion begins from vedipadai. There is a pilaster, around the wall of garbhagraha and ardhmandapa, raised up to the wall which is in stone. The inner portion has devakosthas adorned with Dakshinamurthi, Durgai in the south and north, whereas the west side devakosthas is empty. The second prakara wall has empty devakosthas on the south, north and west side where we cannot see any sculptural representation. It is pseudo type of kostha. This is only style of Pandya and later Pandya. The utara is shown with bhutavari and the prastara is embellished with eluthagams, kapotam and the yali frieze is seen above. The vimana of the temple consists of divitala vimana. Top of the tala is adorned with the round griva. grivakostha is embellished on the four sides of the griva. Vesra type (round) sikhara is shown over the griva. On the top of the sikhara, stupi is shown.

Signs of Zodiac or Planets

Ceiling in the temples were simple and plain till the thirteenth century. The Vijayanagar rulers introduced some carvings in the form of lotus with row of parrots, twelve signs of Zodiac or planets are engraved in the ceilings. The ceiling of the mahamandapa at Mayapandiswarar temple also had the carvings of twelve signs of Zodiac or planets. It is construed that this temple had additions during the Vijayanagar period.

Sculptures

Dakshinamurthy T.A. Gopinatha Rao states that Siva is said to be seated facing south while teaching the rishis (saints) and hence known as Dakshinamurthy (dakshin means south). On the south side of the garbagraha devakoshtha, Dakshinamurthy is represented in a seated posture, The right leg is hanging down vertically straight, and resting on a Muyalaka (a demon). The left leg is bent and it rests on the right thigh, as in Virasana. Among the four arms, upper right arm has akshayamala, lower right arm is in upadesamudra, upper left arm bears snake while his lower left arm hanging towards down.

The jatabara flows on either side of his head. His elongated right ear bear patra Kuntala where as his left ear is empty. He wears simple ornaments adorn his neck, bracers, armlets in hands, and anklets in leg. He wears uttrabhandha and drapery covers his waist upto thigh. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Durga

The only female deity, accommodated in the northern devakoshtha of the garbagraha, is Durga. She stands in tribangi posture, on a buffalo head, with karantamakuta on her head. Of her four hands, the upper right and left hand are in katri mudra and hold the sangu and chakra. The lower right is in abahya hastha and left is in uru hastha. Trisula is shown on the rear side of the Durga. She wears the makarakundala and patrakuntala in her ears. Simple ornaments like the haras, the necklace, keyuras and valays and anklets adorn her body. The breast band Kujabhandha and the finely carved out drapery are sculpted beautifully.

Chandikesvara

Chandikesvara is located on the northern prakara. He is regarded as the chief controller of a Siva temple. He is usually honoured in Siva temple by being enshrined in a separate shrine, very close to sanctum, in the northern part of the prakara. The image is in a seated posture, facing south. The right leg is bent vertically at the knee and the left leg is bent cross so as to rest upon the right thigh. He has two hands. He holds parasu in the right hand and keeps the left rested on the thigh.

Dwarapalakas

There are two massive Dwarapalakas, at the entrance of the ardhmandapa. The Dwarapalaka on the south is in a standing posture, by resting his right leg rests on a patrapitha and left leg is kept across at the back of right leg like Krishna playing flute posture with two hands. The right hand is in Tadagahastha and left hand is resting on a Kada autham. He wears Karantamakuta in his head. He wears kuntalas in the ears and haras in his neck. He adorns uttrabhandha. A fine drapery is tied to his waist. The north Dwarapalaka bears similar features as his counterpart, except that his lower hand is in reserve position. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Nataraja

Siva in dancing form is called, Nataraja. In all the Siva temples it is in Bronze but here it is stone sculpture. Siva is depicted as dancing on Muyalaka (a demon). The left leg is lifted up, slightly turned towards the right leg and kept across it. The demon has his head on the right side and his leg on the left side. The back right hand holds damaru and the left hand holds agni (fire). The right front hand is

in abhaya pose while the left front is in the varada pose. He wears jatamakuta, with a crescent moon and goddess Ganga on its jata. The Sculpture is adorned with ornaments like finger rings, necklaces and kundalas. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Sivakamasundari

By the left side of the Nataraja, a standing sculpture of Sivakamasundari is seen with two hands, the right hand is in katahahasta and the left in lolahasta (hangs down by the side). Her head is decorated with karantamakuta. She is standing in a simple abhanga posture. She is also adorned with all ornaments. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Bhairava

Bhairava is in a standing posture, with jwalamala around his head. He holds damaru in the upper left hand and noose in the upper right hand. He holds trisula in the lower right hand and kabala in the lower left hand. His vahana, the dog is absent here. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Murgan, Valli, Devayani

The sculptures of Murgan, Valli and Devayani is adorned in the raised platform of north east corner. Lord Murugan is depicted with six known as Arumugam. He is in a seated posture by hanging his right leg down and rests on his Pea cock vahana and his left leg is folded. Of his two hands his right is showing abhaya hastha with his consorts Valli and Deivayani in tribangi posture and holding flowers. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Ganesa

There are two sculptures of Ganesa is adorned the temple. One is depicted on the South east corner of the Garbhagraha and another sculpture is depicted on the right side of the entrance of the mukamandapa. The sculptures were in seated posture. His head is decorated with karantamakuta and his trunk is in his lower left hand. His belly is little too big. Among his four hands, the upper right holds ankus and upper left holds pasa. The lower left is in varada pose and the lower right is in abaya hastha. He is decorated with ornaments. Nilakanteswara Temple at Kulapuram, also adorned the Ganesa sculpture in the same place as in the right side of the entrance bearing the similar features. The sculpture assigned to Later Pandya Period. i.e. Fourteenth Century A.D.

Vishu Temples

Apart from the Siva temple the village is embellished with two Vishnu temples such as Ranganatha Perumal Temple and Naduvittriiruntha Perumal was called by the name Srinivasa perumal or Varadharajaperumal Temple and the epigraphs in this temple belonged to the Kulasekara Pandyan. There is three to four unreported lithic record denoted from Ranganatha Perumal temple during the field survey which is fully painted and unable to read. The lithic record from temple refers the temple name as 'Tirumerkoil Alakeya pandya Vinnagaram' and Naduvittriiruntha Perumal Temple. It consisted of later Pandya inscriptions which denote that the existence of Tiyagapanchara Vinnagara Perumal and the lithic record of Kulasekara Pandya from this temple mention the presence of Dhamodharan matha.

Architecture of Ranganatha Perumal Temple

The temple faces east. The temple comprises of square garbagraha followed by ardhmandapa, mahamandapa and Muhka mandapa, Adjacent to the South side of the ardhmandapa is adorned with a shrine for Ranganayagi amman and Adjacent to the north side of the ardhmandapa is adorned with a shrine for Yoga Narashima. Close to Shrines of the Ranganayagi amman and Yoga Narashima ,fleets of steps leads to the inner circumbulatory path (prakara). On the South west corner of the circumbulatory path (prakara) is adorned with small shrine for Ganesa. On the south east corner of the mahamandapa is adorned with madappalli. There is raised platform on the north side of the mahamandapa is enshrined with the sculptures of Anjeneya, Vishvekshena, Namalwar. The centre of the mahamandapa is adorned with sculpture of Garudalwar. The mahamandapa is followed by muhamandapa and continued by vahanamandapa facing towards the main gate leads to the lamp stand.

Components of the Temple

The vimana consists of six parts namely adhithana, bhadra, Prastra, Griva, Sikara and stupi. The adhithana consists of the following parts viz, Upana, Jagati, Padma, Kanta and pattiga. Above adhithana wall portion begins from vedipadai. There is a pilaster, around the wall of garbagraha and ardhmandapa, raised up to the wall which is in stone. The bhadra portion has empty devakosthas on the south, north and west side where we cannot see any sculptural representation like in the Chola country. It is only empty kosthas without divine figure which was called as pseudo type of kostha. This is only style of Pandya and later Pandya. Either side of the every kostha has beautiful kumbha panchara are shown on Agarai space. The utara is plain and the prastara is embellished with eluthagams, kapotam and the yali frieze is seen above. Inside the eluthagams beautiful wooden work like structure shown. Originally the wooden work are shown in early temple, here the early type is copied here in stone. Kapota portion is shown with so many karna kudas. It consists of divine and semi divine of gandharva figures. Beautifully carved kodungai are shown on the edge of the kapota called sattatalai. The sculpture of Garudalvar is on all four cardinal corners of the prastara. He is in a seated posture, closing his hands in anjali hasta. The vimana of the temple consists of two tiers – Diwitala vimana. The talas consists of Karana kudu, Pancharam and salas. Top of the tala is adorned with the round griva. grivakostha is embellished on the four sides of the griva. Vesra type (round) sikhara is shown over the griva. On the top of the sikhara stupid is shown. bedecked with kirtimukhas and on the summit is the single stupi. It has been painted recently. The Vimana here is built stone upto prastra and above prastara stacco work is shown.

Sculptures

Ranganatha

The sculpture of Ranganatha is shown lying on five headed serpent bed in ananda saynam posture. Goddesses Bhudevi and Sridevi were seated near the foot of the Ranganatha. Of the two hands of Ranganatha the right is shown on the rear side of the head. The long size Vishnu called as Ranganatha beautifully lying on serpent bed is belongs to later Pandya period on stylistic ground.

Padmavathi

A stone sculpture of Padmavathi is seated on padma pitha in padmasana posture with four hands. Upper hands of the goddess holding Chakra and Sanka and the lower hands are in abaya and varda hasta. She is adorned with kirtamakuta, patrakundala, anklet, kujabhandam, and lower garments. Around the sculpture semi circular tiruvachi is shown. Top of the Tiruvachi shimamukha is shown. At present she is called as Ranganayagi.

Yoga Narasimhar

Yoga Narasimhar is seated on a patrapitha, with his two legs folded in Yohasana posture. The sculpture had lion face and human body. Of his four hands, the upper right is in katri hasta, by

holding Chakra and left holds the sangha, the lower right hand and left placed on knee. He wears Kritamakuta on his head. Kuntalas in his ears, haras and necklace in his chest, Keyuras adorns the upper hands and bangles adorn the forehands. A finely carved out drapery, with its folding, is depicted from his hip to thigh. On stylistically ground the sculpture assigned to Later Pandya style (Fourteenth century A.D.).

Architecture of the Naduvitriiruntha Perumal Temple

The temple faces east. The temple comprises of square garbagraha followed by ardhmandapa, mahamandapa and palipitha. The garbagraha is enshrined with Naduvitriiruntha Perumal(Srinivasa or Varadharaja Perumal) along with his consorts Bhudevi and Neela Devi in seated posture. The sculpture of Garudalwar is placed in the centre of the mahamandapa facing towards the garbhagraha. The gardalwar is shown in Anjali hasta. He is shown with mustache. The north side of the mahamandapa is adorned with separate shrine for Anjaneya. He is depicted in standing posture with anjali hasta. The temple has an ekatala vimana and bears similar architectural features like Ranganaatha Perumal Temple.

Conclusion

The shrines of Siva and Vishnu temples surviving in this region ensure that the village had greater influence towards Saivism as well as Vaishnavism. The architectural features of temples, sculptural art and bronze icons adorned in Melmangalam are remarkable which embellished the Later Pandya architecture. The miniature sculpture in the pillars proves the Vijayanagar stylistic features.

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