



Art and Architecture of Tirumeninathar Temple at Tiruchuli: A Study

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Abstract

Paruthikudi Nadu is the part of Pandiya kingdom and was a flourished religious centre for Saivism and it is one of the *Padalpetra Sthalam*, sung by Sundarar. We can identify the glorious of this temple from Sundarar Tevaram. Main great thing about this temple is tenth temple of the fourteen temples in Pandya Nadu. The temple has the evolution from Early Pandya, Later Pandya and Nayakas. This work thus beginning to understand the Pandya's temple architecture and the importance of their role in architecture.

Key Words: Temple Architecture, Medieval, Pandya, Tamil Nadu

Introduction

Tiruchuli region is one of the famous trading and religious centres of the Tamil lands. This Paruthikudi Nadu was part of the Pandya administered regions and had long had a good relationship with Pandya Kingdom. The practice of constructing structural temples out of well-dressed stone slabs received a great patronage at the hands of the Early Pandya. The temple of Tirumeninathar at Tiruchuli remains one among the earliest structural edifices of this region. The architectural study of this temple is an interesting subject since it reveals the various stages of development of the Dravidian Architecture. Almost every part of this temple complex is subjected to several renovation (addition and alternation) made during the time of Later Pandya and Nayaka rulers. On account of these renovations at various periods especially during the age of Nayaka period, the temple lost almost all of its antique architectural features of Early Pandya, except of the sub-shrines. The entire structural temple complex faces eastern direction and is encircled by three enclosure walls.

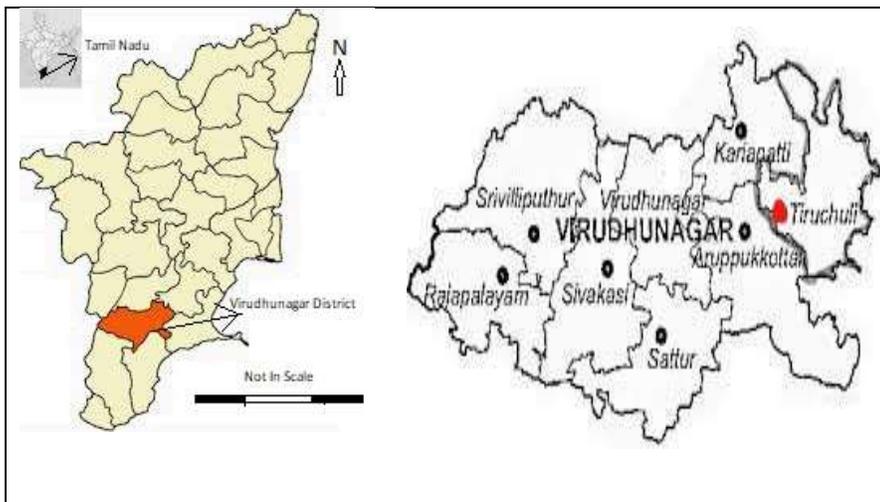


Figure 1: Map of the Tiruchuli

The tirumeninathar temple complex is east oriented and rectangular plan. It consist of main shrine dedicated to Tirumeninathar and a separate shrine dedicated to pralayavidangar of the north west another shrine dedicated to Tirumalaiyamman to the south west in the temple complex. This temple also has sub shrines for Ganesha, Dandayudapani, Shanmuga, Chandekesvara and Ammbal. The temple also has Yahasalai, Madapalli.

The east facing central temple is dedicated to Tirumeninathar. The Tirumeninathar Temple consists of a garbhagriha, an antarala, an ardhmandapa and mahamandapa in an axial line enclosed by Tirumadil. The main deity of the temple is presently known as Tirumeninathar, whereas the epigraphs call it as Lord Mahadeva. The Amman Shrine stand to the right of the main shrine. Bharatamandapa in the north-eastern corner of the temple complex. Eastern and north-east parts have the office room and temple garden respectively. The outer prakara on the east has the main entrance with a gopura. The Early Pandya, Chola, Later Pandya and Nayaka Kings contributed to the development of the temple. The temple which covers an area of about 43,500 square feet. It has 40 feet high Rajagopuram. The main doorway on the east runs through a multi-pillared veranda.



Figure 2: General View of Tirumeninathar Temple

Tirumeninathar Shrine:

The main shrine is dedicated to Lord Siva. This Siva Linga is Suyambu Linga. This Suyambu Linga form of Siva is here called as variously as Tirumeninathar, Sri Bhumeesar, Bhuvanesar, Manakkolanathar, Chulikesar. On plan the main shrine consist of garbhagriha, andarala, ardhmandapa, Mahamandapa.

Garbhagraha:-

The most important part of a temple, its very heart as it were, is the garbhagriha or sanctum sanctorum. This is usually square with a low roof and with no doors or windows except for the front opening. The image of the deity is stationed in the geometrical centre. The whole place is completely dark, except for the light that comes through the front opening.



Figure 3: General view of Sanctum Sanatorium

This temple was constructed based on the adhistana, pada, prasthara, vedika, sikhara and stupi. These portions are located in garbhagriha. Those are main part of the temple architectural study. This temple having two tala. It is apsidal right from the upana having a similar vimana and crowned with a wagon vaulted roof also with an apsidal end.

Adhistan:-

Etymologically it denotes an object and which something stand. Hence it is the basement of the lower member of a building. In this portion's around *upanam, jakati, kumutham, kandam, pathakai, kandam, yalam*. It's were well decorated one. This adhistan is common to both Garbhagriha and Ardhmandapa. The top level of the adhistan is the floor level of the Garbhagriha where the linga is installed.

Pada:-

Pada or *Bhatti* or Wall portion is treated with twelve pilasters and *Koshatapanjaras* or niches. The niches accommodate the images of Dakshinamurthy on the south, Lingothbhava on the west, Durga on the North. The pilasters are arranged in geometrical manner.

The pilaster has a *kal mulasthanam, padmapanda, kalasa, tadi, kumbha* and *palagai*. Just above this, rise the *botika* which bears the vimana. The Devakoshtas are decorated and each of them is flanked by two pilasters on either side which also has the same number of Angas as the other pilasters.

Prastara:-

Over the capital of the pilaster and pada stands *Uttira* and *Kapoda* which are together called as *Prastara*. The *Prastara* is devoid of any sculptural friezes. The *kapoda* is decorated with simple *kudu* motif at regular intervals.

Vimana:

The vimana of the main shrine is square in plan made of stone and decorated with stucco figures. It has two talas. This superstructure is seen over the Garbhagriha. There is a deep recess which separates this Vimana from the Ardhamandapa. The flexed cornice is decorated with *hara*, *kudu* and *sala*. The top most tala has the Lord Siva on the cardinal directions.

Griva:

It is lie between the Sikhara and Prastara. Kanta and Vedi are important angas of a temple. In this portion have supported with Nandi, pudhaganas and Shiva and palakanas supported all four side of the Griva. It is located on the sala portion. Less decorated karnakudu is located its top position.

Sikhara:-

This portion is appeared in the top of the vimana. The front side of the sikara is decorated kirthimukha which gives a majestic and impressive appearance

Stupi:-

The sikhara is pinnaled by the stupi which is hexagonal in shape, with nasikas in all four side. In this temple have only single stupi. It is the last and top of the Vimana Portion. It is fully made on bronze material.

Antarala:-

Antarala, a narrow passage connecting the garbhagriha and the mukhamandapa to the mandapa (pavilion or hall). As already stated, in most of the temples the antarala is identical with mukhamandapa or sukanasi. It was an empty room, it has containing nothing. It was used only for connecting purpose of the garbhagriha.

Ardhamandapa:-

A half pavilion, a vestibule, a court and a porch. It simply acts as a passage to the garbhagriha. It is square in plan. The adhistana of the garbhagriha continues as base of Ardhamandapa also. Above this the pada raises upto the height of prastara. It has attached with Dvararapalakas on entering of the garpagriha. In the wall of it had 4 inscriptions.

Mahamandapa:

This wide Mahamandapa is rectangular in plan and has 14 pillars. The entrance of this mandapa is flanked by a pair of Dwarapalakas. Most of the pillars in mandapa are richly decorated with beautiful sculpture in profile in the 'Saduram' of the pillar. The pillars are adjoined pillars and those are have *nagapandam*, *kadu*, *engonapadai* and *puspa botika*. The *puspa botika* was in well-developed stage.

Sub Shrines:**Malaiyammal:**

The Malaiyammal Shrine represents the next stage in the architecture of the Tirumeninathar temple complex. Devi Shrine is situated just on the southern side of the main shrine. The Goddess Malaiyammal is also called Manikkavalli, Sakayavalli, Thunai Malaiyammai, etc. the consort of the main deity. This Amman temple is very interesting from architectural points of view and comprising the organs of a garbhagriha with dvitala viamana, and ardhmandapa, a mahamandapa, a Mukhamandapa.

Garbhagriha:

The garbhagriha is square in size with 4.5 meters side, facing the east. The stone status of Devi Malaiyammal is installed in the centre of the sanctum. Regarding the outside, adhistana consists of upana, jagathi, kumuda and pattikai as in the case of the main temple.

The adhistana is divided into five bays, a broad bhara, karnas and intervening pratibhadras. The sanctum's northern face projected from the level of the kumuda, is the pranala. The frontal and of the pranala is curved down to from a lip below. The cella's bhadrakoshtas are empty. The vimana is of dvitala variety similar to that of the main shrine. One of the notable features in the vimana is that the corners of griva portion are occupied by square karnakutus. The stucco figures of various aspects of Devi such as Parvati, Varahi and Brahma with four heads are placed in the four niches of the vimana. The sikhara is an octagonal or Dravida type. It is possessing the same floral and other decorations similar to Tirumeninathar shrine. Stupi or Kalasa adorned the top of the vimana.

Ardhamandapa:

In front of the garbhagriha is a square ardhmandapa. The adhistana of ardhmandapa is also the same pattern as that of the main temple. The prastara of entablature carries a slightly flexed kapota, over this runs a yalivari.

Mahamandapa:

The adjoining of the ardhmandapa named as mahamandapa is rectangular in shape. One of the notable features of this mandapa is the wonderful statues of Govinda Dikshita and his wife Nagamamba decked with all kinds of ornaments and garments are installed on the southern side covered by grill gate.

Mukhamandapa:

In front of this mandapa, a rectangular mukhamandapa, is supported by fourteen well sculptured statuary pillars. The figures of Gods, saints and dancing girls are being carved to the front of the pillar shaft.

Pranala:

It is the out let water chute from the garbhagriha. It is found on north wall of the garbhagriha. The pranala is decorated with lion face ended with square form. This stylistically feature is dated to the later addition of the fourteenth and fifteenth century.

Prakaras:

The wall enclosing the temple complex is called prakara. The entire temple complex comprises of three concentric enclosure are possessing trimaligai coisters. The sixty-three Nayanmars have also been installed on the eastern side of the first inner prakara. The figures of the Ganapati, Dandayudapani, Vinayaka, Muruga and Pralaya on the third prakara.

Gopuram:

The gopuram or the main entrance is on the Eastern direction. It had 40 feet high. The gopura on its elevation comprises of *adhistana*, *padha*, *vedikai* and *prastaram*. *Ashistana* is a composite structure. It has *Upapitha*, *Upana*, *Kampu*, plain jagati, three types of *Kumudam*-*Thripatta Kumudam*, and six faceted *kumudam kataka vritha kumudam*, *Kampu*, *Kandam*, *Kampu*, *Pattikai*, *Kampu*, *Padmam* and *Kampu*. The pada portion has pilaster motifs. It consists of *kalasam*, *tadi*, *asyam*, *kumudam*, *palagai*, *padmam* and *potigai*. Above this stands the *Uttaram* and *Prastaram*. The doorjambs are exquisitely carved with *Ganga* and *Yamuna* holding the *Magara torana*.



Figure 4: General view of Gopuram

Pillars:

The pillars in this temple are of two types.

1. Anivottikkal
2. Chitrakandakkal

Anivottikkal:

This type of pillar has an abutting pillar to the main pillar. This type of pillars four are found in the Mahamandapa of the main shrine. The main pillar consist of *Aswapatha*, *Karukkukkattai*, *Idaikkattu*, *Saduram*, *Podigai* and *Uttaram*. The adjoining pillar has *pillaikkal*, *Mathalai*, *Kapotham*, *Bootham* and *Simham* on the top. These pillars are twelve feet high and richly decorated. These pillars have sculptural representation *Siva*, *Vinayaka*, *Muruga* etc. on the *karukkukkattai* portion.



Figure 5: General view of Pillars

Chitrakandakkal:

This type of pillars are found on almost all the mandapas. It consists of Aswapatham, square base with sculptures called Karukkukkattai, Saduram, Nagabandham, Idaikattu, Pathinaru pattam (sixteen sided) Ettupattam, Idaikattu, Saduram, Kattu, Uttaram and Pushpa Podigai. In some pillars there is no sculptural representation in the Katukkukkattai and Podigai is also very simple. The pillars of this type found in the front mandapa are slightly different.



Figure 6: Pathway

Yagasalai and Madapalli:

Yagasalai, where the rituals are performed is seen on the South Eastern corner of the prakara. It is a smile room like mandapa facing west. It consists 8 pillars in inside of it. It all are not decorated, only plain pillars.

Madapalli has a room and a verandah. It is located next of the Yagasalai. On the north eastern corner, there is a chimney. This signifies that this place was once having the cooking fire, so that the smoke escapes through the Chimney.

Vinayaka:

This is the usual sitting posture on the padmapitha, with four hands. The upper two hands hold the angusam and the pasam. The lower hands are in abhaya mudra and varadha mudra. The left leg is folded and resting on a seat. While the right leg is crossed and rests on the left thigh. This shrine has located in the south-western corner of the temple and on the back side of the Amman Shrine. His vahana of the rat also located in near the shrine.

Subrahmanya:

This shrine is facing in northwest corner with his consorts Valli and Daivayani consorts. He is attributed with two hands, Right hand had a Padma and the left hand is resting upon the hip. The wall of the shrine has no decorations. He was seated on the Peacock, and consorts are in posture.

Dandauthapani:

This shrine is facing west in the north-eastern corner. The wall of the shrines has no decoration. He is on the standing posture. His one hand holding on the tadi which is right hand and another one hand of the left is on the rest. On the back side of him one peacock has standing. It is on the only the 3 feet high.

Natarajar:

This shrine is facing south it is an important shrine in this temple. It is a stone image of 10 foot height. The right leg is placed on the body of muyalagan; the left leg is lifted upward. The upper two hands have tamaru and fire (Agni). The lower hand is in abhaya and the left hand passes across the chest with folding namely gajahasta posture. Muyalagan is the symbolism of ignorance. All over his body the snakes were seen as ornaments. In styles, the figure seems to be of 12th or 13th century A.D.



Figure 7: Natarajar

Pralaya Vidangar:

The Pralaya Vidangar shrine, enshrine cylindrical linga in its garbhagriha. It is facing to the east and it is in a square shape. Its front of the mandapa is located in middle of the prakara and have sixteen pillars. The Vimana of the Pralaya Vidangar is in circular type and decorated with stucco figures. It has two talas.

The vimana of the main shrine is square in plan and decorated with stucco figures. It has two talas. This superstructure is seen over the Garbhagriha. There is a deep recess which separates this Vimana from the Ardhamandapa. The flexed cornice is decorated with *hara, kudu* and *sala*. The top most tala has the Lord Siva on the cardinal directions.

Conclusion

The temple has a remote past and a glorious history of nearly twelve centuries. It is clear from the epigraphical sources and structural evidences. The legends of the temple show its antiquity and religious importance. The famous Hindu priest Sri Ramana Maharishi was born here. His house was also located near to the temple. The temple enjoyed the patronage of the rulers of various dynasties of South India. In this study I noticed Kamatchi Temple at Madurai have same as development from Pandyas to Nayakas in architecture and various sculptures.

The study of architecture of the temple clearly shows that the present structure of the temple does not exhibit any feature of Early Pandya architecture. The temple was renovated in the later Pandya period and attained its present form by gradual development. The temple is also a store house of sculptures of rear quality and antiquity. The sculptures of the sancta of the three shrines and the panels of chittrra gopura show remarkable workmanship of various centuries. It shows the various phase of temple architecture evaluation from middle Pandyas to Nayaka Period.

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