



SAIVISM UNDER THE NAYAKAS OF MADURA – AS GLEANED FROM PAINTINGS OF SATYAVAGISVARA TEMPLE, KALAKKADU, TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

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Abstract

The Satyavagisvara temple dedicated to lord Siva recorded in an inscription dated kollam era 676 (1501 CE) as Purarerichchuvaramndaiya nayinar and located in pachacharrupokku kalakkadu. The temple lies on eastern slope of the western ghats is at a distance of 45km to south most of Tirunelveli city in the district of the same name, in southern most part of TamilNadu. The temple is recorded as the birth place of kurruva nayanar, one of the 63 saiva nayanmars. The temple is a large complex, consist of many shrines, ornak manapas and others enclosed by a prakara with tall gopura at the eastern entrance. The art and architecture features assign the temple to 15th cenary. The tall gopura or Rajagopura is nine storeye, exclusively built to depict the mural in all its storeys assigned to Nayaka times (17th CE). There are seen 200 murals portray the scenes from puranas and Rayamayana. The various forms of lord shiva such as Bhikshatana, Vishnu and others worshipping the *sivalinga* besides the saiva saints miracles and the heroic deeds including Tirugnana Sambandar, Kannappa Nayanar and sunderramurti swamigal. The sivaligas are shown with eye and nose is a unique feaure. Most of the panels were provided in labelled inscription. The rare paintings are defaded and lack of chemical preservation.

Introduction

The expression of human ideas, emotions, beliefs and practices that created in the form of rock engravings, sculpture, painting and so on are collectively known as Art. Among them painting is a powerful visual art and serves as the oldest tangible evidence and primary source to understand the wide range of human activities right from Pre-historic times. In India, that these paintings are found on rock, Buddhist caves, temples, palaces and others. The painting on walls and ceilings of the Temple mandapas are common. The paintings are seen in temples vimana and tall gopuras. The Sangam literatures speaks about the paintings and the experts in paintings

as 1) Oviyankaduppa, 2) Pādām chithra 3) Pavai 4) Cuvarpavai, 5) Chittira Ceikai Padam, 6) Kannul Vinainjar,) (Painting artists), Eluttunilai mandapam (Painting Mandapa) and Chithra madam, 7) The earliest and the standard text on painting Vishnudharmottara and Silparatna (16th CE) records in detail about technique, process of painting, colour and tools. The Chitrasutra in Vishnudharmottara mentions Chithra, Chithrasalas Chithrakara, Tulika (hair brush) and bhittichitra (mural). The selection of colours makes the paintings more vibrant and impressive.

Temple Paintings in Tamilnadu

The earliest historical period paintings belong to Satavahanas. It was followed by Kushanas, Guptas, Vakatakas, Chalukyas of Badami, Pallava, Early Pandya, Imperial Chola, Hoysala and Vijayanagara and Nayakas. The temple paintings at Kailasanatha Temple, Kanchipuram, Jaina Cave temple at Sittannavasal, Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur, Ranganatha temple at Srirangam, Varadharaja Perumal Temple, Kanchipuram, Jaina Temple at Thiruparuthikundram, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai Kallalashag Temple, Alagarkoyil and Narumbunathar Temple at Thiruppudaimarudur in Tamilnadu are generally religious oriented depicting themes from Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Periyapuram. These paintings show the difference in the theme chosen and charming contour of the figures. Besides the mandapa's ceiling that the paintings are found on wall, pillar, inner portion of the temple gopuras. An extensive study on these paintings have already carried out by scholars namely A.K.Coomararaswamy, O.C.Gangoly, Kramrisch Stella, T.N.Ramachandran, C.Sivaramamurti, S.K.Govindaswamy and others. However, the Nayak paintings in Tirunelveli district in details which are significant at local level are not studied except the known Thiruppudaimaruthur paintings. The paintings in the Satyavagesvara Temple at Kalakkadu near Nanguneri, Thyagarajaswamy temple at Idaikkae near Ambasamudram and other temples with epicentre at Ambasamudram are not studied so far. Hence, an attempt is made here to derive an account of Saivism under the Nayakas especially the Nayanmar's panels as portrayed in the Rajagopura of the Satyavagisvara temple at Kalakkadu.

Satyavagisvara Temple

The siva temple known as Satyavagisvara (Lord of Truth) is located in the Kalakkadu town in Nanguneri taluk Tirunelveli district. The Kalakkadu town is picturesque as it lies on the slope of western ghats and surrounded by Kalakkadu forest, western ghats and a river named Pachchaiyaru which joins with river Tamraparani from the south. The town Kalakkadu lies at a distance of 45km to South West of Tirunelveli city and 12km to the West of Nanguneri. It is also connected by railway line of Tirunelveli – Nagarkoyil. The town Kalakkadu is first mentioned in a Tamil inscription in the Perumal Temple of the town dated Saka 1457 (1525CE) of the Vijayanagar emperor Sadasiva Maharaya. The Inscription records the temple town as Kalakkadu alias Solakulavallipuram, meaning a mercantile centre. However, the temple under study i.e. Satyavagisvara is referred to as Puraverichu varamudaiya Nayinar at Pachcharrupokku Kalakkadu alias Solakulavallipuram in Vanavan nadu in inscription dated to Kollam Era 676 (1501CE), being the earliest to refer the Satyavagisvara temple. Though the Siva temple's earliest inscription is dated to 1501 CE. The antiquity of the siva temple can be traced to 7th century CE as the place kalakkadu was the native and birth place of saiva nayanmars. The saint sundaramurti of 8th CE swanited in his Thirutonda togai praises the kurruva nayinar kurran kalantaikon ie chhietain of the kalanthai (kalakkadu) region. Another famous Saiva Saint Manickavachagar of 9th Cent also

referred this temple.

The Kalakkad has other temples namely Jamathakniswarar temple, Thiruvankadanathar temple and Perumal temple. Further the Kalakkadu, Bapanasam, Brahmadesam, Sermadevi, Thirupudaimarudur, Thirukkurungudi and others witnessed artistic development mainly the mural painting, its impact and diffusion with the Ambasamudram which served as epicentre of Secondary zone's such as Kumbakonam and Kodumbalur. The main epicentres were Kancheepuram, Madurai, Tirunelveli and others. These centres witnessed innovations and salient features due to successive artistic generations along with royal patronage like Vijayanagar and Nayakas exhibiting idealistic expression, religious development of the respective secondary zones epicentre. The Nayaka paintings are devoid of expressions and iconographic details based on mythological stories and generally indicate decline in the paintings evidently due to political disorder, frequent wars, religious system and socio-economic conditions.

Gopura Paintings in Satyavagisvara Temple

The Satyavagisvara temple dedicated to Lord Siva is connected with the Ramayana. According to sthalapurana of this temple the abducted Sita by Ravana here was safely returned along with Rama and Lakshmana after the assurance uttered by Lord Siva. Since the assurance was fulfilled that the Lord Siva is called as Satyavagisvarar i.e. one who kept his word. The Satyavagisvara temple is large, traces east, consists main shrine, sub-shrines, mandapas and others all enclosed by three prakaras with Raja gopura entrance in the east. Though the Siva temple is traced to 7th cent CE but its art and architectural developments are assigned to later Pandyas, onwards ie 14 – 15 Cent CE The temple complex witnessed renovations and additions including Mani Mandapa with 21 musical pillars, various sub-shrines, large brick built granary. Besides these the most impressive is nine storeyed tall Rajagopura, soaring to an height of 41.00m, the assigned to 16th cent CE. The gopura is built with stone base and super structure of brick and lime plaster and wood. The gopura's outer portion has more than 1500 stucco figures and depicting various forms of the gods and goddesses based on puranas. However, the Rajagopura is very important for having found with more than 200 murals paintings in the interior walls of all the nine storeys. The gopura's storeys are built with wooden ceilings (floors) and teak pillars. The interior brick built wall of the storeys, diminishing from bottom onwards are decorated with murals of the Nayaka times of 17th cent CE. Each storey has its specific themes depicting the scenes from Ramayana, Mahabarata, Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam (Siva leelas) and saiva saints life. These storeys are easily to facilitate glance of fascinating painting.

Mural Paintings in Nine Storeys

The inner walls of the gopura storeys were covered with pure lime plaster as the first process in Mural technique. Then drawings for the scenes were made prominently on the lime plaster. Finally the mural painting were accomplished using vegetable colours and minerals in green, red, dark yellow, black and white colours. Each panel was given with lines and floral decorated border. The scenes of Gopura paintings are fully based on temple sthalapurana known as Kalanthai Purana composed by the local Mutt head Thirukayilaya Desikar. The sthalapurana mentions a total number of 14 carukkams (sections) namely Thalavicedam, Tirupura Sarukkam, Dasavatara Carukkam, Vedan kathi Perra Carukkam and others. Based upon these sections the Mural paintings

portray scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam (Siva leelas), episodes from Saiva Nayanmars including Tirugnana Sambandar, Sundarar and Kannappar. Some of these panels are labelled in Tamil.

The panels depict the saiva saint Tirugnana Sambanar's visit to Madurai, his fight against Jainism which has dominated by performing Andvadhvam, punalvham conversion of Panya king into Saivism and other occupy a milestone in the Bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu. It serves as a tangible evidence to the Bhakti movement. The paintings in all its nine storeys from bottom onwards named as Storey -I, Storey-II till Storey-IX are nearly arranged in clockwise i.e. from west, north, east and south. But the entrance to each storey is located in the South. Thus the paintings in the storeys can be studied under panel wise. The bottom most I storey has 24 panels. Some storeys consist 24, 20 and 16 panels. But the topmost IX storey has the maximum of 26 panels. These murals to a total number of 200 panels portray the scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharata Siva leelas, episodes of Saiva saints stands as mirror of growth to understand especially the social and religious conditions of the Nayaka times of 17th century in southern most part of Tamilnadu. Hence the Murals are considered as an amazing art gallery of puranic themes depicting the development of Saivism particularly.

Paintings Glorifying Saivism

It is known that all the 9 storeys of the Rajagopura's inner walls have a total number of 200 murals with an average of 20 panels in every terrace. Since the gopura is built in the Siva temple, a majority of the gopura paintings depict the various forms of Lord Siva, as supreme power and the Saiva Nayanmars heroic deeds and miracles. It is indeed to mention that out of 9 storeys that 7 storeys are dedicated exclusive to Saivism. The prominent panels glorifying lord Siva are Mukhalinga, Indra worshipping the Sivalinga, Brahma, Vishnu, Ganesa, Sages worshipping the Sivalinga, Vrishabarudha, Bhikshatana, Bairava, Kankalamurti, Kalarimurti, Tripurantaka, Uma-sahita, Nataraja, Siva-Parvati Marriage, Karthikeya fighting with Tarakasura, Muruga. The Saiva Nayanmars mainly Kannappa Nayanmar, Sundarar and Chermanperumal attaining Kailasa, Chandeswara, Ciruthondar, Thirugnana Sambandar's various panels including his visit to Madurai, miracles like restoration of life to Poompaavai, his marriage, entering in jots and other Nayanmars are incorporated in the gopura paintings. It is unfortunate to record that most of the Murals had been ravaged due to negligence, human vandalism, natural disaster and so on. However, some of the panels in various gopura storeys are preserved to certain extent. A selected panels are taken up for a detailed study to understand the development of Saivism in this Ambasamudram region. It is to be noted that the temple has all 63 nayanmars subjects neatly fixed in a row in south west corner at second prakara

Indra Worshipping the Sivalinga

An important panel in Storey-I depicts the worship of Sivalinga. It is related to curse by Gautama muni towards physical desire of his wife Akaligai by Indra. After worshipping the Siva lingam that Indra was relieved from the curse i.e. Indra's body filled with numerous eyes. The panel is rectangular and fully yellow in colour depicts Sivalinga decorated with flower garland in a shrine. Indra with number of eyes on his body is seated in Padmasana with face sympathetically looking the Sivalinga. Indra wears makuta, various haras, pada valayas and vastara. Adjacent to Indra is perhaps his attendant stands in Anjali hasta. The attendant too wears makuta but

less ornaments.

Worshipping the Sivalinga by Vishnu, Brahma and Others

This panel in Storey-VII clearly depicts the Siva as Supreme deity in the Hindu Pantheon. The Sivalinga in a shrine is shown as worshipped by a row of gods namely Vishnu, Brahma, Devendra, Ganesa and Nandeesvaran. A label Tamil inscription above the panel reads “Swamiyai Vittuna Bamma, Devendran, Nandeesvarar, Pillaiyar Sevithathu”. The term is exactly similar to language, script and paleography with those labelled panels found in the Devasiriya mandapa of the Thyagarajaswami Temple at Thiruvavur. The god is referred invariably as Swami in the Nayaka times. An interesting feature is god Vishnu is recorded in the Kalakkadu gopura paintings as Vittunu, instead of Visnu evident to a tamilized form of vishnu. The depiction of Sivalinga in the form of face with two eyes, nose etc is important. Bhairava is an important samhara form of lord Siva. In this panel Bhairava is shown as standing in Tribhanga with ferocious dog behind. He is four armed holding sula, the pasa, the damaru and the Kapala. The god wears Jvalakesa, haras and garland of skulls upto hip. The dog's teeth and its curled back tail indicate the aggressiveness. Here the artist chosen dark brown and white colour for the Bhairava form and the dog respectively. According to T.A.Gopinatha Rao that the Bhairava is identified as Vatuka – Bhairava.

Prominent Nayanmars

The importance given to the Nayanmars is revealed from the gopura's Storey-III as it is exclusively dedicated to Nayanmars episodes alone. The Storey-III has Nayanmars namely Thirugnanasambandar, Sundarar, Chandeswarar, Siruthondar, Kannappa Nayanar, Arivattar, Enathiyar, Thirunalaipovar, Uruthira Pasupathiyar, Thiruneelakandar, Amarnithiyar and also the Nambiyandar Nambi (Who compiled the history of 63 nayanmars under the Chola emperor Raja Raja -I) But the other prominent Nayanmars like Thirunavukarasar and Karaikal Ammaiyar are not traced out.

Thirugnanasambandar's Marriage

The Saiva saint Thirugnanasambandar who converted the Pandya King from Jainism to Saivism is considered as the most important in the revival of saivism in Tamil country as the first three Tirumurais of Tevaram are assigned to him.===== The gopura Storey-III has a panel depicting marriage of Thirugnanasambandar marriage in the presence of his parents. Adjacent to this marriage scene, a Siva shrine with sivalinga is shown. The sivalinga, the close by newly married Thirugnanasambandar and his wife and their entry into Perunjyoti (all flame) is depicted as per Tevaram literature.

Thirugnanasambandar's restoration of life to Poompaavai

The saiva saint Thirugnanasambandar has performed several miracles besides praising the lord Siva in Tevara Padhikams by visiting 219 Siva temples, all over Tamil nadu. The most important miracle was the restoration of life to a girl named Pumpavai at Mylapore. The bones kept in a pot by a Saiva devotee Sivanesar, after the death of his daughter due to snake bite. The painting in Red and yellow colour clearly depicts Thirugnanasambandar stands with his hands placed on the shoulder and hip, a large pot positively kept with bones of the deceased daughter, temple with Sivalinga and Sivanesar in Anjali hasta.

Kannappa Nayanar

The hunter Kannappar near Kalahasti was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. He plucked his own eye to stop the

oozing blood from the Sivalinga who worshipped daily. When blood was oozing from other side of Sivalinga, Kannappar immediately tried to pluck his another eye. Astonished by his devotion, lord Siva stopped the plucking of the other eye and called him as Kannappar ie one who plucked his eye. The panel depicts the Sivalinga, Kannappar's stretched left leg touching the Sivalinga to pinpoint the oozing blood. The scene is witnessed by depicted priest of the siva temple who stands in Anjali hasta. The hunter Kannappar is shown with shorts like lower garment alone. It is very important to note that the Kannappar's stretched right hand with plucked second eye and the slightly turned down Kannappar's head. Lord Siva's third eye on His forehead is prominently seen. The colour of light brown is applied to Sivalinga. The others are shown in red colour.

Conclusion

The study of selected panels such as Sivalinga worshipped by Indra, Sivalinga worshipped by a row of gods like Vishnu (vittunu), Brahma, Devendra, Nandisvra, Pillaiyar in Anjali hasta indicates the Lord Siva as the Supreme deity besides the palaeogeogly the labelled inscription in Tamil helps to identify those gods. Vishnu is shown with krita makuta, four armed, with long flames indicate the paintings is assigned to 17th cent CE. The inner walls with division like for provisi panels, space between the panels, use of red, black, orange and yellow colours etc suggest the well planned painting work. The panels in most of the gopura storeys is evident to domination of Saivism in this remote western ghat's momentainous area of Tirunelveli district. The depiction of a number of Nayanmar panels including disappearance of newly married Thirugnanasambandar and his wife after entering into Siva temple, Kannappa Nayanar's extreme devotion by plucking his two eyes to stop the oozing blood from the Sivalinga etc., shows the popularity of Nayanmars which continued till the Nayaka times. These gopura paintings are rare in Tamilnadu and reveals the unique contribution of Nayakas of Madura despite the fact of political disorder. The paintings throws light on contemporary religious conditions very clearly. The Ramayana, Mahabarata, Puranas, Thiruvilaiyadalpuranam continued as themes in art and architecture. The Sivalinga's Rudrabhaga with eyes and nose as Siva's face is very important and it is the earliest form of Siva lingas The paintings mainly portray the polytheism which prevalent in the Nayaka times of 16 – 17th cent CE. Though these paintings are mainly religious in character, but the contemporary society's dance, festival, dress, ornaments, hair style, weapons, musical instruments, writing system inscriptions in Tamil etc are easily inferred. Since, mother language of the Nayakas was Telugu, its admixture and influence in art, paintings and culture are revealed forms the gopura paintings of Satyavagisvara temple at Kalakkadu. Most of the temple paintings of Nayaka times at Madurai, Srirangam, Tiruvannamalai, Thiruvellarai and Thiruvalanchuli had been completely destroyed by white washing, sand blasting and engaging untrained labour. The gopura painting at Kalakkadu is very much faded and pathetic condition. Hence it is necessary to take action immediately to preserve. these remaining murals by engaging trained chemists otherwise these murals, a part of nation is rich culture heritage will disappear soon.

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