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ART HISTORY OF NAYAKS PERIOD WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THADIKKOMPU SRI SOUNDARARAJA PERUMAL TEMPLE NEAR DINDIGUL

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ABSTRACT: -

*T*adikkompu is a big village in the Dindigul district of Tamilnadu. It lies in the trunk road from Dindigul to Karur at about a distance of 10 kms. There are regular buses from the Dindigul bus station and private taxies could also be hired for a visit. The temples of the place lie close to the main road at walkable distances. Karur is about 60 kms and is supposed to be capital of the ancient. Ceras who ruled over the weastern part of Tamilnadu nearly 1800 Years ago. The ancient name of the place is Karuvur. Dindigul is a meeting place of the three important segments of the ancient Tamil country, viz., Pandinadu, Cholanadu and Kongunadu.But for its strategic importance, Dindigul was not historicall famous as Madurai to the west, Tiruccirappalli to the north karur to the North-west. There is a huge granite hill upon which a fort, linked with Tipusultan and Umaiturai is based on oral tradition.

KEYWORDS: *Gopalanayak, Umaithurai, Maruthu brothers, Tipusultan, Thadikompu, Rangamandapa, Tayarsannathi, Rajagopuram,Nayaks of Madurai...,*

INTRODUCTION :

A ruined Hindu temple stands at the top of the rock and nearly there is a settlement of the Muslims called Begumpur. It ruins of the rock-fort temple could be associated with Islamic iconoclasm, it is likely that Tipusultan used the Dindigul rock-fort as his military base for sometime. No ancient historical vestiges have been discovered in and around Dindigul. But the chain of hills, running to the south-east called Sirumalai Small Range, is associated with Hamuman and considered to be part of the Sanjivi- parvata which the monkey carried with him to Lanka according to the Ramayana.

This hill is supposed to the abode of traditional herbs of miraculous value. Recently pre-historic painting have been discovered in certain parts of the Sirumalai. Roman coins have been discovered in Karur and Pollachi from where one gets access into the west coast by way of the Palghat pass. So, the ancient trade route seems to have passed through the west coast by way of the Palghat pass to Pollachi, Karur and Uraiyur, suburb of modern Tiruccirappalli. For a long time, Dindigul seems to have commanded the status of a no-man's land.

METHODOLOGY

Both descriptive and analytical methods are inevitable.During the Nayak period (after the 17th century A.D.), it became important because of the contact that the Nayaks of Madurai had with the Nayak of Tanjavur since both of them control over Tiruccirappalli. In the late 18th century A.D., when the Palayakkarar of Tirunelveli and Madurai rose against British imperialism, Dindigul had a part to play because Gopala Nayak was one among the associates of

Kattapomman, Umaiturai and the Marutu Brothers of Sivaganga. So, the association of the rock- fort of Dindigul with Umaiturai seems to have a historical base.

In view of the historical darkness which surrounds Dindigul down to the 16th century A.D., no great work of ancient or early medieval art is to be found in and around the main city. The region around emerges into the historical picture only during the Nayak period. This is supported by the presence of a number of Nayak settlements in and around Dindigul. Many of the place names to this day retain the suffix, nayakkanpatti hamled of heroes. Good examples are Bodinayakkanpatti, Nagal Nayakkanpatti Puccinayakkanpatti and so on. Thadikkompu was also a settlements of the Nayakkar. The place name, Thadikkompu, is derived from the Telugu name, Thadikkompu. That is to say Thadikkompu, is a Tamil corruption of the Telugu, Thadikkompu. Tatti in Telugu means palm tree and gumphu group.

In other words, the place where there was a cluster of palm trees was called Thadigum. That being a Telugu settlement it suggests the fact that the temple here must have been originally erected under patronage of the Telugu migrant inhabitants. The inscriptions of the temple also mention the Rayas of Vijayanagara i.e., Krishnadevaraya and Ramadeva. The main temple in Thadikkompu is dedicated to Vishnu and called Soundararaja Perumal. The Vaishnava origin of Thadikkompu is a further support to the Telugu origin because the nayak were by and large Vaishnavas.

Thadikkompu is also famous as a cult centre of a folk-village Goddess, called Muttalamman. Muttalamman is a Tamil form of the Telugu Mutyalamman. Mutyala in Telugu means pearl and amma mother. That means the Pearl Mother which stands for the Goddess of Small- Pox.

The Vishnu temple in Thadikkompu is called Soundararaja Perumal. It consists of two cloisters of which the inner most square houses all major structures. Stylistically speaking they are in the typical Vijayanagara idiom. Three inscriptions are found here which provide some historical information. They may be summarized as follows: An inscription found on the southern side of the Garuda-Mandapa records the name of Rajadhiraja Rajaparamesvara Ramadeva Maharaya. It is dated in A.D. 1551. It pertains to some donations gifted but the details are lost.

An inscription found on the south wall of the Ardhamandapa records donations for Adhyayana and Kalyana Marriage festivals in the month of Markali (December- January). The name of the donor is not given. He is said to be present in the temple in its Sundara Pandyan- Mandapa in the company of his women (namum nam pentukalum). The place name is mentioned as Puramalai- Thadikkompu. The Lord is called Alakar.

Another record found on the north west and south walls of the central shirne (i.e Alakar) records details of reorganization of the temple Administration. It divides the temple personnel consisting of brahmana, into seven sections. It provides for recital of Itihasa, Purana, Sribhasya, Tiruvaymoli of Nammalvar, Alavantar-stotra, Sundararajajastava Srimad Ramayana and Sri Bhagavata.

The epigraphical informations confirm the fact that by about the middle of the 16th century. A.D. the temple existed. The presiding deity is called Alakar the handsome one. There is a reference to Sundara Pandyan-Mandapa. Sundaya Pndya was a ruler of Madurai of the 13thcentury A.D. But the temple at present consists of no structure of the Pandya period. Some are of the view that the main temple of Alakar was originally a temple of Siva and that it was later converted to Vishnu. If it seems correct, the origin of the temple may be traced back to the 13th century A. D. Later it is likely to have been converted in favour of Vishnu by the Nayak who were Vaishnavas basically. It is likely that they added the Mahamandapa which is in typical Vijayanagara form fitted with a balustrated entrance and added with curul- yali-s. the shrine for Laksmi called Soundaravalli Tayar, Antal, Visvaksena and Garuda are in Nayak style and added after the 17th century A.D.

In Tamil Vaishnava tradition, there are 108 sthala-s holy places. All these are found mentioned in the literature of the Alvars called Nalayirativviyappirapantham or Nalayiram completed by about the 8th century A.D. Thadikkompu is not one among the 108. It is a pointer to the late origin of the temple and emergence of the sthala into the reglious history of the Pandinadu region. But in local tradition Thadikkompu is associated with Tirumalirumcolai (m. Alakarkovil, 15 kms to the north east of Maturai). The presiding God of the Alakarkovil is also called Soundaraja or Alakar. Tirumalirumcolai is one among the 108 Vaishnava sthala-s and figures prominently in the Alvar literature. The later link established between Alakarkovil and Thadikkompu may point

out the latter as a satellite of the former. This is pointed out by the prefix Puramalai (other side of the hill) noted in the inscription. The mulabera principal idol of the Thadikkompu temple is sthanaka and the same mould as the Alakarkovil mulabera. The Kalyana mandapa in both the temples are of the same type and intricately worked out. All these evidences establish a close cultural link between Thadikkompu and Alakarkovil.

There is a controversy regarding the original dedication of the Alakar temple also. Some consider it a temple for Murukan on among the six important centres of the cult in Tamilnadu; others being Palani, Tirupparankunram, Tiruccentur (in the Pandinadu), Swamimalai (in Colanadu) and Tiruttani (Tondainadu). It suggests the fact that some of the temples of the other gods could been converted to Vishnu during the heyday of Vijayanagara regime in Tamilnadu. Bur these are debatable issues which were taken to the court for legal settlement.

From the above study, it may be concluded that the earliest historical evidences of the Thadikkompu temple are available from the middle of the 16th century A D. But the inscriptions do not say anything about the foundation of the temple. The details of administrative reorganization, enumerated in the inscription and the donation to festivals stand proof of the fact that the temple had a strong establishment by about the 16th century. So, the origin of the temple could be pushed back by a century or two. The myth regarding the conversion of a originally Siva temple into one of Vishnu is based on oral tradition. No tangible evidence is available to prove the point. The basement of the main shrine for Alakar at Thadikkompu rises up to 2 metres, a special type called madakkovil. It is mostly associated with Vishnu which may be found in Madurai (Kutal Alakar), Srivilliputtur and Tirukkottiyur. But in the Plinth section of the gopura there are few Saiva themes such as Bhiksatana. This is not sufficient enough assign a Saiva origin. Similar motifs appear in the ranga- mandapa of the Tayar shrine also, to be found in the Taramankalam Vishnu temple. So, the Saiva origin could not be established is a good point in consideration but all Pandya temples need not necessarily be Saiva because some of the Pandya kings like Srimara Srivallabha were great patrons of Vaisnavism and its mystics like Periyalvar.

To be brief the temple has a recorded history from the middle of the 16th century A.D. on wards. Its foundation may get back to few centuries earlier than the gives date. The Nayak chieftains who came to Tamilnadu after the 14th century A.D., following the flanks of Kumara Kampana (A.D. 1371) are credited with the erected temple at the site.

The Vishnu temple is a compact complex occupying an area of four acres of land. The inscriptions (SITI, Pt. II, No. 880) talk of lot of land gifts to the temple but at present the landed property on record is very little and seem to have been misappropriated.There are two cloisters of the temple. It lies parallel to the main gopura. In between the two a garuda sthamba is found. At the south west corner, there is a separate chapel for Cakkarattalvar. In front of this temple a stray image of Cakkarattalvar is also found. No other structure or enclosing wall for the second cloister exists.

The inner cloister forms the core temple. It is surrounded by a tirumatil holy wall and fitted with a gopura on the eastern section of the wall. The shrines inside include separate ones for Soundararaja Perumal, Soundaravalli Tayar (Lakshmi- Sridevi), Andal (Bhudevi) and Visvaksena. All of them face the east excepting the chapel for Visvaksena. It appears on the north eastern corner of the complex and faces south. The shrines of Soundararaja and sundaravalli Tayar occupy the central part of the cloister and stand side by side the latter to the right of the former. On the north western corner the shrine for Andal appears. The shrine for Soundararaja and Sundaravalli Tayar stand apart and are separate entities. The shrine for Andal and Visvaksena merge with the wall of the inner cloister.

In front of the shrine of Soundararaja there is a small chapel for Garuda the Lords attendant and vehicle. It faces the west. The balipitha and Dvajasthamba fall to the back of the Garuda Shrine. The garbha griha of soundararaja, Garuda- mandpa dvajasthamba balipitha and fopura falls in axial alinment. A pillared corridor runs to the south of the Tayar shrine and western part of the inner cloister and merges with the wall. Adjoining the wall and close to the corridor there is an enclave for Dasavatara-murtis. The matappalli holy kitchen is found nearby in addition to mini cellae for Ganapati and Nammalvar. In front of the Tayar shrine the holy well is found close to the shrine of visvaksena.

Besides the stationary structures of the temple there are some movable assets which form part of the

temple. These consist of wooden vahana,s, used for periodical festival processions. The vahana,s include Gaja 'Elephant', hamsa or annam 'Swan', Simha 'lion', Garuda 'Eagle', Asva 'Horse' and naga 'snake'. They are stationed in the corridor adjoining the dasavatara enclave. There is a road which goes around the temple and the village meant for processions the ratha chariot is stationed on the eastern road side nearby there is a open chariot pavilion called treati.The inner cloister of the temple consists of five vimana,s perfect in all possible ways and are mean for deities as follows.

1.Soundararaja 2. Sundaravalli Tayar, 3. Andal, 4.Garuda, and 5. Visvaksena. All the five vimanas consist of the three major parts of the Hindu temple they are: 1.Plinth 2.Pada or Bhitti, and 3.Sikhara. These three basic member are further elaborated into six anga,s called sadanga. They are upapitha, adhisthana ,pada, prastara, sikhara and kalasa.

All the vimana,s are uniformly square from the base to the finial. So, all of them belongs to nagara which type of vimana is said top be square according to vastusastra's. the plinth mouldings in the two main temples meant for Soundararaja and Soundaravalli Tayar. No elaborate decorative mouldings as may be found in cola temples (e.g Tanjavur and Pullamankai) are to be traced in them. The plinth in resepect of the Andal and Visvaksena shrines are comparatively advanced and richly ornamented. They include successive banda of kanth Kumuda padma tripattakumuda mahapadma pattika and vedika. The bhitti part of the Soundararaja and Tayar shrines are also simple in design. Devakostha's appear on three sides other than the east. They are just ornamental and by twenty pillars all of them gems of Vijayanagara art. Four of them are yali sthamba's 16 sculptural pillars and two musical pillars. The gopura of the temple is of moderate size. It stands on a solid granite plinth.

There are four tala,s the griva and barrel vaulted (sala) sikhara. The first tala of the gopura is decorated with stucco images Dvarapalaka's appear on both sides of the dvara in each of the talas. The gopura of the temples is of moderate size it stands on a solid granite plinth. There are four tala,s griva and barrel vaulted (sala)sikhara. The first tala of the gopura is decorated with stucco images. Dvarapalaka's appear on both sides of the dvara in each of the talas.

Architecturally speaking the shrines of the Thadikkompu temple show festures of vijayanagara tradition. The ranga-yali's yali sthamba, musical pillars, the bhitti mouldings of the Andal and Visvaksena are good points in consideration. On the basis of the style the five shrines of Thadikkompu may be grouped into two heads: Soundararaja and Sundaravalli Tayar, Andal and Visvaksena shrines. Ranga mandapa of Tayar Andal and Visvaksena shrines.The first group may be assigned to a data prior to the 16th century A.D. The second group may be dated after the 16th century A.D by virtue of their unique architectural elements. May be they came into being under the Nayak period.

When Dindigul was under the control of rulers of Mysore king Achuda Devaraya started the construction of the temple which was completed by his younger brother. The style of architecture in the mahamandapa and ardhamandapa confirmed this states of king and queens have been installed next to Garudazhvar shrine. Devarayar had christened the main mandapa as Annamanadapa in memory of king Achudha Devarayar. While Anjaneyar the Ilayathiruvadi has been installed on the southern side and Garudazhvar Periathiruvadi is on the northern side and which is against the norm. Usually Periathiruvadi is in the South and Anjaneyar on the northern side. This is peculiar in Thadikkompu.

CONCLUSION

The manuscript presents the following suggestions. Thalapuri and Thalavanam meaning palm grove. Earlier Tadikkompu was the capital of Dindigul. According the legend Saint Manduga had performed thapas in Thalapuri. When Thalasuram attempted to disturb his thapas manduga prayed to Lord Narayana for help and Narayana appeared before him in the form of Thirumaliruncholai Azhagar and destroyed. Thalasuran accepting his desire finally perumal stayed there. The basement is constructed on granite. Slabs which is fixed on the nine feet deep sand bed. The rain water will not go out of the temple and seats under the sand bed.

The twelve inspiring four feet tall Soundararaja Perumal along with Sridevi and Boodevi in standing posture faces. Garudazhavar is in the main mandapa. The procedure of worship is according to Pancharathira

agama of Thenkalai Samprathayam. There is a small peetam in the northern corner of Garbagruha. According to legend Audharsana Azhwar had prayed to Lord Narayana to purify as he had been used in various wars and his body was soaked in blood. According his request Lord Narayana purified him by immersing him equal status was found missing but the peetam is still there.

Next is Periapiratti Sundaravalli Thayar Sannathi where the unjal mandapam has excellent sculptures. There are separate sannathis for Visvaksenar and goddess Andal. The majesty and elegance of Chakarathazhavar is an eye catching one and countrary to other Perumal temples. Chakarathazhavar and Yoga Naraismhar have separate entrances in the same mandapain other temples Narasimha can be seen either a small hole or through a mirror placed behind Chakarathazhavar.

The brilliant sculptures have not wasted even a small space. The empty space in the pillar has been used to chisel the small forms of Rama and Anjaneyar and the minute defects have been rectified in the main statue in the next pillar. All the brilliant yellows saturated reds and lash greens and various shades have come to light on the loaf of the Unjal Mahapam. The presence of the standing Vinayaga urthuva Natarajar and Kali are symbols of saivite and vaishnavite harmony.

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