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ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF SRI AHOBILA VARADARAJA PERUMAL TEMPLE AT BALASAMUDRAM

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ABSTRACT :

his southern country of the Pandyas was like the butter in greatness in the milk. Like the sweetness that is found in the butter is the abode of the wise, righteous the devotees in lakhs throng in Palani, the holy tour. Balasamudram is siturated 5 kms from Palani. This place is not only a reputable and ancient one, but also noted for its historical background that bears in itself. The holy song of Thirumurugatrupaddai by Nakkeerar says that Muruga was deeply in love with his uncle Thirumal. In order to abeaten the anger of Muruga, Brahma and others requisted Thirumal to be sent as a mediator. It is near this part is Balasamudram¹. In this part it is like Muruga standing on a mountain and looking at Arulvarathan and Arulvarathan in turn looks at his beloved son-in-law Baladandayuthapani with of pleased eyes. One, who is deeply in union with God can see both of them (Muruga and Thirumal) with a great

union together from this place. To come to this place there are frequent bus-services. The elders of the place say and believe, that the devotees, who come to worship Muruga, should also worship the temple..Present study highlights the art and architecture of Sri Akobilavaradharaja Perumal Temple at Balasamudram.

KEYWORDS : Arulwarathan, Anjeneya, Palaru Porenthalaru, Thirumurugatrupaddai, Thaladanda yuthapani, Balasamudram Zamindar, Garudalvar Sannathi, Garbhagriha, Nayaks...,

INTRODUCTION

Balasamudram (nearly 5kms from Palani) is known in Tamil as 'Sirumakadal'. Its greatness increases day by day in all these 400 years. At the start Balasamudram Zamindar had a great involvement with this deity. It is believed, that the present temple was renovated some 200 years before by the Balasamudram Zamindars and that the Lord appeared here long before the construction of the temple.² Balasamudram (nearly 5kms from Palani) is known in Tamil as 'Sirumakadal'. Its greatness increases day by day in all these 400 years.

To prepare the research article, both analytical and descriptive methods are utilized. The temple in this place has been structured in the style of the Nayaks who ruled Madurai. Since there is a separate sannathi for the Thirumangai Alwar of the Chola country it is assumed that for this place there would have been a song and the unanimous ideas of the elders of the place is that the songs would have been ruined in course of time. This place is 5kms from Palani towards the south-west direction. On the road there are two water reservoirs known as Palaru and Poranthalaru³.

In this place there are nearly 2500 settlements. Around the temple there are broad roads for the "Car" to be taken in procession. Though there is no definite sayings about the place till today, in the book that was wrought by Velachinovaiyan by name Vaiyapuri Pallu there is the note about the deity. This is the book, that is released first about the place. It can be understood from the structure of the temple and the methods of Poojas observed daily, that the place might have got the significance of the days of Nayaks⁴. In Balasamudram on the north south direction of the place is Kasi Visvanathar Swamy Koil. Here also special Poojas and festivals are offered. On the south east direction is the Muthalamman Koil, where also special festivals are observed. In the midst of the town is Impuli Vinayakar Koil⁵.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Sri Ahobila Varadaraja Perumal Temple is the beautiful land mark of the village. It is facing the eastern direction. The development of architecture can be seen in the sub-shrines of the temple. A garbhagriha, Artha Mandapa and Mahamandapa are there in the temple⁶. The Lord Ahobila Varadaraja Perumal is in standing posture with Sridevi and Poodevi in the garbhagriha. The Architectural features also can be seen in the Mahamandapa next to the main shrine.

All the pillars in the Mahamandapa show the architectural features of the Nayaks period⁷. The research reveals that the Mahamandapa is built only with four beautiful pillars. The artistic approach under the basis of architecture reveals the special features of the temple. The Patha parts of the temple are hidden with the latest architectural work. Brahma Kanta parts of the pillars are decorated with Kodikkarukku motifs, and Nagabandhas. The Brahma kanta part has four sides. Next to that we can see the Vishnu Kanta parts of the pillar. Beautiful floral designs can be seen on the Brahamakanta parts. Various architectural works can be seen on the four parts of the pillars. The side of the pillars are extended to four and then twelve. Various artistic decorations are there on the four sides of the pillars. After the four sides, there are eight sides and then twelve sides can be seen. After twelve sides again it has eight sides. Carving, the Brahama kanta part under the potika is the architectural style of the Vijaya Nagara Nayaks period. The potika part is completed as pushpa potika. The potikas are matching to the appearance of the Mandapa. Particularly the potika parts are created with a lot of care. Carving many beautiful floral designs on the potika part is a new technic in the architecture.

The uttara parts of the pillars in the Mahamandapa are carved in the east-west direction. On the pillars torana decorations and floral motifs can be seen. Each potika is different from the other. This mandapa was only four pillars with various architectural features⁸. To worship the Lord we have to go through the eastern entrance of the temple and to worship the Goddess we have to use the southern entrance of the temple. The centre part of the mandapa vidhana has got beautiful floral motifs and the images of fishes. The construction of the Mahamandapa without many pillars show the development of recent technology in architecture.

MUHAMANDAPA

The Muhamandapa also got the special features of architecture like the Mahamandapa. The entrance of the mahamandapa is decorated with beautiful toranas. On them we can see Nagabandhas, malasthanas, floral motifs and various models of pilasters. The sculpture of Gajalakshmi is a very ancient one. This shows the architectural development of that period. There are more than sixteen pillars in the Muhamandapa. All the lower parts of the pillars have the Brahamakanta structure. The sculptures of the donors are also carved on it. The Vishukanta and Rudhrakanta parts are simply shown on the pillars. But they play a vital role in the decoration on the pillars. All the potika parts have small pushpapotikas. The potikas are carved in the east-west direction. The uthira parts on the potika are also carved in the east-west direction. The vidhana part is constructed in the North-South direction⁹. The Muhamandapa potikas are smaller than the mahamandapa pillars. They don't have much decorative works like the Mahamandapa pillars. The sculptures of the Dwarabalagas are in the entrance of the mandapa. The appearance and decorations of the pillars show that they belong to the period of the Vijayanagara Nayaks. The vidhana part of the Muhamandapa is decorated with twelve Zodiac signs. The Lord's Vahana Garudalvar is facing the Lord on the eastern side of the Mandapa¹⁰.

The Architecture of the Garudalvar Sannathi

The Garudalvar shrine might be constructed in the same period of construction of the mulasthana Arthamandapa, Mahamandapa and the Muhamandapa of the temple of Arulmigu Akobila Varadaraja Perumal.

Even though the adhisthana has gone under the earth, it is clearly shown on the padhapart. Each side of the temple has four pilasters. They are also known as wall pillars. Those pillars do not have much decorations. They are of simple type. This Sannathi is eight feet high and the breadth is also eight feet high at the outside. The prasthara part of this Sannathi is simply carved. Each prasthara part has four kudus. Though the architectural style is simple, there is a speciality. The puspapotika and the griva part after the kapota are shown beautifully Arulmigu Garudalvar sanctum has beautiful kudus on the Griva part. Yazhi freizes are carved on the Kudus. The sikhara is carved in round shape very beautifully. The stupi has got the decorations of recent architectural style. The prasthara part of this shrine was built in the ancient days and the other parts like Griva, Sikhara and Stupi are built in the later period. It might be built to the stupi and it was damaged due to natural calamities¹¹. Then it was renovated and worshippers started worshipping. We can understand that undoubtedly it is an earliest temple structure.

BALIPITHA

The Balipitha has got recent architectural decorations, but it is not built recently. It is an ancient one, the adhisthana part is less than one feet on this Balipitha. The pada part is simply carved. Though it is simply carved the sculptor had shown pilasters on the four corners. This is a significant style of the architecture of south India. The prasthara part which is also called as kapoda is carved on the top. Each side has two beautiful kudus. This is a new development in the architecture of that period. The lotus flower is carved upside down on the top of the balipitha. The appearance of the balipitha is a symbolic representation that the worshippers must get away the unwanted thoughts in the balipitha before entering into the temple. The balipitha is of 3 ½ feet high and it has 3 feet breadth.

DWAJASTHAMPA

The kodimara is placed on a four feet strong stone. The stone has got a decorative upapitha. This shows that the lord is always ready to bless his worshippers. The upapitha of the kodimara is hidden under the earth¹². The Adhisthana part has got many symptoms with the architecture of the Dravidian period. The prior part which shows the Dravidian architecture is the kapota part. The other part Jagadi is clearly shown on that. On the top and bottom of the Jagadi part the sculptor had carved a small part called potika. Next to this is a part called Viruthakumuda. On the out of side of that the sculptor had shown a flat structure. The upper part is reflecting the parts known as kanda and padha. Because they had the structure of the pilasters on it and the prasthara is carved very clearly. Each side of the prasthara has got four kudus. We can see various decorations on them. The kodimara is placed on the pitha which has got beautiful architectural decorations on it¹³.

GOPURAM

The south Indian architecture always give importance to the appearance of the Gopura. The appearance of Gopura place a vital role in the South Indian architecture. This style is followed by the Nayaks of Vijayanagar. The main Gopura of Arulmigu Ahobilavaradaraja Perumal and Perundevi Thayar had started in the ancient age. This is known by the stone decorations. This Gopura is more than 15 feet high. The upana, adhisthana, pada and prasthara of this Gopura are carved with simple decorations. The griva, sikhara and stupi are decorated in the later days. Various kudus with simple decorations and gajaprista appearances show the recent style of architecture. There are three kalasas on the Gopura¹⁴. On both sides of the sikhara we can seen the model of subsikharas as stuccos. According to the places the sculptor had carved matching sculptures like ganas, yazhi friezes, stucco sikharas on four sides. Next to this we can see pillars with ordinary appearance. Next to the Gopura is a Mandapa with Kodimara.

A beautiful kapota is carved next to the upapitha in this mandapa. This type of architecture belonged to the Nayaks period. Beautiful yazhi friezes one carved on the prasthara four beautiful pillars with attractive architecture can be seen on a dias. The potikas are inside the dias. The sculptor had shown four sides, 32 sides and round shapes on the pillars. Innumerable architectural works and beautiful stuccos are carved on the pillars. The potikas are given a matching shape according to the hights of the pillars. The utara part is carved on the top of

the Potikas. A tall kodimara is placed in the middle of the mandapa. This ancient kodimara has the architecture of the Nayaks period. The bottom of the kodimara has four sides. Various sculptures on the four sides of the pillars show the importance of Vaishnavism¹⁵. The four sides of the kodimara is increased to twelve on the top. This kodi mara is about 25 feet high. On the top of the kodimara we can see the architectural decorations like separate pillars. The beautiful decorations of the kodimara is a special architectural beauty of the temple.

SRI ANJANEYA SHRINE

This temple has a beautiful sanctum and a Muhamandapa. This shrine is facing the west and at the same time it is facing the temple of Annai Perundevi Thayar. This temple has a simple Adhisthana appearance and the padha part is in the form of pilasters. Each side four pilasters. This shrine has the prasthara with kudus. There are two beautiful pillars in the mandapa with various architectural designs. We can say that the decorations and sculptures on the pillars were over decorated. These two pillars are small in size and not very high. This temple is the creation of the chettiyars who lived after the Nayaks period. This is known through the inscription in the padha part of the temple on the left entrance. The sculptures of the donors and misterious sculptures are carved on the pillars¹⁶.

The pranala or the water out let of this temple is seen on the north side. This is the architectural style of Nayaks. The griva part is shown as a stucco next to the prasthara part. According to the places and to match the moolavar the sculpture had created many stuccos on the grivakostha. We can see kudus with yazhi friezes and beautiful round sikharas next to the griva kostha. These architectural designs are in the recent style. Though it has various decorations, no special architectural style of the south Indian can be seen on this. Simple architectural style is followed. The specialty of the temple is only the pillars on the mandapa.¹⁷

The shrine of Sri Perundevi Thayar Sannathi

The garbhagriha of Sri Perundeviyar is equally beautiful to the sanctum of Ahobila Varadarajaperumal. The Mulasthana and Arthamandpa are wonderfully built. The Goddess is facing the east like the moolavar. Equal importance is given in the architecture like the sanctum of the Lord Ahobila. The Arthamandapa is simple in style. The torana part of the entrance has the collection of Gajalakshmi sculpture in the form of stuccos. The entrance looks like a devakostha. The decorations which reflects cholas art and the architecture of the cholas and Pandyas. The architectural designs carved on the uttra part of the Mahamandapa might belong to the 12th century AD. The maximum parts of the temple shows that it is an ancient one¹⁸.

The Mulasthana of Ambal has got beautiful pillars in the mandapa like Sri Akobila Varadaraja Peumal temple. All the four pillars have got various architectural decorations and sculptural decorations. The appearance of the Potika and Uttara part one in the direction of east west. The four sides of the pillars have got the sculptures of the donors. The middle part of the same pillars have got small stucco sculptures¹⁹. The potika reflects the architectural style of the Nayaks. Each Potika is facing east west direction but they have different architectural designs on them. These pillars have got the form of chain which is unseen in any part of the temple. This is carved in the centre part of the pillar. On the north side of the Mahamandapa we can see sculptures of Alvars and sculptures related to the dasavathara. Apart from the main entrance, there is another entrance on the southern side of the temple to reach the prahara. This southern entrance is in the Mahamandapa. The sanctum and mahamandapa are built simply but the architectural beauty is clearly shown on the pillars of the temple. We can say that the sculptures of the prahara are the crown of architecture of this temple²⁰.

The first storey of the vimana has got stuccos the Adhisthana, pada and prasthara part are clearly shown. The sala and panjara kosthas are shown next to this the sculptor had shown various floral decorations especially lotus under the griva part. Next to the griva is the sikhara with four sides. The kalasa has got recent architectural designs on it. The other sides of vimana also have devakosthas carved very properly²¹. On the western and northern ides we can see karma kudus, parade of the sculptures and the adhisthana. The water out let is facing the northern side. There we can see the mahara sculpture. The parts until the stubi on the vimana adds beauty to the sanctum. In some places of the devakostha torana, they have carved the model sculpture²².

VARADHARAJA PERUMAL TEMPLE'S VIMANA ARCHITECTURE

The adhisthana is built very simply on the prior garbhagriha. The architectural parts are not mostely seen on this. The padha part is carved very beautifully. But the devakostha appearance is not seen any where. The models of pilasters can be seen on the wall. Though the pilasters do not have architectural decorations the potikas and their appearances are carved on a straight line which is an astonishing factor. The pilasters on the vimana and the other pilasters are closely connected in the appearance and decoration. Either the devekostha or ht emodel of the devakostha or the model of the devakostha or the architectural decorations cannot be seen here. The prasthara part is built with statistical measurements. The kudus and upper part of that are carved on a straight line. Various stuccos and decorations are carved on the Griva kostha. The sikhara has got six flat structures on it and the stupi has got the recent architectural style.

Though the architectural designs are less on the Vimana, the proper structure and the disciplines measurements adds beauty to the vimana. According to the structure of the vimana the water out let is also carved beautifully. Though the measurements are the same like the other temples, the total appearance of the vimana is certainly different from the other vimanas. Less importance is given to the architectural decorations but the sanctum is also has its own individuality. According to the size and appearance of the Griva, the Stupi also built proportionally.

The vimana of the Sri Akobila varadaraja Perumal temple is carved with strong stones from the upana to the prasthara. These stones have architectural decorations on them. The other parts have stuccos on it. This vimana is also damaged and the renovation work is done in the later periods²³.

SRI ANDAL SANNATHI

The architecture of the sanctum of Sri Andal is given equal importance like the other sanctums of the lords. This is the biggest sanctum built for goddess Andal among the vaishnava temples. The adhisthana of this temple of Ambal and Perumal temples. Except the upana part, all the other parts are very clearly carved.²⁴ The research study reveals this and the Mahamandapa in the adhisthana parts adds beauty to the appearance. No sculptures are seen on the part called kalam. The entire appearance is so simple without sculptural decorations. This is a speciality in architecture. The decorative parts are the kudus Adhisthana, and kapota. In between the sculptor had carved small lotus flowers. This is a special decoration²⁵.

The sculptor had shown various structures of the sikharas on the vimana. The different approach of architecture adds beauty to the appearance of the vimana. The beautiful griva kosthas have got the stuccos of Ambal. The sikhara is in a round shape each side has two kudus on them. on the top of the sikhara, we can see beautiful lotus flowers. The stupi has got recent architectural decorations. Like the other vimanas of the temple this Andal temple vimana also got strong stone decorations. From the upana to the prasthara. The griva, sikhara and stupi on the first storey are built with stuccos. The ancient part of the vimana is destroyed and it is renovated with recent architectural style²⁶.

CONCLUSION

The arts of the temple is fully based on the Nayaks period. Lord Vinayaka temple is built in the north-west corner of the temple. This temple is facing the eastern side. This temple has ordinary architectural works. But it has a Ekatala vimana. From the upana part to the stupi we can see the stuccos. The first storey or the Griva Kostha has got beautiful stuccos. The Vimana is in the round shape four sides of the vimana has four big kudus. The faces of the yazhis are carved on the top of the kudus. Small kudus are built in between the big kudus. This type of kudus give beauty to the appearance of the vimana. Stupi belongs to the recent period. The vahana mandapa of the Gods and Goddesses are on the western side. These mandapas are facing the eastern direction. These Gods and Goddess images are used at the time of thiruveediula utsava.

The temple of Lord Krishna is in the southern west part of the temple. This temple is also facing the eastern direction. Like the temple of Lord Vinayaga, this temple is also built simply with less decorations. The stucco decorations can be seen from the adhisthana to the stupi small and big kudus on the sikhara and the Grivakostha are beautifully shown. The ekatala vimana sikhara has got various beautiful decorations. It is eight

feet high and the breadth is less than five feet. The inside vidhana part has got ancient architectural patterns. The mahamandapa has got various external architectural designs and it is a significant one in the field of architecture. We have to preserve our religious monuments.

ENDNOTES:

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- 8. Interviewed Dr.L.Thilagavathi, Associate Professor, A.P.A.C.W, Palani, on 26.8.2017.

9. We can see the same sculptures and fourpitllared mandapa in palani giriveedhi.

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- 16. Harsa nanda, All about Hindu Temples, 2001, p.23.
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