



PAZHANKARAI –PONCHOLISWARA ALIAS MUNTHONDRISWARA TEMPLE SCULPTURE OF AVINASI IN KONGUNADU

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ABSTRACT:

In the place Pazhankarai known as Pazhankarayanallur, Thiripuvana Chakravarthi Virarajendra has built Poncholiswara Temple with enormous sculptures beautifully. Among them, the first is Munthondriswara who is seated as the moolavar. However this temple has many olden sculptures. According to inscriptions, this place has many rivers and wells and the Lord seated is really very great. The trade routes the 'Adikeelthala Padaiveedu' manifest the greatness of the place. Lord Poncholiswara is seated here. It is a very ancient sculpture bestowing blessings to the devotees. Choliswara endows blessings having the Thrimurthi as his leader namely Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. Choliswara is put up on a nearly two feet pita under the divine headed snake at a height of nearly three feet. It has been designed as pouring the holy water on the moolava. In Kongu nadu temples especially in places like Avinashi, Thirumuruganpoondi, Manur, Pazhani, Kolumam, Kannadiputhur, Kadathur, Solamadevi, Perumanallur, Kiranur, Bhavani, Anthiyur and Sathiyamangalam the god in Linga form reveals Saivism in its zenith. The upheaval stage of Saivism was in the days of Kongu Cholas.

KEYWORDS: Mahamandapa, Pasupathiswara sculpture, Lord Subramanya, Ganapath, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Virarajendra, Vijayanagara, Kongu Chola, Choliswar...,

INTRODUCTION:

Building of temples is considered to be an extremely pious act. bringing great religious merit. Hence kings and rich people were eager to spend their wealth on it. All the various steps involved in it were performed either as religious rites or with religious overtones. Let us now try to describe the typical steps commonly involved in building a temple. The yajamana (lit. the sacrificer; here, the financier and builder) must first choose a proper guide or sthapaka or acarya for overall guidance and supervision. This acharya must be a pious brahmana, with a sinless life.

He must be an expert in art, architecture and rituals. The acharya then chooses the sthapati (chief architect) and puts him in charge of the whole construction. The sthapati commands a status and respect equal to that of the acarya. He is assisted by the sutragrahin (surveyor), the taksaka (sculptor) and the vardhakin (builder, plasterer and painter). From the day of sankalpa (religious resolve), the yajamana and the acharya have to take certain religious vows and lead a very strict life in accordance with those vows.

METHODOLOGY

Both analytical and descriptive methods are adopted. The first and foremost step in the building of a temple is the selection of a suitable site situated in or near a holy place and endowed with natural beauty and peace. The site has then to be cleared of all its vegetation. Evil spirits have to be exorcised and the place purified. Assuming that the detailed designs and engineering drawings have already been prepared, the next

item is vastuvinyasa, drawing the vastumandala on the site of the temple construction at an appropriate auspicious time. The cosmic man embodying the whole creation including the different deities of the Hindu pantheon in the different limbs and parts of his body is technically called the vastupurusa. The mandala is a geometrical drawing of 64 squares which represents him. Once the vastumandala is drawn ceremonially, it becomes 'alive', with the vastupurusa fixed on it.

Later, the image or the symbol of the deity will have to be installed in the centre of this mandala at the appropriate time. Another important religious ceremony connected with the various stages of construction is atikurapana (rite of the seeds and their germination). Its main purpose is to facilitate the fruition of the work without obstructions and obstacles. It is performed before the construction starts, before laying the last brick or stone (murdhestaka) into superstructure, prior to the installation of the main image, before the, opening of the eyes' (aksimocana) of the image and so on. The rite consists of placing the seeds of different varieties of rice, sesamum, mustard etc., in 16 copper vessels in front of Soma (the lord of germination) and offering them to the concerned deity after germination. Next comes silanyasa or foundation stone laying ceremony. It is the laying of the first stone (square in shape) or brick signifying the start of construction. It is laid in the north-western corner of the building plan, drawn on the ground after excavating the foundation to the required depth. After this, the construction of the foundation is taken up.

The foundation is built and the ground filled up, up to the plinth level, except in the middle portion of the garbhagrha which is filled up to three-fourths only. In the centre of this place, the adharasila (a base stone) is placed, over which are deposited the following articles in that order: a pot (called nidhikumbha), a tortoise and a lotus, all made of stone; a tortoise and a lotus made of silver; a tortoise and a lotus made of gold. From there, a funnel-shaped tube called yoganala, made of copper leads upto the plinth. The whole thing is covered by another stone slab called brahmasila. Later on, the image of the deity is established over this.

Another extremely important rite which is performed during temple construction is the garbhanyasa ("insemination" of the temple site). A casket or tray of copper, whose dimensions are proportional to the dimensions of the temple, is ceremonially lowered into the ground on an auspicious night after filling its 25 squares with various articles and duly worshipping it. It represents the Mother Earth and the ceremony itself is done with a view to achieving the smooth consummation of the temple project. Materials used for construction like stones, bricks and wood should be procured newly from their sources, for which also there are guidelines. All the tools and implements used in the construction should be worshipped.

After the foundation is built up to the basement level, the superstructure is built either with pillars or with walls or a combination of both. Doors, openings, niches, windows and porches with suitable decorations are added at the appropriate stages, ending finally with the sikhara (the crest or the finial). The most important part of temple construction is the preparation and installation of the image of the main deity as also the images of the subsidiary deities. The most important part of a temple, its very heart as it were, is the garbhagrha 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. Over the roof of the whole shrine is a small tower. This tower is quite high in the North Indian temples and of low or medium height in the South Indian temples.

In some temples, a pradaksinapatha (a circumambulatory passage) is provided just round the garbhagrha, to enable the devotees to go round the deity. Only vesara temples do not have this passage. In front of the garbhagrha and contiguous to it is the mukhamantapa, sometimes called sukanasi or ardhmamantapa, depending upon its proportion relative to that of the garbhagrha. Apart from being used as a passage, it is also used to keep the articles of worship including naivedya (food offerings) on special occasions.

Then comes antarala, a narrow passage connecting the garbhagrha and the mukhamantapa to the mandapa (pavilion or hall). As already stated, in most of the temples the antarala is identical with the

mukhamantapa or sukanasi. The mantapa (also called nrttamantapa or navaranga) is a big hall and is used for congregational religious acts like singing, dancing, recitation of mythological texts, religious discourses and so on.

The dhvajastambha (flagpost in front of either the garbhagrha or antarala or the mantapa is another common feature. It represents the flagpost of the 'King of kings. The lanchana (insignia) made of copper or brass fixed like a flag to the top of the post varies according to the deity in the temple. The figure on the alanchana is invariably that of the vahana (carrier vehicle) of the deity. For instance, in Siva temples it contains Nandi. In Devi temples it is the lion that finds its place. In Visnu temples Garuda gets that honour.

The balipitha (pedestal of sacrificial offerings) with a lotus or the footprints of the deity is fixed near the dhvajastambha, but nearer to the deity. Red-coloured offerings like rice mixed with vermilion powder, are kept on this at appropriate stages during the performance of rituals. This indicates the feeding of the parivaradevatas (attendant and associate deities).

There is every reason to believe that the yupastambha (Sacrificial post) and the balipitha (sacrificial pedestal) of the Vedic age have become metamorphosed into the' dhvajastambha and the balipitha. The whole temple is surrounded by a high wall (prakara) with one main and three subsidiary gates, opening in the cardinal directions. A gopuram (high tower, sometimes called as the Cow-gate) adorns these gateways. Inside the prakara, three will be minor temples or shrines for the minor deities, connected with the main deity. For instance, in a Siva temple, the minor shrines are dedicated to Ganapati, Parvati, Subrahmanya and Chandeshvara. In a Vishnu temple, Lakshmi, Hanuman and Garuda find a place. In a Durga temple, Siva, Ganapati and subrahmanya will be found.

Apart from these, the temple precincts include a yagasala, (sacrificial shed), pakasala (cooking shed) and kitchen, place for the utsavamurti (proceSSIONAL image carried during the car festivals), well or a puskarini (tank), flower garden, stores and other essential structures connected with the management of the temple as also the rituals. A deepastambha (lamp post) is another constituent of a temple complex often found in South Indian temples. It is situated either in front of the balipitha or outside the main gate. The top of this post has a budshaped chamber to receive the lamp. Finally origin and development of temple arts have been discussed. The role of sculpture is inevitable in Temple Arts.

The four pillars found in the Mahamandapa relief sculpture are found. These sculpture are nearly a feet tall in full decorations. Among them Pasupathiswara sculpture are life like. The milkabhisheka performed for Lord Siva with the cow be found only in Saivism and not in any other religion. God is for all beings are released through this sculpture. In the days of kongucholas especially in the region of Virarajendra these stages of growth in the art can be found. Hence this artistic elegance is related to the period of Vijayanagara and Nayaks. Vijayanagar and Nayaks Kings have helped in the growth of Vaishnavism. And have praised Saivism. Lord Subrahmanya has in left hand the velayutha and is in the sitting posture facing towards the east. The sculpture is nearly two feet tall with the beautiful mukuta, the kundalas, the bangles and the holy thread. The lower dress has been carved up to the heels. Opposite to this sculpture is the figure of Ganapathi in the form of relief sculpture and in the sitting posture.

He has the elephant headed with suitable makuta and is to in the appearance of the human being and demon in one, in Ganapathi very widely among the people in the days of Kongu Chola and Vijayanagar. Here Choliswara has been seen in relief sculpture with decorative garland around his neck. Both Surya and Chandra have been exquisitely wrought and naturalness beings on it. The flouristic of the art is manifested in the dexterous way the sculptures like the Swan and Hanuman are engraved. In a few pillars the peacock engravings and the new type of kodikkarukku designs have been carved for ornamentations. In another pillar of the mahamandapa, again one can see the Choliswara sculpture with many flowers, which instigate one to worship the deity. The male and female donars, who have donated for Choliswara are being carved art a height of nearly two tall facing the moolava in the Anjali Mudra. Such type of sculpture belongs to the Nayak days¹. To add beauty to all theses sculptures the dance performed by Kalinganarthana on the serpent is indeed fabulous. Here Lord Krishna as Kaliganarthana has been crowned with Makuta and decorations are

galore. The Lord is an infant is brought out in the smile on the face, which is feast to the eyes of the dedicative devotees.

In another part of the pillar, the Prushamruga worshipping Choliswara has been carved so noteworthy. These figures reveal the different stages of the religion Saivism². Ganapathi who appeared as a relief sculptures on the pillars is seated as a separate sculpture. He faces towards the east with the ayuthas like pasa, ankusa, the nail and he wears the sacred thread with beautiful ornamentation he hears the demands of the souls with his broad ears and relieves their distress. His wide stomach consist the lives of the people. Near the lord his vahana is well engraved. Likewise for the mahamandapa Moolava to the left is Subramanaya as Velayutha³.

DAKSHINAMURTHI SCULPTURE

To the south side, devakosta of Poncholiswara temple, the sculpture of Dakshinamurthi is called Yogadakshinamurthi, in the virasana posture with the aksamala, fire, chinmudra and the palm leaves. He has the jadamukuda, the bangles, the yajnopavita, the dress around the waist with the padasara⁴. His right leg suppresses the form of anava otherwise called muyalaka. The Dakshinamurthi figure is also seeing the vimanatala and parts of the Grivakosta. The Ganapathi figure which is little old is in the south western side in the sitting posture facing to the east usual. He has usual ayuthas and is well decorated. Besides this sculptures relating to ancient nature of the worship of the 'Naga' are also present. In the west prakara the pancha lingas are found. The engraving and worshipping on the basis of the pancha lingas, namely Appulinga, Vayulinga, Thejulinga, Prithivilinga and Ahaya Linga was in connection with Kongunadu. The Lord is present as the Panchalingas and its own. It also denotes the Pnchabhauthas and the Pancha Krityas of the Lord Siva. In a few temples in one linga, one can see streaks of lingas as pancha mukha⁵.

To the north of the devakostha of Poncholiswara temple which belongs to the days of the Konerinmaikondan there is a figure of Durgai, which has been installed new a days. Vishnu Durgai in the sitting posture shows the abayamudra in the hands folded manner with the conch and the wheel in her upper hands seated on the Mahisasura. Annai suppresses mahisa, the arrogant demon and site on him-bestowing blessings. She has the makuta on her head the kundalas, in her ears the bangles, the charapali, kandigai, and the Aaram. This sculpture is two feet tall and has been carved on thwibanga with ornamental cloth on it⁶.

CHANDIKESWARA SCULPTURE

Chandikeswara is seated in the north prahara facing the moolava, in a separate sannathi was prevalent during the age of the imperial cholas and the Kongu cholas age. He has been engraved at height of two feet with the makuda, kundalas and pararsu in the right hand is in suhasana posture⁷. This sculpture which has been carved with ornaments is seated on the vahana. He bears in his right the vel and wears the simple jewels. Sculptures of this art are engraved on the basis of agamas and the silpasatras.

The Pillared Sculptures of the Muhamandapa

The Muhamandapa which is next to the mahamandapa is supported by four pillars bears the beautiful relief sculptures special mention must be made to the dance of Lord Siva and Annai Parvathi as Pathrakali. These are life like sculptures⁸. In the sculptures the sculptor the dancing posture of Lord Siva has been personified which really amazes one self. It has the udukkai, the fire, abayamudra and the kajahastha in the upper two hands. The incapacitated stage of Annai has been well broughtout in the sculpture. Parvathi has the sula, udukkai and while in the sculpture things like makuda, decorations and the cloth that is marbukkacchai has jewels like charapali, kandigai and other ornaments like the bangles, thandai in the pada. Since in the rearly days of Vijayanagar kings sculptured relief panels that were two feet in height it was easy for the later kings to sculptures tall in seizes in the mandapas of the temples in places like Thadikompu, Krishnapuram, Madurai and Thenkasi⁹. In Kongunadu the places like Avinashi and Perur such

sculptures are found. The simha in its fiery posture has been carved life like. In another side of the same pillar there are many donars sculptures. Yet with beautiful makuda, the sula in the right hand the pasa in the left hand, the Bairava sculpture reveals the development of art of those days. Lord Dandayuthapani is meant to bliss is seated. A few sculptures of Mahamandapa are also found in the muhamandapa¹⁰. At the top of the entrance of mahamandapa there is the Gajalakshmi sculpture. On either sides of are the elephants. She is seated in the Ardhapadmasana and has in her upper two hands the Padmas while in the lower two hands the Abaya and Varadha Mudras. In this sculpture the beautiful Kritamukuta, the high craftsmanship at entrance with the elephants sculpture in the relief form are note worthy¹¹.

NAYANMARS SCULPTURE

The sculpture who have carved in different pillars and also independent sculptures have placed the four Nayanmars sculptures in the muhamandapa. Apparswamy's figures are put up on the pita, which is nearly a feet tall in the standing posture facing towards the north¹². In his lft hand the palm leaves and his right hand the Rudhakshamala have been carved. In many place along with the neck the Rudrakshamalas are seen. Simplification and the love towards the god are the salient qualities to reach god has been revealed through this ascetic sculpture. The figure of Sundarar art a height of nearly two feet in the Anjalai Mudra is a proof that the days took the devotees towards the path of piety.¹³

SHANMUGA SCULPTURE

In the west prahara Shanmuga facing towards the east is along with his Devies bearing the cock flag and the vel. The sculpture has six faces with the respective makuta and the ornaments. One can see many ayuthas in the hands and also abaya varda mudras. He is in the samabanga posture on the pita which is a feet tall. Lord Subramania is as tall as figures with his consorts Valli and Devayani. Both Devies are seen in the thwibanga posture. The Devies and Subramanya's sculpture are very ancient. In all the saivite temples of the Kongunadu, Murugaperuman is seen six faces. The best examples are the temples in Avinashi, Thirumuruganpoondi and Koduvai.¹⁴ In the silpastras, he has been considered as leader of the Lords. Hence he is called Devasenapati. He scattered to pieces the Krouncha Mountain and killed the demon and also own over him. He taught the Vedas for Brahma. Hence he is known as Brahma sasta. Since he lessioned his father he becomes the Swamintha. The god's six faces are attributed to the five sense organs and the mind.¹⁵

Besides the six faces have been attributed to six yoga stages like Mulathara, Swathistana, Manipuraha, Anahatha, Visutha and Agna. He married the daughter of Indra and also Valli who lived in the forest. This is to denote the irrespective richness or purity. Mercy and magnanimity are the qualities compared to the two devies. The god's wisdom is vel. Hence the demon ignorance can be own by their weapon.¹⁶ The level sensations are the poisonous snake. Bachelorship is the peacock. Hence the God comes on a procession on this. Hence the fame of Subramanya has also been accepted in the Kongu Cholas days and was willingly worshipped. Hence he is installed in a separate sannathi.¹⁷

The Pazhangarai Sri Surumpar Poonkuzhali Nayaki Sculpture

Annai Sculpture in the sitting posture in the Pazahangkarai Choliswara Temple was installed in the period of Vijayanagar and Nayaks. Annai Poonkuzhali in the Thribanga, faces towards the east. It is a sculpture at a height of nearly four feet. She is put in a separate sannathi equal to that of the moolava. Annai Devi is the avatar of Sakthi and is seated with rich decoration. She has the Padma in her right hand and wears beautiful makuta.¹⁸ She is adorned with ear rings and ornaments around the neck like the Kandigai, Aaram and bangles. In order to decorate the ornamental craftsmanship has been practiced. She has a merciful face, dress up the knees, 'Thandai' in the legs and in the left hand the 'Tolamudra' beauty and mercy that protects the living organisms are found abundantly. The sanctum and the figure belongs to the sixteenth century.¹⁹

The Sculptures of Sri Nityakalyana Srinivasa Perumal, Sridevi and Bhudevi

On the campus of Pazhankarai which is known as Annaichupoondi Poncholiswa Temple, to the left side of the Moolava, Mahavishnu, the chief god in Vaishnavism is seated here as Srinivasa Perumal along with the Devies facing to the east. The deity with the Sanku, Chakra, Abaya, Varada Mudra and wears the Karanthamakuta.²⁰ Apart from this the flows to the heels with full decoration then there is the Kandigai, beautiful Aaram, the Makara kundala and the holy thread manifests the artistic features of the later days of Nayaks. In par with the Lord the figures of Sridevi and Bhudevi are based is nearly at a height of four feet while the figures of devies are three facet tall. In the guideship of Mahavishnu Annai is consoled. Their level is to protect and conserve the living organism. The Annai bestows rewards for those who do good acts. In the days of the Vedas she is known as Sri and later as Lakshmi. She has been believed to be the daughter of Pirgu sage. Annai is golden yellow in colour, stands as a consort with Mahavishnu who is blue in colour protecting the souls and the resources.²¹

Mahavishnu stands as Srinivasa. He has the Garuda as his Vahana, who broughtour from the palace of Indra the amirda vessel and gave for all. Hence Vishnu worship was in the days of Kongu Chola. The best example is the Vijayamangalam Karivaradarajaswamy Temple. The sculptures of the Vainava Alwars and Acharyas are found in the Srinivasa sannathi of the Mahamandapa.²² In the padmasana the figures of Madhvacharya found. This sculpture facing towards the south and Ramanuja has the tanda in his right hands and the state of bliss that he enjoyed has been well wrought. This sculpture reveals the simplicity and piety and is only a few tall. Another Madhvacharya sculpture is engraved in the Anjalimudra with simplicity and is in the seated posture.²³ Garudazhlwar, the vahana of Mahavishnu is seen near the sannathi in Anjalimudra at a height nearly three feet wearing the makuta and facing towards the moolava.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the research paper presents the suggestions.The Dweepasthamba sculpture found here belongs to the days after the reign of the Vijayanagar and Nayaks. In its brahmakantha part many relief sculpture have been engraved. To the west side of the pillar Annai Parvathi is seated facing the moolava with the padma in her right hand. The ornaments and the artistic craftsmanship are in its consummate. Annai wears the beautiful Mukuta and the Kundalas. To the north of the Dweepasthamba, the trident has been carved while to the south Pasupathiswara relief sculpture has been well carved. To the east the figure of Mahaganapathi is in sitting posture at height of one foot. The Ayuthas and Mudras with a rich display of art have been follower in this sculpture. Thus the sculpture of Poncholiswa temple have been enriched by the kongucholas and contributed by Vijayanagar and Nayaks also.

FOOT NOTES:

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