

## **History of Art and Architecture of Sarangapani Temple at Kumbakonam**

Dr. A. Karkuzhali<sup>1</sup> P. Ranjani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of History

PG & Research Department of History,

Kunthavai Naachiyar Government Arts College for Women (A), Thanjavur-7

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D., Research Scholar (Full-Time),

PG & Research Department of History,

Kunthavai Naachiyar Government Arts College for Women (A), Thanjavur-7

### **ABSTRACT**

The temple in this district bear a number of epigraphically records which would throw light upon the historically, socio, religious and economic conditions of the people and the temple. The south India temples are an institution by themselves art is handmade religion. The Bhakthi cult, the Agama literature and the temple worship led to the development of architecture, sculptures and paintings from the middle Chola.

**Keywords:** Abhisheka - Bathing of the deity, Adimakal -Temple slaves, Agni -God of fire, Alvar-Vaishnava Saints, Ardhamandapa - Antechamber, Asanas-Seat, Agvdha- A weapon, Kal - a square shaft, Kapota - cornice, Nalayira Divya Prabandham -Means the four thousand auspicious hymns. Padma - lotus, Sala - Trident mark.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

South India is famous for its innumerable temples and other religious institutions, both Vaishnavite and Saivite. In the South India at town of Kumbakonam called as “Thirukkudanthai” is particularly famous for its large number of temple both Vaishnavite and Saivite. Some of which particularly Sri Sarangapaniswami temple and Sri Adhi Kumbeswarar temple are very ancient and big and sung by Alwars and Nayanmars respectively. Besides the temple, there are holy tanks attached to temples which are considered very holy, particularly the Maha Maha Tank and the Porthamarai Tank. On the Masi Maham day every year and particularly once in 12 years (Maha Maha year) it is considered very meritorious, if we have a bath in above two tanks and the river “CAUVERI”, and for the Maha Maham festival, like “KUMBAMELA” in the north, lakhs of pilgrims congregate in Kumbakonam for having the holy bath as aforesaid and for workshop in the temples<sup>1</sup>. Another essential part of South Indian temple is the Prakara or enclosure wall, sometimes simple, but frequently with several shrine as in Kumbakonam. They enclose not only the main shrine, but other smaller ones, as well as bathing pools and shaded porticoes, not common in the north but necessary in the hot climate of the south. The southern type of architecture underwent a long evolution in its details. It can most conveniently be divided into five periods. This coincides with the ruling dynasties in South India, since here, as elsewhere, architecture developed under royal patronage. The temple is the focus for all aspects of everyday life in Hindu religious community, cultural, educational and social. The temple is also the place where one can transcend the world of them. It subsequently came to mean the residence of gods. The temple in Tamil Nadu was maintained

through donations from royal patrons and private individuals. There are many words in Tamil Nadu referring to the temple, which is mostly prevalent in Tamil Society.

## **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Kumbakonam is a town 40 kilo miters from Thanjavur the district headquarters. The town is bounded by two rivers, the Kaveri River to the north and Arasalar River to the south. Kumbakonam is known as a temple town due to the prevalence of a number of temples here and is noted for its mahamagam festival which attracts people from all over the globe. Kumbakonam dates back to the Sangam period and was ruled by the early Cholas, Pallavas, Medieval Cholas, and Later Cholas. Pandiyas, the Vijayanagar Empire, Madurai Nayaks, Thanjavur Nayak sand the Thanjavur Marathas. The town reached the zenith of its prosperity during the British when it was a prominent center of European education and Hindu culture and it acquired the name the Cambridge of south India.

There are around 188 Hindu temples in and around the town of Kumbakonam. Apart from these there are several thousand temples around the town there by giving town and city of temples. Kudandai or Kumbakonam is one such place where every start can boast of a temple. Amirtha Theertham mixing the amirtham of the Kumba with send lard Shiva emerged as lingam. The sacred place where he gave darshan as Kumbakonam is now called as Kumbakonam. They received protection, first, from the ruling monarchs who were treated as the saviors of their life on earth and this tendency later on shifting to the creator and sustainer of the universe which is personified as the god the savior.

Many centuries ago, Goddess Lakshmi in the form of a child was seen floating on a golden lotus in the Porthamarai Tank, immediately to the West of the present temple. Hemarishi who was doing Tapas on the Northern bank of the tank, picked up the child and brought her up<sup>2</sup>. The child grew to marriageable age and in response to his Tapas Lord Vishnu in the form of Sri Hemarishi who had been bringing up the child, gave her in marriage to Lord Sri Aravamudhan. Lord Sri Aravamudhan settled down in this temple with his chariot as will be seen from the chariot forming part of the shrine constructed. A unique feature of this temple is that it has two entrances like that is Sri Vaikunta one in the north called “Utharayana Vaasal” and the other in the South called “Dakshinayana Vaasal”. The Utharayana Vaasal will be opened on the Makara Sankaranthi day and will be kept open till the first of Adi (14<sup>th</sup> January to 15<sup>th</sup> July) the Dakshinayana Vaasal being kept closed during this period (Utharayanam). Similarly the Utharayana Vaasal will be closed and the Dakshinayana Vaasal will be opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Adi every year and kept open till the Maka Sankaranthi day (15<sup>th</sup> July to 14<sup>th</sup> January)<sup>3</sup>.

## **3. RELIGIOUS AND LITERATURE**

Sarangapani temple is considered third in the line of Srirangam and Tirupathi temples, the temple is revered in Divya Prabandham, the 7<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> century Vaishnava canon, by Andal in one Periyalvar in three, Bhoothathalvar in two, Thirumalisai Alvar in seven, Peialvar in two, Nammalvar in eleven

and Thirumangai Alvar in 25 verses. The temple is classified as a divyadesam, the 108 Vishnu temples that are revered in the Vaishnava canon. As per a Hindu legend, Nathamuni, who compiled Divya Prabandham by the twelve alvars, found only the first ten verses sung on Aravamudhan. Nammalvar recited the remaining 3990 verses unconsciously while he was in deep Meditation and Nathamuni compiled all of them. Pancharanga kshetrams (also called Pacharangams, Meaning the five Rangams or Ranganathas) is a group of five Sacred Hindu temples, dedicated to Ranganatha, a form of the god Vishnu, on the banks of the Kaveri River. The five pancharanga kshetrams in the order of their successive locations, on the banks of the Kaveri River are: The Srirangapatnam called the Adi Ranga, the first temple on the banks of the Kaveri River from the upstream side; the Srirangam (island in Thiruchirappalli) in Tamil Nadu Known as Adya Ranga ( the last temple), Appalarangam or koviladi at Tirupernagar in Tamil Nadu, Parimala Ranganatha Perumal temple or Mayuram at Indalur, Mayiladuthurai and vatarangam at Sirkazhi. The sarangapani temple at Kumbakonam is mentioned in place of Vatarangam in some references<sup>4</sup>.

## ARCHITECTURE

Sarangapani is the largest Vishnu temple in Kumbakonam and has the tallest temple tower in the town. The temple is enshrined within a huge wall and the complex enshrines all the water bodies of the temple except the Porthamarai tank. The rajagopuram (the main gateway) has eleven tiers and has a height of 173ft (53 m). There are five other smaller gopurams in the temple. The rajagopuram has figures depicting various religious stories. The temple faces east and the Porthamarai tank is located outside the western entrance. The central shrine of the temple is in the form of a chariot. There is a sculptural representation of the sage Hemarishi in the western part of the temple<sup>5</sup>. The central shrine of the temple houses the image of Sarangapani in pallikonda posture, with his head resting on his right hand. There are other images of sage Hemarishi, Lakshmi and festival images enshrined within the sanctum. The temple has two processional chariots carved out of wood stationed outside the rajagopuram. In Bharatanatyam, a South Indian dance form, 108 karanas form the basic movements. Some of these karanas are sculpted around the walls of the temple. Similar sculptures are found in Bhrahadeeswar Temple in Thanjavur and Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram<sup>6</sup>.

## PANCHARANGA KSHETRAM

Pancharanga Kshetrams literally means 5 Ranganatha Temples (pancha five; Kshetram: holy places). These 5 temples are situated on the banks of Kaveri. The following constitute Pancharanga Kshetrams: Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple (Srirangapatna), Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple (Srirangam), Sarangapani Temple (Kumbakonam), Sri Appakkudathan Perumal Temple (Thirupper Nagar), Parimala Ranganathar Temple (Thiruindaloor)<sup>7</sup>.

## CENTRAL SHRINE

Central shrine dates from the late Chola period with many later alterations. (Since the lord came down from his celestial abode to marry Komalavalli, the sanctum is in the form of a chariot with wheels drawn by horses, and the canopy is called Vaidika vimana. The forces of the chariot must

have been great and elephants are seen arresting the speed. Its entrance, with the innermost circuit, is guarded by huge duvarapalas, identical to Vishnu. Between the duvarapala are carved perforated stone screens of different designs. In front of them stands a sacred, square fireplace. Within the sanctum Araamudan is seen in a lying posture with his head slightly raised (to talk to Thirunmazisai Alvar), with Bhru and Sri Devi nearby, Brahma rising from his navel, Hema sage, Sapta Rishis, River goddesses and Devas paying homage. One can see him in a standing posture also wielding the Bow Sarangam in his right hand<sup>8</sup>. The sanctum of Komalavalli is near the uttarayana steps. Andal, Perial was, Rajagopalan with Rukmani and Satyabhama and Kannan are all enshrined here. In a separate sanctum is housed Rama, Sita and Laxmana. The Srinivasa there are two types of Mettu and Patals Srinivas. The latter is reached by steps below. During the day, pinpoints of light from ceiling windows penetrate the darkness around the sanctum, designed to resemble a chariot with reliefs of horses, elephants and wheels<sup>9</sup>.

## **ALVARAS**

Alvar means one who is “immersed” in the experience of God, the omnipresent mysterious one. Tradition reckons 12 Alvars. They come from all walks of life and all strata of society and include in their ranks one woman. Between the fifth and ninth century, in the Tamil speaking region of South India, these saints revitalized the Indian religious milieu, sparking a renewal of devotional worship throughout the subcontinent; travelling from place to place, from temple to temple, from holy site to holy site, they composed exceedingly beautiful poetry. Divine Beloved, Vishnu, as an expression of their love for Him. The Alvars composed approximately 4000 Tamil verses. Thirumangai Alvar who saw this sanctum was inspired to compose a Ratha banth (chariot like verse) called Thiru Ezhu Kurririkai. It is exhibited in a painting near the flag staff<sup>10</sup>.

## **FESTIVALS**

The Floating festival takes place in Masi in the Golden Lily tank. The deity stays from some time in the four corner Mandapas, in the central pavilion and the ashram of sage Hemarishi during the festivals<sup>11</sup>.

## **POTRAMARAI TANK**

Located between Sarangapani and Kumbeswara temple at Kumbakonam on Thanjavur route, approximately 2 k.m. from new bus stand. When Siva in the form of Kirathamur the (Shiva as hunter) aimed the Puranakumbam with the bow and arrow (Banam in Sanskrit language) and broke it, the bowl split and the Amirtham got stagnated in two places at Portamarakulam (golden Lotus pond) and Mahamaham tank. A Shiva Lingam formed at the place where Kirathamurthy aimed the Amirthakudam. Since the lord used the arrow (Banam) the deity lingam is called Banapureswarar<sup>12</sup>.

## **TEMPLE'S CARS OR THE RATHAS**

In Tamil Nadu temple cars are famous. Out of them the most famous are those of Tiruvarur, Tiruvidaimarudar and this temple. The car of this temple is very big and cannot easily be drawn. After big and cannot easily be drawn in Chitrai<sup>13</sup>.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

South Indian architecture development in Dravidadesh the old name of what is now known as Tamil Nadu. This architecture has several distinctive features. Here the Vimana standing on a square base is a high pyramidal tower obtained by superimposing diminishing story. On the comprehension of this fact depends the understanding of these sometime seemingly bewildering structures. The other typical building of the south Indian temple complex is the Gopuram or temple gateway. The Sanskrit word denotes the village cow-gates of the Vedic age, which developed into the city and temple gates. Its plan is oblong; the store on the ground floor has vertical walls. The passage leads through its center. Pilasters and niche usually adorn these walls. They simulate two stories separated from each other by a horizontal molding. Like the Vimana it has a Pyramidal super structure divided into story's surrounded by harassing and like the plan it is oblong. It is crowned by a barrel vault, with a row of staples along its ridge.

Architecture viewed historically remains as the principal visible material record through the ages for man's intellectual evolution. Each cultural movement has contributed to the art of building reflecting the aspiration of the people. Temples of Tamilnadu are the treasure houses that preserve the age long culture of the Tamil people. They stand as the testimony to understand the outstanding contributions made by the Tamil society in the field of art and culture. The constant support of the royalty that had gone in accord with the dedicated involvement of the body and the spirit of the people has resulted in the creation of such fine temple structures, which have the appreciation of the world at large. The biggest temple in this city is that of Sarangapani the bows held by Vishnu in different aspects carry different names. Rama's bow is called Kodandam and hence is called Kothandaraman. There is a bow called Sarangam and the Lord who wields it is called Sarangapani, who is housed here. The temple is a very beautiful one with four circuits. It is in the form of a chariot. A beautiful tank called Hema Pushkarni separates this shrine and the Adi Kumbeshwara. The significant aspect of the temple is that they remained as economic entity besides being spiritual center. Temple played as many roles in association with society. According to their tradition, their architecture is Dravidian style. Therefore their contribution to Dravidian architecture is remarkably significant and noteworthy.

## **5. REFERENCES**

- [1] Sri Sarangapaniswami Temple Sthalapuravaralaru, Temple Publications, Kumbakonam, 2014, P.12.
- [2] Ibid, P.20.

- [3] P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, South Indian shrines Illustrated, New Delhi, Asian Educational Service, 1991, P.324.
- [4] Ibid, P.534.
- [5] Gopal, Rupa, Immortalized in stone, The Hindu, Retrieved 08.04.2013.
- [6] T.S.Subramanian, How karana Sculptures in Big Temples were discovered, The Hindu , Retrieved 08.04.2013.
- [7] Sthalavaralaru, Kumbakonam Sarangapani Temple Administration, Retrieved 07.04.2013.
- [8] Dalal Roshen, Hinduism An Alphabetical Guide, Penguin Books India, Delhi, 2011, P.339.
- [9] S.R.Balasubramaniam, Later Chola Temples, Madras, 1979, P.62.
- [10] Ibid, P.63
- [11] K.R. Srinivasan, Temples of South India, National Book Trust, Delhi, 1972, P.64.
- [12] S.R.Balasubramaniam, Early Chola Art, Part-I, Asia Publishing house, Bombay, 1979, P.68.
- [13] Ibid, P.69.