

Historical and Tourist Monuments of Nayaks – A Study

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ABSTRACT

The Nayaks ruled Tamil Nadu with Madurai, Tanjore and Chenji as their capital in 17th and 18th centuries. They showed much interest on the growth of architecture. The Nayaks followed Vijayanagar style. In Tamil Nadu, though they were constructed on Dravidian style, the Islamic style which penetrated into it gave new dimension to them. Many existing temples were expanded with additional Structure, Gopurams, Temples, Palace, Public buildings and Mandapams. The contributions of Viswanatha Nayak, Thirumalai Nayak and Rani Mangammal to the development of art and architecture are more appreciated.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nayaks ruled Tamil Nadu with Madurai, Tanjore and Chenji as their capital in 17th and 18th centuries. They showed much interest on the growth of architecture. The Nayaks followed Vijayanagar style. In Tamil Nadu, though they were constructed on Dravidian style, the Islamic style which penetrated into it gave new dimension to them. Many existing temples were expanded with additional Structure, Gopurams, Temples, Palace, Public buildings and Mandapams. The contributions of Viswanatha Nayak, Thirumalai Nayak and Rani Mangammal to the development of art and architecture are more appreciated. The Nayaks constructed and renovated certain temples.¹ Thirumalai Nayak was a great patron of the arts and architecture. He revived the traditional arts in architecture and sculpture. He made substantial additions to the Dravidian temple plan. The pillared Mandapas, Kalyana Mandapas and Teppakulam were new additions to the temple art. The temples at Alagarkoil and Tirupparankunram contain excellent sculptures. The Pudumandapam at Madurai lodges some of the finest sculptures.

ARCHITECTURE

The word 'Architecture' is derived from the 'Latin word'. 'Architecture' meant the art or practice of designing and constructing buildings.³ Temples became more elaborate and ornate. Pillared Mantapas, Kalyana Mantapas, towering gateways above the outer most prakaras, separate shrines and subshrines for the goddesses and minor deities, elaborately carved Pillar, statues all out of a single block of stone – these are the main contributions of the Nayaks style of temple construction. Such temples lie scattered throughout Tamilnadu – Srirangam, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Srivilliputtur, Tiruppuvanam, Sucindram and Alagar kovil being important examples. The Mohanamantapas and the Kalyanamantapas are impressive halls. The kalyanamantapas contain some of the most ornate statues of the period. The Rayagopurams of the Thirumalai Nayak, are fine examples of Nayak architecture. Temple architecture in south india culminates with the great temple at Madura. The temple itself certainly all its magnificence to Thirumalai Nayak.⁴ The most important monument of this period was palace

constructed by Thirumalai Nayak. The palace was 160 feet length and 100 feet breadth. It revealed the artistic skill of this period. It was typical example of sarasonic architecture.⁵

2. DEVELOPMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE

Thirumalai Nayak constructed many public works and many religious buildings. It is stated in one of the Mrityunjaya Manuscripts that he built choultries or buildings for the accommodation of travellers along that whole road from Uttatur, the most north place in his dominions to Cape Comorin in the most southerly one. From this it may be inferred that there were high roads during this time. The repairs of tanks or at all events the more important repairs seem to have been executed by the government; and to have been paid for, out of the proceeds of the fishery of the tanks when drying up. The public works which principally engaged Thirumalai's attention, and which have made his name famous, were huge solidly constructed works of a highly ornamental character, such as could not have been built by any other than a despot possessed of boundless wealth.

3. THE ARCHITECTURE OF NAYAKS

- Madurai Meenakhi Amman Temple
- Thirumalai Nayaks palace
- Pudumandapams
- Rajagopuram
- Theppakkulam
- Thirupparankunram
- Alagarkovil
- Tiruppuvanam
- Srivillipithur
- Srirangam and Thiruvaikka
- Rshivandiyam
- Kuthiyakundu Sivan Temple.

MADURAI MINAKSHI AMMAN TEMPLE

Madurai minakshiamman temple is the best example to know the development of art and architecture in Tamilnadu. It is a huge and attractive temple with 847 feet length and 729 feet breadth. The temple contains pudthumandapam, huge pillars and archs, gopurams, compound walls and sculptures. They revealed the architectural beauty of the temple. Meenakshi Amman Temple also contain the historic importance thousand Pillar Mandapam.⁸ Thirumalai Nayaks services to the temple are recounted in the thiruppanimalaipudumandapa was built by him with 120 pillars and painted. In May 1628, Thirumalai Nayak began revovating the temple. He built the front mandapa of the Minakshi Temple. The MinakshiNayakanMantapa was named after its builder MeenakshiNayak, one of the ministers of Thirumalai Nayak. Most of the other items preserved in this temple, go back to the time of Thirumalai Nayak. The sacred temples which were under Thirumalai Nayak still preserve some of his pious donations.

PALACE

The largest and most magnificent of them was the great palace. The palace at Madurai is a good specimen of Indo-Islamic architecture. It has a court yard 160 by 100 feet surrounded by arcades on all sides. In it the arches are preferred to the lintel. The pillars on which the arches rest are of stone forty feet in height and “are joined by foliated brick arcades of great elegance of design, carrying a cornice and entablature rising to upwards of sixty feet”. Next to it is another building called the Svargavilasam or celestial pavilion measuring two hundred and thirty five feet by hundred and five feet. It is arranged like a mosque, the central dome being supported by 12 columns, linked together by Islamic arches. “Four similar arches are there thrown across the corner and the octagonal drum rises from these pierced by a clerestory. Above this at the cornice 45 ½ feet, the octagon is changed to a circle and the dome rises in the center to 75 feet, from the floor”. The whole of the ornamentation is worked out in the exquisitely fine stucco called “Chunnam” of shell lime, which is a characteristic of the Madras Presidency. The Durbar Hall in the palace is a peculiar combination of Dravidian and Western style. The effects are heavy, but this is atoned for by the originality and strangeness of the design.

This place was built in circa 1636 by Thirumalai Nayak. This palace is considered the most marvelous secular building south of Bombay. According to tradition Thirumalai Nayak is said to have had the help of an Italian architect in designing this building. The building that we see today was the main palace building where Thirumalai lived. But it is believed that the original palace complex was four times bigger than what it is today. The grand palace consisted mainly of two parts, namely Swargavilasa and Rangavilasa. Besides these two royal residences there were a theatre, a palace throne queens apartment, an armoury, a building for housing palanquins and the like and royal bandstand quarters for relatives and servants, a pond, garden, etc. the whole was enclosed by walls on all the four sides. The enclosure walls are said to have survived till a hundred years ago, when they were pulled down as they were badly dilapidated. The enclosure called PariMadil, was 300m in length east-west, and 200m in width north-south, and 12m height. To the west of this enclosure there was a flower garden with a pavilion in the Centre. To the west of the Swargavilasa the queen’s apartments were located. They have since disappeared. But in the south – west may be seen a room, with black polished columns supporting the roof. The queens used to hear music and literary discourses in this portion, during the mornings.

THE PUDU MANDAPAM

The pudu Mandapam built by Thirumalai Nayak between 1629 and 1633, is in front of the east gopura. It is actually a large corridor with a central nave having an aisle on either side. Next to the palace the most important work was the vasanta of pudu Mandapam, which still exists in a perfect state. The Mandapa is a three-aisled rectangular hall, measures 330 feet by 105 feet. It is supported by four rows of columns all profusely sculptured. The four types of pillars characteristic of the Madura School the Yali type, the portrait type, the decorative compound type and the iconographic type- the canopied mantapa used for ceremonial purposes and the life-size statues of the Nayak rulers add a charm and elegance to this famous structure. The pillars are usually adorned with warriors sitting on the rearing horse, their feet supported by the shields of foot soldiers sometimes killing men and sometimes tigers. Known as

‘Thirumalai’s Choultri’, Thirumalai built this mandapa for the reception of the presiding deity of the place, who consented to leave His dark cell in the temple and pay the king an annual visit of ten day’s duration in the hoot month of May, on condition of his building a hall worthy of his dignity, and where he could receive in a suitable manner the homage of the king and his subjects.

On the granite pedestal at the Centre of the hall, the deities are placed during festivals. Wonderful stone images of Thadathagai, Meenakshi’s wedding, Ravana lifting Mount Kailas and the stone-elephant eating sugarcane decorate this mandapam. The Nayakkar rulers are immortalized by their statues here. The images of kali, Nataraj, Eka Pada Murthy and sun and Moon also decorate this mandapam. Thirumalai Nayak is said to have personally supervised the building. In order to acquire the site of the Mandapam, he built houses to the North of the North Gopuram, for families of Archakas, 11 for the Vikramapandya Battar group and 12 for the Kulasekhara Pandya Battar Group. Pudumandapam is a striking example of Tamil architecture.

RAYAGOPURAM

The Gopuram in front of the Choultry was also begun by Tirumala Nayak. From north to south it is 174 feet and in depth it is 117 feet. The gopuram remains incomplete; but even in its present size it is an imposing structure. The door posts are made of single granite stone carved with beautiful scroll patterns of elaborate foliage. Had Thirumalai Nayak lived to complete it, it would probably have been the finest edifice of its class in southern India. Being unfinished, and consequently never consecrated, it has escaped whitewash and alone, of all the buildings of Madura, its beauties can still be admired in their original perfection. The Rayagopuram was begun in 1654 but was not destined to be completed. The *Mrityunjaya Manuscripts* says that Thirumalai commenced building in various parts of the country, sixty – four of those large and expensive building in one and the same muhurta or auspicious moment, but was unable to finish them all; and the “*History of the Carnataka Governors*” improving upon this story says, he commenced but did not finish 96. Thirumalai Nayak wanted to build the most gigantic gateway possible, not only at Madura but at several other places. Called Rayagopuras, after the name of the Vijayanagar’s king, these were intended to be nearly 300 feet, over 90 metres, high.

TEPPAKKULAM

The famous Teppakkulam, the most beautiful and the biggest in the south, is another structure of religious importance. Mariamman Teppakkulam, the holy tank south of Madurai is the largest stone masonry reservoir in South India. It was built by Thirumalai Nayak about the year 1645, for the use of the Goddess Meenakshi. Tradition points to this spot as the place where the bricks for Thirumalai Nayak’s palace were made. Here too was found in the course of excavation the huge image of Ganapathi, which is now placed in the temple. This tank is measuring 1000 feet north to south and 950 feet east to west, occupying an area almost exactly equivalent to that of the Great Temple of Madurai. The Ganapathi image is now installed at the entrance to the Sundaresvarar sanctum and popularly known as Mukkuruni Pillaiyar. The tank is connected with the river Vaigai through a channel. The float festival is performed in the month of January. After nightfall the images of Siva and Meenakshi are floated on a decorated raft around the island illuminated with thousands. At the centre of the tank, there is a small island over which stands a small white temple surrounded by flowering trees. It provides a magnificent sight from

a distance. At the four corners of the island are tiny ornamental temples rising from the angles of the stonework; and the space between these and the main temple is filled in with ever-green trees. The whole effect is exceedingly tasteful. The sides are faced with cut granite and surmounted by a handsome parapet also of cut granite, which is pierced by flights of steps at suitable intervals, and adorned here and there in the Hindu style with figures of Gods, and horses, peacocks and other animals.¹⁴

TIRUPPARANKUNRAM

This sacred place is situated seven kilo meters south of Madurai. The temple itself is a tribute to Thirumalai's love of art and sculpture and it is appropriate that a statue of this great builder should stand at the side of the shrine. The statues of Thirumalai, his wives and his minister are found with folded hands, in front of the main shrine of the tirupparankunram temple. Among the renovators of this temple, Thirumalai Nayak stands the foremost. The mandapas with fine sculptures at this temple are said to have been built by Thirumalai Nayak. As the emblems found on the flag-staff of Madurai, made by Thirumalai Nayak are found its conunter-parts at Pushpavaneswara Temple, Tiruppuvanam and at Subrahmanyaswami Temple, Tirupparankunram, etc. We can infer that all these flag-staffs were made by Thirumalai Nayak. Burgess considered that it was a far finer one than he was led to imagine from Sewell's descriptions of it. He believed it to be one of Thirumalai Nayak's works.

ALAGARKOVIL

Alagarkovil is about 18 kilometres north east of Madurai. The famous Vishnu Temple of Alagar is at the southern end of the hill called Alagarmalai. Around this temple are the ruins of the palace of Thirumalai Nayak, seen even to-day. Thirumalai Nayak built a palace at Alagarkovil. He renovated the Yagasala the bedchamber of the deity, the golden Vimana, an ivory palanquin and the Abishekha Mandapa. Thus Thirumalai Nayak made many renovations and donations. The outer Mandapam of Alagarkovil (120' X40') consists of 40 pillars, one of which contains a bold relief statue of king Thirumalai Nayak. This building is now in a dilapidated condition. The portrait sculptures of Thirumalai Nayak two of his wives and Muthaiyalu Nayak are found in the 'Thiruppalliyarai Mandapa'. Again we find another set of portrait sculptures of Thirumalai and his wives in the Yagasala of this temple. In the god's bed chamber adjoining, stands a rare and antique bedstead, said to be the gift of Tirumalai (Whose statue stands at the entrance to the room) which from all accounts must be nearly unique. It is said to be 12 feet long by 10 feet wide and about 15 feet high; to stand on a pedestal of sculptured black stone, inland with small ivory figures, supporting four pillars carved from similar stone and ornamented with small detached shafts and figures in ivory; and to be covered with a domed wooden roof elaborately inlaid with ivory work carved in most intricate and minute designs. Tirumalai Nayak is closely associated with the construction of several mandapas and palaces within the precincts of the temple. The fair round belly for which Thirumalai Nayak was notorious is realistically and unflatteringly depicted in his life-size statues. The Rayagopuram at Alagarkovil was built by Thirumalai Nayak, it embodies the best stone-carving. The Mandapam Nayak with their consorts is called Thirumalai Nayak Mandapam.

TIRUPPUVANAM

Tiruppuvanam, ten miles from Madurai, is an historic place. It figured in the reign period of Thirumalai nayak. It is notable for a portrait sculpture of Thirumalai nayak the portrait of Thitumalainayak stands in the Pushpavaneswara Temple along with those of ChokkappaNayak, Ponnanaiyal and a Siddhar. The temple is notable for the four portrait sculptures and for the insignia are Sambandar on the south, a boar, the sun, the moon, a dagger and a tree on the west, a dancing Ganapathi on the north, and Nandi, the sun, the moon, and a tree on the east. The western figures are crucial. They indicate that the temple must have been built in the Nayak times. The first four of the figures constitute the Vijayanagar emblem, often together with a squatting lion. The Nayak of Madurai, who was originally vassals of the VijayanagarRayas, seem to have substituted the tree for the lion, but retained the other figures. The portrait sculptures are of the first importance. It was late in the history of Hindu India that king and noble were moved to leave presentments of themselves.

Here, in Tiruppuvanam, stands the great Tirumalai Nayak in effigy. Compared to his dainty portrait in Srivilliputhur, he is a rather rough and ready individual, the warrior rather than the devotee, or the patron of arts. He wears a dagger at the waist, but the most distinctive part is his headgear. This is peculiar Tatherr stunted; it slants sideways, so it sits rather oddly on the royal, or vice regal, brows. The Rayas did not wear this kind of headgear, but many chieftains like the Marudu Brothers in the Kalayarkoil temple and some of the Sethupatis in Tiruppullani, do. Perhaps it was distinctive to the Madurai viceroyalty or kingdom and survived in later times. The Ponnanaiyal Mandapam which is in dilapidated condition now, near the famous Pushpavaneswara Temple, was built by Thirumalai Nayak according to oral traditions. The statues of Thirumalai Nayak, Ponnanaiyal and the minster ChokkappaNayak have been removed from this mandapa to the Pushpavaneswara Temple. The dilapidated 'Rayagopuram' in front of the Pushpavaneswara Temple was also built by Thirumalai Nayak.

SRIVILLIPUTTUR

Thirumalai Nayak attached great importance to this Sri Andal Temple. The statue of Thirumalai Nayak with his consorts in the Maha Mandapa is very attractive. In the Maha Mandapa, there is in the middle, the gold plated Sukravarakuradu, in the side pillars of which there are the statues of Thirumalai Nayak and his consort. There is a Mandapa known as 'Kalmandapa' said to have been built by Thirumalai Nayak. There is a Thirumalai Nayak building in south car street where taluk office and District Munsif's court is house. It is said that Thirumalai Nayak used to come and stay there. The front Mandapa of Sri Andal Temple was built by Thirumalai Nayak. In the VaidyanathaswamiKovil, at srivilliputtur, Thirumalai Nayak built the Kalyana Mandapam. We can see the statue of Thirumalai Nayak at this mandapams from Madurai to Srivilliputtur. The present 'drum' at the Sri Andal Temple was the one donated by Thirumalai Nayak. During *Chitrapoornami* garland is sent from Srivilliputtur to Kallalagar and in exchange Parivattam is received at the Perumal Temple at Tallakulam.

SRIRANGAM AND THIRUVANAICKA

The temple at Srirangam received considerable additions in the form of prakaras, gopuras and mantapas during the Nayak period. The portraits of the garuda mandapa at Srirangam temple

were excellent specimens of the richness of the art. The 'Rayagopuram' in front of the Sri Ranganathaswami Temple in srirangam was built by Thirumalai nayak. We can see the statues of Thirumalai nayak and two of his wives at the great Garuda Mandapa, in the third court at this temple. The art museum of this temple has an ivory statue of Thirumalai accompanied by his wife. Now one of the arms of the statue of the statue of the former is found broken. He had profusely renovated this temple. Thirumalai Nayak also honoured the Bhattar Tirumalacaryar of Srirangam Temple. Local traditions say that 'Meenakshi Sundareswarar Mandapa' in the famous Jambugeswara Temple at Thiruvanaikka was built by Thirumalai Nayak whose portrait sculpture together with two other portraits are found here. The mandapam is of the size of 30'x30'x16'feet. Thus we see that Thirumalai Nayak contributed much to the temples at Srirangam and at Thiruvanaikka.

RISHIVANDIYAM

This place in South Arcot District, near Kallakkurichchi contains an old temple dedicated to Ardhanariswara. There is a richly carved mantapam on the right side of the main entrance. This is supposed to have been built by Thirumalai Nayak.

KUTHIYARKUNDU SIVAN TEMPLE

Kuthiyarkundu is a village 10 kilometers south east of Madurai. The Siva temple here contains a 'Kalyana Mandapa' donated by Ramappayyan, the dalavay of Thirumalai Nayak. The six pillared hall in front of this temple contains the portrait sculptures of Thirumalai Nayak and Ramappayyan.

4. CONCLUSION

Nayaks very much contributed to the architecture. These buildings and monuments reveal the historical and tourist importance of Nayaks architecture. The most noticeable contribution to Tamil Nadu Temples architecture was made by the Nayakas. This gave the architects exposure to different types of temples. And with every passing dynasty, their mastery only grew. Even since, people of Tamil Nadu are known to be the best temple builders in India.

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