

Architectural Features of Sri Thirukkodeswarar Temple at Thirukkodikaval

Mrs. V.S. Vijayalakshmi

Associate Professor,
Department of History,
D.G. Government Arts College (W),
Mayiladuthurai,
Nagapattinam District,
Tamil Nadu.

Thirukkodeswarar Temple is located at the central place of Thirukkodikaval. The chief deity Thirukkodeswarar is enshrined in a separate structure of the northern most side of the temple complex. The temple was built on facing the Eastern side. Sri Tripura Sundari Amman shrine is located at the left side of the shrine. The adjoining eastern side of the temple complex is the main road leading from Mayiladuthurai to Kumbakonam near Kathiramangalam. Around the temple there are a few margosa, pipal, coconut and shenbaga trees.

Temples are supposed to be built on sacred spots and the sacredness is usually indicated in the legends associated with the sthala and narrated in the Sthalapuranam.¹ The temple has the architecture in *gopuram*, *vimanam*, etc. Sculpture made of stone, metal and wooden, paintings on the walls or ceilings of the shrines with necessarily religious themes, as well as in the form of dance.²

The building of temples has been a process of evolution and what were only simple structures housing simple idols in course of time became massive. During the early period, the temples and the buildings were built with reed, bamboo, wood and mud. But this type of materials were easily demolished. So only after the coming of the Pallavas and the Pandyas the cave and the structural temples with brick and stones were built in some parts of Tamilnadu like

Kumbakonam, Chidambaram and Madurai³. One such structural temple is the Thirukkodeswarar Temple at Thirukkodikaval.

Nandhi Varma Pallavan who built this temple was a great patron of Saivite. But the larger work of extension in this temple was carried out by the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Mutharayas. The whole temple complex of Thirukkodeswarar Temple is divided into two parts. One for Lord Thirukkodeswarar and other for his consort Sri Tripura Sundari Amman.

Swami Sannathi Karbhagraham

The karbhagraham is the cell containing the sacred deity. With a vimana or tower over it. Karbhagraham is a shrine housing the Main Linga in a chamber (partly enclosed and partly opened hall) in front. The Linga is the form given to Lord Thirukkodeswarar. The Linga in this temple is known as Aavudaiyas. The sanctum sanctorium is square shaped structure. As Saivism is considered to be one of the earliest religions of India particularly in Tamilnadu, Lord Siva is marked as the premier God in the Hindu Pantheon. St. Sekkizhar in his Periapuranam depicting Linga as follows

*"Kanadha Aruvinukkum Uruvinukkum Kaaranamai
Nel nagam Anindharkku Nigalkuriyam Sivalingam".⁴*

The pyramid shape of Vimana is raised at the top of the sanctum sanctorium of the karbhagraham.

Vimana

The Vimana of the Siva temple is of Dravidian style. The Vimana of the temple has six storeys, head, neck, shoulder, body, leg and foot are the six division of the human body. Just like the organs, the Vimana has six divisions like adhistana, bhitti, pras-tharam, griva, sikhara. kalasa. In Thirukkodeswarar Swami Sannathi, Vimana is a beautiful one. The name of the Vimana is Boustika Vimana.⁵ The basement of the vimana is named as adhistana. The is constructed above the upabeeda is two feet elevated from the ground level. Above the upabeeda only the adhistana is starting. The upabeeda is in a square shaped structure. There is some floral designs in the upabeeda, above the adhistana, bhitti is present.

In the bhitti , one can be able to see the small pillars in which the sculptures of Lion (Simha) is carved. Prastharam is the third part of the Vimana. At the up's and down's of the prastharam mythical figure of yali is found generally. But in this temple, the figure of yali is not present. Only the floral designs are there in the prastharam. The fourth part is known as griva. There is absence of sculptures in this part. Sikhara is the top part on which the kalasa rest. On the basis of the sikhara only, the structure of the temple depends, in this temple, the Vimana is square shaped (chathura vimana). So it is considered as Nagara sikhara.⁶ The kalasa is the sixth part of the vimana. The top of the vimana is plastered with lime and the copper kalasam is installed at the top of the vimana.

Arthamandapa

“Artham” is referred to as porul in Tamil. Here porul refers to God. The place where the people worship God is termed as arthamandapa. The outside wall of arthamandapa is called praharam. On the either side of the arthamandapa, there is a statue of Dwarapala.

Mahamandapa

The mahamandapa will be larger than the artha-mandapa (“maha” means “large”). In the mahamandapa, the Utsavamoorthi of Thirukkodeswarar with his consort is installed in the left side corner of the mahamandapa. Also in the mahamandapa, there is an inscription. But it is completely damaged. Also the letters in the inscriptions are not clear. This inscription is located in the northern side wall of the mahamandapa.⁷

Muhamandapa

Muhamandapa is the lengthiest mandapa. The length of the mandapa is 30 feet and its breadth is 12 feet. In the muhamandapa, the sculptures Navagraha and Muruga are found in the northern side. The Vinayaga statue is installed in the southern side of the muhamandapa. The sculpture of Virabadra in the left side corner and Durga sculpture is installed in the right side corner of the mandapa.

Amman Sannathi

Lord Thirukkodeswarar's consort Tripura Sundari is installed in a separate shrine very nearer to the main shrine. It was constructed by Sembiyan Madevi. This shrine is rectangular in shape. The sculpture of Sri Tripura Sundari is installed in the karbhagraha. There is no architectural pieces and the walls are plain. Deity is in a standing posture (tribhanga pose) carrying the lotus flower in the right hand and the left hand is the hanging down (lolahasta). The Vimana of this shrine is Shanthika Vimana.⁸

Inner Prakara

Inner prakaram has many of the shrines. Natarajar shrine located at arthamandapam. The Natarajar idol is in dancing position. Vinayakar shrine is located on right side of the inner prakaram. His vahanam is Big Rat which is also found on the front side of this idol. Lord Muruga, Valli and Deivanai shrine is located on the left side of this prakara. Kandeewarar shrine is located on the northern side of this prakara. It was in a small room. The entrance gate faced in eastern side but the idol is facing the southern side. Durga idol is found on outer side north wall of karbhagraham.

Southern side of this prakara there are many of the idols are found on this place. They are called as Astama Sakthi. They are Brahmmani, Maheswari, Gowmari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Mahendiri, Samundi, Rowthri. At the centre part of these idols one big idol is found on this place. The name of this idol is Indrani. Nine altar is found on the centre place of this prakara. Dakshinamoorthy shrine is

located nearer to this place. Finally the Ursavamoorthy statue is installed in southern west corner of this prakara. Sri Thirukkodeswarar is in a standing posture with his usual characteristic features namely, the upper hands carrying the deer and the battle axe, the lower left hand in abhya pose and the lower right hand in the attitude of embracing. His consort Sri Tripua Sundari is in tribhanga pose, carrying the lotus flower in her right hand.

Veli Prakara

Veli prakaram has four main shrines. They are as follows Vinayakar shrine, Murugan shrine, Dhandayuthapani shrine and Bairavar shrine. Vinayakar and Murugan shrines are found on right and left side the main entrance gate. These are facing to eastern side. Dhandayuthapani shrine is located at the back side of the Navagrahas. This shrine is faced into western side. Bairavar shrine is found on inner side of the northern wall. This shrine is facing to the south.

Kalyanamandapam

Kalyana mandapam is located at the front side of Amman temple. This mandapam is linked with the inner side of the western side compound wall. During the time of Thirukkalyanam the celestial marriage was conducted at this stage. Twelve stone pillars are supporting this mandapam.

Sculptures

The sculptures are indeed so bound up with people's religion and mythology of which it forms the mirror. In Indian sculptures the majority of the figures are based on the human body. From the 12th century A.D. onwards, the construction of temples were increased. Also these temples were beautified with sculptures either the image of God or the portrait of the human being.⁹ In Thirukkodeswarar Temple also one can see the sculptures such as the image of the Gods and the human portrait.

Dwara Balagars

In the midst of the great mandapams the two other mandapams are called artha mandapam and karbhagraham in the two side of gateway to the arthamandapams. Dwara Balagars otherwise defending children with weapons as defence as they protect the main deity of the temple are seen.

Flag Staff and Altar

In front of the sanctum on which the flag appropriate to the deity should have is an important and almost unavoidable feature in a temple. It is called the dvaja stambha. The height of the flag staff is 30 feet. The pole is covered with copper plates. Besides the flag-pole there is an altar at a height of four feet. The structure of the altar is like a lotus in a top-down state made of granite stones.

Nandi God

In front of the altar a nandi viewing the deity at a height of 5 feet has been constructed. The floor steps have been built to move up to perform pujas to nandi God.

Thirumadaipalli and Temple Well

On the south eastern side of the temple, a room called Thirumadaipalli is constructed where prasadam are prepared. Temple well is nearer into the northern side as the madaipalli. This well has been built with beautiful stones. The well with 15' deep and holy water is taken for pujas and for the preparation of prasadam.

Rajaqopuram

The Raja qopuram stands in front of the Swami Sannathi. The gopuram stands with a height of 35 feet with many upstairs. They have three entrances. This Raja qopuram is located at top of the entrance gate. It includes many of the attractive and beautiful pilaster figures on it. The five kalasams are found on the top of the gopuram; The Raja gopuram is built with large space with an entrance.

General Structure of the Temple

The Thirukkodeswarar Temple has been built according to Saivite scriptural principles. Moreover, the structure of the temple resembles the spiritual and organic structure of human body. The Raja gopuram stands for the fact and

the flag post for the cordinal, the two Dwarabalagars for the shoulders. Arthamandapam for the neck and karuvarai for the head respectively. The above similarities elucidate and illustrate the great words of Thirumoolar at the popular Saivite poet. Body to the temple (Oon Udambu Alayam in Tamil),¹⁰ The structure of the temple stands to remind us to understand the ancient art of construction, etc.

Notes and References

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