



Arulmigu Periaavudaiyar Temple, Palani

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Abstract

The Periaavudaiyar Temple located on the banks of Shanmuganathi is 5km away from Palani in a village named Iravarur. The Temple has hoary past, rich culture, history and tradition. The temple was ancient one and the inscriptions of Veera Keralas are found in this temple. The Kongu Cholas, a clan of Chola family missed an opportunity of worshipping their famous deity Periaavudaiyar at Tanjore. So they began to show interest in worshipping Periyaavudaiyar temple at Palani. This article elaborates the nature and characteristics of Periaavudaiyar Temple.

Keywords: Periaavudaiyar Temple, Architecture, Worship, Sculpture, Pooja.

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Introduction

The Periaavudaiyar Temple located on the banks of Shanmuganathi is 5km away from Palani in a village named Iravarur¹. The Temple has hoary past, rich culture, history and tradition. The temple was ancient one and the inscriptions of Veera Keralas are found in this temple. The Kongu Cholas, a clan of Chola family missed an opportunity of worshipping their famous deity Periaavudaiyar at Tanjore. So they began to show interest in worshipping Periyaavudaiyar temple at Palani. (photo.1)

The devotees believe that if there are any temples on the bank of river the god has some special powers². The devotees perform the rituals at the river bed, bath in the river and proceed to the temple. Pilgrims going to Periaavudaiyar temple fetch the holy water from this river. There is a staunch belief that if once bathed in the Shanmuganadhi, it is equal to have holy bath in 66 important holy rivers; it is also considered that this river gives salvation of those who bath.³ The Lord Siva in this temple is facing west which made some of the historians to believe that the Chera rulers might have constructed this temple. In 1992, the holy consecration of Periaavudaiyar temple has been conducted. In the original Sthalapurana of Balasubramanya kavirayar⁴ this place is found mentioned as Kannikavaram.

This temple has been built by a Virakerala king of chera dynasty around 10th to 13th century itself. This is a very ancient temple and was built around a thousand years ago. This temple has been renovated and additions were made by the Kongucholas and the

Pandyas. The kings who performed their divine duties in this temple are: Chera-Veerakeralan, VeeraNarayanan, Amarapujangavarman, AdirajarajaDevan, Veerakeralavarman. Pandya– Sadayavarman Srivallabhadevan, Paramakesarivarman, Perumal Viracholan. Chola-Vira Narayana Adhisayacholan, konarimanikondan. These rulers contributed a lot to this temple.

The main employment of people in this area is agriculture. They also involved in cattle management. There are 1500 acres of fertile land for dry cultivation around the temple. The temple had 16 stone inscriptions and it is sad to note that during the kumbhabisekha ceremony all the inscriptions were destroyed. The deity of the Goddess is established by Vikrama Pandya Ganga Narayana Chakravarthy. This is observed by the charter INS721-07-1905.⁶

There is a special sanctum for Periaavudaiyar. It is believed that there had been a separate deity and temple for Goddess Brihannayagi and it was replaced to Palani as Perianayagi brought to Palani. The Amman temple is popularly called as Urkoil or Urambakum, Town temple or Perianayakiamman temple. Lord Siva's Tiruvilaiyadal in Palani: The Virada king liked hunting very much. At that time Siva appeared as a deer, he jumped in front of the king, the King followed the deer. The deer hidden behind the Linga to protect its life and the king speared his arrow over the deer and proceeded inside the temple to catch the deer. But the king could not find the deer, the blood is coming outside from the Linga. The King asked Lord Siva to forgive his mistakes. Lord Siva in his echoed that he performed this Tiruvilaiyadal to show the place where the Lord lives. According to Lord Siva's order, the king built garpagraha in this place made pooja's to Siva. The deer in Tamil is Maan. So the place came to be called as Maanur. In the

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Linga has arrow scar which is seen at the time of Abhisekam⁷.

Art and Architecture of the Temple

The Linga in the Periaavudaiyar temple is Self born.(swayambu) According to the Hindu mythology, the self born Linga is more powerful than artificially installed in the temple⁸. There is a pillar shaped part upon the Linga is called “Baanam” the base is called “Aavudai” the tube like structure which carries the holy water is called “komugam”. According to the local people the naturally born Linga, existed even before Bhogar⁹. Only male gods are found in the temple. A majestic figure of Dakshinamoorthy, a rare Rudran, and other gracious images in stone are located in the temple.¹⁰ Architecturally the temples in Tamilnadu can be classified into three broad categories namely Nagara, Vesara and Dravida style. The Periaavudaiyar temple belongs to Dravidian style and agama traditions are followed for the constructed of the temple.

Maha mandapa

In the Mahamandapa, consists of four pillars, which are decorated beautifully with marvelous ornamentation work. The adhisthana part in the mahamandapa reveals the architectural achievements of the time. The bases of the pillars are bigger in size than that of the Nandi stage. All the four pillars are decorated beautifully and adorned with beautiful icons and pillared structure images.¹¹ The potigai and utihra part clearly reveals that the temple possess all the latest architectural development. The Nandi is installed on stage with adhistana of later tradition. The temple has four beautiful pillars with rich ornamentation work. They are of square shape, octagonal potigai and other structures. All these are recent style of architecture. In the outer prahara of the mahamandapa, most of the adhistana part has been engulfed by earth surface. However we find Muppattai, kumutham, kandam, and kattaikai part in the adhistana. The wall is seen without any ornamentation work.

The Ardhamandapa

The Arthamandapa is rich in beauty and it consists of various styles of architecture. Here too the portions of adhistana is found beneath the surface of the ground. But kumudham, kandam, pattigai are clearly visible in the Adhistana.

Patha

The Patha part in the mahamandapa is different from that of the ardhamandapa. The walls in ardhamandapa has half pilasters with eight faces. The lower part of the pilasters has miniature structures of sculptural tradition. In that pilasters consists of Nagabandham, Malasthanam, Tadi, kumbam, padmam, Kalasa and palagaietc, are seen.¹² The kumbapanjara on the walls have pillared structures. The upper part is constructed on the model of Vimana of the temple. (photo.3) In the kaboda part are nest like structure,

without ornamentation or decorative work. The kaboda part in the mahamandapa is decorated with stucco figures. Garpagraha and ardhmandapa are constructed purely with black stone. The adjacent part of the sub temple and the nest like structure in it are also made up of stucco work.

The Griva

The Griva is completely constructed with stucco and beautiful ornamentation and decoration are found in the griva. The Nandi in a sitting position is seen on the four sides of griva. The half pillared structure in the grivaare beautifully decorated. Likewise the subshrines of Brahma, Vinayaka, Tirumal, Dakshinamoorthy are also adorned with stucco works. The griva of grapagraha, the kostas are seen with added beauty to the Vimana of the temple¹³.

The Sikara

The Sikara part of the Vimana has foursides and is enlarging upwards in a slanding position. The four sides are beautified with figures of Simha(Lion). The dorana structure found in the Vimana adds beauty to the temple. In the nest like structure, the simhas, the Narasimha in a sitting position, and the statue of Gopalakrishnan and male and female figures add beauty to the vicinity of the temple. The Vimana belongs to Ekatala Vimana type. Lord Dakshinamoorthy is seen in Yoga posture, surrounded by rishi's and yogis¹⁴ on the grivakosta. Lord Dakshinamoorthy figure is engraved on all the four sides. The small Vimana possesses all the artistic beauty including the pictures of Boothagana and apsaras are really superb part in the temple¹⁵. Rudra figure is in sitting posture with four hands consisting of Maan, Malu and Aabayamudra. The stucco statues in the Vimana add beauty to the temple. On the Kabota part is seen in the divine deities statues of Lord Vishnu and Nandi and they are of later addition. On the weaternPrahara of the temple the Bairava shrine is seen and it consists of small Vimana with stucco statues. It is to be noted that both the sides of Bairava is decorated with Vimana.

Northern Side of Vimana

On the Northern side of Vimana in the grivakostha Lord Brahma in a sitting posture with Abhaya and Varada mudra. On his both the sides of the Salai, the huge statue of Senai and Boodhagana's are seen. On the Kabota part of the Vimana Goddess Saraswathi is seen in a standing posture. On the Grivakasta part figures of Nandi, Lion and garland and other decorations are seen.

Eastern Side of Vimana:(photo.2)

In the devakosta Lord Triumal is carved in a sitting posture having his hand holds Sangu and chakra. The devakostha part is also adorned with the statues of bhudhakanas and Narada. The yazhi seen in the upper part is really a marvelous work done by the sculptor. The

figure of Nandi is in a sitting posture. The huge statues of Senai, (soldiers) with their dress, ornaments, head makuta and the bouquets in their hands give lively appearance¹⁶.

Southern part of the Vimana:(photo 4)

In the southern part of the Vimana in the Grivakosta part the beautiful statue of Lord Dakshinamoorthy is seen. On his two sides the rishis are humbly standing and offering their salutation to their divine guru and on the upper surface of the four sides the ornamentation and decorative work in best quality is seen.

In the arthamandapa and the outer Garpagraha the images of Rudra, Dakshinamurthy, Tirumal, Brahma and Vinayaka are seen. The artistic perfection is seen in the kaboda and stupa. The vimana is further decorated with the salai and hara structure and nest like structure and grivakosthas and round sikaras and all these add more beauty to the temple. It is to be noted that the vimana of sub shrines are circular in shape. The Vinayaka statue erected in the outer prahara of the temple is of modern tradition and the pillars in it reminds us of the later tradition. The pillars have four, eight, twelve and sixteen faces respectively. However the Potigai part is not much decorated but it is adorned with icons like Nandi, Siva, Parvathi and Vinayaka.

Chandikeswarar

Chandikeswarar one among the 63 Nayanmars who deeply showed his devotion to Lord Siva. In all the Siva temples a separate chapel is allotted to him. He holds either danda (staff) or tanka (bottle) in his hands.¹⁷ Chandikeswarar shrine is located at the right side of the temple with a small passage. He always in deep meditation. He is in the position of receiving blessings from Lord Siva and delivering it to the devotees. He must be worshipped at the last after all the other gods are worshipped. As he is in deep meditation, the devotees clap hands in front of him to ensure their presence after worshipping Lord Siva. In this temple the idol of Chandikeswarar was built as a model of 10th century Chola idols.¹⁸

Bairava

Bairava shrine is situated in the western side facing east. The vehicle of this God is dog. He is in standing position right hand holds sword and left with bowl. He is the one who protects us from the fear yaman, the destroyer. He is regarded and revered as the veda of Lord Siva

Lord Brahma

He is considered the first among the three great trinity gods. He is in the creator. In the Periaavudaiyar temple Brahma facing north. The Vimana of the Lord Brahma seen with Annam and other male and female figures. Lord Brahma has three heads, he holds akshamala (rosary) kamantaka (water jug) in his hands,

front hand holds a book¹⁹.

Dakshinamoorthy

In the Salai part of the Vimana is seen on his shrine and he adorned with the Senais with modern type of dress. The Nandis are in sitting posture on both side of him. Rishis are seen around him. The stucco works with colourful decoration add beauty to the vimana. His image is seen in the southern side of the temple facing south.²⁰ He is seated below a tree attended by sages as students.

Nataraja

Lord Nataraja statue is installed at the entrance of the temple with its own splendor and it adds beauty to the entrance. Lord Siva appears in nine different postures. The four forms such as sivam, sakthi, nadham, vindhu; the four physical forms- maheswar, Rudhra, Vishnu, Brahma; and the one unique sadasivam – all these together are said to be the nine varieties of Lord Siva.

Navagraha

Navagraha are in the North east corner of the temple. Nearer to this there are a big bael tree and kadambam tree as sthalavirukshas of this temple.

Poojas and festivals

Poojas

The self born Linga in Periaavudaiyar Temple undergoes rituals thrice a day.

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| They are | 1. Kalasandhi - 9 a.m |
| | 2. Mid day - 12 noon |
| | 3. Evening - 5 p.m |

and are performed everyday in this temple. Special rituals and sacred baths are performed during special occasions. The Lunar day's worship is famous in this temple rather than day worship. The lord is worshipped in "PanchaUpacharam" and "sodasa Upacharam". Pancha Upacharam is done in all poojas. Sodasaupacharam only in special worship. (special occasion)

Occasional worship

Worship done on special occasions like Sivaratri, Pradosam and Tiruvathirai are called naimittika puja. The worship differs from place to place or even temple to temple. It is done in addition to the daily worship. Special homa, japa, abshiekam and elaborate worship are its distinctive features. The Utsavarmoorthi taken out in procession, and he is well decorated and exhibited to the devotees. During the day of Pradhosam the deity is bathed with sesame oil sandal, flowers, milk, curd, honey, turmeric powder, fruits, panchamirtham, tender coconut, ghee, sugar, rosewater, ghee, rice flour, scented powder, holy ashes are used.²⁰ Then special pooja and archana are offered to the deity.

Holy bath in Rice (Annabhisekam)

The Lord is worshipped by bathing with rice. This is done during the Tamil month “Aippasi” on the full moon day. The aim of this worship is to receive rain instantly and thereby the lives will be flourished. This type of worship is done specially in Periaavudaiyar temple. Then the rice was given to the devotees as prasadam. Specialities of full moon day: Each full moon day in every month has a special function on it. These function can be seen in Periaavudaiyar temple. These are done in every Tamil months²⁰.

Chithirai	- ChitraPournami
Vaikasi	- Vaikasi Visagam
Aani	- offering three kinds of fruits
Aadi	- offering milk sweet
Aavani	- Aavani Avittam
Purattasi	- Lord dressed in fruits and sweets
Aippasi	- Annabhisekam
Karthigai	- Festival of Lamps
Margazhi	- Dharasham of Lord in dancing form
Thai	- Thaipooam
Maasi	- Maasi Magam
Panguni	- Panguni Uthiram.

Important days for worshipping

It is believed that if Lord Shiva is worshipped during the Lamp festival in Karthigai, people would get all benefits. It is good to worship in the New moon day.

Masi

Mahasivaratri is one of the important worship offered to lord Siva in the month of masi.²⁰. In this day the people who offered their prayers do not sleep at night and worship the Lord four times with special poojas. They undergo fasting and chant mantras of Shiva like om namah Shivaya. In this day special pooja offered in the night and morning. Brahmostsavam is also celebrated in the month of Masi for 10 days. It is believed on masimaham festival the devotees have to bath in the holy river and then worship Periaavudaiyar to attain the feet of God and for cleansing their sins.

Thiruvaadhirai

The Aarudhradarshan of Lord Natarajan denotes the five occupations of the Land- production, protection, destruction, hiding and blessing. The food is prepared from rice flour with sweet brown sugar is offered to the Lord on this day. The food is named ‘Kali’ refers to happiness. Women undertakes fast in this day and worship the Linga. It is believed that this worship will bring them good husband and good life. The star occurring in the month of Margazhi is considered very auspicious²⁰.

Method of worshipping Lord siva in the sanctum and Nandhi

According to the tradition of Periaavudaiyar temple, people should not stand in between Nandi and Lord Siva in the niche. The reason is that it is believed

the air breathed out by the Nandhi gives life to the god in the Niche, that is why, the abdomen is placed straight opposite to the nostrils of Nandhi. This also paves way for other devotees to worship freely. Therefore, we should bend ourselves while worshipping Lord Siva²⁰.

It is clear that Periaavudaiyar temple has a lot of historical information and rare kinds of art and architecture. The niche, Sanctum Sanctorum, and the shrines constitute to the beauty of the temple. The deities of Lord Brahma, Vishnu, Bhairavar, Ganesh, Agni, Dakshinamoorthy Chandikeswarar, and the nine planets are seen inside the temple. The towers and other areas of the temple is now getting renovated. Every day, three times Pooja's are performed for Periaavudaiyar. Moreover special worships are done during festival days. So the devotees come in flocks to worship Periaavudaiyar Linga and also the other small Gods in the temple.



Figure I. Front view of the peria avudaiyar temple



Figure II. Sculptures of the vimana of the temple



Figure III. Kumbha panjara of periya avudaiyar temple



Figure IV. Sculptures of the vimana of the temple

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