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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**ARULMIGU VENUGOPALA PARTHASARATHI TEMPLE AND RISHABESHVARAR TEMPLE
INSCRIPTIONS IN CHENGAM TALUK**

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Abstract

Inscription is one of the primary sources in History. Chengam or Sengama is a one of Taluk in Tiruvannamalai district which provides most of the epigraphy sources like Hero stones, Inscriptions. Temple dedicated to Lord Venugopala Parthasarathi, a form of Krishna and Temple Dedicated Lord Rishabeshvarar a form of Shiva had inscriptions in the prahara of the temple which give social, economic conditions of the Chengam Region.

Keywords: Incription, Temple, Chengam taluk

Introduction

The temples of South India, particularly in Tamilnadu, retained their importance and popularity down the ages. It was the hub of the Socio- religious life of the people and served as the centre of all activities of the village community. They have also preserved the age-old traditions and customs around it and fostered arts of different kinds in a significant way. Temple was also a centre of learning. Schools and colleges were located in the temples. Endowments were made to maintain teachers and students in the premises of the temple. Provision was made for the study of the Vedas, Vedanta's, Sastras and Divine Hymns etc.

The temple had its own managing committee through which it administered the village and also the members of the committee were elected in the temple premises. The committee had the right to purchase and sell the lands and keep accounts of its assets and liabilities. It maintained its treasury and employed priests, artisans, and servants based on their qualifications and it specifically fixed their duties and wages. It lent money to individuals or local bodies in times of scarcity or distress. It leased the temple lands and houses to the individuals and merchants for interest. On the whole, the temple also served as people's bank in those days.

All the temple activities were thus directed

towards the promotion of the welfare and happiness of the community, in ancient times each place of habitation, where a hamlet or city existed maintained its own temple for the prosperity of the inhabitants. It is an admitted fact that the construction of temples was customary religious acts amongst the ancient Hindu kings.

The ancient, historic, splendid and monumental temple of Lord Vishnu, dedicated in the name of Sri Venugopala Parthasarathi Perumal, is located picturesquely on the right bank (South side) of the legendary river Cheyyaru, to the western side of the ancient town called Chengam, in the Taluk of the same name in Tiruvannamalai District. It is situated on the South Western side of another ancient temple of Lord Siva, in the name of Sri Rishabeshvarar Swami Temple.

These two temples are built as per the agamid traditions i.e., the Siva Temple should be located in the North-east side of the Vishnu Temple. The ancient town of Chengam was laid in the form of a lotus medallion with several lotus petals of the flower, with its stem below. Similar was the ancient town planning of Chengam in old times, with neatly laid out streets, in front of these two temples, which are named as Durgai Amman Koyil Street, Sivan Koyil Street, Perumal Koyil Street, Raja Street and Oddar Street, the Perumal Koyil Street being the central petal of the lotus flower. It is stated that in the ancient times, the old town of Kanchipuram was also laid in a similar plan. Now the town has grown haphazardly, obliterating the ancient town planning. Yet a careful eye can discern the original, ancient town planning.

Venugopala Parthasarathi Temple Inscription

This temple was built by Kondama Nayakkarayan Kumara Muthu Krishnappa Nayakkarayan Talavai Thimmappa Nayakkar, a small land king. The name of this temple was given as Chenganma in the Sangam period and Madirai Senganma in the inscription, today it is given as Chengam. The name of the devar is Kannai, the name of the Lord here is Nayakkan who possessed Kannai. Outside the sanctum sanctorum, the 10-feet tall Dwarpalagar Tirumeni amazes visitors and there is a separate shrine for Amman Kashi Viswanadha in the outer prakaram.

On the basis of the epigraphs found engraved in the upapitha part of the main shrine the temple may be dated to the late Vijayanagara Nayaka Period of the 17th Century AD. There is a Portrait sculpture in relief, in one of the pillars in the open mukhamandapa. This is stated to the portrait of a certain Dhalavoy Thimmappa Nayaka, who is stated as the builder of the temple. He is shown as the perpetual worshipper of the deity in anjalimudra. He is portrayed along with his queen Tirumalamma in the Andal shrine, worshipping the deity there. The temple was built probably towards the end of the 16th or in the early 17th century on the orders of a local chieftain, Dalava Nayaka, whose portrait appears on one of the front mandapa's pillars.

The ceiling of this very ornate hall was once decorated with paintings depicting the Ramayana, the majority of which, but for those in its central part, have disappeared. Tamil and Telugu labels here and there bear the names of the main characters are identify the incidents depicted¹. The scenes that have survived illustrate episodes from the Yuddhakanda, beginning with the duel between Lakshmana and Ravana's son Indrajit, in which the former is wounded and eventually revived by the magical sanjivini herb brought by Hanuman. What makes this set of paintings particularly interesting is that a number of the illustrated episodes are based on the local tradition rather than on the well-known Valmiki Ramayana. The series end with a beautifully detailed the Rama pattabhisheka tableau. Rama's coronation is witnessed by a number of gods, sages, by his allies and his devotees among which is Dalava Nayaka.²

There are two inscriptions found engraved in the temple. The first one is engraved in the base of the central shrine. It is in Tamil language and script. It belongs to the reign period the Vijayanagara king Venkatapati maharaya. It is dated in the saka year 1554 (AD 1632), Anginasa, Tai 3. It records the creation of an endowment of 74 pon, due from four persons, who had mortgaged their lands to the donar Salem Nayinappa nayakkar to provide for worship in the temple, the present town of Chengam was named as Chengama Pattanam allias Ekachakrapuri. It was in the territorial division called Adaiyur nadu in Palkunrakkottam.

The endowment was made for the merit of the king Venkatapati mahanaya and the parents of the donar, who are named as Krishnappa nayakar and Ammachchi ammal (Ammani ammal). This inscription is in tamil. The second inscription is found engraved on the base of the north side upapitha. It belongs to the reign of king Sri Ranga maharaya of Vijayanagara dynasty. It is dated in the saka year 1568 (AD 1646), Parthiva, karttikai, su.5. It is in Telugu. It records the gift of land to the temple in Chengamapuri by konetinayaka for the merit of the king. Dhalavoy Timmappa Nayakka and his queen Tirumalamma were the worshippers of the deity. Their portraits are found in the temple's front mandapa and Andal shrine.³

Sri Rishabeshwarar Temple Inscription

The Chengam Sri Rishabeshwarar temple is one of the few existing Chola temples with a rich and hoary past has been taken for detailed on its walls dating from the period of 12th century A.D. the Later Cholas, Sambuvarayar (Raja Kambeera Samuvarayar) to that of the Vijayanagar rulers the temple complex with many additions and renovations through centuries provide a rich field for the study of Dravidian architecture, Sculpture and Iconography. This temple has also a rich collection of stone and metal sculptures. The temple reflects the ancient and lasting glory of Tamil culture with its impact on arts, language and spiritualism. Mythology has close links with the history of the place and its temple.

The inscriptions and other monuments bear eloquent testimony to the hoary traditions built up by successive kings, philanthropists and the wealthy people. Inscriptions dating to the period of the later Cholas, Sambuvarayar and to that of Vijayanagara rulers are found⁴. Various structures of the Renugambal temple have been added at different ages. This temple influenced through the ages the social and economic life of the people.

There are many inscriptions from Vijayanagara periods. Due to some natural disaster, the temples lay buried and it was only through the efforts of Srinivasan Services Trust, a part of the TVS Group that many have been unearthed and renovated since the early 1990s. In

1926-27 the Government Epigraphists copied the inscriptions from this temple (A.R.E. No. 17 to 5301 year 1926-27).⁵ as per the evidence given by the inscriptions no 521 of 1926-27 of this temple.⁶

Two inscriptions of Tirubuvana Chakkaravarti Konerikkondan are found in the temple. The ruling Dynasty of these inscriptions is not known. The other inscriptions of the temple belong to the period of Medieval Pandyas.⁷ An Inscription of Jatavansan Perunseral Kulasekaradeva is written in Grantha and Tamil. The other inscriptions are written only in Tamil. It is not possible to know the names of the builders of the temple from these inscriptions. But they give information about the donations made to the temple, offering of services and the exemption of land taxes. In the temple some inscriptions are in fragments. But all the inscriptions are found in the central shrine.⁸ We understand from the inscriptions that the Rishabeshwarar temple was given, so much importance in the time of the medieval Pandya kings.

The kings were generous in their donation. Whenever needed the kings in order to maintain the activities of the temple donated lands and villages. They also made exemption of land taxes belonging to the temple so as to enable its speedy development. The Pandya kings donated some fertile lands to the temple which lay near to canals and tanks in order to cultivate more crops throughout the year.⁹

Findings from the inscriptions of the temple help us to understand that many individuals enjoyed the benefits of the temple lands and failed to perform the temple services.¹⁰ So it is clear, that during the rule of medieval Pandyas, the lands were taken back from them and were given to persons who conducted the temple services properly. Thus in the medieval Pandya period the Rishabeshwarar temple was socially and economically in a flourishing condition. Several concessions such as land donation and exemption of land tax paved the way for its smooth conduct of the temple activities. Inscriptions from Sri Rishabeshwarar Temple at Chengam refer to different classes of employees in general terms like pattan, Nambi, Sivabrahmanas, Devakanmis, Sripandavathar Brikariam, Srimahesvara, and Kankani. During the period of Sambuvarayar Chieftains in 1236-1375

A.D. the srirudras, Srimahesvaras and Brahmasthanas managed the temple affairs.

Conclusion

Venugopala Parthasarathi and Rishabeshvarar temples have epigraphy sources which give the social, economic conditions of the old town of Thiruvannamalai district sengama or chengam. They need a renovation to keep the historical sources safe. These temples are now under the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment.

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