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Sree Adikesava Perumal Temple – Thiruvattar in Kanyakumari District

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Abstract:

Kanyakumari is the Southernmost part of India. It is located in the South West portion of the Indian Peninsula by forming an irregular triangle with its apex at Cape Comorin. It is situated in the coastal strip between North and East by the Mahendragiri mountains and on the South by Indian Ocean and the West by Arabian Sea. Kanyakumari District consists of four Taluks. They are Agasteeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode. This district presents a striking contrast to the rest of Tamil Nadu in point of physical features and Agricultural conditions.

Thiruvattar is a small town situated in Kalkulam Taluk in Kanyakumari District. One can reach this place by travelling 47 kms South from Thiruvananthapuram on the National Highway. Then turn left on Azhakiyamandapam road branch. From there six km travel is enough to reach Thiruvattar, a small town situated on the base of hill. Otherwise from Marthandam 7 kms travel is enough to reach Thiruvattar, It is a hilly region. On this region there is one police station and some public offices. The river paraliyar encircles the place. The abundances of water in this place has been described as 'Valaneer Vattaru' by poet-'Malkudi Kilar' in a verse of 'Purananuru'. The old Tamil anthology says that the famous Vishnavite shrine of Sri Adikesava Perumal Temple at Thiruvattar is about 18 miles from Nagercoil and 28 miles from Trivandrum.

The place Thiruvattar is originally known as 'Adi Ananthapuram' or the ancient city of Ananta. It later became as Thiruvattar – 'Vattar' means the curved river as it flows encircling the temple. It got prefix 'Thiru' because it is a holy place. The tributaries of Paraliyar make this location highly fertile and beautiful. The temple of Adikesava Perumal is situated here.

1. Introduction

Sree Adikesava Perumal temple is one of the most ancient Vaishnava temple of South India. A striking feature of the temple is close resemblance with Sri Ananthapadmanabha Swami Temple at Thiruvananthapuram. It is presumed that the later was modeled after this temple as this belonged to an older period. This sacred Temple is also known as Adi-Dharma-Stalam, Dakshina Vaikundam, Parasurama Kshethram, Srirangam of Cheranadu and Adi Anantham.

Sri. Adikesava Perumal Temple consists of a Garbhagraham, having three door-ways and an Ottakkal Mandapam in front. It is built in granite and provided with a copper sheeted roof. This temple is one of the shrines sacred to the Vaishnavites. The great antiquity of this place has been described by the Tamil poet Malkudi Kilar in a verse of purananuru. Namalvar has sung few poems in praise of Adikesava Perumal Temple.

2. Inscription

We don't know the early history of this temple. But it is mentioned in the ancient works inscriptions of other copper coins etc. On the base of the belikkal plat from an inscription relating to king Rajendra Chola I (of Chola dynasty 1013-1045 AD 188/220 M.E) appears. This is the earliest inscription here and it describes the deity as the Thiruvattar God.ⁱ

A Belikkal inscription of 1582 AD/757 MD records that the metal casting of the stone belikkal in the temple of Adikesava Perumal. In 1603 AD/788 ME inscription records that the wonderful Ottakkal Mandapa was put up by kind Veera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara. The inscription dated 1605 AD/780 ME mention repairs and addition made to the temple by him and his brother. His younger brother Adithya Varma paved the inner quadrangle with stones. While the next brother Rama Varma installed the two metal Dwarapalakas. The Thiruvattar temple possess twenty two inscription in Tamil Vattezhuthu and Sanskrit Nagari script relating to Chola and Chera royalty.ⁱⁱ

Most of the Chera inscriptions were damaged. These inscriptions seems to date from sixteenth Century AD and deal mainly with grants donations structural additions and alternations made time and again by many especially by the royal trustees. The figure in the copper coins consists of Sree Adikesava on one side and Sree Padmanabha on the other side. This coin are dated during the period of king Bhothala Veera of cheras.

3. Historical Events

In the later half of the 17th Century, Venad, the historical place where the temple now stands was a tiny kingdom comprising a part of the present Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu and adjoining district of Thiruvananthapuram of Kerala State.

At one time it was in a state of local turmoil. Umayamma Rani queen of the kingdom had fled from Thiruvananthapuram to Nedumangadu a place about 20 kms. away, after the murder of her five sons in a plot known in history as the “Kaliappankulam incident” shocked and overcome by grief she stayed at Nedumangadu paying little attention to the affairs of the state. The chaotic and weak condition of the kingdom drew the attention of a Petty Sardar under the Mughal Emperor and he swept over the country to camp near Trivandrum the capital and encamped at a place near by called Manacaud. The helpless Rani sought the assistance of a relative King Raja Kerala Varma, who hastily organized an army at the crucial time. When the Sardar’s forces were scattered over there and busy in collecting revenue.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Sardar was forced to retreat to the south hotly pursued by the forces of Keralavarma. While retreating the Sardar camped on the hill side near Thiruvattar. It was an ill-chosen spot for him. The rocks and jungle made it difficult for passing but they afforded protection from the Rajah’s archers and slingers. The fighting was severe with great loss of life. When the fate of the battle hung in a fine balance an unforeseen event took place. The tree under which the mughal sat aside as tide watching the battle was near the temple.^{iv}

The Rajah entered the temple and prayed to the Lord for punishment for the Sardar. He sung a verse composed by him which later came to be known as ‘Paada Sankeerthanam’ or ‘Adi Kesava Sthavan’ Before the Keerthana was over large number of wasps came out of the temple and rushed the mughal army. Before he could understand what was happening they attacked the Sardar, stinging him and his horse threw down its master on the floor, where stones and arrows rained down on the floor, where stones and arrows rained on him, killing him on the spot. The Mughal army that was demoralised by the death of their leader was thoroughly beaten and most of them were captured.^v

With the three hundred horses and equipment captured Kerala Varma established a Cavalry of his own. A cross still mark of this spot where the Mughal’s remains are said to be buried. Near the battle ground stands the famous temple dedicated to the Adikesava Perumal. It is considered to be one of the oldest in the country. The Alwar great hymn singers of the 8th century had made reference to this. Kerala Varma also a poet stood before the Mughal Mandapam and recited fourteen verses before going the battle field Thiruvattar. These verses are popularly known as “Padda Sankeerthanam”.

“Ahi kula vara sayana rama vara
Mahitha padambuja Natha Pathaka
Dahana janardhana dhanujan Dhaka
Dara Saraseeja dhara Karunakara
Aha maha mikayodu poruvan varu
Mathitha ray udhi sapthi jayippan
Adhara hari havara marulenam
Kasi madhanal Nadha Thozhunnen”

In 1741 Marthanda Varma Rajah of Venad made offerings to this temple and worshiped her before going direct to the famous battle of Colachel in which he vanquished the Dutch.^{vi}

Another episode associated with the temple is the attack made by the Nawab of Arcot, Desth-Ali-khan. The Muslim army plundered the temple in 1740 AD, and carried away the beautiful idol (M.R.915 Kumbham 26)

This story tells that this idol which was left in a lumber room along with several other used to appear on top of the pile every day, whenever weights were put on it. The Nawab’s relatives Chanda Sahib and Baba Sahib therefore had it chained having two holes on its pedestal. Even then the idol could not be controlled and about this time the Nawab’s Begum was attacked by a very painful stomach trouble.

The Azhati (body guard) of the Lord at Thiruvattar had a dream directing him to meet the Nawab and recover the idol. The Azhati explained the greatness of the idol and assured the Nawab that the Malady (childness) of the Begum would be cured only after the restoration of the idol to its original place. The Nawab ordered the return of the idol and the Begum was also cured of her disease. As repentance, the Nawab donated a gold cap and a plate of weighting 388 tholas of pure gold to the temple, to be used by the priest. When the deity was taken around the temple for daily Sreebali. He also made endowments for a special pooja called ‘Thiru Halla Pooja’ to be performed at night from the yoga mandapam. During the two utsavams this pooja is performed in the temple even now.^{vii}

The story also narrates that when the Azhati was returning with the idol he hated near the Siva Temple at Thaliyal and went to take bath. When he returned after taking bath he could not lift the idol from where it was placed. He informed the matter to his highness the Maharaja of Travancore. The Maharaja visited the place and made arrangements to restore the idol after performing Suddi Kalasam, (Purifying the idol) This is the significance of the Araat at this place during the festival in Oct-Nov.

4. Structure of the Temple

There is a main double door for entering into ehattambalam. There is also a Gopuram. This Gopuram consist of some fine piece of wooden carvings. Some excellent examples of Dravidian sculpture and stone work can be seen inside the temple. The Udayamarthanda mandapam in front of the sanctum. Sanctum is elaborately carved and is regarded as an remarkable example of

Kerala art and architecture. The pillars inside the mandapa contain some fine pieces of wooden carvings. In the wooden ceiling of the mandapa the figure of vinayaka pooja, procession and palazhi madhanam are exquisitely curved

The mugamandapam in front of the Sreekovil is otherwise called Ottakal mandapam (made of one single stone) which is an engineering marvel. It is three feet thick, measuring 18 feet by 25 feet. One of the inscriptions state that Thirumaliga, Thirumandapam Neerara under the orders of the his highness of Sriveera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal in 1603 A. D.^{viii}

Even though the temple is one of the famous Vaishnavite shrines. It is facing westward, which is an usual factor. The worshippers generally enter the temple to the entrance of the eastern side. On entering they proceed outwards through Sree Balipura to worship Sri Bhoothanadham. After that, they move on the southwest corner where the idols of Vishnu, Venkatachalapathi, Vinakayakar, Lord Krishna and Salagraman and the goddesses are enshrined. The room is known as 'Upa-Devaayam'. Then they reach the Dwaja Stambam (flag staff) at the western entrance where there is a Nalambalam through the Balikkapura (Khitra Sabha)

Among them Sri, Adikesava Perumal temple in Kanyakumari District is called as Vaikundam of South India. There were 108 temples of Vishnu in India. Among them Sri Adikesava Perumal Temple is one of the famous temple.^{ix}

The Dwajastambam is made up of copper. It is inscribed that the existing Dwajastambam was installed in 1895 A.D., by his highness Sreemoolam Thirunal Maharajah of Travancore.

On all four sides of Sree Balipura are founded 224 granite pillars, each of them bearing marvellous sculptural images of Deepalakshmi, the traditional lamp bearer images vary from pillar to pillar in dressing and hairstyle.

The life size image of Lakshmana, Indrajith, Venugopala, Kanganalathar, Vishnu, Sanghaehoodan, Kaala Bhairavar, Nandhi, Nammalwar, Viagrapadar and Hanuman bearing musical instruments cut in stones are seen on either side of the Balikkal puramandapam. The images of Rathi and manmatha present an enchanting picture. Beautiful wooden carvings are founded over the Sreekovil and Udayamarthanda mandapam. A rod with a chine curved out of a single piece of wood is sure to attract any once attention. On the eastern side of the western Sree Balipura is the shrine dedicated to Sree Krishna of Thiruvampadi.

At Thiruvattar Lord Kesava appears as Adhikesava reclining on the serpent king Adishesha. A full view of the long image can be had only through the three doors to Sree kovil. The left-hand of the idol is hanging down. The woods of the serpent king can be seen over the head of the image. The main idol is made up of peculiar combination known as 'Kadukusarkarai yogam' and 16,008 Salagramams, which cannot be washed with water. Daily anointments and decorations are therefore made to the Archanadeity which is placed and worshipped just below the breast of the Lord along with three other idols of Bhooma-devi, Lekshmidivi and Kathaleyas.^x

5. Festivals

Two festivals are conducted in the Adikesava temple every year. One during October-November and the other during April-May. The duration of each of these festivals is ten days. During the October-November Festival the Arrat or holy immersion takes place in the river parali, near the shrine of Lord Siva of Thaliyal and during the April-May festival takes place at Moovattukumam, two miles west of the temple, at parali and Kothayar.

The Lord installed on the golden Garuda, is being taken procession by the Brahmin priest during these two festivals is a magnificent sight. In addition to these Ashtami, Rohini (Sree Krishna Jayanthi) Vaikunda Ekadasi (Swarga Vayil Ekadasi) Kalabham, in January the two Sri Balis in January, February and July-August are held in Thiruvonam in August or September and the Perunthamirthu Pooja in July-August and January- February are sacred celebrations of the temple.

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