



**INSCRIPTIONS OF ANCIENT TEMPLES IN
AGASTEESWARAM TALUK**

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ABSTRACT

India is the only country in the world where a large number of religions have evolved and flourished since ancient times. It is traditionally a land of faith and spirituality. Temples had an importance to the integral part of the life of Kings and common men. The people of Agasteeswaram Taluk belong to different religions. Hinduism is the religion of the majority people. Temples are the main stay and back-bone of Hindu religion. The inscriptions which are engraved on the temples brought more importance to the temples as well as the life of ancient kings. The present paper analyses the Inscriptions of Ancient temples in Agasteeswaram Taluk.

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

In India religion is an integral part of entire Indian Community. As a token of Indian faith and spirituality, temples of this land have its monumental antiquity. Kanyakumari District consists of four Tamil speaking taluks such as Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai, and Agasteeswaram. Agasteeswaram taluk was ruled by Cholas, Pandyas, Venad and Travancore Kings from 11 to 19 BC. The Agasteeswaram taluk has promising cultural heritage and religious legacy. The numerous inscriptions of this ruler in Agasteeswaram taluk speak the fact of the kings and the life of common men. Hinduism is the religion of major part of this taluk people. The Agasteeswaram Taluk with headquarters at Nagercoil has the cultural and religious heritage on account of the location of Bhagavathi temple at Cape Comorian, Thanumalayaperumal temple at Suchindram, Nagaraja temple with Jain memories at Nagercoil, St Xavier's Church at Kottar and the Vaikundapathy at Swamithoppu. The prominent god worship of the taluk is Vishnu, Siva, Sakthi or Bhagavathi, Subramania and Sastha. The present paper analyses the Inscription of Ancient temples in Agasteeswaram Taluk.

Inscription in important temples of Agasteeswaram Taluk

Agasteeswaram taluk has great historical heritage. The temples are places where the devotees worship God and so the place of worship should be sacred. Tamil Sangam literature referred as 'Ko'. It means God. The assembly of the people called 'il'. So koil is derived from the two words ko+il is koil. Hence the residing place of God is called Koil. It is general belief among the Hindus, that temples are the abodes of gods and goddesses. The temples are considered as places of worship from time immemorial. They are considered to be the backbone of Hinduism. Hence the ancient king's chieftains constructed temples, not only for themselves but also for their subjects to worship. So that there will be plenty, and prosperity in the District of Agasteeswaram Taluk. The best example for the early temples in Agasteeswaram Taluk is the Kumari Amman Temple, Suchindram Temple, Nagaraja Temple, Kanya Kumari_Guganathiswamy Temple, kariyamanikapuram Temple, Parakai Temple.

Kanyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple

The land's end of the Indian sub continent Kanyakumari has unique historical and cultural heritage. Kanyakumari, named after virgin Goddess Kumari Amman, situated at the confluence of three water bodies such as the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean in the southern tip of Indian peninsula. The temple is one of the major Hindu

temples across India and is mentioned in almost all the ancient Hindu Scriptures. This place has been a very famous pilgrim center from very early times. The sculpture of the Goddess is considered to be one of the most beautiful in India. The Kumari Amman temple is dedicated to the Goddess Bhagavathi Amman, also known as Kanyakumari. The Goddess in this temple is virgin, so called as Kanyakumari. There are number of legends speak why she became virgin. The Goddess Kanyakumari is being worshipped from early days. The worship of the virgin goddess Kumari Amman is referred in the Silappatikaram and Manimekalai. The Kumari Amman temple was constructed on a rock known as “Sri Padapara” nearly 600 feet from the shore. There is a Manimandapa in front of the sanctum which is supported by six inscribed cylindrical pillars. The Sabamandapa is located in front of the Manimandapa. The statue of Devi in the sanctum sanctorum is the most beautiful sculpture found in the temple. The inscription of the temple is rather poor for such a famous temple as that of Kanyabhagavati at Cape Comorin, and it possibly represents only those jewels and utensils that were left in the custody of a apparently the melsanti (worshipping priest) of the inner shrine. The record is unimportant and the list itself does not furnish any names of ornaments used for the goddess, two and a half centuries ago. Todu (ear-ornaments), kirita (coronet), kanmalar (embossed pieces of gold for the eyes), chikattam (srihastam=hand) malaiyan-tali (a small crescent-shaped gold plate ornament of the Malayalam type), and undai-mani (spherical beads of gold) of the goddess Periya- nachchiyar are enumerated. This record is found on a pillar in the Cape Comorin Temple is engraved on the east wall of the first prakaram of this temple. It mentions the gift of two lamp-stands of two tiers made by a resident Muttam for use in the temple of Kumari-Bhagavati-nachchiyar. For instance an inscription is engraved in Tamil on the west wall of second prakaram of the temple states that Maniyan Govindan, merchant of Kollam supplied the ghee necessary for maintaining a sacred lamp in the sanctum of Goddess. He also gave a lamp with an image of peacock to this temple in 1201 AD. From the inscriptions found in this temple we learn that the Goddess Kumari Bhagavathi was worshipped as the family deity of the Pandyas.

Suchindram Sthanumalayan Swami Temple

Suchindram is a small village about 12kms north from Kanyakumari and about 7 kms from Nagercoil. Suchindram denotes the place ‘where Indra attained purity. The temple is a place for purification from lust. It is said that Indra suffered a curse from the sage Gautama, when he looked with a lustful eye at Ahalya, the wife of Gouthama. To get relieved from the curse Indra prayed to Lord Siva and attained purity. The temples here

are built in the distinctive Dravidian style and are adorned with massive gopurams which are a common characteristic of all the Dravidian temples. The highest gopuram is 134 feet high and the inside of the temples sport various exquisite rock cut pillars and gateways.

There are more than a hundred inscriptions of great archaeological importance in the temple, which belongs to the 7th century A.D. The period of the mighty Chola Sovereign Paranthaka I (907- 953A.D.) and Raja Raja I (985-1013A.D.) are engraved on the walls of the temple. These inscriptions find a place in Epigraphic India and the date of the latter inscriptions has been calculated and verified by Dr. Kielhorn. 1968/194- In Suchindram, the southern side wall of Sthanumalya perumal temple inscriptions which was engraved during the period of Veera Pandyan, explains about the offering of Chokka Thandaal who presented two hundred new gold, for the purpose of giving food to three Brahmins and for poojas. Another Suchindram inscription engraved in the temple exhibits, the glories of king Jatavarman alias Udaiyar Sola-Pandyadeva, the Dandanayaka Velan Solakeralan alias Karikalasola-Vaidumbarayan of Marudattur in Tiruvali-nadu, of Vadagarai-Rajendrasinga-valanadu of Sola-mandalam, gave fifty sheep, which neither die nor grow old. Brahmadeya of Nanjil-nadu, of Uttamasola-valanadu in Rajaraja-Pandinadu offered ghee, so that one sacred lamp may be burnt in this temple as long as the moon and the sunset. Having taken in his hands these fifty sheep, Sattadi Sorudaiyan bound himself to supply daily one ulaku of ghee to the temple.

Nagercoil Nagaraja temple

The temple popularly known as ‘nagaraja temple’ is situated in the heart of the Nagercoil town. It is surrounded by paddy fields, flower gardens and coconut groves. The temple with its garden is believed to be guarded by cobras and with that belief nobody steal the flowers or cocoanuts there from. Even though there are plenty of cobras inside the temple no fatal case of snake bite has ever occurred anywhere around the area. This peculiar feature is mentioned in the ‘Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics’, compiled by Dr. James Hastings, “Snake bite is not fatal within a mile of the temple”

It is believed that at the beginning Nagaraja temple was a Jain temple which is evident from the images of Jain Tirthankaras, Mahavira and Parswanatha, found on the pillars of the temple. The entrance to the Nagaraja temple is constructed on the model of Buddha Vihara. Nagaraja temple of Nagercoil is visited by pilgrims mostly in the month of Avani. On the 15th day of the month of Panguni in the Kollam year 764, which was Wednesday with panchami of the first fortnight and Rohini-nakshatra, Tirukkurukaipperumal of Kumbikulam in karungula-nalanadu made a gift of 65 panam. From the interest in paddy

on this amount, namely, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ kottai, three kuruni, two nail, at the rate of 3 per 100, daily offerings at the rate of one ulaku of rice had to be provided to the god Nager-Tiruvananthalvar at kottaru. On the 22nd day of the month of Ani in the Kollam year 820 which was current after Saka 1567-a Friday with saptami of the first fortnight and uttiram-nakshatra, Maluva- Nambi and Tambir ankutti- Sadaiyan collected money from several individuals, cast a makaratorana- vilakku (an arch of lamps) for the temple of Nager at kottaru and provided for the daily supply of two nail of oil to it from the interest of 600 oanam which they had utilized for redeeming certain temple lands from the debts which the temple had incurred thereon.

Guhanathaswamy temple-Kanyakumari

The Guhanathaswamy temple at Kanyakumari was built during the time of Imperial Cholas. This is 1000 years old temple. There are 16 inscriptions found in this temple that date back to the years 1038 A.D., 1044 A.D., 1045 A.D as well. An inscription found on the west base of the central shrine of the Guthanathaswamy temple belongs to the reign of Rajakesarivarman Raja and is dated as the 31st year of his reign.

There is an inscription engraved on the west base of the central shrine of the Guthanathaswamy temple belongs to the reign of Rajakesarivarman Rajaraja. It records that the servants of the temple sold the land adjacent to the temple to a body of persons called the narpatennayiravar for the purpose of establishing a watershed. It was named as Jayangondasolan tannir-pandal, after the surname of Rajadhiraja. This inscription consists of a single verse in Tamil stating that Ayyanambi alias Mangalakkalavan, the minister of the Chola king established a watershed at Ten-Kumari.

At the south base of the central shrine an inscription is found in this temple. It is dated the fifth year of the reign of the king Parakeasivarman Rajendradeva and records that a woman setup a perpetual lamp, for which she made a gift of twenty five sheep. The inscription is engraved on the south base of the Ardha Mandapa of Guthanathaswamy temple is belongs to twenty fourth year of the reign of Parkesarivarman Rajendra Choladeva. The inscription says that Cholakulavalli, the woman who cooked the meals for the king and made a gift of fifty sheep, for a perpetual lamp. They seem to have been taken charge of by a person who bound himself to supply daily one Ylakkam of ghee as measured by the temple measure called Pacittira Maanikkam for burning the lamp. Another inscription engraved on the south base of the central shrine of this temple is dated on the eighth year of the king Parakesarivaramn Rajendra Choladeva, which records that the perpetual lamp was donated by a private person. The west base of the central shrine

inscription is dated the twenty eighth year of the king Rajendra Choladeva I, and also records a perpetual lamp. The inscription is engraved on the rock in the Guthanathaswamy temple in which the script of the record in Vatteluttu and the language was in Tamil. It appears to belong to the reign of Prantaka Chola I, the first Chola king who extended his conquests as far south as Kanyakumari. It records the gift of 50 sheep for a perpetual lamp by Rajakesarivarman to be burnt day and night in the presence of the deity at Suchindram.

The Agasteeswaram Udaya Mahadeva Temple

The Agasteeswaram Udaya Mahadeva Temple is one of the holistic Siva temples in Agasteeswaram. The temple was built during the reign of the Pandayas. It contains sanctum, andaralam, ardhmandapa and mahamandapa. The epigraphical evidence clearly shows the donation endowed to the temples by the Pandya kings, especially Jatavarman Srivallabha. One of the inscriptions dated 1123 AD, mention that the Pandya king Jadavarman Srivallabha donated 107 ½ madai to the temple for various purposes. 1968/6- The inscription in the second bar on the south wall of the Unnali of Agastheeswarar temple depicts mahadevar temple and nambiradi. The nambiradi depicted in this inscription might be the Goddess of Pandiyan Shri Vallabhan. Only mid part of the inscription is available in the temple. 1968/17 - The mid part of this inscription, which is present in the second bar on the north side wall of the Unnali of Agastheeswarar temple, indicates the auditorium donated to perform the worship to the beautiful bride Perumal on the day of thiru onam. 1968/14 - In agastheeswaram, the west wall's third bar of the agastheeswarar temple says the reign of Sadaiyavarman Srivallapadevar Pandya's fourth year and there is a middle part of an inscription which was written in Tamil denotes the land provided to 50 persons who were the daily poojhar and the followers of siva .

Kariyamanikapuram Temple

Kariyamanikapuram Temple is another center for Vishnu worship. The Vishnu temple is also called as Kariyamanikapuram alwar temple. The Srikoil consists of a Garbhagraham with two front rooms one after the other, open Muhappu has a wooden ceiling with a Sikharakm over it. The pilgrims who go to Suchindram temple usually visit this temple as they consider that the deity is more powerful. 1968/28- In Kariyamanikapuram, the kariyamaniskazhavar temple pirakaara south side wall inscriptions showed Chempu Nadu and about Thanthai Pattinathu Arangain perumal for conducted daily poojas. 1968/29 – In kariyamaniskazhavar temple Eastern side wall of tower Inscriptions showed Mangala seri Mathisoothann granted land as a gift to Brahmins for their food during the day of Amavaasai and for building huts and providing cool for every month of fourteenth day.

Parakkai Temple

It is one of the most ancient important Vaisnava temples of kanyakumari District. It has been referred in the early literature of Travancore. The SreeKoil's Deity – Madusoodhana Perumal consists of a Garbhagraham has two rooms in front, built in granite and terraced. These are two prakaras (corridors) and gigantic compound wall with 20 feet high are the important additions to the glory of this temple. Parakkai, a village five miles to the south west of Nagercoil, contains a temple dedicated to Madhusudana vinnagar-Emberuman. Another small Siva temple in this village is called the akkarai mahadeva which is ruined. The Vishnu temple, on the other hand, must have been one of sufficient antiquity as testified to by a Pandya epigraph engraved on what is now the saptamatrika – balikkal. From another inscription we learn that Kilarinangalam had the other name of Abhimanameru – chaturvedimangalam, and from this fact, we may guess that the village owed its name too, and was probably the gift to Brahmans by a Pandya king who was called 'Abhimanameru'. Kilarangalam has also been mentioned in some of the records as Valikolli – Kilarangalam. Valikolli – kilal probably signifies the goddess 'Duraga, who destroys the strength of enemies'.

Vadiveeswaram Temple

The Sreekoils of this Vadiveeswaram temple consists of a Garbhagraham, an Edanazhi, Sri Shabhamandapam and a Muhappu, all in one structure. The whole structure is built in granite. The Garbhagraham is provided with a siharam and the remaining are terraced. The Mukappu facing southward is located the Alagammancoil build in granite and provided with a sikaram. There are three inscriptions engraved on a wall of the mandapa inside the temple. Two of these are dated in Kollam 6[6]4 and Kollam 712 respectively, while the third record registers two items of donation made to the temple on two different occasions in Kollam 785 and 786. An inscription on the temple says about a gift of 2 ma of first class land as devadana or the expenses of conducting daily worship in the temple of god Vadivisvaram – Udaiya Nayinar and the goddess Alagiyamangai – Nachchiyar at Kottar. Sankaranarayana Venrumankonda Bhutalavira Sri – Ravivarman of Jayatunga – nadu who was the king of Travancore in Kollam 712, and registers the gift, a piece of land capable of yielding over 39 kottai of paddy per year to the temple.

Puravaseri Temple

Puravaseri, a village situated at a distance of one kilometer from Nagercoil and a reputed vaishava center. The Puravaseri Vishnu temple consists of a Garbhagraham, Ardhamandapa and Garudamandapam, all built in ganite. The Garbhagraham has a

Sikharakm, and the other Mandapams are terraced. On the three sides of the SreeKoils, there is an ambalam. Several inscriptions reveal that this temple was very famous even during the time of the Cholas.

Conclusion

The temples of Agasteeswaram taluk reflect the rich Indian heritage and religious legacy. The inscriptions which engraved on the ancient temple walls, rocks, pillars, make the temple of this land worldwide popular and induce the foreigners to visit the Holy Temples of India. Thus the present paper clearly portrays the importance of the temples in Agasteeswaram taluk with the transparency of inscriptions.

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