



**ARULMIGU SRI VAALMEL NADANTHA AMMAN TEMPLE, KALAYARKOVIL
– A STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Historically worship is as ancient as human civilization. The primitive was puzzled and scared of the elements of nature and began to worship them. Gods are believed to be the sectors of mankind and therefore people adore them with great love with a sense of fear. The temples designated as *Prasada*, *Devagriham* and *Devalayaserve* as centers where religion implies and sentiments of the people find a natural outlet. The temples are not buildings, but their structures imply innumerate philosophical meanings and messages. Puja is the core-ritual of the temple worship. They manifest the inner urge and its fulfillment. Festivals help to retain the best in the culture and by the celebrations in the present hand it down to the future generations. The paper tries to highlight *Arulmigu Sri Vaalmel Nadantha Amman* which was built by ViraPandya who ruled kalaiyarkovil in 12th and 13th century. It was a typical example of Pandya architecture with its features.

Keywords : Devagriham, Ekamukhi, Antarala, AnmarthaPuja, Panmartha Puja.

INTRODUCTION

Historically worship is as ancient as human civilization. The primitive was puzzled and scared of the elements of nature and began to worship them. The beautiful sun at the dawn and dark and the blazing sun in the zenith at noon should

have been his first God. Faith in such forces at nature grew and man idolized them and established temples. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom so says the Bible and only this unflinching faith holds the things together in. Gods are believed to

be the sectors of mankind and therefore people adore them with great love with a sense of fear. Temples are the visible symbols of earth prayer of heaven. Temples are the greatest teachers of piety to all classes of people. Construction of temples, installation of idols, renovation, preservation and conduct of pujas and festivals are deep rooted and are important aspect of Indian culture. They are the symbols of the Omni present blessing to all the beings in the universe as being God. Thus the temples are not buildings, but their structures imply innumerate philosophical meanings and messages.

The term temple is derived from the Latin word “*tempulam*”. As a religious institution and place of worship the temples in India has a hoary past. The temples designated as *Prasada*, *Devagriham* and *Devalaya* serve as centers where religion implies and sentiments of the people find a natural outlet. The ancient people knew neither temples nor images. They worship nature and they worshipped Sun, Moon, Fire, Rain etc. The Vedic Aryan possessed no temples and used no images. Temples seem to have come into existence after the Vedic period. They were constructed in accordance with agamas and *silpasastras*. Tree worship was the most primitive form of worship. The concept of tree worship dates back to the Harappan time 3250 B.C

-2750 B.C. In the Tamil country almost every important temple has sacred tree known as *Sthalavriksha*. [1]

LOCATION OF THE TEMPLE

Amman Vaalmel Nadantha temple was located in Kalaiyarkovil, sivagangai District which is 18 Km east of Sivagangai. It was situated with the Tirukkulam in the North east corner of the big banyan tree. [2]

LEGEND AND STORIES

Veerasena, the Pandya king has no male issue to rule the Pandya kingdom after him. The king prayed to God Kaleeswarar for the solution of his problem. God asked the king to bath in Rudratheertham of *Vaalmel Nadantha Amman* Temple with his spouse bearing a doll child made of gold. The king obeyed the order of God and bathed king's problem was solved and he was blessed with a real child in his hand by *Kaleeswarar*. The famous *Pandyankottai* (fort) is situated at the northern side of this temple in a dilapidated condition. God ordered him to built the temple. In Kalaiyarkovil, Lord Sundareswarar and his consort Meenakshi are in Linga form called *karanalingam*. It is said that Veerasena or Varaguna Pandya offered prayer to Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar at Madurai daily and returned to

kalaiyarkovil, after attending the *Arthajamapuja*, one day he was unable to go to Madurai on account of torrential rain at Kalaiyarkovil worried and disappointed on not being able to offer prayers to Madurai Meenakshi Sundaeswarar. The God appeared before him asked the king to build the Meenakshi Sundaeswarar also at Kalayarkovil. The main deity is called Kaleeswarar.

NAME OF THE GODDESS

“Arulmigu” means more powerful. The goddess gave power to protect the Pandyas in the *kanapperil* in the battle against Cholas. The *kanapperil* is now known as kalayarkovil. The Goddess helped the Sivagangai maravarpadai also. “Sri” means ‘Lakshmi’. ‘Perumal’ was known as Srinivasan because she was residing in the chest of Thirumal. So in the name of the temple included the name of ‘Sri’. There is a belief that the goddess had made Pandasuravatham and killed Kottaiasura by having a walk on the sword. So the full name of the temple was “*Arulmigu Sri Vaalmel Nadantha Amman*” one who walked on the sword. This historical truth happen every year in the *Vaikasi* month, a ritual is performed every year by a walk over the sword.[3]

STRUCTURE OF THE TEMPLE

Arulmigu Sri Vaalmel Nadantha Amman refers the name of the Pandya king. Varaguna Pandyan ruled kalaiyarkovil in 12th and 13th century. It was a typical example of Pandya architecture with its features. The temple has a stone basement on the basis of agamas. The temple has a *Garbhagriha*, *Antarala*, *Arthamandapa* and *Mahamandapa*. The main deity *Vaalmel Nadantha Amman* which is facing north is enshrined in the *Garbhagriha*. The deity is 7.9 feet in height, the goddess of time, creation, destruction and power. She is in a sitting *Tribhanka* posture facing the north with four arms and hands showing aspects of creation and destruction. The two right hands are held out in blessing (*Varada Mudra*) and down right hand in a mudra saying ‘fear not’ ie., (*Abhaya Mudra*) conferring boon. Her left hand up and down is in *pasam* and *Nilotpava* flower. The sanctum is richly ornamental. There is a big sword on the left side of the *Amman* statue. The passage between *Garbhagriha* and *Ardhamandapa* is known as *antarala*. An *antarala* links *Garbhagriha* with *ardhamandapa*. There is a separate *Ardhamandapa* where the worshippers can stand and worship the main deity *Arulmigu Sri Vaalmel Nadantha Amman*. Next there are *Sri DwaraSakthis* standing on the right and left side of the sanctum. They are

represented in *Mahakali* form, the greater form of kali. It can also be used as an honorific of the goddess kali having ten arms and ten hands with one headed image (*Ekamukhi* form). There are two big lamps in front of the goddess.

The *Mahamandapa* is rectangular in shape. It is supported by 6 pillars. In the left side of the *Mahamandapa*, a big lion standing with eight hands, it was very angry like kali. Her right side hand was taken with the aim of destroying the Demon in the form of bull statue is installed. Further the sculptures were carved on and above the Tower or Gopura to transform a false image into a real child.[4]

MINOR SHRINES

All minor shrines are in the first *prakara* of the temple. In the right side of Garbhagriha facing eastern side the *Sri Ayyanar*, *Purnarkalai*, *Pusphakalai*, *Sri Aanjaneyarand Veerapathiran*, *Sri Bairavar*, *Sri Rakkachi Amman* then Murugan'svelstatuesis installed.

SECOND PRAKARA OF THE TEMPLE

Rising to a height of 18.4 feet the *kodimaram* has the figure of *vedalam* at the top. The lower part of the *kodimaram* has the decorations of *upanaJagadi*, *kumuda* and *kodungai*. The shaft is placed on a

stone platform of 192 length feet 66 widthfeet. The shaft is made up of teak wood. In the opposite side of the mainshrine, there is a tank *orkulam* with steps. Gopuram and *vimana*, *kodimaram* and all painting are *pandyan* style. Besides some floral designs, the figure of kali is depicted on the walk over sword.[5]

HISTORICAL INFORMATION AS GLEANED FROM THE INSCRIPTION

There are inscriptions in this temple dated 1530 and 1532 A.D recording gifts of lands by *Sundara Thoudayar Mavali Vanadhirayar*. The inscriptions of the 12th and 13th century were taken and published in Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy numbering 166 to 183. There are references to Arikesari Maravarman, king kochadiyan ruled in A.D 640. King Varaguna Pandya ruled in A.D 792. In 1216 A.D renovations were done by king Maravarman Veerasena Pandya Vanadhirayarkal, Sivagangai Rajas, commanders and chieftains. Some of the villages were given to the temple. So the temple was grown to a great extent.[6]

Pujas:Puja means a ritual worship with oblations and floral offerings with the accompaniment of chanting of mantras. It is the core-ritual of the temple worship. It

has a powerful sensual impact on the devotees. This is enhanced by the sound of musical instrument combined with the ringing of bells and the chanting of the sacred texts. God is welcomed to be present in the icon by means of the prayers. All the royal paraphernalia meant for a king is shown to the God. The daily offer of worship to the various deities was of fundamental importance. The day to day ceremonies connected with the worship are called *Nithya puja*. They represent the basic ceremonial rituals which are governed by the agamas. These festivals are not compulsory but they add colour and grandeur to the temples. There are great occasions when the devotees from even the distant places gather to take part in the celebration. But their scale and grandeur are determined by the financial resources of the temple and the offerings of devotees.

Festivals: Festivals are the cultural mirror of the life of the Hindus reflecting their feelings, sentiments, beliefs, aspirations, and values like art dance, music and drama. They manifest the inner urge and its fulfillment. Festivals help to retain the best in the culture and by the celebrations in the present hand it down to the future generations.

RITUALS AND FESTIVALS OF THE TEMPLE

Rituals and Festivals bring an air of joy and develop in us feeling of love and brotherhood. Festivals are occasions which give full expression to the social and religious instincts of the people. The observance of daily rituals, monthly as well as yearly festivals without any interruption or hindrance can alone ensure the religious popularity and historical significance of a temple. Two kinds of rituals are prescribed by the principles of *agama*. They are *Anmarthapuja* and *Paramartha puja*. *Anmartha puja* is performed for the uplift and the benefit of the individuals this may be performed for upliftment, redressal or recovery. *Paramartha puja* is performed with all piety by following a special code of conduct. It is performed for peace, prosperity and benefit of the entire mankind. These rituals are performed by the local priests of the temple at specific times regularly. *Arulmigu Sri Vaalmel Nadantha Amman* Temple is also well known for its rituals and festivals. That is why it has attracted people including devotees and pilgrims from the neighbouring places.[7]

DAILY RITUALS

The daily rituals performed in this temple are based on the principle of agama. The daily rituals are performed seven times a day. The daily rituals are as follows the *abishekam*, the deities are decorated and then pujas are performed. After this, puja is continued offering Neem tree, flowers etc. There is a recitation from *Devaram*, and *Amman slogam* also. After that *karpura aradanai* is performed. It is an inspiring ritual carried out every day. At the end, *vibhuti*, *kumkum* and sandal paste are given as *prasadam* to all the devotees present. There is no discrimination inside the temple. In the evening after the *Sayaratchai puja*, the *neivedha prasadam* is given to all the devotees. This *prasadam* is given in all the days. Special *prasadam* is offered to the presiding deities on Tuesday and Friday.

Deepam also plays a significant role in the daily rituals there is special implication for each kind of *Deepam*. Single tier *Deepam*, three tier *Deepam*, Five tier *Deepam* and Nine tier *Deepam*- signifies the *sakthis* in all the days. Nine tier *Deepam* Which signifies nine *sakthis* is widely used in the temple during pujas.

WEEKLY RITUALS

In addition to the aforesaid daily rituals the following weekly and monthly

rituals are carried out uninterruptedly. These weekly rituals go a long way in promoting the worship and in enhancing the influx of devotees. There is a separate statue in the pond which is facing the *Amman sannathi*. Special *puja* is performed to this deity on every Tuesday and Friday which is special days for the *Amman*. In addition to these weekly rituals, there are certain fortnightly rituals which are observed in this temple.

MONTHLY RITUALS

CHITIRAVISU

From the commencement of the first Tamil month *chitirai* till the end of the last month *Panguni* various festivals are carried out. *Chitira pournami* (Full moon Day) was celebrated to the goddess. *Chitira pournami* is celebrated for a period of ten days. The festival was held from 06-05-2018 to 15-05-2018. In that time *Amman* is taken out on a procession in the *Ratha Veedhi* of this place. Then the devotees worshiped with the offerings of coconut, bananas and devotees bought flower garland for *Amman*. In those ten days, *Amman* rally takes place. [8]

TEPPATHIRUVIZHA

Vaikasi Visakam is an auspicious day for the Hindus in *Vaikasi*. It was celebrated three days before *Vaikasi visakam* to every year for goddess. It is

called “seven day festival”. The festival is held from 10A.M to 12 A.M every day which is the right time for making *puja* in the temple from 19.05.2018 to 28.05.2018. King Varaguna Pandya was bestowed with a child when he did the *puja* with a toy child at Amman temple. Afterwards, people had a great belief on the power of Amman and they wish to get the same blessings who are childless. This was celebrated every year with good hope. It is the custom to make *puja* to god Kaleeswarar first and then to Amman but *TeppaTiruvizha* priority is given to Amman and *Utsavamurtis* in three forms with goddesses reached the Amman temple in *RishabaVahana*. The *Pandara* community performs the role of god Kaleeswarar and sprinkle the holy water on the childless couple. Then they drowned with a toy child into *RudraTheertham* opposite to Amman temple to get ridden of their sins.

AADIPOORAM

Another popular festival celebrated in the month of *Aadi* is *Aadipooram*. It is celebrated with pomp and glory. The star *Pooram* was considered to be the birth star (*Jenma Nakshatiram*) of *Ambal* or *sakthi Devi*. Hence that festival was celebrated in *Sri Vaalmel Nadantha Amman* Temple. On that day they decorate the *Amman* with bangles, new wedlock and yellow threads.

That *valaikappu* or bangle festival was a very important festival in that temple. Devotees come to the temple on that auspicious day to witness the performance of the rituals. *Afteraradhana*, *kumkum*, bangles and yellow thread etc are distributed to the devotees present in the temple.

NAVARATHIRI FESTIVAL

Navarathiri festival is also another important festival celebrated with pomp luxury as a holy festival in the month of *Purattasi*. Following “*Amavasaya*”, ie after the New Moon day, that festival is celebrated for 9 days in that temple and culminates on the ninth day called the *Mahanavami* of all the celebrations of *Sakthi*, the *Navarathiri* is the most important. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are considered to be the *Tri Murthi* governing the three eternal functions of creation, preservation and dissolution. Their functional energy is separately considered to be the three *sakthis*, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Parvathi. In three days of the nine of *Naravarthiri* are set apart for each of these goddess or *Sakthi*. In all the nine days, the Goddess’s *Utsava* image is decorated in such away to express the nine aspects. Saraswathi *puja* is also celebrated in a grand manner to gain sound knowledge and wisdom by the grace of the Goddess. On that day during the

Uchchikalam they place all the account notebooks associated with the temple in the front mandapam of the temple and conduct various rituals. On all the days after the pujas an *aradhana naivedyam* offered to the deity is given to the gatherings as *prasadam*. *VijayaDasami* is also celebrated. On that day there is special *aradhanas* and *archana*. People throng in large number for the holy *darshan* of Amman on this day.[9]

DHANUR MONTH PUJA

The *Dhanur* month puja is celebrated during all the days of *Margali*. *Tiruppalieluchchi* is sung in that temple during the dawn every day. The women undertake *pavai nonbu* in that month. They take bath in the early morning hour and observe fasting on behalf of Goddess Parvathi in all the Siva and Vishnu temples. Such fasting and celebrations are common during that month. In the same Tamil month on the day of *Tiruvattirai*, *ArudraDarhasanam* celebrations are arranged. Special rituals are arranged for Goddess in that temple.[10]

MAASIMAGAM OR MAASIKALARI

Another festival associated with the month of *Maasi* is *Maasimaham* and *Mahasivarathri*. *MaasiMaham* festival is a significant one during the month of *Maasi*.

The star *Maham*, when it is on its ascendancy, is called *Maham*. It is the biggest religious festival. On the first Tuesday of the month of *Maasi* the Neem leaf was insulated by the stained thread. All the people are in fasting in kalaiyarkovil. Next Tuesday (13.3.17) evening some women in the temple will dance. People are giving forty or fifty goats to god as offering, then kneel down to God and throw rice in four directions around that temple. These will take up to one hour a night. The next morning, *Annadanam* will be given in that temple. All the devotees who come to this temple get the blessings of the goddess. Further unmarried virgin girls will marry if they pray for that Amman.[11]

The goddess was the wife of god Kaleeswarar in Kalayarkovil. So the first festival is to the goddess. After that there will be a festival for the god Kaleeswarar.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals the features of Dravidian art and architecture in the Pandya period. It gives importance to the cultural heritage of Kalayarkovil. It portrays the architectural skill and the patronage rendered by Kings. It describes religious customs and beliefs of the

people. The celebration of Rituals and Festivals in the Amman temple is clearly explained. It contributes cultural information to History of Tamilnadu.

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