

Evolution of Temples in Pandya country

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Abstract

Pandyas were important patrons of temples throughout their rule in Tamil country. Although the temples came into existence from ancient time, the construction of cave temples begun to increase from 6th century C.E., and the structural temples begun to increase from 8th century C.E. Primitive type of Temples in the beginning was called as hypaetheral temples. They were elevated sites without surrounding walls and roofs. Many primitive beliefs like ancestral worship, animism and totemism were followed. But the post Sangam period and later period witnessed the infusion of many religious cultures into Tamil country and the emergence of structural temples. The early Pandya period witnessed an important landmark in the construction of Temples. Temple construction turned into full-stone religious edifice during 7th century C.E, i.e., cave temples. The temple construction was moved towards large and big temples in Tamil country. It is another development of Temple structure in the later period. This paper will shoe light on evolution of Temples in Pandya Period.

Keywords :- Pandyas, Sangam period

Introduction

Generally, India is a land of large number of temples particularly Tamil country is not an exceptional one. Temples are abundant in the Pandya country. They are hypaetheral, big, small and spreaded all over the Pandya country. If we look at the historical context, it is clear that the processes of social relations were forced for changes and were reinforced by various ideas of sects and cults.

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Sangam Period

Kottam, Koil and Nagaram denote temples in Sangam period. Sangam Anthology which comprises Ettuthogai and Pathupattu provide the informations for the existence and establishment of temples. Further they bring out the functions and activities of the society. In Sangam period people worshiped and performed ritual practices in temples. Many primitive beliefs and magico religious rituals were practiced in natural way of worship. Birds, animals and reptile like snake were used as symbols and vehicles of Gods in later structural temples. Tree was worshipped and attached importance to it as an abode of God or spirit. Perhaps this is the prototype of Totemism. Ancestral worship, Animism and Totemism were popular cult practices on those days.

These kinds of beliefs were rooted in common folk, the refined Brahmanical practices and their edifices are also focused by Sangam texts. Pattinapalai states that Kantu , the embodiment of deity was enshrined at Poduvil Mandram and worshipped by the people. This shrine or cult spot for worship called Poduvil, mandram and referred to in Sangam classics may be generally categorized under the hypaetheral temples.

Ancestral worship was practiced along with the forms of beliefs like Animism and Totemism. The monuments of funerary or sepulcher character essentially indicate that ancestral worship was widely followed throughout Tamil Country, particularly under Pandya region. Nadukal or hero stone which was erected in memory of heroes was popular and also worshiped. The scholars identify that in Tamil culture this may be cited as evidence for the origin of temple formation.

In Sangam period Kottam, Koil and Nagaram indicate the shrine places which acquired a worship of particular deity in relation to Tinai or eco-zone system of Kurunji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Palai. According to this each eco-zone had separate Gods and Goddesses. Among them mayon, seyon, varunan and Indran acquired importance in worshipping. All these facts establish that many kinds of Gods and Goddesses existed and many kinds of worship forms were followed. Sangam Anthology which includes Pattupattu and Ettuthogai provides ample evidences to establish these facts. Further many kinds of kuthus like Kuravai Kuthu, Veriyattu and other sacrificial practices characterize the worship pattern, practiced in these shrine spots. However, there is no debris of evidences of these types of temples of Sangam period. But there are a few good pen pictures in the Sangam Anthology about the nature and form of the contemporary religious edifices.

Many alien religious cultures like Aryanism, Buddhism and Jainism were infused into Tamil country during the Sangam and Post Sangam period. The Sangam anthology like Ettuthogai, Pathupattu, Paripadal and Thirumurugarrupadai give the idea of temples as the focus of devotional cult which

was developed later. It is different from Sangam practices, which has the character of Sangam poetry humanism. Humanism refers to reflection of humanistic characteristic nature rather than devotional character of the later period. Thirumurugarrupadai, which describes the particular shrine abode of Kurunji Tinai deity Lord Muruga , gives the understanding of permanent shrine abode for God.

Early Pandya Period

The early Pandya period witnessed an important landmark in the construction of temples. . Temple construction gained more importance under the Pandya and Pallava period. Alwars and Nayanmars were popularised the temple cult at that time. They were responsible for the erection of numerous temples in Tamil Country. At the meantime the Bhakti movement focuses to gain new momentum with temple in their period.

Cave Temples of Pandyas

Temple construction turned into full-stone religious edifice during 7th century C.E, i.e., cave temples. Pallavas were pioneer of cave sturcture. Mahendravarman I who attempted the cave temple at Mandagapattu and he involved vigorously in carving many more temples. Posterior to this development Pandyas attempted many cave temples in their regime from 7th century C.E. The cave temple at Malayadikuruchi appears to be the earliest piece of construction. Further many more cave temples were dotted in the Pandya Kingdom. They are located at Pillayarpatti, Kunnakudi, Anaimalai , Tirupparankundram, Arittappati, Sittannaval and other places. These cave temples belong to Saiva and Vasihlava sects. Among them large number of cave temples are affiliated to Saivism. The Vishnu cave temples are to be seen in Anaimalai, Thirumayyam and Thiruthangal. Even the early Pandya rulers contributed to the development of cave temples which showed the further development in temple construction. Sittannaval and Umaiandar Koil at Thenparankundram are good examples for Jain cave temples. Further inscriptions engraved in these cave temples or sacred cult spots, show the different transition and deviation from the previous period.

Totally sixty cave temples were constructed by Pandya rulers. The significant fact of cave temples of Pandyas is that, they still exist under worship by the people. Cave temples at Tirupparankundram, Tirumayyam, Anaimalai, Kudumiyamalai, Kunnattur, Arittapatti are cited as examples. Among the cave temples of Pandyas, few of them had developed into famous centres of worship and converted into structural form of temples like Tiruchendur, Kunnattur, Puvalaikudi and Tirukokarnam temples and others. Kalugumalai temple is the monolithic temple in the Pandya kingdom. These cave and

monolith temples were royal executions of Pandyas and they were also patronized by the other people as well as kings.

The another remarkable development seen was a major shift from rock cut style to structural style in the evolution of temples in Tamil country. The developments of structural temples were resulted in the establishment of Brahmadeya, Devadana and Sabha. Large number of temples had been constructed and renovated by Alvars and Nayanmars during the Bhakti Movement. Many inscriptions could be cited as examples to attest this view. Brick structure, stone structure were restored from brick structure into stone structure seemed to be common in the process of temple development from the medieval period. According to the inscriptions found in Manikanteswara temple at Kilamathur, Madurai District, it is understood that the affairs of stone temple are named Srikantheswaram. It was the old Devadana lands which were checked by the time of Vira Pandya. Apart from these it indicates the temples have a brick structure and it was converted into stones.

Structural Temples in Imperial Pandya Period

The temple construction was moved towards large and big temples in Tamil country. It is another development of Temple structure in the later period. Pallavas, Cholas and Pandya rulers were involved in constructing large and big size temples with magnanimous art and architectural features like Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi stands for Pallavas, Bragadeeswara temple at Thanjavur stands for Cholas and Meenakshi temple at Madurai stands for Pandyas .

The later Pandya period evidenced the construction of huge structural temples. Pallavas were the pioneers in this kind of structural development of temples and their magnum opus are Kanchi and Mahabalipuram. Subsequently this pattern was followed and contributed to the construction by Pandyas and Cholas. They were fulfilling reconstruction and renovation of large number of temples in their regime. Later on several huge temples had emerged with large complexes, gopuras and vimanas. Most of the structural temples were constructed with garpagrahas for housing the Gods and Goddesses. Apart from these mandapas were evolved with elaborate rituals. The archaeological, epigraphical and literary evidences provide ample scope to trace the origin and development of various types of temples from early period to 12th century C.E.

Conclusion

At the outset all these facts give the idea of varied types of temples, developed and patronized by Pandya kings in their country. Various types of temples may be catagorized as Sangam age temples (built by perishable materials), Cave temples ,Structural temples ,Temples with large mandapas and

gopuras. These focus categories and explain about the origin and development of temples in Pandya country from Sangam period to later Pandya period.

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