

**THE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF VEEZHINATHAR SWAMY TEMPLE AT
THIRUVEEZHIMIZHALAI IN TAMILNADU**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focus on *the architectural features of the Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu*. Every temple has its own myths and it speaks the religious antiquity of the temples, based on the myths and the contemporary stories, the temples had been built and even rebuilt by the rulers of the dynasties like the many rules. So, rulers of the temple myths related to this temple is taken into consideration while tracing the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai. Thiruveezhimizhalai is situated at a distance of 10 kilometers West of Poonthottam which lies between Thiruvarur and Mayiladuthurai in Tamilnadu State. This temple owned by Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam, there with many glories. Saints Thirugnanasambandar, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swamihal, Santana and Arunagirinathar have visited for this temple and sung hymns praising the deity. The major contribution had been made by the Imperial Cholas, the successive dynasties like the Pandyas, Vijayanagar, Nayaks and the Marathas of Thanjavur. They had also contributed to the architectural development and greatness of this temple, this beauty is still being maintained due to the services of renovations and reconstructions. In the inscriptions, the main deity of the temple is called Thiruveezhimizhalai Udaiyar and the Goddess is referred to as Pidariyar. The earliest inscriptions of this temple belong to the period of a Parakesarivarman of Chola dynasty who may be identified with Vijayalaya Chola. This temple has Vimana, Sanctum Sanctorum, Arthamandapa, Mahamandapa, Mukamandapa, Subsidiary Shrines and Enclosure Walls and others.

Keywords: Poonthottam, Adheenam, Vimana, Sanctum Sanctorum,

Introduction

This paper focus on *the architectural features of the Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu*. Thiruveezhimizhalai is situated at a distance of 10 kilometers West of Poonthottam which lies between Thiruvarur and Mayiladuthurai in Tamilnadu State. This temple owned by Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam, there with many glories. Saints Thirugnanasambandar, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swamihal, Santana and

Arunagirinathar have visited for this temple and sung hymns praising the temple deity. The history of the Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai could be reconstructed on the basis of historical information could be gleaned from the inscriptions and literatures available relating to this temple. Even though, the puranic accounts are considered to be semi-historical and quasi-historical in nature, yet some amount of historicity can be obtained. Most of the records belong to the later Chola period, some belong to the Pandyas and few to the Vijayanagara rulers. These records are largely donative in character, still they furnish valuable information about the architectural features, administration and other matters connected with this temple. In the inscriptions, the main deity of the temple is called Thiruveezhimizhalai Udaiyar and the Goddess is referred to as Pidariyar. The earliest inscriptions of this temple belong to the period of a Parakesarivarman of Chola dynasty who may be identified with Vijayalaya Chola. The temple has Vimana, Sanctum Sanctorum, Arthamandapa, Mahamandapa, Mukamandapa, Subsidiary Shrines, Enclave Walls.

I. VIMANA

This part focus on the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu, particularly Vimana portion. The *Vimana* of the Veezhinathar Swamy Temple is called as *vinnizhi vimana*,¹ it is of *madakkoil* type according to one of the legends of the temple. This *Vimana* was brought from the heaven and Lord Indra had a ride on this *vimana*, there are quite a number of temples, belong to this type and they are located near the banks of the river Kaveri. It is said that saint Thirugnanasambandar had a *darshan* of Lord here in his *Thirutthoni vimana*, just as in Sirkali.² This *vimana* was constructed based on the mythical origin of this temple. The *vimana* of the temple is divided into six parts,³ *adhithana* is the basement of the *vimana*, it contains the following parts namely *upana*, *jagati* with *padma*, *kumuda* and *vedikai*. *Upana* is the lower most part of the basement, it projects beyond the vertical norm. It consists of a series of plinth stones galloped on to in the form of lotus petals, suggesting a *padmakosa* (Lotus mould design) conception of the shrine. Above the *padmapitha* is present the *jagati* portion with *padma*. The *jagati* is the rectangular portion of the basement, the *padma* design is present both on its top and below.

The date of the *vimana* could be fixed only on the basis of the style of *kumuda*, the large-sized rounded *kumuda* here confirm the date of the construction of the *vimana* to Parantaka-I. It separates the *kumuda* and the *kapota* or cornice moulding, it is the top-most portion of the basement and it is ornamented with Chaitya – windows. The next architectural portion is *Bhitti*

or wall, this part is decorated with pilasters and devakoshtas, no using the images of the deities. The outer walls of the *vimana* are divided into vertical panels by pilasters. There are twelve in total, each one has square base, shaft and a cushion shaped capital with bevelled end, it consists of cornice and a frieze of *yalis*.

The cornice is the middle portion of the *prasthara*, it decorated with a series of *kudus* with *sinhamuha* (*couching lion*) *finials*, and such type of ornament is called as *chaitya* - *window*. The entablature is finished off by a series row of *yalis with makara* (an ornamental motif developed from an alligat of crocodile head with glenified tail head at the corners. The frieze of *yalis* gives a beautiful look, in art, they represent strength and vigour. Some figures of *yalis* are represented with riders, here the super structure consists of three parts namely *pyramidal roof with griva, sikhara and stupi*.

II. SANCTUM SANCTORUM

This part focus on the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu, particularly Sanctum Sanctorum portion. The sanctum - sanctorum being square in shape faces east, it measures 10x12 metres length and breadth the height is approximately 20 metres it is built out of well dressed granite stones. The sanctum is called the house of the womb, of germ or embryo for it is here that regeneration is effected and the higher self of the devotee is reborn through initiation and self realisation.⁴ On the exterior side of the sanctum-sanctorum, there exists a mandapa called *nirali mandapa* or *unnali mandapa* which is supported by sixteen pillars of Chola period. The capital portion of the pillars contain cushion shape with bevelled end, the characteristic feature of the Chola style.

III. ARDHAMANDAPA

This part focus on the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu, particularly Arthamandapa portion. The *ardhamandapa* is also square in shape, the height of the *ardhamandapa* is eight metres, it measures 26x4 metres length and breadth. The entrance wall has two pilasters, which have cushion capital, with bevelled end palagai and then has padma design; all indicate the characteristic features of a Chola style. The inscriptional evidence attested this view, that the structure was the contribution of the Chola King Parantaka - I. At the entrance of sanctum, within *ardhamandapa* is present a pillar called *arasanikal* which is the symbolic representation of the marriage ceremony of the god and goddess.

IV. MAHAMANDAPA

This part focus on the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu, particularly Mahamandapa portion. The *mahamandapa* is rectangular in shape, this *mandapa* measures by 15x15 metres length and breadth. The height measures approximately 8 mts, the entrance of the *mahamandapa* has two pilasters of Chola style.⁵ This *mandapa* has eighteen pillars, one is called as "*pandalkal*" which remind the custom of erecting such pillar, at the time of the marriage of god and goddess. Even now, in the society, also the same practice is being continued, the pillars inside *mahamandapa* have cushion capitals with bevelled ends indicating the Chola style. The portion in between the two squares is divided into sixteen facets.

V. MUHAMANDAPA

This part focus on the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu, particularly Muhamandapa portion. This mandapa being in rectangular shape, it measures 12x10 metres length and breadth, the height measures 10 metres, the eighteen pillars of the *mandapa* are in Vijayanagar style. The capital portion of the pillars have pendent drop design, a typical Vijayanagar style. The highly ornamented *kalasa* as well as the *nagabanda* (snakehood) designs at the base of the pillars also support such dating the *abacus* or *palagai* is very small in size, unlike the Chola types.

SUBSIDIARY SHRINES

This part focus on the architectural features of Veezhinathar Swamy Temple at Thiruveezhimizhalai in Tamil Nadu, particularly about Subsidiary Shrines. This Shrines shows into Nine Divisions as follows:

(a) Mappillai Swamy Shrine (Kalyana Sundarar)

The shrine of Mappillai Swamy is present inside the *mahamandapa* facing the southern direction, the shrine measures 10x12 metres length and breadth, this height is approximately eight metres. On the basis of its architectural stylistic features the shrine can be attributed to the period of the King Parantaka-I.

b) Thiagarajar Shrine

This shrine is also called as *Cakrapradanamurty*, it measures approximately 10x12 metres and the height is 8 metres.

c) Munnai Vinayaka Shrine

It is located on the southern side of the *garbagriha*, it faces the eastern side and it is constructed out of granite stones. It measures 2x2 metres length and breadth, the height is 3 metres. The walls of the shrine is ornamented with twenty pilasters of Chola period. This Vinayaka is popularly called as Munnai Vinayaka, the inscriptions of Rajaraja -III are present on the walls of this shrine. From the stylistic and inscriptional evidences, this shrine could be dated to the period of Cholas of 12th-13th century C.E.

d) Somaskanda Shrine

It is located on the western side and faces the east, the walls of the shrine are constructed out of stone and the super structure is only out of bricks and mortar. It measures 6x6 metres in length and breadth and the height measures 5 metres. The shrine is preceded by a mandapa containing nineteen pillars of Vijayanagar style, having the pendent drop design on its capitals. The broad-sized *nagabanda* design present on the base also confirm the above date. The pillar contains two square portions, the portion in between the squares are divided into sixteen facets of equal size. Normally, the construction of this type of mandapa was undertaken only by the Vijayanagar rulers. The same type of mandapas of Vijayanagar period are present in the other temples like Hazara Ramaswamy, and Vittolaramasamy, both at Hampi the capital city of Vijayanagar. In Tamil Nadu, the mandapas at Vellore, Kumbakonam, Tadpatri, Srirangam, Tiruvarur and Chidambaram are the best examples of Vijayanagar period.⁶

e) Subramanya Shrine

This shrine is located in the north western corner of the inner enclosure wall and faces the eastern side. The height of the *shrine* is 5 metres, it measures 6x6 metres length and breadth. The entire structure is constructed out of stone, it could be dated to the period of Cholas of 10th-11th century C.E., on architectural stylistic background. The mandapa preceding the Subramanya shrine has ten pillars, dated to the period of 16, 17th centuries C.E.

f) Gajalakshmi Shrine

It is a granite structure located on the western side of the inner enclosure wall, the height measures 5 metres. It measures 3x3 metres length and breadth, it could be dated to the period of the Cholas of 10th-11th century C.E. The shrine houses the stucco image of the goddess.

g) Adi-Chandikeswarar Shrine

It is located on the northern side of the inner *prakara*, it measures 2x2 metres length and breadth, the height of the *shrine* measures 2 metres. Being a granite structure, it contains the inscriptions of the king Kulottunga- III, and probably under whose period, the structure might

have been reconstructed with stone. The walls contain fifteen pilasters of Chola style, the mandapa in front is supported by a short pillar which has inscriptions. On the basis of both the architectural and inscriptional evidences, the structure is dated to the period of 12th century C.E.

h) Nataraja Shrine

It is located on the northern side of the inner enclosure wall, it measures 6x6 metres length and breadth. The height of the *shrine* is 5 metres, in front of this shrine, there is a mandapa supported by sixteen pillars of later Chola period. The pillars have the characteristic cushion capital with bevelled end, the *karukkukatta* designs and the small sized *nagabandha* design date the structure to a later Chola period of 12th century C.E.

i) Mulanathar Shrine

Facing the western direction, the shrine is measures 4x4 metres length and breadth and the height is three metres, a nandi is present in front of the shrine. Inscriptions are present on the walls of the shrine, on architectural ground, the shrine is dated to the Chola period of 13th century C.E. The inscriptional evidence also confirms such date.

FIRST ENCLOSURE WALL

The temple has three *prakaras*, the first *prakara* could be dated to the period of Parantaka-I, the second *prakara* has shrines, mandapas and walls. The shrines of Vinayaka and Subramanya are present, one on each side of the entrance of the *gopura*. The practice of constructing separate shrines for Vinayaka and Subramanya at the entrance of the gate ways was started from the later Chola period onwards only.

SECOND ENCLOSURE WALL

It is larger in size than the inner enclosure wall and the construction was caused by Vijayanagar ruler Viruppana Udayar.⁷ *Balipita* is the raised pedestal on which floral or cooked offerings are made, the intention of offering this food is to appease the *prakara* deities in not giving any disturbance to the ordinary conduct of the daily worship.⁸ It is present next to the flagstaff, the structure is beautified with floral designs, it measures 1 metre in length and breadth and the height is 1 metre only. The philosophical significance of constructing the *balipitha* at the entrance of the temples that is a place where one has to sacrifice *anavam* (egoism) *kanma* (self-conceit) and *maya* (illusion).

Flagstaff is placed on a raised platform and the purpose is to hoist the flag, at the time of the starting the festivals of the temple. It is situated on the south - western corner of the second *prakara*. It is said that at this place St.Sundarar had received *padikkasu* from Lord Siva when

there was a severe famine occurred in Thiruveezhimizhalai. It measures 1.5 x 1.5 metres length and width and the height is 0.5 metres, it is present on the western side of the second *prakara*. From an inscriptional evidence, the third *prakara* was attributed to the Chola ruler Kulotturiga-I,⁹ the *prakara* is noted for the presence of various structures like shrines, tanks etc.

THIRD ENCLOSURE WALL

The inscriptions of this temple mention the presence of various *nandavanams* within the enclosure walls, further the inscriptions state the donations made for the maintenance of the flower gardens. It was during the time of the Chola king Parantaka-I, the flower gardens like *Umainangai nandavanam* and *Thiruthanthontri nayanar nandavanams* made their appearance.¹⁰ During the reign of Rajadhiraja-I, nine *nandavanams* (gardens) had been formed,¹⁰ the names of the each and every *nandavanam* had been mentioned in this inscription. It is said in the *sthalapurana* that there existed as many as twenty-five *thirthas* around this temple, they all speak the religious importance of the temple.¹¹ The *thirthas* might be dated to an early period but construction of the steps around the *thirthas* began with the patronage of the kings on later periods. A well is present on the northern side of the first enclosure wall, it is said that once it was called *padravalli thirtha*, due to the sanctity of its water. Even now the water from the well is being used for bathing ceremonies.

CONCLUSION

From the proper analysis of the architectural features of this temple, it can be stated that the major contribution had been made by the Imperial Cholas. The successive dynasties like the Pandyas, Vijayanagar, Nayaks and the Marathas of Thanjavur had also contributed to the architectural development of this temple. The Vimanas, Mandapas, Gopuras, Subsidiary Shrines, all speaks the architectural greatness of this temple, the architectural beauty of the temple is still being maintained due to the services of renovations and reconstructions¹². Drastic measures should be taken by the temple authorities to keep the architectural glory and grandeur of the temple for all the years to come.

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