



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

STRUCTURE OF SRI SOWMIYA NARAYANA PERUMAL TEMPLE - THIRUKOSHTIYUR IN SIVAGANGAI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

KEY WORDS: Thirukoshtiyur temple, Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Structure, Mahamaga well.

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ABSTRACT

Thirukoshtiyur, the village is notable for the great temple, Thirukoshtiyur is known for its great temple, Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Thirukovil (Thirukovil means temple). which is one of the 108 divya desams. The holy shrines for the Vaisnavites. It comes under Pandya Naatu Thiruthalanganl. Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Thirukovil, surrounded by a high walls on its four sides, with a Raja Gopuram (Main tower) at the entrance which shows the gigantism. The inner infrastructure, mainly sanathis(separate shrines) are unlike other temples. Inside the temple complex, The shrine for narayana is constructed in form of three stages, similar to that of three floors in a building. This interprets as Boologam (earth), Thiruparkadal, Vaikundham. Narayana appears in three stages in three forms. In Ground floor as Krishna in dancing posture. Next level he is sayana thirukolam (sayana = sliding, thirukolam = posture), a posture resting on Athishesha. And top most level in standing posture as Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal. This form of appearances of Narayana is been poetically described as Nindran (means Standing posture), Kidanthan (means sleeping posture), Aadinan (means dancing posture) by Alwars.

Introduction :

Thirukoshtiyur is a village located near Tirupathur (on Tirupathur-Sivaganga road) on the way to Sivaganga, Tamil Nadu. It is 9 km from Thirupathur. This place has an importance among Vaishnavites. The Village is notable for the great temple, which is one of the 108 divya desams. The holy shrines for the Vaisnavites. It comes under Pandya Naatu Thiruthalanganl (region once ruled by Pandyas).

Significance of the Temple

Thirukoshtiyur, derived from its native name Thirukotiyyur. During Kritha yuga, Rishis, devas and people were tortured, anguished by the aura Hiranyakashipu as the vengeance for hiranyaksha's death in hands of Lord Vishnu in the form of Varaha Avatar. Devas, Rishis approached Brahma and Shiva for the solution. In response Brahma, Shiva, all devas, Saptha Rishis decided to meet at one place to discuss regarding. Finally all chose Thirukotiyyur as the spot. Together they came like a group and so the name came as Thirukoshtiyur, koshti means in group or as a team. Thirukoshtiyur is known for its great temple, Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Thirukovil (Thirukovil means temple). One of the 108 divya desams in India.

History of the Temple

Fuelled by the boon obtained from Lord Brahma and the arrogance grown then, Hiranya began to harass the Devas. They sought protection from Lord Vishnu. Lord called them for a discussion to decide on the action against Hirayna. The sages, still afraid of the demon, told the Lord that the venue of the discussion should be such not known to Hiranya, which Lord approved. Meantime, Kadhamba Maharshi was performing penance here on Lord Perumal. He had a boon that there should be no disturbance in the place of his penance. So this place-Thirukoshtiyur was chosen for discussion. Lord said that He would take Narsimha Avatar to destroy Hiranya. Pleased with the decision, Devas and sages begged the Lord to grant them the darshan of his forthcoming Avatar. Lord was too merciful to grant them the darshan even before it took place. Yet, not contended with this darshan, Devas and sages begged the Lord to grant them darshan of His other forms too. Lord granted His reclining, sitting, standing and walking forms. As the Tirukkai (harships) of Devas and Rishis were solved in this place, it came to be known as Tirukkottiyur.

Structure of the Temple

Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Thirukovil, surrounded by a high walls on its four sides, with a Raja Gopuram (Main tower) at the entrance which shows the gigantism. The inner infrastructure, mainly sanathis(separate shrines) are unlike other temples. Inside the temple complex, The shrine for narayana is constructed in form of three stages, similar to that of three floors in a building. This interprets as Boologam (earth), Thiruparkadal, Vaikundham. Narayana appears in three stages in three forms. In Ground floor as Krishna in dancing posture. Next level he is sayana thirukolam

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Besides consorts Mothers Sridevi and Bhodevi, Lord Soumya Nayaraya Perumal graces the devotees with Madhu, Kaidaba, Indira, emperor Pururuva, Kadhamba Maharshi, Lord Brahma, Mothers Saraswathi and Savithri. Lord Santhanakrishna (Perumal who grants child boon) is in a cradle. He is also praised as Prarthana Kannan. Those seeking child boon pray here lighting lamps. Indira was staying in this place till Lord killed Hiranya, gave the Soumya Narayana Vighraha to Kadhamba Maharshi. He was worshipping Perumal in his Indraloka earlier. This Vighraha-idol is the procession deity of this temple. In his Mangalasanam, Periazhwar had included this procession Perumal too. The place and temple has the reputation of Mangalasanam of five Azhwars, Periazhwar, Thirmangai Azhwar, Thirumazhisai Azhwar, Boothathazhwar and Payazhwar.

It is noteworthy that divine sculptor Vishwakarma and demon sculptor Mayan had jointly worked in the design and construction of the Ashtanga Vimana. The Vimana has three petals representing the three syllables Ohm, Namu, Narayanaya. Perumal blesses the devotees in four forms from the Vimana – as Nardana Krishna (Bhooloka Perumal) from the base petal, as Soumya Narayana Perumal (Thiruparkadal-Milk Ocean-Perumal) from the first tier in reclining form, as Upendra Narayana (Devaloka Perumal) in the second tier, as Paramapada Nathar (Vaikunda Perumal) in a sitting form in the third tier. Mother Tiru Mamagal has Her own shrine, also praised as Nila Mamagal and Kulama Magal.

Prayer with lamp is an important prayer here. Devotees buy a lamp, place it at the feet of Lord, take it back home, place a coin and Tulsi leaf, keep it in a box and cover it. They believe that Lord and Mother had come to their home in the form of Tulsi and coin. Realizing their wishes, they take this lamp along with another one lit with ghee on the Masi (February-March) float festival day for worship. New devotees coming there take this lamp for their worship.

AsdathingaVimanam (tower)

The temple is situated in a serene village and a huge tower welcomes us inside the temple. The uniqueness of this temple is, there are three tiers in the main Vimanam above the sanctum and each tier houses a deity, the main one being on the first floor. This is a rock cut temple and here we can see the blend of Vaishnavism and Saivism. At the entrance there is a separate shrine for Siva with Nandi mandapam in front. As we enter the Perumal temple, there is a small shrine for Vinayagar, On the

ground floor there is a beautifully carved statue of dancing Krishna with Rukmani and Satyabhama. There are many idols of Azhwars (Vaishnavite saints) in this prakaram. Turning left, climbing a few steps one would reach the Sowmya Narayana Perumal's sanctum. The Moolavar (the main deity) is Vishnu in Anantha Sayanam known as Ugramellanaiyan and along with him are Boodevi and Sreedevi. The Utsavar is Sowmaya Narayana Perumal with his consorts and there are also idols of dancing Krishna, Chakrathazhwar, Ramanujar and Nambigal. On the ground floor is the shrine of the Thayar , known here as Thirumamagal . From the Thayar sannidhi there are a fleet of steps which takes one to the top of the Vimanam .A trip up the vimanam is adventurous , scary and cannot be accessed without the help of a guide as the maze like formation may make one feel dis -oriented. The width of the narrow rock- cut staircase is just about 21/2 feet. Lack of air, the dark interiors , frequent twist and turns in the steep staircase without railings does create panic. At times one has to bend double as the ceiling is too low.

On the 2nd floor is the sannidhi of the Upendra Narayana with his consorts and here the Lord is in a standing position . There are beautiful murals on the walls of this temple and it is believed to be one thousand years old . Above this sanctum is another sannidhi of Paravasudevan with his consorts (All different names of Vishnu) . From the terrace of the Vimanam we could see the house of Sri Tirukoshtiyur Nambigal who was the Guru of Ramanujana, God's devotee and a great Vaishnava saint. It is believed that Ramanujam gave the *Mantropadesham* of **Om Namo Narayana** to all his disciples from this place. It is also said that from the top of the vimanam one could also watch the Meenakshi Kovil's tower at Madurai which is 70 Kms. away.

Outside, when we circumambulate there are shrines for Emperumanar ,Chakrathazhwar, Nambigal, all Vaishnava saints.Facing the west we could see two huge idols of Narasimha Moorthy fighting Hiranya Kashipu and tearing him by putting him on his lap (photos included). The Vimanam is ashtanga vimanam. Similar Vimanams are in Madurai , Koodal azhagar temple and other one in Chengalpet near Chennai. .

The legend is that this was the place of Kadamba Maharshi's ashram and he was being tormented by Hiranya Kashipu.To find a solution to this, all the rishis and devas assembled in Goshti (group) and hence this place came to be known as Tiru Koshtiyur. Here only the Prahlada charithram and slaying of Hirnyakashipu was planned. It is also believed that Vishnu gave the Anantha sayana darshanam to Lord Indra here and the Sowmaya Narayana Perumal who is also known as Madhavan was given to Kadamba Maharishi by Lord Indra.

Mahamaga well:

While Emperor Pururupa was carrying out renovation of this temple, the great Mahamaga festival of Kumbakonam also coincided. The emperor wished to have Perumal darshan in this place. Responding to his prayer, Holy Ganga sprang up in the well at the northeast side and Perumal gave darshan to the emperor from this well. The well is thus named Mahamaga Kinaru. Well-Kinaru in Tamil. This festival occurs once in 12 years when Lord grants darshan sitting on His Garuda Vahan.

The place and temple occupy a great place of importance in the history of Vaishnavism. Being one among the celebrated 108 Divya Desas of Lord Vishnu, the temple has the famous Astanga Vimana above the presiding Perumal. Just a couple of Vishnu temples have this Vimana. This is also a historical place from where great Vaishnavite Acharya the author of Visishtadvaita philosophy and social reformer Sri Ramanuja preached the holy Narayana Mantra to everyone irrespective of caste discrimination sitting on this Vimana.

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