HISTORY OF BIG TEMPLE, THANJAVUR AND ITS CONSECRATION – A STUDY

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Brahadeeswara Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is located in Thanjavur. It is also known as Periya Kovil (Big Temple) RajaRajewara Temple and Rajarajeswaram. In Tamil, the temple is called as “Peruvudaiyar Kovil”. It is one of the largest temples in India. This temple is an example of Hindu Architecture from South India from the Chola period. The Temple turned 1000 years old in 2010. The Temple is also called as Dhakshina Moorthy of South.

Brahadeeswara Meaning

Brahadeeshwara is a Sanskrit composite word composed of Brihat which means big, great, etc, and Ishvara means “Lord Shiva”, Supreme being suprenatman (soul). The name means the “Great Lord, Big Shiva Temple”.

The Big temple (or) Peruvudaiyar Koil was built to grace the throne of the Chola Empire by the Emperor Arulmozhivarman, popularly known as Rajaraja Chola I. This temple is also known as Periya Koil, Brihadeshwara Temple, Raja Rajeswara Temple and Rajarajeshwaram. The esteemed architect and engineer of the temple was Kunjara Mallan Raja Raja Perunthatchan.

From the epigraphical evidence it is known about Rajaraja I started building this temple on his 19th year and completed of his 25th year. It took just 6 years to complete the temple.
Rajaraja I named this temple as "Rajarajesvaram". Lord Shiva in Linga form as "Peruvudaiyar" in this temple. So, the temple also called as the deity's name as "Peruvudaiyar koil".

In the later period Maratha and Nayaks rulers constructed various shrines and gopurams of the temple. During the Maratha rule the temple was named in Sanskrit as Brahdisvaram and the deity as Brahadesvara.

**Sri Vimana**

The Magnificent Srivimana is pyramidal in structure and is 60.96 meters tall. The foundation for this gopuram is only seven feet deep.

The Sri Vimana is of the Dravidian style of architecture. It rises to a height of about 216 feet, a tower of fourteen storeys, finally decorated with pilasters riches and images of Gods. The basement of the structure which supports the tower is 96 feet square. The silkara (or) cupolic dome is octagonal in shape and crowns the Vimana. The glided kalasa over it is 12.5 feet high.

On the front side of the Vimana the carved the sculptures is abode of Shiva called as Mahamera. The whole of Sri vimana is built using granite rocks.

The first three stages of the Sri Vimana houses, various forms of Shiva and Parvathi including the Dakshinamurthy, Bichandavar, Lingothbavar, Durga, Shiva and Parvathi in natural standing pose called Astagostam. In the third stage many view of warrior standing with weapon pose, was carved.

The top of the Sri Vimana near the neck of the gopuram there are 8 Nandhi carved very prominently. These Nandhis are huge and carved from single stone.
Keralanthagan Gopuram

This is five stage gopuram. In the front of the gopuram carved various forms of Shiva - Rudharathandava pose. In the back side of the gopuram carved Krishna Leela, Mahavishnu in the first stage, Narasimha combating with Hiranyakasibu in one side and Hiranya Samkara on the other side on the top stage their carved the Shiva and Vishnu idols.

It is to be noted that Rajaraja Chola I assumed the title of "Keralanthakan", which means destroyer of Kerala, after his victory over Kerala King Baskararavivarma. This gopuram is named after this title. The Keralanthakan Gopuram is constructed on the same architectural concept of the Srivimana.

Rajarajan Gopuram

Rajarajan Gopuram is built by Rajaraja I and depicts the Chola architecture. The two huge 15 feet monolithic Dwarapalas on either side of this entrance which reveals that the God is everywhere as shown by the upper two hands and the pose of right hand index finger denotes that God is one and only one. They carved there a elephant is being swallowed by a snake and the lion standing behind. This denotes even if one false such a big problem as of this magnitude a strong stand similar to that of a lion. Strong standing posture will lead ways to realize the God.

Nandi Mandapam

The Nandi Mandapam has a monolithic seated bull giving the sanction. The Nandhi (Bull) facing the Mukh-Mandapam weighs about 25 tones. It is made of a single stone and is about 2m in height, 6 in length and 2.5 M in
width. The image of Nandi is a monolithic one and is one of the largest in the country.

Other Mandapas

The Two mandapa namely Mahamandapa and Makha Mandama, are square plan structures axially aligned between the sanction and the Nandi mandapa. The Mahamadapa has six pillars, one each side the Mahanmandapa has six pillars on two giant stone Dvarapalas. It is linked to the Makha – Mandapa also has Dvarapalas. In the western wall Cella was a massive grasite Ganeshabuilt during Rajaraja -1 Era, but who is now found in the Tiruch – Churru-Malingai (Southern veranda) of the Shaktish Traditions Seven Mothers, only Varahi Survives in a broken form. Her remnants are now found in a smallmodern era brick “Varahi Shrine” in the southern side of the courtyard. The original version of the others along with their original Chola shrines are missing.

Murals

The temple features Amny Sculpturism relief and Murals. The painters used natural pigments and infused it into the wet limestone layer as it was setting some of the paintings in the sanctum sanctorum and the walls in the passage had been damaged the Archaeological Survey of India, use its unique de-stucco process to restore 16 Nayak paintings. These 400-yearsold paintings have been mounted on fiberglass boards, displayed at a separate pavilion.

Inscriptions

The temple complex has sixty four Inscriptions of Rajaraja Chola-I. Twenty nine Inscriptions of Rajendra Chola, one each of Vikrama Chola, Kulattunga – I and Rajendradeva (Rajendra Chola-II), three of a probably
Pandya king. Two of Vijayangara rulers namely Achyutappa Nayaka and Mallapa Nayaka.

**Millennium Commemoration**

The Big temple turned 1000 years old in September 2010. To celebrate the 100\textsuperscript{th} year of the grand structure, the State Government and the town held many cultural events. To mark the occasion, the State Government organized a Bhrahathanatyam Yajna.

**Cultural Events**

The Brihadeeshwar temple at Thanjavur is the site of annual dance festivals around February, around the Mahashivaratri. The Temple car festival was rolled out on its trial run from apposite to Sri Ramar temple on 20 April 2015 witnessed by a large number of people. Nine days later, the Maiden Procession of the Temple Car was held.

**Consecration in Big Temple**

The First Consecration (Kumbabhishegam) to the Big Temple was held in 1010 CE and was done by the King Raja Raja Cholan I himself, who built the temple. He did it on 25\textsuperscript{th} year of his coming to the power as of inscriptions in the temple.

According to Kudavayil Balasubramanian, the temple researcher and epigraphist in Thanjavur, as per manuscripts available at Rajah Serfoji II Saraswathi Mahal Library and Inscription in the Kalasam on the temple, the Kumbabhishegam (Consecration) was performed to the temple during Maratha Period by Raja Serfoji I in 1729 CE and by his great Grand Son Sivajindra Chatrapathi in 1843 CE (Table-1).
The present Kalasam is said to have been made during the period of Raja Serfoji I and placed on the top. That the Kalasam was presented by him has been written in the Kalasam as “His Udayam”. The Kalasam was renovated during the Kumbabhishegam performed by his great grand son. “Not only the Kalasam, but also the entire Vimana was Gold Plated during the Raja Raja Cholan I period, according to another inscription” said Balasubramanian.

Then after 177 years, the Consecration was performed to the temple on April 3, 1980 CE by the then Collector Gangappa. The next Consecration was performed in 1997.

Consecration in 2020

The present Consecration (Kumbabhishegam) to the Big Temple held on 5th February 2020, which was the Sixth Consecration in the history. The Consecration was held after 25 years gap. The Balalayam to the Images and Deities was performed in December 2019. Application of Ashtha Babdhana Marunthu to all the Deities has been done and the Kalasam on top of Vimana had been removed for renovation and Gold Plated and then again installed.

Yagasala has been put up at Pethannan Kalaiyarangam near the temple. The police were given importance to crowed management and had chalked out a plan for regulating the crowed clear entry and exit point. M. Govinda Rao, the Collector of Thanjavur had arranged the function. In the Consecration, more than 10 Lakhs devotees and the tourist from across the country took part.
Table-1. Consecration in Big Temple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.no</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of Devotees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1010 CE</td>
<td>Raja Raja Chola I</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1729 CE</td>
<td>Rajah Serfoji I (Maratha)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1843 CE</td>
<td>Sivajindra Chatrapathi (Maratha)</td>
<td>Thousands of Devotees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1980 CE</td>
<td>Gangappa District Collector, Thanjavur</td>
<td>4 Lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1997 CE</td>
<td>Government of Tamilnadu</td>
<td>6.5 Lakhs</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>2020 CE</td>
<td>Government of Tamilnadu</td>
<td>10 Lakhs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Source: Saraswathi Mahal Library, Thanjavur)

Conclusion

Thanjavur is an important centre of South Indian religion, art and architecture. The Big Temple is an important example of architecture achieved during the Chola Dynasty. The Big Temple is part of the UNESCO world heritage site known as the "Great Living Chola Temple"
REFERENCES


