

**UMAMAKESWARA TEMPLE AT TIRUNALLAM –  
A STUDY ON ART AND ARCHITECTURE****Dr. V. Raju**Assistant Professor,  
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Annamalainagar**ABSTRACT**

During the reign of the imperial chōlas, the Tañcāvūr district has been studded with innumerable temples. Between the period of Parāntakā I and Rajaraja the Great, a new type of architecture had become the fashion of the day. The temples built by Cempiyan Mātēvi (wife of Kantarātitta) the period of Uttama chōla can be cited as an excellent example for this type of architecture. Among these temples, Thirunallam Umamakeswara shrine is considered as an important specimen of this type of architecture. The temple and the tank are on the eastern side of the bus stop of Koneriracapuram. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. St. Gnanacampantar sanctified this temple with his hymns. Appar praised the Lord of the temple as Nallattan. He says, “Nallattan is the Lord, who has given us the privilege of a devotee! Please chant His glories! At once your miseries will disappear!”. In another verse, he expresses that “He is the Lord of Umātēvi, who dwells in this village. Hence it is good for us to worship Him.” In the same sense, he had composed several verses in praise of Siva, the presiding deity of this temple. From these references of St. Campantar and St. Appar, it seems the temple might have become popular even before the days of these saints. But we know from the inscriptions that in the present structure of the temple, the Sanctum Sanctorum and the artha mantapā have been constructed by Cempiyan Mātēvi in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the additions of this temple have been built by the after rulers of the chōla dynasty. In this article, scholar focused the art and Architecture of the Temple.

**Introduction**

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type of architecture. Among these temples, Thirunallam Umamakeswara shrine is considered as an important specimen of this type of architecture.

### **Topography of the Village**

Thirunallam is the old name of the modern Koneriracapuram. There is a village called C. Putūr in the highway from Kumbakonam to Karaikkal. Thirunallam is situated in between the C. Putūr and Vatamattam of Tañcāvūr district.<sup>1</sup> In other words, this village has been placed 21 kms distance from Kumbakonam in the South-eastern direction.

### **Significance of the Village**

This village, surrounded by fertile lands, has been known as one of the important centres for the vedic scholars. This ancient village has been surrounded by a number of places with religious importance like Nakambadi, Anniyur, Vayalur, Nallavur, Tiruvilimilalai, etc., of puranic fame.

### **Observations about the Temple**

The temple and the tank are on the eastern side of the bus stop of Koneriracapuram. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. St. Gnanacampantar sanctified this temple with his hymns. Appar praised the Lord of the temple as Nallattan. He says, “Nallattan is the Lord, who has given us the privilege of a devotee! Please chant His glories! At once your miseries will disappear!”<sup>2</sup> In another verse, he expresses that “He is the Lord of Umātēvi, who dwells in this village. Hence it is good for us to worship Him.” In the same sense, he had composed several verses in praise of Siva, the presiding deity of this temple. From these references of St. Campantar and St. Appar, it seems the temple might have become popular even before the days of these saints. But we know from the inscriptions that in the present structure of the temple, the Sanctum Sanctorum and the artha mantapā have been constructed by Cempiyan Mātēvi in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the additions of this temple have been built by the after rulers of the chōla dynasty. In this article, scholar focused the art and Architecture of the Temple.

### **Structure of the Temple**

Though this shrine appears to be a small one in its form, facing west words, it is not only an ancient temple but also is one of the temples that have been well maintained by the authorities. In the precincts on the Southern side of the Rajagopuram, the shrine of Lord Ganesa extends a warm welcome to the devotees. On the northern side of the presiding deity,

a small temple of Murukā<sup>3</sup> can be noticed. In the northern side, the temple for Cakti adds its grandeur to this temple complex.

In between the inner Verandah and the tower of the temple opposite to the sanctum sanctorum, the hall for the vakanas stands in a majestic form. After crossing that hall, one can enter into the gates under the smaller tower which leads to the precincts of the presiding deity. There is an entrance-hall (Muka Mantapā), which serves as an inner verandah. Then there is the Artha Mantapā. After crossing these structures, we can reach the sanctum sanctorum. At the two sides of the gate of the presiding deity, there are two imposing statues of the two gate keepers (Tuvārapālakas).

### **Sanctum Sanctorum**

The sanctum sanctorum is 6.10 Sq.m. in size. The length of the Arta Mantapā is 6.10 mtr, and the entrance hall is 10.3 meter in length. This is perhaps the Pukalaparana Mantapā referred to in one of Kulottunga III's inscriptions.<sup>4</sup>

The Vimānā, towering over this shrine is of the Vēcarā, type. The lower portion of the external side of the shrine contains various parts, such as Upanam, Kumutam, Pattikai, Kantam, Kampu, Pitti and Kapotam.

This shrine is facing westwards. So there are small shrines on three other sides of the walls of the temple. In the temples of earlier Chōlas, only a cluster of three or five figure can be seen on three sides of the wall. But in this temple, a cluster of nine, shrines are sculptured on the three sides. This is a significant feature of Cempiyan Mātēvi's style of architecture.<sup>5</sup>

### **Surface of the Northern Wall**

In one of the northern clusters of the shrine, the Goddess Durga with eight hands, crushing the demon Makisa, has been portrayed. On the two sides of this figure two bar-relief's of the sculptures are engraved. The figure at the left side seated in the posture of severing its own head and the figure at the right side seated in the posture of cutting its thigh to present them as offerings to Durga. This kind of sculptural motif can be witnessed in most of the temples erected by the queen Cempiyan Mātēvi.

On the left side of Durga, there is the sculptural panel of Artanariesvara and on the right the statue of Kankalamurti. A sculpture of dwarf-demon can be seen in the near side of the Kankalamurti. Adjacent to this sculpture, the figures of Pramma can be noticed.<sup>6</sup>

### **Eastern Niche**

In the niche on the eastern side of the wall, the image of Linkotpava catches our attention. Under the feet of Siva, the figure of a pig makes strenuous efforts to search for and find out the feet of the Lord. On the top of the Linka the figure of a swan finds a prominent place. Besides these the animal and the bird, the portrait sculptures of Tirumal on the left and Pramma on the right and found in the worshipping posture. In all other temples, only the swan and the pig can be seen in the sculptures of Linkotpava. But in the Tirunallam temple, the two divine images have been added to this sculpture, which clearly tells the puranic mythology. This is an other significant feature of this temple. This has been acclaimed as another sculptural motif adopted by the queen Cempiyan Mātēvi.

Lord Siva of this sculpture has four arms. Each one of the arms holds a weapon like an axe in one hand, a deer in another, the third in the pose of affording protection and the fourth hanging down in the Uru mudra. He wears the belt (utarapanta), garland of sacred beads, bracelets and the crown of matted locks. Pramma appears with his three faces and four hands. Two of his hands (the hands in back side) holds the garland two (front side hands) the left arm is paying homage to Siva. In the same manner Vishnu has the canku and chakkaram in his backside hands and the front right hand pays homage to Siva.<sup>7</sup>

### **Southern Niches**

In the four niches on the Southern side, the sculptures of Tatcanamurti, Nataraca, Akattiyar and Vinayakar adorn the wall. The niches containing Lord Nataraca arrest our attention. The fascinating image of the Lord, the exquisite figures of the dancing Kali and Kuli the beating of drum by Nanti on the side of Nataraca express the classical excellence of the Chōla Art. Besides these, the charming slender figure of Uma, who graces the occasion with amazement, has been portrayed on the left side of niche. This sculpture of Uma bears ample testimony to the ideal of womanhood as conceived by the Tamils, in the days of imperial chōlas. This sculpture resembles the early Pandyan sculpture at Tirupparankunram.<sup>8</sup>

The top of these niches have been ornamented with the Makara festoon (Makara Torana), on a grand scale. In the midst of these festoons and in the lower parts, the puranic episodes of Vali performing worship to Siva and killing of Elephant by Siva are shown in miniature forms.

### **The Sculpture of Kantaratita**

The bas-relief sculpture of the Chōla king Kantaratita is found in the southern wall of the temple, next to the niche of Tatcanamurti. A small sculpture depicts the Siva Linka another figure represents a priest who adorns, the Linka with a place of cloth. Opposite to this scene, there is a figure seated with folded hands. Behind that figure, one person holds the umbrella and another person waves the *vencamaram*.

Below this relief-sculpture, an inscription in Tamil can be easily noticed. The inscription states: “Hail Prosperity! This temple has been erected by Matevati Kal Sri Cempiyan Mātēviyar, wife of Sri Kantaratita in the reign of Uttama Chōla. She has raised a temple out of granite for Thirunalla mutaiyar, which is called by the name of her beloved husband. In this temple, she has made arrangements to depict this sculpture in the posture of Kantarātitta worshipping the feet of the Lord of Tirunallam”.<sup>9</sup>

From the inscription, it appears that this temple was erected by Cempiyan Mātēvi. Hence, the figure worshipping the Civalinka represents Kantarātitta without any doubt. The temple was built in the reign of Uttama Chōla the only son of Cempiyan Mātēvi and Kantarātitta. These informations are conveyed by this inscription. So, it can be perceived that this temple construction has been considered as an important one in the history and architecture of the Chōlas.

### **Misrepresentation of the Fact**

Some scholars like Sethuraman have misinterpreted this sculpture. Thiru Sethuraman thinks that the devotee worshipping the Linka in the sculpture is the queen Cempiyan Mātēvi. He says that there are some flowers in the head-dress of the figure and there are bangles in the hands which can be easily seen. So this figure represents the queen, and the figure which adorns the Linka with a cloth should be the king. Hence, Kantarātitta seems to have lived as an ascetic after the erection of this temple in 974 A.D.<sup>10</sup>

First we must not forget that the inscription itself states that Kantarātitta Chōla worships Lord Siva. But it did not say that the person (most probably the priest) who adorns the deity with a cloth is Kantarātitta. Though he may have been the emperor, he would not have been allowed to touch the idol. So, that figure must be a representation of a priest who must have performed the daily worship. The seated figure with the folded hands is represented with the royal paraphernalia in the back round. If we keenly observe the whole

sculpture, then it will reveal that the seated figure should be the king. We should not forget that in olden days, men also used to adorn their tuft with flowers and bracelets in their wrists.

We understand from the inscription that Cempiyan Mātēvi must have erected this temple to perpetuate the memory of her husband. So, it would be improper for one to infer that Kantarātitta was alive at that time. Besides this, if the figure is the representation of the queen, the inscription would have mentioned her name there. In the light of the queen, the inscription would have mentioned her name there. In the light of the above facts we can state that it is the seated devotee that should be the king Kantarātitta.<sup>11</sup>

### **Sculpture of Haracarana**

There is a dwarf-figure under the sculpture of Akattiyar. The inscription under this figure clearly states that this is the figure of the officer who was in charge of supervising the construction of the temple. He was called as Cattan Kuna Pattiran Haracarana Cekaram of Alattur.

### **The First Arcade**

In the first arcade of the temple, right to the sanctum sanctorum the shrine of Cantecuvvara, gives delight to the devotees. This shrine was built by Tittai Vilumiyan in the 15<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Kulothunka I.

On the western side of the wall of this temple, the figures of Cantecuvvara and this chief have been depicted, worshipping the Lord. The standing figure in this sculpture has been identified with this chief and the seated figure with Cantecuvvara. On the upper side of Cantecuvvara and the right side of Tittai Vilumiyam there are two inscriptions that make specific reference to their names and tell that they are worshipping the Lord.<sup>12</sup> In this arcade, the icons of Sivalinka, Canisvara and Pairava are placed in the back side of the main shrine. In the front side.

### **Inscriptions**

There are a number of inscriptions in this temple which shed sumptuous light on the donors, who have contributed liberally to this temple for daily worship as well as for the annual festivals.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

From a brief study of the art and architecture of the temple we can come to the following conclusions. The Siva temple at Koneriracapuram bears ample testimony to the religious fervour of the Chōla queen Cempianyan MĀTĒVI, who appears to have led the life of a widow for a long time. The architectural style of this temple serves as a connecting link between the Parāntakā and Rajaraja styles of temple architecture. The sculptures of Turkkai and Nataraca of this temple in many respects, resemble the sculpture of early paydays at the Thiupparankunram Murukān Temple. The significant feature of the sculptures of this temple is the tablets contain the names of the figures represented in the sculptural panel as an illustration. This type of inscriptional explanation was rare in those days. Besides these, the Bronze image of the Nataraca shines as a source of inspiration and unique specimen of the cult art not only to the devotees but also to the connoisseurs and art lovers of the world.

**Notes and Reference**

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