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ATCHEESWARAR TEMPLE AT ACHARAPAKKAM , MADURANTAKAM, TAMIL NADU



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ABSTRACT

Acharapakkam, the headquarters of the Acharapakkam Panchayat Union is about 15 km. from Madurantakam and has railway station in its name at a distance of about one kilometre. This place which is one of the important Sivasthalas, was sung by the Nayanmars, Sambandhar, Tirunavukkarasar, Manickavasagar, Sekkizhar and other poets. There are a few interesting stories which explain the name cause of the village. One of them is that Tharakatchan, Viyanmali and Kamalatchan had a quarrel with the Devas and used to torture them and other people with their three flying forts'. The Devas begged for help from Lord Siva who promised to destroy the forts. The Devas prepared a chariot for Lord Siva to use in the battle against the three persons. They had the earth as the chariot proper, the four vedas as four horses, Lord Brahma as the driver, the sun and the moon as the wheels, the Meru Mountain as the bow, Lord Thirumal as the arrow, Agni (Fire God) as the arrow's sharp point, Adhishesan as the string and Vayudeva as the chariot wings. The devas, amongst their busy war preparations forgot or neglected Lord Vinayaka, who in return thought it fit to teach the Devas a lesson, broke the axle of the chariot. The place at which the axle was broken was called Achirupakkam (Achu + Iru + Pakkam) Achu=axe; Iru=broke; and, Pakkam=Village. Achirupakkam has later been corrupted as Acharapakkam. Another story is that the Pandya King deputed his Minister to bring sand from the Ganges. When the carts returned with sand, the river Vaigai was in spates and the axles of the vehicles which broke rendered the vehicle immobile. On the suggestions from some passersby, the Minister visited a nearby Konnai tree where he found a big hole and saw a golden coloured fresh lizard entering

it. When he suddenly shot at it, to his amazement he saw blood oozing out of the hole. When the bushes there were cleared, he could see a Linga. He was quick to convey these facts to the Pandya King, who, on the suggestions from the Minister, ordered the construction of a temple on that spot. When the king came there to attend the Kumbabishekam, he found two Sivalingams installed in the temple, with two different sanctum sanctorums “the Swayambu Lingam” opposite to the sacred pillar, and the other opposite to the gopuram entrance. The Minister when enquired about this, explained to the king that Swayambu Lingam was ‘Emai Atcheesar’ and the other ‘Umai Atcheesar’. Daily poojas are offered, even now, to both the Sivalingams.

A number of inscriptions found on the walls of this temple, describe the donations made by Pandya, Chola and Vijayanagar kings. The Brahmotsavam of this temple is celebrated during April-May. Festivals attract a large gathering from far and near.

This town panchayat has travellers’ bungalow. The main occupation of the people of this village is agriculture.

KEYWORDS : Temple, Siva, Nayanmars, Devas, Atcheeswarar, Acharapakkam, mandapa.

INTRODUCTION :

Acharapakkam, the headquarters of the Acharapakkam Panchayat Union is about 96 km from Chennai and 15km from Madurantakam. This place is one of the important Siva *sthalas*, was sanctified by the Nayanmars like Sambandhar, Tirunavukkarasar, Manickavasagar in *Devaram* and by Sekkilar and other poets.¹

NAME STUDY OF THE VILLAGE

Three cruel demons *Tharakatchan*, *Vidyunmali* and *Kamalatchan* had a quarrel with the Devas and used to torture them and other people with their three flying forts (i.e., built fortresses of gold, silver and iron with wings) which they received from Lord Brahma, by their intense penance with the view to hurt *Devas*. The *Devas* begged for help from Lord Siva who promised to destroy the forts. The *Devas* prepared a chariot for Lord Siva to use in the battle against the three demons. For that they use the heaven as the chariot roof, the earth as the chariot base, the four *Vedas* as four horses, Lord Brahma as the driver, the sun and the moon as the wheels, the Meru mountain as the bow, Lord Thirumal as the arrow, *Agni* (fire God) as the arrow’s sharp point, *Adhiseshan* (snake) as the string and Vayudeva as the chariot wings. Lord Siva and the *Devas* amongst their busy in war preparations forgot to worship Lord Vinayaka, which is a rule to worship Vinayaka before starting any work. Lord Vinayaka, who in return thought it fit to teach the *Devas* a lesson by, broke the axle of the chariot. Realizing the Lord Siva worshipped Vinayaka to help in his task soon his son Vinayaka obeyed his father Lord Siva. The place at which the axle was broken was called *Achirupakkam* (*Achu+Iru+Pakkam*) ‘*Achu*’ means axle; ‘*Iru*’ means broke; and ‘*Pakkam*’ means village. *Achirupakkam* has been later corrupted as *Acharapakkam*.² Lord came to be known as Atcheeswarar.

Another story related with this place and temple is that the Pandya King deputed his Minister to bring sand from the Ganges for the erection of temple in his country. When the cart return with the sand, it was not able move beyond from this place and the axles of the cart which broke made the cart immovable. The king heard this news through the hum from the heaven. Immediately he came to this place and dedicated a temple to God Atcheeswarar. As this the place where axle was broken it came to be known as *Achirupakkam*.³

INSCRIPTIONS

The temple has inscribed twenty nine inscriptions assigned to various dynasties. Among the twenty seven inscriptions, eighteen belongs to Chola Period, seven belongs to Pandya, another three belongs to Vijayanagar Period and one belongs to Sambuvaraya.

The earliest inscription in the temple belongs to Parakesarivarman alias Rajendra Chola Deva I . The lithic record dated in his third regnal year mentions about the gift of sheep for burning a lamp.⁴

There are nine inscriptions assigned to Rajakesarivarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulottunga Chola Deva- I, A lithic records dated in his third regnal year mentions that the king clubbed several villages together into one called it Kalikadinda-Solan-Sattanur and granted it to the temple. The village belonged to the *Oymanadu alias Vijayarajendravalanadu*.⁵ His another inscription dated in his fifth regnal year registers a gift of land and mentions the image of Kulottunga -Choleswara, which was set up in the temple and *Oymanadu alias Vijayarajendravalanadu*.⁶ Other inscription dated in his ninth regnal year denoted the gift of sheep for burning a lamp⁷ A lithic record dated in his twelweth regnal year refer to the gift of jewels by Sengeni -Ammaiyappan "who took the Pandya Country".⁸ Yet another lithic record dated in his fifteenth regnal year cited that Attimallan Kulottunga Sola Sambuvarayan granted the proceeds of certain taxes to the temple.⁹ His other inscriptions dated in his forty second, forty third, forty ninth regnal years' mentions about the gift of sheep for burning a lamp¹⁰ and also point out the name of his chieftain as Ammaiappan Sambuvarayan.¹¹

Two lithic records of Parakesarivarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Vikrama Chola dated in sixth and seventh regnal year spotted the gift of lamp for burning.¹² Another three inscriptions of Tribhuvanachakravartin Rajarajadeva II dated in his third regnal year elucidate the gift of sheep for burning lamp¹³ and also refer to gift of ten buffalo- cows for burning a lamp to the temple of Atchikondaruliyadeva.¹⁴ Yet another lithic record dated in his eighteenth regnal year reveals the grant of the proceeds of a tax by Rajanarayana -Sambuvaraya of the Sengini Family.¹⁵ A lithic record of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Konerimaikondan refers to the gift of land to an image set up by Atkondanayaken alias Sediaryayan.¹⁶ A lithic record of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Tribhuvanaviradeva dated in the thirty fifth regnal year register the gift of gold for burning lamp.¹⁷ Inscription of Virarajendra dated in his fifth regnal year mentions the gift of paddy and of the proceeds of taxes.¹⁸

Four lithic records of Pandya king Maravarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Vikrama Pandya Deva " who conquered every country" dated in his third, fourth and fifth regnal year register the gift of land to the temple.¹⁹ Other Pandya inscriptions dated in the sixth regnal year of Maravarman Tribhuvana Chakravartin,²⁰ fifteenth regnal year of lithic record of Jatavarman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Sundara Pandya Deva²¹ and seventh regnal year lithic record of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Vira Pandya Deva²² also cited the gift of land to the temple.

The inscription of Vijayanagar King Krishnaraya records a gift by Vira-Narasimharaya-Nayakkar on the merit of the occasion of a lunar eclipse.²³ Another inscription of Vira Bukkana- Udaiyar reveals the gift of land.²⁴ Yet another inscription of Kampanna Udaiyar II son of Virabukkana Udaiyar II denoted the minister names as Somappar and Koppanar and also refers to the gift of land to a *matha* at Kanchipuram.²⁵ Finally an unfinished lithic record of Sakalalokachakravartin Rajendra Sambuvarayan dated in his eighteenth regnal year is also reported from Achirupakkam.²⁶

TEMPLE HISTORY

Once a Pandya king was on a pilgrimage to Lord Shiva shrines, the axis of his car was broken. When his men were repairing the wheel, the king noticed a giant golden lizard running through the bushes and climbing tree and changing its colours. He followed it but suddenly the lizard hid itself in a

Sarakondai tree. He ordered his men to axed the tree, when they axed the tree, it began to bleed The king was shocked but the lizard could not be traced despite all efforts. That night, Lord Siva appeared in the dream of the king and told him that he appeared here in the guise of the lizard in order to inform that he was there in a form of Swayambu under the tree and build a temple for him.

The king obliging the command of the Lord and decided to build the temple as said. He came across a sage Trinetradharai and sought his help to build the temple. Then he continued his pilgrimage. On his return, he saw the temple had been constructed with two presiding deities in two sanctum and sanctorum (*garbharaha*). One was in the middle of the temple with *nandi*, *balipitha* and *dwajasthampa* called *Emai Atcheeswarar* and the second is behind this opposite to the *Rajagopuram* called *Umai Atcheeswarar*. When he asked the sage Trinetradharai about it, sage said, "Lord who graced you, graced me too in the form of Chameleon (lizard). So I built one *garbagraha* for the lord who graced you as *Umai Atcheeswarar* whereas the word 'Umai' means "You" the king and one for *Emai Atcheeswarar* whereas 'Emai' means "Me" the devotee which is the main shrine. The king agreed with him.²⁷ In Inscription of Rajaraja – II the temple was cited as 'Temple of Atchikondaruliyadeva'.²⁸

Components and Architectural Features of Atcheeswarar Temple

The Atcheeswarar Temple consists of two *garbagraha* enshrined with Siva Linga's, one is *Swayambu Linga* called as *Emai Atcheeswarar* which is the main sanctum and other one is called *Umai Atcheeswarar*.

Emai Atcheeswarar Shrine

Emai Atcheeswarar Shrine is straight to *nandi*, *balipitha* and *dwajasthampa*. Lord Siva in the form *Swayambu Linga* is called by various names such as *Paakapuraesar*, *Atchieesar*, *Atchikondar*, *Istheeravasapurieswarar*, *Mullaikaanamudaiyar*. The Goddess in the is called as *Sundara Nayaki*, *Balambikai*, *Illangilammai* and *Athisundara Meenaalammai*.

Emai Atcheeswarar Shrine facing towards east. It consists of *garbagraha*, which is followed by the *ardhamandapa*, next to the *ardhamandapa* is the cloistered mahamandapa consists of four pillars in two rows. A note worthy feature in this temple is that Asuras Tharakan and Viyunmali who were killed by lord Siva are the *dwarapalakas* adorned on either side of the entrance of *mahamandapa* which is followed by the Pillared mukhamandapa in an axial line. The *Nandi* and *balipitha* are enshrined in the *mukhamandapa* facing towards the *Linga* in the *garbagraha*. The *mukhamandapa* leads to the pillared corridor and inner prakara . The southeastern corner of the *mukhamandapa* is adorned with anjanayer shrine facing towards the Vishu shrine. The southeastern corner of the corridor has small shrine for *Polla Pillaiyar* and near to this shrine sculptures of *Appar*, *Sundarar*, *Sambandar* and *Thirunavukarasar* enshrined . The southern corridor consists of sculptures of sixty three Nayanmars in a row. The south western corridor has door way. Next to is Alamelumangai Amman shrine, Srinivasa Perumal Shrine, Umai Atcheeswarar shrine, Palani Andavar shrine , shrine for Uttchavar adorned in the western corridor. *Murugan* shrine is enshrined in the northeastern corridor. The Northern corridor adorns the bronze images of sixty three *Nayanmars* in a row The Northern side of the lower prakara a small shrine for Chandikesvara is enshrined. The shrine of *Nataraja* is enshrined in northern corridor of the *mukhamandapa*. In the eastern side of the *mukhamandapa* consists of small shrine for *Arunagirinathar* , Kalyana Bairavar, and Suryan which leads to the entrance followed by outer or second prakara adorns the *nandi*, *dwajasthampa* and *balipitha* . The right of the eastern side of the outer prakara has temple office . The south eastern corner of the outer prakara is adorned with *madapalli* and *vahana mandapa* . The southern side of the outer prakara has small shrine for

Sapthakani's . The south western corner of the outer prakara is adorned with Vasantha mandapa . The north eastern side of the outer prakara has sthalavriksham-the Kondrai tree . The northern side prakara has Kondrai Adi Siva shrine in which Siva is enshrined in the form of Linga and straight to it nandi has seen and sculpture of sage Trinetradhara is depicted under the tree in a worshipping form near to this, there is a well resemblance like auvudayar. In north western side of outer prakara there is a separate shrine for Illangilli Amman is enshrined with the garbagraha, ardhmandapa and mukhamandapa with eight pillars four in two row. There is Palliarai and Iyyapa shrine. Adjacent to Amman shrine is adorned with Navagraha is seen. The Amman shrine leads the temple main entrance which is with five tiers Gopura . The temple is encompassed with highly raised madhil with nandi at regular intervals. The temple tank is seen opposite to the main entrance.

UMAI ATCHEESWARAR SHRINE

Umai Atcheeswarar shrine is straight to the Raja Gopura , the temple entrance. It faces towards east. *Umai Atcheeswarar* shrine comprises of *garbagraha*, *plain ardhmandapa* and *mukhamandapa* with four pillars two in a row. The *garbagraha* enshrined with God *Umai Atcheeswarar* in the form of linga and the sculpture of Lord Siva and *Parvathi* has carved in *koshtha* at his rear side. The sculpture of Lord Siva and *Parvathi* is seated in Marriage posture. A meditative nandi facing towards Linga in *garbagraha* is adorned in the *mukhamandapa* and it is believed that the Samadhi of sage Trinetradhara is cited below the sculpture of nandi. A small shrine for *Umaparvathi Amman* is enshrined in the *mukhamandapa*.

The temple bears simple architectural features, the square *Garbagriha* has simple *adhithana*, it seems a portion of the *adhithana* is buried under the ground. The wall or the pithi is embellished pilasters and *devakoshtha*. The *devakoshtha* adorned sculpture of *Narthana Vinayaka*, *Dakshinamurthy* on south, *Maha Vishnu* on the west and *Brahma* and *Durgai* on the north. The *Prastara* has kudu motifs at regular intervals, above which raises the *dwitala Vimana* . The tala is square in shape and *Karnakudu* on all four corners, which look like a miniature shrine. Above which is placed a circular *Sikhara*, The *Stupi* is placed on top of it.²⁹

Sculptures

Narthana Vinayaka

The sculpture of *Narthana Vinayaka* is in standing in dancing posture on *Padmapitha*. His head is adorned with *Krita makuta*. Off his four hands the upper right holds *ankusa* and upper left holds *pasa*. The lower right and left hand holds *damuru*. He is shown with belly and his trunk is turned left and touching the *damuru*. He is adorned with ornaments and *yajnopavitha* is adorns across his chest.

Dakshinamurthy

Dakshinamurthy, adorns the southern wall of the *garbagraha Devakoshtha*. He is seated under a tree on a *patrapitha*. The right leg is hanging down vertically straight, and resting on a *Muyalaka* (demon). The left leg is bent and it rests on the right thigh. He has four hands. His upper right holds *damuru* and upper left hand holds *Agni*(fire) . The lower right hand is in *Abaya hasta* like teaching and lower left is in *Pustaka hasta*, holding *pustaka* (book).The *jatabara* flows on either side of his head. His elongated ears bear *patra Kuntalas*. He wears simple ornaments adorn his neck, *bracelts*, armlets in hands, and anklets in leg. The smiling face enchants the viewers.

Mahavishnu

On the western *devakoshthas*, the sculpture of *Vishnu* is enshrined. He is in standing posture on a *padmapitha*. He wears *kritamakuta* on his head, *kuntalas* in his ears, *haras* in his neck of his four hands, the upper right and left hold the *Chakra and sangha*, the lower right is in *abhaya hasta* and the left is in *uru hasta*. He is carved with belly. A finely carved out drapery with its folding is depicted in his waist.³⁰

Brahma and Durga

The sculptures of Brahma and Durga enshrine the northern wall of *devakoshtha*. Both are depicted in standing posture.

Chandikesvara

The sculpture of Chandikesvara is enshrined in the small shrine is located on the northern *prakara* facing toward the south. He is in a seated posture. The right leg is bent vertically at the knee and the left leg is bent cross so as to rest upon the right thigh. He has two hands. He holds *parasu* in the right hand and keeps the left rested on the thigh. He is adorned with ornaments in his body and *mukuta* in his head.

Srinivasa Perumal

The sculpture of Srinivasa Perumal is enshrined as standing in *samabhanga* posture on an *padmapitha* above *Avudaiyar*. He wears *kritamakuta*. His Lower right hand is in *varadhahasta* and left in *uru hasta (Katayavalambita hasta)*. His upper right hand holds *sangha* and the upper left hand holds *chakra*. The finely carved out drapery is sculpted beautifully from his waist. He is adorned with ornaments.

Murugan, Valli, Devayani

The sculptures of Murugan along with his consorts Valli and Devayani are enshrined in the north eastern corner of the corridor. Lord Murugan is depicted with six heads known as *Arumugam*. He is seated in his peacock *vahana* by hanging his right leg down and rests on his Peacock *vahana* and his left leg is folded. Of his two hands his right is showing *abhaya hasta* and left hand is in *varadha hasta*. His consorts Valli and Devayani is depicted in *tribangi* posture and holding flowers in one hand and other in *lola hasta*.

Dwarapalakas

The entrance of the *mahamandapa* is flanked with two *dwarapalakas* on either side. The *dwarapala* on the south is named *Tharakan* and the *dwarapalaka* on north is known as *Viyunmali*. They are in standing posture with their right leg firmly footed on a *danda*, and the left leg is stood straightly and firmly footed on the *patra pitha*. The *makuta* adorn their head. Off their four hands, the upper right and left holds *Sanka* and *Naga*. The Lower left hand of *Tharakan* and lower right hand of *Vidyumali* were placed on *gada ayutha* and The Lower right hand of *Tharakan* and lower left hand of *Vidyumali* were in *susihasta*. He wears *kuntalas* in his ears, *haras* in his neck.

Portrayed Sculpture

The wall around *Emai Atcheeswarar* shrine has depicted with portrayed sculptures such as cow pouring milk on the *Siva Linga (kamathenu)* which is usually seen in early Chola temples, another scene

narrates about the Hiranyakasipu Vatham, Lord Siva rushed to stop Kannapa Nayanar from digging out his second eye. The other portrayed sculpture elucidates the scene of Chandesa Nayanar cutting his father's leg for having stamped upon the Siva lingam made of sand. Yet another scenes depicted is an elephant and Snake worshipping Lord Siva and Karaikal Ammaiyar walking on her head to mount Kailash. Finally a scene portrays Lord Siva Seated along with Parvathi with Child Skanda (Murugan) is in standing posture in between them.

Bronzes

The temple is decked with large number of bronze idols such Somaskandar, Vinayaka, *Uttachava* deities, images of sixty three Nayyanmars in *anjali hasta*, images of Goddess, Image of Iyappan, etc. Apart from this there is raised platform which enshrined the bronze image of Nataraja and Sivakama Sundari. Nataraja is in *Annada tandava* posture by on footing his right leg on *muyalaka* (demon) and the hair are arranged like a fan adorning his head. The right hand is in *abhaya hasta* and the left it's slightly bent like Pallava hasta and is shown by the side of his abhaya hand. The upper hands hold deer and *damuru*. Simple ornaments are shown in ears, neck and waist.

The bronze image of Siva Kamasundari is standing by the side of Nataraja in *tribhanga* pose by wearing *Kritamakuta* in her head.

To conclude, the study of the Atcheeswarar Temple of Acharapakkam, elucidate the history of the place and origin of the temple history. The architectural features of temples, sculptures and bronze icons show that the place under study had greater influence among the people towards Saivism , which explicit the religious devotion existed in this region. The architectural and sculptural features are unique in the annals of the temple history of Tamil Nadu

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