

Recently Discovered Ruins of Civaṇ Temple with Tamil Inscriptions at Tirumaṅkalāi Area in Trincomalai District, Sri Lanka

Pushparatnam, P.

Former Professor of History, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Received: 27 April 2021,

Accepted: 27 June 2021.

Abstract

During the Chōla rule for 77 years (from 993 A.D. to --1077 A.D) with Polanaruwa as capital in Sri Lanka, Hindu temples built outside of Polanaruwa outnumbered the temples within Polanaruwa. Yet, most of these temples have not been identified, studied and documented so far. Recently discovered ruins of Civaṇ temple in Tirumaṅkalāi forest area in Trincomalai District stand testimony to this fact. This temple was constructed with granite stones and bricks with the adoption of Chōla art tradition. Presently all portions of the temple except the Antarālam right in front of the Karpakirakam (Ante-chamber to the inner sanctuary of a Hindu temple) are in a state of ruin. The granite pillars with artistic workmanship, bricks, Āvuṭai (where in the Linga is placed), pedestals, shrines for Minor Gods and Tamil inscriptions found among the ruins are evident of the fact that this temple has been bigger than the second Civaṇ temple in Polanaruwa.

So far, five Tamil inscriptions have been discovered among the temple ruins. Three inscriptions among them belong to 10 and 11 century A.D. These inscriptional evidences conform that this temple was influential during the Chōla period. The other two inscriptions state about the donations offered to this temple in 15th and 16th century A.D. These evidences make us ascertain that this temple continued its influence even after the Chōla period.

It is learnt that Bronze images of God, Statues and Sculptures from ruins of this temple were removed to other places by people. In support of this belief, temple bell with the name "Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṇ temple" inscribed on it was found at Kaṅkuvēly in Trincomalai district. Hence, it is hopeful that more details about the Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṇ temple could be brought into light if further excavation is carried out in the location of this temple.

Corresponding author: Dr.P.Pushparatnam, Former Professor of History, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.
e-mail: pushpa1252000@gmail.com



This article is published under the Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND) License.

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>).

This license permits use, distribution and reproduction, non-commercial, provided that the original work is properly cited and is not changed in anyway.

Keywords: Civaṇ temple, Tirumaṅkalāi, Kīliveiveṭṭi Kaṅkuvēly, Chōlas, Dravidian art tradition, Agamic and Non-Agamic.

1 Background

Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṇ temple is considered to be one of the ancient temples with continuous historical importance that are found so far in places highly populated by Tamils in Sri Lanka. It is located amidst the dense forest approximately ten kilometres away from the main road of Kīliveiveṭṭi area in Trincomalee District. Electric fences are built around this area for the protection of people due to the presence of thick forest within the circumference of around seven kilometres of the temple and considered to be a place of increased movement of elephants. This barrier could be the main cause for the negligence of the area during archaeological and historical researches conducted in Eastern Sri Lanka (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Front view of the Temple

2 Archeological Investigation and Discussion

In that situation, a friend from Cēruvil has understood the importance of this temple and sent us the photos of ruins of the temple through the officer of Archaeological Department of Jaffna region, Mr. V. Manimaran. Accordingly we conducted an extended archaeological exploration during 2017 and 2018 with the Project Manager for Jaffna Project of Central Cultural Fund Mr. Lakshman Santhana Maithiripala, the officers of Archaeological Department Mr. Manimaran, Mr. Kapilan and Archaeological special undergraduate students of University of Jaffna. It was proved through the research that the Karpakirakam, Antarālam, Muṇmaṅṭapam (Lobby), exterior wall and sub shrines of this ruined temple were built using granite and bricks (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Damaged condition of Antharalam

This is further proved by the damaged ruins of the temple walls, foundations, the building

components that are buried in soil and granite stone pillars that are identified all around in the temple as well as in its premise. The Karpakirakam and Vimāṇam built on the Karpakirakam of this temple are fully extinct while the ground level where Karpakirakam was seen is now a large earthen pit. The earthen pit was said to be dug by treasure hunters. Only the Antarālam conjoined to Karpakirakam could be identified even though it is damaged. The temple walls of approximately five feet in length, breadth and height were built using bricks whereas their roof tops were built with granite stones (Figure 3).



Figure 3: *Artistic Granit Pillars*

The entrance that was built using granite stone pillars is approximately of three and a half feet width and four feet height. It is seen that a Shiva Lingam that was constructed on this Antarālam in later days is being worshiped by some people visit the place at present. The foundation of Muṇmaṇṭapam that is 16 feet long and 5 feet wide proves that Muṇmaṇṭapam and Alter were built conjoined to Antarālam. A Tīrtakiṇaru of the temple that was deep and

built using granite stones in three feet long and wide could be seen on the left side of the Muṇmaṇṭapam. The presence of exterior walls and the sub shrines for Minor gods is proved through the foundations and existing bricks and granite stones in the premise.

There are a lot of granite stone pillars, arch pillars with decorative engravings, balconies, pedestals where statues of gods were placed, balconies, Kōmuki and Kōṭuṅkai could be seen next to the temple (Figure 4).



Figure 4: *Pillars and Bricks are found nearby the temple*

Most of them are buried inside the earth. When looking at the architectural styles of the shape of e granite stone pillars and the decorations and engraved statues in them, pedestals, balconies and Kōmuki, they reflects the Dravidian architectural style of Hindu temples of middle age Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. Close similarities could be identified on architectural styles when comparing the second Civa temple built in Polonnaruwa during Chōla reign and

Tirumañkalāi Civaṇ temple and at the same time Tirumañkalāi Civaṇ temple can be considered to be large in size (Figure 5)



Figure 5: *Tamil Inscriptions Inscribed on Pillars*

This should further be proved by the future archaeological excavations that will be conducted in Tirumañkalāi Civaṇ temple.

The five Tamil inscriptions discovered within the ruins of the temple play an significant role in the research on the history of this temple. There are high chances of many other Tamil inscriptions buried in the earth alone with these inscriptions. The inscriptions found here were believed to be embedded in the granite stone pillars of the temple (Figure 6).



Figure 6 : *Tamil Inscriptions (Stampages)*

The main reason would be for letting the people who come to worship the temple to know the history of the temple. In general inscriptions, copper plates and inscribed coins were issued on the contemporary period when the historical events occurred. Therefore, the

chances of interpolation, exaggeration and imaginative stories like in historical literatures are very low here. Thus, the inscriptional evidences are considered to be of highly reliable in archaeological researches. All the five Tamil inscriptions found in Tirumañkalāi

Civaṅ temple were issued in different years and for various purpose. The historical evidences on the origin of this temple, the development of the temple, temple administration and rituals happened in the temple as well as people who have served for the development of the temple can be found from these evidences. Three of those inscriptions are datable to the 10th and 11th century A. D on paleographical grounds (Pushparatnam, 2017). The inscriptions describe record on the administrative regulations of the temple and the donation (donation made with money) given to the temple by officials like Siṛṛampalam Uṭaiyāi, Tiruveṅṅaikkūṭṛaṅ Tiruvarahiruvaraṅkam and other welfare of the society (Figure 7).



Figure 7: *Present Condition of Temple's Karpakirakam*

The other two inscriptions were issued in 15 and 16 century A.D. These inscriptions record on the information on giving cows as donation

to the temple by some welfare lived in the society.



Figure 8 : *Temple's Bell with Tamil Inscription*

Further the charter embossed in a bell that was being in use of the temple plays a vital role in knowing the importance of the temple and the period of the temple being worshiped. Based on the epigraphy of the charter the bell is found to belong to 17th century A. D. Thus, as of the calculations of years, it is proved that the temple was under worship by people for more than 700 years (Pushparatnam, 2017). The bell of this temple is in Kaṅkuvēly village of Trincomalee district at present. It is know that the religious symbols including the bell that were in use during worship by the people lived in Tirumaṅkalāi for generations took them all to places they displaced since 1964. The bell that was taken is now kept well protected in Kaṅkuvēly village. This statement is further confirmed by the inscription engraved in the temple bell as “the donation by Pattaṅ the son

of Pattipeṭi lived in Tirumaṅkalāi to the Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṅ temple (Figure 8).

Moreover, some historical evidences on the temple are exposed when the inscriptions found in the ruins of the temple are studied with the historical background of the natives of the area. The early civilization history of this area was begin 2800 years ago with Megalithic culture or Early Iron Age Culture. Therefore the pioneering worship culture of Hindu religion could have initiated in the religious believe of these people in Sri Lanka similar to South India (Sitrapalam, 1996, p. 182). Mahawamsa, One of the first historical literatures of Sri Lanka in Pali chronicles that there were Hindu temples in Sri Lanka even before the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka (Gaiger, 1950, p. X : 89). The researcher conducted studies on the native history of Trincomalee, provide Bramic inscriptions as evidence on the existence of Hindu religious worshiping culture even before 2200 years (Paranavithane, 1970, pp. 894,1120,1137,1149) (Gaiger, 1950, pp. X;102, XIX 37) (Pushparatnam, 2003). The existence of three Hindu temples in Eastern Sri Lanka before 1600 years is stated in Mahawamsa (Gaiger, 1950, p. XXXVI:4). The Tirukkōṅēśvarar temple in Eastern Sri Lanka and Tirukkēśvarar temple in Northern Sri Lanka was given priorities next to Tamil Nadu in the songs of Nāyanmār who led the Paktī movement on Saivism and Tamil language in Tamil Nadu (Pathmanathan, 2003).

Many Hindu temples were built in Sri Lanka by the Chōla officers lived in the country at times of Chōla reign and some Tamil trade guilds. A substantial number of temples were built in Trincomalee is evidenced through inscriptions by them (Pathmanathan, 2003, pp. 160 - 172). However, the information on the places of the temples built in, their architectural styles and the gods of worship was not identified yet. The main reason for the destruction to temple is the policy of vandalism demolishing of culture practiced against native religions by the Portuguese and Dutch who ruled the coastal regions of Sri Lanka since 16th Century (Indrapala, 1970). Hence the location of Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṅ temple away from the reign of European and into the country aside to the dense forest could be the reason of great escape from cultural vandalism. Therefore the history of this temple that was worshiped for more than 1000 years is brought out into light.

The architectural style of this temple, the culture of the religious symbols found in the ruins of the temple and the stone inscriptions found in the area confirm the origin and growth of the temple from 10th Century A.D. However, the place could possess a long history that can be the reason for establishing a temple before 1000 year in contrast to the condition of the place as a dense forest at present. The researches were undertaken in the pits dug out for several reasons in the surrounding area of the temple provide further evidences identified

through the potteries, ancient roof tiles and terracotta figures that belong to various era. The different types potteries are identified to be belonged to 8th century A.D. Thus, considering them the reliable evidence, it could be proved that people lived in this area before 8th century A.D.

The culture of constructing temple in Agama tradition using stones initiated after the rise of dynasty of Pallava/reign in Tamiḷnāṭu in 6th century A.D. The continuous development of the culture could be seen in temples of Chōla and Pāṇṭia who succeeded Palavas. The culture has influence the contemporary Sri Lanka which is evident through the Hindu temples in Pallawa architecture found in Anuradhapura (Indrapala, 1970). The inscriptions and literatures state presence of temples for native gods that do not belong to Agama tradition in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. Hence those temples were built using perishable materials like soil, timber and straw the architectural style and their traditions could not be fully identified. Due to the presence of dense human settlements in these areas conjoining the temples the temples of Agama tradition following the Pallawa architecture of using stones were established in the same places. Even though there are several village temples of non-Agama tradition could be seen in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka that are worshiped by people at present, many temples of non-Agama tradition are transforming to Agama tradition

following the new architectural style introduced by Pallawa. These transformations have not only bring changes to the architectural styles of the building constructed using stone but also bring changes to the names of gods worshiped in temples of non-Agama tradition. For example, instead of some famous gods worshiped in temples of non-Agama tradition like Vairavar, **Aṇṇamār**, **Nātaṇpiran**, Turkai and **Kāḷi** were changed names in temples of Agama tradition as Civaṇ, Murukan, Amman, Parvati and Puvaṇēśvariamman. Therefore, the origin of Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṇ temple could be the transformation of a non-Agama temple of 10th century to a temple of Agama tradition or the temple could be built newly due to the importance of the Tirumaṅkalāi area in those days.

Those who are willing to conduct researches on this temple can consider this to be a national heritage of Sri Lanka based on the historical antiquity of it. Else it could be considered an ancient cultural heritage of Hindu religion or a long lost temple of worship. However, in our opinion, the temple vividly shows the native history and culture of Sri Lankan Tamils especially the people of Eastern Sri Lanka disguised in the history of the temple. Because the temples of Dravidian architectural styles were built mostly in administrative capitals, commercial centers, port cities and places of historical importance rather than common human settlements in the cultural history of

middle age Sri Lanka and Tamilnāṭu. The Tamil inscriptions written in 10th and 13th century A.D. in Sri Lanka prove the fact. As the Tirumaṅkalāi Civaṇ temple originated in this era, it could be stated that one or many of above identified causes can be the reason for origin of

the temple. This could further be evident by the existence of ruins of two Hindu temples built in contemporary period to this temple. This could bring light to the unveiled history of the Eastern Sri Lanka if only further researches are conducted in these areas.

References

- Gaiger, W. (Ed.). (1950). *Mahavamsa*. Colombo: Ceylon Government Information Department.
- Indrapala, K. (1970). *Dravidian Architecture in Ceylon (in Tamil)*. Colombo: Kumaran Publishers.
- Paranavithane, S. (1970). *Inscriptions of Ceylon: Early Brahmi Inscriptions*. Colombo: Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka.
- Pathmanathan, S. (2003). The Hindu Temples of Sri Lanka. In P. Harrigan (Ed.), *Glimpsis of Hindu Heritage* (pp. 160-172). Colombo: Ministry of Hindu Religious Affairs, Sri Lanka.
- Pushparatnam, P. (2003). Muruka Worship in Sri Lanka: New Archaeological Evidences. In P. Harrigan (Ed.), *Glimpsis of Hindu Heritage* (pp. 182-185). Colombo: Ministry of Hindu Religious Affairs, Sri Lanka.
- Pushparatnam, P. (2017). *Ceylon Tamils – A Concise History (in Tamil)*. Malaysia: Tamil Education Service, Switzerland.
- Sitrampalam, S. K. (1996). *History of Hinduism in Sri Lanka up to 500 A.D.(in Tamil)*. Jaffna: University of Jaffna.