

**ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF VILVANATHISVARAR TEMPLE AT TIRUVULLAM****M. Nanjil Kumar**

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Thiruvallam is a biggest village in katpadi taluk Vellore district. It is located on the bank of the river palar. The silent speaker of the history of Thiruvallam is the Vilvanathisvarar temple also known as Bilvanathisvarar temple. It lies just one and half kilometers from the Thiruvallam railway station and is situated on the western bank of the Nuga river, a tributary of the river palar.

When we dug into the page of history to know about the builder of this temple, the pages are blank. When we look in to the literary source for origin and development of the Bilvanathisvarar temple, we come across many legendary stories, which are very interesting. The temple, the deity, and the tirtam of this temple have their origins in various legends. Legends regarding the name of the place have already seen in the previous chapter 'History of the village'.

There is a legend regarding the origin of Niva-nadhi (river) which follows here. It was usual for a devotee to bring the daily Tirumanjam (water for scared bath) for giving an abhishegam (scared bath of the deity) to Tiruvallanathisvarar, from the kanjangiri, located at the distance of about three kilometers from thiruvallam. A notorious Asura (giant) named kanjan was systematically ill-treating the devotee, who was doing this sacred service of bringing the Tirumanjanam. On this, the devotee sorrowfully complained to Lord Siva regarding the atrocities committed to him by the Asura. There upon Lord siva sent Nandhikesvarar (bull mount of Lord siva) to destroy the asura. Accordingly Nandhikesvarar goaded the asura to death by his horns. Pools of blood, which poured out of the body of the asura fell in various places of the hill, in each of which a Sivalingam emerged¹. On every Purnami day (full moon Day) at about 11 p.m. in the night, a divine Jothi appears over these lingams. Especially during the fullmoon days in the months of chittirai and Thai the dazzling brilliance of this Jothi is found to increase many times².

With this incident, God siva called the river to flow by the side of the temple by ordering as Ni Va Nadhi in Tamil, which means 'You come river', Hence the river has been called a 'Niva Nadhi'. Even today, the river exists with the name Niva. This is said to be done by the lord siva so as to prevent the devotee from walking three kilometers every day to get water for Tirumanjanam³.

The first source to speak about the temple is the Devarnam of Sambandar. This great Nayanmar visited this temple in the 7th century A.D. on his way to Kalahasti from kanchi and sang eleven hymns in praise of lord siva. He addresses the god with all his fame and ends each song as "...such a great God is residing in Tiruvallam". He calls Tiruvallam as a vala Nagar (fertile city).

Inscriptional evidence starts from the latter half of the 7th century A.D. Since we get inscriptions⁵ of Jayanandivararama, the Bana chief, who served under the pallavans, had requested the Pallava Nandivarman to donate the Tiruvallam temple and the king had done it, we are very sure that in tiruvallam, Bilvanathisvarar temple existed and that too, it must be of stone since the inscription was engraved then.

Renovations and Constructions:

One epigraph of Bana chief Jayanandivarman who is said to have served under Nandivarman pallavamalla (793 A.D.) says that, some Arideran, son of madavan, a native of Alanganapakkam of Urukkattu kottam had given some land for the renovation of Vada Sigara-Koil⁶. Whether this is a separate temple or a shrine in the north side of present temple is unknown. And it is impossible to-day, to locate. The inscription is found on a boulder near the river Niva.

The cholas evinced great interest in the upkeep of this temple. The renovation of the temple was taken up during the time of Rajaraja I. An official of Rajaraja I, named Irayiravan Pallavarayan repaired the sanctum and named it as "Raja Rajeswara Garbha Griham"⁷.

We find inscriptions of the Bana king Vikramaditya were re-engraved during the reign of Rajaraja I⁸. They were said to be re-engraved when the renovation work has undertaken by Rajaraja I⁹.

Some Kirthimarhanda Brahmadhirajan of Rajaraja's time had set up an image of Uma Bhattarakki. This was done in 992 A.D. In the same year Madurantakan Gandaraditian had donated land for the temple¹¹.

In 992 A.D. Maduranataka Gandaraditian had visited Tiruvallam temple and caused 1000 jars of water to be poured on God¹² and he had checked the accounts of Bilvanathisvarar temple. Having found the offerings to God being decreased, he summoned the authorities, to find out the reasons. Since rest of the lines of the inscriptions are missing, we are unable to know the full details of the incident. Hultzch considers the event of 1000 jars of water pouring as Kumbhabhishegam¹³ which is usually done when a temple is newly constructed or major renovation work undertaken.

In this temple erection of Tuvagamanival Endu mandapam was undertaken by some pottappichcholan in 993 A.D. Presently it is difficult to identify this mandapam.

In 1022 A.D during the reign of Rajendra chhola DEVA I, some more addition were made to the temple. A military regiment named Kamugupadi had established the states of Tribhuvana Sundarar, his consort and Lord for the archana and archana-bogam.¹⁵ Again we are Left in dark in identifying these status.

We get a number of inscriptions in the successive periods, which speak of the donation to the temple for its maintenance, but not for any repair or renovation till the time of Kulottunga I's reign. Thus in 1078 A.D. in the 8th regional year of Kulottunga I, we get a reference to the repairing work of Bilvanathiavarar temple. Sengeni mindam Attimallan Sambuvarayan had granted the Trisulakasu and fine collected as kurra dandam to carry on the repairs of the temple. Velaivangi a Vairagin, who was the chief of Tiruvallam had caused the charitable gift to be made. Thus end the renovation work of this temple.

But we get inscriptions which are undated. One incomplete inscription which does give no information regarding date, ruler and constructor, speaks of the construction of a Thirumandapam. Some persons named Arungan Nadarchetty has renovated Kodungai

Now the temple is kept in a state by the efforts of Sachidananda (mowna) Swamigal. It is with the efforts of this mowna Swamigal, renovation work was carried out some years back and Kumbaghishegam was performed.

Presents Position of the Temple:

The temple gopura is in the southern entrance which is the main access to the temple. The shrines of Siva and his consort are facing east. There are two Prakarams inside the temple. Immediately after entering the gopura, the Thirukulam named Gowri Tirtam is found on the entrance of which leads to the inner temple. The Nagarivarar shrine is on the left side

The utsava Murtis are found in the south-west corner of the temple. The shrines of Sahasralingam and Lord Muruga are located in the west of the prakaram. The shrines of Ambal and Minakshi Sundaesvarar are situated in the northern prakaram. Bhairavar and Surya are installed in the north-east corner of the temple.

The shrines of Jalakandesvarar (Padhakesvarar) is found to the right side of the Siva's shrine. The presiding deity of this shrine is Vallanadhisvarar, who is also otherwise known as Bilvanathisvarar. His consort is Sri Valambgai, alias Thunu Madhyabal, denoting that her waist is bow shaped. To the east end, west of the southern side of Valambgai shrine Lord Vishnu offers darshan in sitting and standing postures respectively.

There are two sacred Tirtams in this place viz., the Niva-Nandhi and Gowri Tirtam. The sacred Vilva tree is the sthalaviruksham of this shrine. Some people call the old jack tree inside the temple as the Sthalaviruksham.

A noteworthy feature of this shrine is, unlike other temples, the Nandhi is not facing the Lord, but facing the east in the same direction as the presiding deity. The Bali-Pitam, between the Nandhi and the presiding deity is like a tortoise, in shape.

Apart from beautifully carved images of Lord Genesa, Dakshnamurthy, Durga etc., housed in the niches of the gopura, there are splendid relief carvings atop each niches. Of the five corridors, that of Ravana Anugrahamurthi in the northern corridor is the most impressive.

Bhikshatana and a musical group are some other sculptures of equal merit, especially, the letter with a coy maiden clutching a mridanga (a type of drum). Finely carved prancing Yali adorn the cause of sanctum, seemingly supporting the with roof with their up lifted lags.

Now pujas are performed four times daily, by a hereditary Brahmin priest, who is paid monthly salary, besides the offering of devotees. The temple owns antique jewellery in gold and silver worth about Rs.10,000.¹⁷ The temple occupies an area of about 0.5 acres. The landed properties of the temple include about 3.24 acres of wet and dry lands which are leased out.¹⁸ The income is spent towards the up-keep and general maintenance of the temple.

There are two ancient cars and a palanquin here, apart from ten Vahanas. Navarathri, Sivarathri, Teppa utsavam, Ani Tirumanjanam, Tahi pusam and Masi maham are the important festivals celebrated here, which attract about 5,000 devotees from far and near.

The administration affairs of the temple is vested in a Board of Trustees, functioning through an executive officer of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board.

References:

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