

TOURIST CENTRES AND MONUMENTAL SITES IN VILLUPURAM DISTRICT

DR.B.KARTHIKEYAN*

Abstract

Villupuram district, Tamilnadu state in India is one of the most significant districts which has the affluent tourist places and monumental sites. There are many more archaeological evidences of Chola, Pallava, Vijayanagar and Nayakas rule in Tamilnadu. But these sites and monuments have been ignored unknowingly the significance of the same by the people. The Genji, the seat of Nawab Tej Singh has got more importance and it has been eulogized in various ballads.

Mandakapattu rock cut temple, Sir Bakthajeneswarar temple, Poovarasankuppam temple, Thalagiriswarar temple, Abirameswarar temple, Keelvalai rock paintings and Kabilar kundru in Villupuram district bestow the information for the cultural and religious activities of the ruled and rulers.

Title of the study

This article entitled “**Tourist Centres and Monumental Sites in Villupuram District**” discusses the monumental sites which reflected customs and conventions of the people inherited from the past and analyses the tourist places located in Villupuram district which have been ignored without knowing of the significance of pertinence with the entertainment of the society, economic development and impact in cultural phenomena.

*** Assistant Professor of History, Arignar Anna Govt. Arts College, Villupuram – 605
602, Tamilnadu, India**

Objectives of the Study

This article aims at the following objectives:

1. To understand the salient features of the Villupuram District.
2. To explore various monumental sites in Villupuram District
3. To comprehend the significance of monumental sites in Villupuram District
4. To know the tourist centres located in Villupuram District and their pertinence with the development of economy
5. To suggest the measures to be taken to protect monumental sites in Villupuram District

Research Methodology

The four different methods of historical research i.e., exposition, explanation, narration and critical analysis have been applied wherever applicable.

Delimitation

Villupuram is one of the most significant districts as it has more monumental sites and tourist centres. Hence, this study has the topographical limitation within Villupuram district.

Gingee – Location

Gingee Fort or **Senji Fort** (also known as Chenji, Jinji or Senchi) is one of the surviving forts in Tamil Nadu, India.¹ It lies in Villupuram District, 160 kilometres (99 miles) from the state capital, Chennai, and is close to the Union Territory of Puducherry. The fort is so fortified, that Shivaji, the Maratha king, ranked it as the “most impregnable fortress in India” and it was called the “Troy of the East” by the British. The nearest town with a railway station is Tindivanam and the nearest airport is Chennai (Madras), located 140 kilometres (90 miles) away.

The Gingee Fort complex is on three hillocks: Krishnagiri to the north, Rajagiri to the west and Chandrayandurg to the southeast. The three hills together constitute a fort complex, yet each hill contains a separate and self-contained citadel. The fort walls are 13 km (8.1 miles) and the three hills are connected by walls enclosing an area of 11 square kilometres (4.2 sq. miles). It was built at a height of 800 feet (240 m) and protected by a 80 feet (24 metre) wide moat. It has a seven-storeyed Kalyana Mahal (marriage hall), granaries, prison cells, and a temple dedicated to its

presiding Hindu goddess called Chenjiamman. The fortifications contain a sacred pond known as Aanaikulam. The walls of the fort are a mixture of the natural hilly terrain comprising the Krishnagiri, Chakkilidurg and Rajagiri hills, while the gaps were sealed with the main wall that measures 20 metres (66 feet) in thickness.² On the top of the hillock, there are minor fortifications.

Water resources are usually sparse in South Indian forts, *Kalyana Mahal at Gingee fort* while it was well managed in the Citadel. There are two sweet water sources on the summit and below it there are three reservoirs for storage of rain water. Water for Kalyana Mahal was brought through earthenware pipes from reservoir located 500 m (1,600 ft) from it.³

Kabilar Kundru (Edachikal)

Kabilar Kundru or Kabilar rock or Kabilar hill or Edachikal is a hill rock in the middle of the Ponnaiyar River near Tirukoilur in Viluppuram district.⁴ It is situated 40 km away from the district head and it is surrounded by Sankarapuram in west, Villupuram in east, Kallakurichi in south and Tiruvannamalai in north. Kabilar kundru is located in the village 'Kilaiyur' in the river bed of south Pennar. During Sangam age, this region is known as Parambu Nadu ruled by Vel Pari who was killed in a battle. After the death of Vel Pari, his daughters namely Angavai and Sangavai were deserted in the hands of his friend Tamil poet Kapilar. Kapilar requested many chieftains to give life to the daughters of Pari. Finally, he left them in the hands of Malayaman Thirumudikari of Tirukoilur chieftains and did Vadakirrutal (facing north, fast unto death) here.⁵ It is one of the protected monuments in Tamil Nadu by the Archaeological Survey of India.⁶

This Kapilar hill is popularly known as Edaichikal and Kapila kal by the local masses. Once a woman who selling butter belonged to Edayar community was crossing the river south Pennar.⁷ Suddenly flood was overflowing and the woman was climbed over rock and saved her life. After that, it is named as Edaichikal. As Kapilar was facing north and lost his life on the peak of the rock, it is otherwise known as Kapila kal. As the hill is symbol of the glorious past, it can be facilitated with various amenities and keep it as the monumental significant one in Villupuram district.

Mandagapattu – Rock Cult Temple

Mandagapattu is located in Gingee taluk of Villupuram district, where is witnessed with rock cut temple of Pallava period. The Pallavas were highly contributed to art and architecture which were scattered over northern part of Tamilnadu. Mandagapattu is also one of the best monumental places of Villupuuram district. In this rock cut temple, many titular names are inscribed in the Sanskrit language. Without wood, brick and any metal, the temple was fabricated with Nanmugan, Thirumal and Siva. This temple might have been built during the ruling period of Mahendravarman I.

Mahendravarman I, was a Pallava king who ruled the Northern regions of what forms present-day Tamil Nadu in India in the early 7th century,⁸ he was the son of Simhavishnu, who defeated the Kalabhras and re-established the Pallava kingdom. Tamil literature flourished under his rule, with the rise in popularity of *Tevaram* written by Appar and Sambandhar. He himself was the author of the play *Mattavilasa Prahāsana* and another play called *Bhagavadajjuka*.⁹

Patronage of Arts and Architecture

Mahendravarman was a great patron of letters and architecture. He was the pioneer of Rock-Cut Architecture amongst the Pallavas. In the inscription at the Mandagapattu rock-cut temple, it is claimed that the temple was built without wood, brick, mortar or metal.¹⁰ The five celled cave temple at Pallavaram was also built during his reign as was the Kokarneswarar Temple, Thirukokarnam of Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu. Fine examples of his rock-cut temples can be witnessed at Mahabalipuram, (Satyagirinathar and Satyagirishwarar twin temples), Siyamangalam (the Siva temple Avanibhajana Pallaveswaram) in North Arcot district and the upper rock-cut temple at Trichy.

Sri Bhakthajaneswarar Temple – Thirunavalur

Thirunavalur is the birth place of saivite saint Sundarar. The original name of the place might be Navalur. As it is well-regarded by Sundarar saivite saint, this place is prefix with Thiru and called as Thirunavalur.

Prayer

Thirunavalur shrine is devotionally revered by those closely attached to Saivism. It is here planet Sukra (Venus) got relieved from retrograde effects. People awaiting marriage, expecting trade development, elevation in jobs and health improvement visit this temple for fulfillment of their desires. Those worshipping the Lord here get mental peace, oratory skill, educational recognition and above all the very blessings of the Lord.

It is noteworthy that Sukra (Venus) installed a Shivalinga here and performed the *pujas* as per rules and was blessed by the Lord. This Linga is near the Navagraha (9 planets) in the temple. Special *pujas* are performed to this Linga on Fridays as Friday belongs to Sukra.

Prayer Commitment

Devotees worship the Lord with white lotus, white silk dhoti, do the lighting with white ghee and achieve their boons from the Lord. Their endeavours progress without any obstacle. *Archana* (worshipping the Lord chanting his names) with 3 limes and 3 turmeric bring happy events to the family.

Abishek is done with oil, turmeric powder, flour powder, milk, curd, fruits, sugarcane juice, honey, *panchamirtham*, sandal, rosewater, sacred ashes and cloths offered. *Annadhanam* is undertaken by the wealthy to the visitors. Sundaramurthy Nayanar is the speciality of the temple.

Poovarasankuppam

This temple is approximately 1200 years old. This is a spot where he is said to have given darshan to the seven rishis along with his consort. Lord Narasimhar took an instant incarnation as human-lion God, answering the prayers of his bhaktha – Prahalada to slay the demon king – Hiranyakasibu. After slaying the king, his anger did not subside and he roamed all over India. On the Northern shore of the river South Pennar in South India known as Dakshin Pinnakini, the “Saptha Rishi” or Seven rishis prayed to the Lord to have his darshan. It is at a spot called Poovarasankuppam, where he gave darshan to these rishis. However, the rishis could not bear the intensity of heat emitting from the Lord and requested his consort to calm him down. Goddess Amirthavalli, obliged and sat on the Lord’s lap and looked at him with one eye and the rishis

with the other. This act of the Goddess Lakshmi brought a soothing and tranquil effect on the Lord. To this day, it is only at this temple in the whole world does the Lord Lakshmi Narasimhar appear in such a pose. This pose where the Goddess, looks at the bhakthas and her Lord simultaneously is believed to be having a conversation with the Lord presenting the bhaktha's petitions to him.

This is how this place got its name, "Poovarasankuppam". One of the kings of the Pallava dynasty embraced Jainism and started destroying Vishnu and Shiva temples. People were enraged at this act and protested against the demolition of temples. The king imprisoned those who protested against him. 'Narahari', a sage who was horrified at the act, spearheaded the movement against the king and was sentenced to death. Furious at the punishment imposed on him, the sage cursed the king with 'Brahma hathi dosham'. At this juncture, the king was besieged with problems and difficulties. Finally, he repented for his sins and wanted to get rid of the curse by seeking the blessings of the sage. He went in search of Narahari. While taking a nap beneath a 'poovarasam tree', the Lord appeared in his dream and declared that he would be redeemed of his curse as the sage would come there to bless him. He woke up from sleep but was unable to identify the Lord. Just then a leaf from the poovarasam tree dropped on the king. He could see the image of Lord Lakshmi Narasimha on the leaf. His happiness knew no bounds when the sage appeared in person to bless him. The king was absolved of the curse. As per the wishes of the sage, the king constructed a temple for the Lord at Poovarasam Kuppam. Narahari stayed there and propitiated the Lord.

Keelvalai

Keelvalai is a small village situated in Villupuram to Tiruvannamalai bus route. There is a drawing which might be belonged to Sangam age is known as Keelvalai drawings. It is otherwise known by the names of blood drawing Block rock and Entha parai as it has red in colour. Very first is found out by the group of school teachers of Pondicherry. The drawing is segregated into four groups. The first group has a man on the horse back, a male figure walking along with horse, the man figure which inhibiting the first two, the special features of this drawings are the nose of the man is like that of beak of the birds, a crown on the man's head, and

swords the horse riders' waist. In the second volume consists of boat riding of the four men. Among them, a man has an oar. Their shape of the nose is also like that of beak of the bird.¹¹

In the third block, five symbols are there such as thatched hut, drum, comb and a round with cross lines. The pictograms are similar with lipids of Indus Valley Civilization. But attempts have been made to decipher these drawings.

In the fourth block, the six men are standing in the series. The hill area is in deserted condition and it can be maintained by ASI as the monuments are the symbol of glorious past.

Panamalaipettai

Panamalai is located in north west direction and 22 km away from Villupuram. There is a Thalagreeswar temple on the rock. The word Thalagiri is the Sanskrit word which Tamil meaning is Panamalai. During Pallava rule, their contributions to the architecture has been categorized into three divisions such as chariot style temple, rock cut temple and building temple. Among the three, the chariot style temples were built nearing sea shore of Mahabalipuram, the building style temple on the Marudha lands and the rock cut temple were built on top of the rock of Thalagiriswar temple. Gabireal Leo Dubroi, Professor in France was the first personality who brought this temple into light. In the south – east part of this temple a Linga statue was set up in Karpagraham in Moolasthanam is rectangular circumference. From altar to thatching granite was used for construction.¹²

For constructing Vimana and other sculpture were constructed with mortar paste. There are three floors found in the Vimana. The architectural style of this temple is similar with Kailasanathar temple at Kanchipuram and sea shore temple at Mahabalipuram which are belonging Pallava period. The special features of Pallava architecture is lion pillar. The process of drawing in the temple is another style of Pallavas. This can be found both at Thalagrishwar temple at Panamalai and Kailashanathar temple at Kanchipuram. The figure of lord siva and parvathi are found on the walls of the circumference of the Karpagraha. These drawings are similar with that of Ajantha, Amaravathi in Maharashtra and Sikkiria drawings at Srilanka which belonged to 5th Century A.D.

The worship of lord Durgai is popularized during Pallava period. The Durga sculpture was found not only in Kanchipuram Kailasanathar temple but also in Panamalai temple. The Durga sculpture is described in the cave located in the bottom of the rock. The Durga sculpture is found with Trianga posture i.e. left leg is found on the lion and right is on the ground. On the left side, there are two hands. At one hand is placed with bow and arrow and in another there is a conch. On the right side there are two hands, one is placed with shield and another one is rested on the thigh. The head was decorated with crown and ears were ornamented with ear rings which are known as Bathra Gundalam. The wrists of the hands are decorated with bangles, chest with necklace (Purinool) and waist with waist belt with hermi circle in front portion. The ample of the diety with is insitedwith anklet. This Durga sculpture is otherwise known as the Kotravai and Simmavahini. This is one of the best examples of the Pallava architecture.

Thiruvamathur

Abirameswarar temple is located at Thiruvamathur village which is 3 km away from Villupuram and lies in western direction of Villupuram. The Sthala purana of this temple insists that the Kamadhenu, Nandhi and cows got horns through prayer from the god. Hence this place is known as Aamathur, Thaayur and Gomathurupuram. The temple is by the name of Abirameswarar temple as it has lord Easwara as the chief god. The chief deity is Mathamman. The chief deity is carrying Ox bow on his head. Even Rama, hero of Ramayana had also worshipped this temple and Sundaramoorthy Nayanar also had worshipped this temple. It has been fabricated during 6th regnal period of Paranthaga I. The Karpagraha is in rectangular in shape. But the style of architecture is contradicted with temple architecture as it has renovated with later period. The Vimana of the temple is little level damaged. At the gateway there are two standing pillars seen.

Mummoorthy (Bhramma, Vishnu and Siva) sculpture are found on the wall of the temple. On the opposite direction of the Abhirameswarar temple, Muthalamman temple is erected by the name of Muthalamman temple. In this sthala Thirupathigam was being chanted by born blind poets. There are 16 poets who chanted Thirupathigam (praise songs) and got cloths. It is insisted through inscription which started from 'Pudavai Muthal'. The temple is one of the most significant places in social, cultural and religious phenomena.¹³

Thirukoilur

Thiruvikkrama Lord Vishnu Swamy and Vedavalli Thaayaar (Vaamana vathaaram) temple is located in the center of this town. This temple comes under 108 Divya Desams. In the east of the town is the Sivan Temple situated on the banks of River Thenpennai. Near to the temple, in the river, there exists Kabilar (Saint) Kundru (tiny mountain). On the banks of River Pinakini, we can find the Moola brindavana of Sri Raghuutthama Teertha (1595 AD) and Sri Satyapramoda Teertha (1997), very eminent pontiffs of the Uttaradi Mutt of Madhwa lineage. One of the famous Jyotir ling mutts of Sri Gnananda Tapovanam is on the Tirukoilur - Thiruvannamalai Road. This mutt was started by his holiness Sri Gnananda Swamigal and still continues to be thronged by pilgrims seeking his blessings.

Conclusion

Monuments irrespective of topography have been created for thousands of years. They are often the most durable and well known symbols of ancient civilizations. There are many forms in monuments viz., dolmens, tombs, caves, pillars, stones, temples, buildings, etc.,. The society became organized on large scale. So, the monuments are as large as to be difficult to destroy. The monuments are also often designed to convey the message relating to historical and political field. These monuments are used to bringforth the information hidden in the sites. These are also used to educate the populace about the important events and figures inherited from the past. The government should frame special legislation for the improvement of Villupram district. District level archaeological department should be created to develop the tourism. Frequent transportations to tourist sites should be arranges in order to make the places more accessible. Infrastructure facilities should be constructed and tourist guides should be appointed to help the tourists.

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