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Historical Series 2

SRI NETRODDHARAKASWAMI TEMPLE

Panaiyapuram



Dr. P. Rajaraman, M.A., Ph.D.

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PREFACE

This small monograph on Sri Netroddharakaswami temple at Panaiyapuram in Villupuram Taluk, South Arcot District is an enlargement of an article that I presented at the Fourth Annual Congress of the Epigraphical Society of India, held at Madras in January 1978. As one born at this holy place, and as a student of history, I was rather inquisitive to know, from my younger days, the history of this temple, its architecture and the part it had played in the socio-economic life of the village. There are a number of inscriptions in the temple which range from the age of the Cholas to that of Vijayanagar. I have attempted to draw a picture of this temple based on the available materials.

I am grateful to the Chief Epigraphist, Archaeological Survey of India, Mysore for having supplied me with copies of transcripts of the unpublished inscriptions of this temple.

I am extremely thankful to Dr. K. V. Raman, Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology who has carefully gone through the script and made modifications wherever necessary and to his colleague, Dr. S. Gurumurthy, for his invaluable help for the improvement of this book.

I dedicate this monograph to Sri Netroddharakaswami whose grace I pray for.

FOREWARD

Dr. C. E. RAMACHANDRAN, M.A., M.Litt., Ph.D.,
Professor and Head, Department of Indian History,
University of Madras,
Madras-600 005.

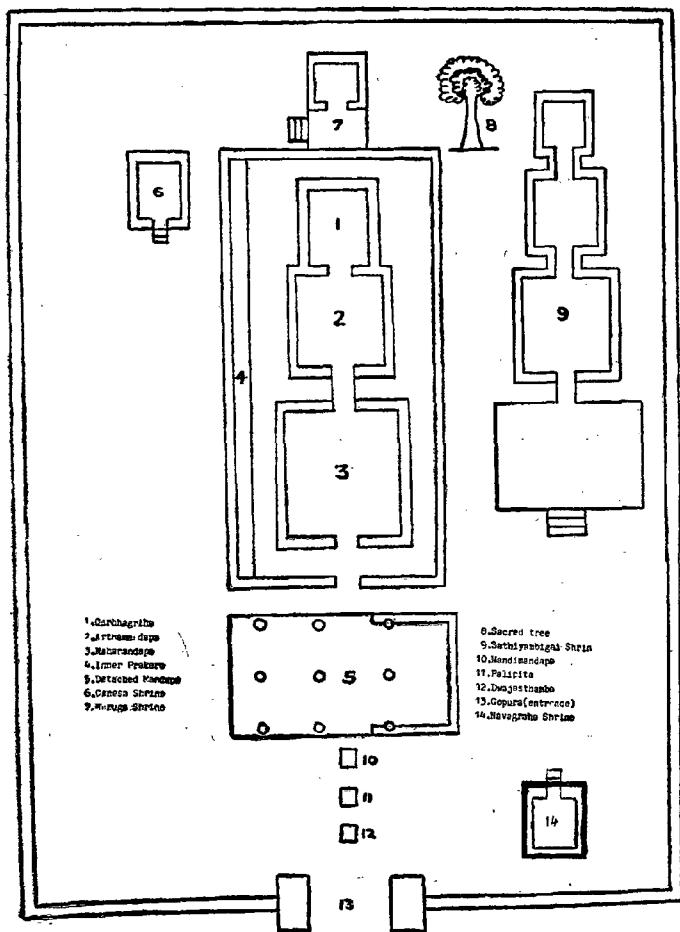
Dr. P. Rajaraman in his monograph on Sri Netroddharakawami Temple has given us a wealth of information about the temple which dates back to the Pallava times. His main source has been the epigraphs and he has succinctly indicated how the epigraphs help the reconstruction of the history of the temple and its rôle in society. The author also deals with the architectural beauty of the temple and while doing so has touched upon the engineering skill of the architects of the times, in enabling the rays of the sun to fall on the presiding deity and His consort, starting from the first day of the Tamil month, *Chittirai* every year, for about a week.

It is interesting to note that this Siva temple contained within its precincts a shrine for Vishnu also, and this goes to prove that the Imperial Cholas patronised Saivism and Vaishnavism equally.

Incidentally the work also indicates how the valuable epigraphs have been damaged while renovating the temple and thereby cautions against such damage being done to other such inscriptions on the walls of ancient temples.

Monographs of this kind are bound to enrich our knowledge of the hundreds of ancient temples found in Tamil Nadu and the author deserves to be congratulated for his venture on the study of ancient monuments of Tamil Nadu.

C. E. RAMACHANDRAN.



The Lay-out of the Temple

Sri Netroddharakaswami Temple Panaiyapuram

A small village in South Arcot District which lies at the junction of Madras-Tanjore and Villupuram-Vazhudavur roads at a distance of 10 kms in the north-eastern direction of Villupuram, Panaiyapuram has a long historic memory. It played a conspicuous role as the capital of Punaiyur Nadu, a subdivision of Panaiyur Nadu in Rajendra Vala Nadu.¹ It was also a place of pilgrimage as the Siva temple situated there attracted a large number of devotees. Infact, the temple added sanctity to this place of historical antiquity. Thirugnanasambandar, one of the Devaram hymnists, calls it புறவார் பனங்காட்டுர்.² It is presumed that Thirupuravar Panankattur is the original name of this place as this name is derived from the legend which is associated with the temple. This holy place is also referred to by different names in the inscriptions carved on the walls of this temple. One of the epigraphs of Rajendra II (1052 to 1064 A.D.) which was engraved on the southern wall of the shrine and dated in his 6th regnal year, mentions this place as Paravaipuram.³ The name Paravaipuram was perhaps given to this place after Paravai Nangai, the queen of Rajendra I. The very fact that the festival of *Jothi Thirunal* was celebrated to commemorate the birth day of Paravainangaiyar tells us the importance that was given to the queen of the Chola king.⁴ S. R. Balasubrahmanyam holds the view that Panaiyapuram must have been the head-quarters of Panaiyur Nadu, and Paravaipuram was perhaps a part of township where the

1 ARE 319 of 1917.

2 Sambandar Devaram, Thirumurai II, Dharmapura Adina Publication, Dharmapuram, p. 129.

3 ARE 319 of 1917.

4 ARE 318 of 1917.

temple was situated. In the inscriptions of Pandyan king Maravarman alias Vikrama Pandya Deva (1268-1281 A.D.) it is referred to in its original name as Puravar Panankattur.* The broad streets (broader than those of modern towns), with which this village has been laid out, confirms the view that it has played a leading role as the headquarters of a territorial unit of the Chola country.

Legends

The legends with which the temple is associated reveal that it has a hoary past. It is believed that it is the shrine where the sun offered worship to Lord Siva by showering his blazing rays and attained *mukhthi*. Curiously, this legendary tale is confirmed by the fact that the rising sun in the month of *Chittirai* during the first seven days pours his rays first on the presiding deity of this temple and then on His consort, giving much holiness to this temple. This feature can be attributed to the architectural design of this temple. The *garbhāgraha* is specially built for this purpose. Lattice windows are provided at the top of the *ārtha-māṇḍabha* to admit sunlight direct on the *moolavar* on such occasion.

Why the place is called Panankattur ?

There are a number of places in Tamilnadu which are called after the groves in which they were probably situated such as Tirumaraikkadu, Mangadu, Kattuppakkam, Sayakkadu, etc. "Kadu" literally means forest or uninhabited area as against "Nadu" or "Ur" which means inhabited area. Here *Panankattur* would mean Ur or village in the grove of "Panai". *Puravar* the prefix would also mean "grove".

There is every reason to believe that the name *Panankattur* is derived from *Palmyra* tree which still serves as the sacred tree (*Sthalavriksha*) of this temple. The word, புறவார் (புறவு + ஆர்)

(a penguin is satisfied) is added from the fact that it was the holy place where the legendary king *Sipi* was given *mukthi* by the Lord of the shrine appreciating his gesture of kindness to part with a pound of flesh from his thigh and even the entire flesh of his body if necessary for the sake of a pigeon when it had taken asylum in his hands to escape from a hunter.⁶ Thus the prefix *Purayar* being associated with the name of this ancient city renders historic connotation to the mythological story of *Sipi*.

The Presiding Deity

The presiding deity of this temple is known as *Netroddharaka-swami*⁷ (Protector of eyes) in Sanskrit and *Kannamarnda Nayanar* in Tamil.⁸ It is generally believed the Lord of this temple protects the eyes of those who suffer from defective vision or offers vision to those who have lost their sight when they surrender themselves unto His lotus feet. The deeper significance of the name is the god who elevates the devotee's vision to greater spiritual heights. However Gnanasambandar describes Him as the God bearing third eye on the brow. His consort who is called *Meyammai* in Tamil, *Sathiyambigai* in Sanskrit is considered to be the guardian angel or tutelary deity of the village. The people of the locality firmly believe that if any one dares to speak falsehood in front of this deity, he will be doomed to death.

LITERATURE

The temple is not only old in story but in song. However, the literature either on the temple or on the village is very meagre. There is, neither any *Sthalapurana* for this temple nor any tradition which speaks of its ancient greatness. The only literary work

6 P. K. Nambiar and K. C. Narayana Kurup (ed), *Temples of Madras State, Tiruchirapalli and South Arcot*, Census of India, Vol IX (Madras, 1966), p. 298.

7 This name is used in all official records.

8 ARE 324 of 1917

available to us about the temple is the *Devaram* of Saint Gnanasambandar who had composed eleven verses imploring the Lord of this temple to shower His bountiful grace on his devotees. He has given in his poems a beautiful description of this village and its environs. In one of his verses Gnanasambandar tells us that *Puravar Panankattur* was a fertile village where paddy crop grew in abundance. Buffaloes, let loose during the night times, grazed the paddy crops in the field and came out of their sheds with corn ears in their mouths.⁹ In another poem, he condemns the Jain monks, who used to loiter in the streets without any attire.¹⁰ From this, it is understandable that this place of pilgrimage had acted as cynosure even for Jain monks. However it cannot be taken that it was a place of religious animosity. Though Gnanasambandar had visited this place with an avowed purpose of propagating Saivism he had not confronted any tussle with leaders of other religions. The existence of a *Jaina Palli*¹¹ at Panaiyapuram testifies to the fact that it was a centre where people of different religions lived in amity. A recent composition on the presiding deity of this temple entitled *Panaiyapura Siva-peruman Pathigam* was brought out by Dhandapani Swamigal of Vannacharabham. He has also sung in praise of the Goddess of this temple which bears the title *Panaiyapuram Sathiyambigai Pathigam*. These works, though speaking of the various qualities of the God and Goddess of this temple, do not furnish any historical information. *Abidhana Sindhamani*, written by Prof. Singaravelu Mudaliar is yet another work which gives only scanty information about this sacred place. It furnishes a list of *Sivakshetramanmiyam* of Magada Nadu in which *Puravar Panankattur* is given the third place;¹² it is not exactly known

9 “மேய்ந்திளஞ் செந்நெல் மென்கதிர் கவ்வி
மேற்படுதலின் மேதி வைகறை
பாய்ந்த தண் பழனப் புறவார் பனங்காட்டுர்”

—Sambandar *Devaram*

10 “நாணழிந்துழல்வார் சமணரும்”

—Sambandar *Devaram*

11 ARE 320 of 1917.

12 A. Singaravelu Mudaliar, *Abidhana Sindhamani*, Asian Educational Services, (New Delhi, 1981), p. 1537.

why this region is called Magada Nadu by this Tamil savant. Prof. R. P. Sethupillai also gives sketchy information about this village in his *Tamizhagam Urum Perum*.¹³

Inscriptions

No account of this temple will be complete without touching upon its epigraphical wealth. There are about sixteen inscriptions of which three were published in the South Indian Inscriptions, and the rest though numbered (ARE 317-329 of 1917) remain unpublished. It is highly deplorable that at the time of recent renovation most of the inscriptions were disfigured and stones replaced and broken. Perhaps the renovators were not aware of the value of these chiselled historic documents.

HISTORY OF MANAGEMENT

During the time of the Imperial Cholas, the temple grew in importance and its activities multiplied. A lot of endowments and gifts were given by munificent benefactors. It necessitated the creation of a permanent body of officials to look into the affairs of the temple. Information gleaned from the epigraphical source throws light on the administration and management of the temple. For instance, an inscription of Rajendra II records the gift of paddy for a lamp to be lighted up in this temple.¹⁴ It also speaks of a group of officials called *Thiruvonnazhi Sabaiyom* who received the endowment on behalf of the temple. *Thiruvonnazhi* means sanctum and this *sabha* would mean the body of priests intimately dedicated to the religious performance. It is presumable that the management of the temple was in the hands of prominent citizens of this village who constituted the administrative committee namely *Thiruvonnazhi Sabaiyom*.

13 R. P. Sethupillai, *Tamizhagam Urum Perum*, Palaniappa Bros., (Madras, 1946) p. 160.

14 ARE 319 of 1917.

It is evident from the inscription of Adi Rajendra¹⁵ that the village of Panaiyapuram had grown in its dimension and had become an attractive town. The administration of the town as well as the temple was run by a set of people called *Nagarathom*.¹⁶ They were supposed to be the guardians of the temple. To improve its wealth they even purchased landed property by utilising the money of the temple treasury. *Nagarathar* were a corporate body of merchants who had a long tradition of trade and commerce. They were also well-known for their acts of charity for temples.

It is rather unfortunate, that we are not able to collect much information either about the composition or about the functioning of *Thiruvonnazhi Sabaiyom*. However, we can make a prudent guess that these bodies were the trial models of the *Variapperumakkal* of the earlier days.

The hey-day of the temple was gone with the decline of the Chola power and the town of Panaiyapuram lost much of its importance. The temple management continued to be in the hands of *Sivabrahmins* who had acted both as the custodians and as the spiritual functionaries of the temple.¹⁷ However there was a revival of the fortune of this temple during the days of Pandya king Vikrama Pandya (1268-1281 A.D.).

The temple acquired a new status when its wealth increased due to the gifts of land. A class of people called *Thanathar* acted trustees of the temple. Since they received grants on behalf of the temple, the responsibility of fulfilling the purpose of the endowments was entrusted to them. They were generally nominated by the local people. Nonetheless, they were not free from the periodical check by the Government of the times. In the opinion of Dr. K. V. Raman, they were "a powerful body of temple-trustees who were the supreme authorities in the temple adminis-

15 ARE 322 of 1917.

16 *Ibid*.

17 ARE 436 of 1903.

tration"¹⁸. The fortune of the temple fell on evil days when South India came under Muhammadan rule. There was no royal patronage. The economic ruin which the 17th and 18th centuries witnessed had a direct impact on the temple. Many *poojas* and festivals were abandoned.

The property of the temple was often misused and its maintenance was very poor. The old structure of the temple became dilapidated and it needed complete renovation. At this juncture, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Madras State took over the administration of the temple. With the help of the Government of Tamil Nadu and the people of the locality, the temple was reconstructed in 1971. The *Mahakumbhabhishekam* was held for seven days from 1-2-1971 to 7-2-1971. Thence-forward the annual *Brahma Utsavam* is being conducted without break.

At present it is only the executive officer, appointed by the above Department, who runs the administration of the temple with the help of the trustees periodically nominated by the Government.

Temple as a Centre of Culture and Learning

The temple of Panaiyapuram, during the days of Imperial Cholas, served as a great cultural centre where reading of *Siva dharma*, recitation of *Thiruppadiyam* hymns, musical performance such as playing the *Veena*, etc., were periodically held.¹⁹

Free School

Under the auspices of the temple, a free school was run with a single teacher. For the maintenance of the school, an endowment has been made by a wealthy donor whose name remains unrecorded in the inscription.²⁰ The same inscription

18 Dr. K. V. Raman, *Sri Varadarajaswami Temple*, Abhinav Publications, (New Delhi, 1975), p. 121.

19 ARE 321 of 1917.

20 ARE 323 of 1917.

makes provision for the maintenance of three water sheds, one each in the front of the two temples namely Paravai Eswaramudaiyar, Rajendra Chola Vinnagar Alwar and the third in front of the *mandapa* called Rajendra Chola. Provision had been made for the appointment of one supervisor to inspect the work of *Devadana, Salabhoga and temples*.

A Feeding House

A feeding house was also attached to the temple like the one at Ennayiram though smaller in size ; it fed daily 50 *brahmins* and 10 *Sivayogins* ; oil was also supplied to them for bathing. The *Salabhoga* mentioned above was evidently for the maintenance of this feeding house which was meant for a college or School (*Sala*) like the famous Kandalur salai.

The historical information that these inscriptions furnish is of rare value. They give us, very fascinating information regarding land measurement and taxes. An inscription on the walls of the central shrine of this temple was one of Rajendra Chola I. (1012-1014 A.D.). It speaks of some of the land measures like, *Ma, Mukkani, Mundhirikkai*, and it also refers to the unit of measure called Paravai Nangai Marakkal.²¹

These inscriptions enumerate a long list of taxes like *Tari-irai, Maravadai, Ur Kadamai, Inavari, Dhanapanam, Vettivari, Mavadai, etc.*²². The *Tari-irai* was a tax on the loom. This would mean there were weavers in the town..

An inscription of *Konerinmaikondan* also gives a list of taxes collected from the people such as *Chekkirai, Ponvari, Kamuku Kadamai, Payir Kadamai, Punchai Kadamai, Thattoli, etc.*²³

A Vishnu Temple within the complex of this Siva Temple

The inscription which was engraved on the southern wall of *mandapa* in front of the shrine refers to the existence of a

21 ARE 317 of 1917.

22 ARE 325 of 1917.

23 ARE 437 of 1903.

Vishnu temple called Rajendra Chola Vinnagara Alwar, probably named after Rajendra Chola I. Since there is no such Vishnu shrine in the temple complex of Panaiyapuram, it needs to be identified.²⁴ However the endowment of lands both wet and dry for conducting the festival called *Kothandarama-Sandhi* testifies to the fact that there must have been a Vishnu temple in the same temple complex.

The Images of Rajendra Chola and Paravai Nangaiyar

An undated and unnamed inscription engraved on the southern wall of the temple provides for offerings and lamps to the images of Rajendra Chola Devar and Paravai Nangaiyar set up in the same temple.²⁵ It may reasonably be conjectured that even this epigraph might be of Rajendra Chola II since it was found on the same wall where his inscription existed. Probably he made this provision for the images of his father Rajendra I, the most celebrated of all the later Chola kings and his favourite, Paravai Nangaiyar. It is not known when and where these images were installed in the temple complex. Unfortunately they are also to be included in the long list of missing images of South India.

The Festivals

The epigraphical source indicates several benefactors including kings from the days of Rajendra I till the times of Harihara II of Vijayanagara dynasty had made endowments of land and money for lamp and worship and offerings in the temple. The system of worship that they initiated and practised ceased to exist due to the ravages of time. However, some of the festivals referred to in the inscriptions need special mention here.

²⁴ S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples* (985 to 1070 A.D.) Thompson Press (India) Ltd. (Haryana, 1975) p. 284.

²⁵ ARE 320 of 1917. There is a popular story about Paravai Nangaiyar. She was a dancer of exquisite beauty and a gifted songster. Her bewitching charm attracted no less a person than Rajendra I who was very much after her. The Emperor gave her even royal status and a lot of endowments to five temples in her name.

It was a festival held in the month of *Chittirai* to commemorate the birthday of Paravai Nangai.²⁶ We do not know the reason why the celebration of this festival was given up by the people.

Kothandarama Sandhi

Kothandarama Sandhi was a special service offered to the presiding deity of the Vishnu temple and instituted in honour of the Pandya king, who adorned the title of *Thirubhuwana Chakkaravarthi, Konerinmaikondan*. The inscription speaks of endowments of lands both wet and dry for conducting this festival for the sake of the king's health. There is dispute among historians in identifying this Pandya ruler. Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri ascribes this title to Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan who took the surname Kothandaraman after his conquest of Sri Lanka whereas K. V. S. Iyer attributes it to the earlier king of the same name.

The Festivals of Present Day

There are many festivals conducted periodically during the course of the year. The landlords and rich merchants of the locality participate in the programme.

Surya Pooja

On the very first day of the *Chittirai* month, i.e., the beginning of the Tamil year, the temple acquires a festive appearance. As stated already, the rising sun showers brilliant rays on the presiding deity and then on His consort. This occurs for about a week. This is popularly known as *Surya Pooja*. It attracts a large number of devotees every year.

The Brahma Utsavam

The *Brahma Utsavam* of this temple which is the most spectacular of the festivals also takes place in the same month.

It is a ten day festival ; it starts on the *Panchami thithi* of the waxing period of the moon and concludes on the full moon day. The ninth day festival is the car festival. *Utsavamurthy* being gorgeously decorated with costly jewels and with His consort is taken around the main streets of the village on a splendidly embellished chariot. Thousands of people throng there every year to witness the scene.

Anithirumanchanam

The next important festival of the temple is the *Anithirumanchanam*. Lord *Nataraja*, who is splendidly decorated with jewels in His dancing posture is taken in procession along the streets with His consort *Sivagamasundari*. It is one of the festivals conducted with pomp and show.

Parasakthi Festival

To Goddess *Parasakthi*, a festival is conducted on *Pooram* star in the month of *Adi*, which happily synchronises with the full moon day. In the same month on *Swathi* star a festival is celebrated for *Sundarar*, one of the *Devaram* hymnists. A well decorated *Utsavamoorthy* is taken in procession along the main streets of the village. Perhaps this is conducted to signify his death anniversary.

Pittu Thiruvizha

One of the festivals which pleases both the eyes and ears of the people of the village is called *Pittu Thiruvizha*. It is celebrated on the *Moolam* star in the month of *Avani*, to recall one of the sacred sports of Lord *Siva*. The festival is conducted to tell us the story of Lord *Siva* who carried head-loads of sand for the sake of an ordinary food called *Pittu*, prepared in rice.

Navaratiri Festival

The famous Nine Nights festival (*Navaratiri*) is held for ten days in the month of *Purattasi*. Both *Netroddharakaswami* and *Sathiyambikai* grace the *darbar* or *kolu* in the *mahamandaba*

of the temple. On the day following the *Navaratiri* festival the *Vijayadasami* day is celebrated. It is on this day that the *Arrow festival* takes place and this is celebrated to recapitulate the disastrous end of *Mahishasooran*.

Annabhishekam

Annabhishekam is performed on the presiding deity of the temple on full moon day in the month of *Aippasi*. Cooked rice is placed on the *linga* from top to bottom covering it entirely. Perhaps this offering is made to the Lord of the temple praying for good harvest in the coming month of *Thai*.

Somavara Vizha

This festival is conducted on every Monday in the month of *Karthigai*. The decorated *Utsavamoorthy* is taken around the outer *prakara* of the temple in this month. On the day the *Utsavamoorthy Chandrasekarar* is taken in procession in a gorgeously decorated cart along the streets of the village; there used to be bon-fire also.

Arudhara Dharisanam

This festival celebrated in the month of *Markazhi* is a colourful one. Lord *Nataraja* with His consort *Sivagamasundari* will be taken in procession along the main streets of the village. This festival symbolises the *udhara* posture of Lord Siva (anger and wrath).

Sivarathiri

This festival is conducted in the month of *Masi* when *pooja* will be performed four times in a day. It is gratifying to note that these festivals mentioned above are being regularly conducted after the *Mahakumbhabhishekam* held in 1971.

The Daily Poojas

The hereditary *gurukkal* who is paid a monthly salary offers two *poojas* daily, one in the morning and the other at night. Ornaments in the temple are worth several thousands of

rupees. According to the report of the Census of India of 1961, published in 1966, the immovable properties fetch an annual income of Rs. 4,150. The temple owns a car, a palanquin and a *vimanam*.

Art and Architecture

The epigraphical records from the temple suggest that it is essentially a Chola temple. The stone sculpture of the *garbhagraha* and the *ardhamandapa* reveal that they are of the time of Rajendra I. It covers an area of 73 cents.

It is sad to note that the entire temple structure excepting the basement of the *gopura* had been uprooted at the time of recent renovation which marred its ancient architectural beauty. During the process of reconstruction the remnants of the original structure have been reused, particularly in the construction of the sanctum and the adjoining compartments. The original stone slabs bearing the inscriptions of the Chola kings right from the time of Rajendra I form part of the walls of the sanctum. Some of the slabs are laid upside down. But these inscribed slabs proclaim the antiquity of the temple. There are also decorated pillars and door lintals and jambs lying uncared for in the outer *prakara*. These seem to have formed part of the original temple structure. There is a pair of short pillars with scouting lion face lying in front of the *gopura*. They are of granite stone. They might belong to Vijayanagara period. There are also a few stone *nandi* figures seated by the side of *Sthalavriksha* of the temple. They could have once adorned the outer *prakara* wall.

The Gopura of the Temple

An imposing tower mostly assignable to Vijayanagar period adorns the entrance to the temple. The basement of the *gopura* stands intact. It has been built of granite stones. Luckily it was not altered at the time of recent renovation. The inner basement bears inscriptions of Vijayanagara times. This confirms the view that the *gopura* was built by one of the Vijayanagara kings. It is not known whether the superstructure of the *gopura*

was left incomplete during their times. However it is now beautifully renovated.

The basement, though original in structure, is devoid of any niches or stone sculptures. However, there are a few carvings on the interior of the basement wall, which represent a *linga* and a cow milking on the *linga*, etc. The *gopura* is broad-based and raises gradually in five diminishing tiers. It is about 60 feet high, with a big entrance.

The temple has the following architectural components. The *garbhagraha*, where a beautiful *linga* is installed for worship, is square in size. It is preceeded by a square *ardhamandapa* (of bigger dimensions) which is again preceeded by a *Maha Mandapa* of square size. The *mahamandapa* has some bronze icons of recent origin. There is a niche at the centre of northern side of the *mandapa* where *Nataraja* and His consort are being kept. There is an inner enclosure going round this complex. A cloister runs along the southern side of this enclosure. It bears the figures of *Nayanmars*. There are a few stone sculptures like *Surya*, on the eastern side.

There is an elevated platform just in front of this enclosure (detached) with its northern side closed. It is covered and supported by nine pillars in three rows. The entrance to this *mandapa* is thrown open in all sides except on the north. In front of this *mandapa* towards east are seen a *nandi mandapa* (a simple stone basement with *nandi* at the top) of a *balipeeta* and a *dwajastampa*, all lying in one axial line with the *garbhagraha*, the *arthamandapa*, etc.

There is an outer *prakara* enclosing all these components, besides a shrine for *Ganesa* on the South-western corner and a shrine for *Muruga* on the western side touching the back wall of the sanctum. The sacred tree of this temple namely the palmyrah is grown right on the northern side of this *Muruga* shrine.

Sathiyambigai Shrine

A separate shrine in smaller dimension is built exclusively for the *Devi Sathiyambigai* on the northern side of the main shrine. It is a replica of the main shrine in many respects. It is also facing east and lying parallel to the main shrine. It has all essential compartments that the main shrine consists of. It has a small square *garbhagraha* preceded by a square *ardhamandapa* (bigger size) which is again preceded by a *mahamandapa*, square in size. The *mahamandapa* has entrances on the southern and northern sides with flights of steps. It is preceded by a detached open platform. There are some stone sculptures placed inside the *mandapa* such as *Vinayaka* and *Dandayuthapani*.

Muruga Shrine

It has a small square *garbhagraha* and a square *arthamandapa*.

Vimanas

The *vimana* of the main shrine is three-storeyed and *vimana* of the Amman shrine is two-storeyed. They are of recent origin without any architectural significance. They are completely painted and do not possess any sculpture of artistic value.

The Exterior Wall of Sanctum and Ardhamandapa

The exterior wall of the sanctum is decorated with niches at the centre of the each side besides pilasters (half pillar). The niche on the southern side bears *Dakshnamoorthy*; the niche on the western side carries *Lingodhbhava*; in the niches on the northern side *Brahma* and *Durga* are placed. The exterior wall of the *ardhamandapa* on the northern side has a niche with *Bairava* sculpture. The walls of the *mahamandapa* are plain.

Prakara

The outer *prakara* wall is also recently built. It is of 14 feet height. It is also plain.

Sculpture

There are not many sculptures in this temple. However the following are of special mention :

1. *Dakshnamoorthy*
2. *Brahma*
3. *Durga*

These three sculptures do exhibit some facial features which recall the late Chola style. The following are other sculptures which are of recent origin.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Surya</i> | } Main shrine inner enclosure. |
| 2. <i>Bairava</i> | |
| 3. <i>Vinayaka</i> | } Amman shrine <i>Mahamandapa</i> |
| 4. <i>Dandayuthapani</i> | |

Bronzes

There are a few bronze figures seen inside the *mahamandapa* of the main shrine. Among the bronzes, the following are of special mention :

1. *Vinayaga*
2. *Siva and Parvathi as Utsavamoorthies*
3. *Nataraja and Sivagamasundari*
4. *Subramania*
5. *Arjuna*

These bronzes are of late origin. However they exhibit a fine workmanship recalling the age-old bronze specimen of Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

The *Netroddharakaswami* temple at Panaiyapuram is one of the ancient temples in Tamil Nadu with a long historical background. It is evident from the epigraphical source that it had been a place of administrative and religious importance during the times of Imperial Cholas and Later Pandyas. Though in subsequent times the political significance of Panaiyapuram has dimmed, the place remained atleast for several centuries, as a centre of pilgrimage attracting men and women, young and old and rich and poor.



