



## Muveraivendran – A glance

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### **Abstract**

The Hindu temple architecture reflects a synthesis of arts, the ideals of dharma, beliefs, values and the way of life cherished under Hinduism. Their meaning and purpose have extended beyond spiritual life to social rituals and daily life. In political and economic life, Hindu temples have served as a venue for the succession within dynasties and landmarks around which economic activity thrived. The cave temples of the Pandyas served as galleries of varied sculptural and iconographical forms. Malaikolundiswarar cave temple is located on a hillock on the banks of the Arjuna river. It is 5 Km away from Muvaraivendran. On the way to Malaikolundiswarar temple, an inscription of Maravarmam Sundara Pandyan and Kulasekara Pandyan were found in the steps. Sundara Pandyan inscription states about his coronation ceremony while Kulasekara Pandyan inscription deals about the Karanmai Kani land given as a gift to ten persons. Veeramallan by his diplomacy won over Nathampatti Zamindar, Saptur Zamindar and Devadanam Zamindar. Thus he and his village earned the name "Muveraivendran". Malaikolundiswarar cave temple is located in a hillock with a spring known as Kuberathirtham. The sanctum houses a rock-cut linga with a pitha in the shrine with the iconic form of Siva faces the East. Many of the sculptures in the temple lost their original form and few only retain their originality. Sculptures depict the picture of contemporary life. Muveraivendran served as an important religious and spiritual centre gaining prominence to Saiva sect. The fragile inscriptions and urn burials needs more attention to enhance the history of the region.

### **Introduction**

In ancient Indian texts, a temple is a place for Tirtha-pilgrimage. It is a sacred site whose ambience and design attempts to symbolically condense the ideal tenets of Hindu way of life. All the cosmic elements that create and sustain life are present in a Hindu temple-from five to



water, from images of nature to deities, from the feminine to masculine, from the fleeting sounds and incense smells to the eternal nothingness yet universality at the core of the temple. Their meaning and purpose have extended beyond spiritual life to social rituals and daily life. In political and economic life, Hindu temples have served as a venue for the succession within dynasties and landmarks around which economic activity thrived<sup>1</sup>.

### **Cave architecture**

The cave temples of the Pandyas served as galleries of varied sculptural and iconographical forms. Unlike the Pallavas, the Pandyas patronized the cave architecture for a long time. The cave art of the Pandyas seems to be to some extent cross-fertilized by the Badami Chalukya and Pallava art forms<sup>2</sup>. The cult of Ganesha, Sapta matrka and Jyeshtha penetrated into the Pandya region from Chalukyan area before their adoption by the Pallavas in the Tondaimandalam. Most of the Pandyan cave temples are affiliated to saivism. The Vettuvan kovil at Kalugumalai is unique of its kind in the Pandya region was inspired by the trenching technique of Rashtrakutas at Ellora. Mostly the cave temple houses with a single shrine, the Arthamandapa has two pillars and two pilasters having equal distance as in Vallam, Mahendravis, Mamandur, Vishnu and Seymangalam cave temples. Lord Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, Surya, Karthikeya, Ganesha and Durga received a great boost in the hands of the Pandyas.

### **Muveraivendran**

It is located at about 15kms from Srivilliputhur on Rajapalayam-Madurai road. Malaikolundiswarar cave temple is located on a hillock on the banks of the Arjuna river. It is 5 Km away from Muvaraivendran. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva in Linga form. It is built in the middle of the hillock<sup>3</sup>.

### **History**

The antiquity of Muveraivendran is witnessed by the evidences of microlithic stone tools found on the banks of the Arjuna river<sup>4</sup>. Many urn burials were excavated from the agricultural fields and road expansion programme.

Malaikolundiswarar cave temple belonged to 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is the best example of the earliest Pandya rock-cut art. This temple received royal patronage from the Pandyas (8<sup>th</sup> century AD) to Nayak period (18<sup>th</sup> century AD).



On the way to Malaikolundisvarar temple, an inscription of Maravarmam Sundara Pandyan and Kulasekara Pandyan were found in the steps. Sundara Pandyan inscription states about his coronation ceremony while Kulasekara Pandyan inscription deals about the Karanmai Kani land given as a gift to ten persons. Karanmani means the right to cultivate the land. Muveraivendran inscription of the 12-13<sup>th</sup> century dated 8<sup>th</sup> year of Pandya Kulasekhara directed the sabha of a Brahmadeya and the occupant who have taken residence and settled there and raised crops to pay 1/8 accu per unit of land measured by the periakol<sup>5</sup> (big pole). The details are lost from the context it could be inferred that the village was deserted and had to be resettled so a concessional rate of levy was warranted in the rainfed tract. The reference to “Periakol” might simply mean the measuring rod which was long and consequently the rate of levy could have been for a larger extent than the standard rod used elsewhere carrying a concessional element with it<sup>6</sup>.

### **Etymology**

During Madurai Nayak period, Rani Mangammal gave an endowment to Veeramallan, a Marava for his skill.<sup>7</sup> He was not a Palayakkar but the head of the village. The then Nathampatti Zamindar, Veeramuthu Thevar used the river water in Kanni mountain. After the endowment to Veeramallan, he dug a lake and changed the course of river to the lake. After the lake was filled, the remaining water alone proceeded to Nathampatti Zamindar region. So there was a difference of opinion between Veeramallan and Veeramuthu Thevar. Devadanam Zamindar and Saptur Zamindar stood by the side of Veeramuthu Thevar. When Veeramallan came to know about this confederation, he promised that when this three Zamindars entered this village on the stipulated day, he would become as a sanyasin and surrender the village to them.

After this a day was fixed and on that day dry plants and creepers were put on the eastern side of the lake. On the other hand, three sides of the lake was broken and set fire on the plants. So the fire and the outburst of the flood river from the lake prevented the Zamindar to enter into the village. Nathampatti Zamindar accepted his defeat and surrendered his region to Veeramallan. Then he became a sanyasin<sup>8</sup>. Hence Veeramallan by his diplomacy won over Nathampatti Zamindar, Saptur Zamindar and Devadanam Zamindar. Thus he and his village earned the name “Muveraivendran”.



### **Brihat samhita**

Ancient Sanskrit text Brihat samhita suggest the appropriate site for a temple near water and gardens where lotus and flowers bloom where swans, ducks and other birds are heard, where animals rest without fear of injury or harm. The Gods always play where lakes are:

- (i) Where the Sun's rays are warded off by umbrellas of lotus and leaf clusters.
- (ii) Where clear water paths are made by swans.

The Gods always play where groves are near rivers, mountains and springs, and in towns with gardens. Malaikolundisvarar cave temple is located in a hillock with a spring known as Kuberathirtham. The spring is well protected from contamination and pollution. The sanctity of the spring is elixir and it serves as a perennial spring.

### **Architecture**

Some temples like the Siva cave temple at Malaiyarpatti, the cave temple at Pillayarpatti and the cave temple in Muveraivendran the shrine part occupies, as it were a corner of the oblong mandapam, which thus enclosed it on two sides-in front and on one of the flanks, suggesting a partial copy of a model with a central shrine and a surrounding mandapam with a greater part of it in front<sup>9</sup>.

The sanctum houses a rock-cut linga with a pitha in the shrine with the iconic form of Siva faces the East. The linga is carved out of a hard solid rock. The aniconic linga usually identified as a phallic symbol, was in many ways the most significant form, and it remains the cult object in all Shiva temples<sup>10</sup>. There is a small cistern or pit cut into the floor of the sanctum below the projected channel spout on the top of the linga pitha or image pedestal to receive and collect the abhisheka water. This feature is found in the chalukyan area and Dieng valley in Java (Indonesia).

Ardhamandapa is located in front of Garbagriha and at the back of Nandhi mandapam. It consists of two pillars and two pilasters on either side. The lower part of the pillars is rectangular while the central portion is square in shape. The entablature has a lotus medallion with a seated lion<sup>11</sup>.

Muhamandapa has the sculptures of Lord Siva and Uma in the northern wall. At the back of the western wall and the middle of garbagraha leads to five steps and it is in ruined stage.



### **Sculptures**

Many of the sculptures in the temple lost their original form and few only retain their originality. Sculptures depict the picture of contemporary life. It is the product of culture and an important mean of social control. The skills of the sculpture can be found in his imagination and visualizations of the deities, ideal proportions and expressions<sup>12</sup>.

### **Pillayar**

Ganapati is chief among the siva ganas, an epithet of Ganesa 'Ga' means wisdom and is the first syllable of the term gyana means wisdoms 'na' means stands for liberation 'pati' lord or master<sup>13</sup>. His other popular names are Ganesa, Vigneswara, Vinayaga and Pillayar. Pillayar, the prominent deity of Hinduism was carved on the left side of the mandapa. He wore a sacred thread and bangles on the hands. The presence of a very big stomach proved that this belongs to the first Pandya period.

### **Muruga**

Lord Muruga was carved in the standing posture with his celestial vehicle peacock and it has a snake in its beak. The left hand shows the Varatha mudra pose while the right hand shows the Abhaya mudra. Above the Pillayar and Murugan Gandharvas with flowers in one hand and the other hand in worship were depicted.

### **Nataraj**

Shiva Nataraja depicts the Hindu God Shiva as "Lord of the Dance" engaged in the dynamic, victorious "Dance of Bliss" (Ananda thandava). Shiva Nataraja is crushing Muyalahan a demon (ignorance) under his feet who looks up benevolently at the God even as his own ruin is in progress. The left side of the matted locks had a tiny figure perched in hair was the river Ganga in the form of goddess. He wore a makara , a mythical creature on left side of the ear and on the right side a palm leaf ring. He is depicted with his consort Uma, illustrating the cosmic balance of male and female energies.

### **Nandi**

Nandi is represented by the recompart bull placed in front of the main shrine in a Shiva temple, is described by Hemadri to be one of the attendant demi gods of Shiva<sup>14</sup>. This was formerly a theriomorphic form of Shiva, who was known to the Greeks as the God of Gandhara in bull form. This bull is emblematic of moral and religious duty, justice and law



and represents the qualities of strong, hence it is mount of Shiva the great yogi. This seated Nandi faces Malaikolundiswarar. This Nandi wears only a garland of bells around his neck.

### **Maragathavalli Amman**

Amman shrine is located on the north of the cave temple and faces the east. It consists of garbagraha and mahamandapa. Maragathavalli goddess is in standing posture with wheel in upper right hand and a conch in the upper left hand. Her lower left hand rests on her thigh while the lower right hand shows abhaya mudra.

### **Conclusion**

Muveraivendran served as an important religious and spiritual centre gaining prominence to Saiva sect. Its antiquity revealed the historicity of the region and the sculptural representation reflected social and economic life of the people. The fragile inscriptions and urn burials needs more attention to enhance the history of the region.

### **End notes**

<sup>1</sup> Satpal Yadav, “*Classification of Hindu Temples*”, Book Ocean Publication, Varanasi, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Dayalan.D, “*Early Temples of Tamil Nadu*”, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> “*Muveraivendran Malaikolundiswarar Cave Temple – A Study*”, UGC 10<sup>th</sup> Plan 2005-2006, Dept of History, V.V.V. College for Women, Virudhunagar, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Senthil Selvakumaran. M & Sandivaanan.C, “*Virudhunagar Maavatta varalaru, Tamilnadu Arasu Tholliyal Thurai*,” Chennai, 2001, p. 109

<sup>5</sup> Tirumalai. R, “*The Pandyan Townships*”, UGC Minor Research Project, Dept of Archaeology, Chennai, 2006, p. 327.

<sup>6</sup> ARE 206/ 1980-81.

<sup>7</sup> Vedachalam V., Sethuraman G.,&Madhuca Krishnana, “*Virudhunagar District An Archeological Source Book*, Srinivas Fine Arts Ltd, Sivakasi, 2000, p.75.

<sup>8</sup> Rajendran. P & Santhalingam. C, “*Varalattu Nokkil Virudhunagar Maavattam, Pandya Nattu Varalattu Aivumayyam*”, 2014, p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> Srinivasan. K.R, “*Temples of South India*”, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2014, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> Champakalakshmi. R, “*The Hindu Temple*”, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2007, p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> Akila. A, “*Muveraivendran kudavaraiyum kalvettukalum*”, Johnmin printers, Sivakasi,2009, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Rahul Mishra, “*Sculptures of India*”, Diamond creation, New Delhi, 2015, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Margret Stutley, “*The Illustrated Dictionary of Iconography*”, Routledge and Keyan Paul, London, 1985, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Krishna Sastri. H, “*South Indian Gods and Goddess*”, Madras Government, Madras, 1916, p. 162.