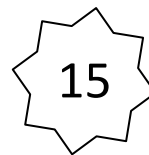


Secular themes present in the Sculptures and Structures of French in Puducherry.

Dr. K.A.Babu

Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Art History
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu
Mail: drbabumku@gmail.com



Introduction

The Modern history of Puducherry begins with the arrival of trading companies in Puducherry about from the beginning of the 16th century. The Portuguese were the first to set up a factory in the region in the beginning of the 16th century. The Danes and the Dutch followed the Portuguese and established their trading centers in Porto Novo, the present Parangipattai and Cuddalore. The French were the last joined the race to set up their trade centers later in Puducherry. It is said that the first French expedition to India took place during the reign of Francis I (1515-1547). During the time Puducherry was under the control of the Gingee Nayak. The Nayak invited the French to establish their trade in the region. The French who waited for the offer immediately accepted and made arrangements to establish their trade activities in Puducherry.

The Arrival of the French in Puducherry

In 1617, a Frenchman named Jean Pepin reached Puducherry with his French Company ship named St. Malo. He was permitted by the Nayak of Gingee to repair the Portuguese fort and to occupy it. But due to the lack of funds to repair the fort and to set a trade centre Pepin returned to France soon after.

The French who failed to set their trading post and left Puducherry earlier at the time of Gingee Nayak rule again got the offer to set a trade centre in Puducherry. The French Company was allowed to carry on their trade and they were permitted to secure the loge with defenses and to maintain their own guards within the same. At the time Sivaji reached Gingee on his famous Carnatic expedition and captured Gingee at the first assault. Then the French gave Rs 11,760 to Hari Raja the Maratha *subedhar* of Gingee for getting permission to fortify Puducherry. After the death of Hari Raja, Rajaram the younger son of Shivaji came to Gingee and established his authority. During the time under the leadership of Francois Martin the French settlement at Puducherry had greatly developed, the fortifications, the factories had been built and the trade had increased.

Francois Martin was the first Governor started to build Puducherry and transformed it from a small fishing village into a flourishing port-town. Francois Martin, who is often called as the founder of French Puducherry died at the age of 72 on December 31, 1706.

After Martin able Governors like Lenoir (1726-1735) and Dumas (1735-1741) and an ambitious Governor Dupleix (1742-1754) expanded the Puducherry area and made it a large and rich town. During their reign in Puducherry they have contributed many to the welfare of the public in Puducherry.

Secularism in French Art and Architecture of Puducherry

The unique features of architecture and town planning in Puducherry are highly influenced on the Bastide towns of France. The main features of Bastide towns are with a large open space for the market, a church close to the market and square or rectangular plots for the buildings and houses. Every prominent places will be have the statues important personalities and with monumental sculptures. The planning of



the Boulevard town of Puducherry was followed on the above principles. Likewise the similar styles and few features exposed in the white town of Puducherry by the French.

Like all the European countries came to India not only for the trading purpose they also wanted to spread Christianity in India through their missionary activities the French also built many churches in Puducherry. At the same time they created and sculpted many secular structures and sculptures for the welfare of the public in Puducherry. Some of the important structures and sculptures are 1. Aayi Mandapam, 2. The Travel Goddess and 3. The War Memorial.

1. Aayi Mandapam (Water Monument or Park Monument)

This majestic quadrangular shaped monument was built to commemorate a courtesan called Aayi from the village of Muthirapalayam situated on the suburb of Puducherry, during the reign of Napoleon III and has a rich history behind it.

The first attempt to supply drinking water to the Puducherry town was made in 1863 from the place of Aayi *Kulam* in Muttirapalayam. The water from Muttirapalayam was brought to the town through a brick masonry canal supplied by means of public taps to the people in Puducherry town. The fountain in the Place du Gouvernement along with the Aayi *Mandapam* was began to construct in the year 1863 according to the plan drawn by Lamairesse. And it was inaugurated in 1866.

The monument of Aayi was built in Greco-Roman architectural style. Now the beautiful monument stands majestically at the center of the park with beautiful lawns, flowerbeds and fountains. Visitors in the park get enchanted with the presence of this wonderful architectural brilliance.

The Secular themes in relief sculpture present in Aayi Mandapam

Aayi Mandapam is a well-planned structure, built in the style of Greco- Roman and looks symmetry. The figures in the pediment of four sides of the Aayi Mandapam symbolize the different characteristics of the *Mandapam*. The front elevation facing the West, the pediment's tympanum has the sculptural depiction of Aayi in a reclining position and the sculpture is presented in relief form. In order to portray Aayi as a courtesan, she is depicted in a semi-nude form. The drapery on her covers only up to the hip from the leg and the rest of the body is shown in nude. To depict Aayi symbolically and to link her, she with the subject 'water' for which the monument was built, three water pitchers can be seen kept alongside Aayi.

The pediment in the façade facing east towards the sea shows a symbolic pictorial element of two "affronted winged horses" facing each other. In between the two winged horses an 'anchor' is placed. This element was intentionally added by the French to show the eastern side facing the sea and the port area where all import and export activities were being carried on.

The pediment of the façade facing south shows the pictorial element of two girls dressed in formal attire like the school uniform. The girls are seen posing frontally on two ends and in between them is placed a plate with some dishes and in the side is kept a jar. These elements symbolically shown here refer to the schools, living areas and dining areas on the southern part of the French Indian city.

The pediment facing north towards the Governor's Palace has the sculptural element of an eagle which symbolizes French Imperial Authority. This pictorial element has also been placed intentionally by the French to show the direction where the Governor's Palace is situated.

The Aayi *Mandapam* thus acts as a public structure as well as a point of attraction at the centre of the French Indian town. At the same time, it shows the directions where four important avenues converged. The Aayi *Mandapam* in Puducherry is today, a symbol proclaiming the fusion of Franco-Indian cultural

camaraderie.

2. The Goddess of Travel Statue

At the time of French rule the South Boulevard of Puducherry was familiar for transport facility so French government sets a railway station and the train services were started in 15th October 1879. The French railway line was connected with the British railways between Puducherry and Villupuram was served for the transportation of coal, consumer commodities and other raw materials for the industries in Puducherry. The official inauguration ceremony was graced by the Duke of Buckingham, the then Governor of Madras.

The Goddess of travel statue placed in the middle of a garden in front of the Puducherry Railway Station is 6 feet tall. Although it appears as a stucco piece it's made up of bronze and is fixed on a 5 feet high decorative steel pedestal. The octagonal pedestal is designed with an opened mouth demon with two sheep horns on two sides and with bunches of beautiful flowers and plants on the other two sides. The figures in the pedestal are painted colorfully and the above statue is painted in white. But it is not known as to when exactly the statue was erected there.

In 1863 drinking water was brought from Muthiraipalayam to Puducherry through a stone built channel. Then drinking water was stored in some important locations of Puducherry for the welfare of the public and it was set like an artesian well pouring the water. Like that this statue is also set as an artesian well. Europeans were experts in designing and setting up the water artesian wells. One could see this in all European countries. Like that the French men also set water supply in four way pipe artesian in South Boulevard of Puducherry and positioned a statue to beautify the place. At first in the pedestal of the Goddess of travel statue, four pipes had joined and water had come from the mouth of demons later four demon were changed to two faced. The feature of the demon head with horn is an 'anthropometrical' figure.

For the benefit of the people to pour water in the night the torch was added in the artistic way. Goddess statue bends her head down to the earth and keeps a light on both hands. Now this statue is with electric light but before at early times it was with fire torches. The 6 feet tall statue expresses the youthful features of a beautiful woman. This statue is on 'S' stance posture. So one leg of the women is rooted on the earth and other is placed with toes on the surface.

Although the place near the Goddess of Travel statue has undergone a lot of changes this statue still retains its beauty and attractiveness. In front of the railway station this statue is adorning the place and welcoming the passengers.

3. The War Memorial

It is situated in the beautiful Goubert Avenue locally known as beach road. The French War Memorial was constructed in honor of the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the World War I. The 'Conseil General' gave its approval for the erection of this memorial monument in the year 1935 and it was opened to the public by the French Indian Governor named Crocicchia on 3rd May 1938.

This war memorial has many distinctive qualities of its own. When we look at the statue of the soldier, it's very posture with a bended head express the deep mourn and honour. And when we look at the four long elongated rectangular shaped tall pillars at the back of the statue, it seems to express the greatness of the sacrifices made by the soldiers. The vertical free standing eight feet high statue of the soldier is casted in bronze and coloured in metallic blue is placed on a two feet high pedestal with a flat base against the wall.

The soldier shown here may be reckoned to be between the ages of 35 and 45 and is in a rigid





ISSN:2582-9513

Pranav Journal of Fine Arts

(A Peer Reviewed Quarterly Online Journal)

standing posture slightly bending his head downwards as if paying honour to the dead. With the soldier's attire, its facial features express the cruel reality of war. The pointed nose and the slightly opened eyes and mouth of the soldier reflect the deep sorrow in his heart. The helmet and the lengthy military robe tightly fitted up to the neck seem to cover the grief of the soldier within himself. But the attention like posture expresses the bravery and the military discipline of the soldier. He is seen resting both his hands on the gun which is placed vertically on the ground paying homage to the dead soldiers. The drapery showed here is with fewer folds mostly a flat surface is seen in the entire costume including the bullet pockets. Rather than showing the details in the anatomy and in the attire the statue lays emphasis on conveying its expressions and its feelings.

The vertical wall attached with four towering pillars seems to be in the height of more than 30 feet has three inscriptions. The inscriptions carved on marble slab has the names of the soldiers who died in the war are placed vertically and horizontally above the wall. Above the top of the three inscriptions one inscription in French directly inscribed on the wall says the details for what the monument was built on. Two cube shaped elongated pillars are seen within the wall and the rest two is flanked on both sides of the wall and is attached with a horizontal beam from the wall.

The war memorial is an excellent example of French art and architecture. To highlight the importance of the War Memorial the Puducherry tourism and the French Consulate in Puducherry is celebrating the Bastille Day on 14th July every year, when the monument is all decked and illuminated to look its best.

Conclusion

In Puducherry there are a number of historical monuments which were erected from the past to present. Likewise the French erected some memorable monuments mostly in the white town in Puducherry. These monuments were raised to reveal some historical facts and to commemorate some significant events, or as a tribute to the memory of the certain person. Like the same many of the sculptures and structures were created for the public benefits. To the deceased also the French erected the monumental sculptures and the tombs. These monuments which were erected by the French decorate the land marks with its splendor appearance and still serve the public to mention the important avenues in and around Puducherry.

Bibliography

1. A. Ramasamy, *History of Pondicherry*, Sterling Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1987.
2. Cyril Antony, (ed.) *Gazetteer of India: Union Territory of Pondicherry*, Government Press, Pondicherry, 1982. Vol 1 & 2.
3. C.S. Srinivasachari, *History of Gingee and its Rulers*, Annamalai University, 1943
4. P.Rja & Rita Nath Keshari, *Glimpses of Pondicherry*, Busy Bee Books, Pondicherry, 2005.
5. *Revue Historique De Pondichery*. Vol. VII
6. "Study Area Profile, Pondicherry Region, A Tentative impressionistic and investigative spatial study", Planning Dept., Govt. of Puducherry, 1973



ISSN:2582-9513