AIRAVASTESVARA TEMPLE REFLECTS THE RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE CHOLA DYNASTY

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Abstract

Oh what a beauty it is – the grand Airavastesvara Temple in Darasuram. The temple located in Kumbakonam is a treasure-trove of history, facts and amazing art. The construction of the temple dates back to the 12th century CE and was built by the renowned Chola king Rajaraja Chola II. Architecture, sculptures, paintings, bronze casting – the temple reflects the rich cultural heritage of the Chola dynasty. The temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is named after 'Airavat', the majestic white elephant of Lord Indra. A part of the trio of 'Great Chola Temples' that also include the Brihadeeswara Temple at Thanjavur, the Gangaikondacholeeswaram Temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram and the Airavastesvara Temple is also a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The art work that adorns the temple is extremely detailed, intricate and beautiful. It's sheer poetry in stone. Built in the Dravidian architectural style, the main stone work of the building resembles a chariot. The entire temple complex is filled with rich carvings and inscriptions that narrate stories from ancient Indian Puranas. Words don't do justice to the charm and splendor that the structure emanates; it's one to be seen and experienced.

Key Words:

Airavastesvara Temple in Darasuram, UNESCO, World Heritage Sites, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Adi Sandeswarar, Gangadevi, Tumburu Narada, Vaishravana, Chandran, Maha Sada, Nagaraja, Vayu West: Devi, Rudrani, Vaishnavi, Brahmi, Varunani, Nandidevar, Periyadeva, Shandyaditha Shakti, Shanta Devi, Vidya Shakti, Pratishta Shakti, Nivarthi Shakti South Face: Daksha Prajapati, Yamuna Devi, Rati, Kamadeva, East: Agni Deva, Agastya, Sri Devi, Durgadevi, Devendran, Padma Nidhi, Surya, Subrahmanya, Kshetrapala, Saraswati, Vishwakarma, Isana.

Mind-blowing part of the temple

Yet another mind-blowing part of the temple is the musical steps. These 7 singing steps that lead to the altar are intricately carved and represent seven musical notes. What a fascinating work of art that dates back to thousands of years. All these features make the temple complex a truly must-visit destination on your trip to Tamil Nadu.

A Hindu Temple of Dravidian Architecture

Built by the Chola Emperor Rajaraja II in the 12th century AD, the Airavadeswara Temple is located in Kumbakonam in the Thanjavur district of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The temple is a Hindu temple of Dravidian architecture. The temple is a UNESCO World Heritage Site along with the Prahadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur and the Gangaikonda Choleswarar Temple in Gangaikonda Cholapuram.

The Iravadeswarar temple is one of the group of eighteen large medieval Hindu temples in Kumbakonam area of Thanjavur district. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and is a symbol of the Vaishnavism and Shakti traditions of Hinduism, with legends associated with the Nayanmars – the Bhakti movement of Saivism.

The stone temple has a chariot structure

The stone temple has a chariot structure and includes major Vedic and Puranic deities such as Indra, Agni, Varuna, Vayu, Brahma, Surya, Vishnu, Saptamatrikas, Durga, Saraswati, Sri Devi (Lakshmi), Ganga, Yamuna, Subramanya, Ganesha, Kama, Rathi. It has a separate shrine called Periyayaki Amman Koil, consort of Lord Shiva. It is a separate temple located to the north of the Iravadeswarar temple. It may have been part of the main temple when the outer courts were completed. Currently, some parts of the temple like the tower are in ruins and the main temple and associated shrines stand alone. It has two sundials, the morning and evening sundials, which can be seen as chariot wheels. The temple continues to attract a large number of Hindu pilgrims every year during the Maha season, while certain images such as Durga and Shiva form part of special pujas.

Place of Located

The Iravadeswarar Temple is located in the town of Kumbakonam, 310 kilometers (190 mi) southwest of Chennai and 90 kilometers (56 mi) from Chidambaram. It is about 40 kilometers (25 mi) northeast of Prahadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur and about 30 kilometers (19 mi) southwest of Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple. All three are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Inside the Pyramid-Iravadeswarar Temple

The nearest airport with regular services is Tiruchirappalli International Airport (IATA: TRZ), about 90 kilometers (56 mi) away.[9] The temple is on Highway 22 connecting Tiruchirappalli and Highway 36 connecting Thanjavur. The nearby towns of Tiruchirappalli and Chidambaram are connected daily to other major cities by the Indian

Railways and the Tamil Nadu Bus Services network. Although the temple is inland, near the Kollidam River, within the Kaveri (Kaveri) delta that flows into the Bay of Bengal and through it to the Indian Ocean.

The Cholas built hundreds of Hindu temples throughout their empire. These four are vast complexes with all stone planes. Iravadeswarar Temple is one of these four. The other three temples were built at Thanjavur by Rajaraja I, at Gangaikonda Cholapuram by Rajaendra I, and at Tribhuvana by the later Chola king Kulothungan II.

The Iravadeswarar temple is another square-plan structure completed in 1166 CE. The remaining [note 1] courtyard is nearly six stacked squares of 35 meters (115 ft) side, totaling about 107 meters (351 ft) and measuring 70 meters (230 ft). The Nandi Mandapam and Sthampam are found outside this main temple courtyard and are attached to the east-west axis of the main temple.

Structure of the Temple

It is classified as a Karakoil, a temple modeled after the temple chariots which are carried around the temple in procession during festivals. There is no immediate circumambulation around the sanctum sanctorum as in the Thanjavur temple and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple. Instead, this path is outside the courtyard. The sanctum sanctorum is connected to the Mukha Mandapam through the Artha Mandapam supported on pillars and flanked by two large Dwarapalakas. The maha-mandapam is a rectangle about 24 meters (79 ft) by 18 meters (59 ft), with six rows of right pillars (forty-eight in all). These have embossing and intricate carvings. To the east of the Mahamandapam is the Agra-mandapam also known as the Rajagambiran-thiru-mandapam. The mandapam is in the shape of a chariot, furnished with stone horses and wheels. The design is similar to the nirdha-sabha (community dance hall) of the Chidambaram temple and the Konark Sun Temple near Puri, Odisha.

In the south-west corner of the court is a mandapam having 4 shrines. One of these has an image of Yama. Adjoining this shrine are large stone slabs sculptured with images of the sapthamathas (seven celestial nymphs). The construction of a separate temple for Devi, slightly later than the main temple, indicates the emergence of the Amman shrine as an essential component of the South Indian temple comple .

At the south-west corner of the court is a hall with 4 shrines. One of these has an image of Yama. Adjacent to this shrine are large stone slabs carved with images of the Saptamatas (seven celestial nymphs). A separate shrine to the goddess was built somewhat

later than the main temple, indicating the emergence of the goddess shrine as an essential part of the South Indian temple complex.

Inscriptions are important

Inscriptions are important in identifying sculptures that were once part of various defaced monuments. For example, the east tower has inscriptions referring to the sculpture. Most of these sculptures are now broken or missing. Inscriptions indicate that it contained the following sculptures. North Face: Adi Sandeswarar, Gangadevi, Tumburu Narada, Vaishravana, Chandran, Maha Sada, Nagaraja, Vayu West: Devi, Rudrani, Vaishnavi, Brahmi, Varunani, Nandidevar, Periyadeva, Shandyaditha Shakti, Shanta Devi, Vidya Shakti, Pratishta Shakti, Nivarthi Shakti
South Face: Daksha Prajapati, Yamuna Devi, Rati, Kamadeva, East: Agni Deva, Agastya, Sri Devi, Durgadevi, Devendran, Padma Nidhi, Surya, Subrahmanya, Kshetrapala, Saraswati, Vishwakarma, Isana.

This temple was built by Rajaraja Chola II. He ruled the Chola Empire from 1146 to 1172. The capital established for his predecessors was Gangapuri, also referred to in some inscriptions as Gangaikonda Cholapuram, named after the holy river Ganga and the deity. Rajaraja II, however, spent most of his time in the second capital, Ayratali, also known as Palayarai and Rajarajapuri. This urban complex also included Darasuram, the site of the Iravadeswarar temple at Kumbakonam. He was a patron of Tamil literature and sponsored new Hindu temples in the empire, replacing the improvements and expansions patronized by his father and grandfather. One of his legacies is the Ayratali temple, known in inscriptions as Airavadesvara temple.

Airavadeswarar Temple was bigger than it is now. It had sapta veedhis (seven streets) and seven courts, similar to the Srirangam temple, according to inscriptions. All but one courthouse with the main temple is gone. A short distance from the present visitor complex are the ruins of the tower and some other structures, confirming that the site was badly damaged in some places, like other major Chola-era temples and various Chola cities, including the capital Gangaikonda Cholapuram.

The Cholas in the late 13th century

The reasons for this extinction are not clear. According to Vasanti, the Pandyas who defeated the Cholas in the late 13th century may have razed the city [Gangaikonda Cholapuram] to avenge their earlier defeats". Chapter Excavations at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Rajendra Chola's imperial capital, and why its importance was destroyed is not clear. The temple received various gifts and grants from the later Cholas, Pandyas and the

Vijayanagara Empire. 1311 An alternative theory links the destruction to raids, looting, and battles in 1311, with the invasion of the capital and former territories of Madurai, a former part of the Chola Empire, by the forces of the Delhi Sultanate led by the Muslim general Malik Kafur in 1311. Wars between Hindu kings and Muslim sultans broke away from the Delhi Sultanate and formed new principalities like the nearby Madurai Sultanate (1335–1378). It was the target of Muslim and Hindu neighbors near and far. The Madurai Sultanate was founded in the 14th century, after disastrous raids and plundering of southern India by the forces of Ala ud-Din Khalji of the Delhi Sultanate led by Malik Kafur. George Michael (2008), Architecture and Art of South India, Cambridge University Press, pp. 16-12, pp. 16-13 Randaula Khan and others raided it from the east and west coasts of South India, and some occupied it for some years. The Vijayanagara Empire defeated the Madurai Sultanate in 1378, and the temple, along with other Chola-era temples, came back under Hindu kings, who repaired and restored many of them.

Iravadeswarar Temple was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2004. The major surviving Chola temples include the Pragadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur, the Gangaikonda Choleswarar Temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and the Iravadeswarar Temple at Kumbakonam. All these temples were built by the Cholas between the 10th and 12th centuries and have a lot of similarities.

Conclusion

This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It reverently depicts the Vaishnavism and Shakti traditions of Hinduism, along with legends associated with the Nayanmars – the Bhakti movement of Saivism ascetics. Airavadeswarar Temple was built in the 12th century by the Chola king Rajaraja Chola II. It is one of the eighteen medieval Hindu temples in the Kumbakonam area. The temple displays the feet of Vaishnavism and Shakti of Hinduism, as well as the traditional Nayanars, the pious monks of Saivism.

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