



Attur Fort through the Ages

(Subject : HISTORY)

Research Paper

Submitted By

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ABSTRACT :

The aim of this paper is to describe the history of Attur fort. The historical Attur fort is situated Fifty one kilometre to the east of Salem on the Salem - Cuddalore main road in Tamil Nadu. Its location is picturesque with gardens and paddy fields. Its original name is Attur.¹ There are two other name to this place, Attur - Anantagiri² and Ariyur Tabovanam. Attur fort is one of the best specimens of ground forts found in Tamilnadu of the early modern period. But now the encroachment by the public, who seldom care about the preservation of ancient monuments in their original form spoiled the atmosphere. They have to realise the value of antiquity. Attur is divided in to two parts by the river on the south of the river proper Attur is situated. On the northern part the old fort stands near the Hamlet Mulluvadi.

KEY WORDS : Anantagiri, Getti-Mudaliar, Kaveripuram, Puvarahans,

INTRODUCTION :

Attur fort is one of the best specimens of ground forts found in Tamilnadu of the early modern period. But now the encroachment by the public, who seldom care about the preservation of ancient monuments in their original form spoiled the atmosphere. They have to realise the value of antiquity. A local tradition says that this place was called Thandakarunyam in Threthayugam, when Rama visited this place, saint vasista and his followers met him. The saint made penance here having in his mind Lord Venkatachalapathy, who appeared before him with Alarmelumangai. So the temple built here was known as prasanna venkateswarar. The river which served to vasista was also known as vasistanadi.

Methodology And Techniques Used :

The methodology adopted in this work is survey and area study method . The concern of present research is Attur fort as a hole the historical, political, religious, architectural and geographical description of Attur fort as such will be included in this area of study. The nature of this area study predominantly is factual and descriptive rather than inferential .

EARLY HISTORY

In Kaliyuga 3102 BC a ruling dynasty was founded by Thirthagiri who was followed by Seshagiri. During the time of Anantagiri, the fort, palace and the temples were built. So the town is named after the king. When Getti-Mudaliar became the ruler of the kingdom he wanted to renovate the fort and the temples. He found the treasure trove of seven pots of gold coins near the temple.³

For the first time Archaeological survey of India, sanctioned Rs.10 lakh to renovate the Attur fort since the fort came under the control of the Archaeological survey of India on 2.2.1921 though minor repair works had been done time to time.

He used the coins for the renovation and fortification of the place. One of the pots is preserved in the Govt. Museum, Madras.

According to some other tradition the local chieftain, Gattimudaliar constructed the fort. His capital city was Kaveripuram and some times Omalur and Amarakundi. He ruled the kingdom, which was extended upto Talaivasal. When the ruler went out for hunting he saw a hare running from a bush in this place. It looked in golden colour. With curiosity he examined

the bush. He found the neck of an iron pot protruding above the ground. He then cleared the bush and found seven such pots with full of gold *puvarahans* (coins). He used this treasure for the construction of the fort and the temples.

Based on the tradition Le Fanu says that Gattimudaliar lived about 1750 A.D.⁵ But Chikka Devaraya of Mysore captured this place in 1689.⁶ There were about ten Gattimudaliars. They might have been ruled atleast for 100 years. So the fort may be built between 1580 and 1650 A.D. The inscriptions found in the Siva temple, which is in the fort have no reference about the fort. There are also no reference about the fort in any of the epigraphical record or literature before 17th century. So the fort may be constructed at the close of 16th century or at the beginning of the 17th century but not later or earlier than that.

Gattimudaliar's capitals were Omalur, Kaveripuram and Amarakundi. They changed their capital more than once. Taramangalam was also the centre of Power where they built a costly temple. Their permanent forts were found at Omalur and Attur. But the fort at Omalur is no more in existence. A glance at the map will show that the disposition of these forts guarded against an invasion from Mysore. Attur commanded the short-cut route to the coast and guarded against any flank move on Trichi by way of Vellar Valley.

FORT THROUGH THE AGES

In 1689 Attur came into the possession of Chikkadevaraya of Mysore by the treaty concluded by Lingurajah with Aurache.⁷ It formed part of Hyder's dominions till 1768, when it was surrendered to colonel wood. He wiped out wood's conquest in December same year without firing a shot and regained the lost territories.⁸ As commanding the pass from Salem to Tyag durg this post was considered very important in the wars of Hyder Ali. It was his possession of it that secured the retirement of his main army in March 1769 when he made his famous dash on Madras. When Tipu lost the third Mysore war, by the treaty of Seringapatam of 1792 Attur and other forts were transferred to the British.⁹ Till the end it was not possible for Tippu to regain the lost territories.

Attur was garrisoned by 23rd Madras Battalion under the command of captain campbell. Under Lord Clive's scheme of 1799 it was made an ordanance station and was occupied by the

detachment till 1824, when it ceased to be a military station. After that private encroachment began and now nearly half of the fort area is converted into agricultural lands. In the remaining part a small village named Kottai occupies major portion. The buildings are now under the control of Archaeological survey of India southern circle. They are doing renovation work.

FORMATION OF THE FORT

The fort is in the form of a square with 62 acre area. The rampart runs through all sides with bastions. It is about 20 feet high and 10' thick. There are five semicircular bastions on each side. The bastions may be constructed for two reasons. This form gives more strength to the wall and with the projection one can attack the enemy in a closer view. In each corner there are flag staff platforms. One more is found at the centre of the western rampart and another in the centre of the Southern rampart. To fix the flag staffs there are Circular holes big and small with 9" deep carved out of single large rocks. They look like mortar. The platforms are well above the surface of the rampart about 15' high. They are the highest points of the fort. The rampart itself was used as pathway around the fort. There are steps that leads to the top of the rampart.

The rampart is constructed of well dressed stones with earth backing. Mortar was also used. The stones are fit with each other very correctly. There is no space between the stones. The shape of the stone is unique. The front side is either square or rectangular shaped and the back is very narrow like triangle. The stones are used breadth wise not length wise. The breadth is about 2' and the length from 3' to 4'. It is found in good condition in all the sides except in the east. In the south west corner and middle of the west, the rampart is damaged to a smaller extent. It is now being reconstructed by Archaeological Survey of India. It is said that the western rampart was damaged when it was attacked during the time of Haider Ali.

The main gate is situated in the middle of the eastern wall. Now the gate alone stands in good state. But in the northern side only basement of the rampart is seen. The super structure were demolished long back. On the southern side of the gate it is partly damaged. There is also a wicket gate by the side of it. On the side pillars of the main gate various figures are carved. They are a sword, a crescent, a square with a circle inside, and another square with flower designs. The square with circle is found in all the gates of the fort.

Inside the fort there are three large granaries and one small granary. Among the three two are in good condition. The third, which is large is partly damaged stands without roof. The granaries are of 75' x 25' size. They have bomb proof semicircular roofs. The roof of the granary is being accessible by hidden stairs. The walls of the granaries were built partly with stones and partly with brick with mortar. They have sufficient height to contain larger quantities. The thickness of the wall is 4'. The small one is found near the northern rampart with 40' x 20' size. It is constructed only with brick and mortar.

INSCRIPTIONS

In 1913 five inscriptions were copied from basement of Karuvari outer walls of Kayanirmaleswarar temple by the Government epigraphist.¹² Twenty eight line inscription of parantaka chola I (907-955 A.D) found on the lower Thala of the temple. In 921 AD 14th regnal year of Parantaka I alias Parakesari, temple servants Perumal, Kaman and Perumangala Mudiyan were donated Paddy to the temple.¹³ Another Chola inscription found on the west prakara wall. In the thirty second regnal year Kulotunga III alias Vannenja Perumal donated two hundred kuli wetland to the temple for maintaining the lamp¹⁴ another unfinished inscription describe about the Kulotunga IIIrd period chieftains, Vidukathologia perumal, Mahathai Perumal Vannilaikanda Perumal and Thayaluhalla Perumal. It also referred Kulotunga III as Vannancha Perumal.

Two inscription of Krishna devaraya found on the north and south prakara walls of this temple. One of the inscription was issued by the Krishnadevaraya on 8th April 1513 AD found on the South base of the prakara wall. It records that Attur polygar Akkithimma Nayak granted villavarayanatham village to Sri Rangaraja Bhattar son of Arunagrathana of Iraivanaraiyar¹⁵ the granted village received the surname Akkithimma Nayaka Chatur-Vedimangalam. Another Inscription of Krishnadevaraya of 1523 AD found on the north base of this temple. It records that, Akkithimma nayak the governor of Attur region granted Kallanatham village to parpahabha Bhatta, son of Arunagrathana of Iraivanaraiyar¹⁶ unfinished inscription of Krishnadevaraya period of 1528 found on the west base of the Kayanirmaleswarar temple. It records that the grant of a village for the merit of king.¹⁷



There is Kottai Muniappan temple which is found on a raised platform. This is considered as the guardian deity of the fort. (Kaval Theivam).

CONCLUSION :

Attur fort is one of the best specimens of ground forts found in Tamilnadu of the early modern period. But now the encroachment by the public, who seldom care about the preservation of ancient monuments in their original form spoiled the atmosphere. They have to realise the value of antiquity. For the first time Archaeological survey of India sanctioned Rs. ten lakh to renovate the Attur fort, since the fort came under the control of the Archaeological survey of India on 2.2.1921 though minor repair works had been done time to time.

Recommendations :

The forgoing research articles reveals the former fallen greatness of Attur fort from the time immemorial Attur fort has been associate with imperial tradition Attur fort was under the inference of the Cholas of Sangam age. After the Kalabhras this fort was brought under the Pallavas, western Ganges, Later Cholas, Vanakovarayes (1014A.D-1224A.D) later Pandyas, Hoysalas(1251-1316),Vijayanagar(1336-1565),Getty Mudhaliyar dynasty(1557-1689),Mysore rulers , Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan and British (1792-1947).The study of art and architecture of the fort palace and temples are enlightening. This majestic monuments manifest the dream and achievements of the Attur rulers through the ages. The Attur fort proved to be a centre of art and architecture and this is one of the true yard sticks to measure the greatness of any rule

The following are some of the recommendations based on the findings forts are the edifices of cultural and natural importance they proclaim the artistic eminence and cultural attainments of the people of the age to which they belong. one cannot but wonder at the masterpieces of sculptural workmanship at the beautiful construction of this forts. some of the beautiful images of this fort are wonderful creation of the artist of the olden days. It is their imaginative power that sustains them in their efforts. Though this artist and workmen are no more their creations remain in the fort. The government and society are highly indebted to the protection and preservation of the architectural heritage of the fort.

REFERENCE AND END NOTES :



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- ² Taylor, **Oriental Historical Manuscripts**. p.163.
- ³ Manimegalai Publishers, **Salem Mavattam** (Tamil), Madras, 1986, p.25.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*,
- ⁶ Wilkes, **Historical Scketches of South India, Vol-I**, Madras, 1882, p: 122
- ⁷ Ibid - Aurachee was the term referred to the people of this place.
- ⁸ Hayavadana Rao. C, History of Mysore Vol: III, P:93.
- ⁹ Baramahal Records Sec. XXI P:15.
- ¹² Rangacharya, **Topographical list of inscription of Madras presidency, Vol-II**, Madras, p.1207
- ¹³ Annual Report on Epigraphy 1913 No.407.
- ¹⁴ Annual Report on Epigraphy 1913, No.405.
- ¹⁵ Annual Report on Epigraphy 1913, No.403.
- ¹⁶ Annual Report on Epigraphy 1913, No.406.
- ¹⁷ Annual Report on Epigraphy 1913, No.404.