



## Sri Sapta Matrikas Sculptures Of The Saptarisheeswarar Temple At Lalkudi

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The name of the Siva temple here is *Thiruthavathurai* is old name. Now its present name of Lalgudi. In South India, a number of ancient shrines owe their own name to their location. Since the Siva temple was on the bank of Kavery river, the term “turai” bathing ghat + where people usually get down to have a dip in a river got associated with the temple *turai* means the place of his grace or benevolence to his devotees. The puranic account mention that the recipient of the Lord’s grace was devi his consort, and the bestower of divine grace was none other than the lord of the place that is how the temple came to be called “*Thiruthavathurai*”. Later Muslim invasion this temple gopura is red show an the Muslim invented Arabic language red gopura means Lalgudi.

### Saptharisheeswarar Temple

Lalgudi is situated on the banks of river coleroon, known also as north cauvery about 20 km from Trichy. The temple here has won a unique place among the temples of Tamil Nadu. It was here only the seven rishis Atri Brihu, Pulsithar, Vasistar, Gauthamar, Angeerasar and Marichi. Prayed to the presiding

dity.<sup>2</sup> Saptarisheswarar, to war off the bad period. They were passing though the temple was taken up for being extended by the Parantaka Kings.

One of the noteworthy features of the South Indian temples and especially those of Tamilnadu is the preservation of innumerable inscriptions written on their walls which contain valuable data on the history of the temples and the villages in which they are located. In some temples they have been disturbed or even destroyed in the process of renovation and alternations. But in many others, they have fortunately come down to us undisturbed. In the temples namely called Saptarisheswarar of Lalkudi. There are total inscriptions of 109,<sup>3</sup> belonging to different dynasties and different times ranging from 907 C.E. to 1470 C.E. from them we are able to learn the long historical vicissitudes through which the place passed over the centuries.<sup>4</sup> All the major dynasties of Tamilnadu (i.e.) the Pallavas the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagaras besides several minor ones like the Muttaraiyas and Pazhuvattaiyaras, have held sway over the Lalkudi region.

A review of this epigraphical data, attempted here, helps us to know the political situation and the consequent impact on the temple. Administration, the nature of the patronage extended by the royal officers or chieftains and other related factors which are essential to understand the historical developments and the socio-economic and art and architecture changes that were occurring from

### **Lalgudi under the Pallavas Period**

Lalgudi situated in Thondaimandalam, was in the land of the Pallavas who were in active control of this area with their capital of Kanchipuram from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E.<sup>5</sup> In our temple four inscriptions belonging to the Pallavas period and also find out the some sculptures of the Pallavas periods. Literary references also mentions that which was closely associated with Appar, Sambandhar and Sundarar,<sup>6</sup> the Devaram hymnist and Pallava king Mahendharvarman 10 miles from rock-cut cave temples Thiruchirapalli.<sup>7</sup> So, the temple, in a small dimension as a brick structure would have existed at time of Pallavas close vicinity of Thiruvellarai and Thiruchirapalli. There are many temples and places visited by Moovar Devaram who lived during the Pallava period.

The hymns sung by the Nayanmar, Nanacampantar, for example, has hymns in praise of he following places which are famous cult centres to this day Piramapuram (m. Cirkali 1:1) Kattuppalli (1:5) Nallaru (1:7) Pulamankai (1:16) Vitamarutur (1:32) Cenkattankuti (16:1) Kutamukku or Kutantai or Karonam in Kumbakonam (1:72) Arur (m Tiruvarur (1:9) Aiyaru (1: 20) and so on. But at the same time in other parts of the Tamil country where rock is available in plenty the contemporary rockcut temples are to be found examples are Cirappalli (1: 98) Kulukkunram (1: 103) Ekamparam (m Kachipuram 1: 133) Tirumeyam, Tirukkalukkunram<sup>9</sup> cave and structural temples are found. This is to point out the fact that some type of temples should have existed in the delta which due to the perishable nature of the media of construction or inundations of the river perished.

Devaram is an example because the inundations have played over the monuments. If the region around Lalgudi could be viewed against this background. It would be evident that there should have been temples here the Saptamatrikas in Lalgudi would show that stone images could have formed part of brick temples.

The hymns of Nanacampantar and Navukkaracar prove existence of a temple at Lalgudi. The images of Saptamatrikas lend further support. These images worn out to such an extent that it is difficult to make out their feature. All seven were present, flanked by Virabhadra and Ganapati. The matrkas are found seated in lalitasana posture with the right leg suspended and left rested on the pedestal.<sup>10</sup>

On the southern side of the Amman temple corridor of the innercourt ward and facing the main sanctum is an impressive array of exquisite sculptures of the seven mothers. Saptamatrikas, this word is Sanskrit. This word mention that “Seven Kannika” The bold depiction graceful features and extraordinary poise and charm they display clearly attest to their Pallava period 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E.<sup>11</sup> All of them show the *abhaya – hasta* with the other features (weapons, mudras etc) appropriate to their cult here.

### **Saptamatrikas Sculptures**

These idioms are typical of Pallava art which peep upto Tirupparankunram<sup>12</sup> in the far south as the image of Jyestadevi in the cave temple there is endowed with a similar tiara. On these basis, it may be proved that

vestiges of Pallava temples in the region around Lalgudi is to be found which had become extinct in course of time. Some how the images of the matrikas were adored by the folk and so they have survived. Even now, the matrikas in Lalgudi Siva temple found housed here. In case of Lalgudi, remnants of old temples are found to the south outside the temple complex. The matrikas are likely to have remained there before they were brought into the Saptarishiswarar temple. The temple for pitari the Tamil equivalent of eamunda, found close to the tirukkulam, should have been the seat of the folk cult in those times.<sup>13</sup>

The Saptamatrikas were popular in Tamil country from atleast the 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E. as pointed out by the Tamil epic, *Cilappatikaram*.<sup>14</sup> The literature refers to a goddess who the youngest of six others *aruvarakkilaivanankai*<sup>15</sup> which is a matrikas others being *Mahesvari*, *Kaumari*, *Vasinavi*, *Varahi* and *Indran*.<sup>16</sup> The matrikas cult is supposed to have reached the Tamil country during the Pallava country from the Calukyan region.<sup>17</sup> But there are earlier evidences as pointed out by the *Cilappatikaram*. In art of course, the earliest, images are from Mammallapuram (stary images) Tiruttani (Stray pieces, housed in the Virattanesvara temple), Maliyatippatti<sup>18</sup>, Tirukokarnam, Tirukkolakkuti and Tirupparankunram<sup>19</sup> (Stray pieces). So, the presence of the matrikas by about the fag end of the Pallava period at Lalgudi need not be a wonder again, the place name, Avaninarayanam, a title of Nandivarman – III<sup>20</sup> would give clue to the fact that the hamlet should have been a centre of patronage right from the days of Nandivarman.

The Lalgudi images are very important in the history of the Matrika imagery in the Tamil country because they seem to be the earliest appearing in Colanadu region.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, it may be added that from the saptamatrika, of the Pallava period. The sculptural art of the saptarishiswara temple is a world of its own. There are specimens from the various epochs of its history such as early Cholas later Chols, Vijayanagaras and Marathas.<sup>22</sup> The Cholas and Vijayanagaras sculptures from a category of their own. All these show the culturally vibrant forces of the temple. Surviving through the ages this is simply unique and serves to enhance the basic idea forwarded through the present study. That is to say the Lalgudi temple has continued to be a living entity having the contributions of the various historical periods indelibly recorded. Its rich sculptural art is a good example in this regard. Though the sculptures belong to various epochs, they command an underlining unity of thought and serve to project the culture, centering around the village and its historical and religious traditions.<sup>23</sup>

### Endnotes

1. Arumiku Saptarishiswarar Thirukkoil, Sthalapuranam, p. 2.
2. Arulkavi Azhakarsamy Pillai, *Arulthiru Perunthiruppratty Andhathi*, Vol. IV, p. 15.
3. A.R.E. No. 167 of 1892.
4. K.A. Nilakanda Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 112.
5. E.I. Vol. VIII, p. 260.
6. Ibid., p. 2.

7. K. Sivaramalingam, *The Sivayoganathaswami Temple Tiruviyalur*, p. 112.
8. J.C. Harle, *The Brahmapurisvara Temple at Pullamangai*, Vol. IV.
9. C. Sivaramamurti, *Kulugumalai and Early Pandyan Rock – Cut Shrines*, Fig. 11.
10. K.R. Srinivasan, *Temples of South India*, p. 55.
11. K.A. Nilakanda Sastri, *The Cholas*, p. 112.
12. Raju Kalidos, *The Malaiyadiatti Cave Temples, South Asian Studies*, Vol. IV, pp. 56-69.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
14. *Cilappatikaram*, 20 : 11. 34-40.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 41.
16. *Ibid.*, 113.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. K.K. Rajarajan, *Further Light on Triupparankuram Caves*, Annai (AION) Vol. 51: 4, pp. 395-408.
20. S.I.I. Vol. XIII, p.159.
21. Gopalan, *History of the Pallavas of Kanchi*, p. 12.
22. K. Sivaramalingam, *Op. Cit.*, p. 155.
23. B. Sheela, *Vazhuvur Virattanesvarar Temple*, p. 254.