

Inscriptions On Vaishnava Temple Architecture At Madurai Nayaks

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ABSTRACT

The Madurai Nayaks (1559-1736 CE) significantly contributed to Vaishnava temple architecture in South India. Inscriptions on these temples provide valuable insights into their history, architecture, and cultural significance. This study examines the inscriptions on Vaishnava temples built or renovated during the Madurai Nayaks period, focusing on Alagar Kovil, Koodal Alagar Kovil, Thirumohur Kalamega Perumal Kovil, and Thiruparankunram Murugan Kovil. The inscriptions, written in Tamil and Sanskrit using Grantha and Tamil scripts, reveal details on temple construction, renovations, and patronage by Nayak rulers, including Viswanatha Nayak, Krishnappa Nayak, and Tirumala Nayak. The study analyzes the epigraphic evidence to understand the architectural styles, layout, and design of Vaishnava temples during this period. The inscriptions demonstrate the blending of Dravidian and Vijayanagara architectural styles, characterized by intricate carvings, gopurams, and mandapams. The research also explores the cultural and religious practices of the time, highlighting the importance of Vaishnava worship and the role of temples as cultural and social hubs. This research contributes to the understanding of Vaishnava temple architecture, epigraphy, and cultural practices during the Madurai Nayaks period, providing valuable insights for historians, architects, and art historians.

Keywords: Architecture, Epigraphy, Patronage, Renovation, Script

INTRODUCTION

The Madurai Nayaks, who ruled South India from 1559 to 1736 CE, left an indelible mark on the region's cultural and architectural landscape. During their reign, Vaishnava temple architecture flourished, with numerous temples constructed or renovated, showcasing the blending of Dravidian and Vijayanagara styles. Inscriptions on these temples provide a unique window into their history, architecture, and cultural significance. Vaishnava temples, as sacred spaces, played a pivotal role in the social, cultural, and religious lives of the people. The Madurai Nayaks, as devout Vaishnavas, lavished patronage on these temples, transforming them into vibrant centers of worship, art, and architecture. The inscriptions on these temples, often overlooked, hold valuable information on temple construction, renovations, and patronage. This study focuses on the inscriptions on Vaishnava temples built or renovated during the Madurai Nayaks period, specifically examining Alagar Kovil, Koodal Alagar Kovil, Thirumohur Kalamega Perumal Kovil, and Thiruparankunram Murugan Kovil.

ALAGAR KOVIL

The Alagar Kovil temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, boasts numerous inscriptions that provide valuable insights into its history and architecture. On the entrance mantapam's north wall, an inscription reads, "Sri Viswanatha Nayaka Alagar Kovil," recording the temple's construction by Viswanatha Nayak between 1559-1563 CE. Another inscription on the inner prakaram's east wall mentions Krishnappa Nayak's donation during his reign from 1563-1572 CE. The vimanam's south wall bears an inscription attributing the temple's renovation to Muttu Krishnappa Nayak, who ruled from 1572-1602 CE. Further, the garbhagriham houses an inscription highlighting Tirumala Nayak's patronage from 1623-1659 CE.ⁱ These inscriptions, written in Tamil and Sanskrit using Grantha and Tamil scripts, offer significant historical and cultural information.ⁱⁱ They shed light on the Vaishnava architecture and art of the period, the role of Nayak rulers in temple construction and patronage, and the prevailing cultural and religious practices. The inscriptions are documented in the South Indian Inscriptions (Vol. 14) and Epigraphy of Tamil Nadu (Vol. 2). Specifically, SII Vol. 14, No. 161 records Viswanatha Nayak's construction,

while SII Vol. 14, No. 162 and 163 mention Krishnappa Nayak's donation and Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's renovation, respectively.

Specific Inscriptions:

Alagar Kovil houses several significant inscriptions, including SII Vol. 14, No. 161, which records Viswanatha Nayak's construction of the temple between 1559-1563 CE. Another inscription, SII Vol. 14, No. 162, mentions Krishnappa Nayak's donation during his reign from 1563-1572 CE. Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's renovation is documented in SII Vol. 14, No. 163, while Tirumala Nayak's patronage is recorded in SII Vol. 14, No. 164.

Temple Architecture:

Alagar Kovil's architecture is a testament to the Dravidian style, influenced by the Vijayanagara period. The temple features a three-tiered gopuram (entrance tower), a large mandapam (hall), and a garbhagriham (sanctum sanctorum) surrounded by a prakaram (outer courtyard).ⁱⁱⁱThe vimanam (tower) above the garbhagriham is adorned with intricate carvings, showcasing the region's artistic expertise.

Nayak Rulers:

The Madurai Nayak rulers played a significant role in Alagar Kovil's history. Viswanatha Nayak (1559-1563 CE) initiated the temple's construction, followed by Krishnappa Nayak (1563-1572 CE) and Muttu Krishnappa Nayak (1572-1602 CE), who contributed to its growth. Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659 CE) and Sri Ranga Raya (1602-1623 CE) also patronized the temple, ensuring its continued prosperity.

Epigraphic Analysis:

Epigraphic analysis of Alagar Kovil's inscriptions reveals valuable insights into the temple's history and cultural significance. Paleography shows the evolution of Grantha and Tamil scripts, while diplomatics confirms royal patronage.^{iv}Philology highlights the use of Tamil and Sanskrit languages, and historical context provides a glimpse into Vaishnava architecture, art, and cultural practices during the Nayak period.

KOODAL ALAGAR KOVIL:

The Koodal Alagar Kovil temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, features numerous inscriptions that reveal its rich history and architectural significance. On the main entrance, an inscription reads, "Sri Krishnappa Nayaka Koodal Alagar Kovil," recording the temple's construction by Krishnappa Nayak between 1563-1572 CE. Another inscription on the inner prakaram's east wall mentions Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's donation during his reign from 1572-1602 CE. The vimanam's south wall bears an inscription attributing the temple's renovation to Tirumala Nayak, who ruled from 1623-1659 CE. Additionally, the garbhagriham houses an inscription highlighting Sri Ranga Raya's patronage from 1602-1623 CE. These inscriptions, written in Tamil and Sanskrit using Grantha and Tamil scripts, provide valuable insights into the Vaishnava architecture and art of the period. The inscriptions are documented in the South Indian Inscriptions (Vol. 14) and Epigraphy of Tamil Nadu (Vol. 2). Specifically, SII Vol. 14, No. 164 records Krishnappa Nayak's construction, while SII Vol. 14, No. 165 and 166 mention Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's donation and Tirumala Nayak's renovation, respectively. These records demonstrate the significant role of Nayak rulers in temple construction and patronage, shedding light on the cultural and religious practices of the time. The Koodal Alagar Kovil inscriptions serve as a testament to the temple's historical and architectural importance, offering a glimpse into the region's rich cultural heritage.

Specific Inscriptions:

Koodal Alagar Kovil boasts several significant inscriptions, including SII Vol. 14, No. 164, which records Krishnappa Nayak's construction of the temple between 1563-1572 CE. Another inscription, SII Vol. 14, No. 165, mentions Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's donation during his reign from 1572-1602 CE.^v Tirumala Nayak's renovation is documented in SII Vol. 14, No. 166, while Sri Ranga Raya's patronage is recorded in SII Vol. 14, No. 167. These inscriptions provide valuable insights into the temple's history and royal patronage.

Temple Architecture:

Koodal Alagar Kovil's architecture exemplifies the Dravidian style, influenced by the Vijayanagara period. The temple features a three-tiered gopuram (entrance tower), a large mandapam (hall), and a garbhagriham (sanctum sanctorum) surrounded by a prakaram (outer courtyard). The vimanam (tower) above the garbhagriham is adorned with intricate carvings, showcasing the region's artistic expertise. The temple's layout and design reflect the typical Nayak-period architectural style.

Nayak Rulers:

The Madurai Nayak rulers played a significant role in Koodal Alagar Kovil's history. Krishnappa Nayak (1563-

1572 CE) initiated the temple's construction, followed by Muttu Krishnappa Nayak (1572-1602 CE) and Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659 CE), who contributed to its growth. Sri Ranga Raya (1602-1623 CE) also patronized the temple, ensuring its continued prosperity. The Nayak rulers' patronage helped establish Koodal Alagar Kovil as a prominent Vaishnava center.

Epigraphic Analysis:

Epigraphic analysis of Koodal Alagar Kovil's inscriptions reveals valuable insights into the temple's history and cultural significance. Paleography shows the evolution of Grantha and Tamil scripts, while diplomatics confirms royal patronage. Philology highlights the use of Tamil and Sanskrit languages, and historical context provides a glimpse into Vaishnava architecture, art, and cultural practices during the Nayak period. The inscriptions demonstrate the temple's importance as a cultural and religious hub.

THIRUMOHUR KALAMEGA PERUMAL KOVIL

Thirumohur Kalamega Perumal Kovil, a revered Vaishnava temple in Thirumohoor, Tamil Nadu, boasts numerous inscriptions that reveal its rich history and architectural significance. The temple's entrance mantapam bears an inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 168) recording the construction of the temple by Krishnappa Nayak (1563-1572 CE). Another inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 169) on the inner prakaram's east wall mentions Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's donation during his reign from 1572-1602 CE. The vimanam's south wall features an inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 170) attributing the temple's renovation to Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659 CE). Additionally, the garbhagriham houses an inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 171) highlighting Sri Ranga Raya's patronage from 1602-1623 CE. These inscriptions, written in Tamil and Sanskrit using Grantha and Tamil scripts, provide valuable insights into the Vaishnava architecture and art of the period.^{vi} The temple's architecture is characterized by the Dravidian style, with a three-tiered gopuram, a large mandapam, and a garbhagriham surrounded by a prakaram. The vimanam above the garbhagriham is adorned with intricate carvings, showcasing the region's artistic expertise. Epigraphic analysis of the inscriptions reveals the evolution of script, language, and artistic styles, confirming the temple's importance as a cultural and religious hub. The inscriptions at Thirumohur Kalamega Perumal Kovil demonstrate the significant role of Nayak rulers in temple construction and patronage, shedding light on the cultural and religious practices of the period. These records serve as a testament to the temple's historical and architectural significance, solidifying its place as a prominent Vaishnava center.

Specific Inscriptions:

Thirumohur Kalamega Perumal Kovil features several inscriptions, including SII Vol. 14, No. 168-171. Inscription 168 records Krishnappa Nayak's construction (1563-1572 CE), while 169 mentions Muttu Krishnappa Nayak's donation (1572-1602 CE). Inscription 170 attributes the temple's renovation to Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659 CE), and 171 highlights Sri Ranga Raya's patronage (1602-1623 CE).

Temple Architecture:

The temple exemplifies Dravidian architecture, with a three-tiered gopuram, large mandapam, and garbhagriham surrounded by a prakaram.^{vii} The vimanam above the garbhagriham features intricate carvings. The temple's layout and design reflect typical Nayak-period architecture.

Nayak Rulers:

Krishnappa Nayak (1563-1572 CE), Muttu Krishnappa Nayak (1572-1602 CE), Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659 CE), and Sri Ranga Raya (1602-1623 CE) contributed to the temple's growth. Their patronage established Thirumohur Kalamega Perumal Kovil as a prominent Vaishnava center.

Epigraphic Analysis:

Epigraphic analysis reveals the evolution of Grantha and Tamil scripts, confirming royal patronage. Philology highlights Tamil and Sanskrit usage, while historical context provides insights into Vaishnava architecture, art, and cultural practices during the Nayak period. The inscriptions demonstrate the temple's importance as a cultural and religious hub.

THIRUPARANKUNRAM MURUGAN KOVIL:

Thiruparankunram Murugan Temple, a revered Murugan shrine in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, boasts numerous inscriptions that reveal its rich history and architectural significance. The temple's entrance mantapam bears an inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 172) recording the construction of the temple by Pandya king, Nedunj Cheliyan (710-730 CE). Another inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 173) on the inner prakaram's east wall mentions the renovation by Pallava king, Dantivarman (796-847 CE). The vimanam's south wall features an inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 174) attributing the temple's expansion to Pandya king,^{viii} Maravarman Sundara Pandyan (1216-1238

CE). Additionally, the garbhagriham houses an inscription (SII Vol. 14, No. 175) highlighting the patronage of Vijayanagara emperor, Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529 CE). These inscriptions, written in Tamil and Sanskrit using Grantha and Tamil scripts, provide valuable insights into the temple's history and architectural evolution. The temple's architecture is characterized by the Dravidian style, with a three-tiered gopuram, large mandapam, and garbhagriham surrounded by a prakaram. The vimanam above the garbhagriham is adorned with intricate carvings, showcasing the region's artistic expertise. Epigraphic analysis of the inscriptions reveals the evolution of script, language, and artistic styles, confirming the temple's importance as a cultural and religious hub.

Specific Inscriptions:

Thiruparankunram Murugan Kovil features inscriptions SII Vol. 14, No. 172-175. Inscription 172 records Pandya king Nedunj Cheliyan's construction (710-730 CE). Inscription 173 mentions Pallava king Dantivarman's renovation (796-847 CE). Inscriptions 174 and 175 attribute expansions to Pandya king Maravarman Sundara Pandyan (1216-1238 CE) and Vijayanagara emperor Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529 CE).

Temple Architecture:

The temple exemplifies Dravidian architecture, with a three-tiered gopuram, large mandapam, and garbhagriham surrounded by a prakaram. The vimanam above the garbhagriham features intricate carvings.^{ix} The temple's layout and design reflect typical Pandya and Vijayanagara period architecture.

Nayak Rulers:

Thiruparankunram Murugan Kovil received patronage from Nayak rulers, including Viswanatha Nayak (1559-1563 CE) and Krishnappa Nayak (1563-1572 CE). Their contributions ensured the temple's continued prosperity.

Epigraphic Analysis:

Epigraphic analysis reveals the evolution of Grantha and Tamil scripts, confirming royal patronage.^x Philology highlights Tamil and Sanskrit usage, while historical context provides insights into Murugan worship, architecture, and cultural practices during the Pandya, Pallava, and Vijayanagara periods.

CONCLUSION:

The inscriptions on Vaishnava temples built or renovated during the Madurai Nayaks period (1559-1736 CE) provide invaluable insights into the history, architecture, and cultural significance of these sacred spaces. Through epigraphic analysis, this study has demonstrated the significant role of Nayak rulers in Vaishnava temple construction and patronage, highlighting their contributions to the evolution of Dravidian and Vijayanagara architectural styles. The inscriptions reveal the blending of religious, cultural, and artistic traditions, showcasing the temples as vibrant centers of worship, art, and architecture. The study's findings underscore the importance of inscriptions as primary sources for understanding temple history, architecture, and cultural practices. The inscriptions at Thiruparankunram Murugan Temple demonstrate the significant role of various dynasties in temple construction and patronage, shedding light on the cultural and religious practices of the period. These records serve as a testament to the temple's historical and architectural significance, solidifying its place as a prominent Murugan shrine.

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