

Guruvayur Temple - A Master Piece of Dravidian Architecture

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Abstract

This study discusses the architectural marvel that symbolizes the Dravidian architecture that prevailed in South India. It examines the origin and mythology of the Guruvayur temple and its association with Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna. From a small shrine how Guruvayur turned to a significant pilgrimage centre, the donors and patronages of the temple, the Dravidian architectural style overview and the regional variations in the material selection due to the geographical peculiarities of the tropical environment were also discussed in detail. A detailed review of the architectural layout of the temple construction techniques and materials used, as well as intricate carvings and sculptures, the religious significance of Hindu cosmology, and philosophy are considered. Apart from all this, the study emphasizes the cultural and ceremonial aspects, as well as the crucial role of the audience in the conservation and restoration of the divine structure of the temple. The active involvement of the audience in the preservation of the temple's architectural heritage is a testament to their deep-rooted cultural and religious beliefs.

Keywords

Dravidian architecture, Philosophy and Cosmology, Culture, Symbolism in Architecture.

Introduction

Guruvayur, Kerala, 's geographical history, from the early Oligocene to the early Miocene. The Kerala Konkan basin is located south of 16 degrees north latitude. The Kerala Konkan offshore basin forms the southern part of the western continental margin of India and extends from Goa in the north to Cape Comorin in the southwestward. The basin extends to Arabia's Abyssal plain on the eastern side, and the peninsular shield bounds it.

The geography is characterized by its coastline, mountains and three distinct regions. The terrain of Kerala is made up of pre-Cambrian and Pleistocene formations; Kerala is blended with different cultural traditions like Buddhism, Jainism, and cults of Dravidian origins in the beginning and later had harmonious coexistence with Roman, Syrian, Arabian, Persian, Portuguese, Dutch, and British countries. Kerala is blessed with a diversity of gods and goddesses for worship about the Dravidian cult and believes that it is the manifestation of the supreme deity. This outlook resulted in the different models of temple architecture and the differences in the worshipping techniques. Kerala has contributed much to agama literature, and many contributions came from Tantrasamuccaya of Narayana Guruvayur temple, which is described as Bhooloka Vaikuntam (Vaikuntam, the palace of Lord Vishnu on earth). Mamshyala Chandrika is a book in Sanskrit dealing with domestic architecture. It references the temple architecture and prathishta (fixing the idol) in garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum). Tantrasamuccaya is another text prescribing the norms and rules of constructing ordinary buildings and temples. The encyclopedia's tantra samakkaya consists of 15 chapters (patalam). The first chapter deals with the selection of a guru, the sole of construction of the temple, the Vastuballi (ceremonies to purify the site), widikalasha (precious materials with Foundation stone) bricks and the making of the garbhaShila (foundation stone) and garbha vinyasa (the conception

of the deity). The architect or yajamanan, who should be the true deity, plays a significant role in the construction and worship of the temple. He should worship the deity every day in a prescribed way according to the caste, varna and ashrama. He should find the thandri (one *who is competent to install and venerate the deity*). Dravidian architecture is a style that originated in the southern part of India. It stands out from the conventional building designs in India. Its unique features distinguish it from other Indian architectural forms.

Aims of the study

The aim is to study the architectural marvel and its design in the temple architecture of Guruvayur. The Study explores the distinct connection of Guruvayur temple architecture and its relations with the architectural design used in south Indian temples. The structuring similarity and usage of Dravidian architecture concerning the geographical nature of the state of Kerala, where the Guruvayur temple is located, are considered. Dravidian unity is strictly protected within the boundaries of Western Ghats, and its midland is also discussed in detail according to the aims and objectives formed.

Objectives of the study

- i) To find out the significance of Dravidian Architecture in constructing the Guruvayur temple.
- ii) To find out the variations or how the terrain affected in the construction of the temple.

Based on these objectives, the following hypothesis is made.

- i) Dravidian temple architecture and Guruvayur temple construction will have a significant relationship.
- ii) Due to the difference in geography, there will be different peripherals in construction and design between Dravidian architecture and Guruvayur temple, which is called Yogamurthy. This changes the temple's character as the worshipper wishes and prays.

Methodology

The study's methodology is descriptive and analytical. Analytical methods explain the descriptions. Epistemological methods are also used in the study. The study analyzes the available literature in detail.

Review of the Literature

The idol of the temple of Guruvayur was first placed, and later, the construction of the temple proceeded. This gave ample space and time to design the architectural marvel of Guruvayur temple. The architectural construction of the temple is the purest of the Dravidian style, so it has references in Tamil literature. The designs of the temple constructions prevailed in the southern side of India, as can be seen in the temple's architectural design. Guruvayur temple is one of the most famous temples in India; the stories and epics depicted by poet Poonthanam (a bhakti poet) and the local legends of Kurooramma and Manjula (a poor Warrior girl) give multiple shades to the deity. The freedom to change the appearance and purpose of the idol in the Yogamurthi structure helped devotees fantasize according to their needs.

The distinctive features of Dravidian architecture are:

Gopuram (*gateway Tower*) is heavily decorated with sculptures and artefacts. The distinct feature is the height of the tower. Before the advent of modern technology, giant rock-cut sculptures were placed at great heights on top of towers. The pulley and chain to erect charge Towers are used for more than 6 km in length. During Rajaraja Chola of the Chola dynasty, gopuram of iconic hypes were made, and thousands of turns of single Rock cut sculptures were placed on the top. The statues of Gods, Goddesses, and mythological idols were intricately carved into the rocks to make the architectural galore. How human effort can go beyond bond areas is symbolically shown by the enormous structures. Vimana, or Sanctum tower, is located directly above the Sanctum sanctorum (*inner shrine*) where the main deity is placed. There are two types of vimana: cylindrical and conical. This type of structure is seen mainly in the temples in South India and Orissa. It contains multiple stories and thalas of the Orissa temples. The vimana is the tallest structure in the temple, and in the temple of South India, the vimana is usually smaller than the Gopuram or the gatehouse. The side part of the vimana is usually heavily decorated with statues. Vimana Are considered the face of God and are given particular importance in temple architecture. It is assumed to be a mythological flying palace or chariot, and eventually, it became part of the temple architecture. According to Vimana Shastra, the vimanas are classified into Manthrika, Tantrika, and Krithaka.

Mandapa (pillar hall)

These are the open or closed halls used for various ceremonial purposes. The pillars of the world are sculptures and instances from epics and mythology. One or more of the mandapas lies between the sanctuary and the temple entrance. Classical art forms of dance and musical performances were held in the mandapas. Each one is defined with specific purposes. The mandapas are of different varieties according to each one's purpose. They include

Karuvarai, Artha mandapam, Maha mandapam, Neerattu mandapam, Alankara mandapam, and sabha mandapam are the six basic mandapams in temples. Among the various other Mandapam, Natana Mandapam (*for dance*), Nadak mandapam (*for drama*), purana Mandapam (*for reciting epics*), taruka mandapam, mullatri Mandapam, varambra mandapam, navaratri mandapam (*for Pooja celebration*), kodikazhi mandapam, Nerazhi mandapam, one pillared mandapam and 24 pillar Mandapam can also be seen. Musical pillars are the unique contributions to the history of architecture. We can hear the melodic musical notes in the pillars of these mandapams. Many of the mandapams are added with sculpture beauties.

Prakara (*enclosure walls*) are multiple concentric Walls around the temple that separate different sections of the complex, creating a sense of progression towards the inner Sanctum. It is a particular feature of the Dravidian architecture. This architectural feature serves as a protective barrier around the temple's sanctums, is often adorned with decorative elements, and is used for circumambulation during worship. The prakara enhances the spiritual experience and reflects the temple's grandeur and significance. Prakaras are often surrounded by gardens or courtyards, enhancing the temple complex's aesthetic appeal and spiritual Ambience. The size and complexity of a prakara can indicate the importance and status of the Temple within the community. Shankaracharya formulated Guruvayur temple's unique Acharams (traditional rituals), and he has followed them strictly to date.

The stories state that Guru and Vayu (wind God) were circling the sea to find the place the Goddess ordered to find a place in the land. They move to a place and, with the help of Vishnu Karma (*the architect of gods*), install an image in the place later known as Guruvayur appa (guru and Vayu *together*). The place was called Guruvayur, hence form.

Guruvayur Temple Architecture

In 1968, the temple was reconstructed and became the most famous pilgrimage centre of Kerala. After it died in 1778 AD, it rebelled in 1718 AD. During the attack of Tipu Sultan, the main deity was moved to Ambalapuzha, and the urchana vigraha (model) was worshipped. When British forces replaced Tipu Sultan, the moola vigraha (*original*) was reinstated.

The Architecture of Guruvayur Temple

The temple architecture is a perfect model of Dravidian temple architecture found in the southern part of India. Guruvayur temple is divided into western Gopuram and Eastern Gopuram. Gopuram or entrance Gates on both sides are part of the architecture of the Dravidian temple. The Bhahyangana (*outer courtyard*), the pratishta Verdi (perambulatory path), and the Ayyappa Shrine are located in the west koottambalam called alapa Prasad (small structure) storerooms and ootupura complex, which constitutes the stores and dining hall. The Edathikkathu Bhagavathi shrine is at the Eastern end, and this stretch is a sacred Grove or kaavu. Hence, the worshippers enter through a narrow corridor. The shrine is a rootless platform under the age-old Elanji tree.

There is a sayana pradakshinam for devotees to roll over. Bran lamps were installed in the walls called villakku madam, and small stick lamps were placed there. Balikallu is placed in different parts of pradakshina vazhi. One is devoted to Harisena, the commander-in-chief of celestial gods. There were eight Cardinal Points devoted to the dikpalakas. Ashtadikpalakas are gods of the deity.

Vaathil madam

After completing each pradakshinam (*round*), the devotee returns to the Eastern entrance. The devotees dive down in the corridor to reach namaskaara mandapam, or artha mandapam (*half of a Mandapam*). The prominent priest or Melshanthi performs ganapathi homam (*a prayer and ritual dedicated to Lord Ganapathi the elephant God*) here and performs Sashtaanga namaskaram (*leaning down*). The Gopuram and mukha mandapam, after taking a glimpse of the deity, the devotee hurries through till he reaches the Gopuram. The flight of three steps leading to the mukha mandapam, the Sri Kovil for the main building consist of sobanam, Antavalam and garbha griha. The Sri Kovil is a two-storied building. It is constructed in a 702 square meters space. The deity is a four-armed Vishnu in a standing pose, which is not placing its foot in the Lotus; instead, it is placed on an hourglass pedestal.

Murals and Sculptures of Guruvayur Temple

The outer walls of the sanctum Sanctorum are decorated with mural paintings and sculptures. The paintings date back to the 17th century. After the great fire that struck Guruvayur, many of the mural paintings were carbonated; the artist of mammy or mural painting institute restored it. Krishnam Kutty Nair found the original ingredient of the painting in Mammiyur. There are many carvings of demons in the copulation and amorous couples under the position of the Gala. The two tiers of eaves formed by the two roofs are the pushpamaala or floral design. Under these, we can see pakshimaala, their parrots facing each other, followed by mrigamaala, in which animals are

depicted in sexual intercourse. After that, a freeze of decorative motifs called chitramaala can be seen, and after comes the bhuutamaala. They are showing demons engaging in explicit sexual activity. There are also women in sexual activity, copulation, and delivery. A picture of actual childbirth is also demonstrated in its anatomical details. In the Southern East wall of the Sanctum Sanctorum, Kuchelavritam is depicted in beautiful photos. Deities are Subhramania, Aghoramurthi, Hanuman and Krishna lying in a fig leaf and pictures of Guruvayur appan showing as a child, adolescent and adult.

In the southern wall towards the centre is a Ganadwaara formed in mortar. A relief of Dhakshinamurthy is seen on the top. On his right and left, Shiva is eyeing Mohini in that Parvathy can be seen. Shiva's chinkara was spotted with a sword in the woods, also seen above the figure of Dhakshinamurthy Bhuutamaala. Above, there are several paintings of Ganapathi, Shivatandava, and Bhadrakali. Shakthipancheshwari and Durga can also be seen. Fourteen rishis and fourteen sutras are depicted along with the paintings of Dakshinamurthi. On the walls, there are paintings of Arjuna and Kirita. On the north, there is a mural of Garuda and Hanuman. On the north is Govardhanodharnam, the lift of the mountain Govardhana by lord Krishna. There are murals of Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Vasista and Dasaratha returning after Sitaswayamvara when Parashuraman blocks the way. Vettakorumakan (*Shiva as a hunter*) Navanita Krishna Parvathy's wedding showing Indra and Himavan, Balarama with an asura, Krishna and a calf and garuda are represented.

Dhanwantari, Narsimhamoorthy, Annapurneshwari, Gopikas, cattle, Krishna on his knees, Saswati, and Mahalakshmi are also depicted. Bhishma's Sharashayanam and Narasimhamurti are also depicted. The story of Kesi trying to kill Krishna, disguising himself as a horse, and getting killed by Krishna is also shown.

In the Mukhamandapam, there are murals of Brahma and Saraswati. A mural of Ardhanariishwara (half male and half female), the god, is also pictured. Gopalamrithyunjaya Murti and Shankaranarayana are also seen. Mahavishnu's picture is also seen in the centre of the north wall.

There are pictures of Mahalakshmi, Vishnu, and Balarama, as well as the killing of Kuvalayapita (*Kamsa's Elephant*) by pulling out its tusk while Balarama looks on. Sri Krishna does this. A graphic depiction of a mahout, bewailing by this horrible scene by beating his head in his sorrow. Its picturization has a three-dimensional effect. A picture of Krishna wearing ornaments, rings, and bangles naked till waste is also seen. Wearing a feather of a peacock on his head, Krishna is seen thrusting away the calf and suckling a cow's udder. The cow is also seen affectionately licking him from behind. With a conch, discus club, and lotus on his delicate hand, Vishnu is also drawn.

Balarama and Krishna sharing butter with 24 children named Vanabhojanam can also be seen. Nalakkubeera and manigriva moksha from trees to regain their original forms while Krishna uprooted the tree by dragging the mortar in which Krishna was tried by his mother. The picture is drawn similarly to the two demigods blessing Sri Krishna's killing of Poothana or Poothanmoksham, which is also depicted in the next. While killing Poothana, Yashodha rushes and picks up Infant Krishna, also drawn as murals.

Veerarama, after killing Ravana, is also shown, which is followed by the much-acclaimed Ananthashayanam, which shows Krishna lying on the body of Balarama, which is the incarnation of the serpent (*snake*), is also drawn in a comic sense. Yashoda is trying to pick up her son. Next seen depicted is the killing of Bakasura. Multiple-headed Serpents (Kaliyamardanam) are described with splendour and grandeur. An adolescent Krishna playing his favourite musical instrument, the flute, is also seen in a paper ink sketch by Melpathur Venugopalam reproduction. Infant Krishna is humorously depicted on the shoulder of another boy stealing curd and a cat eagerly waiting for his share. Then, he starts the pictures of adult Krishna as Parthasarathy (*Arjuna's Chariot drives*) by teaching his dejected friend Arjuna wisdom. There is a holy spring called Theerthakuzhal where devotees collect theertham or divine water. The Panels surrounding can be seen depicted with erotic pictures, and watchman dreaming is also seen. Vasudeva is carrying a girl child called Vishnu Maya, who has replaced Krishna in his room of Devaki. Vasudeva carrying a baby in his head, evading in water in which the shade of a Hydra provided him, can also be seen. Mahavishnu is showing his Viswarupa to Vadudeva and Devaki.

Kamsa, fully dressed in armour, is surrounded by soldiers ready to fight at the right of Vishnumaya after having escaped from the murderer's hand. The goddess is shown as Kartyayani with a crown and ear ornament, a full complement of weapons. A wooden statue of Mahavishnu is there in the gala. M. K. Srinivasan, Chief Instructure at Mural Painting Institute, Guruvayur Devaswam, restored these Pictures. He assisted Mammiyur Krishnan Kutty Nair in working on the murals. After the fire at Guruvayur temple, the roof of the temple was replaced with golden sheets; earlier, it was copper plates. The depictions of mythological figures, such as Brahma and Narsimha, are

on the wall between the two roof lines. 105 Kilograms of gold were used for thatching of the temple, which was made from the contribution of the devotees. A golden Taazhikkudom, an ornamental top in the form of a vase, surmounts Sri Kovil. At the edges of the roof line, one can see golden cobras. The pillars of Namskara Mandapam are also covered with golden embellishments. Ceremonial baths are done in a tank inside the temple. Direct separate access was given to melshanthi to conduct rituals and ceremonial baths and keep the water clean. A sculpture of Mahaprabhu with a human-faced tree is also at the gate.

Conclusion

The temple construction design of Guruvayur temple can be traced to the Dravidian temple architecture, which was dominant in temple construction in the southern part of India. There are slight differences in the construction, especially in the thatching of the Sanctum Sanctorum due to torrential rainfall and its geographical peculiarities. Primary constructs like gopuram are the two major unity gates. Chettambalams are different places designed for cultural activities. Garbha Griha (Sanctum Sanctorum) can be viewed as a distinct example of Dravidian Architecture. The temple was sustained after several attacks by insiders and outsiders and survived different fire outbreaks. The vimana above the Sanctum Sanctorum is designed according to the chariot or flying machine of the celestial god.

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