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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**HISTORIC EDIFICES OF KANYAKUMARI – A SUBALTERN STUDY
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Abstract

Heritage monuments and edifices reflect the history and culture of the people and country. Kanyakumari is located edge of the Indian Sub-continent. Kanyakumari had previously referred as the Alexandria of the east. Thiruvalluvar statue is an important monument in Kanyakumari. It is located at the confluence of the three great seas. Vivekananda rock Memorials is an monument in Kanyakumari which attracts large number of tourists. Kanyakumari have prominently noted for several secular monuments. Gandhi Mandapam has constructed above eight feet from the sea level on the seashore. Vattakottai a granite fort is situated at distance of six-kilo meters northeast of Kanyakumari. Kanyakumari decorates itself with a variety of monuments and pleasant centers. The offshore monuments enhance the beauty of Kanyakumari and attract more tourists from different parts of the world. The confluence of seas, the monuments on the shore and off the shore and other attractive centers indeed provide a colourful feast to the eyes of the tourists. These monuments and other attractive centers invite a large number of people to the tip of Kanyakumari every day. Arrival of tourists from different parts of India leads to flourishing business and money flow in Kanyakumari.

Keywords: Edifices in Kanyakumari district, important memorials, Religious sites, Tourist endeavor.

Introduction

Cape Comorin is the Southernmost Points of Malabar and of India. It is called Kimania by Ptolemy and Kumari or Komar by the author of the periplus¹. Kanyakumari was once referred to as the Alexandria of the east. This place has been a great Centre for art, culture, civilization and pilgrimage for years². During the early part of 8th century AD Islam entered the Southern part of India through the sea route with

traders and missionaries. Through St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Christ Christianity arrived in this area in 52 A.D. Islam, Christianity and Jainism have greatly contributed to the architectural wealth and literacy of this place³.

The first epigraphical mention of Kanyakumari the cockpit of South India found in the record of Rajaraja I dated the 18 year of the reign engraved on the pillar is the Bhagavathi Amman temple at

Kanyakumari⁴. In addition, inscriptions of Sundarachola Pandya and Kulothunga I are found in the Cholaraja temple. In commemoration of his victory over Kanyakumari Rajaraja Chola renamed it as Rajaraja Cholawaram and Kottar was called as Mummudi Cholanallur⁵. As Kanyakumari is not only the end of India and also it is noted as a pilgrim centre from very earliest days. The central and the State government established memorials at the Cape Comorinto the renowned scholars like Swami Vivekananda and Thiruvalluvar.

Vivekananda Rock Memorial

Vivekananda Rock Memorial is a monument in Kanyakumari which attracts large number of tourists. As its name implies it is essentially a sacred monument built by the "Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee" to which Shri Mannath Padmanabhan was president Maneeya Eknath Ranade was organization secretary. The Executive Committee Members of the memorial Committee drawn from different states to commemorate the visit of Swami Vivekananda to "Shripada Parai" during 24th, 25th December 1892 for deep meditation and enlightenment⁶. From very ancient times, the Rock has been regarded as a sacred place⁷. In puranic tradition, it has been known as "Sripada Parai" meaning the Parai which is the Tamil word for rock that has been blessed by the touch of Shripada feet of the goddess.

The memorial site being situated in mid sea, the memorial had to be in granite, and that too of requisite quality to ensure its long durability. To select proper varieties of stones, specimen pieces of granite from quarries in the vicinity Kanyakumari were sent to laboratory for ascertaining their quality. After obtaining results of scientific tests made on specimen pieces of stones sent to laboratory, two main quarries were selected by the committee for procuring stones required for the memorial structures. While the bulk of the stone used in the memorial is blue granite procured from a quarry near Ambalamudram in the Tirunelveli District, the red granite used for the shikharams of the Vivekananda Mandapam has been procured from a quarry near Tuticorin about ninety six miles away from Kanyakumari.

The financial assistance for the construction of the memorial came from all the states in India. The number of skilled artisans capable of working on granite stone is very limited in our country and all such artisans from the South Sthapathi, Shri S.K. Achari was of great help to the committee in overcoming this difficulty. As the memorial structure was to be in stone the dressing work formed the most essential preliminary part of the construction work. The stone dressing work was inaugurated on 6th November 1964 with only six artisans several work sheds were put up for the purpose on a spacious plot of land on the Kanyakumari shore. Similarly temporary quarters were also constructed at a suitable place in the Kanyakumari town ship to provide accommodation for skilled stone artisans who came to Kanyakumari from various parts of Tamilnadu to work on the Project.

At first the boating facility for the tourists to visit Vivekananda Rock was founded by Vivekananda Kendra. Because of its inability to continue the services, Tamilnadu Government took over it in 1981. This memorial was inaugurated on 2 September 1970 by the president of India Shri V.V Giri.

Thiruvalluvar Statue

Thiruvalluvar statue is another important monument in Kanyakumari. It is located at the confluence of the three great seas. It depicts the great tenets of Thirukkural namely virtue, wealth and love. The imposing 133 feet high statue is erected on a minor rock in mid-sea by Dr. Ganapathy Sthapathi and his team of around 500 specialists and other technical people. The statue is fully made up of granite stones, weighing 700 tonnes and comprising 3681 pieces of granite boulders each weighing 3-8 tonnes. The granite used for making the statue was procured from three quarries of Tamilnadu state. One at Ambalamudram of Tirunelveli District and the other two at Siruthamoor and Pattumalikuppam of Kancheepuram District. In the design of the statue thirty eight feet high pedestal depicts the first thirty eight chapters which deal with virtue and the ninety five feet depicts the rest of the ninety five chapters which deal with wealth and love there is one more thing which deserves note by the modern technicians. The height of the statue is 133 feet, for which a scaffolding work has to be attempted upto

a height of 150 feet. In this scaffolding work no steel fabrication was used but only the traditional casuarina posts were used right from the beginning to the end.

Secular Monuments

Kanyakumari is noted for several secular monuments. In order to project the greatness of the great personalities of our country, these monuments were erected and seeing these monuments people were inspired by the services made by these great leaders. Gandhi Mandapam, Kamaraj Mani Mandapam and Vattakottai are important secular Monuments.

The construction works of the memorial was started in the year 1954 and the entire construction work was over in the year 1955. The same architect by name Ganapathy Sthapathi who constructed the Vivekananda Mandapam was the architect of the Gandhi Mandapams. This Mandapam was built in Orissa style of architecture by consulting different architect with their advice, stones were examined and after experiment the building was constructed⁸.

Gandhi Mandapam

Gandhi Mandapam was constructed above eight feet from the sea level on the seashore. It was erected in memory of Gandhiji when he died his ashes were taken to Kanyakumari where three seas meet. The ashes with urn were kept on the sea shore for the worship of the public. The place where the urn was kept Gandhi Mandapam was erected. When the Gandhi Mandapam was constructed, a hole was made on the roof of the Mandapam through which sun light falls on the place on the birth day of Gandhi, October second Gandhi Mandapam consist of four Mandapams among which one is prayer hall. Gopuram of the Mandapam has a total height of seventy-nine feet which remembers the age of Gandhi who died. In front of Gandhi Mandapam there is a Bharath Matha statue is found.

Kamaraj Mani Mandapam

When Perunthalaivar Kamaraj was the Chief minister, he rendered great services to the public. After his death the urn containing his ashes was brought to Kanyakumari and it was kept for the worship of the

public. After that his ashes were thrown in the sea in that particular place the Kamaraj Mani Mandapam was erected in memory of great leader K.Kamaraj. Inside the Mandapam a number of photos are kept on the wall through which we can get the information about his relation with great leaders. There is a library inside the Mandapam. It contains a number of books relating to Kamaraj and other leaders. The entire building is built with marble.

Vattakottai

Vattakottai a granite fort is situated at a distance of six kilo meters northeast of Kanyakumari. It forms the terminal of a line of ramparts known as "The south Travancore lines" built under the order of De Lannoy during the reign of Maharaja Marthanda Varma (1729-58) to serve as the defense for Nanchil Nadu against the inroads of pirates. The army here had the advantage of being drilled and disciplined on the European model under the supervision of De Lannoy. It is rectangular in shape and covers an area of about three and a half acres⁹. The fort is enclosed by walls twenty-five to twenty-six feet high including the parapet, twenty-five feet thick at the fort. It is said that there is a subway or tunnel about four feet width supposed to connect the Padmanabhapuram palace. Now the tunnel has been closed. On the northern side of the fort is found a slope to bring the canon from the lower to the upper part of the parapet of the fort. There is a well of about six diameters. The fort built with lime but now it was ruined. Hence the whole wall around the fort is repaired.

The Religious Monuments Of Kanyakumari

The religious monuments of Kanyakumari are wonderful and popular in many respects. They focus the greatness of the religions and the architecture of the monuments reveal the skill of the architect who wonderfully carved different types of statues found in the temples. The most remarkable religious monuments in Kanyakumari are Bhagavathiamman temple, Gunganathaswami temple and St.Lady Ransom Church. They adorn the beauty and grandeur of Kanyakumari.

Bhagavathiamman Temple

According to one tradition the original Bhagavathiamman temple dedicated to Kumari Bhagavathi was on the rock, which was known as “Sripadapara¹⁰. Nearly 600 feet from the shore consequent on the encroachment of the sea the rock became an island and the old temple had to be shifted to the present site. From the records of the temple, we find that the rock has been regarded as a sacred place from very early days. On it there is a small Projection resembling a human foot which has traditionally been reversed as a symbol of the Sree Padam. There are three Prakaras in the Temple. The image of Kanni Bhagavathi facing east is a fine piece of marvelous sculptural skill She stands with a garland in her right hand. Her left hand is placed of Bhagavathi with a smiling face is a combination of innocence, purity and beauty She creates a sense of devotion and a peace that passes an understanding in the mind of every worshipper. From the inscriptions found in the temple we can easily identify that it was built by Pandya Kings and the goddess Kumari Bhagavathi”, was in fact worshipped as the family deity of the Pandyas.

Guganatha Swami Temple

Guganatha Swami temple is another popular and sacred temple of Kanyakumari Guganatha Swami Temple is situated at the distance of about half furlong from the Brahmin village of Kanyakumari. At present the temple is in bad condition around the Sanctum Santorum of the temple there is a dark. Therefore, the temple is called Guganatha Swami Temple. There are six inscriptions are there in this temple. They contain much information about their temple. Most of the inscriptions are in Tamil language and they are good state of preservation. One of the inscriptions found on the southern base of the Mandapam of the temple belongs to the reign of Parakesariwarman Rajendracholadeva. From that inscriptions it is interesting to note that the temple was constructed by Rajaraja the great. King’s officials and rich persons voluntarily came forward to donate much money for the development of this temple.

ST Lady Ransom Church

Another important monument of Kanyakumari is St Lady Ransom Church. The scenic beauty

surrounding this church and structures are wonderful. In the year 1900 the old church was demolished and the foundation stone of the present church was laid down. It was completed in the year 1956¹¹. The structure of the new edifice is well proportioned and very imposing and it forms and outstanding example of Gothic architecture. The interior portion is very graceful and quite conducive to prayer and worship. At the entrance is a big mandaps on which three towers. The central tower with a height of 153 feet was crowned with a golden cross blessed by Rev. T.R. Agniswamy, the Bishop of Kottar on 20th November 1955¹².

The towers on either side are hundred feet tall. Two big bells are hung in them at a height of fifty-three feet from the ground. The paintings and other arts found on the wall art highly remarkable in many respects. Not only the Christians but also the people belonging to other religions who visit Kanyakumari also visit this church for worship and enjoy.

Conclusion

Kanyakumari decorates itself with a variety of monuments and pleasant centers. The off-shore monuments enhance the beauty of Kanyakumari and attract more tourist from different parts of the world. The confluence of seas, the monuments on the shore and off the shore and other attractive centers indeed provide a colourful feast to the eyes of the tourists. These monuments and other attractive centers invite a large number of people to the tip of Kanyakumari every day. Arrival of tourists from different parts of India leads to flourishing business and money flow in Kanyakumari.

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