



HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KAILSANATHA TEMPLE AT SEMBIANMAHADEVI: GLEENED FROM THE INSCRIPTIONS

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Abstract:

Sembianmahadevi, well known as a pilgrim centre today, is one of the oldest villages in South India. For the past two thousand years it has been a great centre of South Indian Art and culture. In South India, the history and culture of a region often centres round a temple. This is particularly true of Tamilnadu where the temple has made a unique contribution not only to the religious life of the people but has also served as the nucleus round which the social and cultural life of the people revolves. Though many cities and towns could boast of ancient origins, not all of them could have a claim for a continuous history. The great cities of Kanchi, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Tiruchirappalli, for instance, are unquestionably ancient centres like Sembianmahadevi. But they have not had an unbroken history and they have become pre-eminent only during a comparatively short period. Kanchi, the capital city of the Pallavas and some of the early Cholas has faded off as a political capital later. The Cholas had capitals at various places. The most ancient of them, Uraiyur is now only a suburb. Tanjavur has a comparatively long history but its origin does not date back earlier than the ninth century A.D. It lies on the south east coast of Tamilnadu, nine miles east of Kanchi. It is one of the temple cities which come under the jurisdiction of Tamilnadu. The *Sthalapurana* states that it lies in Nagapattinam district of Tamilnadu. The Kailasanatha temple of Sembianmahadevi has twenty three inscriptions which reveal the historical significance of this temple.

Historical Significance of the Kailsanatha Temple at Sembianmahadevi: Gleened from the Inscriptions:

Sembianmahadevi, well known as a pilgrim centre today, is one of the oldest villages in South India. For the past two thousand years it has been a great centre of South Indian Art and culture. In South India, the history and culture of a region often centres round a temple. This is particularly true of Tamilnadu where the temple has made a unique contribution not only to the religious life of the people but has also served as the nucleus round which the social and cultural life of the people revolves. Though many cities and towns could boast of ancient origins, not all of them could have a claim for a continuous history. The great cities of Kanchi, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Tiruchirappalli, for instance, are unquestionably ancient centres like Sembianmahadevi. But they have not had an unbroken history and they have become pre-eminent only during a comparatively short period.¹ Kanchi, the capital city of the Pallavas and some of the early Cholas has faded off as a political capital later. The Cholas had capitals at various places. The most ancient of them, Uraiyur is now only a suburb. Tanjavur has a comparatively long history but its origin does not date back earlier than the ninth century A.D.²

Sembianmahadevi was religious centre from the days of cholas to the present day. This fact also more than any thing else is enough to gain for Sembianmahadevi continued as a religious centre of some dynasties or other for four centuries and more. At present Sembianmahadevi is one of the important pilgrim centres in the state next only to Thiruvnaamalai and Chidambaram. It lies on the south east coast of Tamilnadu, nine miles east of Kanchi. It is one of the temple cities which comes under the jurisdiction of Tamilnadu. The *Sthalapurana* states that it lies in Nagapattinam district of Tamilnadu.³ This famous Centre is surrounded by innumerable other trading centres such as Nagore, Karaikal, Thanjavur and Mailaduthurai Sembianmahadevi. The history of Sembianmahadevi as a religious centres goes back to remote times. Sembianmahadevi temple is not only of hoary antiquity but is also glorified by the entire Marudhavanapurana relating to the divine activities of Sri Kailasanathar, the main deity of Sembianmahadevi temple. This *purana* not only narrates the lilas (divine activities) performed by the Lord but also the condition which prevailed during the chola times.

At present Sembianmahadevi is a tiny village located at about 2 km north west of Nagapattinam. The temple of Kailasanathar is situated in the heart of Sembianmahadevi village.⁴ The origin of, many of the existing temples in Tamilnadu is shrouded in mystery and it is equally so with regard to the beginnings of the Kailasanatha temple at Sembianmahadevi. Evidence of the existence of a prehistoric culture like tree worship is found in the temple which has also become important in the history of the resurgence of Saivism, through its close association with many Nayanmars.⁵ Again Sembianmahadevi temple can be distinguished from some other temples which were forgotten either as *Pallippadais* or built as royal memorials. The importance and popularity of such temples declined with their patrons or donors who were responsible for their construction while the temple found at Sembianmahadevi has a continuous history from a period going earlier than historic

times and has played a large role in theistic currents in South India. It has not entirely depended on princely patronage, though at the same time it has received a substantial royal encouragement. In this section an attempt is made to reconstruct the history of Sembianmahadevi temple with the evidence supplied by the *Puranas* and epigraphs.⁷

The temple at Sembianmahadevi has a steady growth, spread over many centuries. A survey of the origin and development of this temple reveals that it has a humble beginning and complex achievement, through a period extending over two centuries. Fresh additions and installation of new images within elaborate structures were introduced from time to time. The successor of Parantaka I was Gandaraditya the second son of the former. He patronized and developed many temples in the Pennai region along with his queen Sembian Mahadevi. She was the pious queen of Gandaraditya Chola and an ardent follower of Saivism. She built a number of Siva temples. She appears to have spent large sums of money in renovating ruined temples.⁸ The Umamahesvarar temple of Konerirajapuram was constructed by her in memory of her husband Gandaraditya. Moreover she built a temple each at Villupuram Anangur (near Thirukoilur), Keelai Thaduthakundur (near Thiruvannainallur). She reconstructed the temple at maperur.⁹ These temples are located in and around Thiruvamathur. She made gift of two velis of land for raising a flower garden in the Konerirajapuram temple. It is called Gandaradityam¹⁰ moreover there was a flower garden called Sembian Mahadevi also called *Perumchenbakanandavanam*¹¹ in Sembianmahadevi.

The Kailasanatha temple of Sembianmahadevi has twenty three inscriptions which reveals the historical significance of this temple. On the base of the south wall of the central shrine in the Kailasanathasvamin temple of A.D. 982,¹² records a gift of money to be deposited with the Chaturvedibhatta-nappemmakal for offerings to be made to the deity on the day of Kettai in Chittirai, the natal star of Chembiyamahadevi by the five queens of Uttamachola including Malapadi Tennavan Mahadeviyar and Vanavan-Mahadeviyar, daughter of a certain Irungolar. On the base of the west and south walls of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 985. Gives a detailed list of the articles required for worship, offerings and the sacred bath to the deity on all the sahkranthi days of the year, for which provision was made by Urattayan-Solabbaiyar the senior queen (of Uttamachola).¹³ On the base of the north and west walls in the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 985, records a gift of certain lands for various offerings and worship in the temple built by Udayapirattiyar Madhuran-takan Madevadigalar alias Sembian Mahadeviyar, mother of Gandan Madhurantakadevar alias Uttama-Chola-deva, by Urattayan Sdrabbaiyar alias Tribhuvana Madeviyar, queen of, Uttama-Chola, who purchased for the purpose some plots of land to supplement her own.¹⁴

On the base of the south wall of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 985, records the gift of a gold forehead-plate for the image of the deity by Pattan Danatongiyar, a queen of Uttama-Chola.¹⁵ On the base of the south, wall of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 985,¹⁶ records the gift of a gold-handled fly-whisk for the deity, by Panchavan Madhadeviyar, another queen of Para-kesarivarman alias Uttama Chola-deva.

On the base of the south wall of the central shrine of the same temple of A.D. 985, records the gift, by a lady (queen?), Kannapparasiyar alias Sonna-Mahadeviyar, of 507 1/2 kalanju with the interest on which some offerings had to be made to the deity on the day of Kettai in Chittirai, which was the birth day of Sembian Madevi the founder of the temple. The money was to be in charge of the Chaturvedibhattatmapperumakkal.¹⁷

On the base of the south wall of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 986, records a gift of 590 kalanju of gold by Aruran-Ambalattadigalar, a queen of Uttamachola and another gift by Urattayan-Scrabbai alias Tribhuvana Madeviyar for offerings to be made to the temple deity on the day of Kettai in Chittirai. The committee called Sdsanabaddhd-Chaturvedibhatta-tanapper-umakkal to whom the gifts had been made is stated to have been the creation of Sembian Madevi herself.¹⁸ On the base of the south wall of the central shrine in the Kailasanatha temple of A.D. 970, records a grant of 150 pon by a resident of Pangajanadu to the temple, for feeding with the interest thereon, certain personson the day of Kettai in Chittirai, the natal star of Sembian Madeviyar, the mother of Uttamachola.¹⁹

On the south wall of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 988,²⁰ the record furnishes a list of made of gold presented by Sembian Mahadevi alias Parantakan Madevadigali mother of Uttamacholadevar to the temple of Kailasamudiya-Mahadevar at Sembian-mahadevi-chaturvedi-mahgalam in Ala-nadu. These included a pot weighing 190 kalanju, two forehead plates weighing 90 kalanju and 3 gold flowers (11¼ kalanju), 21 gold flowers (79¾ kalanju) and two more gold flowers (5 ½ kalanju). Chembiyarmadevi-chaturvedimangalam was a brahmadeya in Alanadu on the southern bank. On the base of the south wall of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 990, seems to record the remission of taxes on some lands belonging to the temple by the assembly of the village.²¹ On the same wall in the same temple of A.D. 990, seems to record an order of the assembly to the Ur-variya committee.²² On the north base of the centr; shrine in the same temple of A.D. 992, records a gift, by Urattayan Sorabbaiyar alias Tribhuvana Madeviyar, the queen of Madhurantakadeva alias Uttamachola, of 100 kasu which was deposited with the pentmakal of Srikailasam. From the interest on the certain offerings were to be made in the temple on the day of Tirukkettai in the month of Chittirai which was the natal star of her mother-in-law, Udayapirattiyar Pirantakan-Madevadigalar alias Sembian-Mahadeviyar. The village is said to have been founded by the latter.²³

On the same base of the central shrine in the same temple of Records a gift of 220 kalanju of gold by, Arumoli Arinjigaipiratti and Kundavaiyar for offerings in the temple on the day of Kettai in the month of Chittirai. The money was deposited with the Femmakal who were 'bound by orders' (sasana-baddha) to Kailasam. On the same base of the central shrine in the same temple of Records a gift of land for the main-tenance of the sacred bath on every Sahkranti day of the month, for burning a perpetual lamp and for feeding a hundred brahmans on the Uttarayana and Dakshina-yana days of the year in the temple of Srikayilasamudaiya-Mahadeva built by Sembian-Mahadeviyar at Sembianmahadevi-chaturvedimangalam, a brah-madeya in Ala-nadu on the southern bank. The lands were purchased by the princess for the purpose from two ladies, a daughter and her mother, who had respectively the right of stridlina and of disposal of the lands devolved upon them by the latter's husband. On the same base of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1019.²⁴

Begins with the historical introduction tinunahni-valarai etc. of the inscriptions of the king. Records the remission by assembly of the village of the taxes due on a land granted by a resident for the maintenance of a flower-garden for the maintenance of a flower-garden for the temple. Another remission is recorded of taxes on lands granted by another person for offerings and worship to the images of shabhavahanadevar and of queen Sembian Mahadevi Pirattiyar and several images of the temple for which no offerings had hitherto been made. Ajanadu is stated to be a s.d. of Arumohdeva vajanadu. The record also mentions Vikramacholavadi.

On the base of the north, west and south walls of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1035, begins with the historical introduction, timmannivalarat etc. or the inscriptions of the king, and stops with the mention of the sub-division Valivalak-kurram of Arumolideva-valanadu.²⁵ On the same base walls of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1035, begins with the historical introduction, tirumanni-valara, etc. of the inscriptions of the king. Stops with the mention of Ala-nadu in Arumolideva-valanadu.²⁶ On the north base of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1012, records a decision of the assembly which had met in the Sembian-Mad Eviyty-Periyainandapam in the village, to utilise the Velldnveti tax derived from the devadana lands of the temple of Aditiesvaram-udaiya-Mahadeva at Mongam, the western hamlet of the village for burning a twilight lamp in that temple.²⁷ On the same base of the central shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1028, commences with the historical introduction, tingalartant, etc. of the inscriptions of the king. Seems to record the remission, by royal order, of taxes on some lands belonging to the temple of Tiruvelirulckai-mahadeva for a lump payment of 160 kasu (Rajarajan-kasu, 75 and Palahkasu 25) made to the assembly of Sattiyakkudi. In the same place is another long introduction of an inscription ending with the regnal year of king Vijaya-Rajendra.²⁸

On the west wall of the Chandesvara shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1233,²⁹ records that the assembly of the village decided to hold their meetings for the conduct of the grdmakaryam and kadamaikkaryam only in the day time, since the night meetings consumed oil in excess of the quantity sanctioned for the lighting of the hall at nights, and not to reelect the old members for the assembly until after five years. On the south, west and north wall of the same temple. Gives a detailed list of the several ornaments to the temple. On the north wall of the Chandesvara shrine in the same temple of A.D. 1262,³⁰ records the gift of a house with all privileges to a certain stone-mason called Mannan Uttama-vedapperumal Achariyan, by the tanattar of the temple who had assembled in a meeting in a hall called Inrunurenra-Tsrnm-Tirukkavanam.

On the south wall of the mandapa in jS front of the central shrine in the same temple of States that the temple was renovated' by Uttamavedap-Perumili at the instance of the Periyandttar, and records the grant of a kalam of paddy each on every veli of land owned by them for its upkeep. Sembianmahadevi, however, is one of the few towns to have enjoyed a continuous history for a very long time. The *Sthala Purana*¹ speaks of its hoary antiquity, it is said that, *Agastya* the ancient sage did his penance here. Whether as a temple town or as a religious centre the history of Sembianmahadevi is distinct from those of the other towns of Tamilnadu.

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