



Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple - Gopuram and Tank.

ANTIQUITY
Of
THE SRI PADMANABHASWAMI TEMPLE

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S. SANKU AIYAR

(Assistant Sarnadhikariakar)

Trivandrum, the present Capital of Travancore, is one of the twelve sacred regions of Malainadu sung in the hymns of the Vaishnava Alwars. Its chief source of attraction is the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple which is attributed to Vilvamangala, the

devotee par excellence of Sri Krishna, whose name as a saint and poet has spread throughout the length and breadth of India. The legend relating to the establishment of this temple is that one day, when Vilvamangala was offering worship to his Sājagrāmams, his Ishadēvata appeared before him as a boy and indulged in boyish freaks by displacing the Sājagrāmams. Not knowing the divine character of the boy and getting annoyed by his actions, the saint in a mood of half meditation pushed the boy aside with the back of his hand. Taking umbrage at this, the boy suddenly disappeared, telling the saint that he was no other than the deity whom he had been meditating upon and that he could be seen again only at Anantankādu. Waking up suddenly from his meditation, Vilvamangala understood the reality of the situation and repented the folly of his action. Unable to satisfy his growing desire to see the object of his meditation, the distressed saint left his abode and travelled far and wide in search of Anantankādu. In the course of his wanderings he learned from a Pulaya woman that he was not far away from his goal. Before he took a few steps again, he heard the jingling sound of bells and saw the Lord in the shape of a baby hiding in an Iluppa tree (*Bassia Longifolia*). No sooner had he seen this than the tree came down with a crash, and the Lord appeared before him as Vishnu reclining on Ananta, the king of the serpents. Vilvamangala felt consoled and caused a temple to be erected at the spot to enshrine the Lord as Anantasāyi. This is said to be the nucleus of the Sri Padmanabha temple at Trivandrum.

Earlier Origin

This legend may be taken for what it is worth. Recent investigations lead us to the conclusion that Saint Vilvamangala lived some time in the 13th century A. C. But there is

evidence to prove that the Sri Padmanabha temple existed from a much earlier time. How then did the name of Vilvamangala get associated with this temple? The answer to this question can only be surmised. In his interesting article 'Saint Vilvamangala', Rao Sahib Mahakavi Oollur S. Parameswara Aiyar says that Vilvamangala was born at Puthenchira in the taluk of Parur in North Travancore. This view is perhaps correct as legends are current connecting his name with many hallowed spots in Puthenchira among which are the temple of Pāramēl Trikkovil dedicated to Krishna and a secluded rocky bit of waste land called Villamangalaparambu. The former is pointed out as the holy spot wherein Vilvamangala performed his daily poojas, and the latter as the Asrama wherein he practised yoga. Mr. Parameswara Aiyar also mentions that Vilvamangala was a Sannyāsīn of Thekkē Matom in Trichur, one of the Namboori centres in the Cochin State. In all probability this Sannyāsīn was selected as the Swāmiyār of Mitrānandapuram Patinjāre madom, one of the two Sannyāsī madoms in Trivandrum which possess the right to perform Pushpānjally in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple. It is a well known fact that from time immemorial the Swāmiyārs of Padinjāre madom in Mitrānandapuram are recruited from the Sannyāsīns of one of the Swāmiyār Madoms of Trichur. The Krishna-swamy shrine in the premises of the Padinjāre madom is believed to mark the spot where sage Vilvamangala had his last Samādhi.

The Mathilakom Granthavari, a document which professes to chronicle the events that have taken place in the Padmanabha temple from its inception, traces its history back to the 950th day of the Kali era, a date which corresponds to 2097 B. C.

According to this document, it was Saint Divākara who consecrated the Sri Padmanābha temple. In the Sanskrit work *Anantasayana Kabētra Māhātmya* is a verse which supports this view. But who was Divākara? Was he an historical or mythical personage? If he was an historical personage, when did he actually live? These points have not been investigated.

Early Literature

According to some scholars, there is a reference to the Sri Padmanābha temple in the literature of the Sangam period which

as 'Tirumāl of Tiruvānantapuram', that is Vishnu of Trivandrum². Similarly, in the Sangam epic *Chilappadikaram*, it is mentioned in the chapter describing the Remares expedition of the Chera King Senkuttuvan that, on the eve of Kuttuvan's departure, certain persons approached him with the 'prasādom' of the "Lord reclining on the serpent-bed in Adakamādom". The commentator of *Chilappadikaram*, an old scholiast whose name and date are also not known, explains the word "Ādakamādom" in this passage as "Tiruvānantapuram" i. e., Trivandrum, giving also an



Raja Rajeswari A Mural in the Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple.

covered the first three centuries of the Christian era. In the 4th decad of *Patittu-pathu*, a Sangam work which eulogises the prowess of the ancient Chera Kings, there is a passage depicting the attitude of the worshippers of a Vishnu temple in the Chera country. It runs as 'Kama|—Kurarrulai—a|a|n|k|a|r—selvan—chēvadi—paravi'. The old commentator of this passage whose date and identity are not known explains the term 'selvan' in it

alternative meaning "Eravipuram"³. The passages are, therefore, said to refer to the Sri Padmanābha temple at Trivandrum. It is inferred from this that the temple of Sri Padmanābha at Trivandrum existed in the Sangam period.

Nobody has hitherto refuted the interpretation of the passage in *Patittu-pathu* referred to above. But as to the meaning and identification of the name "Ādakamādom"

occurring in Chilappadikaram there is difference of opinion. Mr. M. Raghava Iyengar who holds the view that the word "Ādakamadam" is used in Chilappadikaram in its ordinary sense, seeks to establish that the temple referred to in the passage is the Vishnu temple of Karur in Kongunadu'. The late Mr. K. G. Sessa Iyer seems to think that 'Ādakamadom' is Trippunithura or some place in Trikkana Mathilakom in the Cochin State'. A careful reading of the passage in Chilappadikaram will show that there are difficulties in accepting the identification of the place made by these scholars. Neither of them seems to remember the fact that the deity described by the author of Chilappadikaram is that aspect of Vishnu represented as lying on a serpent-bed. A temple of Vishnu answering to this description has yet to be discovered in any of the places mentioned above.

There is a reference to Trivandrum and the Sri Padmanabha temple in the Varāha purāna. In this, Vishnu expresses himself thus:

"Syānandūrēti Vikhyātam
Bhōmēh Guhyam Padam namā
Uttarētu samudrasya
Malasyasyatu dakshinē".

Chap. 150

When exactly this purana was composed we have little evidence to prove. Some scholars assign it to the 6th century after Christ.



A Lady's toilet—another mural in the Padmanabhaswami Temple.

The earliest classical work in Tamil which contains a reliable reference to the shrine of Padmanabha is the devotional song of the Vaishnava saint Nam Alwar. This devotee calls Trivandrum "Tirūnandapuram" and describes Padmanabha as lying on the serpent-bed. It is admitted on all hands that Nam Alwar lived some time in the 9th

* In medieval Tamil literature as also in some of the inscriptions and grantha records of the Sri Padmanabha temple, Trivandrum is called Tirūnandapuram. But this old name does not continue now. It, however, lingers in the word "Mitrānandapuram" which is the name of the quarters to the west of the Western Gopuram of the Sri Padmanabha temple. In the Sthalapurana of Tiruvattar, that sacred place is called Adyanandapuram, a name which may be interpreted as original Anandapuram or original Trivandrum. Nam Alwar's eulogy about the deity of Tiruvattar temple also. He calls Him "Mani mad, vattattar".

century after Christ. The reference to the shrine of Sri Padmanabha in Nam Alwar's song is therefore an authority that the temple existed in the 9th century A. C.

Epigraphy

The inscription of the Pandya King Parantaka engraved on the prakāra of Kanya-

former half of the 12th century A. C. It is stated therein that Parantaka defeated Chēma and married the daughter of the Kūpaka King, that he took the ancient Viḷinjam where he fought his first battle, that he destroyed the armoury of Kāndalūr Sālai, and that he set up 10 golden lamps of rare workmanship for the God of Anantapuram, granting the village



Subramania and Narada - Also murals in the Padmanabhaswami Temple, Kumari temple is the earliest epigraphical record which makes mention of the Sri Padmanabha temple. The date of this inscription is fixed by the late Mr. Gopinatha Rao as the

of Tāyanallur for their up-keep. Kāndalūr Sālai mentioned in this inscription is Valia Sālai and Anantapuram is Trivandrum.

* The interpretation is given.

The earliest inscription found in the Sri Padmanabha temple is that of the Venad King Sri Vira Raman Kerala Varma. It is engraved on the base of the Mandapa in front of the temple and bears the date Kollam 384, corresponding to 1210 A. C. In this record, as in Nam Alvar's hymns, Trivandrum is mentioned as Tiru-anandapuram. The object of the inscription is to register a gift of land to the temple by Pallavarayan for the performance of a vazhipadu on the Panguni Uthram day. The inscription speaks of the existence of a Sabha and Samanjita at Mitrānandapuram.

In the precincts of the Valiasala Siva temple lay a slab of stone on the two faces of which were engraved the birudas of one of the famous kings of Travancore, Sangrāmadheera Kulasekharadeva Ravivarma Maharaja. This inscriptional stone has recently been removed to the Rengavilasom Art Gallery in Trivandrum. Numerous epigraphs of this monarch are found in the temples at Kanjipuram, Srirangam and Tiruvadi. They disclose that Ravivarma was the son of Mahārājādhiraja Rajaparameswara Jayasimha Veera Kerala of Quilon, that his mother was queen Umādevi, and that he was born in the Sikha year 1188 equivalent to 1266-1237 A. C. When 33 years of age, he conquered the whole of Kerala country, defeated Veera Pandya and married a Pandya Princess and brought the Pandyas and Cholas under his sway. At the age of 46 he was crowned on the bank of the river Vēgavati at Kanjipuram.⁸ The Valia Sala inscription men-



Sasta on horseback yet another mural in the Padmanabhiswam Temple.

tions that this king was a devout worshipper of God Sri Padmanabha of Trivandrum.⁹ The largest and the most artistic gold vessel in the Sri Padmanabha temple, called Ratnapatra, used for offering Ratnapayasa to Sri Padmanabha during the ceremony of Perum-thirumuthu-pooja is the endowment of this famous king. It contains the inscription "5th year Kollam 493 Eravi Kulasekhara Perumal". He composed the Sanskrit drama Pradyumnābhūdāya. The prologue of this drama states that it was intended to be enacted in the Sri Padmanabha temple during Yātrōtsava. For his remarkable qualities of head and heart and his wide conquests, he possessed the titles Sangrāmadheera, Kūpakasārvabhauma, Dakshinabhūja, Nāmāntarakarna, Dharmā-

century after Christ. The reference to the shrine of Sri Padmanabha in Nam Alwar's song is therefore an authority that the temple existed in the 7th century A. C.

Epigraphy

The inscription of the Pandya King Parantaka engraved on the priskara of Kanya-

former hall of the 12th century A. C. It is stated therein that Parantaka defeated Cherala and married the daughter of the Kupaka King, that he took the ancient Vilinjam where he fought his first battle, that he destroyed the armoury of Kāndalūr Sālai, and that he set up 10 golden lamps of rare workmanship for the God of Anantapuram, granting the village



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tharumoolakanda and Dharmamaharajah. In the Mandapa of Srimushaam temple near Srirangam supposed to be built by this king is a sculpture with the inscription "Dharmamaharayan".¹⁰ It is believed to be the statue of Sangramadheera.

The title Maharajadhiraja Rajaparameswara borne by Sangramadheera's father JayaSimha Veera Kerala shows that he was also a Chakravartin of the first order. Perhaps, Revivarma conquered a portion of the Kerala, Pandya and Chola countries as yuvaraja during the reign of Jayasimha Maharaja himself. Quilon—more correctly Venad of which Quilon was the capital—took its name of Desinganadu (Jayasimhanadu) from this Maharajah.

Structure

The bulk of the structures in the Padmanabha temple is of comparatively recent date. The nucleus of the shrine had existed from the date of its foundation and improvements and additions were made to it by the successive Sovereigns of Travancore. The names of five of them can be gathered from the old cadjan records kept in the archives of Mathilakom and from inscriptions. We have already found that the Mandapa in front of the temple has an inscription of Sri Veera Raman Kerala Varma and that it bears the date Kollam 384, corresponding to A. C. 1210. Finding that the old structures were falling into ruins, King Sankaranarayana Sri Veera Rama Marthanda Varma Kulasekhara reconstructed the Vimana, Chuttumandapa and Deepasala between Kollam 634 and 636 corresponding to A. C. 1459-1461. This king also re-built the Mukhamandapa with a single slab of stone. But it is to his successor Sree Veera Udaya Martanda Varma Kulasekhara that the beautiful Abhisravana mandapa in which the statues of three old

king of Travancore are treasured up owes its present form. Until these statues are finally identified, two of them may be taken to be those of Sree Veera Rama Martanda Varma and Sree Veera Udaya Martanda Varma.

Bala Martanda Varma Kulasekhara Perumal, the maker of modern Travancore, was also the maker of the Padmanabha temple in its present form. It is seen from the inscriptions on the base of the vestibule in front of the Ottakkal Mandapa that the above king, resolving to rebuild the temple which was destroyed by fire sometime previously, summoned the Brahmin architect Bala Kanchhara (Thaikattu Bhatathiri) and ordered him to renovate the temple from Vimana (Sreedol) to Dipasala (Vilakku Matom). The work was started on the 29th Ani 904 M. E., corresponding to 1778 A. C. and in course of time, the central shrine, the Ottakkal Mandapa, the Maha Mandapa, the Dig Mandapa, the Dipasala, the Alankara Mandapa and the Artha Mandapa were finished. The images of Padmanabha, Lakshmi, Bhoomi, the parivaras and the serpent-bed were then prepared. Finally, on the 3rd Panguny 908 M. E. the Kumbhanyasa Ceremony was celebrated." Mr. Sankunty Menon says in his history of Travancore that 12,000 Sajarams were used for making the image. The Gopura in front of the temple for building which foundation was laid by a previous king and the Sreebalimandapa which treasures up some of the best specimens of the sculptor's art, were also the works of this king.

Frescoes

One attractive feature of the main shrine of Sri Padmanabha is the fresco paintings on the outer surface of its walls, representing incidents taken from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavatha. Though these frescoes

are not mentioned in the inscriptions of the temple there is reason to believe that they were the work of painters who lived under the patronage of King Marthanda Varma.

No history of the temple of Sri Padmanabha will be complete without a proper reference to the Kulasekhara Mandapa. It was constructed by Bala Rama Varma Kulasekhara, the immediate successor of Bala-Marthanda Varma. Essentially Malabar in style, this rectangular hall is a gallery of beautifully set sculptured pillars and artistically worked iconographic specimens. The visible surface of every part of it is richly adorned by carvings of puranic stories, floral designs and animal species. This Mandapa is also known as the thousand-pillared hall. It is made of granite from foundation to roofing.

It will be seen from the foregoing that though we are unable to trace back the history of the Sri Padmanabha temple to its exact beginning the evidences gathered by us combine to show that its nucleus has certainly existed from a date much earlier than the 6th century A. D.

References

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2. *Patattu pathu*, Edited by Mahasanthapadhyaya Swaminatha Aiyar, 1920, P. 45.
3. *Chilappadikaranu*, Edited by Mahasanthapadhyaya Swaminatha Aiyar, 1927, P. 536.
4. M. Eaghava Iyengar, *Cheran Chenkuttuvan*, 1937, pp. 165, 166.
5. K. G. Seshu Iyer, *Cera Kings of the Sangam period*, P. 88.
6. T. A. S. Vol. I, No. 3, pp. 1-7.
7. T. A. S. Vol. IV, Part I, pp. 66-68.
8. Dr. Kuelhorn, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. IV.
9. T. A. S. Vol. II, Part I, pp. 52-59.
10. A. M. Satakopa Rameswaraiah, M. S. L., *Proceedings and Translations of the Ninth All-India Oriental Conference*, December 1937.
11. T. A. S. Vol. I, No. 5, pp. 1-4.

SRI CHITRA GUARDS

The following Press Note has been issued :-

For purposes of civil defence in times of emergency provision has been made by Proclamation dated the 30th December 1940 for the constitution of the Travancore Sri Chitra Guards. Having regard to the latest developments in the international situation it has now become necessary to take active measures for the organisation of the Sri Chitra Guards for internal security purposes.

The main features of the scheme are noted below :-

(1) The organisation will be known and referred to as the Sri Chitra Guards.

(2) The men recruited to the Sri Chitra Guards will be paid a monthly bonus of Rs. 12 during the period of their training or while being employed on active duty. This payment is exclusive of expenses on account of messing and lodging.

(3) The function of the Sri Chitra Guards will be to assist the police in the discharge of their functions in relation to the protection of person, the security of property or public safety. They will be attached to the Police Headquarters.

(4) The recruitment to the Sri Chitra Guards will be by selection under the personal supervision of the Dewan and will be confined to men between 18 and 40 years of age.

(5) A branch of the Sri Chitra Guards will work as A. R. P. Wardens.

(6) The period of training under Clause (2) above will ordinarily be for a month.

(7) A training centre will be established forthwith at Trivandrum. The site now occupied at Oolampara by the Armed Police Force will be used as the camp for the first batch of trainees.

(8) The Sri Chitra Guards will be given a distinctive uniform with badges.

(9) 1,000 men will be recruited as the first instalment.

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