

THE PLACES OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN ERODE DISTRICT: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

Erode district, which bifurcated from the then Coimbatore district of Tamilnadu state has the potential in both industrial and agricultural sectors. Erode, the place indigenously highlighted as 'ManjalMaanagaram'(Turmeric City) has a unique identity in history through its cultural heritage and monuments. Monuments have served as symbols of power, remembrance and cultural identity. The ancient temples, Churches, and archaeological sites and ancient irrigation dams are the living monuments provided with specimens of Dravidian, and Indo-Saracenic architecture. Kodumanal, which is one of the megalithic sites discovered in the state located in the district and still the excavations are materialising. In this historical limelight this paper tries to highlight the historically important places of the Erode neighbourhood.

Key words: Temples, Monuments, Archaeological Sites, Dravidian architecture.

INTRODUCTION:

Erode district, which bifurcated from the then Coimbatore district in the year 1979. It lies on the extreme north of Tamil Nadu situated between 10.36⁰ and 11.58⁰ north latitude 76.46⁰ and 77.58⁰ east longitude. It is bounded by Karnataka state in the north, Dindigul district in the south, Namakkal and Karur districts in the east and Coimbatore and Nilgiris in the west respectively.¹ This area was ruled by Rashtrakutas, Cholas, Chalukyas and later by Pandyas and Hoyasalas. After Panday's dissension, it came to the control of the Madurai sultanate. Followed by it, Vijayanagar Empire, Nayaks of Madurai, Tipu sultan and finally fell into the hands of the British up to the Indian independence² Over the years of the historical narration this district witnessed several realms and different cultures which could exist as monumental evidence. Temples are the treasure houses of culture and prosperity of the people who live in the neighbourhood.

OBJECTIVES:

- I. To record the places of historical significance.
- II. To understand the places of archaeological findings in the district.
- III. To identify the architectural features of the historical monuments.

BHAVANI-SANGAMESWARAR TEMPLE:

Sangameswarar temple is otherwise called Thirunan and Thirukoodulhurar. It is located in Bhavani, 15 km from Erode. It is a Hindu temple dedicated to lord shiva. The temple was built at the confluence of the two rivers: the Cauvery, and the Bhavani and it has earned the sobriquet, 'Dakshina Prayag' or Triveni Sangamam of South India³". The river Amudham, that emerged out of the nectar, which was given to sage Parasurar, at this place by the Devas, joins the two rivers invisibly (Anthar Vahini). Tirighana Sambandar refers this place as 'Tirunaa', which means those who visit the temple will be blessed with a hassle free life⁴. This temple is built under Dravidian architecture.

THINDAL MALAI TEMPLE:

Arulmigu Velayuthaswamy Thirukovil, popularly called as Thindal Murugan Temple. It is a Hindu temple dedicated to lord Murugan located at Thindal malai hillock near Erode. There is a golden chariot Temple Car that is used to carry images of God in ceremonial procession. People celebrate the festival such as Panguni Utsavam and Kanda Shasti etc, every year⁵

MAGUDESWARAR TEMPLE, KODUMUDI:

Veera Narayana Perumal and Brahma Deva Temple are dedicated to lord shiva, lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma in respective manner. It is on the banks of the Cauvery twenty-one miles south-east of Erode⁶. It is one of the seven Sivalayams in Kongu Nadu⁷The people celebrate the Maha Shivaratri as a Saivaite festival. People celebrate the 18th day of Tamil 'adi' during which time deities will be taken to the river bank, bathed and decorated with sandalwood powder. The moola nakshatra day of Tamil month Aavani is celebrated as PithruThiruvizha and the Rohini Nakshatra day of the one month is the birthday of lord Krishna. On the eve of the Thiruvathirai nakshatra day of Margazhi is the day for Natraja. A procession of the festive deities will be traditionally taken out for the public dharsan. There are other famous festivals such as the Ekadhasi to reach Vaikundham meaning heaven. Pushpa Nakshathra of 'Thai' month is a day of Theertha Vizha. Thirunavukkarasu Nayanar has sung in praise of the deity at Kodumudi. This temple is constructed in the style of Dravidian architecture.⁸

VIJAYA MANGALAM JAIN BASTHI:

The plan of the Jain Basthi at VijayaMangalam is similar in some respects to that of the Hindus. A column rises through the roof, and a Choultry faces the principle gateway which is surmounted by several storeys. The entablatures of the exterior are ornamented with figures of Adi Iswara, the very image of Buddha, and seated like him cross-legged, in some places holding a bell in one hand, and in others seated under the shade of an umbrella. There are also figures of the god canopied by the elevated trunks of two elephants, one in each side of him, men on elephants, miniature pagodas, men playing on various musical instruments, men riding on lions, figures with a horse v-tail punkah fanning a cross-legged image of Adi Iswara and figures in gothic niches.⁹

PACHAMALAIARULMIGUSUBRAMANIYA SWAMY TEMPLE:

It is called the Pachamala Balamurugan temple with Dravidian style architecture, it has been built at the top of a small hillock near Pudupalayam, Gobichettipalayam. Lord Muruga exists there. Pachamalai means nothing but the green hill Swarnabandenam- the gold plate covering the departed has been done for Moolavar. In 1954 Amara P.K. Kuppusamy Goundar saw the divine light emanating from the shine. It was in collapsed condition. He took steps to rebuild the temple by 1980, the temple that consists of a fire ebony gopuram reflecting the Dravidian architecture. People celebrate the Panguni Uthiram, a chariot festival every year. Kalyana Uthchavam(the marriage ceremony) is performed for lord Subramaniya. There is a Kadamba tree near the Temple that is auspicious for lord Muruga.¹⁰

KONDATHUKALIAMMAN TEMPLE :

It is a temple for Goddess named KondathuKalliamman situated at Pariyur near Gobichettipalayam. It was once known as Azhagapuri, ruled by the King Pari. The Amman temple has a fire stoney gopuram at the south corner of the goddess. Rudra is believed to be the head of the goddess there is a huge statue of Sri Maha Muniyappan who is regarded as the saviour against fear and evil apart from granting boon to bear children. The divine ropes offered to Sri Maha Muniyappan and Sri Kondathu Kali are considered to provide protection against evil and ill health. Pooja is going on daily. Fire walking ceremony (Kundam) is held during every January month yearly. There is a special practice for the sake of the people. To take action into anything else people want to consult the goddess and to know her consent. It is called Vakku kettal¹¹. People usually put flowers on both the sides of the goddess Kalliamman, decision is a mark of acceptance or rejection through the fall of flower from the statue. This temple is also an indication of Dravidian architecture.

SIVANMALAI :

Sivanmalai is located 5 km away from Kangeyam and 40 km north of Dharapuram. The temple is built on a hillock and is accessed through a flight of 200 steps. The main shine enshrines

Subramanyar and Valli. Panguni Uthiram, Thai Poomam, Aadi Kirthikai and Kanda Sashti festivals are celebrated every year.¹²

BANNARI AMMAN TEMPLE:

It is a famous temple for goddess named Mari Amman situated in Bannari, near Sathyamangalam, Erode district. The main deity is Goddess Mariamman (the goddess for rain), an incarnation of the goddess Parvathi. It is a strong conventional belief of the Hindus that the goddess is regarded as the most powerful not in Tamilnadu but also in Kannada. The people celebrate the Kundam festival in the Tamil month of Panguni (between March and April) is one of the important festivals of the temple.¹³ It is believed that there was a fort called Danayakkankottai, in the nearby forest area of this temple built by Danda Nayakan about 800 years back. Inside the fort, there were two temples, one dedicated to Siva and the other to Vishnu. These temples contained many inscriptions, the oldest of which related to the reign of Hoysala King, Vira Ballala III. The place was considered as an important strategic point by the Hoysalas and the Nayakas. Between this place and the Devalagiri hill, Col. Floyd fought a severe battle with Tipu in the third Mysore war.¹⁴ Now it is in dilapidated condition and it is under the control of the Forest Department

CHENNIMALAI MURUGAN TEMPLE:

The temple of Chennimalai is located on the banks of Noyyal called Kanchima Nathi. In front of the temple, one finds the Puliyadi Moolavar are the shines of Markandeeswarar and to the left Umdhavalli and Vijayalakshmi. The temple is situated at about 400 meters above sea level. It is believed that the temple was built during the reign of Karikala Chola of the early Chola period under Dravidian architecture.¹⁵ The city underneath this hill is called the Chennimalai hill. The lord of the Mountains Kurinji Andavar, or Murugan is worshipped. This is a shelter for Peacocks, Monkeys, Rabbits, Snakes and other reptiles. Chiral (spotted deer) can be sighted there, it needs a 15 minutes time to reach the hill temple by road and it gives a thrilling experience while travelling through such green forest with the steep elapses on the side 1320 steps to climb up. People celebrate the temple festival in the Tamil month of 'Thai'. There are also other important festivals such as Chithra Pournami, Kanda Shasti, Agni Nakshatram Panguni Uthiram and Mariamman festival. According to the Kongu tradition, people show interest in plucking flower from the hilly areas and singing traditional songs and playing various dances.¹⁶

BROUGH CHURCH IN ERODE:

CSI Brough Memorial Church situated at Panneerselvam park in Erode which was built and consecrated in the year 1930 by Rev, Antony Watson Brough. The church was constructed with Indo-Saracenic architecture. Stones, mortar and egg were the materials used for building and plastering. The building has five aches, in which hexagonal structure and arc carved in the middle out of a square pedestal.¹⁷

KODUMANAL:

Kodumanal in Perudurai taluk of Erode district is located on the northern bank of the river Noyyal, a tributary of the Kaveri River. It is about 15 km west of Chennimalai and about 40 km south west of Erode.¹⁸ The name Kodumanal was derived from 'Kodumanam,' the word praised by several Tamil poets. It is a village of historical significance added as a megalithic sites and textual references can be seen in Sangam literature which upholds its trade relations with neighbouring areas.¹⁹ It is an area rich in beryl and rock crystals, which accounts for the existence of an industry of beads in gems, quartz, and crystals. Excavations have yielded a lot of material relating to the bead industry such as bead blanks, broken beads, waste pieces, and rough-outs. Over the years of archaeological evidences contain invaluable clues to craftsmanship, technology, and the level of material culture besides to the organisation of manufacturing, the raw material source, the routes of distribution and the points of

exchange. Kodumanal, as the relics show, was a major industry which had a larger distributing network around it connecting the main ports like Muziris, Kokai, Azhankulam, Pukar, and Arikamedu which were themselves bead making centres.²⁰ An inscription discovered in Erode describes about the word 'Nigam' which means Trade Guilds or Merchant Organisation.²¹ The Pattirrupattu refers two times of the corrupt form of Nigam as 'Niyamum'.²² Another one inscription found in the late eleventh century near Erode, says about the existence of Nanadesigam or refugee centre for the artisans arranged by merchant organisation.²³

KALINGARAYAN CANAL:

It is a 90.5 km long irrigation canal built by the Kongu Chieftain Kalingarayan during the thirteenth century AD near Bhavani River. The canal irrigates approximately 8866 acres of agricultural land. It is one of the rivers linked to irrigation projects in India. The plan of execution started in the year 1270 AD and finished in 1282 AD. The canal starts at Kalingarayan anicut which is about 755 square kilometers length and 541.15 breadth on Bhavani river near Urachikottai and joins Noyyal river near Kodumudi.²⁴ Inscription found at Pollachi Agathur Amman temple speaks about the Kalingarayan Canal. Epigraphist, Rasu, corroborates the fact with the literary sources like Kongunadu Sathagam, Thiruchenkottu Tiruppanimalai, Chennimalai Andavar Pillai Tamil, Erode Iyanarappan Pallu etc. It stands as a historical monument in Erode district.²⁵

CONCLUSION:

Erode district and its monuments still retain its past glory and continue to be the seat of socio-religious significance. Kodumanal is one of the megalithic sites unearthed in the state which gives evidence that the beads making industry existed there many years ago. Temples, Churches, and ancient dams in the district represent the religious culture and the architectural style of the people who lived during the ancient period. Understanding this holistic role provides a glimpse into the historical richness and complexity of Erode district's cultural tapestry.

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