**Conservation of Five Mathams in Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh**

In religious, social history and cultural history of India, Srisailam was a link between various cults that nurtured in north and south. Early rulers of ancient Andhra beginning from satavahanas, Ikshavakus,Vishnukundins, Kaambas and Chalukyas always considered this place as the capital of religious activities of the country and paid their reverence to the deity here. Later Kakatiyas,Reddy kings,Vijayanagara Rulers upto Chatrapti Sivaji considered this place as the source of rejuvenating their spiritual power for the welfare of their Kingdoms.

In Tamil Saivaite tradition and literature this place was better known as Thiruparpadam, synonymous with the terminology used in Vishnukundins’ inscriptions. According to Tamil works, Srisailam was very significant Saiva centre during the middle of fist millennium CE. All the three Saiva saints Thirujnansambanadar, Thirunvakarasar and Sundaramurti Nayanar(Sundarar) the authors of Tevaram hymns have issued 30 songs on the praise of the Lord here and the environs of the place. According to Periya puranam of 12th CE, it was the ancient route to north India from south and vi ce versa.

It is fact that the place was a forest area with full of Arjuna trees (Terminalia Arjuna) and hence the Lord of this place was better known as Mallikarjuna. Among the Tamil Nayanmars, Sundarar of 8th CE gives a very vivid panoramic description of the place. He heralds that Sriparpadamalai (Srisailam) itself is the embodiment of Siva. It is said to have a perennial spring at the bottom where deers and peacocks drink water, nomadic tribals tame the elephants and the mount is surroundred by dry crops (Tinai).,wild pigs expose the earth and encounter semi precious stones. Interestingly Sundarar had lost completely to the natural scenes that he hardly praises the glory of Siva which is unusual.

**Mathams**

In the growth of Saiva philosophy, the Mathams (also Known as mutts) played a vital role in bridging the gap between the high theological worship and the great suffering of masses. In the later part of first millennium CE they grew up and were occupied by monks who fed the poor, tendered the sick, consoled the dejected and set up schools for the education of the youth and functioned similar to those viharas of Buddhist origin. It is no wonder that Srisailam being the nerve centre of Saivisam of south had many such Matas, the earliest such being traceable as belonging to 7th CE.

They also served the purpose of establishing a Saivisam of complete social and religious equality among the sectarians like Kalmukhas,Kaplikas and Siddhas who practiced long austerity for the welfare of society at large. These Siddhas never had any individual aspirations and believed to have left their mortal body but till now gracefully grant relief to the sufferings of the mass irrespective of caste and creed.

Being the centre of north –south unification centre, the Mathams established in Srisailam have unique feature of having subterranean chambers used for tapas by the siddhas. It is reported that there were many such subterranean chambers and now only few are protected in these mutts.

It is absolutely necessary to preserve them and the Mathams are not only archaeological monuments but inspiring centres of religion which served the social problems at large in ancient India.

**Architectural marvels**

Inscriptional evidences record the existence of at least 11 such mutts in Srisailam. Among them five can be located now. A thorough study of these five mutts and other remains in the vicinity show that they are structures of par excellence. In plan they generally consist of a square garbhagruha, with a front common mandapa connecting many such shrines, but much spacious for the use of discourses or interaction with scholars. Ardhamantapa is an optional edifice in some cases. They had underground subterranean mini chambers to accommodate only one person and the entrance opening is so small one can only crawl and enter them.

*There are reports that till few years ago the entire vicinity of the mathams had such chambers, but due to much modern constructional activities they are lost to the vandalism.*

In elevation the superstructure of some of the Mathams are Kadmaba Nagara Vimanas of pre chalukyan styles. The stone masonry walls are simple dry masonry blocks kept in two blocks inner and outer without any in between core. The blocks of stone bear the weight and provide stability due to mere friction. Over the wall the stone slabs are found to be arranged in corbel system to span the inner space and the top grhabindi is square slab that provides counter weight to create stress over the edifice for stability.

The pillars of the mandapas are free standing with a moderate capital and mostly plain beams are found to be kept over them. The roof slabs are covered with weathering course which are replaced many times in the past.

In spite the fact that these monuments are not properly maintained for many decades, and the growth of wild vegetation over them they survived the stress and strain and proved the supremacy of the ancient techniques adapted here.

**Conservation of PanchaMathams at SriSailam, Andhra Pradesh**

**Governemnt**

Revenue Department of Government of Andhra Pradesh vide their order G.O.Rr.No1287 Dted 17th Dec 2015 have granted permission for conservation of the ancient Mathams and permitted Mr.Kaza Lakshmi Naryana of Vijyavada to fund and undertake restoration project with the assistance of Architect Mr krishnan and Satyamurthy, of REACH foundation of Chennai

The following Mathams are referred for restoration and conservation:

1. GhantaMatham 2) Jada veerabadhra Matham or kshetrapala Matham 3) Viboothi Matham 4)Rudhraksha Matham and 5) Sarangadhar Matham.

They were inspected on 5-6th Feb by the following team:

Sarva sri/ Kaza Lakshmi Naryanan, Satyamurthy ‘Archaeologist, REACH, Dhandapni, Archaeolgical Engineer, REACH, Harnath Reddy, the Joint Commissioner of Srisailam, and Assistant Sthapathy Srisailam. Prof Chandrasekar from the Telugu University was also present.

**GhantaMatham: (pl 1)**

**ISSUES**

There are five shrines in this group with Vimanas of Kadambanagara style. Each shrine has a garbhagruha, ardhamantapa and a common mahamandapa. They are not forming any symmetrical pattern in plan as the possibilities of their construction in different periods cannot be ruled out. Gunda (Water body) is also separately available in the southern territory.

Western Shrine(Main shrine in the complex) is sunken at various places with accumulated earth to a depth of 50-60 cms. Original entrance of the main shrine has been subsequently, in past it is observed to be reconstructed by widening the width due to which roof slabs are not in correct position. And inside garbhagruha, beams are broken and additional support is given.

Likewise mahamandapa was also widened at north and south with new pillars erected not matching with the original centre bay of the mandapa. Wild growth of vegetation over the roof had weekend the terrace. Due to this Weathering course is found to be decayed hence heavy leakage of water is observed.

Shrine facing south is almost intact but weathering course is found to be completely disintegrated and degenerated. Adjoining shrine on the northern side is in completely in out of plumb. Original Gunda (water body) has to be exposed and conserved properly after removing the heavy growth of trees.

Shrines on the south west corner and western side are out of plumb and some of the veneer stones are fallen and missing. They have to be dismantled and reconstructed to the plumb after proper documentation. Stepped well has to be preserved properly including providing proper steps?

All around this mutt, earthwork has to be carried out to expose the original ground level, recollect the fallen and broken architectural members for reuse. Proper shrine for the Goddess koumari on the north east corner has to be provided.

**Solution:**

1. Shrine facing west has to be dismantled and reconstructed as per the original measurement after mending the broken beams including those in ardhamantapa.
2. Extension at North and South of Mukha mandapa to be removed and original center bay has to be reset properly after exposing the original floor level.
3. Out of plumb pillars have to be reset properly in Common Mahamandapa.
4. Shrine facing south has to be reset properly.
5. Water tightening the terrace of pillared mandapa, maha Mandapa and ardhamantapa are essential works.
6. Shrine at North eastern side has to be dismantled and reconstructed.
7. Removing the heavy growth of trees and expose the original Gunda (water body) and to be conserved properly.
8. Providing stone apron around the shrines after exposing the original floor level to avoid percolation of water into the foundation.
9. Reconditioning the stone flooring for all the sub shrines, ardhamantapa, pillared mandapa and maha mandapa.
10. Proper drainage system has to be provided all around after exposing the original floor.
11. Removing the white wash on the walls, pillars, beams and ceiling slabs with mild chemicals.

Note:

**All these works should be done as per original plan and elevation. If some edifices are missing they are to be re conjectured with the available evidences.**

**All structures are in dry masonry and no inner core is necessary to be added. Almost all fallen stone blocks will be available in the debris in the site. Only broken beams are to be replaced. The need of new blocks may be less than 10 percent.**

Immediate measures:

All vegetation growth over the structures should be removed and tree killer should be applied.

There are some unauthorised worship by some and they smear adulterated Vibhuti and other powders etc over the scultures . These sculptures belong to very early period and such vandalism done unknowingly is to be stopped immediately.

**Jata Veerabadhra Matham (kshetrabala) (pl 2)**

It is a stone shrine with Kadambanagara Vimana facing west, but a mandapa is found to be added in southern side of the ardhamantapa and the ardhamantapa mandapa is also converted into a shrine. The front pillared mandapa is with 12 pillars. Four massive pillars form the inner central courtyard and remaining pillars are placed over a plinth resembling the kakshsana platform of Chalukyan period. The weight of the roof is carefully placed over beams supported by the pillars and a dwarf wall support the ceiling slabs in front of the sanctum. The architect was very careful to see that the dead weight is not placed over the sanctum wall directly. This feature saved this monument from collapse but the growth of vegetations and disintegration of surkhi allowed water to seepage inside.

There is a window opening in the eastern side and this ankana is converted into a chamber for Dhyana.

Heavy leakage is reported from the vimana also. Uneven settlement in front had made the outer pillars to come out of plumb. Heavy white wash had marred the ancient grandeur.

**Issues:**

Main shrine, ardhamantapa and pillared mukha mandapa are found to be sunken Water Leakage is seen in the ardhamantapa and mukha mandapa. Surrounding original floor level is not found. There is uneven settlement in the mandapa. Heavy coat of Whitewash is seen in all the members.

**Solution:**

1. Ardhamantapa and pillared mukhamantapa have to be dismantled properly after documenting the members and stacked properly for reuse.

2. Flooring stones should be removed for resetting and to be stacked properly.

3Foundation has to be checked and re-laid if necessary.

4. Resetting the pillars, beams and capitals to a plumb including mending the broken ones are necessary items of works.

5. Relaying the ceiling slabs as per the existing style with suitable slope.

6. Water tightening of the terrace and Vimana is necessary

7. Relaying the stone flooring in the ardhamantapa and pillared mukhamantapa with available stones and also providing new stones in the place of missing and broken stone members are necessary.

8. Removing the white wash on the walls, pillars, beams and ceiling slabs with mild organic chemicals is necessary to bring back the grandeur of the stone mandapa.

9. Earth work excavation around the temple to expose the original floor level is necessary and provision should be and for proper drainage system. Proper apron up to 2m is suggested

10. The lay out plan by the conservation architect may take cognizance of the level of these monuments for the preparation of lay out plan.

11. Ancient wells on the western side and northern side have to be preserved properly and beatification will be the key note of the architect who is planning this aspect.

12.The village habitation near the water bodies suck the water through many water pumps. This may lead to the complete drying of the water gunds. This should be properly planned and the stakeholders may resort to supply of drinking water in appointed times.

Here also some unauthorised worship is continuing and they smear chemical base vermilion over the ancient sculptures. They should be persuaded to stop this practice.

**ViboothiMatham (pl 3)**

It is one of the very few rare remains of educational Institutions of ancient India. It is almost symmetrical to many Viharas where the siddhas resided and taught the knowledge of religion, philosophy and ethics to all. It is accessible through a flight of descending steps from southern side.

In plan it is a simple central low level courtyard surroundred by two aisles The central courtyard holds a linga at centre with a corbel roof of south Indian order. It has got a ventilator opening in the roof.

The side aisles have two elevated ankanas to accommodate many students. The outer ankanas are later converted into two long chambers by the construction of accretionary dry masonry walls in between the pillars. The front ankanas are again divided into two bays by a partition heavy wall with a open courtyard and a inner porch. There is a closed chamber in the north-eastern corner which is accessible through a low level opening. This could have been used for dhyana in ancient days.

Two structures are found to be completely dilapidated condition in front could have been used as a shrine in ancient days.

The entire complex is constructed with dry stone masonry walls and no super structure was found to be the characteristic of this building.

There is a underground Dhyana chamber in the eastern side of the Vibhuti mandapa.

**Issues**

All around the walls of the matham, outer veneer stones are fallen and missing in various places. Inner stone blocks are intact. This dry masonry structures lack inner brick/lime masonry core and this is a feature places this monument as structures constructed earlier than 1000CE.

Weathering course is found to be disintegrated and water leakage is reported. Accretionary walls at Northern and Southern side cloister of inside mandapa were found to be constructed in between the pillars. Pillars are found to be out of plumb in Southern side mandapa and ceiling slabs and beams are not in proper position. Heavy coat of whitewash is seen on the pillars, walls and ceiling slabs. At present, mud flooring is available in the mandapa and cloister. Two sub-shrines in South west are seen without ceiling slabs.

**Solution:**

1. Earth work excavation has to be done around the matham to expose the original features, floor levels and collect the architectural members.
2. Weathering course has to be removed by stacking the useful materials.
3. Dismantling the ceiling slabs, beams, capitals and stacking them properly for reuse.
4. Removing the Accretionary walls in between the pillars to expose the original pattern of the monument.
5. Foundation has to be verified.
6. Reconstruction of veneer stone walls as per the existing style to a plumb.
7. Resetting the pillars to a plumb.
8. Re-erection of capitals, beams and ceiling slabs properly.
9. Water tightening of the Terrace including providing proper drain as per the original drain level.
10. Reconstruction of parapet wall al round the terrace.
11. Removing the white wash on the walls, pillars, beams and ceiling slabs with mild organic chemicals manually.
12. Restoring original floor in the cloister and mandapa with stones or bricks A decision of the material can be arrived after exposing the present floor.
13. Resetting the South west sub shrines with available members. Ceiling slabs may be provided if any clue is available.
14. Stone apron around the matham has to be provided with proper drainage system.
15. Gunda (Water body) has to be conserved properly.
16. Approach steps have to be reset properly.

**Rudhraksha Matham (pl 4)**

It is similar in plan like Vibhuti matham without any superstructure and could have accommodated many students. A pillared mandapa adore the front entrance facing east holds some sculptures of recent origin.

This is also a dry masonry structure. It is rather a pillared mandapa pavilion converted into inner chambers by raising Accretionary walls in between the pillars.

The front varandah wall is the only running wall without pillar that bears the Beams of the roof. The northern side Accretionary walls have collapsed and vegetation growth over the monuments are seen. The original floor is found to be disturbed.

**Issues**

All around the wall of the matham, outer veneer stones are fallen and missing in various places. Inner stones are intact. No core is found. Weathering course is found to be decayed and water leakage is observed. Pillars are found to be out of plumb in eastern side mandapa and ceiling slabs and beams are not in proper position. Heavy coat of whitewash is seen on the pillars, walls and ceiling slabs. Stone flooring are sunken in many places.

**Solution:**

**The following items are suggested:**

1. Dismantling the complete weathering course and stacking all useful materials for reuse.
2. Dismantling the ceiling slabs, beams, capitals, pillars and walls after proper documentation and stacking them properly.
3. Before reconstruction foundation has to be verified.
4. Earth work excavation around the matham to expose the original features and floor level.
5. Reconstruction of veneer stone walls as per the existing style to a plumb.
6. Resetting the pillars to a plumb.
7. Re-erection of capitals, beams and ceiling slabs properly.
8. Water tightening of the Terrace including providing proper drain as per the existing using lime surkhi is recommended
9. Reconstruction of parapet wall all round the terrace.
10. Removing the white wash on the walls, pillars, beams and ceiling slabs with mild chemicals
11. Stone apron around the matham has to be provided with proper drainage system.
12. Reconditioning the stone flooring.
13. Revetments with steps have to be reconstructed in the northern side where the rivulet is flowing.

**Bhimasankankara Mutt (pl 5)**

**Note:**

Sometime back, major conservation works were reported to have carried out and original features also were exposed. Space between the exposed and the present ground is very close. It has to be further exposed on the west and necessary boundary wall has to be constructed and proper drainage system has to be provided to avoid percolation of water into the foundation.

White wash on the wall and the ceiling have to be removed to expose the original features. Mukhamantapa has to be free from the unwanted enclosures to have a free movement of public. Stone apron all around the matham has to be laid.

The unauthorised occupation in the mandapa may be evicted.

**Sarangadhara Matham (pl 6)**

This is one of the very beautiful matham with a shrine in rear side and a underground chamber for Dhyana in north-eastern side in subterranean level. It is subjected to repairs in recent past and in the process many ancient features are lost. Bringing abck the matham to original shape is a challenge and after the conservation of other mathams it can be taken up. There are some encroachments and unauthorised stay here also. It should be set right.(pl 7)

**Common Observations**

It is noticed that all these mathas are constructed over a natural bed rock and the possibility of failure foundation is ruled out. However wherever there are un even settlement, it is better to check up them properly.

The walls are with dry masonry inner and outer stone blocks without masonry core. There are evidences of bond stones in the walls of some of the mutts. This feature should be retained and no brick/lime masonry wall is necessary. They withstood all natural calamities/vandalisms all these centuries. No change of this pattern is suggested.

The fallen debris would contain all the architectural members and hence it should be exposed under the supervision of an archaeologist. All missing elements would be available in the site and hence it is not necessary to acquire new stones. However the broken beams and ceiling stone slabs should be replaced for better strength and stability.

Stable scaffolding is required and wherever necessary proper props should be provided before the commencement of the work.

The entire process will require more labour components than material cost.

**Time frame &Work Schedule**

**I.Preparation of drawings and complete digital Doccumentation :1 week**

**II. Distress mapping and preparation of conjectural Views : ten days and estimation can be done simultaneously.**

**III. Dismantling and stacking of stone elements: One month**

**IV. Re assembling and providing weathering course.: Three months**

**At the first phase Ganta matham and Jata Veerabhadra can be taken up and some of the civil engineers can be trained for future works.**

**Other Priorities**

There are some more ancient structures like Vyasa matham (Pl 7)etc., and they can be included subsequently

For the attention of the architect:

Through conservation measures it is possible to provide the original level of the monuments. Lay out plan can be prepared to keep this as the foundation level of these mathams.

It is interesting that the water body, the brook runs all along the terrain and in fact connect these mutts. This feature might be retained and all water bodies will be resurrected. A heritage walk way prohibiting the entry of motorised vehicle will improve the conditions of these monuments.

Proper security guards may be posted to prevent any more human vanalisam.