

Kanyakumari Church Architecture

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Abstract:-- The church architecture of Kanyakumari springs from two sources, the first from the work of Apostle St. Thomas and the Syrian Christians and second from the missionary work of European settlers. It is possible that some of the temples were adapted as church for services by the population who got converted into Christianity by St. Thomas. Since the early Christians lived in isolation, far from the main centres of Christianity they were not aware of the church building conventions of the west; besides the community itself has a Hindu background and Hindu temples were their models for church building. Historical evidences suggest that the first wave of Christianity came from Syria in fourth century A.D. owing to the persecution of Christians in the Persian Empire. According to the inscription of the times of Stanu Ravi by 9th century, Christian communities enjoyed many rights and privileges. They also played a vital role in trade and commerce.

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Types of Church Architecture

The Gothic type has been most extensively used in churches. "Forever upwards ascend the lines of the Gothic spirit". But it takes more than a few pointed arches and windows to make a church Gothic. There must be length, and the right relation of width, length and height "Gothic is not a matter of surface ornament; it is a structural system". The early Christian Churches were of the "Romanesque" or classic style. This permitted free use of the arch, vault, and dome, three basic forms of Roman architecture. The Romanesque style has been used extensively among Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. It is characterized by the round arch, barrel vault, and massiveness of the structure. Horizontal lines are emphasized, whereas in the Gothic style it is the perpendicular lines that are made to stand out. The Colonial

churches are built of wood or brick. They are rectangular in shape. If built of wood the structure is always to be painted white; if of brick the exterior wood work is painted white. Interior wood work and channel furniture are painted white. Pews are white with dark top rail. Pew ends are low and square and rectangular in shape. (Avoid the arm chair pew and in any type of church). Clear glass may be used in windows, the panes being 9 inches by 12 inches or smaller.

The Spanish type may be used, especially in certain localities, as for instance in California. It would not be good judgement to use of Spanish type in sections of the country to which it is altogether foreign. The modern type can be made very beautiful. If the chancel with altar and pulpit is given the right treatment there is no reason why this type of architecture cannot be used. But as yet it does not have the hallowed associations of the older types. At least until recently the most common offense against good design has been the square auditoriums or theatre type of church. Often the pulpit is put in one corner and circular seating is installed. The altar, if any, is placed in a little niche behind a lectern type of pulpit. The entire arrangement suggests a lecture type of hall and not a church. As a rule, these churches have no center aisle, a drawback in any church. Let there be a long aisle pointing up on the altar, with the opening in the communication rail in the center, not at the side. This emphasizes the length of the church and tends to accentuate the altar.

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE OF KANYAKUMARI:

Gothic Architecture

The old church of Virgin Mary was demolished in the year 1900 and erected a new church in 1956. This church dedicated to our lady of Ransom is situated on the main road near the railway station at Kanyakumari.

The structure of the new church is well proportioned and imposing and it forms an outstanding at Gothic architecture. It is a lovely structure. The central tower is crowned with a gold cross. The flag staff in front of church and its 130 feet high. The church with its beautiful statue of the Blessed virgin Mary demercode is one of the beautiful churches in south India. St.Xavier and St. Thomas had visited this church.

Romanesque and Gothic Style of Architecture

The cathedral of St. Francis Xavier one of the most impressive historic monuments of India containing a small chapel of our lady when Xavier used to celebrate Holy mass, is situated at Kottar. He used to worship St.Mary in the small temple. He was popularly known as ‘Valiya pandaram’ among the people of Kottar, while he was at Kottar, he averted the invasion of Padagas on the people of Venad which was appreciated by the king, who become closer to the priest. In recognition of Xavier’s services, the king allotted a land to him for the purpose of constructing a Catholic church at Kottar. There was already a church in 1544 in the same place, where a St. Xavier’s church stands now.

The church records shows that the church was built in 1600 A.D. but in the year 1865 A.D. the church was enlarged and the shrine of our lady was also renovated and vaulted over. In 1930, the church was raised to the status of a cathedral. The cruciform church has acquired different styles of architecture. The style of round arches and vaults in the church is Romanesque, the architecture of the high pointed arches is of Gothic and the fine stone mandapa in front of the church is purely of Indian. The 12 towers in the church represent the 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ.

The home church at Nagercoil is an outstanding example of the architectural achievement of the missionaries. It locally known as ‘Kallukoil’ which is Greek style of architecture is one of the oldest and biggest Protestant churches in India. With the permission of the Queen of Travancore, Rev. Charles Mead utilized the elephants of Nagaraja temple and the prisoners in the construction of the Church which has been called as ‘Kallukoil’ as it is built with huge stones. On the 14th Jan 1819, the foundation stone was laid and the congregation was started in 1836. In the year 1843, the imposing structure in Greek style was completed. The church is 140 feet long and to feet wide including the space of 70’ and 20’ which form the front Verandah and the office room in the rear. The edifice can provide accommodation for nearly 2500 people at a time.

An old church in Eraniel, built on European model for the use of the Arasans. The Portuguese were the first to introduce

European styles in the Church architecture of Kanyakumari followed by Dutch and British. Ceilings and walls were painted with religious themes in the style of European masters. An old Catholic Church in Dravidian style of Church resembling south Indian Hindu Temple. It has a fine stupa over the altar. The pillars are in black stone inside, resembling the carvel stone pillars of Hindu temples. It has big marble windows covered by marble fret work, which evoke much admiration.

CONCLUSION

Churches with regular chance and have began to be built and there evolved a style of church architecture. The church and the ancillary buildings were enclosed in a massive laterite wall. There was an open cross in front of the main entrance on a granite basement in the model or balikkal, the altar stone. A church also had the flag mast in front.

Woodcarving and mural paintings, the two decorative media of temples are seen to be adopted in ancient churches also. The subsequent development in church architecture in the British period also saw the introduction of a new church design. In the external features the central tower or rather the Roman dome now comes at the centre of the transept imparting a classic form of European architecture.

Perhaps experimentation in religious architecture is mostly manifested in church architecture as compared to that in temples or mosques which more or less adhere to old evolved forms. The Christian architecture form a unique chapter in the annals of the art history of Kanyakumari District.

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