CHAPTER - VI

ARCHITECTURE
In this chapter, an attempt is made to bring out the architectural importance of the main component parts of the Vīlināṭhasvāmy temple, its sub shrines, outer mandapas, gopuras, enclosure walls and other parts. The Vīlināṭhasvāmy temple consists of Sanctum Sanctorum, arthamandapa, mahāmaṇḍapa and mukamandapa. The component parts of the temple are encircled by three enclosure walls.

**VIMĀNA**

The vimāna of the Vīlināṭhasvāmy temple is called as Vinnizhi vimāna.¹ It is of mādakkōil type. According to one of the legends of the temple, this vimāna was brought from the heaven and Lord Indra had a ride on this vimāna. There are quite a number of temples, belong to this type and they are located near the banks of the river Kāvēri. It is said that saint Thiru-Thānasambandar had a darshan of Lord

---

¹ Madakkoyil: is a kind of temple, constructed on a Dais for the purpose of avoiding the entrance of elephants inside. In Tamil Nadu, the Vimana of the temple is called by the names such as Vinnizhi Vimana and Thiruttoni Vimana.
here in His Thirutthōṇi Vimāna, just as in Sīrkāli.¹ This Vimāna was constructed based on the mythical origion of this temple.

SANCTUM SANCTORUM OR GARBA GRĪHA

The sanctum - sanctorum being square in shape faces east. It measures 10x12 metres length and breadth. The height is approximately 20 metres. It is built out of well dressed granite stones. The sanctum is called the house of the womb, of germ or embryo for it is here that regeneration is effected and the higher self of the devotee is reborn through initiation and self realisation.²

NIRĀLI MANDAPA

On the exterior side of the sanctum-sanctorum, there exists a mandapa called nirāli mandapa or unnāli mandapa which is supported by sixteen pillars of Chōla period. The capital portion of the pillars contain cushion shape with bevelled end, the characteristic feature of the Chōla style.

¹ Sirkali: is just 13 kilometres to the south of the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram. The name of the main deity is Chattanathar. In the hymns of Sambandar. The vimāna of the temple has been referred to as Tiruttōṇi Vimāna. Toni means a small boat. The name is applied to the vimāna due to it’s resemblance with the boat.

² C.R. Nagasamy, Tamilaka Koil Kalaikal, (TI), Tamil Nadu, 1969, p.3.
The base has no nagabanda design. The vimāna of the temple is divided into six parts.\footnote{1. Adhisthana 2. Bhitti 3. Prashthara 4. Griya 5. Sikhara 6. Stupi.}

I. **ADHISTHANA: (BASEMENT)**

   Adhisthana is the basement of the Vimāna. It contains the following parts namely upana, jagati with padma, kumuda and vēdikai.

   a. **UPĀNA**

      Upāna is the lower most part of the basement. It projects beyond the vertical norm. It consists of a series of plinth stones galloped on to in the form of lotus petals, suggesting a padmakōsa (Lotus mould design) conception of the shrine.

   b. **JAGATI**

      Above the padmapīṭha is present the jagati portion with padma. The Jagati is the rectangular portion of the basement. The padma design is present both on its top and below.
c. **KUMUDA**

It is present above the Jagati portion. Generally the date of the vimāna could be fixed only on the basis of the style of Kumuda. The large-sized rounded kumuda here confirm the date of the construction of the vimāna to Parantaka-I.

d. **KANTA**

It is present above kumuda. It separates the kumuda and the kapōta or cornice moulding.

e. **VEDIKAI (OR) PATTIKA**

It is the top-most portion of the basement. It is ornamented with Chaitya - windows. Above it, rises the wall or Kall.

II. **BHITTī (OR) KĀLL OR WALL**

The next architectural anga (portion) is Bhitti or wall or kall. This part is decorated with pilasters and dēvakōshtas, ho using the images of the deities.

**PILASTERS**

The outer walls of the Vimāna are divided into vertical panels by pilasters. There are twelve in total.
Each one has square base, shaft and a cushion shaped capital with bevelled end.

III. **PRASTHARA**

It consists of cornice and a frieze of yalis.

a. **CORNICE: (KODUNGAI)**

The cornice is the middle portion of the prasthara. It decorated with a series of kūdus with Sinhamuha (couching lion) finials, and such type of ornament is called as Chaitya - window.

b. **FRIEZE OF YALIS**

The entablature is finished off by a series row of Yalis with makara (an ornamental motif developed from an alligat of crocodile head with glenfied tail) head at the corners. The frieze of Yalis gives a beautiful look. In art, they represent strength and vigour. Some figures of Yalis are represented with riders.

IV. **SUPER STRUCTURE**

Here the super structure consists of three parts namely Pyramidal Roof with **Griya**, **Sikhara** and **Stūpi**.
a. **ROOF**

Inscriptions of this temple mention the gift of gold tiles for covering the roof of the temple, by the King Rajadhiraja I.

b. **GRĪVA**

It is the neck of the super structure of a *Vimana*. Being in square shape, it is decorated with stucco images of gods.

c. **SIKHARA**

The *sikhara* above griva is circular in shape.

d. **STUPI**

The *sikhara* is pinnacled by *Stupi*. The joining portion of *stūpi* with *sikhara* is ornamented with lotus motif.

**ARDHAMANḌAPA**

*Ardhamandapa* is also square in shape. The height of the *ardhamandapa* is eight metres. It measures 26x4 metres length and breadth. The entrance wall has two pilasters, which have cushion capital, with bevelled end palagai and then has padma design; all indicate the characteristic
features of a Chōla style. The inscriptional evidence attest this view, that the structure was the contribution of the Chōla King Parāntaka - I

ARASAṆIKĀL

At the entrance of sanctum, within ardhamandapa is present a pillar called arasāṇikāl which is the symbolic representation of the marriage ceremony of the god and goddess. This pillar is now covered with brass.

MAHAMANDAPA

The mahamandapa is rectangular in shape. This mandapa measures by 15x15 metres length and breadth. The height measures approximately 8 mts. The entrance of the mahāmandapa has two pilasters of Chōla style.\(^1\) This mandapa has eighteen pillars. Of the eighteen pillars, one is called as "pandalkal" which remind the custom of erecting such pillar, at the time of the marriage of god and goddess. Even now, in the society, also the same practice is being continued.

The pillars inside Mahāmandapa have cushion capitals with bevelled ends indicating the Chōla style. The portion in between the two squares is divided into sixteen facets.

**MUKHAMANDAPA**

Being in rectangular shape, it measures 12x10 metres length and breadth. The height measures 10 metres. The eighteen pillars of the mandapa are in Vijayanagar style. The capital portion of the pillars have pendent drop design, a typical Vijayanagar style. The highly ornamented kalasa as well as the nagabanda (snakehood) designs at the base of the pillars also support such dating the abācus or palagai is very small in size, unlike the Chōla types.

**SUBSIDIARY SHRINES**

(a) **SHRINE OF MĀPPILLAI–SVAMI (KALYĀNA SUNDARAR)**

The shrine of Māppillaisvami is present inside the mahāmandapa. Facing the southern direction, the shrine measures 10x12 metres length and breadth. The height is approximately eight metres. On the basis of its architectural stylistic features the shrine can be attributed to the period of the King Paṟāntaka-I.
SHRINE INSIDE ARDHAMANDAPA
THIAGARAJAR SHRINE

This shrine is also called as the shrine of Cakra pradana- mūrti. It measures approximately 10x12 metres and the height 8 metres.

1. MUNNAI VINĀYAKA SHRINE

It is located on the southern side of the Garbagriha. It faces the eastern side. It is constructed out of granite stones. It measures 2x2 metres length and breadth. The height measures 3 metres. The walls of the shrine is ornamented with twenty pilasters of Chōla period. This Vinayaka is popularly called as Munnai Vināyaka. The inscriptions of Rājarāja III are present on the walls of this shrine. From the stylistic and inscriptional evidences, this shrine could be dated to the period of Chōlas of 12th-13th century A.D.

2. SŌMĀSKANDA SHRINE

It is located on the western side and faces the east. The walls of the shrine are constructed out of stone and the super structure is only out of bricks and mortar. It measures 6x6 metres in length and breadth and the height measures 5 metres.
SŌMĀSKANDA MANDAPA

The shrine is preceded by a mandapa containing nineteen pillars of Vijayanagar style, having the pendent drop design on its capitals. The broad-sized nagabanda design present on the base also confirm the above date. The pillar contains two square portions. The portion in between the squares are divided into sixteen facets of equal size. Normally, the construction of this type of mandapa was undertaken only by the Vijayanagar rulers. The same type of mandapas of Vijayanagar period are present in the other temples like Hazara Ramaswamy, and Vittolaramasamy, both at Hampi the capital city of Vijayanagar. In Tamil Nadu, the mandapas at Vellore, Kumbakōnam, Tādpatri, Srīrangām, Tirūvārur and Chidambaram are the best examples of Vijayanagar period.¹

During the periods of Pallavas, the Chōlas and the Pāndyas no such separate shrines to Sōmāskanda are present in the prakāra of the temple. It can be said beyond doubt that the credit of constructing the Sōmāskanda shrine goes only to the architects of Vijayanagar period. The

Kumuda portion of the adhisthana is ornamented with curved lines, which is also purely of a Vijayanagar style.

3. SUBRAMANYA SHRINE

This shrine is located in the north western corner of the inner enclosure wall and faces the eastern side. The height of the vimāna is 5 metres. It measures 6x6 metres length and breadth. The entire structure is constructed out of stone. It could be dated to the period of Cholas of 10th-11th century A.D., on architectural stylistic background.

SUBRAMANYA MAṆḌAPA

The mandapa, preceding the Subramanya shrine has ten pillars, dated to the period of 16, 17th centuries A.D.

4. GAJALAKSHMI SHRINE

It is a granite structure located on the western side of the inner enclosure wall. The height of its vimāna measures 5 metres. It measures 3x3 metres length and breadth. It could be dated to the period of the Cholas of 10th-11th century A.D. The shrine houses the stucco image of the goddess.
5. ĀDI-CHANDIKESWARAR SHRINE

It is located on the northern side of the inner prākāra. It measures 2x2 metres length and breadth. The height of the vimāna measures 2 metres. Being a granite structure, it contains the inscriptions of the King Kulottunga III, and probably under whose period, the structure might have been reconstructed with stone. The walls contain fifteen pilasters of Chōla style. The mandapa infront is supported by a short pillar which has Inscriptions. On the basis of both the architectural and inscriptive evidences, the structure is dated to the period of 12th century A.D.

6. NATARAJA SHRINE

It is located on the northern side of the inner enclosure wall. It measures 6x6 metres length and breadth. The height of the vimāna is 5 metres. Infront of this shrine, there is a mandapa supported by sixteen pillars of late Chōla period. The pillars have the characteristic cushion capital with bevelled end. The karukkukattais designs and the small sized nagabandha design date the structure to a late Chōla period of 12th century A.D.
7. MULANĀTHAR SHRINE

Facing the western direction, the shrine is measures 4x4 metres length and breadth and the height is three metres. A nandi is present infront of the shrine. Inscriptions are present on the walls of the shrine. On architectural ground, the shrine is dated to the Chōla period of 13th century A.D. The inscriptions also confirm such date.

GODDESS SHRINE

Generally it is viewed that the goddess shrines are constructed within the temple-complex only during the period of Vijayanagar. But there are examples, even during the period of the Imperial Chōlas and Pāndyas. During the period of the Chōla King Rajaraja II, a separate goddess shrine was constructed at Darasuram, Thanjavur district. The goddess shrine of this temple also, on architectural ground is dated to the late Chōla period.

The sanctum is preceeded by an ardhamandapa and its wall are adorned with pilasters. The mandapa is devoid of pillars. The ardhamandapa is preceeded by mahamandapa, whose ornamentation is also mainly pilasters. The mahamandapa has eight pillars and it is preceeded by a
mukhamandapa which is a brick structure. It has fourteen pillars which are also made out of bricks. It seems to be of Maharātta construction. The Ceiling of the mukhamandapa is depicted just like the back of an elephant and thus it comes under Gajaprista style of architecture.

NIRALIMANDAPA

The main sanctum and arthamandapa are closed by niralimandapa, which is supported by twelve pillars of Chōla period.

OTHER MAṆḌAPAS

1. KATTU SUTTHI MAṆḌAPA

Being located infront of second Gōpura, the mandapa has fifty four pillars in six rows. Some pillars have small sized snake-hood designs and such a style date them to the late Chola period. The purpose of the mandapa is mainly to keep the images of Utsavamūrties.

ALANGĀRA MAṆḌAPA

It is present to the northern side of the kattu sutthi mandapa. It is made out of bricks. The decoration of the deities at the time of festival occasions, mainly take place
inside this mandapa. The entire structure reflects the Mahrāṭta style of architecture.

**INNER GŌPURA**

This Gōpura decorated the inner enclosure wall, and is dated to the period of Rājarāja I, based on inscriptions. It consists of two tiers or storeys. The height of the gōpura measures approximately 20 metres.

**DOUBLE PILLARED ARCADE**

A double pillared arcade goes around the inner enclosure wall. The pillars belong to the Chōla period of 11th century A.D.

**FIRST PRAKĀRA**

The temple has three prakāras. The first prakāra could be dated to the period of Parāntaka I. The prakāra lacks structures.

**STRUCTURES OF THE SECOND PRAKĀRA**

Based on an insessional evidence, the date of this prakāra is ascribed to the period of Rājaraja I. The second prakāra houses shrines, mandapas and walls.
VINAYAKA AND SUBRAMANYA SHRINE

The shrines of Vinayaka and Subramanya are present, one on each side of the entrance of the gopura.

The practice of constructing separate shrines for Vināyaka and Subramanya at the entrance of the gate ways was started from the late Chōla period onwards only.

SECOND GŌPURA

The Presence of an inscription of Jatāvarman Sundarapāṇḍya, on the gopura, date, this structure to the Pāṇḍya period of 13th century A.D.

SECOND ENCLOSURE WALL

It is larger in size than the inner enclosure wall and the construction was caused by Vijayanagar ruler Viruppanna Udayar.¹ It is constructed of granite stone.

BALIPITHA

Balipīta is the raised pedestal on which floral or cooked offerings are made. The intention of offering this food is to appease the prakāra deities in not giving any

¹ A.R.E., No.434 of 1908.
disturbance to the ordinary conduct of the daily worship. It is present next to the flagstaff. The structure is beautified with floral designs.

It measures 1 metre in length and breadth and the height is one metre only. The philosophical significance of constructing the balipītha at the entrance of the temples is that it is a place where one has to sacrifice āṇavam (egoism) kāma (self-conceit) and māyā (illusion).

FLAGSTAFF OR DHVĀJA STAMBHA

Flagstaff or dhvāja stambha is placed on a raised platform and the purpose is to hoist the flag, at the time of the starting the festivals of the temple.

SUNDARAMŪRTI PĪTHA

It is situated on the south - western corner of the second prakāra. It is said that at this place St.Sundarar had received padikkasu from Lord Śiva when there was a severe famine occurred in Thiruviḻimalalai. It measures 1.5 x 1.5 metres length and width and the height is 0.5 metres.

---

THIRUNĀVUKKARASU PĪTHA

It is present on the western side of the second prakāra. The structure is entirely of stone. It is said that St. Thirunāvukkarasar also received padikkāsu from Lord Siva at this place during the famine occurred in Thiruvilimilalai. It measures 2 x 2 metres in length and width and the height measures 2.5 metres.

STRUCTURES OF THE THIRD PRAKĀRA

From an inscriptional evidence, the third prakāra was attributed to the Chōla ruler Kulottunga-I. The prakāra is noted for the presence of various structures like shrines, tanks etc.

GŌPURA OF THE THIRD ENCLOSURE WALL

The gōpura bears an inscription of Rājaraja III who probably might have built this gōpura in the 13th century A.D. It lacks superstructure and the reason for it is not known. It has two pillars one on each side of the entrance. The pilasters of the gōpura are of very late Chōla period.

THIRD ENCLOSURE WALL

It is constructed out of bricks. Probably, it might be the contribution of the Mahārāṭṭas of Thanjavur.

HUNDRED PILLARD MANḍAPA

This manḍapa is present on the North eastern corner of the third enclosure wall. It is in rectangular shape. It measures 18x35 metres length and breadth and the height is eight metres. It has two entrances at the western side. The entire structure is supported by one hundred and ten (110) pillars. At the northern end of this manḍapa there exist a stage. It has two entrances at eastern and western ends respectively. The stage has sixteen pillars of Chōla period, having cushion capitals with bevelled ends. The portion in between the two squares have sixteen facets. Infront of the stage, there is a huge manḍapa, having sixty pillars of Chōla period. The manḍapa has an extension infront and it is supported by forty pillars having the stylistic features of Nayak Art. The capital portion of the pillar has fully blossomed flower design. The middle portions of the squares have lotus medallions. The bases have broad sized nāga-banda (snake-hood design). All of them speak of the Nayak style. All such artistic features, date the structure to the Nayak period.
NANDAVANAMS (FLOWER GARDENS)

The inscriptions of this temple mention the presence of various nandavanams within the enclosure walls. Further the inscriptions state the donations made for the maintenance of the flower gardens. It was during the time of the Chōla king Parāntaka-I, the flower gardens like Umainaṅgai nandavanam and Thiruthānthōnri Nāyanār nandavanams made their appearance.¹ During the reign of Rajadhiraja-I, nine nandavanams (gardens) had been formed.² The names of the each and every nandavanam had been mentioned in this inscription.

THIRTHAS (OR) TANKS

It is said in the sthalapurāṇa that there existed as many as twenty-five thirthas around this temple. They all speak the religious importance of the temple.³

Due to such religious importance of the tanks of the temple even now number of devotees take holy bath. The thirthas might be dated to an early period but construction of the steps around the thirthas began with the patronage of

¹ A.R.E., No.437 of 1977.
² Ibid., No.437 of 1908.
the kings on later periods. The tanks even now plays an important role in the time of the religious ceremonies of the temple.

WELL

A well is present on the northern side of the first enclosure wall. It is said that once it was called Padravalli thirtha, due to the sanctity of its water. Even now the water from the well is being used for bathing ceremonies.

PADIKĀSU VINĀYAKA SHRINE

It is located on the north western side of the outer prakāra. It measures 3x3 metres length and breadth and the height is 5 metres. Being a stone edifice, it could be dated to 11th-12th century A.D.

MAHĀLINGASWAMY SHRINE

It is also located on the northern side of the third prakāra. It also belongs to the period of the Chōlas of 11th, 12th century A.D. It measures 3x3 metres in length and breadth, and the height is 2 metres.
MAYŪRANĀTHAR SHRINE

It is located on the north eastern side of the third prakāra. It is also of the same period, measuring 3x3 metres in length and breadth and 2 metres high.

THER MĒTTU MAṆḌAPA

It is constructed out of bricks. An inscription found in this maṇḍapa mentions that a lady by name Sivappinachiyar had constructed this maṇḍapa during the reign of Mahrāṭṭas of Thanjavur. The architectural style also reflects the art of Mahrāṭṭas.

Thus from the proper analysis of the architectural features of this temple, it can be stated that the major contribution had been made by the Imperial Chōlas. The successive dynasties like the Pāṇḍyas, Vijayanagar, Nāyaks and the Mahrāṭṭas of Thanjavur had also contributed to the architectural development of this temple. The vimānas, maṇḍapas, gopuras, subsidiary shrines, all speak, the architectural greatness of this temple. The architectural beauty of the temple is still being maintained due to the services of renovations and reconstructions. Drastic measures should be taken by the temple authorities to keep the architectural glory and grandeur of the temple for all the years to come.