CHAPTER - IV

CONSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES
Epigraphy plays an important role in the constructional activities of this temple. The inscriptions found in this temple contribute much to the constructional activities of the temple and its neighbouring temples. Here, an attempt is made to reveal the constructional activities of Thiruvilvānāthar temple at Thiruvilvānilalai through the inscriptions of this temple. The inscriptions mainly belong to different dynasties such as the Chōlas, the Pāndyās, the Vijayanagar and the Mahrattas of Thanjavur.

CONSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES UNDER THE CHŌLAS

The Imperial Chōlas paid their attention towards the construction of the buildings of this temple and also in spreading Śaivism. Being staunch Saivites, they built innumerable temples devoted to Lord Siva. But they were tolerant towards other religions also. They also contributed much for the growth of Vaiṣhnaviśm.
As far as the Śiva temples are concerned, they had constructed many new temples and also re-constructed the temples built by the Pallavas of Kanchi. Regarding Thiruvilināṭhaśvami temple at Thiruvilimilalai, Vijayalaya Chola (A.D.850-871) laid the foundation and the super-structure was built by Parantaka I (A.D.907-955).

There are about eighty nine inscriptions which could be dated to the Imperial Cholas. These inscriptions clearly expose the multi-sided religious activities undertaken by the kings of the Chola dynasty. The growth and the development of the structural buildings of the temple was mainly due to the untiring efforts of the Chola kings. Renovation works were also undertaken by them.

Vijayalaya (A.D.850-871)

The inscriptions found in this temple form the basic source to date the structures of this temple. As the earliest inscription of the temple belongs to the King Vijayalaya, it can be observed that Vijayalaya might be considered as the real founder of the granite structures of this temple. The architectural styles also support this view. The pillars of the ardhamandapa of the goddess shrine resemble the
artistic features of the pillars of the temples of the early Chola period. Now the pillars are found in the goddess shrine. There are different views as regards the construction of the shrines to the goddess. It is viewed in general that the occurrence of Amman (goddess) shrine was only from 12th century A.D. The presence of the pillars, imbibing the early Chola stylistic features, should be as already stated, the original component parts of the ardhamandapa and due to negligence, they might have been removed and remained inside the premises of the temple unnoticed for a long time, until they were planted with the Amman shrine. Anyhow their presence clearly reveals the fact that the earliest architectural activities were started by the King Vijayalaya himself.

PARANTAKA I (A.D.907-955)

The period of Parantaka I also witnessed the structural development of the temple. From an inscription dated in the 34th regnal year of the King,¹ it can be gleaned that the King undertook the activities of both renovation and reconstruction of the early structures like sanctum and ardhamandapa. The architectural edifices have resemblance

¹ A.R.E. No.440 of 1908.
with the Naltunai Isvaram temple at Punjai (Thanjavur Dt.) whose construction was mainly caused by Parantaka I.

The period of Parantaka I also witnessed the construction of nandavanam or flower gardens like Umai Nangai Nandavanam and Thiruthanthonri Bhattarar Nandavanam. It is known from an inscription belonged to Parantaka I that an individual called Adigal Paluṛettaraiyar took all the responsibilities in the construction of the above gardens or nandavanams.¹ Medicinal herbs and flowering plants were grown in such gardens.

RAJA RAJA I (A.D.985-1014)

The patronization meted out by Rajaraja I to the Thiruvilinathar temple at Thiruvilimilalai is a laudable one. During his period, the second prākāra had been constructed. An inscription assignable to the period of the king, found on the fourth pillar of the southern side of the second prakāra records that the pillar was the gift of a certain Bharadvaja Devarkalnayan. The same information is also recorded on two other pillars.²

¹ A.R.E. No.437 of 1908.
² Ibid., No.424 of 1908; T.N.A.D. No.538 of 1977.
The architectural styles of the pillars resemble the pillars of the other temples of Rajaraja’s period. The Thanjavur Brihadisvara temple can be quoted as the best example. Based on both epigraphical and architectural evidences, the construction of the second prākāra can be attributed to the King Rajaraja I only.

Rajadhiraja-I (A.D.1018-1054)

Rajadhiraja-I, rendered monumental services for the growth and development of this temple. Not only that, the King also took concrete steps for the growth of Saivism throughout the country. Covering of the temple structures especially of the Vimana with gold plated tiles treated as the foremost religious service from the period of early cholas. It is known that Paratakal was responsible for covering the tiles of the vimāna of the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with gold. Likewise an inscription of the ThiruviMilimalai temple, present on the northern wall of the sanctum, records the gift of gold plated tiles to this temple, during the period of the King Rajadhiraja I. The donor was Vijayarajendradeva Anukkiyar Pallavan Pāṭṭālianaṅgai. The inscription is dated in the 36th regnal year (C.A.D.1054) of the King. Further the deity of the temple

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1 A.R.E. No.384 of 1908.
has been referred to in the inscription as Thiruvilimilalai Udaya Mahādeva. Thus it is clear that the covering of the vimāna of the temple with gold tiles took place only in the period of Rajadhiraja. In style it resembles the vimāna of the Chidambaram temple. An epigraph dated to the period of Rajadhiraja I records that the same individual who caused the covering of the vimana with gold plated tiles also took responsibility in forming a new place called Pattali Isvaram with a Siva temple. The place Pattali Isvaram, even now bearing the same name, is located just 5 kms to the east of Thiruvilimilalai. Both the Siva temples at Pattali Isvaram and Thiruvilimilalai are closely related to each other as regards the religious festivals are concerned. The administration of the Siva temple at Pattali Isvaram was also looked after by the assembly of the temple at Thiruvilimilalai.

The shrines of the Prakāra of the temple at Thiruvilimilalai like Rishabavahanadhevar and Araseri-Iruntha Pillaiyar, were constructed during the regime of Rajadhiraja-I. The above shrines came into existence mainly due to the efforts of a lady whose name is not

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1 ASL. No.384 of 1908.
2 K. Chockalingam, Census of India, p.236.
known. But it is stated that she was hailed from the place called Thiruvanaikaval which is adjacent to Sri Renganathar Temple at Srirangam.¹

The *mahamandapa* of the central shrine was also a contribution of the period of Rajadhiraja-I. An inscription assignable to the period of the king, found on one of the pillars in the *mahamandapa* records the gift of this pillar by one certain Ukkalkilan - Edirili - Chola Pallavaraiyan.² The two reverse sides of this pillar also bear the name of this individual. Thus it is confirmed that the construction of this *mahamandapa* was mainly caused by the same individual who might be one of the minor chieftains under the Chola king Rajadhiraja-I.

The foregoing facts clearly expose the special attention attributed by Rajadhiraja-I, for the constructional development of the temple.

**KULOTHUNGA-I (A.D.1070-1120)**

After the period of Rajadhiraja-I, the next king known from the inscription of the temple was Kulothunga I. The

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¹ *A.R.E.*, No.393 of 1908.
attachment of the Kings who ruled in between Rajadhiraja and Kulothunga I with this temple is not known. The contribution of Kulothunga I to the constructional development of this temple is a highly commendable one.

The shrine of Adichandes varadeva was constructed only during his period and this is confirmed by an inscription assigned to the 34 hr regnal year of the king (C.A.D.1104).¹

The inscription clearly states that the shrine was rebuilt with granite stones. From this it can be inferred that originally the shrine might have been constructed out of bricks and mortar.

From an inscription it is known that the western gopura of the third prakara of the temple was also treated as a fittest contribution of the King Kulothunga I.² The pillars and pilasters of this structure exhibit the style of late Chōla period. The inscription further says that the King also made donations to the temple called Aruvattisvaramudaiyar at Jagannathanallur, which is very

¹ A.R.E., No.427 of 1908.
near to Thiruvilimilalai. Due to such liberal contribution of the king, the region witnessed the growth of Śaivism. Thus the constructional activities of the King Kulothunga-I, in a way developed the temple to a great extent. The temple could have been neglected but for Kulothunga I.

VIKRAMA CHOLA (A.D.1118-1136)

Being the successor of Kulothunga I, Vikrama Chōla, took painstaking efforts for the survival of Saivism. He took special care and attention in the construction of the shrine dedicated to goddess Pidari. An uninterupted religious services were performed during his period.

KULOOTHUNGA-II (A.D.1133-1150)

Being the son and successor of Vikrama Chōla, Kulothunga II, took efforts in maintaining the religious importance of the temple. Some nearby temples could also get renovation of their structures. An inscription states the activities of renovation undertaken in the nearby temple called Thiruvagastisvara- mudaiyar Mahadeva at Velan Anniyur. Even now the puja and other religious ceremonies of the temple are regularly performed.

2 T.N.A.D.I, No.415 of 1908.
place Velan Anniyur is just 2 or 3 kms to the east of Thiruvilimilalai.

KULOTHUNGA III (A.D.1178-1218)

No direct information is available to know the contribution of the King to the constructional activities of the temple. But anyhow scooping-out of a cave nearby; speaks of the service of the care and attention meted out by the King for the propagation of Saivism in and around the region. At the present the cave is being served as the religious mutt. On festival occasions devotees are being served with food in this mutt.

RAJARAJA-III (A.D.1216-1256)

Being the son and successor of Kulottunga III, Rajaraja III also continued the religious practice of adding structures to the already existing temple complex. The nandavanams of the temple were the contribution of the king. The garden was called as Thomoli Gnanasambandar nandavanam, perhaps after the name of Thirugnanasambandar, who was one of the 63 Saiva nayanmars. The responsibility of constructing the

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Thanithanisvara Mudaiyar shrine was mainly attributed to the King Rajaraja III. This too is well attested by an inscription.¹

The king took keen interest even in repairing the structures of the temple. An inscription of the temple says that the main shrine as well as the shrines dedicated to the nayanmars could get redressal of its repairs.² Further the deity of the temple has been referred to as in the same epigraph as Ninraruliya nāyanmar and the goddess as Nerivārkulaḷi.

RAJENDRA III (A.D.1216-1256)

The empire of Imperial Chōlas founded by Vijayalaya, came to an end with the reign of Rajendra III. The Chōla dynasty reigned in Tamil country for a period of about four and a half centuries. The construction of a mutt called Thiruṉanasambandar Madam on the northern side of the temple had been undertaken during Kulottunga III period. A mudaliyar of Kōttur had constructed this mutt. Arrangements were here made for the stay of one saint and

¹ Ṭhēṟṟū, No.400 of 1908.
² Ibid., No.403 of 1908.
The mutt even now is doing its religious service. Another mutt known as "Thiruchchirambalamudaiyar Madam" also had been constructed during his regime by one Thavapperumal alias Gnānasiva who was the disciple of Thirucchattimurrattu Mudaiyar of Thirugñanasambanda Thirumadam, which is located to the east of the temple of Thirucchittimurramudaya Nayanar. Thiruchchattimurram which is one of the saivite centres, south of the river Kaveri and its reference is found in the hymns of Appar.

The foregoing inscriptional evidences give a flawless information regarding the constructional activities of the kings of the Chōla dynasty. An uninterrupted services carried out by the Kings of the Chōla period form the main and foremost cause for the occurrence and the development of the various structures of the temple.

The religious services of the temple were properly maintained due to the liberal donations made by the Chōla Kings mainly in the form of lands.

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1 T.N.A.D.I., NO.585 of 1977. The term Ṑduvar refers to the riciters of the Dēvaram hymns. They played an important role during the period of the Chōlas.

2 A.R.E., No.392 of 1908.
CONSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES UNDER THE PĀṇḍyas

After the decline of the Imperial Cholas, the Pandyas of second empire, dominated the politics of Tamil country. Like the Chōlas, the Pāṇḍyas also contributed much for the development of the constructional activities of the temples.

JATAVARMA SUNDARA PĀṇḍYA III (A.D. 1268-1271)

During the period of Jatavarma Sundara Pāṇḍya III, a new pavilion called Thirukkaikottti was constructed by the Hoysala King Narasimha, who had accepted the sovereignty of Jatavarma Sundara Pāṇḍya III. The purpose of the pavilion was to recite especially Devaram Hymns. The construction of such pavilions was a common one during the period of the Chōlas also. During the period of the King Rajendra I (A.D. 1012-1044) such a kind of pavilion was constructed in the temple at Thiruvorriyur for the recital of Dēvāram hymns.

For unknown reasons, the recital of Dēvāram hymns was stopped for a while and it was the Pāṇḍya King, who revived the practice of recitation in the pavilion. The reciters were properly rewarded both in kind and in cash.

1 A.R.E., No.414 of 1908.
Reciting the hymns of Devaram was considered to be a sacrimonious one.

CONSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES UNDER THE VIJAYANAGAR EMPEROR

The constructional activities of the temple had been extended to the Vijayanagar period also. Eventhough the Viajayagar Kings use staunch Vaishnavites, they never under-estimated the religious values of Saivite temples. Eventhough this temple lacks the contribution of the major kings like Krishnadeva Raya and AchutaDeva Raya, its constructional extension was undertaken by the king called Yruppanna Udayar-II alias (Viruppaksha-I). The northern enclosure wall of the second prakāra was constructed by one Nāgappan, son of Ellappan, as gleaned from an inscription.¹ It can be inferred that the entire second enclosure wall might be completed during the regime of the King Vruppanna Udayar.

CONSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES UNDER THE NĀYAKS OF THANJAVUR

Tamilnadu had witnessed the rule of Nāyaks. The contribution of the Nāyaks of Thanjavur to the

constructional developments of the temples is treated as a milestone in the architectural history of Tamilnadu. The rule of Nayaks witnessed the construction of the Mandapas of greater size. Here also in the temple at Thiruvilimilalai a mandapa with hundred and ten pillars was constructed by the Nayaks. The exact name of the nayak king, is not known from any of the evidences. The architectural stylistic features of the mandapa purely resembles in Nayak style. The huge pillars with the plantain fruit design capital very well attest its identity with the Nayak style. Even now, there exists a saying that before constructing any edifice, the architect, would make an agreement that they would never construct a mandapa like the one at Thirivilimilalai, the Vimāna like Brihadeswara temple at Thanjavur and the cornice (Kodungai) of Arandaiyar temple at Pudukkottai. This itself brings to light the architectural importance of the mandapa of the temple at Thiruvilimilalai. The mandapa is constructed such a Durga way to avoid the bats to stay there. In one way, it reflects the scientific importance of its architecture.

As the bats could not get shelter inside the mandapa which is named “wawālnatha mandapa", wawal refers to the bat. Natha denotes its incapability to hang inside. Due to this the mandapa could bear the name as wawālnatha mandapa.
The kings of the Mahrāṭṭa dynasty did their religious service by renovating the temples of early periods. Some of the temples could get additions also. The best example is the “Ther Mēttu Mandapa” of the temple at Thiruvilimilalai. The construction of the mandapa was undertaken by a lady called Sivappi-nachiyar.¹

CONSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES DURING MODERN PERIOD

After the period of the Mahrāṭṭas of Thanjavur, the royal contribution to the constructional activities of the temple had been stopped. The donations made by the common people saved the temples from negligence. Even now the daily pūjas and ceremonies of the temple are being maintained by the Thiruvāduthurai mutt. The religious importance of the temple is mainly responsible for its growth. It can be said beyond doubt that the temple will ever have its proper maintenance for all the years to come.