CHAPTER - VII

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE
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The temple of Vilinathaswamy was not built at one time. The three enclosures (prakarās) are the result of centuries of growth and improvement in different stages. An attempt is made in this chapter to reconstruct these stages and present a sequence of the structural growth and expansion based on the study of architectural features and styles of the buildings and correlated to the inscriptive data if available. The inscriptions on the walls and basements quite often give us information to assess the date of particular construction. They are useful when they are found, to belong to the period of construction and not inscribed at a later date. Sometimes the inscriptions may be found at the basement and the superstructure might have been rebuilt or renovated at a later time. In such cases we have to distinguish between the earlier and later parts of the same structure. So the architectural features should be integrated with the epigraphical data in arriving at the age of the structure and the architectural features should be carefully noted to see that they tally with the data of inscription.

Sequence of temple construction

The construction and development of temples in South India can be divided into four stages. The first temple was of course built in mud and had a roof of thatch. A relic of that temple is found in Tiru Arur in the name of Paravai in Mantali, the mud temple worshiped by Paravai wife of Saint Sundaramūrti as stated in one of his hymns.¹ (c 700 A.D.) The
linga was a development in course of centuries and the sanctum and other attendant chambers were evolved later when they were built in brick and mud. In the second stage the Pallavas introduced cave temples, also cut and sized stones were transported by them from hills, that resulted in construction of grand temples in stone. The chola's expanded them with additional subshrines, towers and with fort wall or rampart and a moat all round which can be considered as the third stage in the development of temple architecture. The fourth stage saw the elaboration of temple with additional mandapas and pillars under Vijayanagar rulers.

Most temples constructed through ages have been facing east - a direction considered auspicious being the direction of the rising sun, while a few are facing west. The east facing temple is considered to confer bhoga on the folk, while the west facing is considered to confer moksha (salvation). The Vilinatha Swamy temple is facing east.

Siva temples have several corridors or circuits round the sanctum and they are three, five, or seven. They are called prakaras. (The Vilinatha Swamy temple has three prakaras. The first circuit is round the linga itself within the sanctum. The second is called inner prakara which houses the subshrines. The third is the outer prakara, a continuous hall running on all four sides.) The structural details in three prakaras of the Vilinatha Swamy temple is discussed below.
First Prākāra

The sanctum complex (GP.1)

The āgamās and śilpasāstrās contain elaborate rules and descriptions of how a temple should be built - the soil, the material to be used, measurement of images for worship etc. The sanctum sanctorum, according to āgamās should be the smallest and be dark compared to other parts of the temple. The āgama lays down that the deity should be seen only with aid of a lamp. The sanctum where the chief deity is installed may be compared to the womb or the heart as stated in the agamas. The garbagriha is the nucleus of an all sided increase on the outside in the horizontal, a stepping forth from dark interior into expanding bulk and multiplicity of form and meaning. Its outward impact within its walls is traversed in the vertical direction by the urge of growth which correspond to the sprouting of the seed, and leads from the broad earth and the base of the temple, towards its high point even above the superstructure. The vivifying germ (garbā) and the embryo of splendour (hiranya garbā) are within the walls of garbagriha. The sanctum is also called Mūlasthānam a tāmil word deriving from the term mūlam meaning root from which the tree of creation namely the world, is stationed there, and that is the place where God is.

(The sanctum is 9' x 9' in the outer most and 5' x 5' (Plate 2) in the inner most with just enough space for the sivacharya for circumbulation as prescribed in the āgamās) The linga is seated in the front side of the sanctum. The outer
wall of the sanctum has twelve inscriptions belonging to the cholās) namely Rājarājā, 4 Rājēndrā, 5 Kulōttunga 6 and Vikramacholā. 7 (and the earliest is dated 990 A.D.) of Parantaka which can be fixed as the date of the temple complex. The architectural features also go to confirm its cholā origin. (The mouldings on the wall surface of the garbagrihā is composed of an upanā, a jagati, a tripāṭta kumuda, a recessed kantā and a plain patikā. The pilasters are plain and square in section. On the outerwall of garbagrihā which is of plain with rectangular granite stones except kumudam and yāli varimaṇam no other specific feature is seen.)

Basement (Adhishtanā)

(The entire garbagrihā structure is often built over a solid masonry platform or adhishtanā) The adhistanā or pedestal is variable. (Fig 2) In its simplest and most primary form it would consist of an off set bottom course, the upanā a taller neck like recessed vertical course, the kantā and a top projecting platform the prati or pathikā. A slight elaboration would be the insertion of a torus moulding called the kumudā which is three faceted (tripāṭta) or rounded (vrittā) and placed above in the kantā and below the patikā having another plain moulding less offset than the upanā but taller and coming over it called the jagati. A jagati or kumudamay also be placed over a series of lotus petals shown as spread over the upanā. These in earlier periods indicate regional forms and show elaboration in later forms.
The Adhistana of Vilinathaswamy temple comprises of two components or divisions namely the upa pitha (foundation) and the adhishanā about it. The upapitha is of Kapotabhadra (lower basement) type while the adhishtanā is of pratibandha style (basement with some ornamental units.) (Plate 3)

Water spout (pranalā)

(From the top of the adhistana at about the middle of the northern side an immense and carved water spout is projected which discharges the abhishēka water flowing out of the sanctum floor. The lengthy pranalā or water spout is found fitted into the adhistana mouldings just below the brahmā niche facing north) It is a customary fact that in siva temples the water spout faces north so as to revere the shrine at kāsi which synchronises with the name Dakshina kāsi in the case of Vilinathaswamy temple. (The water spout is supported on the head of a bhutta squattting over the upapitha platform.)

Vimānā (Canopy) (GP.2)

Vimānā is installed by āgamās with mantras to denote the various aspects like pada (lord) varna (colour) bhuyan (creation) and tattvā (essential nature of things) as the divinity cannot be defined or measured by gross standards. The āgamās declare the vimānā as the body or deha and God as the soul inhabiting this body. Vimānā measured in its parts is the form of God, which in this universe the macrocosm and the temple as well as a middle term made by men, the microcosm according to his understanding and by measure.8
The vimāna of Vilināthasvāmy temple is a single storied vimāna (an ekathāla vimāna) consisting of essentially of six vertical components which from the base to the apex would be (1) the adhistanā or the basement (2) the pāda or the bhitti or wall as the structure stands enclosing the sanctum (3) the prastārā or architecture with the prominent cornice of kapotā (4) The griva over sanctum terrace and entablature (5) the sikara or ultimate roof covering the griva) and sikara are the octagonal on plan, and falls under the category of Drāvida Vimāna sub-shrines, towers, and in the fourth stage, under Vijayanagar period further elaboration with additional mandapas were made.

Arthamandapam

(In front of the sanctum is the Arthamandapam (lobby)) The Arthamandapam commonly is a rectangular arte chamber intervening between the sanctum and the main hall (called the Mahāmandapam where people congregate to worship the idol). The Arthamandapam of Vilināthasvāmy temple has a total of 27 pillars in four rows of which 18 are of chōla style, rectangular bearing heavy bevelled corbels at the top. The remaining 9 are pillars with Vijayanagar lotus corbelled type. A pillar at the entrance of the sanctum in Arthamandapam is round in shape denoted as Pandakkāl (Plate 4) which illustrates the legendary conception of the marriage of the Lord Śiva with Kāthyāyani at the place.)
The Mahāmandapam which is preceding the Arthamandapa is a pillared hall with a flight of steps on both southern and northern sides which indicates the chōlā pattern of architecture. The chola pattern comprised the introduction of balustrated flights of steps between the arthamandapa and mahāmandapa to the south and north symmetrically to bring a certain degree of cohesion to the axial spread and to separate the ritual diversity. The mandapa was in addition to arthamandapa received variation in the organisation of the temple, structural lay out, axially or otherwise drastically from the time of Parantakā in the second quarter of the 10th century A.D. The mahāmandapam of Vījnāthasvāmy temple has 29 pillars of which 20 are of chōlā style with the capital of the pillar and pilaster rectangular with its sides cut off at 45° and has the chōlā corbel in the central portion projecting block. The other 9 pillars are of Vijayanagar style lotus corbelled type. The pillars which are octagonal in shape have a base square, shaft, kalasam and kumbam. On the outer wall of Mahāmandapam the features are striking. With a plain cornice and vālivarimānam the mandapa wall raises itself with padmam kumudam and a line of padmam again with a wall with rectangular granite stones goes up with decorated cornice on top with kūdus.

A noted feature in mahāmandapa is the pāthala nandi or the placement of nandi below the sanctum complex. Legend says that worship of Śivā in temple of such type is
significant which equals to Śiva being worshipped at kailāsa
(abode of Śiva).

Second Prākārā or Inner Prākārā

(The second prākārā consists of madappalli, (temple kitchen) the local tree, isolated shrines and the Natārāja mandapa. All of them are within a spacious rectangular enclosure of high walls having the main entrance on the eastern side, the description given here is clockwise as we circumbulate.)

The inner gopurā (Eastern Gopura) or nuḷai vāsal (GP.5)

(The gopura entrance is called nuḷai vāsal and also called Oli mukavasal (Oli - sound, mukavasal - entrance) because the sound of the temple drums was raised here to mark the beginning of a function inside. Over the entrance is a small cell on both sides). The entrance has large wooden doors each 15x4 ft. The basement of the tower is high and built of stone. The superstructure over the plinth is of brick and mortar. It has a rectangular griva surmounted by wagon-vaulted roof sāla-sikharā with nāsika ends and seven stucco kalasās on top. On the body of the gopura there are a number of stucco figures of saivite pantheon which however look modern because of recent renovation. Its stone portion is undoubtedly old and probably belongs to the 14th and 15th centuries.)

Madappalli & ugrāna

(A raised platform extends from the east to the south and from south to the west with the same length and width
(252'x245'). The temple kitchen — madappalli is placed in the south eastern corner as prescribed in the āgama-s. Adjacent to the madappalli is the storeroom known as ugrānam which is meant to keep the provisions and materials for the abishēka and pūjās.

Shrines on the platform on four sides

In the second prākāra raised and closed platforms are seen on all four sides. On the eastern side there are six pillars of which first, third and the sixth pillars contain inscriptions belonging to later chōla period. In the southern side, forty eight pillars in two rows 24 in each are seen (Plate 7). The outer pillars in two rows 24 in each squatting yalis with their trunks curled up and with pronounced abaci. The lotus-petal decoration below has prominent petal tips. The capital as in other pillars has the beginning of the bodhika decoration which in the Vijayanagar period develops into the lotus decoration. Each of the four inner pillars is divided into sections, three oblong and two polygonal. There is a shrine of Sōmaskanda (Esan-Sivā, Pārvathi and Skanda) on the western corridor. There is a closed mandapā adjacent with seventeen pillars square shaped with similar features as those seen in the southern side. (Plate 8) The shrine of Murugā with Valli and Theivānai is next to that of Sōmaskanda connected by a small mandapa with 10 pillars. Both these shrines are of modest size with flat roofs.
In the northern verandā there is a closed room which is used as a granary extended by a closed mandapa with a total of 26 pillars. (Plate 9) The northern veranda is used to keep the vahanā or vehicles which are used on festival days. It joins on the eastern side with the shrine of Natarājā. The Natarājā shrine has no vimāna, and as is customary faces south. Its adhishtanā does not have any work of architectural value. There is a pillared mandapa in front with 15 pillars of which five are of Vijayanagar style with lotus corbels, 3 pillars are of chōlā type with a shaft and lotus on four sides and seven pillars are plain with a shaft. (The metal icon of Natarājā is placed on a raised pita seen with his consort Sivakāmi.)

Isolated shrines in the second prakāra

In the eastern and western sides of the second prakāra there are no isolated shrines. On the southern side is the shrine of Munnaī Vināyakar facing east. (Plate 10) The shrine has an ēkatala vimāna with a stūpi, and four kūdus on all four sides. (GP.7) The vimāna is of dome shape. Another shrine is that of Dakshīṇamūrthi facing south, in a square room with no superstructure. The shrine is similar to vināyakar shrine with a dome shaped vimāna and four kūdus in four corners and a single stūpi. On the northern side there is the shrine of candikēśwarar in a small closed room with an ēkatala vimāna (Plate 11).

Sacred tree (sthalā vriksha) (Plate 12)
Trees were revered as the embodiment of divinities in India and so they are treated as holy shrines receiving all acts of worship. The very ancient and deep rooted cult of tree worship continued in South India particularly in Tamil country even after organised temple worship of the Hindu cults had grown. This would be seen in the association of religious places or sthalā with particular trees, the sthalavrikshā along with particular water course, river, tank or lake (The sthalavrikshā of Vilināthaswāmy temple is Jack fruit tree (Botanical name - Artocarpus integrifolia line) grown in the second prākāra on the western side with an enclosure.) (GP.6)

Third Prakara

(The third prakara has an extension in the western and northern sides. The Dwajasthambā, Nandimaṇḍapā, Vasantha Maṇḍapā, are placed close to one another in the eastern side leading to Rājagōpara)

Nandimaṇḍapā (Plate 13, 14)

(On the eastern side facing the Rājagōpuram is a large hall or closed maṇḍapā with 46 pillars called Nandimaṇḍapā. The balipidam, flag staff or dwajasthambā are seen in this maṇḍapā. The balipidam according to āgamas denotes the Antarātma in which state, the mind should sacrifice then and divert its desires towards the attainment of the feet of the Lord. This place between the balipidam and flag staff is where he has to prostrate and invoke the grace of the Lord.)

The Rājagōpara (Plate 25 & 26)
The main gopura entrance to the temple on the east is called the Rajagopura. Till the time of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I only small gopurams were built on the gateways in order to give the tower gopurams were built on the gateways in order to give the tower (vimana) greater prominence over the mainshrine. To quote a few examples the great Brahadiesvar temple at Tanjavur and temple at Gangai Konda Cholapuram built by the imperial cholas, Rajaraja and Rajendra I respectively. During the later chola and pandyas periods, the gopurams at the entrance of the temple assumed prominence and tall towers at the gateway became order of the day.

The Rajagopuram of Vilinathaswamy temple (120 ft in height) stands on a stone plinth which forms stable foundations for the superstructure. (GP.10) Pyramidal in shape, it is composed of 5 tiers and has seven stucco kalasas at the top. Besides quality, fineness and variety of bold sculpture, more aesthetic design is in its superstructure. The five talas superstructure, a clever variation of the corner elements in the talas haras which are square, octagonal and circular karanakutas conforming to the Nagar, Dravida, and Vesara types, besides there are also panjaras of the apsidal vesara type turned sideways in one of the lower talas corners. The top most tal carries four square karanakutas (Plate 14) again flanked by a pair of recumbent nandis, one on either side which is a renovation of chola Rajendra I in his later temples.
A specific feature in the third prākārā is the location of pīdams (or square platforms) on souther and western sides. (GP.8 & 9) These pīdams are considered significant on account of legendary grant of gift of wealth to saivite triumvirate by the deity of the shrine) The pīdam on southern prakara denotes the grant of jewel or wealth to Sundaramūrti (Plate 15) by Śivā. The pīdam on the western side indicates the grant of paidkkāsu to Tirunāvukkarasu by Śivā at the time of famine. (Plate 16) The wall in the third prākārā on western side is rich with chōḷa inscriptions. (Plate 17)

Isolated shrines in the third prākārā (Plate 18)

The shrine of Padikkāsu Vināyakar is seen on the extended yard of the western prākārā. The shrine is small, yet with a garbagriha, arthamandapā and mahāmaṇḍapā. (GP.11) The shrine has an ēkataḷa vimāna, with a single stūpi four big kūḍūs and small kūḍūs. Another isolated shrine in the prākārā is that shrine of Mahālinga perumān (Plate 19) facing east in the northern prākārā. With only the garbagriha enshrining the Lingā, the square roomed shrine has a rectangular dome and stūpi with padmam and grīva. It is in the same manner a shrine of Mayūranāṭhar is seen in the northern prākārā. (Plate 20)

Yāgasāla

(The yāgasāla is seen on the north eastern corner. It is a open mandapā with a pīda to perform the yāga rituals. The roof of the yāgasāla has four chimneys as outlets for the smoke from the yāga. It does not have any image inside and belongs to the Vijayanagar period.)
Amman shrine (Plate 21 & 22)

(The shrine of Sundaragujambai or Alagiyamamulaiamman is in the northern side)(The garbagriha of the Amman shrine is similar to that of the main but smaller and is 270" x 300" in the outer most. (GP.12) There are five devakoshtas two on the west wall, one on south wall and one on the north wall framed by kutta fronts mounted on the shorter canopy of the niches bear the curved fronts on the top. The niches are flanked on either side by decorated kumbapancharas placed in the recesses of the wall. The other pilasters have six faceted shafts. The padmabandha is followed by kalasa kumbaradi and idal. The carefully carved phalaka is of medium size. Its lower part is scalloped into petals and the top has pushpa potika corbels. The cornice or kodungu is embellished with a string of kudu arches.

The Vimana of the Amman shrine is a dome shaped ekatala vimana)

(The Amman shrine has no arthamandapa. The sanctum is immediately followed by a mahamandapa. It has sixteen pillars which are partially lathe turned in respect of their capitals while the shaft is square and angular marking the beginnings of the characteristicis and almost wholly lathe turned pillars are of round in cross section or with sathuram middles and bevelled corbels on top with tenon like projections. (The mandapa is dated to 15th century A.D.) on its stylistic grounds and the roof is similar to 100 pillared mandapa.
There are two entrances to the shrine, one on the east (main) and another on south. The main gopura (Plate 23) is three tired with stucco female figures. The other gopura on south must have been of a recent origin.

Isolated shrines around Amman shrine

The parivāra devatās namely Ganēsa, (GP.13) Subramanya (GP.14) and candikēswari (GP.15) (Plate 24) have separate shrines on the southern western and northern sides respectively. All the three shrines have garbagriha and arthamaṇḍapa, with a dome shaped vimāna.

The Hundred pillared maṇḍapa or vouvāl nerri mandapam or vouvāl nathā maṇḍapam (Plate 27,28)

The vouvāl nerri or vouvāl nathā maṇḍapam or the hundred pillared maṇḍapam is an unique architectural specimen in the north eastern corner in the third prākāra. An entrance from Amman shrine on the eastern side also leads to vouvāl nerri maṇḍapam. (GP.16)

The roof of the maṇḍapam generally rectangular is always curved, having a lenthwise ridge at the top where the curves on both sides of the rectangle join. There are pillars on both sides of the rectangle, supporting a beam in brick-mortar and the curved superstructure rests on the beam. The two sides of the roof just remain in position by their own weight and thrust. Such roofs are found is almost all temples.)
The wonderful feature of the hundred pillared mandapa in Vilinathaswamy temple is that there are no beams at all on the four pillars on either side of the rectangle. One pillar is connected to the other not by a flat horizontal beam but by an arch. There are three arches on the southern and northern sides based on four pillars each with a larger arch on the east and west, resting on two pillars on either side. (Fig. 5) The whole roof of the mandapam rests on these arches. Not only the roof is curved but the base on which the curves of the roof rests itself is curved. The curve is not vertical but slopes inward.

Normally in most of the temples the hundred pillared mandapa will be haunted by vouvāl, (a Tamil word meaning bat) which is a common feature. But the architectural excellence is such that in the hundred pillared mandapa of Vilinathaswamy temple the vouvāl or bat can not stay on the roof and hence it is called vouvāl nathā mandapam (a mandapam vouvāl or bat can not stay). It shows the great engineering skills of the architects and it has not been imitated anywhere in Tamilnādu.

Tirumadhil or the compound wall

The outermost compound wall is of 18 ft height. About 2/3 of it is built with stone and the rest in brick and mortar. The wall is plain with no sculpture or inscription and hence the construction of the outer wall can be suggested to Vijayanagar period.)
The tīrtham or tank (Fig. 6)

(he sacred tank of the Vilināthaswamy temple is seen outside the temple complex on the eastern side or just in front of the main entrance of the temple. (Plate 29) This was meant for the devotees to have a holy dip and also to supply water to the temple garden. It is 300' x 270'/8 ft from the ground level. It is said that even during the longest spells of rainless seasons the tank does not go dry, probably because of its proximity to Arisilāru. The date of the tank can not be precisely stated due to lack of epigraphical evidence.)

The temple garden

The courtyard opposite to the hundred pillared maṇḍapā affords space for a fairly big garden in front of the temple. There are inscriptive references on the gift of land for flower garden15 or nandavanam. Thiruṅnānasambandar and Thirunāvukkarasu have called the place as elil sūl milalai.16 The garden is now in a neglected state.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it is evident that the Vilināthaswamy temple was in a humble state during the pre tēvaram period. The pilgrimage of Tirunāvukkarasu and Thiruṅnānasambandar in the 7th century to this place and the significant events that had taken place must have proved to be a turning point. Thereafter the place must have become a holy centre to the saivites in the post tēvaram age and attracted the attention of the kings and devotees.
The chōḷās converted the brick temples into stone, from the basement to the stūpi and the temple of Vilimilalai also must have undergone the change. The sanctum circumambulation and the mahāmaṇḍapā belong to the chōḷā period (about 10th - 11th century) with later additions by Vijayanagar as attested by the architectural style of the pillars. The Amman shrine, the gōpurā and Natarāja maṇḍapā also have features of chōḷā and vijayanagar style. The 100 pillared maṇḍapā must have been an addition of vijayanagar period.
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3. Ibid p.142

4. ARE; 382 of 1908 TNSDA; 514 of 1977
   ARE; 423 of 1908 TNSDA; 535 of 1977

5. ARE; 386 of 1908 TNSDA; 517 of 1977

6. ARE; 421 of 1908 TNSDA; 537 of 1977

7. ARE; 385 of 1908 TNSDA; 516 of 1977

8. Stella Kramrich *opcit*, pp 132-136

9. K.R. Srinivasan *opcit*, p.84


11. Ibid

12. ARE; 389 of 1908 TNSDA; 513 of 1977
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   ARE; 386 of 1908 TNSDA; 517 of 1977


14. K.R. Srinivasan *opcit*, p.84

15. ARE; 410 of 1908 TNSDA; 582 of 1977