CHAPTER – II

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SRI VARAGUNAPANDEESWARAR NITHYAKALYANI AMBAL TEMPLE

As a religious institution and place of worship, a temple in India has had a hoary past. As a structure that enshrines a God or some other object of veneration, circumbulation (pradakshina) adoration and worship (pooja), it has had a varied growth in different parts of the subcontinent. This was according to the local needs and cradle requirements and subject, of course, to the interplay or exchange of thoughts and ideas. Though fundamentally the basic elements of the temples and the worship in them derived mostly from Vedic and Puranic sources, in course of centuries they assumed different styles and patterns during their diffusion over wide areas from the cradle centers of the great Indian religions in north India.

The rise of the protestant cults of Jainism and Buddhism during the pre-Christian epoch and the development of their own versions of the legends, creeds, forms of deities, rituals and the like, resulted in their adaptation of one kind or another of the temple form and its adjuncts as suited to the object of their particular worship and its glorification.  


Essentially a temple in its form and layout depended on the object of veneration installed and the method adopted for its worship. The three creeds-Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism - being indigenous, and not exotic, had not to derive the basic forms of their temples from anywhere except from their own land of origin.  

All the three, while retaining the common Indian plans and elevations, and the native principles and techniques of construction, had, however, to show their distinctions by suitable adaptations of their forms and through emphasis on the features of the cognitions of

the respective creeds in the general make-up and content of the structure.\textsuperscript{6}

The builders or the craftsmen - \textit{stapatis}\textsuperscript{7} and the \textit{silpis} - who belonged to the same guilds of artisans had common principles and set methods of design and construction and they worked in collaboration with the priesthood which knew the rituals, the nature of the objects of veneration, and the modes of their worship.

They together determined the forms of the temples with such modifications as suited the respective cases, as also the fixation of the features of the principal deities and the decorations of the structure with iconic and other sculptural embellishments.\textsuperscript{8}

As a result, the \textit{Vastu}, \textit{Silpa} and \textit{Agama} text and canons as described in the \textit{Sastras} were evolved. All that was known and necessary in the creation of the temple and the conduct of worship therein was codified.


\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Stapatis}: Those people who engaged in temple construction with strict agama rules as per silpasastra.

Thus to the Indian mind, the indigenous architecture remains basically and essentially Indian only. It cannot be subdivided into what is usually attempted to be made out as ‘Hindu’, ‘Jain’, or ‘Buddhist’ architecture.

From the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., the Hindus and Jains of the south too adopted the stone medium, and started excavating rock-cut cave-temples, or carving out rock-cut monolithic temple forms, and ultimately building them on stone.

There are such long stone temples created in close succession and extending uninterruptedly through the past thirteen centuries surviving in their thousands all over the Peninsula, more to the far south where most of them are still in use.

The comparative freedom from foreign invasions and disruption in this part of India and the relative strength of the kingdoms and society were some of the contributing factors.

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Even the early Hindu and Jain temples came into being under the royal patronage of the rulers of the three great empires of the south - the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Pandyas - along with the lesser Kingdoms wedged in between.\textsuperscript{13}

The spirit was soon caught up by the nobility, the mercantile corporations and the agricultural trade, and artisan guilds that flourished during those times. The result was that a chain of temples, great and small, studded every village and town of the south, which thus came to be known as the land of temples.\textsuperscript{14}

The temples were documented by their own expressive and detailed inscriptions, again in their thousands. Temples from the Chola times (ninth and tenth centuries) became the very hub of the rural and urban life in all its aspects - religious, cultural, social, economic and educational; and thus became the repository of all that was best in fabric, architecture, sculpture and other arts.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} C. Muthu Pillai, \textit{India Aalyangal} (Tamil), Tamizhan Nilayams, Madras, 1993, pp. 280-285.
\textsuperscript{15} T. Baskara Tondaiman, \textit{Tamizhaka Koilhal Tamilar Panpadu} (Tamil), Subramaniya Pillai Publications, (Tamil), Tirunelveli, 1983, pp. 30-35.
Hinduism witnessed a great revival under the *Nayanmars*\(^{16}\) (Saiva saints) and the *Alvars*\(^{17}\) (Vaishnava saints) who were soon defined and became part and parcel of the pantheon in the ritual and calendar of festivals.

*Sankara*,\(^{18}\) the great philosopher and teacher, also reformed the popular Hindu creeds - the *Shanmata* and the model of the related worship. With such a background the growth of temples and organized temple worship became truly phenomenal.

The southern temples with their characteristic *tiered vimana* shrines, major and minor, their axial and peripheral *mandapa* adjuncts, which are flat-roofed halls and the towering *gopura* entrances, form a distinct class by themselves as against the northern *prahara* temples with their curvilinear super structures, the crowning *amalaka* and *mandapas* with rising *tiered roofs*.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{16}\) *Nayannars* - 63 in number devoted their life for the promotion of Saivism in medieval Tamil Nadu through their devotional Songs.

\(^{17}\) *Alvars* - 12 in number who devoted their life for the promotion of Vaishnavism in Tamil Nadu, through their devotional songs called totally as Naalayira Divya Prabhandam.

\(^{18}\) *Sankara* - Greatest Philosopher of Hinduism who started four mutts for the cause of spreading the religion and author of Southarya Lahari, a Sanskrit work.

\(^{19}\) S. Venkataraman, *South Indian Temples*, National Book Trust of India, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 140 - 150.
It is strongly believed that the *Gopura* of Srirangam Ranganathaswamy temple is considered the earliest *Gopura* style of architecture in India.\(^{20}\) The tradition says that the *vimana* of the *Gopura* came from *Brahmaloga*.\(^{21}\) Initially the *Gopuras* and the *vimanas* were made of granite.

Nowadays cement mixture is utilized for that purpose. In India temples are considered holy places for all religions. Temple is a place where God lives. It is considered the most respectful place.

“*Shouldn’t live in a village if it has no temple*”\(^{22}\)

- Avvaiyar, (a Tamil poet.)

Temples are the treasure houses since time immemorial. The ultimate aim of a human being is to attain the feet of God and to reach *Swargaloga*\(^{23}\) (place of happiness). Visiting temples, doing prayers, performing *poojas* are the ways and means to reach nearer to God. Irrespective of religions, the structure which is the seat of God attracts the attention of entire humanity.

\(^{23}\) *Swargaloga* - It is one among the six logas (world) as per Hindu. Mythology the remaining is vishnuloga, Brahmaloga, Shivaloga and Sundaraloga.
As per the *Sastras*, we can come across two typical words utilised to refer to a temple. They are *Vimana* and *Prasatha*.\(^{24}\)

**Vimana**, the term was carefully utilised to a temple which was constructed strictly according to the rules and regulations of *Silpasastra*. It looks like a *Ratha* (car) of the God. In the Buddhist literature, it means the place of God. In the ethics and moral stories, it is related with a seven storied building. The Nalanda stone inscription of Yasovarmadeva (B.C.530) mentions about **Prasatha Devalaya**, a place of worship. The medieval literature of south India refers to the term *Prasatha* as *Saba, Saala, Praga, Rangamandapa, Manthra*.\(^{25}\) The inscriptions of Nalanda and Ellora speak about the temple as *Thevagraham, Thevakarum, Thevāyathānam, Thevalayam, Thevakulam, Manthiram, Pavanam, Mulasthanam, Vesman, Keerthanam* etc.\(^{26}\)

Thirunavukkarasar *alias* Appar, devoted his attention for the promotion of *Saivism*, mentions five types of temples in his work.

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\(^{24}\) *Prasatha* - In the Hindu temples after the *poojas* and Prayer, Sandal Paste or *virali* turmeric paste or *viputhi* (ash), or kumkum is offered to the devotees as *prasatha*. *Prasatha* also means the living place of God.


They are Karakoil, Nyalar Koil, Kogudi Koil, Prathana Koil and Aalakoil.27

Books related with art and architecture and sculpture refer to the temple in Sanskrit as Vijam, Sree Bogam, Sree Vilasam, Skantha Kantham, Sree Karam, Hasthi Pirushtam and Kerasam.

The Vedic scholars were well versed in human anatomy and physical science. They declared that the existence of Pancha Boothangal (five elements)28 in the human body as sense of feeling, mind, knowledge, soul and paramathma. But the people, due to their illiteracy, were not able to identify and understand the philosophical explanation; hence to explain all these focal points, temples emerged.29 The people began to worship God in different forms gradually.

28 Pancha Boothangal - Five devils - Earth, water, Galaxy, Air and Fire are popularly called as five devils.
29 V.G. Ramakrishna Iyer, The Economy of a South Indian Temple, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 1946, pp. 3-10.
Relationship between Human Body and Temple (Fig: 1)

Temples are closely related and linked with the human body. They are called as *Shethram* and *Sariraprestharam*. The following explanation confirms the genuine relation between them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organs</th>
<th>Parts of temple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Foot</td>
<td><em>Gopuram</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Fingers</td>
<td><em>Kalasam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Thigh, knee</td>
<td><em>Asthana mandapa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Stomach</td>
<td><em>Palipeedam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Chest</td>
<td><em>Maha mandapa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Heart</td>
<td><em>Nandhi mandapa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Neck</td>
<td><em>Arththa mandapa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Head</td>
<td><em>Karpa Graha</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Left ear</td>
<td><em>Chandikeswarar</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Right ear</td>
<td><em>Dakshinamoorthy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Centre of Eyebrows</td>
<td><em>Lingam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Upper - Head</td>
<td><em>Vimana</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In short *Paramathma* lives on the above organs of the temple.\(^{30}\)

If anybody looks at the structure of a temple from an Ariel view, it is easily understood the symbolic nature of a human pose which is in lying position. The primitive man had no idea about God. Gradually the natural calamities attracted his attention; and then he began to worship them. For example, he worshipped thunder, lightning, fire, flood and galaxy.

Even now the people follow the practice of worshipping the various forms of nature.\(^{31}\) The people gradually started to worship sun, moon, and fire as *Kodinilai, Valli* and *Kanthami*.

*Tholkappiam*\(^{32}\), an ancient Tamil Grammar work says that

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“தோற்னுள்ளோய குருக்கிய வாணிவாற சாறிக
வனிகனுடன் பிடித்தேது காண்டோன
dாயல் எந்தேற்கும் கண்களில் தோற்றம்”\(^{32}\)
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The faultless Heaven,

With Kodinilai, Kandami and valli

Would arrive with

Wreath on head At the praise of god

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Agamas

*Agama* is a Sanskrit word which means ‘wisdom’.\(^{33}\) Though it is common to *Vedas* and *Sasthrs*, it explains the various types of worship, *manthras* to be chanted into the deities, and the systems and practices to be followed in a temple.

Types of Agamas

*Agamas* are associated with the names of the respective Gods. The *agamas* which speak about the Shiva worship are *Shaiva Agama*, and the other one about the Vishnu worship is *Vaishnava Agama* and the *Shakthi* worship is *Sakthi Agama*.\(^{34}\)

The *Giriya patham*, *Sariya patham*, *Yoga patham*, *Gyana patham* are the four rules and regulations, explained in the *Saiva Agamas* which consist of twenty eight in number.\(^{35}\)

Agamas and the Structure of a Temple

1. The most important part of a temple is the *Garpagraha* (*sanctum sanctorum*) where the idol of the presiding deity of the temple is

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installed. In the *Saiva* temples, the *Lingam* structure is seen in the *sanctum sanctorum*.

2. The *Saiva Agama* tells that without any structure or any design, Shiva symbolizes through *Linga*.36

3. The *Garpagraha (sanctum sanctorum)* should be smaller than the other chambers of the temple and only one door should be seen.

4. The *Arththa mandapa*, next to the *sanctum sanctorum*, has only two doors; and it is somewhat larger than the *sanctum sanctorum*.

5. In the *Maha mandapa*, the statue of *Nandhi* should be seated in the opposite direction of the presiding deity.

6. The place left for circumbulation in the temple is called *Prahara*. Each temple has three or five *praharas*.37

The *prahara* should have the *kostam*, in which *Dakshinamoorthy* is seen at the southern side, *Chandikesar* at the northern side, *Lingothbavar* at the western side and *Suradevar* at the

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eastern side. The outer prahara has the *Dwajasthamba* (flag staff), *Pali peedam*\(^{38}\) (altar) and the Nandhi (Bull statue).

As per the *Agamas* the compound wall of a temple, should have the images of *Nandhi* and *Shivaganas* to identify the shrine as a Shiva temple. Regarding the construction of a temple, the above mentioned conditions have to be followed. The various types of lands for the construction of a temple as per *Saiva agamas* are the following: *Subathmam, Bathram, Poornam, Thoomisam*, etc.\(^{39}\)

**Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Temple Construction**

The temple selected for research is located in the village of Radhapuram which is surrounded by *Agrahara* streets on the eastern side and western side, and the temples holy pond is on the north eastern side of the temple.\(^{40}\) On the basis of the rules and regulations as well as *agamas*, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram has been constructed.

a) The Vinayaga and Subramanya Shrines are there at the southern and northern side of the *inner prahara* respectively.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{38}\) *Pali peedam* - a raised structure of stone on which offerings to the deity are placed.


\(^{40}\) Personally visited and confirmed.

\(^{41}\) Personally visited and confirmed.
b) In this temple, the priest alone stands for *poojas* and *Aarathanas*. The devotees worshiping the God are to stand in the *maha mandapa* next to *arththamandapa*.

c) A small *Gopura* is on the main entrance of the temple at the east, and a vimana is there over the *garpagraha* (sanctum sanctorum). A *kalasam*42 (finial) is kept on the vimana and gopura.

**Design of the Temple**

The temple stands facing the east. The presiding deity is in the form of *Lingam*. Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal faces towards the south. There is a close resemblance between Goddess Nithyakalyani of Radhapuram and Goddess Meenakshi of Madurai. The two Shrines are considered important. There are four entrances to this temple.43

The important structures in this temple are the following: *sanctum sanctorum, arththa mandapa, maha mandapa, mani mandapa, inner prahara, outer prahara, separate vimanas* at the top of the temple, *Dwajasthamba* and separate *muhappu mandapas* (rest

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42 *Kalasam* - top of the Vimana built over the Sanctum Sanctorum made in gold, copper etc.
halls) at the eastern and southern gate of the temple. The temple has two praharas called the inner prahara and the outer prahara.

The prasadam distributed here is only virali turmeric. Paste made of the turmeric in the stick form is offered by the devotees. People throng in huge number here on every Monday and on Pradosham days. There are so many versions about the emergence of this temple.

One among them says that one Pandiyan saw the flow of blood from a stone when he was ploughing his land and it is said that he identified the stone as a Shivalinga that caused the emergence of this temple. Lord Shiva appeared in a dream of King Varaguna Pandya and tuned him to build a temple at Radhapuram. Accordingly, the King built the temple and installed the presiding deities, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar and his Consort Goddess Nithyakalyani in two separate shrines.

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47 Ibid.
There is a traditional (*Karna Parambara*) story in connection with the origin and growth of Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal Shrine. Uthayathur, a small hamlet, is situated 5 kms from Radhapuram. *Kalyani*, daughter of a celebrated Vellala Chettiar of that village went to Travancore Kingdom for attending a marriage along with her family. After attending the marriage, the Vellala Chettiar along with his daughter *Kalyani* was returning to Uthayathur. Due to sunset they stayed at Radhapuram village.

On that night she was miraculously missing and the family members started searching for her. It is believed that at that time there was a divine voice mentioning that *Kalyani* was accepted by God Varagunapandeeswara as His divine wife; and so the family need not worry about her.

The voice ordered the family to build a separate Shrine to *Kalyani* at the already existing Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple there. This *Karnaparambara* story confirms that originally swamy shrine alone was there and the Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal shrine was a later addition.

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48 Personal interview with A.C. Jayasekaran, Age 55, Radhapuram on 05-01-2014.
Confirming this statement, the Chetty Vellalas of Uthayathur village followed the practice of supplying *Thirumangalyam*, dress materials to Goddess Nithyakalyani on the occasion of her divine marriage (*Thirukalyanam*) every year.\(^{49}\) Till recently it was in practice. At present no such a practice prevails in the temple.

**Structure of the Temple**

At the entrance of the Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Shrine, there are some wonderful sculptures carved out with rare skill and craftsmanship. The most striking feature of the temple is the *vimana* which rises in stately proportions to a height of 30 ft and is built entirely of stone.\(^{50}\) One could see the sculptures of rare workmanship in the niches on the four walls of the central shrine.

The figure of *Nataraja* is a piece of art. The divine consort Goddess *Nithyakalyani* is in a separate Shrine and sanctum.\(^{51}\) In the north - west corner of the temple, there is an elegant Shrine dedicated to Lord Subramanya. The Swami’s Shrine is considered an exquisite piece of decorative art, and a perfect gem of carved stonework. The

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portals of the temple are guarded by huge Dwarabalakas of 10 ft high each made of a single stone. The deity is given a holy bath (abishegam) daily with different substances, like gingelly oil, Panchamirtham, Tender coconut, milk, rose water, sandal paste, vibuthi, etc.

All these substances offered as abishegam are given as prasadam to the devotees who consider them as of divine remedies. In the sanctum sanctorum stands the colossal Lingam, all glowing with lustre. The beauty of the tilak and the purity of the white cloth on the Lingam are unparalleled. The monolithic nandhi (Fig: 2) is placed in the rishaba mandapa in front of the Swami Shrine.

The sthala viruksha kadamba tree is found in the western part of outer prahara. In the Inner prahara, there is a shrine for Vinayaka, locally known as Sankadahara Sathurthi Vinayagar.

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52 Dwarabalakas - In the major Hindu temples, in front of the arththamandapa leading towards Garpagraha (Sanctum Sanctorum), two male or female statues with beautiful decoration are there and they are considered as gatekeepers.

53 Panchaamirtham - a sweety liquid mixture of fruits like banana, jackfruit, mango, pomegranate, black grapes along with sugarcane and honey. It is offered to God as offering during the abisheka.

54 Sthala Viruksha - Every Hindu temple has a holy tree of its own and it is also worshipped by the devotees.

55 Sankadhara Sathurthi Vinayagar - Everymonth Sathurthi thithi falls once and it is celebrated in the Vinayaga temples with special poojas and abishekas and at the Radhapuram temple a separate vinayaga statue has been designated to perform it.
On a single piece of stone in the Navagraha mandapa, all the 27 stars and 12 signs of zodiacs (rasis) have been carved out. The temple is noted for its architectural grandeur. Its exquisite sculptures are noteworthy.

The temple is artistic, colourful and attractive. The praharas are full of sculptures relating to various episodes from puranas; and all-around the temple from the roof to adhisthana, there are hundreds of figures carved beautifully in stone. There are innumerable figures of damsels in dancing poses in various mandapas.\textsuperscript{56} Studies of animal figures in sculptures in this temple deserve special mention. The pillars inside the shrine have been carved very delicately with numerous floral designs.

The temple faces the east. Crossing the main entrance, one can reach a specious pillared hall muha mandapa, in which the ceiling stands embellished with beautiful sculptures. Next to the Dwajasthamba (Fig: 3), there is a mandapa where the palipeedam

(Fig: 4) and the Shrines of Ganapathy, (Fig: 5) and Subramania (Fig: 6) are situated.57

The structure of the temple is of great architectural interest. The Dwarabalakas (Fig: 7) in the eastern entrance of the shrine are the example of the minute works of the artisans. In the north eastern of the temple, there is a monolithic representation of the Navagraha shrine (Fig: 8). The temple is enclosed in a single courtyard

This is one of the most important of the temples erected by King Varaguna Pandya (Fig: 9) during the 12th century. The sculptures found on the outer walls of the temple are of fine workmanship.58

The temple faces the east and has so constructed that the rays of the sun pass through the entrance and fall upon a particular part of lingam on certain days every year.59

This temple is famous for the beauty of its sculptures. The two praharas contain shrines dedicated to various Saivite saints and also to the manifestation of Shiva.60 It is a unique temple for Shiva

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58 Ibid.,pp.1-5.
worship. A majestic Linga is there at the sanctum sanctorum. It looks so beautiful. Just outside the sanctum sanctorum, there is the Nandhi made of granite with beautiful designs.

A small muha mandapa is also there near the sanctum sanctorum. Very close to the Shiva Shrine, there is a temple has been dedicated to Goddess Nithyakalyani facing the south.

There is a close resemblance between Goddess Nithyakalyani and Goddess Meenakshi of Madurai. In front of the Swami Shrine two Dwarabalakas are beautifully installed. The Muha mandapa is attached with these two Shrines having a lot of sculptures.

An old bronze bell is available in this temple. It is said that in the past, whenever the temple bell rang, the sound reached the entire surroundings.\footnote{Personal interview with V.K. Parvathinathan Chettiar aged 70, Philanthropist, Radhapuram on 07.01.2014.}

Just outside the two temples, there is an inner prahara which contains a number of small shrines. In the inner prahara there are shrines dedicated to Ganapathy, Vishnu, Dakshinamoorthy, Kasivishwanathar, Nagarajar, Subramaniyar, Chandikeshwarar, Sanieeshwarar, Durgadevi, Chandran and Suriyan. There is a
significant addition to this temple, i.e. the Nataraja Shivakami shrine. The idol of Nataraja with Shivakami is majestic in appearance.

It is customary to worship Lord Varunagunapandeeswarar by entering the arththa mandapa from the western side instead of the main entrance. The outer prahara is enlivened with the presence of four Vinayaka idols. The vasantha mandapa has on its pillars, fine sculptures of Muruga holding spear, Ugra Narasimhar, and Agni Veerabhadrar.

**Ganapathy Shrine**

The Ganapathy Shrine is situated in the extreme southwest corner of the temple facing the east. The idol of Lord Ganapathy in sitting posture is called Kannimoola Ganapathy. Next to Urchavamoorthy of Ganapathy, this is taken out in procession during the festival. It is also facing the east. The Urchavamoorties are made of Panchalohas\(^{62}\) (five metals).

**Subramanyaswamy Shrine**

A temple has been dedicated to Lord Subramanya along with his divine wives Devayanai and Valli. This shrine is big in size. A separate muha mandapa is there for this temple alone. The idol Lord

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\(^{62}\) Panchologas - Five metals - Gold, Silver, Copper, Lead and Iron.
Subramanya is four-armed, and it holds *vajra* and *sakti* in the rear hands. He wears *kandamakuta* and *Channavira*, the *siraschakra*, the *jathas* falling over the nape, the *padmapiedam* resting on the *bhadrappeedam* which are all early features. The central loop, the bands of the girdle, the bows and tapering ends of the *katisutra*, the tassels of the upper garment falling outside close to the legs - all proclaim an early date.63

**Chandikeswara Shrine**

The existence of *Chandikaeshwara* Shrine facing the south is unique in character. Normally in a Chandikaeshwarar temple we cannot come around the temple. But as far this temple is concerned we can reach the temple in two directions. The devotees worship *Chandikaeshwarar* by clapping their hands.

**Sanieeshwarar Shrine**

A separate shrine dedicated to Saneeshwarar is situated very near to the Chandikaeshwarar shrine which faces the south. Every Saturday, hundreds of devotees throng the temple for getting His blessings. The idol of Saneeshwarar is 2 feet high, in the standing posture.

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**Nayanmars**

As in the Madurai Meenakshiamman temple, in this temple also there is a separate Shrine for the 63 *Nayanmars* who dedicated their life for the cause of Saivism. Every day, six - time poojas are performed in this *sannathi* also.

**Dakshinamoorthy**

A small typical Shrine has been built for Dakshinamoorthy facing the south. On Thursdays, thousands of devotees will come, worship and get his blessings.\(^{64}\) The temple has four entrances from four directions. The majestic doors made of wood are strong and highly artistic in character. Normally the eastern and southern entrances are open during the *pooja* time. In front of the eastern entrance in the north- eastern side, we can see the holy pond (*Theppakulam*) there. There is an outer *prahara* which consists of so many Shrines.

**Kannivinayakar Shrine** (outer *prahara*)

A *Kannivinayakar* Shrine is situated in the extreme south- west corner facing towards the east. Vinayaga statue is surrounded by

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number of *Nagaraja* (cobra) idols. There is a temple *Nandavanam* in which the temple *Stalaviruksham*, *Vilvam* tree, is found.

**Dharma Sastha Shrine**

A small Shrine dedicated to *Dharma* Sastha is also there in the outer *prahara*, and it attracts hundreds of pilgrims. During the Tamil month of *Karthigai*, *Margazhi* and *Thai*, thousands of Iyappa devotees come there and start their journey.

**Kalabhairavar Shrine**

Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple is famous for its *Kalabhairavar* shrine also. A beautifully decorated 4 feet high granite idol of *Kalabhairavar* blesses hundreds' of devotees every day. It is strongly believed that *Kalabhairavar* is protecting the common people free from accidents. On the *Ashtami* day hundred of people come to this Shrine in the evening hours. In addition to these, there is a small shrine dedicated to Anjaneya. It is a beautifully carved statue in a standing posture facing the west.65

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Theppakulam (temple tank)

According to *Dravida Silpa* tradition, it is necessary to construct sacred tanks in temples. They were constructed to facilitate the pilgrims to have fresh bath before entering the temple. Lord Shiva is said to have five faces Esanam, Agoram, Vamadevam, Tatpurusham and Satyojatham. In addition to this, there is another face called Adhomukha as mentioned in *Kalivenba*. These five faces are represented in Radhapuram as five holy *tirthas*, Satyojatham in the west, Vamadevam in the north, Tatpurusham in the east, Agoram in the south and Esanam known as Shivapadalagangai in the middle of the eastern corridor of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple.

These five *tirthas* are called *Panchabrahma mahapunniya tirtha* which are said to have been established by *Brahma*, the Lord of creation. These are also surrounded by many other *tirthas* like Mukamosanam, Vidyatirtham, Trivargam and Gnanamurdam. Thus, it is evident that Lord Shiva is represented here in the form of *tirthas*. This sacred tank encloses an area of about 266 feet x 168 feet. The

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mystical efficacy of this tank is said to maintain the health and cure skin diseases of those who take bath in it on full - moon days.

**Gopura**

“Gopura” is a Sanskrit word meaning a towering gateway of a town or temple.\(^{68}\) It is considered as the *Stularupam* of a town or temple. It is also considered as the *Stularupam* or gross form of divinity, and hence regarded as efficacious as the *garbhagraha*.

This consists of a structure which was basically rectangular in ground plan with a huge entrance and has receding storeys rising into several floors\(^{69}\) in the Dravidian style of architecture.

Generally *gopuras* are erected over one or more of the cardinal points of a temple and the number of *gopuras* depend upon the number of enclosures. The word *gopura* was first recorded in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to mean the gateway to the town. In the Buddhist *Chaityas* and *Viharas*, The *gopura* can be seen on the gateway determined on the cardinal points, but its shape is different.

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It was marked by the terracotta figures and called *toranas*. The best examples of these are found in the Sanchi stupa.

The origin of the *gopuras* is traced back to the early structures of the Pallavas. In the Kailasanatha temple of Rajasimha, *Tavara Calai* is seen above the entrance. This *Tavara Calai* served as a prototype for the later developed *gopura*.

Under the Cholas, gopuras developed and contained a few tiers designed with sculptures. In the initial stage of architectural history of Tamil Nadu, *gopura* was of a modest size in a place secondary to that of *vimana* but at the later stages the process took place in the reverse direction.

From the period of the Pandyas special attention was given to the construction of *gopuras* imposing in their mature form. These *gopuras* became as mighty as the *Chola vimanas*. The glorious examples of these are Jambukeswara temple at Tiruvanaikkal, the western *gopura* of the Chidambaram temple, the *gopura* at Kumbakonam, and the eastern *gopura* of Tirumalai. Generally *gopura*

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is an entrance or passageway through its interior where the temple has an access.

The passageway runs through the main cornice and divides the cornice into two equal and separate portions. Normally the entryway has its height and width in the ratio of 2:1. The entryway in almost all gopuras has two dvaras at an equal distance from the outer and inner entrance respectively. They are infact doorways or doorframes and not doors.71

Significantly at Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple at Radhapuram, no rajagopura is seen. But the main entrance in the eastern side is very gigantic and the wooden doors are marvellously designed and carved.

Normally in a Hindu temple, Theppakulam (temple tank) is built like that of the total area of the respective temple.72 Like that the Theppakulam (temple tank) was built exactly identical with the area covered in the temple complex. The Theppakulam at Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple has been

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72 Ibid., pp. 135-136.
beautifully built with granite steps on four sides. This pond is utilized for the theppam festival during the festival season.

**Dwajasthamba**

A majestic, tall, beautifully carved copper *Dwajasthampa* (flag staff) is seen in front of the temple. The *Dwajasthamba* of this temple is a unique one. It was built in the Kollam era 767, that is to say 1792 A.D. *Periya Thiruvadi Thiripoovana* Sakkaravarthi was responsible for the installation of the *Dwajasthamba*. This flag mast is made of wood collected from *Kakkachimalai*, a mountain identified with *Swami Ayyappan* in the erstwhile *Venadu*. Later, the *Dwajasthamba* was covered with copper sheet.

On the top of the flag staff there is a Nandhi made up of *panchaloha* (five metals) – gold, silver, copper, bronze and brass. It is believed that, when a devotee comes around the flagstaff and *navagraha*, he will get redeemed automatically.

During the Chitrai festival, the flag hoisting ceremony is performed and the holy flag is hoisted at the top of this *Dwajasthampa*. A holy well is there in front of the Lord Nataraja Shrine in the premises of the temple.
It is said that this well is the main sources of holy water to this temple without any interruption for centuries. Eventhough this region witnessed a drought during the past; the temple well never became dry and provided holy water without any break.\textsuperscript{73}

**Hanuman Sannathi**

It is an essential to have Hanuman Sannathi as far as a Vishnu temple is concerned.

Eventhough the Ramanathapuram temple is a Shiva temple. One can see a small Hanuman Shrine which is carved at the bottom of a pillar, situated in the southern outer prahara facing the west. Due to the efforts of the devotees, small shrines have been built recently and special poojas are performed during the festivals like Rama Navami, Hanuman Jeyanthi etc.

**Inner Prahara**

The AdiharaNandhi (Fig: 11) is seen seated towards the north, at the eastern side of this prahara Suriyan (the Sun), (Fig: 12) at the southern side facing the west and the Chandran (moon), (Fig: 13) at the north. Suradevar (Fig: 14) is situated at the western part of the

\textsuperscript{73} S.M. Lakshmana Chettiar, (Somalay), *Tirunelveli Mavattam* (Tamil), Asian Educational Publications, Madras, 1965, pp. 150-160.
south prahara and sixty three Nayanmars (Fig: 15) with ten Rishis\textsuperscript{74} are seen there.

The Kanni Pillaiyar who blesses the devotees is also seated in the eastern direction and Lord Dhakshinamoorthy (Fig: 16) facing the south and on the eastern side is the statue of Varagunapandya supposed to be the ruler who built the temple.

The western side of the inner prahara has an Urchava mandapa, in which Urchavamoorthies of Meenakshisundareswarar, Panchalingamoorthy, (Fig: 17) Saraswathi Devi (Fig: 18) and Murugan (Sri Subramaniyan) with Valli and Theivanai (Fig: 19) are seen facing the east.

Kasilingam supposed to be the replica of Kasi Viswanatha (Fig: 20) of Varanasi situated at the northern side is facing towards the east and Gajalakshmi (Fig: 21) is facing the south. Saneeswaramoorthy (Fig: 22) just opposite to Chandikeswarar (Fig: 23) facing the south is there. Regarding the statues in the northeastern part, Ambalavana Shivakami is seated facing the south in the mandapa. Kalabairavar (Fig: 24) is also seen in this mandapa.

\textsuperscript{74} Rishis - Excluded from family life, concentrated their attention to reach God, maintained Thyanam, and Meditation.
Sri Varagunapandleeswarar, the presiding deity of this temple is seated in the sanctum sanctorum, in a linga posture. Manonmaniammai, another incarnation of Sakthi is situated very near to the presiding deity. In the arththa mandapa, Chockanathamoorthy is there. In the maha mandapa, Anukai Pillaiyar and Nandhi are present. From the northern side facing the east, Lord Subramania with Valli and Theivanai, Vinayaga facing the south and Sundaramoorthy Nayanar, Agasthiyar, Thirunavukarasar, Nandhidevar, Cheramanperumal Nayanar, Gangalanathar, Seevilee Nayagar, Thirugnanasambandar, Manickavasagar, et.al are installed.

Totally 27 copper idols are there in this chamber alone. The Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal is installed in the karpa graha (sanctum sanctorum) facing the south in a separate shrine. The Palliyarai (bed chamber) is in the north eastern side of the arththa mandapa in which there is a Nachiyar statue. A Nandhi (Fig: 25) is also there at the Mani mandapa.

**Outer Prahara**

At the entrance, Thinvaayil kavalar is seen on both sides of mani mandapa and a Pillayar is seen in the south and Lord Murugan
is seen in the north. In front of this, *Kodimara mandapa* is seen in which *nandhi, palipeedam* and *Dwajasthamba* (flag staff).

In Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, a *muhappu mandapa* is seen with a majestic entrance on the southern side and *Alangaara mandapa* and *Kalyana mandapa* are seen adjacent to the *muhappu mandapa*. In the north-western side of outer *prahara, vasantham mandapa* is to be seen. On the northern side *Velvichalai, Kinaru* (well); (Fig: 26) *Kalanjiyam* (store room) and *Kuthar mandapa, Chithrai mandapa* are situated.\(^{76}\) Next to the eastern entrance, *Kudai veedu vaasal, Panthal mandapa, Anuppu mandapa* and *Kottahai* are seen.

At the southern gate after the entrance, there is an *alankara mandapa* where *Ganapathi* is seated in the extreme south, *Sastha* (Fig: 27) is facing the east and in addition to them *Poorna Pushkalai* and *Agasthiyar*, (Fig: 28) elephant, horse, snake and angels are also seen. *Maada theru (Maada Street)* on all the four directions which were there is a *Chithrai mandapa* are there.

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\(^{76}\) Personal interview with *P.Shankar* aged 55, Radhapuram on 03.03.2014
Literature

Vanniya Perumal Pillai of Surangudi has composed Goddess Nithyakalyani Ammal Pillaiyamil in praise of the presiding deity. Narayanaswamy Naidu of Tatchanallur and Pannirukai Perumal Pillai of Pathamadai have composed Anthaathi in praise of the presiding deity. Significantly the temple occupied a unique place in the social system of the history of Tamil Nadu. It is surrounded by Maada theru (Maada Street) on all the four directions which were once occupied by dancing girls, the devadasis. Significantly, when the Devadasi system was abolished in Tamil Nadu due to the efforts of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, a social reformer, the influence of the dancing girls came to an end. The remaining monuments also speak about the glory of the place.

A Temple with car festival is a significant one in the history of temple in Tamil Nadu. In order to conduct the car festival at this temple during the month of Chithrai every year (April), four Rathaveethis77 (car streets) were laid.

77 Rathaveethis - the streets where the temple cars and to vehicles are visiting to meet the devotees.
Madapalli (Kitchen) (Fig: 29)

Madapalli means the temple kitchen. It is also called as Thirumadapalli. The kitchen of this temple is 82 feet. long and 18 feet. wide situated at the south eastern corner of the inner prahara which is very spacious.

Every temple has a Madapalli (kitchen) for the preparation of Neivedhyam to be offered to God. Neivedhyam is a sacred one, and it should not be prepared outside the temple.

So to offer varieties of food items to the God, Madapallis were built in every temple. Here food items like Panchasaatham, Appam, Puttu, Panchamirtham, Payasam, Aravanai, and Pongal are prepared and offered to God.

Palliyarai (Divine Bed Chamber) (Fig: 30)

In all major temples there is a place called Palliyarai where the Swami and Ambal take rest in the night hours. It is believed that every day the deities take rest there. Next to the Goddess Nityakalyani Ambal shrine there is a palliyarai in which Sri

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78 Panchamirtham - a mixture used in the abhesheka in which five fruits are mixed.
Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani will take rest in the night.

The temple looks like a traditional house in which palliyarai is just like that of a bed room. A number of poojas are performed in this chamber; and its door has been beautifully decorated with a number of musical bells.

**Vehicle Room** (Fig: 31)

In the Alankara mandapa there is a Vahanapura (vehicle room) where the vehicles of various kinds with artistic beauty are parked and preserved. They are used during the festivals. Vehicles like peacock, dove, elephant, horse, bull, lion, nandhi and chapparam (howdah) are preserved there. Significantly this temple has a bhojana salai (dining hall).

In the temple architecture, there is no bhojana salai\(^{79}\) within the main temple. But in this temple, such a one is there. During the festival seasons, the devotees get the chance of taking food within this temple. It is called Annathanam (free distribution of food).

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\(^{79}\) *Bhojana salai* - dining hall where the devotees will take food after poojas.
Yagasalai (Fig: 32)

It is situated on the northern side of Chithrai mandapa facing the south. In this mandapa, the Panchaloha idols\textsuperscript{80} of Swami and Ambal are kept seated during the festival time. On that occasion Velvi, Yaga and sacred fire are performed in the yagasalai.

Paththaayapurai or Kalanjiyam /Store Room (Fig: 33)

As per records, it is believed that the temple owned approximately 4500 acres of both nanjai and punjai lands. It was customary in the past, when the harvesting was over the foodgrains were preserved in the paththaayapurai (store room) for the next six months.

Unfortunately, nowadays no tenant comes forward to supply the dues to the temple in time. The temple store room is situated at the top of Chithrai mandapa. Vigrah\textsuperscript{s} (idols) are designed as the structure enclosing the power of the earthly bodies. In Tamil Nadu, the vigrah\textsuperscript{s} originated from the Linga worship. The earliest temple

\textsuperscript{80} Panchaloga - five idols are used to prepare the temple icons.
idol available in the state belonged to second century B.C. It has been unearthed at Kudimallam village.\textsuperscript{81}

**The Mahalingam of Varagunapandeeswarar**

It is strongly believed that King Varaguna Pandya, the prominent Pandya King who had Madurai as his capital, came to the southern end of his kingdom and established this temple at the place which was called as *Rajarajapuram*, latterly it was called Radhapuram.

The presiding deity in the *Linga* form is called Varaguanapandeeswarar *Mahalingam*. This *Linga* possesses six characters and that is called *Pagam*, from there the term *Bhagavan* emerged.\textsuperscript{82} The devotees get His blessings since its inception.

*Ishwarya, vairakya, veeriya, puhal, thiru* and *puthi* are the six salient characters of *pagam* and the holder of God. In this temple, the presiding deity *Varagunapandeeswarar* is in the *Linga* shape. He is considered the *Mahadeva* controlling the duties like creation, protection, destruction, disappearance and blessing which are being done by deities like *Brahma, Vishnu, Uruthiran, Mageswaran*, and


\textsuperscript{82} V. Kapila, *Shiva-Natesa, Cadence and Form*, In Discourses on Shiva University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 123.
Sathashivan; and the Mahalingam is supposed to enclose all these things into one.

**Structure of Mahalingam**

The Mahalingam of this temple enshrined in the sanctum sanctorum was fixed after accumulating a number of gems like emerald, pearl, ruby and diamond and also golden plates at its adhistanam (base).

The Mahalingam of Radhapuram temple looks like Thiruvannamalai Arunachaleswarar; and the Ambal looks like Madurai Meenakshi.83

**Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal**

The combination of three Goddesses is known as Parasakthi who is always protecting the people from Panchabootha (five elements of Nature). The presiding deity of this temple Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal is enshrined in the separate sanctum facing the south, and she appears as Sivasakthi, Parasakthi, Icchasakthi, Gnanasakthi, and Kiriyasakthi. The lotus bud in one hand and the other hand is

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83 Personal interview with K.S. Chandrasekhara Pattar aged 50, temple priest, Radhapuram on 10.04.2014.
stretched; it looks beautiful. Goddess Nithyakalyani is identical with Madurai Meenakshi, the titular head of Madurai city.

**Palipeedam (Altar)**

The *Palipeedam*\(^{84}\) (altar) is situated between the flag staff and the *Nandhi*. It is believed that before this altar, one should lose *kamam, krotham, lobam, bogam, matham, machariyam*\(^{85}\) etc. Standing near the altar, one can pray to God with peace of mind.

**Sthala virutcham (The Sacred Tree in the Temple) (Fig: 34)**

Each temple has its own tree familiarly called as *Komaram* or *Sthalavirutcham*. In some temples, the flag staff is also called as *Komaram*. It has its own significance. When a temple is constructed after cleaning the forest, the authorities and architects give a particular tree an exception and that tree is announced as *Sthalavirutcham*. Fortunately this temple has five *Virutchams* - *Ayadirachta virutcham, Mangiferaindica virutcham, Kadambu virutcham, Vilvam (Aegle Marmealous virutcham)* and *Eugenia Tumbulana virutcham*.

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\(^{84}\) *Palipeedam* - a raised structure of store on which offerings to a deity are placed.

Theertham (Holy water - Holy tank)

The holy water of the temple pond is known as *Theertham*. It is situated at the north eastern side of the temple. This holy water is taken for *abisheka* (sacred bath) of the deities. At present due to water scarcity, water is being taken from a bore well within the temple complex and used.

Nava Marangal (Nine Holy trees)

This temple has nine holy trees. They are *Kadambu*, *Vembu* (Fig:35), *Vilvam* (Fig:36), *Naval* (Fig:37), *Maa* (Mango) (Fig:38), Pipul, (Fig:39), *Thenai* (Coconut) (Fig:40), *Manjana*, *Athi* trees and the *Vilvam* leaves are used for regular *poojas*.

Sandal Stone

Normally in all the Shiva temples, sandal paste is given to the devotees as *prasadam*. In Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram also sandal paste is given to the devotees as *prasadam*. Due to the significance and priority of *virali* turmeric paste, sandal paste gets only secondary importance. There is

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a separate stone for sandal paste preparation. The temple prasadam turmeric paste is also prepared in a separate room.

**Thiru Uralum, Ulakkayum** (Fig: 41)

The turmeric offered by the devotees in huge quantity is in the manjal mandapa which is near the Dwarabalagas. The crushed turmeric is pounded and mixed with water and offered to God; and then distributed to the devotees as prasadam. The crusher is locally called ural (mortar) and ulakkai (pestle).87

**Thiru Vilakku (Decorative Lamp)** (Fig: 42)

There are 32 beautiful decorative lamps available in this temple. Among them 2 lamps of 7 feet height in bronze are used during festival times. It is said that these decorative lamps were denoted by the royal families, which ruled the region through the ages.

**Auditorium** (Fig: 43)

In the northern part of the temple, there is an auditorium. This is a recent addition. The cultural programmes take place here during festivals.

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87 Personally visited and confirmed
A Survey on the Radhapuram Inscriptions

This temple has a number of inscriptions, among which some of them got published and the remaining has not been published so far. These inscriptions are there on the eastern wall of the Nandhi mandapa in the inner prahara. These inscriptions narrate the donations given by philanthropists to this temple. The donations include landed properties and materials like rice, paavai vizhakku (lamp), etc. As per inscripational evidences, it is estimated that the land- properties owned by the temple extend to more than 4500 acres. 88

Unfortunately, successive white washing and painting caused damage to the inscriptions. If the Archaeological Department of the government of Tamil Nadu takes necessary steps to preserve these inscriptions, it will be a benefit to the lovers of history. The inscriptions which have been engraved on the walls of this temple provide a mine of information with regard to the socio-economic conditions of the locality.

Caste, the characteristic social institution of India was created by the Aryans; and later, it was also introduced into the Tamil country. The inscriptions found in this temple reveal that there were many communities such as Brahmins, Vellalas, Nagarathars and Idaiyars (Yadhavas).

**Brahmins**

It is a belief that Brahmins sprang from the mouth of Lord Brahma. Brahmins played a very important role in the history and culture of Tamil Nadu, and they occupied a prominent position in the society. They embodied the most intellectual section of the Aryan migrants to the Tamil country. Though there are indications of castes in the Sangam literature they are not clear or well defined. Tolkappiyar, the Tamil grammarian of the 3rd century B.C. in his monumental work *Tolkappiyam* narrates the presence of Andhanar, Arasar, Vaishyas, and Vellalas in the society.

However, works relating the divisions mentioned by him are different from the fourfold *Varna* system of the Aryans. It is clear that

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the *Varna* type of caste divisions came to be established in the Sangam society itself.\(^{90}\)

Brahmins are otherwise known as *Andhanar, Parpanar* and *Irupirappalar* (*dvija*-twice born). The terms *Vediyar, Maraiyor, Aravor\(^{103}\) and so on were also used to denote the Brahmins. The study recitation and teaching of the *Vedas*, performing sacrifices, giving gifts and receiving donations were the six-fold functions of the *Brahmins*. Yet Tolkappiyar has set out that Brahmins could also become kings.

In the Sangam period, Brahmins were employed as advisors, messengers and preceptors. It is true that the Kalabhras were opposed to the Hindu faith and *Varnasrama dharma*; and disposed to put a stop to the special privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins in their period.

Inscriptions in the *Velvikudi* copper plates\(^{91}\) mention that a Brahmin called Narasingan, a descendant of *Korkai Kilan* Nerkorran prayed to the Pandya King *Jatilaparantaka* Nedun Chadayan (A.D. 765-815) to restore his original grant which was granted to Korkai

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Kilan Nerkorran by Palyagasalai *Mudukudumi*, a Sangam Pandya King.

During the rule of the Pallavas, Brahmins enjoyed a privileged position with the grant of *brahmadeyas*. Brahmins in large numbers migrated from Andhra country to Tamil Nadu and settled in Thondaimandalam and the Kaveri regions. The residential area of Brahmins was known as *agraharam*. Among the Brahmins, there were divisions based on numerous *gotras* and *sutras*. They came into three groups as *Adi Saiva* Brahmanas, Vaishnava Brahmanas and Veda-reciting Brahmanas. Since they were favoured by the Kings, they were politically powerful.92

The sway of Brahmins was very much in the Chola period. Since there was a growth of temples during this period, a large number of Brahmin families from the north were invited to settle down in the Chola Kingdom. Several *Brahmadeyas* were gifted to them.

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Vellalas

Agriculturists or Vellalas formed the backbone of the society. Their professions were cultivation, cattle breeding, business, weaving and service to the twice born. They acted as high officials in the Chola administration. As a result of royal patronage and large land holding, a number of divisions arose among the Vellala community. Vellalas took many titles such as Pillais, Mudalis and the like.

Idaiyars (Yadhavas)

Idaiyars or Konars were the great shepherd-caste of the Tamil country. They considered themselves as descendants of Lord Krishna. They lived in specified areas known as Ayarpadi, Aykudi, and Dwarapati and so on. Though they patronised the cult of Krishna, there is evidence that they made grants to Shiva temples also.

Nagarathars (Vaishyas)

Nagarathars, a Vaishya Community of Radhapuram held a social status on the economic basis. Tolkappiyar has referred to the

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trading communities of *Vanigas* in his literary work.\(^9^4\) From this, it is clear that there were traders in that period also.

The Tamil society, even from the Sangam age, was specializing in inland and maritime trade. Trade was flourishing during the Chola period. The traders were found to be very opulent men and also pious and religious minded people. There are inscriptions conveying the news of endowments to the temples by the trading community.

**Charitable Endowments**

People of Radhapuram and the surrounding villages made different types of donations to this temple in token of their religious zeal. Information on such gifts are scattered in several inscriptions and copper plates. They are related to the setting up of the images, grant of lands, lighting of lamps, provision of lamp stands, gift of puja articles and construction of the temple flag staff. The majority of gifts were in the form of lands.

**Land Donations**

One of the inscriptions found in the centre of northern compound wall of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani temple

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mentions the land donation given during the reign of Maravarman Thiripuvana Sundara Pandya, a Pandya King in A.D. 1218 (2\textsuperscript{nd} year of this reign).

It mentioned that the Nagarathars of Pusankudi village donated lands during the second year of King Maravarman Tiripuvana Sakravarthi Sundara Pandya Thevar’s reign for providing Neivedya and daily pooja to Varagunapandeeswarar.\footnote{A.R.S.I. E. for 1929-30, Ins. No. 350.}

An inscription found in the walls of the temple on the north, west and southern sides mentions that during the 5\textsuperscript{th} year of Maravarman Tiripuvana Sakravarthi Sundara Pandya Thevar’s reign, (A.D1221) One Arjunan Veeranambi alias Chatha Peran donated land for daily poojas in this temple.\footnote{A.R.S.I. E. for 1929-30, Ins. No. 351.}

During the 20\textsuperscript{th} year of Maravarman Thiripuvana Sakravarthi Sundara Pandya Thevar’s reign A.D.1236, a Devadasi Narththaki arranged for concluding Thiru Aalathi, a renovation ceremony. The inscription found in the south-west corner of inner prahara of the temple evidences the events mentioned above.
Maravarman Thiripuvana Sakravarthi Sundara Pandya Thevar willingly ceded the Chola Nadu to the Chola King in the 20th year of his reign (A.D.1236). The inscription found in the Vinayaka temple on the South-west corner of the inner prahara bears authentication to this fact.

In A.D.1540, (Kollam Era 715), a land donation was made to this temple to perform Ravivarman Chanthi, a special pooja. The inscription found on the eastern wall of the Mahamandapa of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani temple says the following: During the reign of Seithunganaattu Sankara Narayan Ventru Monkonda Poothala Vira Ravivarman, land donation was given to perform the special pooja Ravivarman Chanthi.

Another inscription dated 20th Aavani, Kollam Era 724 (A.D. 1549) informs that land donation was made to conduct Sripali pooja by Ramappa Nayak, the royal representative.

The inscription found on the northern side of the east gate of this temple dated Vaikasi 30, Kollam Era 746 (A.D.1571) mentions that during the reign of Seithunkanaattu Sankara Narayan Ventru

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97 A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 358
98 A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 356
99 A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 357
Monkonda Poothala Vira Ravivarman, one Nainar Muthaliar along with some others started Rayarayapuram Chanthai (Market) and asserted that one third of the total income of the market should be given to the temple.\(^\text{100}\)

**Donation of Cash**

The inscription found on the South-east corner of the car street dated Kollam Era 772 (A.D.1597), mentions that during the reign of Mahamandaleswarar Krishnappa Nayak, the royal representative Ezhumpudalahiyaan along with the people of Pusankudi village donated cashgrant to this temple for conducting daily poojas and to pay remuneration to musical artistes of this temple.\(^\text{101}\)

**Donation of Domestic Animals**

Significantly, an inscription installed on the western wall of the inner prahara of this temple dated A.D 1119 highlights the donation of domestic animals to this temple. It says that during the 9\(^{th}\) year of Sadayavarman alias Thiripuvana Chakravarthi Kulasekhara Thevar’s reign, the Saiva Brahmins attached to this temple received sheep

\(^{100}\) A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 357.  
donation from one *Senthaviman* for the maintenance of the lamps in the temple.\textsuperscript{102}

An inscription found on the southern wall of the inner prahara supplies unique information that during the 48th reign year A.D.1118 of a Chola King, he donated cows to this temple. Unfortunately the name of the King is not known.\textsuperscript{103} An inscription in Sanskrit dated (Samvat 882) A.D 1707, is disfigured. Yet the words ‘*Sri Somanadha Deva* and *Ganapathy*’ are visible and readable.\textsuperscript{104} The *Dwajasthambaa* was donated and installed by one *Periya Thiruvadi Chakravarthi* alias Rajendran in A.D.1792 (Kollam Era 967). A protuberant inscription installed on the left side of entrance door evidences the installation of *Dwajasthambaa*.\textsuperscript{105}

One of the temple records mentions the donation of 150 gold coins to this temple by the founder of this temple Varaguna Pandya.

Another inscription found in one of the two *Chatrams*, in perumal koil street of Radhapuram mentions that the untiring efforts

\textsuperscript{102} A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 352.
\textsuperscript{103} A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 354.
\textsuperscript{104} A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 353.
\textsuperscript{105} A.R.S.I.E. for 1929-30, Ins. No 359.
of a dancing girl for the maintenance of this temple and also the establishment of two Chatrams (Choultries) in this temple town.

One of the temple records gives the list of temple employees; and it also mentions that they were highly rewarded through the endowments and other income of the temple.

Yet some other records confirm the land donation given by King Varagunapandya I, to the temple for providing food to the Brahmins, and the gold ornaments donation given by Jatavarman Sundara Pandya, a Pandya King to this temple. An inscription found in the Chithrai mandaba entrance of the temple dated 2005, speaks about the philanthropical activities of P. Panneerselvam Chettiar of Radhapuram and the donations provided by A.C. Jeyasekaran and his wife Amutha Jayasekaran to this temple.\(^{106}\)

**Temple Renovation**

**A Pre-Independence Renovation**

The renovations of the temple at Varagunapandeeshwaran might have been accomplished during the reign of Rajendracholan and Rajathirajan. No evidence or inscription referring to this. Yet, the

\(^{106}\) Personal interview with A.C. Jeyasekaran aged 60, Philanthropist, Radhapuram on 20.05.2014.
stone inscription erected in A.D.1791 by Karthigai Thirunal Ramavarma alias the Dharmaraja of Venadu, gives information that the *Dwajasthambam* was erected by Chakravarthi Rajendra Chola and the *Jedibandanam* was also performed then. This particular inscription is found in the east gate of this temple.\textsuperscript{107}

**A Post-Independence Renovation**

As per Hindu *Silpasasstra* and *Agamas*, once in twelve years *Astabhanthana Mahakumbabishegam* should be performed in a temple. During the kings' period, it was perfectly done in all the temples of Tamil Nadu.

When the British East India Company took over the administration of the Madras Presidency, these rules and regulations related to the temple administration were not followed strictly, because the aliens had no idea about the native *agamas*.

After Indian independence, once again the temples of Tamil Nadu had renovation works here and there. In Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram, the renovation was also done and *Ashtabandhana*

Mahakumbhabisegam was done in A.D. 1967. According to the inscription found in front of Chittirai mandaba entrance of the temple, once again renovation works were conducted in this temple and Astabhandana Mahakumbabishegam was performed in A.D. 2005. In that purpose, a Devaprasannam pooja was conducted to know the divine opinion about the proposed renovation works.

Sri Parameswaran Aachariyar of Nagercoil came and conducted that spiritual activity and hundreds of people attended the pooja. After getting the divine consent, the renovation works were started. The total cost for all the renovation works was estimated as Rs. 60, 00,000 (sixty lakhs).

In that period, all the mandapas were renovated with second class tiles. In addition to that, arththa mandapa and nandhi mandapa were also renovated with fixing of granite on the floors. In addition to that, annathana mandapa was constructed with a dimension of 40 feet 20 feet.  

At the roof of the temple new floor tiles were fixed in the entire area. The inhabitants of Radhapuram and the surrounding villages

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108 Personal interview with R.Panneerselvam Chettiar aged 70, Philanthropist, Radhapuram on 07.01.2014.
participated in the grand celebrations which lasted for five days. The Government of Tamil Nadu announced local holiday as per negotiable instrument act. Messrs. R.Panneerselvam, R.C. Jeyasekharan and R.Puskalavarathan were the important dignitaries participated in it.

**Subordinate Temples**

When an intensive research is being done on a temple, it is a must to study the related temples attached with the main shrine, and only after that the proposed study will get completed. Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram is significant in the sense that it is surrounded by a number of subordinate temples which are related to the main temple in one way or the other. There are seven similar temples all around the main shrine.109 On the basis of *Agama* rules, these small shrines stand constructed.

The subordinate temples are distinguished into two types - the first one are the temples situated around the main temple within the Radhapuram village, and the second one are the temples situated

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109 Personal interview with *K.S.Chandra Seker* Pattar aged 50, Temple Priest, Radhapuram on 10.04.2014.
outside the Radhapuram village. Totally 17 subordinate temples are situated in and around Radhapuram which are in one way or other related to Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithiyakalyani Ambal temple.

The existence of small shrines around the main temple confirms the significance of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram. A detailed picture has been given below about the subordinate temples.

**Thottaikarai Muthu Vinayakar Temple** (Fig: 44)

It is located in the northern end of Radhapuram village. The Chaliyas, a Telugu speaking spinning community in this locality maintain this temple; and it still exists. Near the temple, there is a big pond. On the backside of the temple, a well is also there. Originally it was called *Kanni Pillayar Temple* and now it is known as *Thotikarai Muthu Vinayakar temple*. During the Varushabisekha (annual celebrations) special *poojas* are performed, and on the day of *Vinayakar Sadhurthi* grand *abishekas* are performed.

A lot of devotees visit the temple at the time of *Thirukarthikai* festival also. The entire month of *Margali* attracts thousands of devotees regularly. *Vilvam* (*Aegle Marmolous*) is the *Thalavirutcham* (holy tree) of this temple. For a long time, this temple was maintained
perfectly by the Chaliyas (a textile community), and later, it was taken by Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board (H.R & C.E.) of the Government of Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{110} The Government is not properly discharging the duties in connection with the maintenance of the temple. The Chaliyas as usual are perfectly maintaining it with devotion.

**Azhagiya Manavala Perumal Temple** (Fig: 45)

Just half-a-kilometre from the Shiva temple, there is a Vishnu temple dedicated to Azhagiya Manavala Perumal.\textsuperscript{111} who is seen in a standing posture with the upper hands holding a conch and discus, the lower right hand in abhaya hasta position and the left resting on the hip i.e. kathasta position.

The deity is flanked by Goddess Sridevi, Boodevi, et.al. The other utsavamurtis in this temple are Navaneetha Narththana Krishna, Viswaksena, Sudarsana and Anjaneya. In the vestibule (antarala) connecting the main shrine with the mandapa infront are the stone images of Viswaksena, Nammalvar, Andal and Ramanujar. Opposite to the central sanctum is the shrine of Garuda. There are two


\textsuperscript{111} *Ibid*, p.16.
praharas (circumambulatory passage) in this temple which are quite wide and spacious.

It is situated just ½ km from Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple. Even though it is considered as one of the subordinate temples of the main temple, it maintains its unique identity.

Oh, my mind!
Sing and sing the history of Rasai
Where manavalar is enshrined; And
Sing and sing
Praising the holy ft
Of goddess Nachiyar;
Those, with joined hands,
Who do worship painasa Payadaiyar
God Manavalaperuman,
Would get rid of Kali
And live and long.

These are the songs sung by the Vaishnava saints on Lord Azhagiya Manavala Perumal of Radhapuram.\textsuperscript{112} This temple has a number of oral stories and moral stories. Significantly, the present priest Raj Pattar belongs to the sixteenth generation; and once he decided to shift to Travancore state due to the draught condition at this region. When he stayed in a chaultry at night, he had a dream in which Lord Perumal directed him to do service in the temple again. With that direction, he again continued to serve the temple.

Again he was not satisfied with the situation and wanted to shift to somewhere else. Unfortunately, he was not able to move a single step due to severe stomach pain. When he started his prayer towards Lord Perumal, he got relieved. So he cancelled his plan once again and stayed there. At the age of 85 even now he is doing the work sincerely.

There is a divine story which also speaks about the significance of Lord Perumal. Once, a son of a priest went to the forest for collecting firewood; he was bitten by a King Cobra, and immediately

\textsuperscript{112} V. Shanumugam, \textit{Arulmigu Varagunapandeeswarar Kumbabhishekam Malar (Tamil), (Souvenir), Op.cit}, pp. 24-25.
passed away. The priest took the body of his son and pleaded with the God that resulted is the resurrection of life to the boy.\footnote{R. Raman, Azhakiya Manavala Perumal Koil Sthalavaralaru, Op.cit, p.10.} Lord Perumal and his consort Nachiyar are seen in the Garpagraha (sanctum sanctorum).

The Perumal’s statue is 7 feet. high and Nachiyar's is 5½ feet., high respectively. The statue of Karuda is on the western direction in the mandapa. The Urchavar is seen in the eastern side. In addition to it, Visvaksenar, Nammalvar, Srimath Ramanujar, Vinayagar, and Nagaraja idols are also there.

In the arththa mandapa, there are idols of the presiding deity in standing, sitting and sleeping postures. On the basis of the records available, it is said that the temple was constructed during the fifth century A.D.; and the muhappu mandapa was a later addition. During the month of December, Karudasevai is performed on all Saturdays. The Thiruvona Group are the the sponsors of the festival in a colourful manner.

In the temple mandapa, Vasuki, a sculpture of five - headed serpent is seen, in which Thiruvaranga perumal is enshrined. The
scenes of *Thasavatharam* (ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu) depicted in the mandpa also add glamour to the temple. A *nandhavanam* (temple garden) with varieties of flowers is also there. The *Gopura* is round in shape. In this temple one time *pooja* is performed now, though it had six time *poojas* in the past.

"I rendered service and recited His holy name Narayana; All the diseases Caused by tedium and depression

I rendered service and recited His holy name Narayana; All the diseases Caused by tedium and depression

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Would turn their way back
Whatever wealth
Whoever gets
Even if his riches prospers
They get the wealth of child
All delicious hill-like
Get bewildled;
Only with the grace of saints
The women would gain
All excellence
With divine grace

- G. Sankarasubramanian

**Pathrakaliyamman Temple** (Fig: 46)

Since time immoral this Pathrakaliyamman temple has been owned by the *Saiva Vellalas* of this region. It has also a subordinate temple situated near the Government Higher Secondary School, Radhapuram. Here, Goddess *Pathrakali* is enshrined with ferocious look. The priest, who belonged to *Isai Vellalar* community, performs the *poojas* there. The present priest belongs to the seventeenth generation of that community.
Mutharamman Temple (Fig: 47)

This temple is facing the east and it is situated near the newly developed market complex. It also belongs to the Saiva Vellala community.

Ujjaini Maha Kali Amman Temple (Fig: 48)

Near Mutharamman temple there is an Ujjaini Maakaali Amman temple in which a member of Isai Vellala community is performing poojas.¹¹⁵

Theivapandeeswara Temple (Fig: 49)

It is situated near Sri Varagunapandeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple opposite to the Registrar's office of Radhapuram. It is facing towards the west. It has a unique history. It is said that the God Theivapandeeswarar and the temple Dwajasthamba (flag staff) came from Kakkachi Malai (mountain).

Ammachi Amman Temple (Fig: 50)

This temple is situated in the west car street of Radhapuram. When the people of this locality went to Travancore state to collect a Dwajasthamba (temple flag staff) for the Sri Varagunapandeeswarar

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Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, it is said that some *Devadhais* (angels) came with the wood. Now it is called as *Ammachi Amman* temple.

*Ammachi* is a *Malayalam* term which means grandmother. Due to the Travancore royal influence and relationship, this temple is called as Ammachi Amman temple. It is also maintained by the *Saiva Vellalas*.\(^{116}\)

The seven temples as stated above are situated around the Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple and they are the *Kaaval theivams* (protecting deities) around the village.

**Subordinate Temples in Other Areas**

1. Vijayapathi Viswamithira Maharishi Temple.
2. Irukkanthurai Kailasanatha Swami Temple.
5. Poothavidangan Saastha Kovil, Uthayathur.
7. Sankara Vinayagar Kovil, Kasthurirengapuram.
8. Udhaya Marththanda Pillayar temple, Samugarengapuram.

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\(^{116}\) Personal interview with *S. Gandhimathi* aged 50, Executive Officer, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal Temple, Radhapuram, on 15.12.2013.


Rajarishi Viswamithramaharishi Temple Vijayapathi (Fig:51)

In the worldly life, it is difficult to know the *Rishimoolam* (the origin of rishi) and the *Nathimoolam* (the origin of rivers). There were two great *rishis* who attained in the destination. They were Viswamithrar and Agasthiyar. Among the two, *Viswamithrar* is worshipped as God in a temple, and it is the only temple in the world dedicated to *Viswamitra*. It is situated at Vijayapathi village near Radhapuram. On the way from Radhapuram to Koodankulam village, there is a village by name Vijayapathi where a temple was built for *Rishi Viswamitra*. It is strongly believed that if a person visits this centre, he will get rid of his sins.\(^\text{117}\)

Vijayam means arrival, victory etc. *Pathi* means the hero. Thus a hero of victory arrived at this area and he was none other than *Rishi Viswamithrar*; and hence the name emerged.

It is believed that *Viswamitrar* performed meditation at this place where the temple has been constructed. Within this temple,

there is an *Omakunda Vinayagar Shrine, Viswamithrar shrine* and Yantras inscribed on stone; and Rama - Lekshman are also present here. Next to the *Omakunda Vinayagar* shrine, the *Viswamithrar* shrine is there; and he is smiling in yoga posture. The *Mahalingam* supposed to have been worshipped by *Viswamithrar* is installed separately in the *sanctum sanctorum*. In the *Maha mandapa*, features like *Nandhi, Dwarabalagas, Murugan* and *Vinayagar* are there.\(^{118}\) For getting the *Maharishi* title, *Viswamithrar* took to intensive penance; and he achieved the effect of the same.

*Pancha Soothram* was preached to the rishi by Goddess *Parasakthi* who is in *Akilandeswari* manifestation here. A *Guru Bhagwan* shrine is also there on the southern side of the temple. Here, the *Rajeswari peedam* and a saint meditating on nine *grahas* are beautifully sculptured. At the other corner, Murugan with His Divine wives Valli and Theivanai, and also Chandikeswarar are there. The *Kaalabairavar* shrine is also there at the other end. *Nandhi* and *Anjaneya* shrines are also there. *Thaipoosam, Adi Amavasai, Thai Amavasai, Shivarathri*, etc are all celebrated very buoyantly.

\(^{118}\) Personally visited and confirmed.
On *prathosham* days, last Fridays, and last Tuesdays of every Tamil month, special *poojas* are conducted. *Chithrai Anusham* and *Karthiga poojas* are also performed with special glamour. The *Sthalavirutcham* (temple tree) is seen dried but it always produces flowers and fruits once a year. It is believed that medicinal values contain in the leaves, flowers, etc.

It is also believed that issue-less women are blessed with children after eating these leaves. There are also *vilvam* (Aegle Marmelalous) tree, *vanni* tree, etc. for which special *poojas* are performed. There are two *Rajagopuras* with small structure.

They attract the devotees. There are *Swami, Ambal, Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswar* and *Viswamithrar* idols which are specimens of art work. The fish symbol carved in this temple confirms the close contact with the Pandyas.\textsuperscript{119} To summarize, the village Radhapuram gets a unique place in the annals of Tirunelveli District, due to its celebrated Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple.

\textsuperscript{119} Personal interview with S. Padmanabhan aged 85, Editor, Aaiyu Kalanjiyam, Research Journal, and Nagerkoil on 05.05.2014.
It was patronized by the Cholas, the Pandyas, and the Madurai Nayaks, the Travancore Kings and also the Valliyoor Pandyas and Kalakkad Pandyas. The rituals and festivals are also unique in the sense that every day there is a celebration held in Radhapuram. Let us discuss in detail the festivities in the next chapter.