CHAPTER – IV
ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Spirituality and science are essential for the evolution and maturity of mankind.¹ They serve like two eyes on a human face. Man can survive without anything else, but he needs both these two aspects for his betterment. The present generation is enjoying all the modern facilities for a comfortable life because of science; but spirituality provides the inner strength and peace of mind which enables a man to enjoy all the scientific inventions and urges him to quest for more innovation.²

This spirituality is symbolically represented through temples, statues, mantras, yantras, etc. The cultural heritage of India varies through time and racial influences.³ Renowned historian A.L. Basham has named his book as "Wonder that was India". It is absolutely correct. Even now foreign tourists get astonished with the existence of

¹ S. Vaithiyalingam, Tamilzhaga Kovilkalai Matchi (Tamil), Sella Muthagam Publications, Parangipet, 1980, p. 52.
² G.M. Muthusami Pillai, "Arimugam", Koyir Kalanjiyam (Tamil), Tamil University, Tanjavur, 1991, p.3.
palatial buildings, temples with gigantic *gopuras*, *mandapas*, and also sculptures encarved on both the walls and *praharas* of the temples.\(^4\)

A temple’s architecture and art forms are the combination of spirituality and aesthetics. An art form represents aesthetics with an unlimited freedom of expression.\(^5\) Architecture is an art that combines in itself technology, aesthetics and fantasy.\(^6\) It is one of the fine arts; and it incorporates the other arts.\(^7\)

"Architecture which is still living in India."\(^8\) Has been generally developed with the construction of temples.\(^9\) Indian architecture stands as a material record for spiritualism.\(^10\) It is considered that God and His temple correspond to the soul and body of a human being. The names of the various limbs of human body are applied in architectural texts to denote the temple structures such as *pada*,

\(^6\) V.G. Ramakrishna Aiyer, *The Economy of a South Indian Temple* Annamalainagar, Annamalai University, 1946, p .3.
griva, Sikhara and the like; and it reflects the concept of organic unity in temple architecture.\textsuperscript{11}

Fergusson was the pioneer who undertook a systematic attempt to interpret south Indian architecture as part of his monumental study of the Indian and oriental architecture. With much pain and difficulties, he did his research on the subject. His work still occupies a leading position.\textsuperscript{12}

Different kinds of authoritative texts reveal the architectural details of India with voluminous details. Out of them only a few are available to us such as Mayamata, Manasara, Visvakarmiya, Indramata, Manusaram and Kasyapam.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to these, the later compilations of Sastras, Puranas, Agamas, Tantras, Samhitas, and Silpatrana also describe the rules and principles to be followed in the construction of temples and their different styles.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[12]{J. Fergusson, \textit{History of Indian and Eastern Architecture}, the University of Michigan, Michigan, 1899, pp. 55-70.}
\footnotetext[13]{M. Shanmugam Pillai and David E.Ludden, eds., \textit{Kuruntokai}, Koodal Publishers, Madurai, 1976, p. 440.}
\footnotetext[14]{P.V. Somasundaranar, ed., \textit{Perumpanarruppadi} (Tamil), The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevelly, Ltd., Madras, 1972, 1.301, p.10.}
\end{footnotes}
The Indian temple architecture is divided into Samaranganai, Sudradhasam, Eesanashivaguru, Deva Pathathi, etc. These forms accumulated into three major styles i) Nagara style ii) Dravida style iii) Vesara style or Varada style.\textsuperscript{15}

A later Chalukya stone inscription speaks about four divisions of architecture namely i) Nagara ii) Kalingam iii) Dravidian iv) Vedasaram.\textsuperscript{16} Temple architecture in India falls under the above mentioned recognizable styles based on its plan and appearance.\textsuperscript{17}

**Nagara Style**

This type of architecture is found in the northern parts of India between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains. The upper part of a temple may contain curved structures. The pillars are four-sided with a square base. These four faceted pillar styles are not found in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} C. Minakshi, *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, University of Madras, Madras, 1977, p.177.
\textsuperscript{17} T.V. Sadashiva Pandarathar, *Pirkala Cholar Varalaru* (Tamil), Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, 1974, p.575.
\textsuperscript{18} Y. Subbrayalu et.al. trans., *Varalaru Pokkil Tennaga Samugam by Noboru Karashima (Tamil)*, Tamizhaga Tolliyal Kazhagam, Thanjavur 1995, p.83.
**Vesara Style**

The term Vesara means a cross or mixture between a horse and a donkey. The provinces situated in the region between The Vindhyas and the River Krishna followed the Vesara style.

The floorings are made in a circular, semicircular or oval shape. It is found in one or two places in Tamil Nadu, but mixed with the Nagara and the Dravida styles. In Karnataka, the temples built by the Chalukyas belonged to this style.

The sanctum sanctorum and Utharangam or Palli Kondan Garbagraham is made in the Pranavahara form. The vimanas of these temples are made in the Prashta form which is semi-circular.¹⁹

**Dravidian Style**

In the region between the River Krishna in the north and Kanyakumari in the south, the Dravidian style was followed. The Ellora caves are the best examples for this style. Majority of these cave temples are facing the east, and exceptionally one or two temples are facing the west.

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The sanctum sanctorum is square shaped and the ardha mandapa is rectangular. The upper part of these temples is pyramid shaped.\textsuperscript{20} The existing Dravidian styles of temples are classified into Nagara, Dravida and Vesara. The peak or Gopura of these temples can differentiate the three styles.

Nagara style - This form is square or rectangular in shape
Vesara style - This is circular or oval in shape
Dravida style - This is octagon or eight-faced shape.\textsuperscript{21}

Even in ancient times, Indians had acquired the knowledge of architecture.\textsuperscript{22}

The earliest phases of the Indian architecture are the remains of the ancient cities of the Indus Valley civilization which existed in B.C. 3000.\textsuperscript{23} But it is not known whether there existed temples or places of worship.\textsuperscript{24}

In one way the culture of a place is represented by its architecture and architectural specimens. The architecture of the

\begin{references}
\item N. Dhanaraj, \textit{Kuttatakalai}, Thirukural Padipakam, Madras, 1990, p. 54.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 2-3.
\end{references}
Vedic Aryans began from small huts in the forests. The architectural descriptions of the wooden buildings of them are amply found in the Rig Vedic texts. The ruins of Aryan buildings that belonged to the Vedic age (B.C. 1500) were not found, because they lived in rudimentary structures made of thatched leaves. However descriptions of buildings are furnished in the Vedas. Before the Buddhist revolution, the temple buildings were not a part of the Hindu religion.

The next phase of Indian architecture belongs to the historical period known as the Maurya’s (B.C. 325-185), a dominant ruling power in North India. The permanent medium of stone was first introduced by the zeal of the emperor Asoka (B.C. 269-232) in Buddhist Chaityas and Viharas.

It was adopted by the Guptas in the North and by the Chalukyas, Pallavas, and the Pandyas in the south. A permanent structure of stone buildings was first introduced by the Guptas in North India. Gradually the western Chalukyas, Pallavas and Pandyas introduced it in the south. The Vasudeva temple of the Satavahanas

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25 P.R. Srinivasan, Koil Kalaiyum Sirpangalum (Tamil), Kalainjan Pathipakam, Madras, 1965, p. 132.
26 Ibid., p.33.
(B.C. 235-220) built with bricks at Pesunagar is traceable to 2nd century B.C. It is considered to be the earliest monument of the Hindu temple found in India.27

Indian architecture attained an extraordinarily high point of achievement during the Gupta period, (A.D. 300-600) which is referred to as the golden period in Indian history. This period is also described as the revival of Brahmanism.28 The rulers of the Gupta Empire gave their royal patronage to build temple for Hindu deities.

The exquisite examples of the Gupta period are the Dasavatara temple of Deogarh, the Parvathi temple of Nachina Kutara, and the Shiva temple at Bhumara, etc.29

Ancient Tamilakam occupied a unique place in the history of India. It had a peculiar culture, civilization and language. The chief rulers of this region were the Pallavas, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas.30

They contributed much for the development of art and architecture, sculpture, paintings etc. The successive ruling dynasties like the Vijayanagar rulers and the Nayaks also contributed much for the development of the Dravidian school of art.\textsuperscript{31}

The temples and their \textit{gopuras, vimanas, mandapas, dwajasthampas}, temple cars, and musical pillars speak about the artistic skill of the artisans of Tamilakam. The foreigners got astonished with the gigantic structures available in hundreds of temples in Tamilakam which highlight the extra - ordinary talent of the artisans.\textsuperscript{32} The most ancient temple existing in Tamil Nadu belongs to the Pallavas.\textsuperscript{33} Who ruled for nearly three centuries from A.D. 600 to 900. During the pre - Pallava period, temples were built with the perishable materials like wood, brick and so on.\textsuperscript{34} Kadiyalur Rudrangannanar, the great poet of Sangam age gives references to a temple made of bricks in his work.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} C. Shivaramamurti, \textit{Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature}, Publications Division of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1994, pp.90-100.
\item \textsuperscript{32} J. Krishna Sastri, \textit{South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses}, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 100-105.
\item \textsuperscript{33} C. Minakshi, \textit{Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas}, University of Madras, Madras, 1977, p. 177.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid p. 178.
\item \textsuperscript{35} R. Nagaswami, \textit{Art and Culture of Tamilnadu}, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1980, p. 24.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The Pallavas laid the foundation for the Dravidian style and formed a brilliant chapter of architecture in the history of Tamil Nadu. The Pallava architecture is classified into four Groups as Mahendravarman Group (A.D. 610 to 640), Mamalla Group (A.D. 640 to 690), Rajasimha Group (A.D. 690 to 800), and Nandivarman Group (A.D. 800 to 900).36

Mahendravarman I established a new trend in art through the Dravidian style of art and architecture. He introduced the technique of erecting cave temples which are found in many places between Madras in the north and Tiruchirappalli in the south.37

Narasimhavarman I made further advances in the rock-cut temple art. He erected monolithic free standing temples commonly called rathas at Mahabalipuram.38

Rajasimha I also opened new vistas in the field of temple building art. He built structural temples with stones cut out of

rocks. The shore temple at Mahabalipuram and the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram are the best examples of Pallava art.

The succeeding Chola age is said to be the Golden age in the annals of the temple history. When the Pallavas excelled in splendid sculptures, the Chola kings can be credited with construction of beautiful temples.

The Chola art and architecture can be divided into three periods as the early period (A.D.850-985) beginning from Vijayalaya to Uttama Chola, the medieval period (A.D.985-1070) from Rajaraja I to Adhirajendra, and the last period (A.D.1070-1270) from Kulottunga I to Rajendra III.

The architectural traditions that flourished during the last days of their predecessors were continued by the early Cholas in the beginning of their rule. Vijayalaya Cholisvaram temples at

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42 D. Barrett, Early Chola Bronzes, Bhulabhai Memorial Institute, Bombay, 1965, pp. 35-38.
Narttamalai, the Muvarkoyil at Kodumbalur are fine specimens of this early Chola period.\textsuperscript{44}

Temple architecture entered a distinctive phase during the reign of Rajaraja I, the Great, and his son Rajendra I. The Brihadeesvarar temple at Thanjavur and the Shiva temple of Gangaikondacholapuram are their glorious monuments. Enormous \textit{Vimana} over the sanctum and the hall supported by carved pillars are the most striking features of this period.\textsuperscript{45}

The final phase of the Chola architecture is also remarkable for certain features. An important feature of this period is the gateway of the temple which began to grow more in height than that of the \textit{vimana} structure.

Another remarkable feature of this period is the erection of hundred pillared \textit{mandapas} and \textit{tirukkamakkottams} which were usually built outside the central shrine. \textit{Airavateswarar} temple of Rajaraja II and the \textit{Kampahareswarar} temple of Kulottunga III are the most impressive examples of this period.


In addition to the above mentioned features, more number of temples was erected all over Tamil Nadu than by those of their successors. Rajaraja II, the most well-known monarch of this period gave his patronage for the construction of a number of temples in Cholamandalam.\textsuperscript{46}

In this chapter the characteristics of a particular south Indian temple which is a significant example for Dravidian architecture and its evolution has been attempted. A study of the architecture of the Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple is interesting, for it throws light on some of the distinctive architectural features prevalent in different epochs of south Indian history.\textsuperscript{47} A study of the architecture of Radhapuram Shiva temple serves another purpose too. There are certain structures, the dates of which are not known directly through epigraphic or other sources. The architectural features may, in those cases, serve to indicate the probable period of their construction.\textsuperscript{48}

The plan of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple is square in shape.

\textsuperscript{47} K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, \textit{The Cholas}, University of Madras, Madras 1955, pp. 715-716.
\textsuperscript{48} G.M. Muthusami Pillai, "\textit{Arimugam"}, \textit{Koyir Kalanjiyam, Op.cit}, p.3.
It consists of a number of mandapas or large halls. They are the following:

i) Thirukalyana mandapa,

ii) Sabapathi mandapa otherwise called as Chithirai mandapa or Kumbabisheka mandapa,

iii) Ambalavanar mandapa,

iv) Vasantha mandapa,

v) Thai poosa mandapa and

vi) Saba mandapa otherwise called as Alankara mandapa or Shivaratri mandapa.

This magnificent temple at Radhapuram, which faces the east, covers a spacious rectangular ground measuring 380 feet 348 feet dedicated to Lord Shiva called Varagunapandeeswarar. The entire complex which has been built in accordance with Agama Sastras comprises three enclosures. In this temple the God and the Goddess face the east and the south respectively which is worthy of mention. The innermost prahara encloses a central shrine, and a number of other small shrines all of which are encompassed by a concentric wall.

50 E.M. Subramania Pillai, Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Tirukovil Varalaru (Tamil), Kanesan Achsukoodam, Tirunelveli, 1962, pp. 24-25.
51 Ibid., p. 25.
This innermost enclosure wall is higher than the other two enclosure walls of this temple. On the eastern side there is only one towering entrance dwarfing the *gopura* and providing access into the inner courtyard.\(^52\)

On coming out of this entrance way, one can reach the inner *prahara*.

**The Inner Prahara** (Fig: 66)

The common corridor, the Inner Prahara, running around the two shrines is distinctly of a later period than the 10\(^{th}\) century A.D. The pillars in the Inner Prahara have corbels of the later Chola variety, and are very plain, with just one *saduram*\(^53\) on each.

In the middle of the outer *prahara*, the flag staff (2.07m to a side), *balipeeda*.\(^54\) (1.55m1.50m), and a *Nandhi mandapa*\(^55\) (2.10m1.70m) are erected on an axial line. An elevated shrine for the Goddess Nithyakalyani, the divine consort of the presiding deity, is located in the inner corridor facing towards the south. It is found with

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a sanctum, arththa mandapa, maha mandapa, mukha mandapa and an alankara mandapa. The whole scheme is again encircled by a wall. In the north - eastern corner and in front of the goddess shrine lies the Thirukalyana mandapa. The Madappalli\textsuperscript{56} and the administrative office are housed on the eastern side of the corridor. All these structures are enclosed by a wall with an entrance way at the cardinal point of the eastern direction.

The third outermost prahara is encircled by a wall with four entrances on all the four directions. The most important of it is the eastern entrance where the soaring small gopura exists. This is the main access to this temple complex and leads to the outer area since it is in front of the central shrine.

The arththa mandapa in front of the garbhagraha of the presiding deity is hardly six feet in height, and is supported by four pillars, two on either wing. The pillars themselves are modelled on the pattern of an early period.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Thirumadapalli- the temple kitchen where the food materials as offering to God are prepared.
The eastern and western faces of the pillars are carved with two crouching lions, between the corbel and the *palagai*. Beneath the *palagai* is the *munai* which shows petals with a series of indentations. Still below are found the *Kudam, Tadi, Kalasam*; and then the *Kal* presenting floral ornamentation, and down below is the *adistanam* bearing sculptural representation of crouching lions.\(^{58}\) The ceiling of the portico is a hollow umbrella - shaped structure. On the inner surface of the ceiling, stone beams which are shaped artistically like wooden supports to roofs, are found converging to a point. At the central spot is the representation of a lotus flower hanging down tapering to a point.\(^{59}\)

**The Central Shrine**

The east oriented central shrine of Lord Varagunapandeeswarar is oblong in plan with the component parts of a *garbhagrha*, an *ardha mandapa*, a *maha mandapa* with a south - ward projection and a *mukha mandapa*. The *garbhagrha* is in the form of a square (5.00m.of a side). It has a *linga* mounted on the circular *avudaiyar* occupying the centre of the floor of the *garbhagrha*. The inner surface of the

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garbhagrha is dimly plain, while the outer surface is lavishly visible with finest works of art and architecture.\textsuperscript{60}

The vimana built under the Dravidian type comprises six divisions from bottom to top namely adhisthana, stambha, prastara, griva, sikhara and stupika. The adhisthana (h.1.25m) which forms the lowest part of the vimana, is of padmaka adhisthana type.\textsuperscript{61} The bottom most layer is upana which is plain without any ornamentation. This upana is followed by urdhvapadma. Then comes a jagati which is high, plain and rectangular in shape. The projecting kumuda rests on the jagati, and three - faceted. Over this, a gala is employed between the kampa and urdhvakampa. Below and above it, there are a number of regular padas in alignment with the pilasters of the walls. The pranala which is projected in this part of the northern side appears to come out of open mouth of a vyala.

It serves to discharge water that flows when the abhisheka is conducted for the image in garbhagrha.\textsuperscript{62} The next portion above the urdhvakampa, the plain pattika in a flat band, on which vedi the

\textsuperscript{60} M.S. Govinda Samy, \textit{The Role of Feudatories in Later Chola History} Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 1979, pp. 60-70.
topmost moulding of the *adhisthana* composed of a *galapada* and clasped with *kampa* mouldings, *padmavajana* and *prati*, are seen in an ascending order. The *bhitti* or the wall portion (h.1.60m) of the *sanctum sanctorum* above the *vedi* (h.0.35m) is vertically divided into three compartments. On each face, the central part is projecting forward; it is known as the *bhadra* bay. The flanking compartments shrinking backward are called *karna* bays.

The *bhadra* bay (2.20m wide) is wider than the *karna bhadra* bay (1.40m wide) containing *devakoshtas* between the *pilasters*, one on either side. The niches of the *devakoshtas* are flanked on both sides by a pair of *nakulapadas* with surmounting *makaratoranas*. These *toranas* are marked by *makarasyas* with lion faced finals and carved inset miniature sculptured panels of *Gajasamharamurti*, *Vrishabhantika* and *Brahma* in the centre of the respective *gadha*.

The niches are filled with high relief stone images of Dakshinamurti on the south, Lingodbhavamurti in the west and Brahma in the north.

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The *bhitti* portion is remarkable for the disposition of eighteen *vishnukanta kudyapadas* six on each side. The *vishnukanta* pilasters are made to rest on the *oma* shown in a simple manner without any embellishments. The two rows of opposed petals known as *padmabandha* are placed above the *mulasthana*. The vase shaped *kalasa* is delicately adorned by festoons and fixed on the *padmabandha*. The intervening part called *tadi* separates the *kalasa* and *kumbha*. The petals of a blossomed lotus (*padmatala*) are spread around the *kumbha*. The petals are supporting the thick square *palagai* with *virakanda*. The corbel at the top is levelled with prominent tenon like projections.

The portion rising above the corbels is known as *prastara*. It is the roof of the *vimana*, which connects the *sanctum sanctorum* and its superstructure.

The *prastara* on the corbels carry *uttara*. This is not equal in width and height to the corbels found below. A *vajana* comes over this, and is intervening panels of figural miniatures corresponding

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with the pilasters below. Above the \textit{vajana} the \textit{kodungai}\textsuperscript{68} is found with \textit{nasikas}, beautiful scroll work ornamentations, with interior empty circles.

The cella is constructed with granite stones (3.60m high) right from the \textit{adhishthana} stage to that of the \textit{prastara} stage. The tapering superstructure of this part is built with bricks. Above the roof, one can notice an \textit{ekatala vimana} square in plan. A \textit{hara} of the miniature pavilions such as the \textit{karnakutas} in the extreme corners, the \textit{bhadrasalas} in the middle and the \textit{panjaras} in between the \textit{sala} and \textit{karnakuta} runs around \textit{harmya} of the \textit{ekatala}.

The \textit{salakoshtas} are devoted for figures of \textit{Uma Maheswara} on the east, \textit{Dakshinamurti} with his sages on the south, \textit{Brahma} with his consorts on the north and Vishnu with his consorts on the west. Eight couching \textit{Nandhis} two in each corner are perched at the four corners of the \textit{pindi} slab above its \textit{Kapota}.

The \textit{griva} of the \textit{vimana} is spherical in shape with tetragonal \textit{pilasters} and \textit{grivakoshtas}. The figures of the \textit{grivakoshtas} are the same as in the \textit{salakoshtas} below.

\textsuperscript{68} S.M. Lakshmana Chettiar (Somalay), \textit{Tirunelveli Maavattam} (Tamil), Nellai Pathipakam, Madras, 1965, pp. 150-160.
The griva is crowned by an elliptical sikhara. The surface of sikhara, the top element of the roof, is decorated with idaikattu, padmam, kattumalai, Kannadi sattam and mahapadma.

The four mahanasikas crowned by simhavaktra and intervening nasikas are presented on the sikhara in the four directions. Above the sikhara a single copper stupika is placed with padmapatri, kumbha, nalika and mukula.

There is no inscription in any part of the garbhagrha, but on witnessing the corbels of the pilasters, one may presume that it must have been constructed during the 12th century A.D.70

Arththa Mandapa (Fig: 67)

The flat roofed arththa mandapa adjoining the front part of the garbhagrha with an entrance of 1.10 m width and 2.00m, height on its eastern end is found without supporting pillars. Two dwarapalakas71 are standing on either side of the entrance of the mandapa. It is intended for keeping the materials immediately

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70 K.V. Raman, Pandyarkala Varalaru (Tamil), Tamil Nadu Text Book Society, Madras, 1976, pp. 45-50.
required for the *poojas*. The external configurations of the walls are similar in style to that of the *garbhagraha*. The niches of south and north walls bear the images of Vinayaka and Durga respectively.

The miniature sculptures of Ganapati and Durga decked in the respective *gadhas* of *makaratoranas* adorn the niches.\textsuperscript{72} A pillared porch (10.65m 9.10m) of a later period (20\textsuperscript{th} century A.D), adjuncts on the three sides of the *garbhagaha* and *arththa mandapa* at a distance of 2 m. The seven *balipeedas* meant for *dikpalakas* or guardian deities exist in this porch at the appropriate places.

**Maha Mandapa** (Fig: 68)

The rectangular *maha mandapa* (12.50m*3.00m) lies next to the *arththa mandapa* with a flat topped roof supported by 22 pillars and the east entrance (2.20m height and 1.50m breadth). These 22 pillars are divided into two types. All these pillars are 2.20m in height. Two pillars are of *brahmakanta* type and the remaining twenty pillars are square type, and both carry the same cushion type capitals.\textsuperscript{73} This *mandapa* has two passages one from the south (2.20m height and

\textsuperscript{72} T.V. Sadashiva Pandarathar, *Pandiyar Seppedukal Pattu* (Tamil), Sarathy Printers, Madras, 1972, pp. 5-10.

\textsuperscript{73} R. Sathiyanaatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1924, pp. 50-55.
1.25 breadth) and the other from the north (2.00m height and 1.15m breath).

The basement of the mandapa has been tastefully made to resemble that of the shrine proper and is elevated on the padabandha adhisthana arranged in horizontal layers such as upana, jagati, tripattakumuda, recessed kantha, and pattika, again kantha with padas, padmavajana and prati.

The wall part above the plinth is provided with the brahmakanta pilasters. These pilasters are found with kal, a mulastana carved with sculptured panels (which is absent in the sanctum). Padmabandha, kalasa, tadi, kumbha, idal, and palagai, are beveled capitals.74 Niches are absent in the walls.

The wall is capped by ribbed mouldings of uttara, padma, and hanging inverted kodungai with kudu profiles inset with gandharvamukha on its key holes. A stone window framed on the southern side of the wall to provides light the interior. The plinth of

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74 S. Gurudhasa Pillai, Tirunelveli Seemai Charithram (Tamil), Barani Achakam, Tirunelveli, 1931, pp. 15-18.
the northern side mandapa is conspicuous from the tripattakumuda due to later day renovation works.75

A Yagakunda, a brass mirror stand, a balipeeda and a Nandhi are furnished in the middle of the maha mandapa. A secret room is placed in the interior on the northern side of this mandapa to store the jewels and garments of the deities.76

The inner surfaces of the east and south walls and ceilings are adorned with paintings of episodes from Shivapuranas. A square columnade (4.80m to a side) with a raised roof of about 2' feet above the general roof is provided in the middle; and this is called Kuthar sabha or Kuthar mandapa situated at a distance of 2.08m South-north exactly in front of the ardha mandapa and at a distance of about 2m West-east. It is with twelve pillars arranged in four rows.77

The four corner pillars have three sided projecting capitals (cushion capital) whereas the rest of them are found with the usual order. It has three doorways in the south, the north and the east; but the principal entrance is in the east.

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75 K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai (1736-1801), Madurai University Historical Series No.1, Madurai University, Madurai, 1974, pp. 90-95.
The southern-side-entrance adjoins a small hall or open porch (h.3.85m) and is approached by a flight of steps flanked by makara balustrades. Its roof-slab is supported by a pair of rudrakanta columns (h.2.10m) which stand on the pratipatra upapitha (h.0.85m).

**Mukha Mandapa** (Fig: 69)

The *mukha mandapa* linked with the *maha mandapa* is 6.50m in length, 13.00m in width, and 4.00m in height; and it is open on the eastern side.

In front of this *mandapa*, a single step protected on the sides by elephant trunk-like balustrades is provided for the purpose of entering this *mandapa*. Inside the *mandapa* there is a platform with two pillars, one in each corner adjacent to the northern wall. *Urchavamurtis* in bronze are safely kept on this platform. Twelve square pillars (h.2.30 m.) have *puspapotika* corbel standing in three rows with four pillars in each row shouldering the flat roof of this *mandapa*. The features of the exterior portions are perhaps similar to

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those of the *maha mandapa*, although the wall portions have been reconstructed later and hence the features are not clearly visible.\textsuperscript{79}

The plant is rectangular (10.30m x 8.70m). Its elevation is divided into three tiers. It has encroached almost the entire space of the *pradakshinapatha* on the eastern side.\textsuperscript{80}

Its north and north-western side on the south of the *mukha mandapa* are closed by the recent masonry wall except for a small passageway. The central portion of the *alankara mandapa* is parallel to the *mukha mandapa* culminated by waggon type roof placed east-west with three finials. The northern and southern portions are covered with vaulted roof without finials.

The ceiling on the northern portion is ornate befitting the name of this *mandapa*. The *puspapotika* capitals over the pillars of the northern portion help one to fix the date of this *mandapa* to 14\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.\textsuperscript{81} The decorated idols should have been kept in this *mandapa* for *darshan* to the devotees.


**Rishabha Mandapa**

This pavilion has at its center *Nandhi* facing the deity. To the north - east and south-east of *Nandhi* are found a pair of double pillars presenting corbels of the Vijayanagar pattern; the flower is shown as having just emerged. The bend that the corbel takes is neither natural nor gradual. The *Rishabha mandapa*\(^{82}\) in the present form might have been constructed during the 13\(^{th}\) century A.D.\(^{83}\)

The *Rishabha mandapa* does not have any window on its walls. Often, large numbers of people come together, gather in the small space and suffer due to the lack of ventilation. This feature is too common in South Indian temples.\(^{84}\) and it has provoked adverse comments from the western writers.

**Thirukalyana Mandapa/Unchal Mandapa** (Fig: 70)

This *mandapa* is situated near the *mani mandapa* which is on the western side facing the east. This has a *kumbha peedam* for

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kumbha pooja. The pillars of this mandapa have the figures of Yogis' and Rishis'. The Yoga murthis' have also been engraved.\textsuperscript{85}

This pavilion is known to have arisen by the 16\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. Its architectural features correspond to those common in the contemporary century.\textsuperscript{86} The four main pillars which support the pavilion are unquestionably of a pattern common only to the 14\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. The shafts of the bulbous capital as well as the corbels of the full-fledged Puspabodigai indicate their modern style. The linear carvings on the pillars are executed splendidly. In fact, the decorative motifs of the pillars in the unchal mandapa present a remarkable similarity with those in the arththa mandapa of the Nithyakalyani shrine; and perhaps they were modeled on their pattern.

Over the stone pavilion, a vimana has been erected with brick and mortar.

There is a little doubt that this vimana is a recent structure. It presents an imposing appearance, rising to a height of about 40 ft from the ground level. Standing by the side of the main entrance of


the temple, this *vimana* appears second in height to it.\(^{87}\) During the Tamil month of *Ayppasi*, *Thirukkalyanam* (divine marriage) is celebrated in a grand scale in this temple. On that occasion, the holy marriage of Lord Varagunapandeeswarar with Nithyakalyani Ambal is performed at this *mandapa*.\(^{88}\)

The *Navarathiri* celebrations are to be held during the Tamil month of *Purattasi*; the popular *Unchal Sevai* (Cradle type playing material) is conducted on the sixth day. On that occasion the Utsavamurthis are seated in an *unchal* and the temple priest pushes and pulls the *unchal* front and back for one hour.\(^{89}\)*Chithirai Vishu*, *Ayppasi Vishu* and *Navarathri Golu* are conducted in this *mandapa*.\(^{90}\)

**Other Miniature Shrines (Parivara Devatas)**

Generally in the major temples, there are a number of subsidiary shrines called *parivaralayas* around the central shrine for *parivara devatas*.\(^{91}\)


During the Pallava period, these shrines were attached to the middle of the south, north and western side walls of the garbhagrha. These can be observed in the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram and Talapuriswarar temple at Panaimalai. During the Chola and Pandya periods, the other shrines were demarcated from the central shrine and were formed as separate Shrines in the prahara. In the succeeding periods, the number of these Shrines was increased commensurate with the formation of the main temple. It can be seen that in the Radhapuram temple also shrines are located admirably within the two enclosures.

**The Shrine of Vinayaka**

The shrine of Vinayaka located immediately to the south of the mandapa, is known to have arisen in the 16th century. But, a few of the distinctive architectural features of the age appear either on the vestibule or on the facades of the garbhagraha.

In fact, the corbels of the pillars supporting the vestibule, and the lack of any decorative motif on the walls might suggest that the shrine belongs to a much earlier date. However, this negative

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93 G.J. Dubreuil, *Archaeology of Southern India*, Oriental Art, Delhi, 1988, p. 156.
testimony should not be overvalued; it is probable that, at later periods, too, structures were erected on the pattern of previous epochs, owing to financial or other reasons.94

**Madappalli and Uttupura**

*Madappalli*95 means temple kitchen. The Hindu science of architecture (*Silpasastra*) stipulates that *Madappalli* shall be located in the south-eastern corner.96 Accordingly, the *Madappalli* of this temple is seen in the south-eastern corner of the second *prahara*. This can be seen abutting the *prahara* wall 13.95 m. long and 3.85 m. broad. *Madappalli* has a threshold facing the west. It is a later addition. There are eight pillars in the middle of it. These pillars stand in two rows four in each. The *sikhara* of rectangular shape over the *Madappalli* has no artistic work, and it is located at the south-east corner of the inner *prahara* facing the west. The kitchen is 20 feet long, 12 feet wide and 30 feet high situated at the south-eastern corner of the inner *prahara* and is very spacious.

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95 *Madappalli* - the temple kitchen where the food materials as offering to God are prepared.
**Uttupura** means feeding house, a place exclusively meant for feeding the Brahmins attached to a temple. Free feeding was done in the south-west side of the outer prahara. In this feeding house, free food is given twice every day, throughout the year. The Uttupura of this temple is said to have been established in the 18th century A.D, following the glorious traditions of the Travancore Kings.  

**Sabapathi Mandapa /Chithirai Mandapa** (Fig: 71)  

This mandapa is situated near the Dwajasthamba (flag staff) in the north-eastern side of the nandhi mandapa. It is situated in the north-south direction.

It is certain that the pavilion called Chithirai mandapa, appeared before A.D.1629. It is a magnificently designed structure. In fact, from the stand point of the size of the edifice, the grandeur of the pillars and the sculptural representations, the Chithirai mandapa occupies a prominent place.

The size of the sculptured figures attached to the pillars of this pavilion is even much bigger. The architectural features of the pillars are more or less similar to those in the other mandapas.

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97 Uttupura - Place for free feeding to the Brahmins alone.  
But the pilasters attached to the pillars in the Chithirai mandapa do not bear the bulbous capital; they are rectangular.

The corbels are of the Pushpabodigai variety; but the dropping of the flower has not been so elegantly represented. The outer surface of the walls enclosing the garbhagrha too, presents a little ornamentation. Only raised layers or pattams are found at regular intervals along the surface as well as at the top and base of the granite walls.

Sabapathi mandapa or Chithirai mandapa has Thoorani pillars on both sides. In total there are 16 pillars. Near the pillar at the entrance there are two Rishis sculpted in Yoga postures. The pillars have the plantain flower decoration. It has a very big lion’s face with canine teeth.

Similar type of lion faces are also seen on the western side of the pillars facing the east. In the central part, there are several flower patterns. The kalasa peedam is also situated there. The two parts of this pedestal have lion faces with floral patterns decorated with red colour.

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On the upper part of the *peedam*, the figure of *Gajalakshmi* is engraved. In the outer hall there is a statue of Hanuman. In total, there are 19 pillars in the outer hall; and at the inside of the *mandapa*, there are 12 pillars depicting the 12 Zodiacal signs. There is a temple tank at the north-east corner of the temple made of rocks. *Chithirai mandapa* is otherwise called *Koothu mandapa* also.102

**Nandhi Mandapa** (Fig: 72)

An open pillared *Nandhi mandapa* is erected with a flat roof in the centre of the second *prahara* of this temple. This is situated just opposite to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the presiding deity. It is oblong in shape and 2.25m high.

A monolithic *Nandhi*, an essential member of all Shiva temples, is found at its center. It is placed directly in an axial line at the same height with the main deity in the *sanctum sanctorum* of this temple. A small *balipeeda* is situated in front of it. This *mandapa* is standing on the stepped up plain *upapeeda* and is supported by four pillars at each corner. Each pillar has a rectangular base. Over the base, there is an octagonal shaft. The shaft is topped by a square cubical block.

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102 Personal interview with *S.Soundarajan* (Sthabathy) aged 48, Radhapuram on 10.10.2013.
The corbel over the pillar is beveled with prominent tenon like projections, a typical feature of the later Chola style. It proves that this *mandapa* might have been built after the 12th century A.D.\textsuperscript{103} The corbel of the pillars carrying moulded fringes consist of *uttara, padma, kapota* with *kudu, adhapadma, and kampa*.

**Amman Shrine**

In Tamil Nadu the construction of a separate shrine for Amman in Shiva temple was started during the reign of Rajendra I and evolved in the 12th century A.D.\textsuperscript{104} Like the Shiva temples of Madurai, Rameswaram and Tiruvarur, in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple at Radhapuram, both the sanctum of the presiding deity and His consort were constructed facing the east and the south respectively, in accordance with the Hindu religious canons.

The east facing one is called surface or *Suryapatti*.\textsuperscript{105} The Amman shrine known as *Nithyakalyani Ambal sannathi* stands as a separate shrine in front of the main shrine. This is dedicated to the consort of Lord Varagunapandeeswarar.

This Shrine has a single storied *vimana*. It has a small circumabulatory corridor around the complex for the devotees to go round the Shrine.\textsuperscript{106}

A small Shrine for God Subramania is found on the north side of the corridor. The whole complex covers a total area of 50.70m * 23.13m, and is encircled by a single *tirumadil* (h.3.40m) with an entrance on the eastern side. It is attached with the northern side wall of the Inner *prahara* on its southern side. The shrine represents the next phase in the architectural history of this temple.

The *sanctum* is a square apartment 4.70m about 3.25m height containing the stone image of Nithyakalyani in the *sthanka* form. In an inscription of this temple, the name of the Amman is mentioned as Manonmaniammai.\textsuperscript{107} In common parlance the deity is called Nithyakalyani. The remarkable architectural features seen in the exterior are in sharp contrast to the *lackluster* interior.

The external wall of the *vimana* has the central bays called *mukhabhadra* on the three free faces projecting forward.

These bays house in their devakoshtas the images of Dakshinamurti in the south, Ichchha sakti in the north and Kriya sakti in the west respectively. The well moulded adhisthana portion is like the adhisthana of the principal shrine, belonging to the Padmaka adhisthana type (h.1.00 m).

To let out the anointed water, there is a neertarai called spout which is projected on the northern side of the adhisthana. There are six brahmakanta pilasters crowned with tenon like corbels. Sixteen pilasters (h. 1.75m) throughout the bhitti part adorn it. The configuration and other features of the prastara are similar to those of the main shrine.\textsuperscript{108}

**Arththa Mandapa**

Next to the sanctum, there is an arththa mandapa with a roof projected 2.50m forward without any pillars for support. This is rectangular in shape and the upper roof is closed and flat. The architectural features of the exterior wall appear as those of the sanctum.\textsuperscript{109} The bhitti portion has eight pilasters with four pilasters on


each side. On either direction there are two devakoshtas, constructed without any sculptures.

Around the sanctum and arththa mandapa, on three directions the north, the south and the west on a high pedestal is built a pillared portico (9.05m7.50m) which seems to be a later construction. At the level of the pedestal, the floor of the courtyard is raised and smooth. The garbhagrha and arththa mandapa seem to be raised from a depth.

The two female dwarapalikas (stucco figures) by name Jaya and Vijaya which guard the central opening of the entrance to the arththa mandapa are in anjali pose.110

**Maha Mandapa** (Fig: 73)

The maha mandapa (8.40m to a side) is linked up with the arththa mandapa. It is of typical Chola pattern with six pillars (h.2.10m) in two rows, which indicates six Vedangas (Siksha, Kalpa, Vyakarna, Nirukta, Chandha, and Jyotisha), are present in the mandapa. The flat roofed maha mandapa (h.2.85m) appears with Yagakunda, Nandhi and balipeeda. All these are found in a straight axis. It has the usual passage on its eastern side (1.92m*1.17m) for

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reaching the *mukha mandapa* while it provides access on its southern side (2.00m*1.05m) with a doorway to enter the *prahara*. At the entrance of the *mandapa* on the east, two imposing figures of Ganapati and Subrahmanya are seen on both the sides of the entrance.\(^{111}\)

The plinth of this *mandapa* on the north only is seen from the *galapada*. The other lower layers are concealed in the ground. The wall portions have four plain pilasters. The top portion of the pilaster is tenanted *potika*. The four shallow *devakoshtas* carrying a well-designed *makaratoranas* are free from sculptures.

In the same manner the southern side wall also should have been constructed, but it is not so, since the wall had undergone renovations later. On the south-eastern side alone, there is a *devakoshtas*.\(^{112}\) The *uttara and vajana* running above the pilasters are super-imposed by *kapota* and sealed with undressed *kudus*.


Mukha Mandapa

The *mukha mandapa* measuring approximately 10.35m by 8.40m at the base has been added to the *maha mandapa*. It terminates into a vaulted roof. Abutting the northern wall inside, there are three rooms with an entrance facing the south.

The first room is for keeping the idols, the second one as *Palliyarai* and the third one is for keeping the *vahanas*. There are fourteen pillars which adorn this *mandapa*. The northern side wall is the continuation of *maha mandapa*; it can be seen from the *galapada*. There are six pilasters in the *bhitti* portion. These pilasters belong to the *brahmakanta* pilaster type.

There are four *devakoshtas* between the pilasters with *patratorana, kalasa, tadi, kumbha, idal, palagai* and *sadapotika* capital. Though the *prastara* is like the *maha mandapa*, below the *kapota* line, there is an ornate moulding which is similar to the wooden work of those days.

The *mukha mandapa* and front *gopura* are joined together by an intermediate pillared hall (8.30m*8.40m) serving as a kind of portico. It is supported with eighteen pillars. It has three rectangular *sikharas*
existing intact from the east to the west. This pillared hall seems to belong to the days of 19th century A.D.\textsuperscript{113}

**Subramaniaswamy Shrine**

Known to have arisen in the 13th century, this shrine could have furnished valuable data regarding the architectural features of the age. But the *garbhagraha*, the small vestibule and the *mandapa* in front, do not present architectural peculiarities worthy of mention.

The two pillars at the two extremes of the vestibule are of the *pattam* and *saduram* variety. The corbels are of later Chōla pattern.\textsuperscript{114} This confirms that, so far as the Subramaniaswamy shrine is concerned, the style of the corbel corresponds to the evolution suggested through identification by Dubreuil.\textsuperscript{115}

The pillared porch running in front of the vestibule appears to have been constructed in the 16th century. The group of four pillars on either side presents *sadurams* and *pattams*.

At the top of the *saduram* appearing on the base of the pillar, there is a *nagabandham* ornament. The faces of the *sadurams* show


nicely carved floral designs. But the corbels of the pillars are only of the later Chōla variety.\textsuperscript{116}

Undoubtedly, the small portico in front of the \textit{mandapa} bears the construction style that was common in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Moreover, the pillars of the portico have very exquisite carving. Besides the skillfully executed \textit{sadurams} and \textit{pattams} presenting minutely worked belts running around the middle of the \textit{sadurams}, a number of elegantly sculptured figures adorn the faces of the pillars.

It is noteworthy that the inner surface of the ceiling is dissected into nine squares formed by slender beams of stone running across each other. In the square at the center is sculptured the figure of Lord Subramania, seated on the peacock. The other eight squares contain uniform sculptures of Shiva seated on the bull.\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{Vasantha Mandapa (Fig: 74)}

Another splendid monument of architectural skill is the \textit{vasantha mandapa}, which is ascribed by tradition to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{116} M.S. Govinda Samy, \textit{The Role of Feudatories in Later Chola History}, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 1979, p. 60-70.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 111-112.
The *vasantha mandapa* is located on the eastern direction of the temple’s outer *prahara*. It is also called *vaikasi mandapa*, because during the Tamil month of *Vaikasi*, grand celebrations are held there to the presiding deities. This pavilion too, displays excellent workmanship. But, from the architectural point of view, it is ascribable even to the 17th century A.D. In fact, the four pillars at the corners supporting the pavilion bear a remarkable representation. The artistically carved floral decorations on the shafts, the bulbous capital and the *puspabodigai* corbel are all common to both.

In the *vasantha mandapa*, a number of images and sculptures of multi-taste are engraved. The sculptures of Maha Vishnu’s ten *Avathars* (incarnations), Paramashivan - Parvathi, Vinayagar, Subramaniar, Natarajar, Shivalingam, Krishnan with cow, *Kalinga narthanam*, Hanuman and *Annapatchi*, are found installed in this *mandapa*. People used to wait for *vasantham* (spring) season to get rid of the summer heat. In the same way, the deities of this temple wait for the spring season to celebrate the *Vasanthorchavam* after the summer season.

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In consonance with this idea, a *mandapa* was constructed and named vasantha *mandapa*. In the entrance of the *mandapa*, there are two saivite saints with arms akimbino a welcoming style. In the steps, an elephant head with trunks stands carved. Above this the *Dwarabalagas* are seen in two pillars. Within that, there is a *urchava mandapa*, which has four pillars and an *arththa mandapa* which has twelve pillars and one *maha mandapa* which has 14 pillars; and totally 30 pillars are there. During the Tamil month of *Vaikasi Vasanthorchavam*, a summer festival takes place at this *mandapa* in a grand manner.

The important event related with this celebration is the installation of the presiding deities in the *garpagrha* of this *vasantha mandapa* which will be filled with full of water. Special *abishegas* and rituals are performed on that occasion.

**Thaipoosa Mandapa** (Fig: 75)

During the Tamil month of *Thai*, *Thaipoosam* celebrations are conducted in this *mandapa*. Through the ages, it was celebrated in a grand scale. Nowadays, the H.R. and C.E department has reduced the

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financial allotment for this purpose. So the people's participation became essential.

Presently the philanthropist of the Thiruvomam group are sponsoring the Thai poosam celebrations; and Annathanam (free food supply) is also conducted on a grand scale. The *mandapa* is situated at the corner where the east car street meets the north car street.\(^2\)

**Alankara Mandapa**

During the annual festival the, icons of Swami, Ambal, Subramaniyaswamy and Vinayagar are mounted on separate *Pallakku*\(^3\) (palanquin) vehicles which are decorated with flowers. When the *poojas* are over, these vehicles are taken along the car streets. That’s why it is called as *Alankara* (decoration) *mandapa*.

**Sabha Mandapa**

This is the largest *mandapa* among others, once King Varaguna Pandya with his ministers, astrologers and other important royal members gathered at this place to hold discussions.\(^4\) The ruler

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\(^2\) Personal interview with *R.V.S. Chockalingam Pillai*, aged 70, Philanthropist and Member, Chitrai Car Festival Committee, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, Radhapuram on 20.05.2014.

\(^3\) *Pallakku* - a typical vahana (vehicle) in which the idol is seated and floral decorations are made during the festival time.

sympathetically redressed the grievances of the common people from this hall. So it is known as *sabha mandapa*.

**Shivarathri Mandapa** (Fig: 76)

During the annual *Mahashivarathiri* celebrations, the cultural programmes are conducted on this platform. At present, the entertainment programmes of *Mahashivarathiri* are conducted here. Nowadays, it is decorated with attractive electric lights.

**Kalyana Mandapa**

It looks like a majestic one. There are 34 pillars. The faces of the lion image are found in the pillars with white stone. It has the sculpture of *Yoga* posture of *Saiva nayanmars*. It also has the plantain decoration and *Kejamuga* seen at the other corner of the temple. The *kalyana mandapa* is used by the devotees for conducting their family wedding functions. Nowadays it is often used for other social celebrations also.

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Southern Gate Mandapa

It consists of *anuppu mandapa, mugappu mandapa, mani mandapa, maha mandapa, arththa mandapa*, etc. In the *anuppu mandapa*, the unique twelve *rasi peedam* carved at the roof is so artistic and elegant in character.\(^{128}\)

Mugappu Mandapa (Fig: 77)

At the southern gate towards Ambal shrine, *mugappu mandapa* is to be found. The northern wall above the door has the image of coloured *Gajalakshmi* (Fig: 78) with other sculptures possess high aesthetic value.

The *maha mandapa* of the Ambal shrine and the *shivarathri mandapa* at the southern gate possess a number of beautiful, colourful sculpture.\(^{129}\) Significantly, certain inscriptions there speak about the donations given by both the royal authorities and the public to the temple for specific purposes.

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Anjaneya Pillars and Their Sculptural Value (Fig: 79)

There are two pillars at the opposite side of the divine bed chamber near the Ambal shrine and mani mandapa. Among them, the northern pillar is called the Anjaneya Pillar. At the base of the pillar the Anjaneya’s image is there and it is in standing posture. In the central part, the Dharmasastha image and at the top Pillaiyar sculpture project in beauty. It is a unique feature in this temple that Anjaneya, Dharmasastha and Pillaiyar are seen in a single pillar and also there is a Vishnu image on the eastern side. The southern pillar has the Yogamoorthy’s sculpture.\textsuperscript{130}

Designing of Eastern Gate Mandapa

At the entrance of eastern gate, down to the gopura these is the image of a snake man blowing his pipe and near this a carved image of a monkey facing the south and a dancing ‘King cobra’ are to be found elegantly.\textsuperscript{131}

Once a Muslim came to Radhapuram for a court case; he slept in front of this temple after praying to Lord Varagunapandeeswarar to relieve him from the case. Fortunately, he got success in the case. So

\textsuperscript{130} E.M. Subramania Pillai, \textit{Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Tirukovil Varalaru} p.48.

he constructed the *anuppu mandapa*. The pillars of this *mandapa* have the structures of temple car, a cow striking the bell for justice etc.

In the outer *prahara* near the entrance of the *Swami* Shrine on both sides there are *Dwarabalagas* with minute art works. Moreover, before them on the lower side of the *nandhi mandapa*, *Idabadevar* is seen at a prominent height in a distinctively peculiar fashion. Below that is the altar, *Dwajasthamba* with a well carved *peedam* in a *panchavarka* decoration with colours. Murugan, Valli and Theivanai icons made of *panchaloha* are also found. The Murugan icon is highly aesthetic in form with a smiling face and grace and Valli and Theivaanai in standing posture on both sides.\textsuperscript{132}\textsuperscript{132} Out of the six idols, Nithyakalyani Ambal’s four idols are in sitting posture and two idols are in a standing posture. Swami’s idols are two in number.

Ambal’s idol is a carving with a lotus bud in her hands. There are two idols for Chandrasekarar, Chandrasekari Ambal with perfect artistic feelings.

There is a single Natarajar idol resembling the Natarajar of Chidambaram temple. The Ambalavanar and Shivakami stand as couple in the Urchava mandapa. Besides these, there are many Swamy icons in the maha mandapa.\footnote{C. Shivaramamurti, \textit{Nataraja in Art Thought and Literature}, Publications Division of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1994, pp.90-100.}

**Pancha Moorthys**


**Sribalipura**

The extensive corridors running around the main structure of the temple form a colossal seat of architecture. They are the products of modern workmanship, for the \textit{Sribalipuras}, excepting the eastern one, were constructed by the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, \textit{South Indian Shrines, Op.cit}, pp. 280-290.}
The Radhapuram Sribalipuras are smaller in length than their counterparts at Rameswaram, Madurai, or Tirunelveli, but they are more compact and suitably proportioned.

The flooring, plastered decently with cement right through, has a smart appearance. It represents a striking contrast to the pavement of haphazardly fixed stone slabs in the corridors of temples such as the Tirunelveli Nelliyappar temple.\textsuperscript{137}

The columns in all the Sribalipuras except the eastern one are excellently carved. Located in a long range at regular intervals on either wing of the corridor, the pillars present a delightful array.

Attached to the main shaft and carved out of the same monolith is a pilaster. The pillar and the pilaster bear admirable floral designs on the sides. The \textit{asvapadam} or the base of the column itself is executed with skill and grace.

At the top, the pilaster has the \textit{kalasam}, \textit{tadi}, \textit{kudam}, idol and \textit{palagai} poised over the \textit{palagai} of the pilaster, and at the top of the main pillar is the end of the huge capital over which there is a crouching ferociously looking lion. The corbel with the fully developed

puspabodigai furnishes the finishing touch at the very top.\textsuperscript{138} While the pillars, described above, adorn the southern and western Sribalipuras and the major part of the northern Sribalipura, the eastern half of the latter presents still more elegantly carved pillars.

The additional embellishment is partly provided by the pilasters attached to these pillars. Here the pilasters are of the bulbous capital variety. Besides, the faces of the pillars bear splendid sculptures of gods and goddesses.\textsuperscript{139}

**Temple Gopuras** (Fig: 80)

Gopuras symbolize the God who controls the entire world.\textsuperscript{140} The main gopura is situated at the eastern entrance. Other than these, there is a small gopura at the southern entrance of the temple.

In the eastern entrance, the gopura is painted with nine colours.\textsuperscript{141} The sculptors and artisans of the medieval period decided to raise the gopuras, and the temples in the form of human body. As per the Silpa Sastra Adhistanam, Paatham, Munjam, Kandam,

\textsuperscript{138} S. Sundararajan, Noor Aandukkalukku Mun Tirunelveli Mavattam Op.cit, pp.72-75.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} V. Ganapathi Sthapathi, Sirpa Sennul (Tamil) Thozhilnutpa Kalvi Iyakkam, Chennai, 1978, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{141} E.M. Subramania Pillai, Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Tirukovil Varalaru Op.cit, p. 52.
Pandigai, sthubi are the Sanskrit words which in Tamil means feet, body, shoulder, neck, head and hair.\footnote{142} Adhistanam - the basement was known as Adhistanam atharam and magaragam are the other names.

Manjam - The shoulder above the sanctum is called as Manjim and Prastharam, Kabotham are the other names of it.

Paatham - The body above the adhistanam in the sanctum sanctorum is said to be Paatham, which is called as Sthambam and Kambam.

Kandam – The neck above the shoulder is the Kandam; and kalam, karnam are the other names of it.

Pandigai – The head is the peak of the body which is called Pandigai.

Sthubi – The hair on the head is called Sthubi. There are certain rules for the proper height of this structure.\footnote{143}

**Pancha Kumbam (Kalasam)**

The top of the gopura has five kumba kalasas made of bronze. The image of Swami and Ambal on the bull vehicle facing the eastern direction is painted with many colours attracting every one. As the


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guards for them, Ganapathy on southern side, Murugan with peacock on northern side and two Dwarabalagas with Nandhi in a sitting posture are also seen.\textsuperscript{144} On the eastern side of the eastern gopura, Lord Varagunapandeeswarar is sitting on the elephant's head with one leg folded and another leg touching the land. On the western side, there is a Mahavishnu sculpture painted in blue colour; on the southern side is Dakshinamoorthy is in the posture of kicking a devilish woman with a crescent at the forehead.

In the north, the figurine of Brahman is with his four faces and the gopura is circular in shape. There is a neon lamp displaying Om fixed near the gopura at the eastern entrance.\textsuperscript{145}

**Thiruther (Sacred Car)**

Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple is a main temple, and hence has two temple cars for Swami and Ambal respectively to carry the presiding deities in procession during the Chithirai festival. Due to the damage in the Ambal car, only one car was used in this temple from 1994 to 2005 during the Chithirai festival. This temple car is unique in design and colour; it is


\textsuperscript{145} Personally visited and confirmed.
an ancient one, hence special care is taken for its maintenance. Recently the damaged car was spruced up at a cost of 40 lakhs and now two cars are ready for the Chithirai festival. During the Chithirai car festival both Swami and Ambal cars are pulled by the male devotees and the female devotees’ respectively.\textsuperscript{146}

**Vehicles**

The carriers of Gods are in silver, lead, wood, ivory, etc. Among them silver bull, (Fig: 81) lead bull, (Fig: 82) peacock, (Fig: 83) Indra vehicle, *Koothar sapparam*, (Fig: 84) *sapparam, sooran head*, (Fig: 85) *small idabam*, (Fig: 86) horse, (Fig: 87) *ivory pallaku, seevili pallaku*, etc., deserve special mention. In addition to these, *sabapathi* vehicle, *Poonguil vehicle* (Fig: 88), lion (Fig: 89,) elephant (Fig: 90), *chamber* (Fig: 91), are also in use. The old vehicles such as *bed dove, peacock*, etc. got damaged.

Recently, they have been repaired and colored. At present there are twenty vehicles in this temple. They are preserved in the *alankara mandapa*.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{146} *Dinamalar*, Tamil Daily, Tirunelveli, 25.04.2014.

\textsuperscript{147} Personal interview with S. Gandhimathi aged 52, Executive officer, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, Radhapuram on 15.03.2014.
Art and Artists

This temple is the best example for art and sculptures. Many natural scenes like rivers, lakes, trees and clouds are found beautifully carved in this temple. Saraswathi playing on the veena is an important specimen for the artistic potentiality of that period.

Ural, Ullakkai and Manjal kaappu scenes drawn beautifully attract the attention of the pilgrims and tourists; Arasa Elai Pillaiyar (Vinayaga) painting is of splendid appearance.

A pipal leaf drawn in green and on which Pillaiyar had drawn in separate it standing posture with His carrier Mooshiga in frontis highly captivating. A painting of Lord Murugan has been beautifully made with peacock and Vel (spear) in many coloured splendour. The Shiva lingam is designed in dark blue colour with a snake which coils around the lingam. Goddess Nithyakalyani is sculptured with a lotus bud in her hand and red colour saree with a blessing posture. Swami and Ambal are figure in the sitting position on the Kailaaya hills on the Rishabam\textsuperscript{148} and having the crescent shaped moon on His head and flowers below it.

\textsuperscript{148} Rishabam – Bull supposed to be divine vehile of Lord Shiva
Music and Dance

Music is indispensable for conducting rituals and festivals in a temple. During the Kumbabisheka, and Varushabisheka celebrations, panchavathyam\(^{149}\) is played in this temple. During the night pooja on the occasion of maha shivarathri and also during the circumbulation of Seevili rituals, panchavathyam is played. Every day Nathaswaram, Thavil, and Chanku (conch) are played.

Every day after playing Murasu, the doors of the temple are opened and the Changu is also blown. Other than these, melam, urumi, paani, change, etc are also played. R.S.Manohar, a popular cine - actor of Tamil film industry performed a drama in 2004 at Radhapuram in which he acted as King Varaguna Pandya and at last he became an ardent devotee of Lord Varagunapandeeswarar.

The dancing programme is familiar during the Nataraja festival. The significance of the worship of Lord Varagunapandeeswarar is explained through the Natarajar koothu, Ambalavanar koothu, Thillai koothu, etc., to the people during the festival time.\(^{150}\)

\(^{149}\) Panchavathyam- It is one among the important musical instrument played in the temple during the seevali and festival occasions.

\(^{150}\) Daily Thanthi, Tamil Daily, Tirunelveli, 15.04.2014.
Thus, a study of art and architecture of *Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal* temple clearly shows that this temple is centuries old and was developed during the reigns of some powerful Kingdoms which ruled South India in stages and reached its present form. The study also shows that great zeal evinced by the Tamils in the art of temple building which reflects their efficacy and superiority in building construction.

This temple has been laudably preserved by the administrator’s right from the time of the later Pandyas and the Travancore Kings till A.D. 1800, with all its multifarious Additions, renovations, repairs, changes and the like. The Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani temple, even as it remains paramount on the religious side, stands equally paramount in the art of its building construction.

In addition to this architectural splendour, and the sculptural edifices of the temple speak volumes of information about the artistic sense of the artisans and also the deep involvement of the successive rulers for the creation of the sculptures. These are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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