CHAPTER – V

SCULPTURAL EDIFICES

Indian sculpture is valued both as an object of worship and as a work of art. More than half a century ago, there was a lack of appreciation of Indian art among western scholars. The *devas*, men and animals (elephants, lions, monkeys and cats in different moods, postures and activities) sculptured in the 'Fresco in stone are among the grandeur in art.

The Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, like several others of its kind in South India, is a treasure house of varied types of sculptures. They are found in different parts of the pagoda; and they belong to different epochs i.e. the influence of the later Cholas, the Pandyas of Madurai, and Tirunelveli Pandyas, Tenkasi Pandyas, Kalakkad Pandyas, Valliyoor Pandyas and the Travancore Kings are seen throughout the temple. Of these, the most

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2 *Pagoda* - Temple.
numerous and splendid products are the sculptures of the Gods and Goddesses particularly the incarnations of Lord Vishnu.\textsuperscript{3}

**Vinayagar**

*Vinayagar* is also known as *Poorana Shivamsamudayavar, Vigneswarar, Ganapathi, Pillaiyar, Athirsta Ganapathy, Varaga Ganapathi, Raja Ganapathi, Moola Ganapathi*, etc. It is believed that He was worshipped by *rishis* and saints. Within the premises of this temple there are four *Vinayaga* idols with different names.\textsuperscript{4}

**1. Kodimarathu Pillaiyar (Flag Staff Vinayagar),** (Fig: 92)

He is also known as *Sithi Puththi Vinayagar* situated at the south gate facing towards the east in the *Mani mandapa*. *Vinayaga Chathurthi* celebrations are performed to this Vinayaga only and hence He is known as *Chathurthi Pillayar* also.


2. **Anukkai Vinayagar** (Fig: 93)

   This idol is seated in the south of *maha mandapa* in which the Swami is facing towards the east. The daily *pooja* in the temple first starts from here only.

3. **Kanni Pillaiyar (Sangadahara Chathurthi Vinayagar)**  
   (Fig 94)

   In the south - west corner of the *prahara*, there is a big *Ganapathi* having a big stomach with a *kolukattai* on his left front hand, which is His favourite food. He blesses the devotees with wisdom and profits. Monthly *Chathurthi poojas* are performed to Him only.

4. **Outer Prahara Vinayagar** (Fig: 95)

   The fourth *Vinayagar* is in the *Alankara mandapa* in the outer *prahara*. He is also called Kanni *Pillaiyar*.

**Subramaniaswamy Shrine**

The *garbhagraha*, the small vestibule and the *mandapa* in the 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 the later Chola
pattern. The pillars running in front of the vestibule appear 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, the nagabandham ornament is
found. The faces of the sadurams show nicely carved floral designs.
Moreover the pillars of the portico have exquisite carving. It is
noteworthy that the inner surface of the ceiling is dissected into 9
squares formed by slender beams of stone, running across each
other.\(^5\)

**Nandhi Mandapa**

A pillared mandapa (length 2.26m breadth 2.32m and height
5.00m) which has been dedicated to Nandhi is found in between the
tank and muhappu mandapa of this temple. This is also in a central
axis drawn from the main shrine. This mandapa stands on the
ashtanga upapitha which commences with an upana.\(^6\) A plain and
smooth kantha is on the upana embraced by inverted padma

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6. Ibid.
mouldings above and below. Over it, there is a straight pattika which has a small vari in its upper part. There are four pillars, one on each corner of the upapitha. The height of each pillar is 7 feet. The body of each pillar is plain and square shaped.

The pillars support the incipient puspapotika corbel that is traceable to the 13th century A.D. The prastara part over the corbel is embellished with the usual mouldings like uttara, ornate vajana, kodungai without kudu motifs and double lined kampa. The square body of the ekatala vimana is mounted over the prastara of this mandapa. Ekatala is formed by karnakutas at each corner, salas in the middle of each side and two intervening panjaras. Four Nandhis are in the four corners at its top. The griva and sikhara above are circular in size. The sikhara is topped by a beautiful kalasa made of copper.7

**Sculptural Significance of the Pillars**

A pillar is a vertical element of sculpture or building construction that consists of a base, shaft and a capital. Pillars not only support the superstructure, but are also useful in determining

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7 Personally visited and confirmed.
the period of the buildings.\textsuperscript{8} The fundamental truth found in the Dravidian style of architecture is that the progress of a pillar indicates the growth of Madakkoyil.\textsuperscript{9} The different portions of the pillar from the bottom to the capital are found in the temples. With the help of the upward growth of the pillar, one can learn about the real growth of the Dravidian mode of architecture.

Pillars are known by a variety of names such as Stambha, Pada, Jangha, Carana, Anghri, Sthanu, Sthuna, Talipa, Kampa, Skambha, Bharaka, Dharana, Anani and Tali.\textsuperscript{10} A pillar has different parts from the bottom upwards as tiranai (bulbous), kaluttu (neck), kutam (cavity), palagai, patti, and idal.\textsuperscript{11}

There are various kinds of pillars which are based on their differences in shapes and ornamentations like brahmakanta, visnukanta, indrakanta, chandrakanta, rudrakanta, chitrakanta and the like.\textsuperscript{12} When many mandapas were added to temples, pillars were

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[9] Ibid., pp. 5-6.
\item[10] P.R. Srinivasan, \textit{Koil Kalaiyum Sir pangalam} (Tamil), Kalainjan Pathipakam, Madras, 1965, pp.110-120.
\item[11] Ibid., p. 120.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
developed in different shapes and sizes. The history of the evolution of the pillars of the South Indian temples can be divided into five stages, that is the Pallava style (A.D.600-850), of the Chola period (A.D.900-1150), under the Pandyas (A.D.1180-1350), the Vijayanagar style (A.D.1336-1565), and of the Madurai Nayaks (A.D.1600-1700). The pillars found in the cave temples of Mahendravarman I, are massive and squat. The top and the base portions of pillars are saduram in section and occasionally carved with circular lotus medallion. The central portions of their shafts in between the squares are octagonal or kattu in plan. Brackets of the pillars are massive with curved or beveled ends.

The pillars of the Mamalla group found in Mahabalipuram are slender. They have the heraldic lions, a royal emblem on their base, fluted shafts and a variety of capital designs of the cushion and inverted bell types.

The pillars were moulded with greater refinement in the Chola period. As a temple attains different stages of development which

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includes the *vimana, prahara* and *gopura*, so also the growth of Dravidian pillar construction has secured a place of greater importance than temple structures from 10\(^{th}\) century onwards. A large number of pillars representing the reigns of the Cholas and the Pandyas can be seen in Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple.\(^{16}\)

Anyone can see many pillars in progressive stages of development of the Pandya period. Three kinds of pillars datable to 10\(^{th}\) century A.D. with very simple design called *brahmakanta*, *rudrakanta* and *visnukanta* are seen in the *mahamandapa* and its pillared portico of the main shrine. The body of the pillars is uniform. The *brahmakanta* pillar from its bottom to top is square while *rudrakanta* is cylindrical and *visnukanta* is octagonal. Over the shaft the capital of the pillar is employed as a bevel and tenon like corbel.

Pillars of different geometrical shapes such as square, rectangular, shafts are found in the *mahamandapa* and *mukhamandapa* of the Amman shrine.\(^{17}\) In this pattern, the base of the pillar is a plain rectangular block and the center of the *stambha*


and top are square blocks. The inner space contains sixteen shafts with very simple bands on top and bottom around and across the shafts. The corbel which is the crowning member of the pillar is formed as in previous capital mouldings. This stylistic consistency indicates that these pillars were built during the 11th century A.D.\(^{18}\)

The pillars are the vertical elements of Sculpture or building construction that consists of base, shaft and a capital. In the subsequent period, the square type of pillars in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple have been skillfully carved with intricate ornamental designs such as flowers, scenes from the mythological stories of Shiva, dancing *apsarases* in diverse poses accompanied by musicians playing musical instruments. The pillars are the vertical elements of sculpture or buildings construction that consists of base, shaft and a capital.

Pillars belonging to the 12th century A.D. exquisitely made from base to top are shown in the outer *prahara* of Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) Personal interview with N.Senthil Selvakumar aged 65, District Archaeological Officer (Rtd.), Tirunelveli on 29.03.2014.
The component of the pillars starting from a rectangular base is known as *Oma*. *Oma* is a delicately embellished foliate with decorations on its sides. The octagonal shaft above the base stands perpendicularly with a *thamam* which employs studded pearls lending charm. In some of the pillars the interior spaces of *thamam* are deeply carved with figural motifs. *Padmabandha* is formed of two rows of opposed petals resting on the shaft.

A *kalasa* placed above them has beautiful leaf-like festoons making it very ornate. *Tadi, Kumbha, idal, palagai,* and *virakandha* are perfectly followed by *Kalasa* one by one. The profiles of the capital are usually of a tenon like triangular cut. This type of capital was later designed like a moulded pendant during the Pandya period (13th century A.D.). This overhanging capital lends charm to the top of some of the square type pillars found in *mukhamandapa* of the main shrine.²⁰

It is indeed praiseworthy that every one of them is monolithic and it is a great wonder that pillars were carved without any fractures. They are of a compound nature that is a miniature pillar

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²⁰ Personal interview with *N.Senthil Selvakumar* aged 65, District Archaeological Officer (Rtd.), Tirunelveli on 29.03.2014.
often found in conjunction with a main pillar. The main pillar consists of two rectangular sections, one at the top of the corbel and the other at the bottom, a cubical section in the middle with the intervening space cut into sixteen facets and a band.

The miniature pillar combined with the main one emerges from the base which is divided by many stylish mouldings. The remaining members of the pillar are well designed combination of banded shaft, padmabandha, kalasa, tadi, kumbha, and palagai carrying the heraldic lion. In some of the pillars, the shaft is artistically carved with rampant hypsography or upraised animal of a supernatural kind (tutiyalī). The lion is holding up puspapōtika capital which has well developed lotus petals.

The various kinds of sculptures in the temple may be broadly classified into those of 1. Natural Scenery; 2. Floral designs; 3. Animals and Birds; 4. Human figures; 5. Portraits of kings and eminent personalities; 6. Gods and Goddesses.21

**Natural Scenery**

It must be admitted that the sculptors who sculpted in the Radhapuram temple, as in most South Indian temples, paid

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comparatively less attention to the portrayal of natural scenery. Sculptures depicting lovely scenes of forests, hills, valleys, rivers or the natural phenomena are rare; and even trees bearing flowers and fruits are sculptured in several places; but, almost invariably, they were rather indifferent manner sculpted. The floral designs are very attractive. The sky and the clouds are depicted in a perfectly naturalistic manner.

This panel shows that if the same attention had been devoted to the sculpturing of scenery as to the Gods and Goddesses, undoubtedly, the temple would have presented remarkable specimens of sculpture depicting nature’s charms.22

**Floral Designs and Architectural Sculpture**

While natural scenery failed to receive the necessary attention, artistic ornamentation by means of lineal carvings was not neglected. The *maha mandapa* of Vasantha mandaba is the earliest to present on the edges of the pillars, as also on the ceiling above, exquisite lineal carving and floral designs. On the ceiling, designs in the pattern of the well-bloomed lotus flower, and other pictorial drawings are seen

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carved. In recent times, they have all been painted with suitable colors, producing a pleasing effect.\textsuperscript{23}

The \textit{vasantha mandapa} of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century too, is noted for the lineal carving on the edges of its pillars. The floral designs are so beautiful and intricate and artistic. The latest specimens in the temple are found in the inner \textit{prahara} and the \textit{chitirai mandapa}. The artistic merit of their workmanship is superb. Once the original design is carefully planned and executed; the others of the same series have only to be imitated. Nevertheless, it demands patient attention to details.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Stone Carving}

Lineal carving and architectural sculpture are at their best in the specimens of stone carving in this temple. Carving in stone is a specialty of the Pandyas; the temple at Avudayarkoil which is popular for its \textit{Kodungai} sculpture and the temples at Madurai and Triunelveli region are some of the best specimens in the whole of India. While most of them belonged to the later medieval period, the stone carvings found in the Tirunelveli region are all of recent times, not earlier than

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p.41.
the latter half of the 18th century. Lineal carving and floral designs of a marvelous type are found in this temple on the rafters and pillars within the arththa mandapa and muha mandapa.

Animals and Birds

Sculptures of animals and birds appear in various parts of the temple. They have been introduced in their appropriate places either as vehicles of particular Gods and Goddesses, or in a few cases, purely for the sake of their decorative value.\footnote{K.K. Pillai, Suchindrum temple - A Monograph, Op.cit, pp. 512-526.}

Lion

The lion, as such, is rarely sculptured in the sitting pose. There is only one place i.e. at vasantha mandapa where a lion has been beautifully carved. The lion in the lying pose on the top of pillars with its array of protruding teeth, wide-opened jaws and fierce look, is a common feature.

In the Radhapuram temple, the lion resting on the top of the pillar appears in the latter half of the 18th century, and has held its own style since then. Nevertheless, the decorative object is excellently
achieved; more so, on the long range of pillars as in the *vasantha mandapa*.\(^\text{26}\)

**Elephant**

Sculptures of elephants are found frequently in different parts of the temple. A long row of elephants and lions alternating with each other is depicted as basement mouldings just above the *adistanam* on the facades of the *Chitrai mandapa* and the eastern *gopura* and its base. The elephants, pictured to be 'guarding' the steps to the *Chitra mandapa*.\(^\text{27}\)

The base-relief's of the facades of the inner and outer *prahara* (*Vaikasi mandapa*) depict the elephant in scenes like 'Gajendramoksa', *Vallitirumanam*, anointing of Shivalinga by the elephant, and 'Gajalaksmi' in the southern entrance. Besides, on the faces of pillars in the *Chitrai mandapa*, the elephant figures as the vehicle of Indra. In front of the Vinayaka shrine, there appears a tiny elephant carved in stone. On the whole, the sculptures of elephants have been executed with good effect.\(^\text{28}\)


**Horse**

The horse, on the other hand figures rather rarely in the sculptures of the temple. Horses appear only where chariots are depicted. In two cases where the *Visvarupa* of Lord Krishna is shown as *Parthasarathi*, the horses attached to the chariots are shown, clearly. The horses form an insignificant part of those elaborate sculptures, and hence, inadequate attention seems to have been devoted to their carving; at any rate, they do not constitute first-rate specimens of sculpture.

**Bull**

The bull is one of the most familiar animals sculptured in all the Shiva temples. The bull, lying in the characteristic pose before the deity, is found in no less than four places in the temple - in front of the *sanctum sanctorum*, of the *vasantha mandapa*, and of the *arththa mandapa* of the Sri Varanguanapandeeswarar shrine. Except the bull in front of the *arththa mandapa*, the others have been sculptured well; great attention having been paid to their pose.

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29 *Parthasarathi*, Parta is a name of Arjuna and Sarathi means charioteer.
Cow

The cows have been represented and just in a few places where Venu Gopala in the Chitrai mandapa and Vasantha mandapa are shown being enthralled by this enchanting play on the flute.

In all the cases where the cow is sculptured in this context, especially at the entrance to the Chitrai mandapa, it has been done well, and the cow's joy and admiration are vividly brought out in its facial expression.\(^\text{31}\)

Buffalo

The buffalo is depicted but only once, as the vahana of Yama, the God of death, in connection with the illustration of the Markandeya story found on the northern facade of the vasantha mandapa. But, it is not a satisfactory representation of the buffalo. Its striking muscular strength and its proverbial calmness are not clearly shown.

Monkey

The monkey, on the other hand, is sculptured skillfully in several places. Naturally in the illustrations of the Ramayana, on the sides of

the *vasantha mandapa* ceiling, they figure. Besides, in cases where the tree has had to be sculptured, as in portraying Yaksinis in the *unchal mandapa*, superscript 32 stray monkeys are shown perched on the top. superscript 33

**Dog**

The dog appears as the *vahana* of Kalabhairava and is found in the shrine dedicated to that deity in the near outer *prahara* and also in another sculpture of the same god shown on a pillar in the *vasantha mandapa* and a third in a panel on the eastern *gopura* base. It may be mentioned that in none of these cases is the sculpture of the dog carved with grace. superscript 34

**Cat**

The cat figures but only once i.e., in connection with the sculpture of *Krishna Lila* superscript 35 on the southern outer wall of the *vasantha mandapa*. Balakrishna adroitly steals butter, and a cat close by, obviously a rival in the field, keeps watching warily, and Krishna makes a 'generous' gesture by throwing a part of his booty to the less

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superscript 32 *Unchal Mandapa, Unchal Mandapa* means a hanging bed in which the metal statues of the God and Goddesses will play.


superscript 34 C. Shivaramamurthi, *South Indian Paintings*, Asian Educational Trust Delhi, 1968, pp. 82-98.

fortunate aspirant. Here, the theme is vividly represented; but the cat is sculptured in a very unsatisfactory manner.

**Squirrel**

A squirrel appearing to worship a Shivalinga is an old piece of sculpture found on the eastern most panel of the northern outer wall of the *Chitrai mandapa*. The significance of the theme is not known. It may be added that the sculpture of the squirrel is of a rather inferior order. Perhaps the limitation of space in the small panel is responsible for this circumstance.

**Mouse**

The mouse is a very much familiar creature figuring in the sculptures of the temple. It occurs as frequently as does Ganapati, who has the mouse as his vehicle. It is really a surprise that Lord Ganesa, particularly remarkable for the generous proportions of his physical frame, should have had the tender mouse as his vehicle. Be that as it may, in the sculptural representation of Ganesa and his *Musika vahana*, the disparity in size is seen. The most striking feature is in the case of the prodigious images of Ganapati in the

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36 *Musika* - Mouse.
shrines of Sankadahara Saturthi Pillayar and Kodimarathu Vinayakar.

**Deer**

The only other animal appearing frequently as a sculptural representation is the deer. Wherever Shiva is depicted with four hands, and such sculptures are many in the temple, the deer is represented as one of Shiva’s symbols held in his left back hand. The particular pose accorded to the deer is enchanting. Held in between the first two figures of the God are the hind legs of the deer, which is depicted as taking a frolicsome leap forward into the air throwing up its front legs. Invariably such representations of the deer have been executed with rare skill and taste.

The full-sized deer is represented in one context. It is in the portrayal of the birth of Goddess Valli, shown on one of the panels of the northern facade of the vasantha mandapa. But it is difficult to consider the sculptural representation of the deer in this panel as satisfactory.

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37 *Kodimarathu Vinayagar* - Ganapathy seated near the Dwajasthamba.

Snake

The snake, by virtue of its sacred association with some of the Gods of the Hindu pantheon, cannot certainly be missed in the sculptures of the temple. A full-sized cobra is represented in the portrayal of the scene of 'Paalaalimardanam' depicted on a panel of the facade of *vasantha mandapa* and another at the *nandhi mandapa*. A snake is shown as held by *Krishna* in the sculpture in the *Unchal mandapa*. Besides, wherever Garuda is sculptured, snakes are depicted around his arms.

The sculpture of *Gangalanathar*, for example in the *Chitrai mandapa*, presents the snake coiling around the waist of Shiva. Krishna in the 'Kaliyamardana' scene on the facades of the *vasanatha mandapa* has to deal with the powerful snake in the height of its vigour; but the piece of sculpture is not of a high order. The snake is not depicted in the animated style that it ought to appear in the context.

Slightly better is the case where Vishnu is shown seated along with Lakshmi on the coils of *Adisesha* (the serpent - God), the majestic hood of the latter serving as the canopy for the divine couple.

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39 *Adisesa* - Name of the Snake owned by Lord Krishna
Both in the sculptures at the *vasantha mandapa* and in the *anuppu mandapa*, the snake have been represented with a certain measure of elegance. But the coils are found to be rigidly and artificially formed.

**Birds**

Birds, too, have been sculptured in their appropriate places as *vahanas* of certain gods. The *Mayura* or peacock, the vahana of Subramania is found in several parts of the temple, one in the Subramaniaswamy shrine itself, another in the niche on the southern wall of the *Chitrai mandapa*, a third on a pillar in the *anuppu mandapa* and a fourth on the panel of the *vasantha mandapa*. Of these, the first two are elegant sculptures of the peacock; particularly, the small peacock on the panel of the *Chitrai mandapa* is carved splendidly.

The elegance of the pose of the peacock and the grace of its wings, spread fan-wise, are charming. The most unsatisfactory specimen of the 'Mayura' sculpture is that on a pillar of the *anuppu mandapa*, carved in low relief in between Subramania himself and the background of the pillar, it has not been vividly portrayed.

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The dove figures as a decorative element over the shoulders of Rati, as also over Manmatha at the Vaikasi mandapa. They have been sculptured fairly well; but, since they form only complements to the main piece of sculpture, they have not received at the hands of the artist the attention they deserve.

**Human Figures**

Numerous sculptures of human figures are seen in various parts of the temple. Most of them are feminine lamp-bearers. They are found on either side of the southern gate of the shrines at the Shivarathri mandapa and on the two wings of the pavilions and porticoes of the temple. Several devotees are shown lying flat on the floor and offering perpetual prayer to the deity.

Carved in low relief, these figures appear in almost every part of the temple. Sides of these devotees are found inscriptions in some places indicating their names and stating that they are performing sadasevai or eternal worship. It is believed people ailing from chronic diseases get relief by having their own figures carved in such a pose.

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41 Rati - The most beauty queen of the heaven.
42 Manmatha - Popular beauty king of the heaven.
43 Personal interview with B. Senthee Natarajan aged 68, Epigraphist, Nagercoil on 05.05.2014.
**Portrait Sculpture**

**a. Portrait Sculpture of a King in Chitrai Mandapa**

The third pillar on the eastern row of the *Chitrai mandapa* presents very probably the portrait of a King, shown in standing posture may be the founder of this temple. His right arm below the ankle is found mutilated; perhaps, it held a sword. The left hand is shown resting on his left thigh. The facial features are sharp and well-marked a pair of moustaches is also shown.

The earrings are long, stretching down to the chest; this appears to be similar to the feature common to Venad figures. The head-dress, rising upto a foot, is elegant; but it does not present intricate carving.\(^{44}\) It is strongly believed that the figure is none other than King Varaguna Pandya, supposed to be the founder of this Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple.

**Artistic Significance of Vasantha Mandapa**

*Vasantha mandapa* is situated on the North West end of the outer *prahara* of this temple. There is a background for the emergence of the name *Vasantha mandapa*. During the Tamil months of *Chitrai*

and Vaikasi, there will be heavy temperature in this region. In order to reduce the temperature, the urchavamoorthis (procession idols) of this temple are seated in the midst of full of water in the outer prahara of vasantha mandapa, and special poojas and abishekas are performed to the urchavamoorthis.

It is generally called as Vasanthorchavam. Regarding the artistic significance of this mandapa, the numerous pillars and the carving of different but unique sculptures over the pillars highlight the artistic sense of the Pandya artisans. The themes of the sculptures depict the puranic tales and the Hindu philosophies.

Vasantha mandapa is exactly square in shape facing the east. It has 30 ft height and 30 ft length and 40 ft width. Just like a Shiva temple, this vasantha mandapa itself has a sanctum, arththa mandapa and maha mandapa with four pillars, twelve pillars and twenty pillars respectively. So totally the vasantha mandapa looks like a 36 pillared mandapa.

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45 Vasanthorshavam - spring festival. During the Tamil month of Vaikasi, it is celebrated in this temple.
Moolasthanam (Fig: 96)

The sanctum is 8 feet long and 8 ft wide. The structure has the elements like Upaana, Mahapadmam, Kambu, Kandam, Kumudam, Kabotham, Yazham, etc. The pillars (Fig:97) are based on their differences in shapes and ornamentations like Vedigai, Nagabandam, Padmakattu, Thongumaalai, Kalasa, Thaadi, Kudam, Thamarai Ethazh thattu, Palagai, Veerakandam etc.⁴⁶

Arththa Mandapa (Fig: 98)

A separate arththa mandapa, in which there are twelve pillars, is seen in front of the sanctum sanctorum of the Vasanthamandapa pillars which have been beautifully decorated.

Each pillar starts with vedigai as basement and pothigai at the top, with innumerable sculptures in between.

The pillars of arththa mandapa have been beautifully decorated with sculptures like birds, flowers, yantras, kumbapanchakams and

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epic scenes, yoga postures, etc. The existence of erotic sculptures adds additional glamour to this mandapa.

**Maha Mandapa** (Fig: 99)

It is significant to note that the twenty-pillared maha mandapa has the elements like upaanam, kandam, and vaajanam. Mahamandapa is the entrance to vasantha mandapa; and it is built as outer prahara. At the entrance of the vasantha mandapa, there are two Dwarabalakas (Fig: 100) with sangu, and chakra in their right and left hands respectively facing the east.

The pillars of maha mandapa have been beautifully erected with elements like Vishnuchakra, Maharathoranam, etc. The standing posture of a saint (Fig: 101) carved at the adhistanam of a pillar situated at the south-eastern side of the maha mandapa is so beautiful. In the same pillar, on the southern side, a saint (Fig: 102) seated in Swasthic asana with Dhiyana Thandam, and Rudrasksha has been well finished. On the western side of the same pillar, a sculpture of a saint with long beard, long nose and big ears is seen in

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47 *Erotic Sculptures* - It is every common among the sculptors of Tamil Nadu to annex certain sexual postures in the construction of temples to avoid thirusti (cowardners).

48 Personal interview with A.K. Perumal aged 70, Epigraphist, Nagerkoil on 05.05.2015.
Koottumuthirai posture (Fig: 103). Normally temples and the
mandapas were built by the ruling dynasties.

Significantly, at the vasantha mandapa of Sri
Varagunapandeeswarar Nithiyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram,
a sculpture of a majestic man with tightened mustache is there at the
southern pillar of vasantha mandapa and his name is mentioned as
Meenakshinathan (Fig: 104).  

It confirms the liberal donations given by the individual to this
temple. The Tamil letters emphasize that the period of the erection of
this mandapa might belong to the 18th century A.D.

Another pillar of the vasantha mandapa has a Saiva saint's
posture; and his name, has been mentioned as Azhwarthirunagari
Subramanian (Fig: 105). Once again it confirms the participation of
general public in the construction of this temple. Another pillar of
vasantha mandapa has a sculpture which depicts the
Gajendramoksha or Gajendra Vimochanam.

On the southern side of vasantha mandapa Hanuman
(Anjaneya) (Fig: 106) is seen on the first pillar. In the southern side of

49 Meenkashinathan - a local philanthropist who built the Vasanathamandapa of this
temple.
50 Personal interview with H. Samayamoorthi aged 70, temple Sthapathi, Myladi on
10.02.2014.
the same first pillar, Sri Rama (Fig: 107), on a warrior posture, is seen beautifully encarved.

Madurai Meenakshi's (Fig:108) sculpture is seen in one of the southern pillars of *vasantha mandapa*. There is also a sculpture of Lekshmanan (Fig: 109) brother of Sri Rama having the moon is its third crescent on his head. This is seen in the central pillar of *vasantha mandpa*.\(^{51}\)

The beams connecting the pillars stand erect with flowers. A sculpture with peacock (Fig: 110) and *annam* (duck), (Fig: 111) in the opposite direction is seen in one of the beams connecting the pillars. Floral decorations are seen in a number of places. The scene of snake fight (Fig: 112) is seen on the western side of the central pillar of *vasantha mandapa*.

One of the top positions of the pillar highlights a five storied flower design which is so attractive. In between the third and the fourth pillars, an *Asura*\(^{52}\) with unpolished teeth is seen. Unfortunately, the western and northern side of the first pillar on the western side of *vasantha mandapa* is pasted with cement.

\(^{51}\) It means Chandradarshan, ie, third day of moon which is very popular among the common people.

\(^{52}\) *Asura* - Devil Force.
So it is not possible to see the sculptures on that side. But on the remaining sides, a Saiva saint’s sculpture in *yoha nishtai* style is seen. A Ramayana epic scene is there on the third pillar of the Western row of the *vasantha mandapa* in which a *Vaanaran* (monkey), (Fig: 113) is holding a stone on his head.

A five-headed cobra (*panchanagam*), (Fig: 114) *sculpture* is seen on the backside of a Shivalinga. The fifth and sixth pillars in the middle row of *vasantha mandapa* are seen with limestone pasting; so it is not visible to identify the sculptures.

In front of the *artha mandapa*, within the *vasantha mandapa*, there three granite steps flanked by elephants with raised tusker stand beautifully carved. It is significant to note that a female saint with *ruthraksha* in her ears, neck and hand in *anchalihasta* posture is seen encarved on the pillar situated in the northern side of the *vasantha mandapa*. This beautifully decorated sculpture is 3¼ ft high and 1 ft wide.

A *Saravanabava yantra* (Fig: 115) is seen on the northern side of a pillar situated in the central part of *vasantha mandapa*. A pillar in

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53 Elephant with raised hand was normally used by the Travancore kings due to their emblem. So it may be a later addition.
the central portion of *vasantha mandapa* highlights a puranic scene, in which Lord Balakrishnan defeats a snake (*Vasugi*\(^{54}\)) and is an addition to the artistic importance of this temple.

On the third pillar situated on the eastern side of *vasantha mandapa*, a *yoga Narasimha* (Fig: 116) sculpture is seen in a seated position in which the fingers of both the hands are facing the earth. On the same pillar at the northern side, a *nandhi* sculpture popularly called as *athikaranandhi* (Fig: 117) is in a standing posture in *anjalihastha* style. The other incarnations of Lord Vishnu have also been beautifully depicted at the pillars of the *vasanatha mandapa*.

**Balarama Avathar** (Fig: 118)

Balarama Avathar, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is seen at the bottom of the second pillar of the southern line of *vasantha mandapa*. Here Balarama wears the royal crown on His head and stands with a bow in right hand and a plough in His left hand.

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\(^{54}\) *Vasugi* - It is the name of a snake which was killed by Lord Krishna.
**Lord Kalki** (Fig: 119)

Bhagavan Kalki is said to be the tenth divine incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The sculpture of Kalki is found in the bottom of the second pillar of the south line in the *arththa mandapa*. He is in a standing posture with a horse head and human body. He is holding *Sangu* and *Sakkara* in His upper right and left hands respectively, and shows *abaya* and *ubaya muthra* (sign) in His lower right and left hands respectively.\(^{55}\)

Similar to Lord Sathiyasarayanan,\(^{56}\) (Fig: 120) sculpture with standing posture is seen in one of the pillars of the western row of *vasantha mandapa*. A Saiva saint (Fig: 121) in a standing posture, wearing cap, *Kundalam* in his ears, *rudraksha* in his neck with raised hands in *anjalihasta* style is seen on the northern side of a pillar situated in the western row.

**Lord Macha Avathar** (Fig: 122)

A sculpture of *Macha avathar*, one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, is seen in the bottom of a pillar facing towards the west.

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\(^{55}\) *Balarama* - One among the incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

\(^{56}\) *Guruvayurappan* - Name of the presiding deity of the city Guruvayur.
Rama – Seetha Suyamwara (Fig: 123)

In the same pillar, on the northern side, there is the *Rama – Seetha Suyamwara* (marriage) scene including the breaking up of *Thanusu*.57

Lord Shivasankari (Fig: 124)

It is one of the divine incarnations of Goddess Sakthi. The sculpture of Shivasankari is in a standing posture. She has *maan mazhu* in Her upper right and left hands, and *abaya, ubaya muthra* (sign) in her lower right and left hands respectively. This sculpture indicates that Lord Shiva and Goddess Sakthi are one.

Lord Koorma Avathar (Fig: 125)

In addition to that, *Kurma avathar*, another incarnation of Lord Vishnu stands carved out at the bottom of the western side of the fourth pillar at the southern row of *vasantha mandapa*.

Lord Varaha (Fig: 126)

One of the incarnations is seen at the bottom of the second pillar situated at the southern side of the *mandapa* and *Varaha*

57 *Thanusu* - Name of the arm broken by Rama, epic hero.
avathara is seen on the southern side bottom of the above mentioned pillar.

**Lord Narasimmar** (Fig: 127)

Lord Narasimma is one of the divine incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Narasimma is found at the bottom of a pillar in the south-west corner of arththa mandapa. He is in a standing posture with Sangu (conch) and Sakkara in His upper right and left hands respectively, and abaya and ubaya muthra (sign) in his lower right and left hands respectively. He throws a fearsome pose with His long-curved teeth.

**Lord Vinayaka** (Fig: 128)

The sculpture of Lord Vinayaka is seen at the centre of a pillar in the south-west corner of the southern pillar line in the arththa mandaba situated in the Vasantha mandabam. Here, Lord Vinayaka is in a sitting posture holding Pasangusam in His back right and left hands a tusk and Laddu in His front right and left hands. He wears a peculiar appearance with an elephants head and a huge belly.
**Sri Rama Avathar** (Fig: 129)

*Rama avathar* is seen at the bottom of a pillar situated at the western row of pillars in the of *vasantha mandapa* there are four pillars in this row. A beautiful significant Lord Venu Gopala Krishna (Fig: 130) sculpture is seen in the pillar situated on the southern side; and at the other side, a cow is enjoying the song of Lord Krishna which encarved fantastically.

**Arjuna Penance** (Fig: 131)

Arjuna’s penance, an episode of Lord Krishna’s *Kalinganarthana* and the *Rama avathar* are some more carvings to be seen on the Western row of the temple. They confirm and confirm Keats dictum that “beauty is truth and truth beauty”

**Sri Nithyakalyani** (Fig: 132)

Significantly, Goddess Nithyakalyani is seen in four pillars with lotus flower in her right hand and ornaments in Her ears and hip. On the northern and southern side of the *adhisthanam*, the third pillar is situated in the western row of the *arththa mandapa*.

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58 Narasimha Avatar - One among the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. In that avathara a devil leader Hamsa was killed.

59 Arjuna’s penance - One among the five Heros of Mahabarata who took penance for getting more powers.
In the eastern direction of the *adhisthanam*, the second pillar is situated at the northern row. In the sanctum of *vasantha mandapa* facing the south, the sculpture of Goddess Nithyakalyani has been beautifully encarved.\(^{60}\)

On the southern side of the second pillar of western row of *vasantha mandapa*, a Saiva saint with long hair, tough beard, sharp nose, *kundalam* on his ears, covering the Shivalinga with his hands and worshipping is seen. *Bharathanatyam*\(^{61}\) (Fig: 133) concert has been encarved at the western side of a pillar situated on the western row of *vasantha mandapa*. Both male and female dancers are dancing in the sculpture.

**Lord Balamurugan** (Fig: 134)

Balamurugan is seen with His vehicle peacock, behind him, holding the *Vajrayutham* in His upper right hand and *Sakthi Aayutha* in His upper Left hand. His lower right hand is in *abaya hastha* position and the lower left hand shows an *ubaya muthra*.

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\(^{61}\) *Bharathanatyam* - A classical dance form originated in Tamil Nadu.
**Kokkarakkan Vatham** (Fig: 135)

The assassination of Kokkarakkan is depicted in a sculpture at the bottom of the eastern side of the second pillar of the northern line in *arththa mandaba* situated in this *Vasantha mandaba*. Here, Lord Krishna opens and tears the mouth of the Kokkarakkan; He dances stamping the wings of the *arakkan* (giant).

**Flute Balakrishna** (Fig: 136)

*Krishna avathar*, another incarnation of Lord Vishnu is encarved at the southern bottom of the pillar situated at the *Pullaankuzhal* - flute (a musical instrument); and on the western side, Lord Krishna is dancing on a cobra.\(^6\) In the central part of the pillar, a cow touching a *Shivalinga* with its tongue is seen.

**Lord Natarajar** (Fig: 137)

The second pillar at the bottom of the northern row Lord Nataraja in dancing posture is seen on the southern side. Lord Nataraja is stamping Muyalagan\(^6\) with his right leg and lifting his left leg towards the right in a dancing posture.

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\(^6\) Lord Krishna at the young age played with Adhesha, a five headed snake.

S. Varma, “*Shiva Avatharangal*” (Tamil), Gowri Printers, Triplicane.1990, pp.53.
Pathanjali Maharishi (Fig: 138) and Viyakkirabaatha Munivar

On the northern side Saint Pathanjali sculpture with five-headed cobra over his body and a snake looking like a tag covering His hip is seen. On the western side of the same pillar, the sculpture of saint Viyakkirabaatha in standing posture is beautifully encarved. Below this sculpture, a female saint in yoga posture is seen under a tree.

Goddess Dhurgadevi (Fig: 139)

Goddess Dhurga Devi has been sculptured at the bottom of a pillar on the north-east part of arththamandapa. She is in a standing posture facing the north. She holds Sangu and Chakkra in Her upper right and left hands, Thirisoolam and Kopparai\(^{64}\) in Her bottom right and left hands respectively.

Lord Vamana Avathar (Fig: 140)

Vamana avathar, the fourth incarnation of lord Vishnu, is seen in the bottom of the third pillar on the northern side of the east line at the artha mandaba in this sculpture. Vamana stands and wears a

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\(^{64}\) V. Krishnan, “Dhurga sculpt” Sheyamala Pathipakam, Udupi, 1996, p.54.
Brahman appearance in the form of a child with a tonsured head and an umbrella in His left hand, *Kamandalam* in His right hand.\(^{65}\)

The *adhisthana* of the pillars situated at the *sanctum* of *vasantha mandapa* are filled with floral designs. Nearly 80 flower designs are there. At the roof of the *sanctum*, there are nine squares, every one of which is filled with eight-tier lotus flowers.

Nearly 16 *Thiruvaachi* toys are seen on the beams connecting the nine squares of the *sanctum*. *Yali* is seen only at the *sanctum* of this *vasantha mandapa*. It is seen on the four edges of the *sanctum*.

In the central portion of the pillar situated at the edge connects the south and the west, wherein there are so many beautiful floral designs. In the middle, nearly 32 *Nagathaali* flowers are seen in the northern row of *vasantha mandapa*.

**Lord Guberan** (Fig: 141)

Lord Guberan is regarded as God of the Wealth by the Hindus. It is interesting to note that Guberan extended a loan to Lord Ezhumalaiyan of Thiruppathi for the expenses of His marriage. Such a

great Guberan has been clearly, beautifully and artistically sculptured in the bottom of a pillar on the south-west part of the Sanctum Sanctorum at the Vasantha mandapa.

There, Guberan is seated on a pedestal with His right leg folded and left leg suspending towards the bottom of the pedestal. His left hand is close to his hip and the right hand posing an abayakaran. He faces the north.

**Lord Garuda** (Fig: 142)

The Garuda sculpture is situated at the bottom of a pillar on the south-east side of the moolasthana in the vasantha mandapa. Garuda with his two broad wings is in a worshipping posture (Anjali hastham).

This sculpture is really a beautiful, clear and artistic work. (It is worth mentioning that *pitha-pithru*\(^{67}\) rites to Garuda, as his son. Sri Rama could not perform the *pitha-pithru* rites to his father Dhasaratha, since he was away from his Ayothi and lived a life in the Panjavadi forest for 14 long years.

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\(^{67}\) A. Madurakavi, *“Vishnupuranam”* (Tamil) Nellai Pathipakam, Tirunelveli, 1986, p. 70.
**Lord Kalyanasundarar** (Fig: 143)

On the occasion of Lord Shiva’s wedding with Goddess Parvathi, the northern part of the earth bevelled and the southern part raised and thereby there occurred an imbalance of the surface level of the earth. Lord Shiva sent Saint Agasthiyar to the south\(^68\), so that the imbalance of the surface level could be avoided. So, Agasthiyar could not attend the marriage and witness the same; and he was very much worried of it.

To console Agasthiyar, Lord Shiva appeared before Agasthiyar at the foot of the Pothigai Hills, as Kalyanasundarar and Kalyanasundari. This scene has been sculptured with Lord Shiva in a sitting posture having Kalyanasundari seated on His left thigh, in the bottom of a pillar on the south-west part of the *moolasthanam* on *Vasantha mandapa*.

**Gajendra Vatham** (Fig: 144)

There is a sculpture of Balakrishna at the bottom of the second *pillar of the northern line in the arththa mandaba situated in the Vasantha mandaba*. This sculpture depicts the scene where Balakrishna kills the Elephant Gajendra. Here, Balakrishna orders

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the outraged Gajendra to kneel down, holds His trunk with His left hands and tusk with His left hand; and stamps his chest, the very part of heart. This scene looks very natural and realistic.

**Agasthiar** (Fig: 145)

Saint Agasthiar is seen at the eastern side of the pillar situated at the north-west direction of the sanctum of vasantha mandapa in a standing posture, playing Veena (a musical instrument).

**Hari Sankar** (Fig: 146)

A peculiar sculpture is seen at the bottom of a pillar in the north-west corner of Moolasthanam in Vasanthamandaba. The general public, i.e, the Hindu devotees regard this sculpture as Lord Hari Sankar as He shows the Varatha Muthra with one of His front hands and holds a Gatha (battle club) in the other front hand. And He stands wearing Vishmis royal crown and holding Lord Shiva’s weapon man mazhu in His back hand.

**Lord Sankaranarayanar** (Fig: 147)

The Sankaranarayanar sculpture is a combination of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu as He holds chakra and mazhu in His back two hands, and wears an abayam and Urthuva hastham with his front two

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hands. It reveals the fact that Saivisam and Vaishnavism are one. (The separate temple for Sankaranarayana is situated at Sankaran Koil). In order to establish unity among Saivism and Vaishnavism and also to assert oneness of God, the sculpture of Sankaranarayana70 stands symbolic.

**Lord Brahma** (Fig: 148)

A sculpture of Lord Brahma with four heads and eight hands is seen on a pillar in the northern part of the sanctum of vasantha mandapa.

**Lord Pichadanamurthi** (Fig: 149)

Within the sanctum, there is a beautiful sculpture of Pichadanamurthi with four hands – one holding a lotus flower, and another holding an Udukkai, the third one touching a dog and the fourth one being the abaya karam. This Pichadanamurthi is seen at the bottom of the eastern side of a pillar on the North east direction of the Moolasthanam at the Vasanthamandaba.

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70 *Sankaranayana* - It is a combination of Shiva and Vishnu
Veerabhadrar (Fig: 150)

A sculpture of Veerabhadrar with a sword is seen at the pillar situated on the western side of the sanctum of vasantha mandapa.

Lord Gangala Nathar (Fig: 151)

Gangalanathar is one of the human incarnations in the divine game of Lord Shiva. Thiruvilayadal Puranam narrates that Gangalanathar worked as one of the labourers in the construction of a dam undertaken by King Pandiya. He did that work on behalf of an old woman –a puttu vendor; and He took puttus (rice cakes) as the daily wages from the old woman.

So, he was called ‘Puttukku man Sumandha piththan.’ i.e, the mad who carried earth for rice-cakes. Gangatharanathar is sculptured at the bottom of a pillar on the north-east corner of Sanctum in the Vasantha mandapa. It is a touching scene to see Gangatharanathar carrying the mudpan full of earth, on His head, holding the pan with His two hands, facing the north.

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Erotic Sculptures

Interestingly, seven erotic sculptures are there at the *vasantha mandapa*. At the top of the second pillar situated in the western row of the *arththa mandapa* of the *vasantha mandapa*, there is an erotic sculpture in which a man touches the breasts of a female with his hands passionately kissing her.\(^{72}\)

It is quite interesting to mention that the sculptures of the *vasantha mandapa* alone are plenty in number, all of which bear elegant designs.

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\(^{72}\) Personally Visited and Witnessed