Chapter II

A SURVEY OF TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE IN KERALA

Building shrines to the beloved deities was one of the bounden duties of the rulers of the ancient Kerala as could be vouchsafed from the Sangham literature. The important deities who had shrines were Mayon, Velon, Baladevan, Surya, Chandra Kottavai. There is a reference in the Silappatikāram that Cenkuttuvan constructed a temple at his capital city Vanchi. The identification of the capital city is itself a vexed problem among scholars, much less to locate the shrine itself. However, all the claims of the Sangham age still remain in the pages of literature and, therefore, it is not possible to reconstruct the history of the evolution of Kerala temples from the Sangham age.

The Sarpa-kāvu (sacred shrubs for serpants) with no roof over it, may perhaps be considered as the earliest place of worship of the people of Kerala. A space is allocated and preserved in which the icons of serpants are kept. Spreading banyan trees afford canopy. But such roofless, structureless shrines continue to be a tradition even to-day. Since it has no structures, it has no place in the evolution of the structural temples of Kerala. All the serpent shrines which are attached to the private families or in the precincts of the structural temple (Trippavallur Siva temple, District Palghat) or outside the temple complex (Vatakkanathan temple complex) have no roofs. Such hypaethral temples are not confined to the serpants alone. For example, the Siva linga found beneath the Konna tree (Cassia

Fistula) in the precincts of Tiruvanchikulam and Bhagavati Shrine of Guruvayur temple, both in the district of Trichur, would testify to its non-conformity. Since the second Cheras were patrons of temples and there are monuments to proclaim their association, the study of evolution of the structural temples can be attempted from 800 A.D., when Kulasekhara Perumal founded the second Chera dynasty. The State must have had a tradition in the construction of temples even before 800 A.D. or else there could not have been a spurt in building temples immediately.

Although the edifices of the first Cheras still await sextan's axe, there are rock-cut cave temples which do serve as connecting links between the earlier tradition and subsequent constructions. There are cave temples from the southern extremity to the district of Palghat. While the cave temples of southern Kerala show Pandyan influence, the cave temples of the Trichur and Palghat districts show the Pallava influence. It can, therefore, be said that the ancient Kerala was well-versed in the art and science of construction of temples of the neighbouring Tamilnadu. It is proposed to survey the temple architecture of the district of Trichur since Trichur was the centre of building activity of the second Cheras. Nevertheless the temples of southern and northern Kerala are discussed in the evolution of temple architecture.

H. Sarkar of the Archaeological Survey of India is the only scholar who undertook an exhaustive survey of the

1. See Chapter I. p.3.
temples of Kerala and his observations are based on scientific analysis and hence the same is followed in these pages. Sarkar has classified the structural progress in three phases, viz. the first phase 800 A.D. to 1000 A.D., second phase 1001 A.D. to 1300 A.D. and the late phase 1301 A.D. to 1800 A.D.¹

FIRST PHASE:

The ground plan of the *garbhagrha* (*Sanctum Sanctorum*) presents various forms like (i)square, (ii)circular, (iii)apsidal and (iv)dravida, of which, the first category can claim the maximum number of temples and the last category a negligible number. Square being the earliest form, let us take the evolution of the square temples. The earliest inscription which says of construction of the square temple at Kandiyur, District Alleppey, is of 823 A.D. Tradition ascribes the Trikkulasekharapuram temple, Cranganore, to emperor Kulasekhara,² the founder of the dynasty, though the temple has inscriptive records of the eleventh century. Similarly the temple of Tiruvanchikulam, Cranganore, has close association with Raja-sekhar Perumal, the second emperor,³ though it has no inscriptive evidence to support it. The *ādhisthāna*⁴(base) of the sanctum of the Trikkulasekharapuram consists of *upana, jagati.*

².See Chapter I. p.5.
³.Chapter I, p.12.
vrttakumuda, kantha, kampa, kantha and pattika. There are other examples of this period like Tali temple in the district of Trichur, the unfinished Siva temple, Netirimangalam, the Lakshminarayana temple, Panniyur, both in the district of Palghat, exhibiting the characteristic of the early phase. The adhisthana may broadly be divided into two groups, those with a highly recessed moulding above the Kumuda and those generally crowned by kapota or pattika. The walls spring up above from the above kumuda. Kantha is divided into two halves by a dentil course. The Kandiyur Siva temple's adhisthana consists of upana, jagati, octagonal kumuda, a very high kantha with galapadas in between kampas, uttara, valabhi and kapota. This temple has preserved the pristine features of the adhisthana of the early phase intact. It is most unfortunate that only a few monuments have survived for students of art history. However, Mahodayapuram, (present Cranganore) the ancient city of the second Cheras has a number of temples, which because of the ravages of time, the changed political set up, may not conform to the different period of art history.

Above the adhisthana is the bhitti (wall) which is of laterite in almost all cases in Kerala. The wall ornamentations may be divided into doors, ghanadvaras (false doors) returns

1.Ibid, p.75  
and projections of the wall, देवकोष्ठास, शाम निचें, कुद्यास्थाम्बास (पिलास्टर) तोराणास, पान्जरास, जलकास और नासिकास.¹ The Trikkulasekharapuram temple has देवकोष्ठास enshrining standing images.² This is a Pallava idiom and this temple deserves to be categorised in the early phase stylistically. In other examples, sala-पान्जरास, ग्हनाद्वारास and pilasters are seen instead of देवकोष्ठास enshrining images. Above the wall the प्रास्तारा has हरास of कापोटा or व्याला, as the case may be. The slanted roof protects the सन्तुम from the rain.

Internally a feature to be noted is its सांधारा type as in Trikkulasekharapuram, Cranganore. "Its internal plan consists of two circumambulatory paths, one of them is permanently closed. The outer प्रदाक्षिण-पाठा seems to be the original one which is formed by the बाह्याभिभत्ति and the अन्तराभिभत्ति. An additional wall was constructed later with a view to forming the present गार्भाग्रिहा.³ The square सन्तुम has a narrower मुखा-मण्डपा which is also another feature of the early phase. This सांधारा विमाना claims to trace its antiquity to the architectural phase of the Guptas. It permeated to the Kerala State through the Chalukyas, via norther parts of Kerala as may be seen in the temples of Eramam, district

¹Ibid, p.81.
³Ibid, p.156.
Cannanore and through the Pallavas\(^1\) and Chalukyas\(^2\) in the districts of Palghat and Trichur. There is no namaskara mandapa in front in the early phase.

Raising the parapet wall, as was in vogue in Tamil-natu, is not a feature in Kerala at all. The roof is built with the help of rafters. The sloping roof is common in "early Chalukya and Kadamba sub-style and are to be called the Kadambanagara or phanasankara style."\(^3\) The device is certainly a borrowal from the northern neighbour as it is found quite suitable to protect from the ravage of the monsoon. It has been accepted in the construction of secular structures.

**MIDDLE PHASE (1200-1300 A.D.)**

During this phase, the āḍhisthāna is ornamented slightly. A new decorative element can be seen in the form of floral designs, alternating with galapada, both in kantha as well as in vedika. The kapota-bandha type of āḍhisthāna became popular along with highly recessed moulding above kumuda. Many of these āḍhisthānas show prati above the kapota.

One of the distinguishing features of this phase can be seen in the internal arrangements of the sanctum sanctorum. The external form of the sanctum may be square or circular but

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1. Ibid, pp.43-49.
internally there may be a Dravida, square, octagonal square circular, in miniature form. It is not possible to discover this strange phenomena from outside. Only a student with a searching eye, can discern this internal plan. The inner shrine is a separate entity by itself. Invariably, it is an example of Dravida vimāna from the base to the top. Here we find an amalgam of the Dravida and indigenous styles. "That one building is placed within another belong to the tradition of sacred architecture and it is termed as the incorporation of a Dravida temple within a Kerala temple."¹ The Tiruvanchikulam temple, Cranganore, the Rama temple of Vatakunathan temple complex, Madattilappan Peruvanam Kollur, Sukapuram Daksinamurti temple, district Malappuram are some of the examples of this phase. The Daksinamurti temple, Sukapuram has "a granite ādhisthāna, with padma-paduka below and consists of upāna, short jaqati, vṛttakumuda, kantha with dentils and pattika."² The ornamentation of the walls consisting of kudya-stambhas flanking the ghanadvaras and two corner pilasters showing incipient pushpa-pōdikas. It is a square dvitala temple, consisting of a square sanctum. Generally in the square temples, the walls are relieved with projections and returns, dividing the wall into five bays, decorated with various devices, pilaster motifs, tōranas, makara arches, sāla sikharas and kapōta-panjaras. The decorative device of the tala bhitti

with relief models of kutas, sālas is a hang over of the hāra of the Tamilnadu entablature scheme.\(^1\) The Madattilappan, Peruvanam, a tritala Vimanana, is certainly the most outstanding example of this phase. The temple stands on a granite adhisthāna consisting of upāna, jagati, vṛtta kumuda, kantha, kampa and pattika, followed by a vedi. Inside there is a circular Drāvida shrine of miniature size. The temple has an octagonal griva and śikhara, the latter having a nāsika on each side. This type of śikhara is uncommon among the Kerala forms. In the early phase, it must be noted that there is no monument which preserves the śikhara exhibiting Drāvida features. Hence this monument is unique and has no parallel in the State.

Apart from the temples of the districts of Trichur and Malappuram, there are examples of square dvitala shrines in the northern part like Subramanian temple, Maniyur, Kodavalam Vishnu temple, Anantapadmanabhasvami temple, Kumbla, all in the district Cannanore.\(^2\)

In many cases, the namaskara-mandapa a square structure is seen in front having a pyramidal roof. Another elaboration in this phase is nalambalam or cuttambalam which encloses both the sanctum and the namaskara-mandapa. The presence of Nandi in the namaskara-mandapa became a feature in Saivite temple.

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The political set up of the State underwent a thorough transformation during this period. The second Chera broke into a number of smaller kingdoms. The pan-Kerala character of the Chera was replaced by regional authorities like Venad in the south, Kolathiri in the north, and the kingdoms of Zamorin and Cochin in between. The changed political set up had its repercussions and reflections on the architectural plans as discussed below:

The ground plan, nevertheless remained the same; there were additions, elaborations and ornamentations of the existing monuments or some of the ancient monuments had, per force, to rebuild owing to political or natural reasons. In Tamilnadu, one witnesses the presence of the rising gopuras, more prakaras, erection of shrines for consorts and parivāra-devatas. In Kerala, there are addition of prakaras during this phase. Beyond the nalambala, a square balikkalpura installing the balikkal (oblation stone) appeared. The consorts and parivāra-devatas do find separate shelters. All the structures are enclosed by a railing known as vilakkumātam in which small lamps are fixed numbering thousands or a lakh. Outside the vilakkumātam the wall with gateways can be considered as one of the developments. But the tall and imposing gopuras (gateways) did not appeal to the Kerala genius although a kind of indigenous gateways appeared on

1. See Chapter 1, p.20.
all four sides. Hence "the emphasis has always been on horizontality rather than verticality".¹

Venad, or the erstwhile Travancore State had close affinity with the Pandyas and, therefore, the temples of the State borrowed many of the Pandyan characteristics. The Rameswara temple Quilon, is a specimen of this period although it has inscriptional evidence which dates it to an earlier period. "Its adhisthana is of a highly ornate variety recalling the later Pandyar Chola tradition which merged imperceptibly with Vijayanagar style".² "It stands on a upaPATHA consisting of upANA, padma jagati, antari, pattika, kantha with galapadas, crowned by kAROTA decorated with kUDUS. The actual adhisthana too stands on a padma-pADUKA, upANA, octagonal Kumuda, Kantha with padas, pattikas and prati."³ It has an inscription dated 1102 A.D., of the last empire of second Chera dynasty who made the city their capital under pressing political situations. The Chola garrison might have smithered the city into pieces and might have damaged the temple structures. Hence it is reasonable to assume that the Venad rulers (as the successors) had to renovate or rebuild the temple.

The Krishna temple at bodyal, district Ernakulam has floral designs on vEDI and the walls are relieved with sham niches with sala sikharas,ghanadvaras and kudva sthambhas with

2. Ibid., p.238.
3. Ibid., p.238.
4. See Chapter I, p.17.
bevelled corbells. Since the area was under the political jurisdiction of the erstwhile rulers of Cochin, this monument can be taken as one of the specimen, nearer to the district of Trichur. Similarly, Kalpathi Visvanatha temple, district Palghat and Tali temple, Calicut, district Calicut are also of this phase. The latter is a square dvitala temple with all the embellishments of this phase. The walls are profusely ornamented the kudya-sthambhas carry pushnapōdika which is clearly a Vijayanagara style. The Vijayanagara influence in adumbrating sculptural wealth in the mukha-mandapa is an unusual feature in the northern part of the earstwhile Cochin area though it is common in the southern parts of the earstwhile Travancore, now forming a part of Tamilnadu. The Zamorins of Calicut became the masters of Kerala and this temple received royal patronage and, therefore, it became an art treasure of the period.  

CIRCULAR TEMPLES: EARLY PHASE

The Bharata temple, Iringalakuda, district Trichur, on the basis of inscriptive evidence, belongs to this phase. It is a circular ekatala shrine, the adhisthāna of which is of granite and the walls above are of wood. Since it has undergone renovations, its earliest vestiges cannot be found out. Similarly, the Avittiputtur Siva temple, district Trichur, has inscriptive evidence to claim its antiquity but the present

2. Chapter I, pp.31 and 32.
structure does not corroborate it. The Trikkakkara temple, district Ernakulam Krishna temple at Trikotitanam and Mahadeva temple in the district Kottayam are examples of this period. A general feature is that the ādhisthāna is of kapōta-bandha type. But the Polpalli Siva temple (now in ruins) district Falghat, though belonging to this period, does not conform to kapōta bandha (ādhisthāna, consists of upāna, jagati, vrtta kumuda, kantha, kampa and patti followed by an undecorated vedi.  

**MIDDLE PHASE**

This phase is characterised by the emergence of a developed type of sandhāra vimana. "In the sandhāra temple of early phase throughout India, the inner wall touches the ceiling similar to that of the outer wall or bāhyabhitti. Secondly, a functional circumambulatory path runs around the ḍarbhagrha. Yet another distinguishing mark is the existence of double circumambulatory paths around the ḍarbhagrha. Generally there are columns around the sanctum known as suttunadi. Lastly, there is a miniature Dravida vimana inside the sanctum "effecting a synthesis of two styles Dravida and Kerala"; the former represented by its miniature form inside a typical

2. Ibid.
3. Sarkar, H., Monuments of Kerala, op.cit., p.34.
4. Ibid, p.34.
Kerala slanted roof.

The floral designs of the adhisthāna have already been referred to. The oldest specimen of this variety is the Vatakunathan temple itself which will be described in the next chapter. The Rama temple, Triprayar, in the district of Trichur is of the same period. It is an ekatala shrine whose adhisthāna consists of upāna, jagati, octagonal kumuda, kantha with kampas, valabhi, kapōta and prati. The outer circular shrine has a square Draviḍa vimana surrounded by two rows of pillars. Similarly the Tiruvembilappan, Venganallur, Trattayappan, Peruvanam are in the district of Trichur, the Siva temple at Tirunilai and the Ieruntirukkoil, Udayanapuram, district Ernakulam are the examples in the neighbouring districts.

LATE PHASE

There are no examples of circular temples of this phase in the district of Trichur. The rulers of Cochin were subjected to a humiliating treaty imposed by the Zamorins according to which the Cochin rulers could not even thatch their palaces without the permission of the victors. The absence of new temples during this period may be due to this injunction. In the neighbouring district of Palghat, the Erandamurti Amma temple belongs to the sixteenth century.

two circular temples built adjacently is the horizontal expansion in plan lay out well to be categorised in the late phase. The Tiruvilvamala Rama Laksmana temple, district Trichur, though square dvitala in ground plan may be the counterpart of this twin-circular shrine. The unique feature of this temple is that the bigger temple and nameskara-mandana stand on common upapitha with upāna, jagati, kantha with kampas, valabhi, karota kantha and simhamāla.¹ The walls have lesser decoration as compared to the ādhisthāna. It encloses a square Dravida shrine surrounded by a row of columns. Similarly the Ettumanur Mahadeva temple, district Kottayam also belongs to this period. The granite ādhisthāna is of Kapota bandha type. Below the ādhisthāna is an upapitha with padma as a conspicuous member.² The external wall of wood is preceded by an inner wall encircling a square Dravida vimana surrounded by a row of twelve columns. The walls have afforded opportunities for murals as the Nataraja of this temple has set the fashion which all others followed and continues even to-day. Apart from the mural paintings, an important contribution to the art world is wood carving of this phase. The ceilings of nameskara-mandana, balikkal-mandana are embellished with choicest designs and models in wood. Bracket figures appear in the first tala of the temples. The Vijayanagar sculptural exuberance reached the southern

¹Ibid, p.262.
parts of Kerala where there are pillars having dipalaksmi motifs but towards north, wood replaced stone in plastic modelling.

Another addition to the architecture is the dhvajastambha which is popular in the southern part of Kerala. In other parts only rich temples have dhvajastambha of one piece of wood, covered either with copper or gold as the case may be. The dhvajastambha has a ritual function, inasmuch as, temporary flagstaff is hoisted during festival days, and it would be removed after the festival. The procession of elephants has become a colourful pageantry of the temples and some of the temples have a rectangular structure in front of flagstaff known as anakkottil where the elephants can be accommodated.

APSIDAL SHRINES

Like the circular shrines, no shrines of apsidal form are seen in fact, though palaeographical evidence proves its existence at Netumbura Tali, district Trichur. This temple has undergone renovations many a time. The ancient Valluvanadu (now forms partly Falghat and Malappuram districts) has apsidal temples built during the early phase. They are the Ayyappa temple, Manjeri, Kalasamharamurti, Triprangode in Malappuram district and Tiruvannur Siva temple in Calicut district.\(^1\)

The Ayyappa temple of Manjeri is a nirandhara which is apsidal externally but oblong internally with no pillars whereas the Triprangad, Kalasambharamurti is both apsidal internally and

\(^1\)Ibid, pp.167 to 169.
externally but has columnade arrangements.

Though the Netumbura Tali has a hoary antiquity, it has characteristics of the middle phase only. It is a dvitala sandhāra vimāna. Inside the shrine, it is divided into an apsidal garbhāgrha and a square mukha-mandapa with columnade arrangements. It has floral designs, harāntharas, and nalam-balam, which are of middle phase. Similarly, the Panjal Ayyappan, district Trichur and the Kizhavellur Vamana temple, district Kottayam are of this period.

There are temples in the district of Trichur and outside which denote that this form has not lost its appeal to the builders. The Sasta temple of Vatakunathan complex a smaller variety and the Mahalingesvara temple, district Cannanore, the biggest variety, are the products of this phase. Besides, the Payyanur Subramania temple, the Mangalappadi Siva temple in the district of Cannanore would prove the popularity of this form in northern Kerala. The Mahalingesvara temple is a tritala apsidal vimāna of sandhāra and sarvatobhadra type with columns inside. It has jali windows, makara-tōrana, kudya-sthambha with pushpa-ōdikas. The roof is made of timber, covered with copper sheets. The district of Trichur has the smallest type viz. Kunnatali Siva temple, Chennamangalam, smaller varieties Panjal Ayyappan, and the Sasta in the Vatakunathan complex

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1. Ibid, p.224.
2. Ibid, p.222.
would suggest that there was an attempt to renew the Nedumbara Tali tradition but it was unsuccessful partly due to the negligence or unpopularity of the forms.¹

ELIPTICAL SHRINES

The elliptical plan, simulating kukkantha, is rather unknown. There are two examples of this class: the Vaikom Siva temple, district Kottayam and the other in Chengannur complex, district Alleppey, of which the former is more important.² The Vaikom Siva has in its interior a square Dravida vimana with two rows of columns. It is a Sarvatobhadra with a sandhara circuit. With fluted pranāla hastihasta banisters, namaskara-mandara and nalambalam, it is of the late phase.³

DRAVIDA SHRINES

There are very few temples having Dravida forms. Due to the early association, the southern parts of Kerala which now form Tamilnadu, have monuments like Parthiva Kesavapuram and Vilingam. During the middle phase, Chalapuram Kattilmadam, district Palghat, the shrines at Tiruvallam, district Trivandrum, are some of the specimens.⁴ The political pressure of the Cholas might be the reason for the construction of pure Dravida style in the extreme south. The Kattilmadam is a Dravida alpa vimana.

¹Ibid, p.185; see the table.
²Ibid, p.269.
³Ibid, p.271.
⁴Ibid, p.188.
Its ādhisthāna consists of upāna, jagati, vṛtta kumuda, kantha with dentils and rattika. Ghanadvāras and kudya-sthambhas are the ornamentation. There are no devakosthas and, therefore, it emphasises the indigenous style. Of the late phase, Krishna temple in the Vatakkuṭhan complex, Kodumbu temple at Palghat and the Ambalappuzha temple at Alloppay are the examples. Although the Dravida form continued to appeal to the people of the State, the torrential rain would not allow such structures. Hence, even some of the Dravida shrines have an independent slanted roof built over them where the rainfall is heavy like the one in Vatakkuṭhan complex and the Ambalapuzha temple.

The development from the simple sanctum, cella structure, the addition and elaboration up to the anakkottil reveals the evolutionary process of the present day temple of Kerala. Many of the temples have tanks for purificatory water. A massive wall encloses the entire structure and there are gopuras on all four sides as can be found in either Vatakkuṭhan complex or Guruvayur temple, both in the district of Trichur, to give two examples. Accordingly the general pattern of structure of Kerala temples is as follows:

The garbhagrha and a detached namaskara-mandapa in front, both are enclosed by a cloister known as nalambalam or cuttambalam; a balikkalapura to house the oblation stone; and all these structures are enclosed by vilakkumātam on which lamps are fixed. Outside the vilakkumātam, a flagstaff and to the

1. Ibid, p.190.

2. We came across two Dravida alpa vimanas built in 1962, in Chittilanchery, district Palghat.
right of the temple a kutambalam, dancing hall, and Anakottil behind the flagstaff. The entire structures are closeted by massive walls, with gateways. Hence "the Kerala temple is a centrifocal entity, more like the sapta-prakara scheme of Tamilnadu temples which are modelled after the Vaikhanasa practice of fixing subsidiary shrines in different prakaras rather than the linear expansion of normal temple scheme of Tamilnadu forming a continuous traverse from the dhvaja-stambha to the Srikōil whereas that of Kerala is concentric in character by which the main orientation only pierces the cardinal point of the layout".  