Chapter III

ARCHITECTURE OF THE VATAKKUNANTHAN TEMPLE COMPLEX

In the centre of Trisur town, the Vatakkunanthan temple complex sprawls on a low promontory. The township of Trisur owes its origin to this temple. Examples of many a temple which helped grow towns around them are Parthipasekharpuram, Kantalur, Tiruvalla, Tirukkodithanam, Muzhikulam, in Kerala; Madura, Srijangam and Ramesvaram in Tamilnadu. The Vatakkunathan temple covers an area of ten square acres. It is fortified by a massive wall about 20' in height on all four sides and capped with Gopuras of the Kerala style at cardinal points.

As far as possible, the nomenclature is adopted from the Silpa text Tantrasamuccaya written by Cennas Narayan Nambutiri. According to the Tantrasamuccaya, there are five structures known as pancaprakara, viz. 1. Antaramandala (akate bali-vattam), 2. Antahara (cuttambalam), 3. Madhyahara (vilakkumatam) 4. Bahyahara (sivelipura), 5. Maryada (matil).

The orientation of this temple is towards west, an uncommon phenomenon but not unusual, as in the case of Varadaraja temple of Kanchipuram facing west; Nataraja temple Chidambaram facing south; Srirangam temple facing south; Parasurama

3. See Chapter 1, p.33.
temple and Tiruvalla (Alleppey district), facing north, to mention a few larger temples, whose orientations are anywhere but east.

In front of the Western gopura, there is a Sarpakāvu (sacred grove for serpents), sans roof over it but a spreading banyan tree as though to remind the ancient place of worship which was prevalent in Kerala before the advent of structural temple. (pl.14)

As one proceeds to the sanctum sanctorum through the western Gopura, the marvāda or the wall is the first structure beyond which is the kuttambalam, to the right of the temple. Further is the vilakkumātam or the madhyahāra encircling the shrines and cloisters inside. Yonder is the cuttambalam (Antahāra) a cloister. There is a rectangular pillared hall on the west, wherein is the Nandi. On the northern side, there are office rooms. The kitchen is on the eastern side, and store-rooms are on the southern side. There are three shrines forming the antaramandala on a north-south axis, with detached namaskara-mandapas.

The Siva temple of Vaṭakkunātha as the name suggests, as the lord of the north, occupies the northernmost of the three; Sri Rama is on the extreme south and in between the Saiva and Vaisnava shrines is the shrine of Sankaranarayana as a compromise to the two streams of Hinduism. There are shrines of parivāradēvatas like Ganapati, Vettakkaruman, Sasta, Nandi, Krishna, Udaremukhēsvaran and also one for goddess Parvati who
is sharing the shrine with her spouse, Vatakkunāthan, whereas the Saptamātrkas are kept beneath a banyan tree, near Sasta’s shrine.

VATAKKUNĀTHAN

This shrine is ekatala (single storeyed) and circular in form whose diameter is of 14.55 metres. Vertically the architectural members of the ādhisthāna are upāna, jagatī, vṛtta kumuda, kantha or gala with kampas, valabhi, kapōta and prati. (Pl.No.1)

The granite base has no upapitha but there is a padmapāduka. The construction of an upapitha is not compulsory as stated in the Tantrasamuccaya unlike the six constituent parts viz. ādhisthāna (base), pada (pillar), prastara (entablature), gala (neck), sikhara (head) and stūpi (finial) which are compulsory. The proportion of this part varies according to the size of the temple. The larger the temple, the smaller will be the proportion of upapitha.

The next member is jagatī, a bigger rectangular part, projecting over the upāna, makes its presence conspicuous and impressive. Except the Manasara, all other works like the Kaśyapasilpa, Mayāmata, Manjari and Gurudēvapaddhati, refer to

1. Sarkar, H., Architectural survey of temples of Kerala, table on p.184 and also see the plan of the Complex.
this part along with the *Tantrasamuccaya*.\footnote{Mallayya, N.V., *op.cit.*, J.A.M.U., Vol.IX, No.1(1939), pp.44-45.}

The *vyrtta kumuda*, circular in form, plumps over the rectangular *jagati*. The execution is neat and pleasing as the expression *kumuda* suggests, over the rectangular parts giving a variation to the architectural form and an embellishment to the structure. A *kumuda* can be circular or octagonal as per classification but it must invariably be circular. The circular shape is compared with a full blown breasts of a woman in full pregnancy.\footnote{Pisharoti, K.R.R., *Extracts from Ratnavali*, I.H.Q Vol.XXV, No.1, (1949), p.69.}

Over the *kumuda* is the attenuated *kantha*, *gala* or neck, which has a vertical face, containing 'floral motif'.\footnote{This member is also known as *gala* in the *Tantrasamuccaya* See *Tantrasamuccaya (Malayalam)*, *op.cit.*, slokas 13,14 and 15, pp.16 and 17.}

The *kampas*, *valabhi* and *prati* are plain without any embellishments. Hence, this *adhishthana* is of *kapotabandha* variety.\footnote{Sarkar, H., *op.cit.*, p.204.}

Various texts prescribe and classify the bases variously, e.g.the *Mâyâmata* has fourteen kinds, the *Kasyapasilpa* has twenty-two, and *Manjari* has two, *Gurudevapaddhati* has eight, *Mânasara* has nineteen while the *Tantrasamuccaya* has only four out of which two are named and the rest are not given any name at all.\footnote{Mallayya, N.V., *op.cit.*, pp.185 to 187.}
"The adhisthāna of the Kerala temples follow the southern mainland norm, in having by and large, the upāna, jagatī, vṛtta kumuda, or tripatta kumuda, kantha (either a simple or multiple kanthas and antaries of lesser height capped by either pattika or kapōta) vedi and prati."¹

The circular wall of laterite rises over the prati. The wall has openings towards the west and the one towards the east for Parvati and another on the south and a ghanadvāra (false door) on the north. The openings on west and east are of ritualistic significance; while the southern one is just an entrance for the high priest to the sanctum, devoid of any ritual importance.

The ghanadvāra has no ritual function but lends itself to be embellished on the top. "Makaratorana" motif is found as an embellishment in this temple as is the case with all the temples in general in Kerala. To fix whether the temple is sandhāra or nirandhara, the ghanadvāra is a criterion. If a temple has ghanadvāras, it can be classified as nirandhara otherwise it is sandhāra.²

There are pilasters adorning the wall the bases of which are partly octagonal and partly fluted rise from the adhishthānga while sham niches in the harantās start from the vedika. "These niches are in the shape of Śala-panjara which has its own uttara, valabhi, kapōta and so on. Most of the potikas are of the bevelled type with a tenon like protuberance in the centre. Niches enclose jalakas displaying human figures carved out of stone. The valabhi with a dentil course and kapōta with kudus are conspicuous in entablature. Even the pilasters are in the harantāra recess but the projected parts exhibit another type of kōshtapanjara standing on two pilasters placed wide apart but they do not enclose either any jali or false niches."

On the northern side, there is an ambumārga (waterchute) an ornamented shaft starting from kapōta down to kantha (pl.15). This has a vyāli motif. A goblin supports the waterchute. Stylistically the sculpture may be dated to the period of the Imperial Cholas. The position of the waterchute is on the north as prescribed in the Tantrasamuccaya. This shrine con-

3.Ibid, p.204.
tains two deities and, therefore, there is a necessity for
two; but intriguingly, there is only one: whereas similar
shrines like the Rama Laksmana Tiruvillamala (district Trichur)
has two on the northern side.

The entrance steps to the shrine is locally known as
sopāṇa (balustrade). On the western side, i.e. on the main
nāṭa (entrance) there is a balustrade consisting of a scheme
which has two lateral flights of steps meeting at a common
landing at the top of the steps, concealed from the front view
by a semi-circular stone on which is carved a vyāli descending
on either side. There is a carving of pūrṇa kalasa in the
centre (Pl.25). The device of lateral flight of steps admirably
fits in the circular plan without breaking or intruding into
any of the members of the adhishṭhāna. The eastern nāṭa has no
balustrade which confirms that the nāṭa must have been hewn
out at a later date.

There is an uttira (beam) on pyramidal roof, made by
means of lupas or rafters. From the uttira, the rafters rise
up to the centre of the roof. Usually a kuta is built at the
centre where rafters meet. This fane has a peculiar arrangement.
There are sixty-four rafters meeting at the centre and joined
by means of an iron chain. The iron chain replaced the kuta
and is found firm and binding; has withstood all the ravages of
time and clime. The rafters are considerably long as two rafters
are joined to get the desired length. The number sixty-four

1. Mallayya, N.V., 'Studies in Sanskrit texts on temple archi-
tecture with special reference to Tantrasamuccaya'. J.A.M.U.,
has a significance as it represents sixty-four arts. They slant sufficiently low beyond the uttira and connect the over-hanging eaves. They are covered internally with planks and externally with copper sheets. The slanting roof protects the ornaments of the wall and the wall itself from the onslaught of the monsoon rains.

Three kalasas are placed in the centre of the rafters above the copper sheet as the whole roof is considered as one sikhara taking the temple as alpa vimana. Over the kalasas (Pl.5) is the stupi, made of gold, which sheds its lustre in sunlight as well as in moon-light.

Generally the roofing material covering the timber frame work is clinker built. "It is made up of laminated wooden planks overlapping one another and covered over by clinker-tiles or tiles highly heated in kilns with a vitreous or glossy smooth surface that makes them waterproof."¹ It is this fishscale like overlapping pattern of tiles that is found reproduced in the covering plaster of the brick and mortar sikharae of the southern vimanas. The roof may alternatively be of metal sheet, copper or brass, which is again found imitated even in the earliest monolithic models at Mahabalipuram (Draupadi Ratham).²

1. Srinivasan, K.R., op.cit., p.181, Rich temples with landed property could afford the sheet either in copper or in gold as is being done in Guruvayur; otherwise only tiles can be seen throughout the State.

2. Ibid.
No difference can be seen between a Kerala temple and a Tamilnadu temple up to the prastara. The distinction can be seen from prastara, gala and sikhara.¹ Like the Draupadi Ratha, the Kerala temples in their simplest form have only the four essential parts instead of six of the simple vimānas. The simple vimāna does not have the "lowest of the low upapitha. The four essential being ādhiṣṭhāna, bhitti, sikhara and stūpi. The prastara and grīva below the ultimate roof is eliminated.²

The device of slanting roof is certainly a borrowal from the northern neighbour as it is found quite suitable to protect the shrines from the ravages of the monsoon.³ It has also been accepted in the construction of secular structures.

Externally the form of the Vatakunathan is circular but internally there exists a square edifice, separate from the external circular wall. The square structure has the base to the prati level of the base of the external circle. It has architectural members like upāna, jagati, octagonal kumuda, kantha and pattika over it, whence the wall rises and which has no roof. The wall has three panjaras on the north, east and south.

There are twelve long pillars (wooden) near the square wall supporting the rafters and another row of eighteen which are nearer to the circular wall performing the same function.

¹Kramarisch, Stella, Consens and Potuval, 'Arts and crafts of Kerala', op.cit., p.42.
²Srinivasan, K.R., op.cit., p.182.
³Vide Chapter II, p.55
In a *sandhīra* temple, there is an inner *pradaksana-patha* marked by a separate wall which is distinct from the external wall. In many cases, there are columns along the *pradaksana-patha* (circumambulatory course) which is locally known as *suṭṭunādi*.¹

There are extant examples of one within the other in other States as stated below:

1) Shri Rangam temple where a square shrine encloses a circular one.²

2) Vijayacolesvaram, Nartamalai a square temple encloses a circular one.

3) Patalesvaram cave, Poona, where a square shrine is enclosed by a circular one.

4) Belgola, Agara, Mysore, circular internally and externally.

5) Parauli and Kurari in Uttara Pradesh circular internally and sixteen sided externally.³

The Buddhist monuments of Nagarjunakonda have similar features of circular shrines enclosed by squares, apsidals or circular.⁴ The circular temples belonging to the Brahminical faith came into vogue as a distinct type between fourth and

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sixth century A.D. The Bhimaratha of Mahabalipuram has a square base and circular šikhara parts, illustrating the mixed variety of Vēṣāra. The circular temples are categorized as Vēṣāra in the Sīlpa texts. The Vēṣāra temples are built by eliminating the angles as per tradition of the land of Kerala. The Dvītala Vēṣāra plan is depicted as a miniature relief in Ganesha Ratha. The Kalachuris built circular temples e.g. the Agara temple of Narasimha (facing west) and Bhakta Vatsala at Bagola, both in Mysore. From Mysore, the plan entered into Kerala through Malabar. The cultural exchange between Mysore and Kerala can be traced from the days of Sankaracharya who established the Sarada Matha. Vimala Siva, one of the preceptors of Kalachuri hailed from Kerala.

The earliest circular temple in Kerala is found at Polpully in Palghat district in the north and Perumpulutur (in ruins) near Trivandrum in the extreme south and both are ascribable to the middle of the ninth century. The circular plan gained popularity in Kerala while it ceased to be so in Tamilnadu and Mysore. The predilection for circular plan

3. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
continues even to-day as can be seen from the rituals in connection with Kotiyur celebrations.\(^1\)

In the terminology of music, the term *Vēsāra* occurs as a corruption of the term *Vega Svara*,\(^2\) as one of the *gītis* which are of five types, e.g. *Suddha*, *Bhinna*, *Gaudi*, *Vēsāra* and *Sādhārani*. It meant that the *ragas* characterised by speed, without sacrificing *gamakas* (roundness) and other criteria of *raṇjakatva*. True to its name, it is replete with *Varna*, *Caṭuśka-sthāvi*, *ārohi* and *sancari* in quick tempo. In short, the form is a by-product but is charming. So also is the case in the field of architecture. According to Mallayya, "The term *Vēsāra* means a mule, used figuratively to convey the sense of circular style of construction. *Vēsāra* or mule is a product of combination of horse and ass and which is thus a by-product, which does not produce. A circle is a derivation from the fundamental square by elimination of angles and is thus a derivation."\(^3\)

The arrangement of columns inside the shrine is akin to that of the Vatadaga of Ceylon.\(^4\) *Daqa* means *Dagoba* meaning *stupa*. "The Vatadaga is a development of the circular *Caitya-grha* of India as we can infer from the bas-relief of Barhut and, therefore, was common in the motherland of Buddhism."\(^5\)

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1. Kotiyur is in the thick forests, Badagara Taluka, District Cannanore. The *utsavam* (celebration) is in the month of April-May. A unique feature is that a 'circular' pit is dug every year where the inaugural rituals are performed.


Due to the influence of Buddhism such structures i.e. having columns inside the circular shrine gained currency in Kerala. The circular temples can be seen in those districts where Buddhism had its sway. The word vattam might have been derived from vatta daga. Vattam means circle in the modern Malayalam language but vattam used in the inscription refers to any temple, especially a circular temple. Hence the influence of Buddhism is also another contributory factor for the popularisation of circular temples. Taking cue from the Buddhists, the Brahmins caused to build centres of learning i.e. Pathasāla Kalasāla and Sarasvatī-Bhandaras (library) attached to the temples. An exodus of Silpa acāri (architects) along with mendicants from Ceylon is very likely to have taken place.

A comparative study of the monuments with columnade will be in order vis-a-vis the Vatakkanathan temple.

1) The earliest specimen of a square inner encircled by an external circle is the ruined temple at Neeramancara, near Nemam, Trivandrum. It has a row of eight columns apart from two more on either side. It is ascribable to the ninth century A.D.

2) The Chittumaladivi temple, Kallada, Kollam district, is circular, externally. It has a square shrine inside and a row of eight pillars. The temple is of the eleventh century.

1. Pillai, E.K., 'Keralabhāṣhayute vikāsa parināmāngal, op.cit. p.82.
3. Ibid., p.59.
3) Vamana temple, Trikkakkara, Ernakulam District, is a circular temple. Inside the circular wall, there is a square shrine with four pillars.

4) Lakshmana temple, Terumuzhikkulam, Trichur district, is also a circular temple. There is a square shrine inside, with a row of columns.

5) Karikkati temple, Mancheri, Malappuram district, is another circular temple. It has a square shrine with twelve columns inside.

6) Tiruvembilappan, Venganallur has sixteen columns for the inner row, twenty for the outer row in front of the inside square and probably has the largest number of pillars. It has an inscription belonging to the twelfth century. It can be noticed that such pattern was in vogue but this temple has accepted the conventionalised system with a 'safe middle' of two rows of twelve and sixteen.

The earliest available literary reference to Vatakkanathan temple is in the Tirujnāna Ula of Cheraman Perumal, identified as Rajasekhara Varma (820-844 A.D.). The Ula blazed a new trail in the whole range of Tamil literature as it is known as 'Adi Ula' i.e. the first one.

Sankara vijayam, a later sanskrit work of Vidyaranya refers to the temple as the place of worship by the devout

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1. Ibid, p.89.
parents of Sankaracharya. There is a strong tradition that he shed his mortal remains in the precincts of the temple.\(^1\)

His presence in the temple is depicted by the symbolic representation of sankhu and chakra. His disciple, Padmapada, became the head of the matha and the mathadhipati used to be the administrative head till 1789 when Tippu occupied the temple.

Another tradition is that Parasurama performed the installation ceremony of the idol.\(^2\) His ashes are also interned here. Every temple in Kerala claims this eponymous hero as the founder and benefactor just as Agastya is claimed in the east coast.\(^3\)

Though the inscriptive evidence and stylistic consideration would help fix the date of construction of the temple to the eleventh century, the literary evidence takes us to an earlier date. The temple might be in existence in a different form before the eleventh century when the Chera emperors built a number of fanes like the Tiruvancikulam, Tirukkulasekharapuram, Kurumba Bhagavati, all at the head quarters of the Chera empire. The foundation of this temple could have been much earlier though the inscription is known to have been

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2. Ibid.
in existence from the eleventh century A.D. 1

The roofless square shrine and the near chaotic arrangement of the interior of the Vatakkuṇāṭha shrine lead us to think on certain factors like who was responsible to the sacrilege. During the eleventh century when the shrine was rebuilt the inner square would not have been kept incomplete. The religious sentiments were thick, the donors were not wanting nor there was the paucity of royal patronage. The namaskara mandapas were ornamented later. So were the nalambalam and kūthambalam.

An iconoclast must have tried his hand much later. In the year 1789, Tippu Sultan entered the temple complex with his battalion. 2 The sanctum had to face the fury of the infidel. It may be stated that the King of Cochin had written to the East India Company that he would not be able to supply timber as he wanted it for the repairs of those temples which were desecrated by Tippu Sultan. 3

SANKARANARAYANA

The shrine of Sankaranarayana is situated in between the Lord of the north and Rāma who occupies the southernmost position. This shrine is also circular whose diametre is 7.37m. It has two storeys, hence, dvitala, and is half of the circumference of Vatakkuṇāṭha, though almost equal in height even with two storeys.

1. Srinivasan, K.R., op.cit., p.184 (Pl.5 and 6)
The members of the adhishtāna are pāduka and upāna, jagati, vṛtta kumuda, kantha, valabhi, kapota and prati like those of its northern neighbour (Pl.2). The lowest constituent part projects farther than the one above it and all the members simultaneously show an inward slant towards the wall. The adhishtāna and the walls likewise are relieved five times with projections and four recesses.1

Apart from the dentil course in kantha further embellishment of projections and returns on this "by product plan" is something novel. The Irattayamman temple, Tiruvallur, has similar projections and recesses, more or less in consonance with this temple but the adhishtāna is of manchaka.2 The extremely logical evolution of 'projection and recesses type' is found in the base of Mukunda temple, Tirunavai, the erstwhile venue of Māmānkan.3 The base has an "upapitha which is of fine proportion and with trippatta kumuda and kapota embellished with nāsikas, over which the padabandha-adhishtāna rises.4 There are five projections and four recesses.5 As an ornamentation, the projections and recesses have been tried into the square bases. The southern neighbour of this temple

3. Vide Chapter I, p.27.
5. Ibid, see photoplate No.62.
(Rama) has a square base with projections and recesses.

Above the ādhishthāna, the circular wall is of laterite which has three ghanadvāras, pilasters, panjaras with sala and nāsika motifs. "The ādhishthāna and wall are likewise relieved the larger bays in the middle of north, east and south sides being sala patterns, with a false floor inside a sthambha tōrana with a makara arch on top. The other bays correspond to the kuta or panjara patterns. All two storeyed models - while recesses have again such two storeyed models of lesser size with sala-sikhara motifs on tops of shorter and more closely set pair of pilasters."¹ The sham niches have jalakas like those in the Vatakkunāthan shrine.

The balustrade differs from the Vatakkunāthan temple in design and in execution. From the ground it has direct approach of steps. On either sides, there are carvings of vyāli and pūrnakalasas on the facades. There is a waterchute on the northern side, supported by a goblin whose form is weathered.

There is a mukhamandapa inside, integrated with the circular shrine. The mukhamandapa is kept within the entrance of the temple door, and has a flat ceiling raised much higher than the door lintel. The external circular wall encloses a square shrine having upāna, jagati, round kumuda and vedi, surmounted by a pyramidal roof. There is a pradaksina-patha

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¹ Srinivasan, K.R., 'Temples of south India', p.185.
in between the external circular wall and the internal square wall and, therefore, this is a sandhāra temple.\(^1\) It is closed for the devotees and only the high priest is allowed to enter the sanctum sanctorum. The idol is Sankaranarayana or Harihara.

The tradition of "enclosing another shrine" has already been discussed. (Chapter II, p.56)

1) The Kudalmanikkam temple, Iringalakuda, Trichur district is a circular temple, but it has a separate square shrine inside.\(^2\)

2) Lakshmana temple, Tirumuzhikkulam, Trichur district, is a circular temple and has a separate square shrine inside.\(^3\)

3) Mahadeva temple, Kaviyoor, Tiruvalla, Alleppey district, is a circular temple, enclosing a square shrine.\(^4\)

4) Tiruvembilappan temple, Venganallur, Trichur district, is a circular temple. It has a square shrine inside.\(^5\)

5) Vishnu temple, Vishnumangalam, Kangangad, Cannanore district, is a circular temple. It has a square inside.\(^6\)

6) Narasimha temple, Raman Tali, Cannanore district, is

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2. *Ibid*, p.79
a circular temple. A separate square shrine is seen inside.\textsuperscript{1}

7) Subramanian temple, Karikad, Manjeri, Malappuram district, is a circular temple. It has a separate square shrine inside.\textsuperscript{2}

8) Irattayappan temple, Peruvanam, district Trichur, is a circular temple. It has a square shrine, inside the circular wall.\textsuperscript{3}

9) Rama temple, Triprayar, Ernakulam, district, is a circular temple. It has a separate square shrine inside.\textsuperscript{4}

10) Vishnu temple, Tiruvanvandur, Chengannur, Alleppey district, is circular, but it has a square shrine inside.\textsuperscript{5}

From the examples from Trivandrum to north Malabar, it may be seen that 'circular shrines enclosing a square' is the convention that is followed. It can, therefore, be said that in Kerala circular garbhagṛhas are often square internally.

Exception to the rule also exists. Polpully, Palghat, has a circle, enclosing another circle.\textsuperscript{6}

The scheme of columnade inside the shrine, a characteristic of Vatakkanāthan shrine is conspicuous by its absence in the shrine of Sankaranarayana. It seems that the sandhāra walls perform the function of the pillars of supporting the ceilings unlike in the Vatakkanāthan where there are no walls.

\textsuperscript{1}Sarkar, H., 'Monuments of Kerala', p.32.
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid, p.35.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid, p.37.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid, p.37.
\textsuperscript{5}Soundararajan, K.V., op.cit., p.56.
\textsuperscript{6}vide page ante 74.
All the specimens discussed above excepting item No.5, have the rows of pillars. A solitary example of a circular shrine without the inner columnade arrangement is seen in the temple of Pullur Vishnumangalam, Kanjankad, north Malabar (noted as item No.5)¹. A fane at the extreme north of Kerala claims propinquity with this shrine of Sankaranarayana.

Over the circular wall is the uttira on which are fixed the rafters forming the first tala. The inner wall is raised further than the external wall and the second tala is formed. According to the Tantrasamuccaya, the second tala is built by raising the inner wall and fixing the rafters to the outer uttira and inner plank.² In each tala higher up, the height should be proportionate to the wall next below and in each there will be prastaras. The inner wall rising up further actually carries the immense conical roof or sikhara with a single metal stupi on top.³ The circular wall of the second tala has sala and kuta embellishments as prescribed in the text.⁴ There is a roof slanting over the circular wall as the second tala built by means of rafters. The roof is of copper plate covering the rafters and planks below.

¹ Soundararajan, K.V., op.cit., p.97.
³ Srinivasan, K.R., op.cit., p.185.
In the case of simple or ēkatala-vimāna, the component parts are six, viz. 1. adhisṭhāna, 2. pada, 3. prastara, 4. grīva, 5. sikhara, and, 6. stūpi. Such a simple structure or alpa-vimāna has sadānga or sadvarga. "The addition of one tala to its body or harmya and architrave of smaller dimension than the ground floor would make the vimāna dvitala with eight angas."¹ This shrine is dvitala and hence has eight angas as mentioned.

On top of each storey, a string of miniature like shrines above the prastara is set. In later times, it is absent on the last tala where the vāhanas or lānchanas appear.² In this temple, there are no vāhanas or lānchanas. The canons of iconography do not prescribe the recognised vehicle for syncretized god as Harihara and, therefore, there cannot be one vahana for this god. But the kōshtha devatas occupy all the cardinal points.

The stūpi consists of three kalasas and three shafts all made of gold like the stūpi of Vatakkanāthan. (Pls. 5 & 6)

There are no inscriptions to throw light on the date of construction of this temple. There are no references in the whole range of literature of the land about this fane. It has only secondary importance and probably that may be the reason of its not being mentioned, unlike the "Lord of North" often finding a place in the religious lore of Trichur. We

2. Ibid, p. 87.
have to seek, therefore, stylistic consideration in fixing the date of construction. Several dvitala temples came into existence during the middle phase, i.e. 1000-1300 A.D. From the available evidence of the temples of consanguinity, this shrine cannot be earlier than eleventh century though it may be contemporary of its northern neighbour. It cannot be later than the fourteenth century during which time, the Nava Mukunda temple was built and which marks the acme of evolutionary progress of projections and recesses. There is inscriptive evidence of the twelfth century found in the prakara in front of this shrine. So the date cannot be extended beyond twelfth century. Hence, this temple can be taken to have been built along with Vatakkanathan, i.e. during the eleventh century and, therefore, coeval with its northern neighbour.

**RAMA TEMPLE**

To the southern-most part of the complex is the two storeyed shrine of Rama, square in plan (samachaturasra) and admmeasuring 27'x27'(8.7x8.7 m) (Pl.7). There is a mukhamandapa 12'4"x16'(3.6x4.8 m) with a plinth integrated with that of the sanctum sanctorum.

The architectural members (Pl.3) of the base of the shrine are pāduka, upāna, jagati, round kumuda, kantha and a

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pattika or fillet, and the square wall over it relieved five times on each of its four faces. On the fillet, blocks of stone, six inches in dimension are jutting out throughout.

The square plan is the oldest extant model in Kerala as the square vimāna antedates the other ones because all the cave temples definitely of an earlier tradition conform to this plan. Some of the cave temples in the State are listed below:

1. Bhranthan Para, Pattambi, Palghat district.
2. Kaviyoor, Alleppey district.
3. Irnilankode, Wadakkanchery, Trichur district.
4. Trikkur, Trichur district.
5. Kallil, Perumbavoor, Ernakulam district.

These cave temples which are the earliest cave architectural monuments clearly show the predilection for square form.

Rama temple, Kadavallur, (Trichur district) is a circular dvitala shrine. It has architectural members as jagati, tripatta kumuda, kantha, vyālavī and vēdi and ascribed to the eleventh century A.D.

The base of Rama has affinity with the base of Rama temple Vatakkunathan complex. Further the base has projections and recesses like its northern neighbour Sankaranarayana temple. This embellishment is tried in some of the square temples as detailed below:

1) Tiruvancikulam, Cranganore, Trichur district.
2) Trikkulasekharapuram, Cranganore, Trichur district.
3) Ongallur Taliyil Siva temple, Kalladipatta, Palghat district.
4) Tali temple, Calicut, Kozhikode district.
5) Triccambaram, Taliparamba, Cannore district.

In all these temples, the projections are five times; hence, the scheme of five projections is conventionalised.

The ornated waterchute is situated on the northern side of the base. It is supported by a yaksa. The design and execution of the waterchute is similar to those in the other two shrines.

The type of the balustrade is the same as that of the northern neighbour. The entrance is provided directly from the ground affording two facades wherein carvings are found. The motifs are chandarāra with a tōrana above it and a pūrṇa kalasa.

The pilasters are square in section. From a square
base the square shaft is fluted to carry a drum-like design, over which is the abacus. It has obtuse bevel-corbel with median bands. The corbel does not have a curved profile but represents simply the appearance of the extremity of joist which has been chamfered. In the recesses it has pierced windows with mini-sculptures. The corner bays have karnas, kutas at the corners and the intervening ones have salapanjaras, nasika-panjaras. The nasika has human figures inset.

On the prastara, there are rows of yaksas in happy and gay mood and the other row of animals like lion, elephant and bull, all in vibrant moods. The uttira supports the rafters of the slanting roof of the first tala. The overhanging roof slope down from hooks and beams set higher up on the face of the inner wall and resting on the wall plate of the outer wall. They are further supported by intricately carved caryatid-like wooden brackets springing from the top region of the outer-wall.

The square wall encloses a circular edifice and in between there is a circumambulatory course. The inner circular shrine has the architectural parts like upana, jagati, round kumuda and vedi. The wall of the inner circular shrine is heavily plastered. It has a pyramidal roof. This peculiarity of enclosing another shrine has become the avowed order of this temple complex as the two neighbours have the same pattern

discussed elsewhere.

It may be seen that the temples in the Trichur dis-
trict, and from Cannanore from the north to Trivandrum in
south, the square shrines have inner circular shrines. The
scheme has become standardised. All the monuments stated
(p. 25) are ranging from early ninth century to twelfth century
excepting the fourth one which has pushpa-pōdikai (flowery bud)
motif in the pilaster and hence it is of later period because
the Vijayanagar shrines have such flowery buds.

The inner wall rises upto a further level carrying
the four sided domical ultimate roof or sikhara. The sikhara
roof has four nāsikas or dormers at the middle of its four
cardinal points. The roof is covered with copper sheets and
above it is the stūpi which consists of three kalasas and
three shafts exactly similar to those in other shrines
mentioned earlier.

The mukhamandapa has the plinth with the members of
architecture viz. pāduka, upāna, jagati, round kumuda, kantha
and pattika. It has no projections and recesses. The roof
of the first tala of mukhamandapa begins with the pilaster
stage. Inside the mukhamandapa, there are four pillars, two on
each side supporting the rafters of the second tala. The roof
of the second tala has a maha-nasika, an elongated pointed arch.
The integrated mukhamandapa or mahamandapa with the sanctum
sanctorum is the oldest pattern of structural temples in Kerala.\footnote{Sarkar, H., 'Monuments of Kerala', p.30.}
A variation in the number of pillars can be seen in the mukhamandapa of tali temple Wadakkanchery, Trichur district which has ten pillars.

Like its northern neighbour, it has no inscription and, therefore, we have to seek parallels for the purpose of fixing the date of construction. The square temples with the mukhamandapa were built during the first phase, i.e. 800-1000 A.D.
The Rama shrine cannot be earlier than the Vaṭakkunāthan temple and, therefore, it may be dated to the eleventh century.

GANAPATI

In between the Vaṭakkunāthan temple and the Sankaranarayana temple towards south-west, there is the shrine of Ganapati, square in plan and admeasuring 9.7 x 9.7 ft. ($2.9\times 2.9$ m) Architectural members of adhishthāna are upāna, jagati, round kumuda (which has lost its roundness) and the square wall above it, are all in granite. A flat roof covers the shrine. In sharp contrast to the other shrines which are spick and span, what made this shrine appear so crude and half-done is intriguing. Along with this shrine, there is a rectangular structure ($27'1''\times 17'6'') (8.2\times 6.5\text{m}) of granite on the rear side which is now used for storing coconuts. The base of this rectangular structure would have housed some of the deities.
The *saptamatrikas* which are housed beyond the *Vilakkumadam* near the Sasta's shrine may have been the original occupants of this structure. It is on record that there are rectangular shrines known as Bhagavati temples where *Saptamatrikas* are installed.¹ On the western side of this structure, there is an inscription belonging to the twelfth century A.D.² Hence this structure along with that of Ganapati is certainly as old as the other structures. The disposition of the inmates might be due to an iconoclast who must have defiled the shrines.³

**KRISHNA'S SHRINE**

Beyond the *Vilakkumatam* towards the west and near the Kuttambalam is the shrine of Krishna. A square shrine 10'x10' (3.1x3.1 m) in measurements has a mukhamandapa of 3'4"x7" (1 x .175 m) size. The *upāna* is buried and, therefore, not visible. The shrine has *jagati*, round *kumuda* and *gala*, the last one having projecting stones all around on the exterior, and a fillet as the upper most member of the base. The laterite wall is heavily plastered. (Pl.9). The adornments are eight pilasters and three *ghanadvāras*. It has a *dravida-vimāna* with

2. *Vide* Chapter No.VII, on administration.
3. *Vide* page ante 16.
octagonal facets capped by a kalasa sikhara and a stupi on it. Rarer are the specimen of Dravida form from the base to the top in the State of Kerala. However, a few examples mentioned already are given below:

1) Kattilmadam, Palghat.
2) Subramania temples, Kodumbu, (Palghat district).
3) Krishna temple, Ambalapuzha, (district Alleppey)
4) Tirunarayana temple, Tiruvalla¹, (District Alleppey)
5) Krishna temple, Padmanabhasvami temple complex, Trivandrum.
6) Vizhingam, near Trivandrum.²

This shrine is small in size and is less embellished like the Kattilmadam (Category No.1) or Vizhigam (Category No.6). The other examples are fully ornate and cannot be surpassed in grandeur or in beauty in the State.

The square shrine of Krishna encloses another octagonal shrine and in between the external square and the octagonal there is a circumambulatory path about 3' in width. The inner shrine rises like a pyramid. The sandhāra arrangement can be seen in all the examples quoted above excepting the first which is a nirandhara.

1. Kramarisch, Stella, and others, op.cit., plate V.
2. Ibid, plate I.
The Dravida shrine is fully protected by a huge rectangular shed with sloping roofs. It has three stūpis on it which might give false impression about the style of the temple if viewed from outside. The Ambalapuzha Krishna temple also has a similar uncouth structure over the Dravida vimana.

As a parivāra-dēvata, Krishna has ritual part to play along with other gods. Such parivāra-dēvata complex appeared during the last phase of the temple construction of the land i.e. from 1300 A.D. onwards. ¹ The shrine of Krishna in the Padmanabhasvami temple complex was constructed during the same period. Hence this shrine can be said to be built after 1300 A.D.

NANDI SHRINE

From the Krishna's shrine if one proceeds towards the north clockwise, there is a shrine for Nandi outside the Vilakku-mātam. A unique feature of this is that Nandi is away from his master beyond the inner prakara and this has added to the mystery. This is rectangular shrine (13' x 8'4") (3.9 x 2.5m) with a mukhamandapa (6' x 8'4" (1.8x2.5 m) facing east. The architectural members are upāna, round kumuda, kantha and pati over it. Over the pati, there is a heavily plastered laterite wall. Towards north and east, it has openings. There are six pilasters and two ghanadvaras. A gabled roof is over the wall and a mahānāsika is seen over the mukhamandapa. The mahānāsika

¹Sarkar, H., Monuments of Kerala, p.40.
is "horse-shoe-shaped" unlike that of the Rama's shrine.

**SIMHODAREMUKHA'S SHRINE**

Exactly towards the north of the Vaṭakkunāthan outside the Vilakkumatam, there is a small dvitala shrine, square on plan. The measurement is 7.8 x 7.8m (pl. 10). It has architectural parts like upāna, jagati, round kumuda, kantha and pati over it. The laterite wall has eight pilasters and three ghanadvāras, otherwise the wall is heavily plastered. The slanting roof of the first tala is on the uttira on which is the wall of the second tala. A gabled roof covered with copper sheets rests over the second tala. The orientation is towards south. There are eight steps directly approachable. On two sides, there are carvings of ghanadvāra with torana.

There is another square shrine inside making it of the sandhara class. The inner square exhibits a rare scheme of octagonal facets internally with a pyramidal roof similar to that of Krishna's shrine.

**SASTA'S SHRINE**

Towards south-west, on the same clock-wise route, there is the shrine of Sasta. It is apsidal on plan. Its longer axis is 4.83m., and the shorter is 3.45m.\(^1\) (pl. 11). The architectural parts are upāna (buried), jagati, round kumuda and kantha

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and fillet. Over the fillet is the wall which has slanted roof made of copper sheets. (Pl.11). The stūpa consists of two kalāsas and two shafts. The orientation is towards east.

This completes the Vatakunathan complex and testifies to the artistic skill of the Kerala artists. In this connection, it may be stated that there are fifteen temples with apsidal plan.¹

All these temples are ekatala, dvitala excepting Mahalingesvara temple Aduru which is a Tritala. The only extant specimen of tritala in the State is the Madattil Appan Peruvanam Trichur district. With this impressive list, it bears testimony to the fact that the Kerala artists were master-builders who could create almost all the conceivable forms known to the south.

The earliest known example of an apsidal shrine is the Nakula Sahadeva Rath, Mamallapuram.² Like the circular plan, the apsidal form also did not become popular in Tamilnadu and, therefore, we rarely come across an apsidal temple in that State. Like the circular temples, apsidal shrines are found in Kerala where Buddhism had held its sway for sometime. Probably the association of Buddhism might be another reason for falling in disrepute among the builders of Tamilnadu where Agamas had an upper hand.

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This shrine of Sasta is elegant and small but is not the smallest apsidal structure in the mode of Kerala construction.¹

The apsidal temple appeared in the Kerala during the second architectural period, i.e. 1000-1200 A.D.² But this shrine being that of a parivāra-devata cannot be earlier than the main shrine. As parivāra-devatas came into vogue only after 1300 A.D., this temple can be dated to post 1300 A.D.

THE NAMASKARA-MANDAPA (HALL FOR PROSTRATION)

There are three halls for prostration in front of the three main shrines viz. Vatakkunathan, Sankaranarayana and Rama. They are detached from the main shrines. The detached mandapa has its origin in the remains of Nagarjunakonda and their patterns became more distinct in stone and brick temples of the seventh century.³ In Kerala, these namaskara-mandapas have since occupied their place for the purpose of ritual for Brahmins for prostration. The Kailasanath temple, Kanchipuram, has a detached mandapa in front of it.⁴ According to the Tantrasamuccaya, this structure is an additional one and does not constitute one of the five prakaras.⁵

¹Ibid, p.186. It records 'perhaps the smallest apsidal structure' The Chennamangalam temple, district Trichur, is the smallest one so far surveyed.

²Sarkar, H., 'Monuments of Kerala', p.34.

³Srinivasan, K.R., op.cit., p.95.

⁴Sarkar, H., 'Monuments of Kerala', p.29.

The mandapa in front of the Vatakkunāthan is 30'x30' (9 x 9 m). There are two rows of pillars of which inner one has eight, supporting the central samatata-vitaṇa ceiling, raised in the form of slight architrave and clerestorey above the lintel which are fully embellished. Beyond the intersection of the lintel beam, the roof projects quadrant-ly and is supported by another row of sixteen pillars, smaller in size. The Tantrasamuccaya prescribes that if the mandapa is small there should be a single uttira with four pillars; if it is bigger, there will be two uttiras and sixteen pillars.¹

The namaskaramandapa of Sankaranarayana is 13'x13' (3.9 x 3.9m). The inner row of eight pillars supports the ceiling and the outer row consists of four. The namaskara mandapa of Rama (20'6"x20'6") (6.13x6.13m) and has eight pillars as inner row and twelve pillars as outer row.

All these mandapas are closed by wooden railings and have no walls, allowing room for a person only to squeeze in. The wooden railings of the mandapa reminds us of the Aihole tradition of the Chalukyas.² The Durga temple has similar

¹ Soundararajan, K.V., op.cit., p.57.
arrangements. Through the Canarese country, this plan might have influenced the Kerala builders. The Kadamba and Tulu temples do exhibit the railing system. The entire structure is obviously derived from a wooden prototype still being constructed in south Canara and Kerala in several variant forms. The type of structure is a common feature of the mukhamandapas and namaskara-mandapas in Kerala temples.¹

**KUTAMBALAM (DANCING HALL)**

In between the Krishna's shrine and the Vilakkumatam is the structure kutambalam or dancing hall. It is rectangular in plan (84′6″x79′) (27.6x21m) facing towards east the Lord of Vatakunathan.

The position of the kutambalam is in front of the deity on the right according to the Tantrasamuccaya.² Since kutambalam belongs to the prasada structure and is an anga or limb of the personage of the temple, the silpis may make use of similar sources of structural design and embellishment for kutambalam as those designated for prasāda or main shrine.³ The hall is open unlike the other structures and hence there is no wall. The slanting roof stands on pillars. There are sixteen bigger wooden pillars which support the uttira on which rests the superstructure. Four main rafters ascending from

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1. Ibid.
the four corners are joined by a ridge pole. Ascending on the established karnasūtra from the outer to the peak of the ridge are thirty rafters, fifteen each on two longer sides and twenty-two rafters, eleven each on two remaining the total forming the skeletal roof.¹ The roof is covered with copper sheets and there are three stupis over it.

Inside this rectangular hall, there is a raised stage (21'6"x21'6") (27'6 x 21'6) square on plan, at the extreme west facing east. It has twelve pillars supporting a pent roof, covered with copper sheet. It has a separate stūpi. The Tantrasamuccaya prescribes that one must build the stage in the backpart of the kūtambalam. The work must be so done that the front and edge will be directly opposite the base of the finial which is in the middle of the kūtambalam.²

Mızhāvu is a kind of percussion pot drum, made of copper and having only one face, and covered with a membrane. Two mızhāvus used to be kept in front of the back doors where the drummers sit to perform the orchestral accompanyment to the Chakyars (traditional actors).³ The structure affords all the facilities of a theatre with perfect acoustics evolved in the indigenous style.

¹.Ibid, p.292, fig.1  
².Ibid, p.294.  
³.The potdrum was originally made of earthen clay and the traditional drummers are Nambiars, a separate caste. The cymbals to keep rhythm are handled by the Nanqiars, the women folk of the Chakyars who perform the dance forms of kutu or kūtiyāttam.
Kūtu means dance in Tamil language. Ambalam means temple in Malayalam and in ancient Tamil. 'Kūtu' in modern Malayalam means a corrupt dance and is an obscene word. This is a place where traditional dance drama 'kūtiyāṭtam' is staged. It is the only dance form in Sanskrit language. The traditional actors are Chakyars. There is a reference to the Chakyars in the Silappatikārām. But it was Kulasekhara and Tolan, a humorous poet, who gave a new form to kūtiyāṭtam which is followed even to-day more or less without any change. The theatre came into existence during the ninth century. But there is no evidence to that effect. There is an inscription in Malayalam which states, "By order of the King of Cochin, Divan Sankunny Menon caused to build the kūtambalam in Kollam Era 1055 (1880 A.D.)." But it cannot be so late though renovated in 1880 as the wooden carvings and the lacquered pillars belong to the seventeenth century when the forms changed from the earlier simple, elongated to the broad, heavy and stylised iconometric forms. According to the Tenakailanathodayam, King Vira Kerala Varma (1591-1615) caused to build the prakara walls and the gopuras, beautified the temple and donated munificently.¹ It is possible, therefore, to assume that many

¹Tenakailanathodayam, op.cit., see introduction, p.vii.
of the additions to the temple might have been made after the seventeenth century as the last phase of the Kerala building activity witnessed the additions of kötambalams, Balikkalpuras and other cloisters.¹

GÔPURAS

The Vatakunatha complex has four gateways known as gôpuras or patîpuras in Malayalam, on all four sides of the massive wall. The plan is rectangular with two porches thrusting out of the wall on east and west. The porches are rectangular. The architectural members are paduka, jagati, round kumud and a fillet, over which is the laterite wall. Despite walls being heavily plastered, pilasters, ghanadvâras are visible. The gôpuras are tritalas and each tala has a slanted tiled roof (Pl.13). The gabled roof of the third floor is also tiled. There are four nasikas or dormers on the gabled roof, on all four sides.

The Tantrasamuccaya classifies gopuras into five types² viz. dvârasôbha, dvârasâla, dvâraharmya and dvâragôpuram; they are to be built on antaramandala, antahâra, madhyahâra and maryada, respectively. The Silparatna prescribes upto seven storeys to the dvâragôpuram.³

¹Sarkar, H., 'Monuments of Kerala', p.42.
³Silparatnam (Malayalam), (Kollam, 1935), p.76.
For a jati prasāda, the width of the gopura can be four kol (1 kol: 24 fingers = 28\%”). Since the width is 276”, this gopura is built as a jati prasāda gopuram.\(^1\) The embellishments like panjara and kumbha lata on the walls are also allowed.

The temple gopuras of Tamilnadu cannot be seen in Kerala. The only exception is that of the Padmanabha temple, Trivandrum. Many of the temples of the state have smaller patipura. Another specimen of the trītala gopura is that of the Tiruvanchikkulam, Cranganore.

The gopuras appeared in the architectural plan in the last phase of the temple architecture, i.e. 1301-1800 A.D. These gopuras are coeval with other cloisters which were caused to be built by Vira Kerala Varma as referred to in the Tenkailanāthōdayam. There are records to show that the northern gopuram and southern gopurams were constructed in 1780 A.D.\(^2\)

The temple has no dhvajasthamba (flagstaff) nor anakkottil nor a teppakkolam (sacred tank). Even a well, usually seen in the south-east corner of the sanctum sanctorum for purificatory bath for the idols and for preparation of food both for gods and men is also absent. The absence of a flagstaff is not without justification as there is no celebration which warrants the presence of a flagstaff.

The absence of anakkottil cannot be explained as the temple was one of the richest and had royal patronage. But the

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1. Ibid, p.76.
2. Menon, P.R., Saktan Tampuran, op.cit., p.504.
absence of well is an added mystery as it is the only exception throughout the State without a well. According to the tradition there was a well behind the shrine of Ganapati or the shrine of Ganapati itself is on the well in which was dumped all the riches of the temple during Haider's invasion in 1776. However, for oblation purposes water is at present fetched from an adjacent tank which is supposed to be a 'sacred tank'.

PROBABLE DATE OF THIS TEMPLE

The inscription found on the base of the circular shrine of Vatakunathan is of eleventh century. It records that the stone was the contribution of "Sāttan Sūrun of Mullappally."¹ The term 'Mullappally' may be the house of the royal architects who used to to execute the patron's desires. Probably they were permitted to inscribe their name. That is why in the Kulasekhara Alvar's temple at Mannargudi has the inscription 'Vasudevan Kesavan of Mullappally'² The patron has to be found out from this inscription only, as no other source is available. It is clear that only a Perumal could cause the royal architect to build a temple. There is another inscription on the tier of the north-west corner of the central shrine. It records that the stone was set up by Chuvatan, kanatan of Mullappally. The inscription is of the twelfth

². Vide chapter I, p.4
The last Perumal was Rama Varma Kulasekhara who was also the Kōil adhikari, ruled upto 1102 A.D.\textsuperscript{1} Hence, we may assume that Rama Varma Kulasekhara who ruled from the end of eleventh to the beginning of twelfth century might be the patron of Vatakkanthan temple complex. The three shrines, viz. of Siva, Sankara Narayanan and Sri Rama show his religious tolerance to all the cults. While Cheraman Perumal was a devout saivite, who sang the glory of Vatakkanthan alone, probably the temple originally may have been a saivite shrine. But after three hundred years, it underwent tremendous changes, so as to accommodate different deities in this complex itself. We do not have any further information regarding the royal architect nor his patron.

There are two more inscriptions of the same century but of the later decades, i.e. roughly of the middle of the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{2} One is found on the base of a square structure, adjacent to the shrine of Ganapati, and the other, on the right entrance of the shrine of Sankaranarayana. Both mention the names of Tiruccaperur\textsuperscript{3} which might be the ancient name of the place, Trisivaperur. In the former was present, the Yogiar Saint and in the latter was Kōiladhikari, among other functionaries. Yogiar Saint was the Pontiff of the Matt, founded by Sankaracharya, whereas Kōiladhikari was the representative of the King or the king himself. The inscriptions throw light

\textsuperscript{1}Vide Chapter I, p.17.

\textsuperscript{2}Pillai, E.K., 'Kerala bhashayute vikasa parinamangal', p.137.

\textsuperscript{3}See Chapter VII on Administration.
on certain aspects of administration, as can be seen from
the chapter on administration, but are silent about the names
of kings.