CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Religious monuments have been the best examples of Indian architectural excellence. Beginning from the Gupta period (319-550 AD), India has an unbroken track of Brāhmaṇic structural temple architecture. Owing to regional needs, climatic conditions, culture, patterns of patronage and belief systems, temple architecture developed in different parts of India reflecting its native society. According to architectural features as well as geographical distribution, Indian temples are broadly classified into Nāgara, Drāviḍa and Vēsara. Drāviḍa architecture, distributed in the southern part of India, display uniformity at macro level, but micro level studies reveal regional variations. The region between south of Pennar river and Kanyakumari on the east coast of south India has remarkable uniformity. The uniformity creates almost monotony. The west coast of south India breaks this monotony and presents a different picture.

Present study attempts to understand the temple architecture of Kēraḷa on the west coast, what went into formulating its form and character, what affinity it has or what way it is distinguished from the Drāviḍa style seen on the other part of south India.
6.1 Summary of the study:

In the preceding chapters attempts are made to understand Kērala temple architecture through selected temples from Erṇākuḷam and Tṛśūr districts. Development of religious architecture in this region had followed the same pattern as in other parts of the sub continent i.e. origin with rock-cut architecture followed by development of structural temples. In a span of one thousand years, the structural temples witnessed many experiments of changes and modification through three phases. The changes were outcome of shifts in religious ideas, elaboration of rituals and experiments of building techniques.

First chapter is introduction to Indian temple architecture in general and it attempts to locate Drāvida style and its Kērala variation from this wider perspective. Research problem, justification for taking up this topic, methodology adopted to study the problem, historiographical review of the subject and plan of study are discussed in this chapter.

Second chapter presents the political and cultural background of art activity in Kerala. It explains the emergence of temple institution and architecture as result of chain of social changes connecting social, political, economic, cultural and religious realms. Here, the temple is viewed as a social institution, performing various social functions beyond religion, towards integration of its society. The temple is identified as a link not only between mortal world of man and immortal divine world but also a link between different
strata of its society. The chapter establishes causal relationship between elaborations of temple architecture with the social functions it performed.

**Third chapter** presents very specific study into architectural features of Kēraḷa temples. For this purpose, different aspects of plan and elevation of Kēraḷa temple are analysed juxtaposed with Drāviḍa style. The evolution of temple architecture in Kerala is classified under three phases. These are

- Early phase (800 - 1000 AD)
- Middle Phase (1001 - 1300 AD)
- Late Phase (1301- 1800 AD)

The study draws a clear picture of Kēraḷa temples within the broad area of Drāviḍa style. The reasons behind formulation of the unique forms of architecture which break from monotonous Drāviḍa style are adaptability to native environment, use of different building materials and techniques employed by builders in accordance with the materials.

**Fourth chapter** is study of selected temples from Erṇākuḷam district. It includes architectural details and historical background of selected temples discussed. According to ground plan, selected temples are grouped as temples with circular shrines and temples with square shrines. Temples are arranged under each group in its chronological order.

Fifth chapter explains selected temples from Trśśūr district. Descriptions of architecture with historical background of selected temples are contents of this
chapter. Selected temples are grouped according to their ground plan as circular, square and apsidal shrines. Each group has a chronological sequence within.

6.2 Conclusions:

Conclusions drawn from the study are the following.

- **Kēraḷa temple architecture, though with distinguished features, fundamentally forms a part of Drāvida style.**

  In principle, plan and structure of Kēraḷa temple share uniformity with Drāvida style and the very conception of temple here is not different from mainland India. The development of temple architecture in this part of India was not an altogether isolated process; rather it had looked for examples beyond Western Ghats to Pallavas and Chalukyas to model its religious edifices. Kēraḷa continued to draw influence from other parts of south India in the following periods too. However, these influences were only adopting and integrating of features to enhance the beauty of an already developed concept. Hence, adopted features are blended into Kēraḷa flavour. Thus, Kēraḷa temple builders have successfully maintained a Drāvida character with Kēraḷa personality throughout its history.

- **On ground plan Kēraḷa temples are distinguished by employment of circular and apsidal shapes for śrīkōvil. Drāvida examples from other places show predominant preference to quadrangular plan.**
The preference for circular plan is not to be found in other parts of south India where Drāviḍa style prevails. Arguments are active on the origin of this characteristic. Many scholars attempted to assign a Buddhist ideological origin to this characteristic. But this view is not unanimously accepted. Yet, no substantial information is discernable in this regard (though Buddhism had a strong hold in Kēraḷa). The circular śrīkōvil built on a plinth and horizontal bands of vēdi above with a softened wall forming wide cylinder hold the sloping conical super structure. The edges of these slopes comes down to join the socle and thus emphasize on horizontality could be marked. This spread of the conical roof above the wide cylinder gives the structure a buoyant lift and a light winged aeriality. As a matter of fact, conical roof is the most satisfactory logical solution for the structure built on a circular plan.¹²

- **Square and circular temples are built in this part of Kēraḷa irrespective of the deity worshipped there in. Temples dedicated to Śiva, Viṣṇu and Śakti could be on either circular or square plan.**

  The preference for circular and quadrangular was not really connected with the deity but choice of the higher priest (tantri), the patron and the builder. Hence, circular as well as quadrangular shrines were built for Śiva, Viṣṇu and Śakti with equal preference.
• The apsidal temples are found mainly dedicated to Ayyappa and Śāsta.

In northern part of Kēraḷa (Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargod districts) there are apsidal shrines dedicated to Viṣṇu, Subrahmanya etc. But in Trissur all the apsidal shrines, except the one at Kulaśekharanallur where Śiva is the presiding deity, are dedicated to Ayyappa or Śāsta, which is not an āgamic deity. Views of identifying Śāsta with Buddha are also notable in this context³.

• Components of elevation in Kēraḷa temples are uniform with Drāviḍa style from base till entablature. The patterns of adhiṣṭhāna, wall decoration, its projections and recessions and prastara are similar features. But the superstructure display remarkable variation from general Drāviḍa style.

Above the prastara, a recessed grīva carrying lofty sikhara and stūpi is not built in Kēraḷa śrīkōvil. Rather, the superstructure takes the form of sloping roof above the prastara. This roof resting on wooden framework and thatched with terra cotta tiles or metal sheets is not seen in general Drāviḍa style. By fixing rafters connected to extending eaves of roof and wall, its weight is well placed and stability and balance to the structure is achieved. Perfect execution of wooden architecture is fundamental about its superstructure. The śrīkōvil which determines the personality of a temple in Kēraḷa thus present a different outlook from Drāviḍa vimāna.
• **Architecture of Kēraṇa temples is in conformity with prescriptions in the texts.**

It is identified that Tantrasamuccaya is the most widely used base text. Though dated to 15\(^{th}\) century, the text carries views, perspectives, ideas and practices of its predecessors. Because all later works on Vāstu vidya acknowledge a great deal of information to previous works and Tantrasamuccaya is no exception. Possibility of the author drawing information from existing structures is not ruled out, yet it is remarkable that components on plan and structure of Kēraṇa temples are built in conformity with prescriptions in Tantrasamuccaya.

• **The reciprocal relationship between environment and temple architecture has specific significance in Kēraṇa’s context.**

The earmarked difference between Kēraṇa temples from its Dravidian counterparts is the sloping tiled roof. Unlike the lofty Dravidian śikhara, Kēraṇa temples have either pyramidal or conical superstructure covered with tiles, in some instances copper sheet also. The tropical climate of Kēraṇa with two heavy monsoons a year and moisture in atmosphere is decisive not only in the shape of a building but also in choosing the raw materials. The extensive use of timber and laterite stone is due to its availability in plenty and more importantly the best suitability with its climate. Majority of the temples have granite plinth,
laterite or wooden or bricks and stucco wall with a sloping superstructure made of wooden planks, tiles or metal sheet on timber frame. The roof timbers rest directly on the wall and coverage in gable form to meet at the top on a finial. The roofing materials are very well prepared to withstand the monsoon waters. The overlapping wooden planks are well polished and smoothened. These wooden planks are covered with highly kiln burnt terra cotta tiles or copper sheets. The glazy smooth surface makes the tiles water proof. Thus in form and materials the environment has much implication on the architecture.

- **The choice of building materials reveals the deep understanding of its builders about the intrinsic relation between architectural form and its environmental space.**

  Employment of heavy granite on base and door jambs, lighter laterite on wall and even lighter wood, tiles and metal sheets on roof is a wise execution to create lighter upper and lightest superstructure resting on a solid and firm base. This architectural wisdom is the contribution of Kēraḷa temple builders to the thrust and counter thrust principle of architecture.

  The excellence of Kēraḷa temple builders are seen on the creation of super structure. The science of wooden construction served the greatest precision, stability and durability to the building. Making of wooden framework and its well placement above the wall helped the even distribution of the weight of roof
and it avoids complete burdening of wall. Thus roof had a firm support and the interior is replete with an impeccably spaced rhythm of concentric pillared colonnades. The portion of the building covered by sloped roof is more than four times the height of the visible wall of the temple.

Due to its geographical position, Kerala’s contacts were limited with Tulu Nadu on north and Pandya country on extreme south. Thus Chalukyan influences on the temple architecture are evident in employment of kapōta-bandha adhiṣṭhāna and the attention paid by builders on ornamentation of praṇāḷa. Yet, this influence was limited and did not develop into distinct mannerism of its own. The process was of adaptation and assimilation of suitable feature into the existing order towards enhancing beauty and stability.

- **Tracing development of temple architecture in this part of Kēraḷa makes it clear that the phases of its development have correspondence with political changes. More than political patronage the reciprocal relationship between temple and political establishment was decisive in this movement.**

It can be undoubtedly stated development of architecture did not exclusively depended on political patronage. Though many temple-inscriptions are related to Kulaśēkhara rulers, no inscription records initiative towards foundation of temple by any of these rulers. Even though Kulaśēkhara period
(800-1124 AD) marked significant changes in social life, proliferation of temples in Ernakulam and Trissur are traced in the post-Kulaśēkhara period only.

The centralised political structure of the Kulaśēkhara periods limited their religious interest to places significant to them. Thus, there are many temples in and around the capital city of Mahādayapuram, identified with modern Kodungallur in Trissur, in important villages like Nedumpura, Airanikulam, Muzhikulam, Tripunithura etc. With the disintegration of Kulaśēkhara rule, the polity became de-centralised as well as large number local chieftains emerged at village levels under territorial rulers like Vēṇāḍu, Kochi and Malabar. A vast number of temples were built during this period and were owned by land owning Brahmans. Temples were not only centres of religion but centres of social integration also. This aspect attracted political establishments to temple building movement. Further acceleration to the movement was provided by economic prosperity resulted from foreign trade. Thus momentum to temple building activity was a result of economic, political and social changes. Because of their balanced reciprocal with other social institutions, temples received donations, grants etc. from local chieftains, well-to-do merchants and rulers too.
This study shows that Kēraḷa temples, undoubtedly, formed an integral part of Drāviḍa style architecture. But it is distinguished by modifications with indigenous features. Every society build up its character in solving its own problems, in the experience of its own misfortunes, is itself a gift which each society offers to the world⁶. The architectural distinction and peculiarity of Kēraḷa temples is one such contribution arose out of its own way of finding solution for the challenges it confronted.

There has not been adequate academic research on temple architecture of Kēraḷa. Present research is an initiative to fill this gap. By figuring out the features of Kēraḷa temples, the reasons behind the development of these features, the thesis is an appreciation of its builders and their contribution to the art of temple architecture in particular and Indian culture in general.
6.3 Notes and References