

GREAT TEMPLE TO VISHNU, NEAR TRICHINOPOLY.

Due probably to its gradual development around the original central shrine, there is a great want of compactness in the general design. It is now a walled town with a number of spires and fanes dotted irregularly about, and, as Mr. Fergusson remarks, the gateways lose half their dignity from their positions, the bathos of their decreasing in size and elaboration as they approach the sanctuary being a mistake which nothing can redeem. On the other hand, there is a great picturesqueness in the whole viewed from a height or distance, and much to admire in the designs and details of the individual structures.

The outer or eighth court covers a very extensive area, measuring 2,520 feet by 2,865 feet. The Northern Gopuram at A on the General Plan (Plate 53) is built up to a height of 4 feet only, and dwelling-houses are erected over it. The Eastern Tower at B is built to a height of 12 feet. The Southern Gate at C is complete to the first storey, and is known as the Rayar Gopuram. The Western Tower at D has its plinth built to a height of only 4 feet.

The Eastern Tower at K, in the sixth enclosure, is known as the Katte Gopuram. There are but two Gopurams to the fourth court, beyond which none but Hindus may penetrate. The walls and buildings coloured red on the plan (Plate 53) enclose the temple proper. Between the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth enclosures are streets of houses.

The principal halls, or mandapams, are between the fourth and fifth enclosures—the Thousand-pillar Mandapam at the north-east corner, the Seshgiri Rao Mandapam on the east side, and the Ranga Vilasa Gopuram to the south. The so-called Thousand-pillar Mandapam runs almost due north and south, and measures 508 feet by 155 feet. It has a series of three terraces rising one above the other to the north. The actual number of pillars in the hall is 952. Details of three of the columns are shown in Plate 57 (Column L) and Plate 61 (Columns M and K). Their simple outline points to the probable early date of the hall, which from its position appears to be an integral part of the fifth enclosure.

The Seshgiri Mandapam is one of the most elaborately carved colonnades in the temple, and judging from the way in which it is placed, seems to be later than the fifth court. Knowing that Trimal Nayakkan had a share in the additions to the Srirangam Temple, the probability of his having built this Mandapam is increased by the resemblance of the rampant horses in Plates 55 and 56 to those in his choultry at Madura.

The Ranga Vilasa Mandapam also appears to have been added after the fifth Court was built. Details of two of the columns, marked No. 36 on the plan (Plate 53) and figured in Plates 58 and 59, show considerable refinement and delicacy in design suggestive alike to those who work in stone or metal.

The column marked H in Plate 59 is from a twelve-pillared porch in the northern part of the fourth enclosure, and is very similar in design and proportion to the pillars in the Rathes at Mahavallipur (650—700 A.D.). Its appearance suggests an early date. The column marked F in Plate 62 is from a four-pillared porch to the south of the third enclosure. The door J in Plate 62 is from the Garuda Temple between the two South Gopurams of the third and fourth enclosures. Most of the better planned and more celebrated Madras temples have doors of this description handsomely carved in wood.

An elegant little porch at the north-west corner of the third court is shown in Plate 60. The superstructure above the cornice, or chujja, is of wood, and probably a repair, the lower parts being of stone. The simplicity of the ornaments is suggestive of the earlier period of Dravidian art. The column G from a hall in the south-east corner of the third enclosure (Plate 58) resembles some of the columns in the Vellore Fort (A.D. 1350).

The principal shrine in the centre of the building, and dedicated to Vishnu, is called Rangnath Swami. It has a modern gilt dome. The goddess has a temple in the north-west corner of the fifth enclosure, called "Rang-naiki." Besides these, there are numerous small shrines in the various enclosures dedicated to minor deities, and one to Ganesh.