

The great temple of Sri Padmanabhaswami in Trivandrum is the best and the only major specimen of the Dravidian style of architecture to be found not only in the District but in the whole of Kerala. It is also worth mentioning that in spite of the predominantly Dravidian style in which it has been built, the Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple also shows traces of the indigenous style. In fact, it may be regarded as a splendid monument showing at its best the fusion of Dravidian and Kerala features of architecture. This temple which is one of the most famous Vaishnava shrines of the South has a history which runs into the dim recesses of antiquity. The idol of Sri Padmanabha is a *Sudha Murthi* made of *chunam* or lime with 12,000 *Salagramams* embedded. *The Travancore State Manual Vol. I* by Nagam Aiya has a detailed description of the temple which is summarised below.<sup>1</sup>

"This temple stands in an elevated part of the town. The area covered by its enclosures is 570x510 feet or 290,700 square feet or about 7 acres. It faces east and is surrounded by massive fort walls. A handsome flight of stone steps on the eastern side shows the gentle eminence of the temple site, the front portion of which is covered by a huge gopura, or tower, pyramidal in shape and built of granite and brick on the model of the lofty *gopuras* of the East Coast temples. This tower is about 100 feet in height and has 7 storeys with window light-openings in the centre of each of them. The stone basemant of the tower is covered with elaborate sculptures and the masonry above with ornamental work of Puranic figures, the top having seven gold steeples or turrets. Underneath the gopura is the main gateway leading to the temple, well protected by a number of massive doors and guarded by sentries. Between the gateway and the inner shrine there is a fine broad open corridor in the form of an oblong supported by 324 stone pillars and covered with terraced roof, the walk of the God's procession. On one side it is 450 feet long and on the other side 350 feet. It is 25 feet broad. The two rows of granite pillars and the stone ceiling above are decorated with the sculptures. Every pillar has the figure of a Nair girl bearing a lamp in the palms of her hands joined together and raised above her waist. The top of each pillar is surmounted by the head of a unicorn in the mouth of which is a loose ball of stone.

1 The summary is taken from the chapter on "Architecture in Travancore", in the "*Arts and Crafts of Travancore*" by Kramrisch Cousins and Poduval, pages 39-40.

This *mandapa* is also used for feeding large numbers of Brahmins everyday. At the four points of this oblong corridor, but not connected with it, stand four stone platforms, from which the people witness the God's procession during the important festivals in the temple. They are used on ordinary days for the reading of the Puranas, or the recital of Puranic stories on special occasions by a class of people called Chakkiars. North of the oblong are the cooking apartments of the feeding house attached to the temple. Beyond this magnificent corridor or covered walk is the flag-staff of gold, which is about 80 ft. in height and circular in shape tapering towards the top and holding Garuda, the God's favourite riding animal. This flag-staff is a fine teak log covered with a series of copper plate rings, gilded thickly on the outside. South of this flag-staff and connected with the corridor is the *Kula-sekharamandapa*, containing most impressive stone sculptures of the early eighteenth century. Between the flag-staff and the inner shrine is the space containing the altar. The inner shrine is rectangular in shape, and consists of two storeys, and is ornamented with gables, an essential characteristic of the Travancore style of temple architecture. Outside the inner shrine, but within the enclosure, there are smaller shrines dedicated to Krishna, Kshetrapala, Sastha, Narasimha, Vyasa, Shiva, Ganesha, Rama Sita and Lakshmana and others. The outer walls of the central shrine are covered with mural paintings depicting various scenes out of the Puranas. The central shrine with the halls and mandapas inside are enclosed by a rectangular structure on the outside of which columns of lamps of brass are fixed."

Among the other ancient temples of the District the Parasurama shrine at Tiruvallam near Trivandrum which also represents the Dravidian style of architecture deserves special mention. The shrine built entirely of granite from the foundation to the ceiling with a superstructure has been assigned to the 13th century. It is a round shrine with a rectangular mandapa in its front and a pinnacle at its top. There is not much of sculpture or ornamentation. A row of *Bhutaganas* or goblins, another of animals—elephants, lions and the like—and a third panel of miniature floral works, with bearded faces of men carved on the convolutions adorn the building at its top. Within the spacious compound of this temple enclosed on all sides by two '*Prakara*' walls of stone are separate shrines dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Shrines of Parasurama