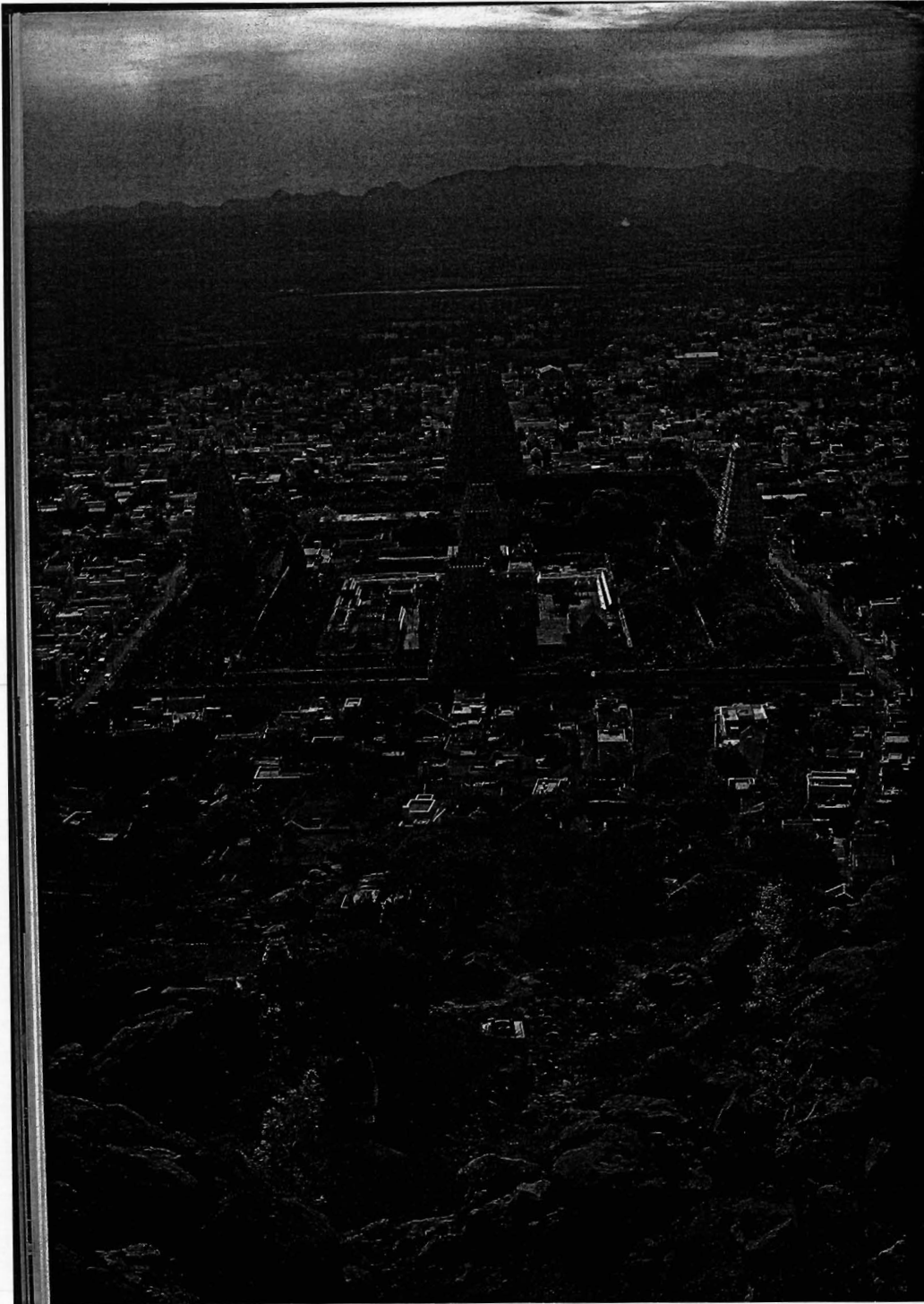


Chola rulers retained Gangaikondacholapuram as their capital, but each built his own grand temple in a town associated solely with him. Rajaraja II built his temple at the town of Darasuram, while Kulottunga III built a towering temple at Tribhuvanam. In the declining days of Chola rule, temples in which the shrine with its towering *shikhara* was the focal point were constructed less frequently. Instead, as we shall see in Chapter 10, temples grew horizontally in spatial terms to resemble mini-townships, and their massive *gopuram* gateways became the dominating feature of the southern landscape.



153
Shiva as
enchanting
mendicant,
Tiruvankadu
temple,
consecrated
before 1048.
Bronze;
h.89 cm, 35 in.
Tanjavur Art
Gallery



154
Arunachalesh-
vara temple,
Tiruvannamalai,
1030–1600, with
19th-century
additions

A persistent feature of the skyline of the densely populated Tamil country is the pyramidal *gopuram* gateway whose height is anything between 20 and 60 m (66–197 ft). While earlier forms of the *gopuram* were known at the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram and the Tanjavur temple, these later *gopurams* overshadow the *shikhara* of the sanctum and give access to expansive walled temple complexes (154), usually comprising four concentric enclosures. The outermost enclosure, open to the sky and entered through *gopurams* on each of its four sides, contains halls and shrines, as well as a large, step-lined water tank. The next, more compact, walled enclosure, entered through smaller *gopurams*, is also open to the sky, with a similar array of halls and shrines. The third enclosure, generally covered with a roof, has one or two compact *gopurams*. Finally a single, small *gopuram*, sometimes two, leads to the innermost roofed area which houses the sanctum. This intricate, almost maze-like layout, often with asymmetrically placed *gopurams*, is confusing to the visitor who is likely to need directions to find an easy route to the main sanctum.

One of the earliest temples of this style arose between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries at Chidambaram, whose dancing lord, Shiva Nataraja, had long been patron deity of the Chola monarchs. The modest eleventh-century Chidambaram temple now grew sixfold in size to occupy 16 hectares (40 acres). The impetus for this expansion came from Kulottunga I and Vikrama Chola, the first two rulers (r.1070–1135) of the new Chalukya–Chola line, and a major force behind the building programme was Naralokaviran, who served both monarchs as general and minister.

The first walled enclosure of the Chidambaram complex,

entered by two *gopurams*, was built during the reign of Kulottunga. The second wall and its two *gopurams* were added during Vikrama Chola's reign, along with the great Shiva Ganga temple tank, subsidized by tributes collected from his feudatories in 1122. Minister Naralokaviran added several important structures in what became the third enclosure: the Hall of a Hundred Pillars, an extensive walled shrine for the goddess, a shrine for child saint Sambandar and a hall for the recitation of the *Tevaram* hymns of the Shaiva saints. The third wall with a double-storeyed pillared cloister was added by Kulottunga III (r.1178–1218), who also built two 'chariot' halls with wheels along their bases, one to serve as a shrine for Shiva's second son, Skanda, the other to serve as a dance hall. Four great *gopurams* that gave access to the third enclosure seem to have been constructed between 1150 and 1300. Each is built of stone along its lower vertical section with aedicular niches housing deities; above this rise seven diminishing storeys of brick and plaster. Crowning the *gopuram* is a barrel-vaulted structure topped with thirteen *kalasha* finials. The base of these gate-houses, accommodating rooms for storage and guards, measures roughly 30 m wide x 9 m deep x 43 m high (98 x 29 x 141 ft). The northern *gopuram* was originally completed only up to its stone cornice level; its brick portions were added in the sixteenth century under the Vijayanagara emperors. No two of these outer *gopurams* are directly opposite each other, while only the southern is even approximately at the centre of its wall. The fourth and outermost wall of the complex, enclosing the temple gardens, was also added during the last phase of activity in the sixteenth century.

The immediate motivation for this enormous expansion was the desire to transform an exceedingly sacred but small and architecturally insignificant shrine into a structure of majestic proportions. Custom ordained that it was improper either to demolish the shrine and build a more impressive one in its place or to change its appearance by adding a tall *shikhara* above the sanctum. One solution was to exalt its environment

by surrounding it with high walls and to provide access through impressive *gopurams*.

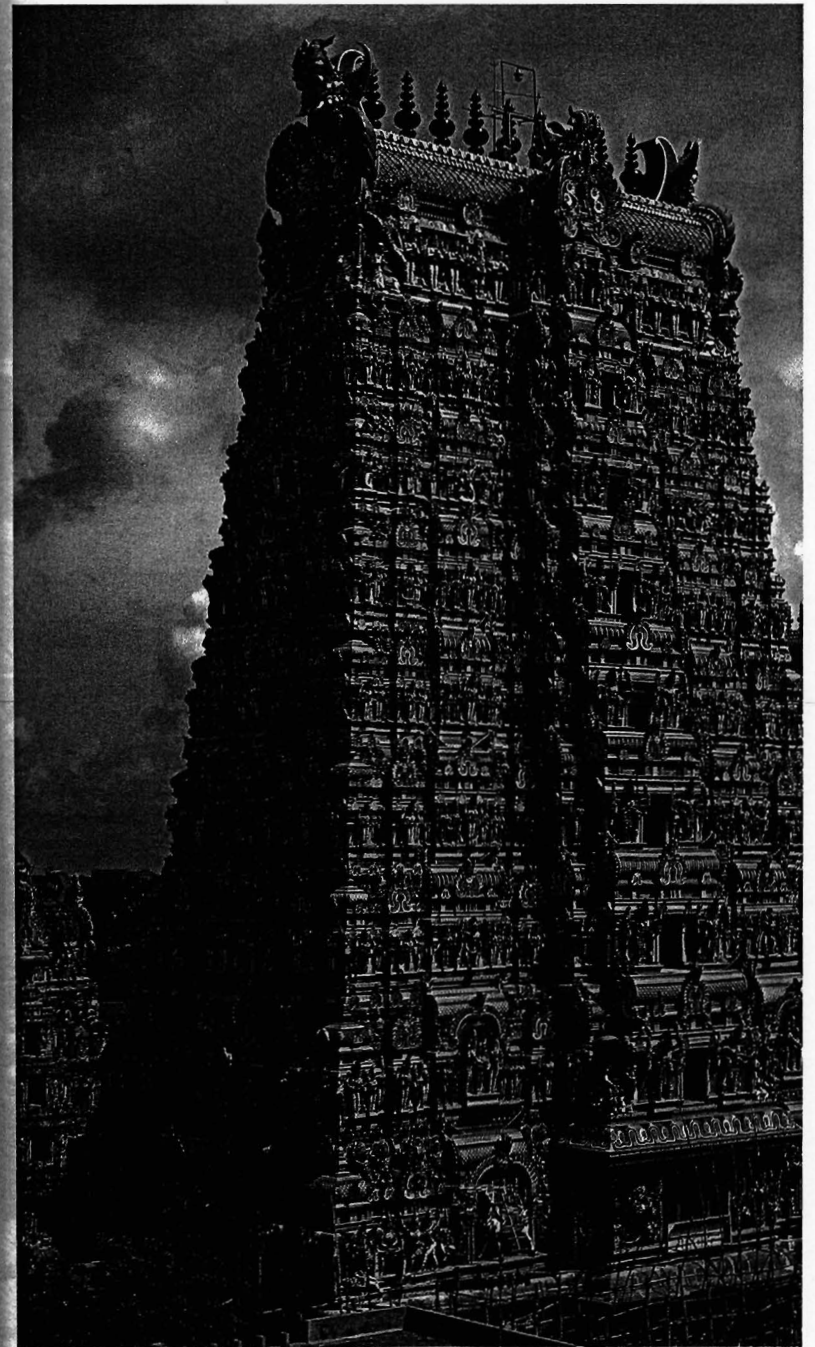
But the altered architectural and spatial emphasis was also due to changes in the concepts surrounding the enshrined god. Previously, the deity of a temple was visualized as resting solely within the darkened mystery of the sanctum, receiving homage and conferring benediction. From the eleventh century, the temple deity was increasingly allotted multiple roles similar to those of an earthly monarch, which included giving audience to devotees, inspecting the temple premises, celebrating birthday and marriage anniversaries, and taking an active part in special festivities. The stone image of the god remained within the sanctum to bless the devout who assembled at the shrine, but bronze images, generally 60–90 cm (2–3 ft) in height, were created to be carried in procession as festival images. We know, for instance, that during the twelfth century a bronze image of Nataraja was taken from Chidambaram to Killai, on the sea, to enjoy the fresh sea air; Naralokaviran, who constructed the road to the oceanfront, also erected a seaside pavilion to house the deity, and constructed a fresh-water tank to serve the needs of the devotees who assembled at the beach.

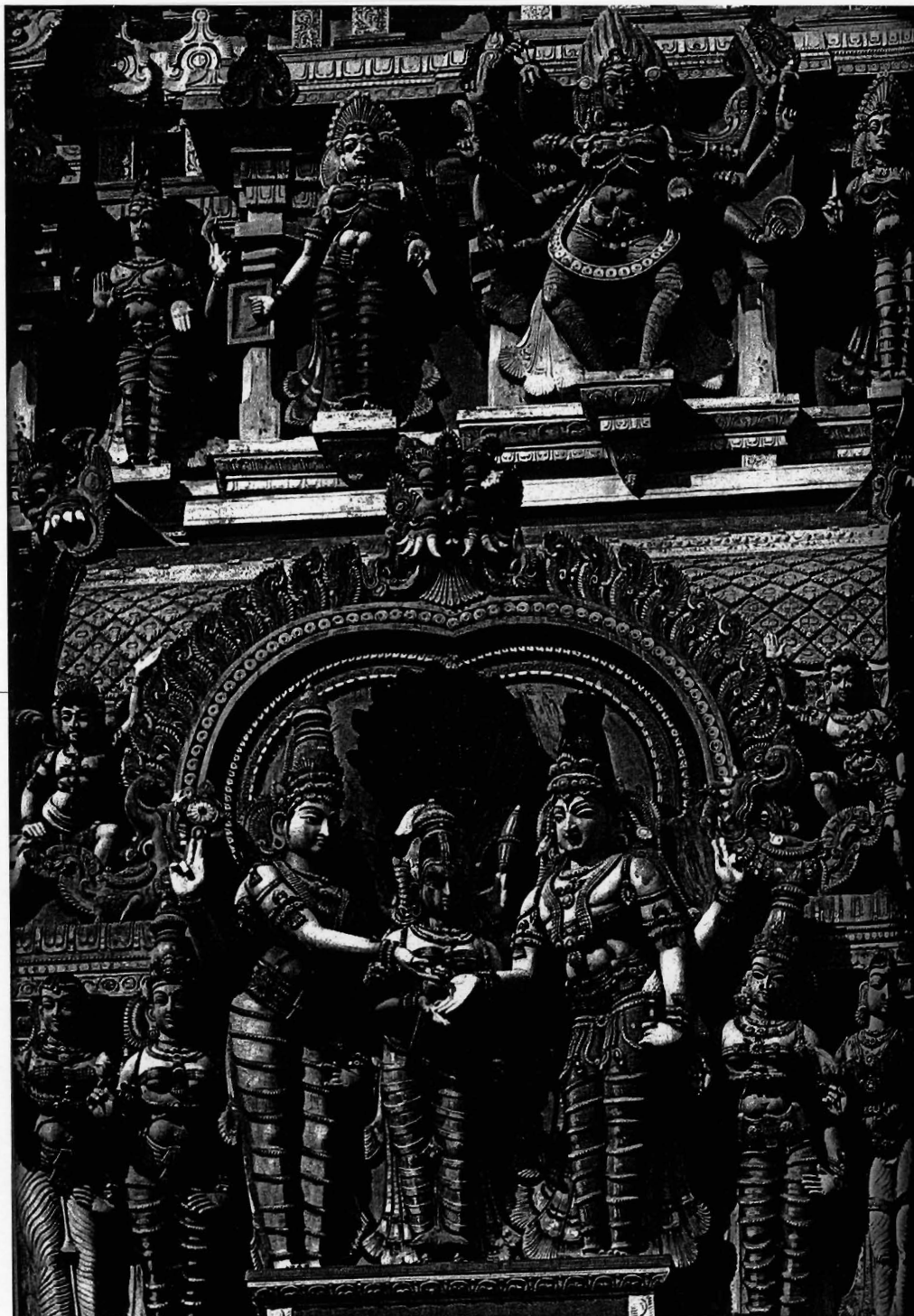
A temple would commission up to seventy such festival bronzes, depending on the wealth and size of its congregation. Annual activities at southern temples involved the celebration of special festivals each month, some of which lasted up to ten days. The creation of vast numbers of bronze images was governed by the fact that appropriate forms of the god and goddess were required for different occasions. A bronze Kalyanasundara group of Shiva taking the hand of Parvati in marriage, for example, such as the group created for Chola king Rajaraja (150), was appropriate only for the wedding anniversary celebration. Any temple of consequence thus needed to possess a range of festival bronzes, most of which were used just once a year and then returned to their place of rest in an area adjoining the sanctum.

A medium-sized temple hall was no longer adequate for the number of people who now assembled to witness temple festivities. In addition, each festival needed a suitable hall for its celebration. Thus, Naralokaviran's Hall of a Hundred Pillars at Chidambaram was erected solely as a marriage hall for Shiva and Parvati; devotees assembled there once a year to witness the festivities and to partake in the marriage feast cooked in the temple kitchens. As temple rituals and celebrations increased in number, a variety of impressive halls and pavilions was added randomly to existing premises – with the exception of a large tank, where devotees wash their feet before proceeding, which is usually located in the outermost enclosure. While their pillared halls and tall *gopurams* are imposing structures, the expanded temples rarely hold together as unified architectural entities.

Most of the expanded temples of the Tamil region belong to a period slightly later than Chidambaram, having been built largely under the aegis of the Rayas of Vijayanagar (1336–1565) and the Nayaks of Madurai (1529–1736), erstwhile governors of the Vijayanagar emperors. These temples grew gradually from the centre outwards over several centuries. One of the most renowned is the Minakshi temple at Madurai along the Vaigai River (155–161), whose festivities provide an insight into the unique nature of the rituals of worship in which we see devotees recreating the gods in their own images. The Madurai temple is dedicated to Shiva, known locally as Sundareshvara or Handsome One, together with his consort Minakshi or Fish-eyed One. The dual shrines dedicated to god and goddess add to the complexity of the Madurai temple layout; while known today as the Minakshi temple, its floor plan reveals that the Shiva shrine is at the very centre of the complex, suggesting that the ritual dominance of the goddess was a later development. The two small shrines with modest *shikharas* crowned with gold-plated *stupis*, are located side by side and enclosed within their own roofed and walled enclosures, each entered by a small gateway, with a connecting gate in their common

155
West gateway
of the Minakshi
temple,
Madurai,
mainly
1336–1736,
gateways
repainted
regularly





156-157
Minakshi
temple,
Madurai,
mainly
1336-1736

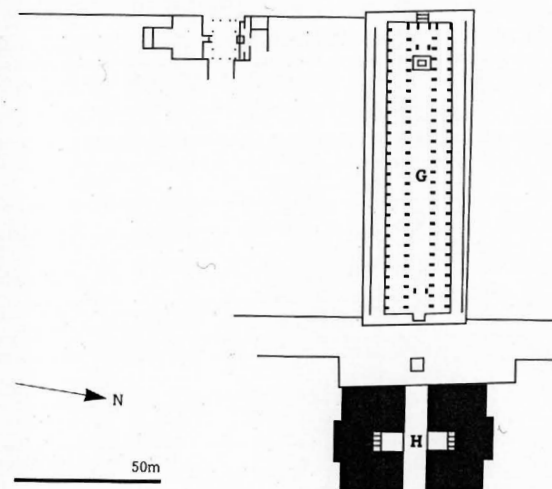
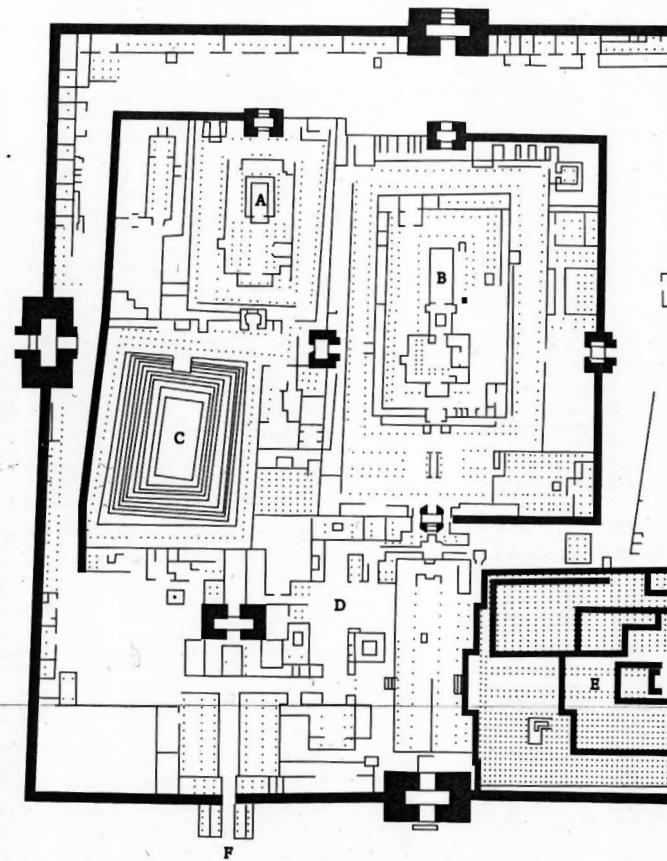
Left

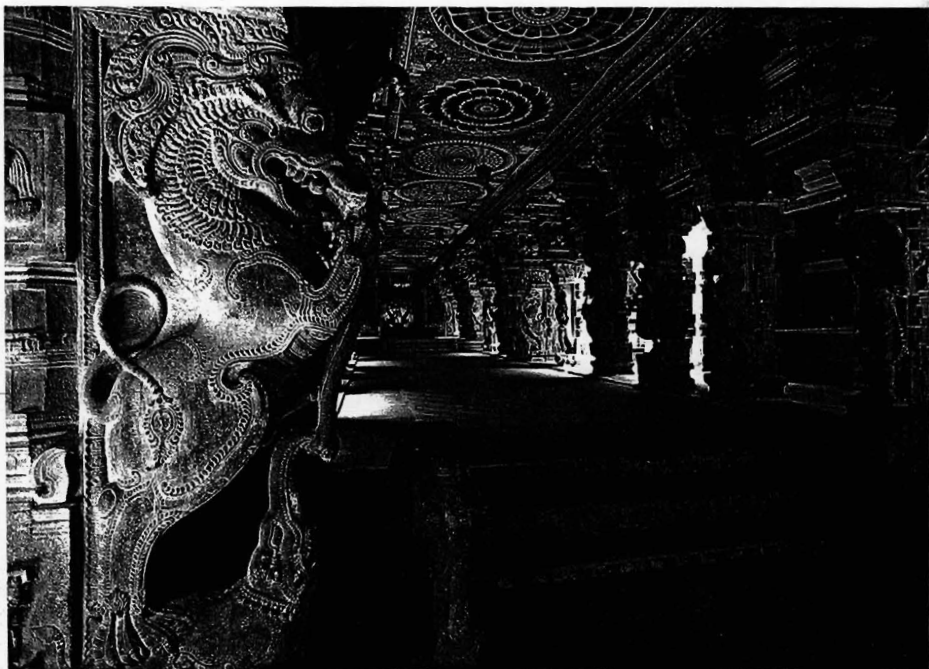
Marriage of
Shiva and
Parvati, 1877.
Detail of
gateway

Right

Plan

(A) Minakshi
shrine
(B) Sundar-
eshvara shrine
(C) Golden Lily
tank
(D) Marriage
Hall
(E) Hall of a
Thousand
Pillars
(F) Porch of
the Eight
Goddesses
(now the main
entrance)
(G) New Hall
(H) Unfinished
gopuram

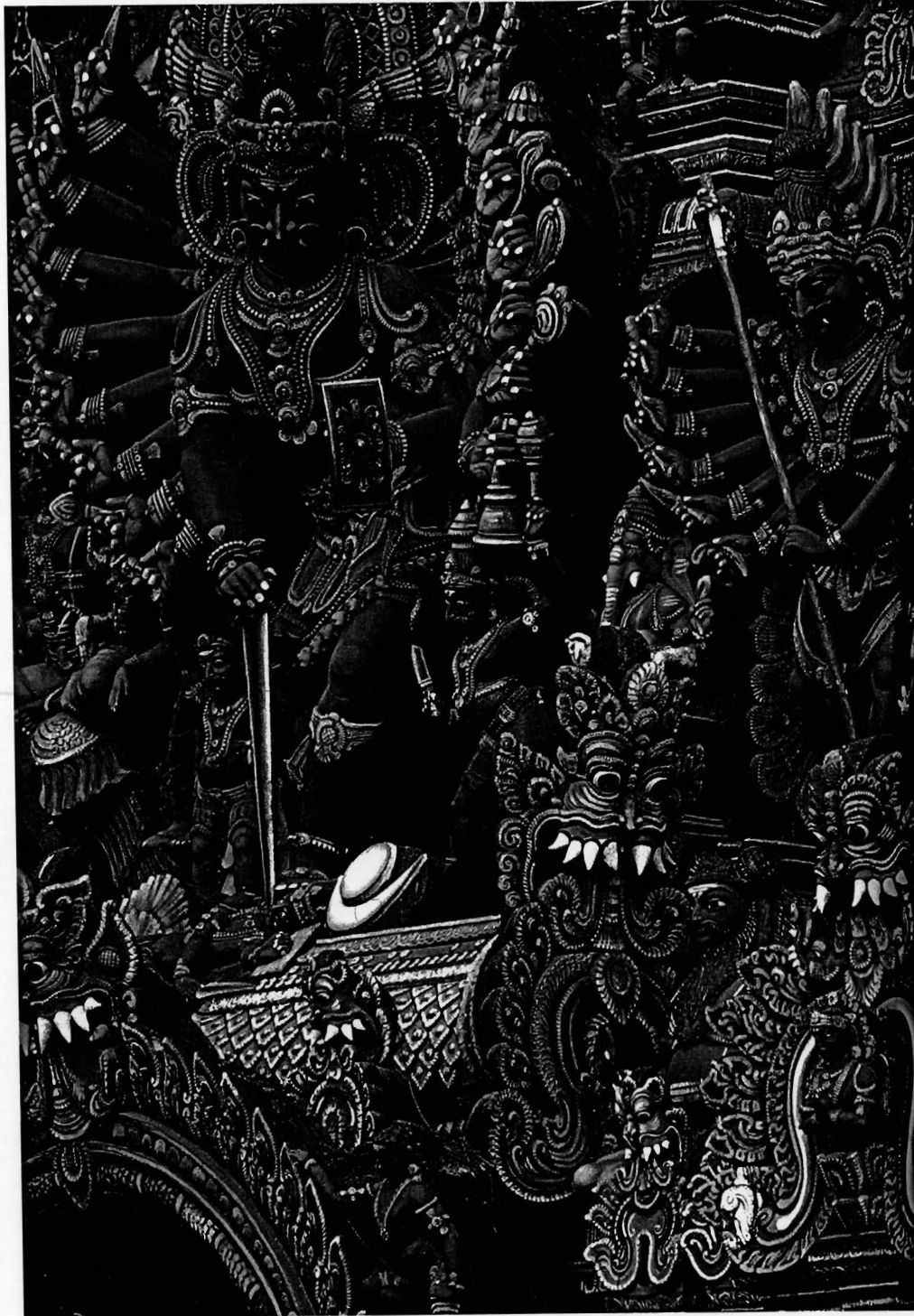




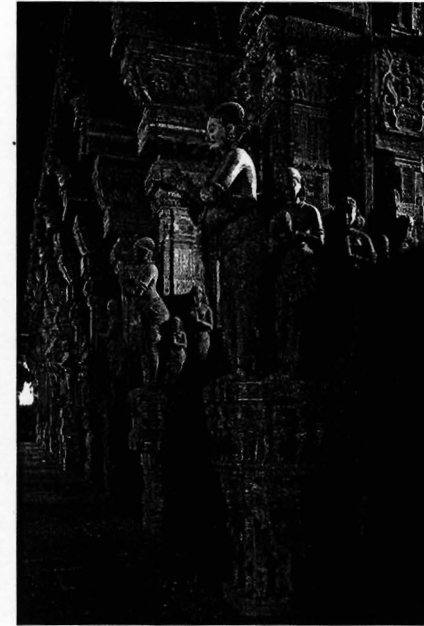
158-159
Hall of a
Thousand
Pillars,
Minakshi
temple,
Madurai, 1569

Left
General view
with a rampant
Yali in the fore-
ground
Right
Rati on her
swan





160-161
Minakshi
temple, Madurai
Left
Detail of figures,
south gateway,
1569
Right
Painted portrait
statue of
Tirumala Nayak
and his queens,
New Hall,
1628-35



side wall. Thereafter, no clear pattern can be traced in the expansion of the temple; even the Golden Lily tank is relocated from its standard location in the outermost enclosure to the second enclosure outside the goddess's shrine (157).

Additions were made at Madurai according to the individual predilections of its patrons. Its spectacular sixteenth-century Hall of a Thousand Pillars (158) was sponsored by the minister of a Nayak ruler. One pillar portrays an exquisite image of Rati, consort of Kama, god of love, seated on her swan (159); a second depicts the elephant-headed god Ganesha with his consort on his knee; a third portrays youthful Skanda riding a peacock; a fourth depicts Sarasvati, goddess of music and learning, holding the string instrument known as a *vina*. Local love legends revolving around gypsies are also featured; one pillar depicts a handsome gypsy carrying away a lovely young princess. Carved from single pieces of granite, each pillar is a monumental work of art.

Clay-modelled figural sculptures decorate the brick superstructures of the Madurai temple's twelve gateways. Its south gateway, built in 1599 by a wealthy landowner, rises to 60 m (197 ft) in a soaring concave curve of nine storeys, and is covered with over 1,500 plaster figures of gods and demons painted in variegated colours (160). Flanking the window openings on each level are guardian figures, often with arms and legs akimbo to emphasize their immense strength. Every twelve years, as the temple prepares for a ritual reconsecration to maintain its sacred potency, craftsmen undertake repairs and renovation. Stucco figures are restored, even replaced, and repainted in bright colours to suit the taste of local townspeople. Figures are occasionally replaced at the whim of the stucco carvers; a temple at Tiruvannamalai carries the figure of an American cowboy!

After the Madurai temple was 'complete', the seventeenth-century Nayak ruler, Tirumala, decided to build an immense pillared pavilion known as the New Hall directly opposite the east entrance and across what is today a busy thoroughfare. He commissioned life-sized images of Nayak royalty to be carved against its enormous granite columns, commencing with the first Nayak monarch and ending with himself accompanied by two queens (161). Traces of the original paint may still be seen. Tirumala erected portrait statues in all the temples in which he had a hand; his figure, depicted with a noticeable stomach roll, speaks of a degree of realism in portraiture. An immense pedestal towards the western end of the New Hall was intended to receive bronze images of Shiva and Minakshi; they had supposedly promised the ruler that each year, in the hot month of May, they would spend ten days in his hall, which was cooled by scented water that filled a sunken course surrounding it. Tirumala Nayak was unable to complete the monumental gateway and wall intended to enclose his pavilion. Another of his projects was an immense tank, the Teppakulam, that was connected to the Vaigai River through channels, and where a Float Festival for Shiva and Minakshi was held. Each January,

after dusk, images of god and goddess are placed in the tank on a float illuminated with myriads of oil lamps; thousands of citizens and pilgrim visitors assemble to enjoy the spectacle. Tirumala also built a grandiose palace whose main hall presents a vista of large circular piers that support broad arches with cusped profiles; an enormous 'Islamic' dome covers the throne area.

While Shiva is the centre of the Madurai temple in spatial and topographical terms, it is the enshrined image of the goddess which attracts the devotees who flock to the town. Through the centuries Minakshi has been gifted fabulous jewellery including a diamond headdress, pearls from the Pandyan rulers and vast quantities of gold ornaments studded with gems. Even the British collector of Madurai was in awe of Minakshi and, in 1812, he presented her with gem-studded gold stirrups for occasions when she might ride on horseback. Each day of the week, Minakshi is decked in one of her sumptuous sets of jewels. Devotees know that if they wish to see her in her diamonds, they must visit the temple on Mondays. Through a substantial donation, wealthier devotees may arrange for Minakshi to be decked in a specific manner on the day of their visit. Friday is the evening of the swing ceremony: bronze images of god and goddess are placed in the swing pavilion which overlooks the temple tank and, as temple attendants push the swing, musicians and singers provide entertainment with sacred songs. Crowds seated along the steps of the tank are cooled by the breeze that wafts off the waters. South Indian vocal music, or *kirtanam*, has a sacred content; it was in temple premises that music was nurtured. One *kirtanam* by Muthuswami Dikshitar begins:

O Goddess Minakshi
 whose lovely body has a deep blue sheen
 with long eyes shaped like a carp
 Goddess who provides release from the fetters of life
 who resides in the forest of kadamba trees

Esteemed one
who conquered Shiva
Grant me bliss.

Each evening after the eighth and last *puja* of the day, a bronze image of the goddess is placed upon a golden bed in the jewelled bedroom (*palli arai*) located in the innermost enclosure around the sanctum. Then a pair of golden feet (to represent the god) is transported from Shiva's shrine to the bedroom. Morning rituals commence at five o'clock when priests and singers congregate before the bedroom and sing to awaken the lord and his consort. At the song's end, priests open the doors, carry the images back to their respective shrines and begin the day's rituals with a dawn *puja*.

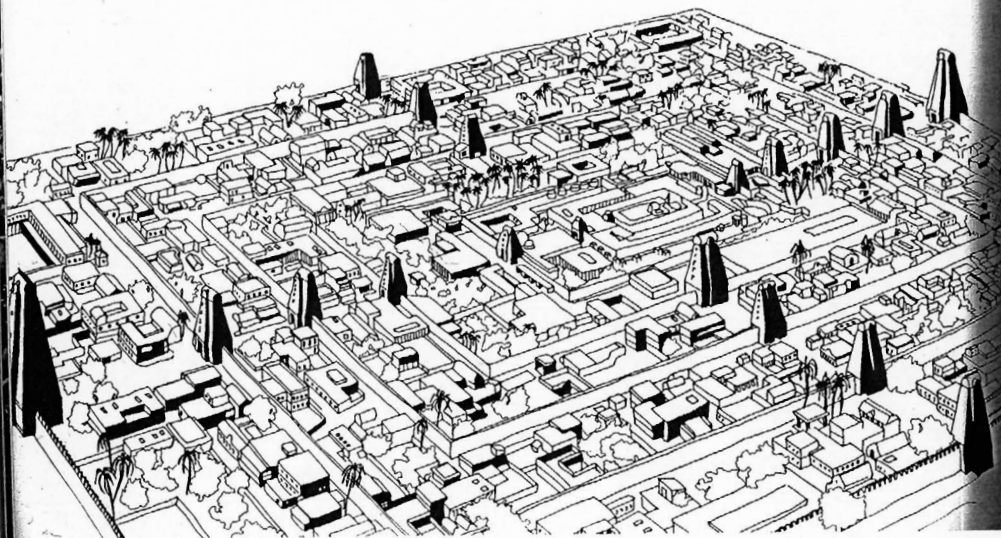
The annual celebration (April–May) of the marriage of Minakshi and Sundareshvara draws throngs of worshippers to the temple. In recent years the festivities have had to be televised so that the thousands who cannot be accommodated in the temple may witness them on screen. Viewers place garlands and sacred offerings around the television sets which provide them with the opportunity for such *darshan*. An important

component of this and other temple festivals is the procession in which bronze images of the deities are taken through the town, halting along the way at platforms and pavilions. At each, the deity rests for a while, allowing those unable to make the trip to the temple, or those disallowed entry, to approach and worship. This aspect of the temple festivities was an additional reason for the immense popularity of the rites revolving around bronze images, and for their continued significance.

While most temples were complete with the fourth enclosure, the great Vishnu temple on the island of Srirangam (162) has seven walled enclosures (the outermost is 878 x 754 m or 2,880 x 2,474 ft) and twenty-one gateways. It grew over four centuries, commencing with its 1371 reconstruction after occupation by the armies of the Sultans of Delhi (see Chapter 11), and reaching its final shape after 1670 when the adjoining town of Tiruchirapalli became the second capital of the Nayaks. Its four outermost gateways were left incomplete; in 1987, the southern *gopuram* was completed by a wealthy land-owning family and today it stands 72 m (236 ft) tall. The three outer enclosures share the character of the surrounding town; they contain houses for temple employees, hostels for overnight pilgrims, eating places, stalls selling temple offerings, and shops selling sacred books and souvenirs. The sacred precincts commence only at the fourth enclosure where visitors leave their footwear to enter holy space. Here are spacious pillared halls with immense monolithic granite columns that are converted, in one hall, to magnificent leaping horses with riders carved almost in the round. The third enclosure contains two tanks, one rectangular the other semi-circular, as well as five huge, octagonal brick structures that may have served as granaries. As one moves inwards, each succeeding gateway is lower; at the very centre is the small barrel-vaulted sanctum tower distinguishable only because it is plated with gold.

The rectangular sanctum of Srirangam encloses an image of Vishnu as Ranganatha reclining on his serpent-couch. The daily

162
Vishnu temple,
Srirangam,
mainly 14th–
17th centuries.
Drawing showing
enclosure
walls and
gateways



rituals of Vishnu are numerous and varied, and commence with this dawn wake-up chant composed by a Vaishnava saint who lived more than 1,000 years ago (*Divya Prabandham*, 'Tirupalliezhi' of Tondaradippodi Alvar):

O lord of Srirangam
 it's time to awake
 the sun looks over
 the crest of
 the eastern hill
 night has departed
 giving way to dawn
 the morning buds open
 dripping with honey ...
 O lord of Srirangam
 will you not awaken
 from your slumber?

The vast number of festivals at Srirangam celebrating Vishnu mythology includes those connected with Vishnu's two popular avatars as Rama and Krishna. A ten-day flower-and-chariot festival in April–May draws immense crowds. Other festivities of major significance include an eight-day swing festival in October–November, a twenty-day recital of the *Divya Prabandham* hymns of the Vaishnava saints in December–January, and a Float Festival in February–March.

It is perhaps because the divine is visualized and celebrated as participating in activities familiar to devotees that the expanded southern temples have retained so strong a hold on the lives of people. To this day, residents of Madurai congregate at the temple tank in the evenings where the atmosphere is enlivened with oil and electric lamps, the fragrance of flowers and incense, and the songs and chants of temple musicians. After *puja*, it is at the temple tank that the local residents socialize and relax. The expanded temples of South India continue to play a meaningful role in the lives of the people.