Thukkachi Temple

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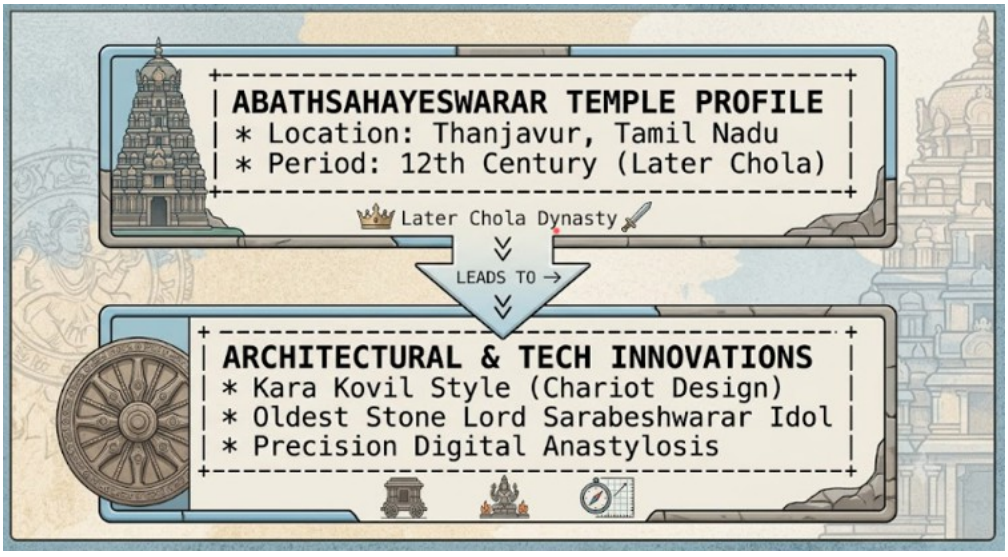
Why in News?

The oft-used phrase "rising like a phoenix from the ashes" finds its perfect expression in the story of the Abathsahayeswarar Temple at Thukkachi, near Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district.

- **UNESCO Recognition** - The 12th-century shrine achieved global recognition after being conferred the prestigious *UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award of Distinction for Heritage Conservation in 2024.*
- **Restoration spearheaded by –**
  - The Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Department in collaboration with the
  - National Centre for Safety of Heritage Structures (NCSHS) at IIT Madras.



Historical Profile

- **Royal Endowments -** The temple is closely associated with the later Chola emperors ***Kulottunga I and his son Vikrama Chola.***

- Kulottunga I initially endowed the shrine specifically for the daily recitation of sacred *Thevaram* hymns.
- **Vikrama Chola Connection-** It is the only major temple built entirely during the reign of Vikrama Chola, who expanded and structurally completed the earlier structure.
- **Epigraphical Records-** Historical inscriptions found on the stone walls refer to ***Thukkachi as Thenthirukalathi or Vikramacholeeswaram.***

Key Architectural Characteristics

- **Chariot Design (Kara Kovil) -** The temple is built as a Kara Kovil, a rare architectural style where the temple sanctuary is structurally sculpted in the physical shape of a chariot.
- **Iconographic Rarity-** It houses a highly revered idol of Lord Sarabeshwarar.

Conservation Methodology

- **Traditional Wisdom Meets Modern Science -** The restoration process merged traditional *Sthapatya Veda* construction principles.
- **Precision Digital Anastylosis -** The core structural conservation utilised modern tech like drone surveys and 3D digital mapping to catalog the crumbling structure.
- Every single shifting granite block was individually numbered and digitally mapped before being dismantled and reset into its structurally sound original position.
- **Prakaram Clearing** - The project team successfully cleared dense invasive plants and trees that had compromised the masonry, restoring two of the temple's key *prakarams* (enclosures) without damaging the underlying relief work.

Reference

[The Hindu | Thukkachi Temple]