

Analysis of Architectural form and elements of a Dravidian Style Temple in Chola Dynasty during Medieval Period of Southern India

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Abstract: During the period of 800-1200 A.D., South India became the centre of political activity. In the beginning of the ninth century, the Pallavas who were a great force were on the decline. The Chalukyas of Badami were by now overthrown by the Rashtrakutas. The latter were engaged in several wars and alliances with northern and southern kingdoms. Temple development in southern India started during the Chalukya rule in the early 7th century. These temples were inspired from the Buddhist architecture. The Cholas who were the feudatories of the Pallavas began to assert their power and were able to replace the Pallavas. The emergence of the imperial Cholas marked the beginning of a new stage in south Indian history. Under their domination, art and culture reached new heights whose influence was felt even in the countries of South-East Asia. Temple architecture in South India reached its pinnacles under the rule of imperial Cholas (850 - 1250). Early Chola temples however, are not as large as the ambitiously planned Pallava Kailashnatha or the Vaikunthaperumal temples at Kanchipuram. Development in early Chola architecture consists, instead, in perfecting the unique elements of the Dravidian style and combining them harmoniously with new forms in astonishingly diverse ways. The Chola king Rajarajesvara built one of the finest Dravidian style temple namely Brihadisvara appears to have been an entirely new foundation, a royal monument of power. The components of this temple are peculiar in its architectural style and one of its kind. The Cholas greatly made use of art to proclaim their power, used temples to make unequivocal statements about their political hegemony.

Keywords: Temple, Architecture, History, Chola Dynasty, Dravid, Brihadisvara.

I. INTRODUCTION

In South India, Temple Architecture developed with independent lines and have rise to building modes quite distinctive from North India. The Southern styles of temples can be grouped into the following five chronological divisions corresponding to the five principal dynasties which successively ruled over the patronized and largely moulded the growth of Architecture in South India. A) Pallava(c. 600-900) B) Chola(c. 900-1150) C) Pandya(c.1150-1350) D) Vijayanagara (c.1350-1565) E) Nayaka (1600-1750). The rock cut structures developed during the 7th -9th century under the rule of Pallavas. The Pallava rulers lead the way of dravidian style of temple architecture and they built the temples at Mahabalipuram. During the Pandyas rule the south Indian temples were added with the lofty gateways gopurams at the entrance with the basic temple composition. The gopurams made the temple visually attractive and also provided the temples with an enclosure. The temples evolved from simple rock cut shrines to a large and complicated structures. The temples in this period were large square building with a projecting porch and decorative pillars. The roof of the temple had small structure which later emerged as the sikhara. The entire temple is simple with minimal decoration. Some of the examples from this period are Lad Khan temple and Durga temple, Aihole. The gopurams evolved from a rectangular base with a pyramid crowned with a barrel vaulted form. This rise to power was under Aditya-I. His son Parantaka ruled for forty two years from 907 to 949AD. He was an ambitious warrior king who drove the Pandya king to exile captured Mathura and invaded Ceylon. His successors had to repeatedly face the onslaught of the Rashtrakutas, Gangas

and Pandyas. It was under Rajaraja the great who ruled from (985-1014AD) that the Cholas rose as the supreme power in South India. He pursued a policy of conquest for fourteen years during which he conquered the eastern Chalukya kingdom of Vengi, subdued the Cheras, conquered territories on the Malabar coast, inflicted defeat on the Pandyas and annexed parts of Ceylon. His alliance through marriage with the ruler of Vengi promoted unity among the Cholas and Eastern Chalukyas. Rajaraja was succeeded by Rajendra Choladeva I who ascended the throne in 1016AD. He ruled for a period of twenty eight years. He further expanded his territories beyond his father's territories. He occupied the islands of Andaman Nicobar, Sumatra, Malaya and the islands of Pegu with his fleet of ships. In his expedition to the North in about 1023 AD he defeated Mahipala the Pala king of Bihar and Bengal. To commemorate his victory he assumed the title of 'Gangaikondai' and built in Trichinopoly district a new capital called, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, which had a magnificent palace, temple and a lake. In the 11th century the Chola rulers built one of the tallest temples of that time the Brihadeshvara temple, Thanjavur with a height of 60 m (Hardy 2007). In the later period the temples extended and became more intricate. More mandaps were included for various activities like dancing, assembly, eating, marriages, etc. The Dravidian style concluded in a series of extended temple cities or townships. His son Rajadhiraja was killed fighting the Chalukyas in about 1052 AD. Adhiraja was the next ruler of the Cholas who was assassinated in 1074AD. He was succeeded by Rajendra Kulottunga I but he formed the line of rulers from the Chalukya Cholas. The finest example of the temple township is the temple at Srirangam and Madurai with several concentric enclosures. The power of the Cholas declined in about the 13th century. The rise of the Hindu kingdom at Vijayanagar ended the Chola dynasty.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHOLAS

The king was the head of the administration and all powers were concentrated in his hands. The Chola kings assumed high sounding titles. Thanjavur, Gangaikondacholapuram, Mudikondan and Kanchi remained the various capitals of different Chola rulers at various times. The Chola empire was extensive and prosperous and the rulers enjoyed high powers and prestige. The images of the kings and their wives were also maintained in various temples which indicated that they believed in the divine origin of kingship. The king was assisted by ministers and other high officials of the state in administration, who were given high titles, honours and lands as jagirs. The Cholas had organised an efficient bureaucracy and their administration was successful. The Cholas maintained powerful armies and navies. The infantry, the cavalry and the war elephants constituted the main parts of the army of the Cholas. It seems that the Cholas had seventy regiments. Probably, the army consisted of 1,50,000 soldiers and 60,000 war elephants. The Cholas spent huge amounts to maintain an efficient cavalry and imported the best horses from Arab countries to equip their army. In peace time, the army remained in cantonments where proper arrangements were made for its training and discipline. The kings kept their personal bodyguards, called the Velaikkaras, who were sworn to defend the person of the king at the cost of their lives. The empire was divided into Mandals for the convenience of administration. They were either seven or eight in number. The Mandals were divided into Nadus and Nadus into Kurrams or Kottams. Every Kurram had several villages which were the smallest units of administration. Society was based on Varna-Asram Dharma but the different Varnas or castes lived peacefully with each other. Inter-caste marriages were permitted and it had led to the formation of different sub-castes. The position of women was good. They were free from many restrictions which came to be imposed on them by the Hindu society later on. There was no purdah-system and women participated freely in all social and religious functions. They inherited and owned property in their own right. There were stray cases of sati but it was not a widely practised custom. Normally, monogamy was the prevalent rule but the kings, the Samantas and the rich people kept several wives. The Devadasi system was also in vogue and there were prostitutes also in cities. The slave system was also prevalent. The Chola empire enjoyed widespread prosperity. The Cholas had arranged for proper means of irrigation which had helped in the reclamation of waste land and increased agricultural production which provided the base for the prosperity of both rulers and the ruled. The Cholas maintained peace and security within the territory, constructed well-connected roads, provided safety to travellers and traders and, above all, kept a strong navy on high seas. In such conditions, trade, both internal and external, grew resulting in increased prosperity of the state. The traders had brisk trade with China, Malaya, Western gulf and the islands of South-East Asia. Industries also grew up under the protection of the Cholas. Cloth, ornaments, metals and their different products, production of salt and construction of images and temples were a few of the important industries which grew and prospered under the protection of the Cholas. The Chola emperors were the devotees of either Bhagavatism or Saivism. Both of which were the most important sects of Hinduism. Both of these sects became very popular in South India under the protection of the Cholas. The reign of emperor Vijayalaya marked the beginning of the rise of these sects and, then, every Chola emperor contributed in his own way to their progress. During this period, temples of different gods and goddesses were constructed in large numbers and they became

the predominant feature of Hinduism. Hindu temples not only became centres of worship but also those of education, arts and social welfare. The temples satisfied not only the religious urge of the people but also served the purpose of social welfare and progress. The Chola emperors helped in the progress of Hindu society and religion by constructing a large number of temples of Hindu gods and goddesses. The Cholas were tolerant rulers. Barring one or two examples, every Chola emperor respected and gave equal protection to every religious faith. And, whenever intolerance was attempted, it resulted in revolt among the people. This proves that tolerance in religion was observed not only by the rulers but even the ruled accepted and pursued it as a matter of rightful duty. The period of the rule of the Cholas was the golden age of Tamil literature. Mostly, the texts were written as Kavya (poetry). Different scholars received patronage from different rulers and engaged themselves in scholarly writings. Among noted scholars of this period were Tirutakadevara, who wrote the Jiwana-Chintamani, Tolamokti, who wrote the Sulamani, Jayagodar, who wrote the Kalingatuppani and Kambana, who wrote the Ramavatrama. Kambana was one of the greatest figures in Tamil poetry. His Ramayana known as the Kamba Ramayana has been regarded as a masterpiece of Tamil literature. The Buddhist scholar, Buddhmitra, wrote the text named the Rasoliyan while another Buddhist scholar wrote the Kundalakesha and the Kalladama. Scholars, like Dandina and Pugalenda, also flourished under the patronage of the Cholas. Besides Tamil, texts were written in the Sanskrit language also. During the reign of Parantaka I, Venkatmadhava wrote his commentary of the Rigveda while Keshavaswamina wrote his scholarly work titled Nanartharava. Thus, literature, both in Tamil and Sanskrit, progressed.



Fig 1: Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram (Rock Cut Architecture-Pallava Style)

III. ARCHITECTURE DEVELOPMENT UNDER CHOLA DYNASTY

The Cholas constructed cities, lakes, dams, tanks etc. at different places. Rajendra I constructed a huge lake at his capital, Gangaikondacholapuram which was filled up by the waters of the rivers Kalerun and Bellara and which supplied water to many canals constructed for irrigation purposes. The same way, many dams at different rivers, canals and tanks were constructed by different Chola rulers. But the chosen fields of the Cholas were architecture and sculpture. Huge and beautiful temples cut out from rocks or from hills and images of different Hindu gods and goddesses were constructed by the Cholas. The best specimens of the Chola art of early period are the temples of Vijayalaya-Cholesvara, the Nagesvara temple, the Koranganatha temple and the Muvarakovitna temple. The Vijayalaya-Cholesvara temple at Narttamalai is interesting for its circular shrine chamber enclosed within a square ambulatory. The Nagesvara temple has many beautiful images of men and women on its stone walls, while Koranganatha temple at Srinivasanallur which was, probably, constructed during the reign of Parantaka I, has been regarded as the best example of the initial phase of the Chola development of the Dravida temple art. However, when the Chola empire grew in strength and its prosperity also increased, still more grand temples were constructed by the Cholas. Rajaraja I constructed the Rajarajesvara temple at Thanjavur and the temple of Viruvalisvarama in the Tinnaveli district. Rajendra Chola also constructed a huge temple of Siva at his capital Gangaikondacholapuram. Rajaraja II constructed the temple of Airavatesvara at Darasuram while Kulottunga II constructed the temple of Kampaharesvara at Tribhuvanam. All these temples possess both the grandeur and the beauty of the art of architecture. The Rajarajesvara temple at Thanjavur stands within a walled quadrangle, 500 feet by 250 feet. It has fourteen storeys which rise up to 190 feet from the ground. At the top of it is a 25 feet high tower

which weighs 80 tonnes and has been constructed by cutting a single rock. The entire temple is covered with beautiful images of different Hindu gods and goddesses carved in stone walls. Percy Brown writes of it, "It is the touchstone of Indian architecture as a whole." These various temples justify the opinion that the south Indian architecture or the Dravida temple art had reached the stage of perfection during the reign of the Chola emperors. Of course, it was inspired by the Pallava art in its early stages but, afterwards, it developed its own qualities and perfected itself. The art of sculpture also progressed during this period. Painting also progressed during the period of Cholas. The wall-paintings at the Siva temple of Thanjavur can be favourably compared to the frescoes at the caves of Ajanta. A typical Architectural and new Chola feature that is different from the Pallava, is the famed ornamentation of temple walls. This consists in the use of real deep niches with entablatures. These niches, the Devakushtas (niches to house deities), flanked by demi pilasters, appear on wall surfaces of Chola temples. The decoration, in most finished examples, alternates between the various niche devices of koshtapanjaras and Kumbhapanjaras. Space is narrow in these forms but the decoration is more rounded. The pilasters of these niches are crowned by a curved roof moulding adorned by two kudu with crowning lion heads. The bases of these decorative devices have makara (motif based on the mythical sea monster) and warrior heads. The Chola distinction is seen in the abandonment of the Pallava yali or the lion at the bases of pillars and pilasters. The pillars too, are more enriched and defined. As earlier noted, the final element in the Dravidian pillar of the notch in the shaft before it flares, with a slight swelling above it, gets transformed now under the Cholas to become the most delicate of vases (kalash). Another elegant feature of the pillar is the decorative device of the kudu, put as a rollmoulding on top of the pillars. The gateways, which are dwarfed in the Pallava, are in late Chola prominent. The dwarfpalas (gatekeepers) in Chola temples are fierce men with tridents, bearing tusks protruding from mouths, rolled eyes and hands always in threatening gestures. These contrast with the benign natural looking single paired arm dwarfpalas of the past.

IV. THE TEMPLE OF BRIHADISVARA BY CHOLAS

All these features climax in two temples, the Brihadisvara (Rajarajesvara) at Thanjavur, the capital of the Cholas and the Gangaikondacholapuram, near Kumbakonam. These come at a time of greatest extent of Chola power. Cholas had become the greatest power in South India by 10th century CE. They had reached the borders of the Rashtrakuta kingdom in the north. Rows of temples were built on both the banks of the river Kaveri to mark their growing power of Rajaraja-I, crowned in 985, carved out an overseas empire by establishing a second capital at Pollonaruva in Sri Lanka.

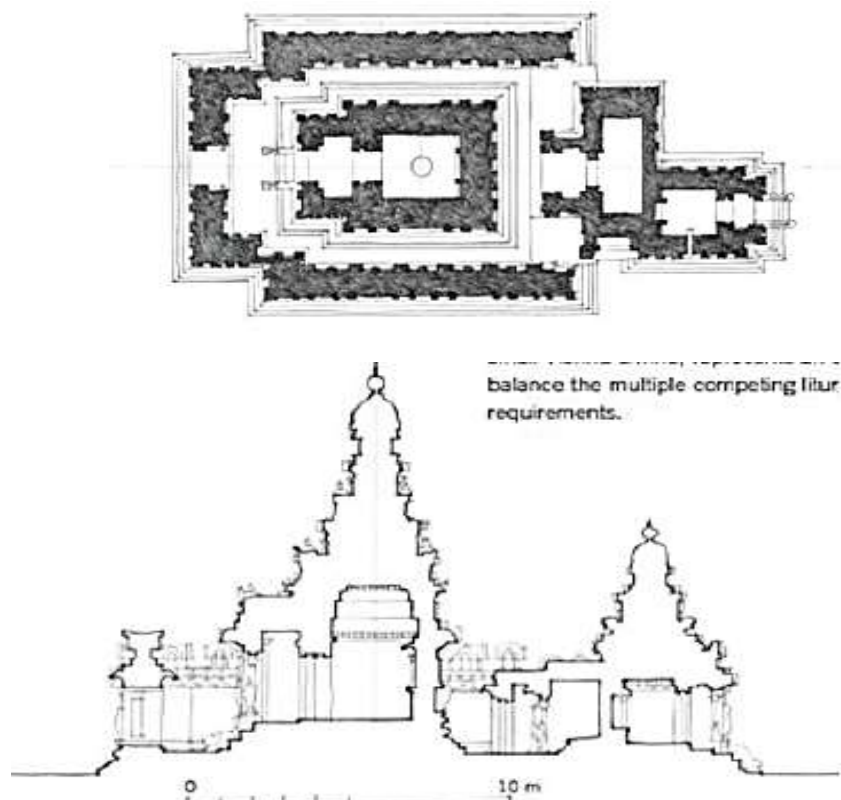


Fig 2: Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram (Rock Cut Architecture-Pallava Style) Plan and Section

The Brihadisvara (995 - 1010), built by him at his capital Thanjavur, though he did not live to see it completed is a product of this success. The temple inscriptions make clear the triumphal nature of the edifice. Donations to the shrine came from far and wide. The numbers of architects, accountants, guards, functionaries, temple dancers, revenue records of landgrants etc are engraved on the temple walls, thus establishing the importance of the temple as an institution of prime importance in Chola times. The Brihadisvara is some 210 feet High (refer fig 3), the largest and the tallest in India. It is laid out as a Dravida padmagarbhamandala of 16 into 16 squares. It was consecrated in 1009 - 10. The site is not associated with any Puranic story or any ancient legend, the The vimana is dvitala (double storied). The vertical base (a square of 82 feet with a height of 50 feet) forms the first storey and the 13 slightly receding tiers form the upper portion. The diminishing tiers taper till the last at the apex to become one third of the base. On top of this rests the crowning dome, which comprises a massive granite block of 25 and a half feet square and estimated to weigh eighty tons. The cupola with its inward curve of its neck is a pleasing break from the outward rigid lines of the composition that has a soaring character. An internal circumambulatory passage, two stories high, consisting of a series of chambers with sills but no doors, runs inside the precinct. On its walls, in 1930, Nayaka period paintings were discovered to overlay the Chola murals that included Rajaraja I with three of his queens worshipping Nataraja (dancing Shiva), the patron deity of Cholas. The temple is entered by side doorways approached by large ornamental stairs leading to an antechamber (ardhmandapa), with a platform for bathing the deities. To it is attached a huge mandapa of 36 pillars (mahamandapa), entered by a front mandapa with a central entrance (mukhamandapa). In all there are 18 door guardians flanking the various entrances and sills. In the decorative treatment, the lower vertical base is of two stories divided by a massive overhanging cornice, reminiscent of the Pallava rock-cut. Except for this powerful horizontal member in the structure, the emphasis is on verticality, the two ranges of vertical pilasters above and below adding to the verticality. Combined with these pilasters are deep niches with motifs of 'tree of knowledge' and other decorative devices. Occupying the middle of each compartment, are ingeniously carved figures. The kumbhapanjara decorative device is introduced here. The surfaces of the tapering part of the Vimana are patterned by the horizontal lines of the diminishing tiers intersecting the vertical disposition of the ornamental shrines, thus producing a very rich architectural texture. Finally, there is the contrast of the cupola at the summit, its winged niches on all four sides relieving the severity of the outline, just where it is most required.



Fig 3: Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur (Chola Style)

V. CONCLUSION

The Chola Kingdom extended along the Coromandel Coast from Nellore to Pudukottai. It also included the areas of Mysore and Madras. The Cholas rose to power in the ninth century AD defeating the last Pallava King. The Chola became the most powerful dynasty of all till then. The period of the Cholas was remarkable from many aspects. It contributed fairly to the polity and culture of south India and thereby, to Indian polity and culture. Its contribution has been widely accepted in the domain of local self-government, construction of a powerful navy, growth of Tamil literature and in the fields of architecture and sculpture. Every section and every decoration at the Brihadisvara is designed for maximum effect. It is the finest example of Dravidian architecture with all its elements reaching their zenith. Within the large enclosure walls are shrines of the parivardevatas (family deities) and the dikpalas (deities of cardinal directions). The eight dikpalas are housed separately against the wall. The two large gopuras in line are first introduced here in Dravidian architecture. The Cholas worshipped all Hindu gods and goddesses and therefore, built the images of all. Besides, images were carved out on the stone walls of the temples. The Chola emperors also built their own images as well as of their wives and placed them also in temples. But the finest specimens of images constructed during the period of the Cholas were the bronze statues out of which the statue of Nataraja Siva has been regarded as the best and which has become widely popular even during modern times.

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