



THE CHOLA ARCHITECTURE: A DRAVIDAN STYLE GLEAND FROM KAILASANATHA TEMPLE AT SEMBIANMAHADEVI

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Cite This Article: R. Vennila & Dr. A. Srinivasan, "The Chola Architecture: A Dravidan Style Gland from Kailasanatha Temple at Sembianmahadevi", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 2, Issue 2, Page Number 121-124, 2017.

Abstract:

Architecture plays a significant role in the socio economic, and cultural life of any society. It helps us trace the historical changes and the reciprocal influence between different socio cultural units. In this context, the temples of medieval Tamil Nadu deserve special consideration because of the interrelationship of the styles of their constructing and the changes introduced by the various ruling dynasties of the Tamil country in the growth and development of the temple art and architecture in that region. Temple architecture in Tamil Nadu is largely indebted to the patronage of the Tamil kings. Generally, those who want to see the different types and their locations should necessarily have acknowledge of the political history and the chronology of temple art in Tamil Nadu. Generally, the characteristic features of the Chola architecture show that it was continued from the past. The early Chola architecture was enriched in general by the inherited tradition of the Pallavas. The early Chola temple architectural forms and designs are modest in scale and very elegant in plan. Fergusson¹⁴ makes a sweeping remark that "in nine cases out of ten, Dravidian temples are the fortress aggregation of parts, arranged without plan an accident dictated at the time of their erection. According to Douglas Barrett,¹⁵ the general plan was uniform throughout the early Chola period. The temple architectural design and main shrine comprised a rectangular flat-roofed *mandapa* (*ardhamandapa*) leading into a square flat-roofed sanctuary which supports a *vimana*. But at the same time, the early Cholas adopted certain forms of the Pallavas who designed the original forms. Among the early Chola kings, Aditya I (871-907 A.D) was the real founder of the Chola architectural tradition. The study of the architecture of Kailasanatha temple at Sembianmahadevi is interesting for it throws much light on some of the distinctive architectural features that were developed in South Indian. The history of the temple reveals that many of its structures were built in different epochs.

Key Words: Agamas, Silpasastra, Ardhamandapa, Garbhagraha, Sanctum, Adhishtana, Mukhamandapa & Gopura

The term 'Architecture' is derived from the Latin word *architectura*, meaning the leading worker or a skilled artisan or craftsman.¹ It is an art blending to technical skills, imagination and beauty.² It is a branches of the fine arts grew and developed with the growth and development of arts. Architecture the scientific knowledge of the people.³ It reflects in many ways the life style, religious, economic and social activities of people. The Greek architecture stands for its purity and excellence; the Roman for scientific skill; the French for the exposure of human feelings; the Italian for intellectualism and the Indian for spiritualism.⁴ It is considered that God and his temple correspond to the soul and body of a human being.⁵ Different kinds of authoritative texts reveal details of Indian architecture. Out of them only a few are available to us such as the *Mayamata*, *Manasara*, *Visvakarmiya*, *Indramata* and *Kasyapam*.⁶ In addition to these, the later compilations of the *Sastras*, *Puranas*, *Agamas*, *Tantras*, *Samhitas*, and *Silparatna* also lay down the rules and principles to be followed in the construction of temples and their different styles.⁷ Religion was instrumental to architecture in the beginning.

In course of time Indian architecture has developed into a multifaceted are because of the influence of the various ruling classes who governed various parts of India and the influence of the aliens. According to the *Silpasastra*, the Indian style of architecture is classified into three types. They are the *Nagara*, *Vesara* and the *Dravida*.⁹ This classification has been made on the basis of regionalistic variations and style. The *Nagara* style or square is seen in North India, the architecture on the eastern coastal region stands as testimony to the *vesara* type, and the *Dravidian* or octagonal style flourished in the Deccan and South India.¹⁰ The names of the various limbs of human body are applied in architectural texts to denote temple structures such as *pada*, *griva*, *sikhara* and it only reflects the concept of organic unity in temple architecture.¹¹ Even in ancient times Indians had the knowledge of architecture.¹²

Temple architecture in Tamil Nadu is largely indebted to the patronage of the Tamil kings. Generally, those who want to see the different types and their locations should necessarily have acknowledge of the political history and the chronology of temple art in Tamil Nadu.¹³

Temple architecture in Tamil Nadu is largely theocentric. The absence of any stone monuments or sculpture, belonging to the Sangam age is most surprising. However recent archaeological excavations help us to a greater extent for the rewriting of the history of Tamil Nadu.

Architecture plays a significant role in the socio economic, and cultural life of any society. It helps us trace the historical changes and the reciprocal influence between different socio cultural units. In this context, the temples of medieval Tamil Nadu deserve special consideration because the interrelationship of the styles of their constructing and the changes introduced by the various ruling dynasties of the Tamil country in the growth and development the temple art and architecture in that region.

Generally, the characteristic features of the Chola architecture show that it was continued from the past. The early Chola architecture was enriched in general by the inherited tradition of the Pallavas. The early Chola temple architectural forms and designs are modest in scale and very elegant in plan. Fergusson¹⁴ makes a sweeping remark that “in nine cases out of ten, Dravidian temples are the fortress aggregation of parts, arranged without plan an accident dictated at the time of their erection. According to Douglas Barrett,¹⁵ the general plan was uniform throughout the early Chola period. The temple architectural design and main shrine comprised a rectangular flat-roofed *mandapa* (*ardhamandapa*) leading into a square flat-roofed sanctuary which supports a *vimana*. But at the same time, the early Cholas adopted certain forms of the Pallavas who designed the original forms. Among the early Chola kings, Aditya I (871-907 A.D) was the real founder of the Chola architectural tradition.

The imperial Cholas grew powerful in the mid 9th century A.D., under Vijayalaya (850 – 870 A.D.) during the reign of Aditya I, particularly after the victory of Aparajita Pallava over the Pandyas in the battle of Thiruppurambiam. This paved the way for the great contribution of the Cholas to the temple art. The Vijayalaya Cholisvaram temple in the Melamalai hill at Narttamalai, Movarkoyil at Kodumbalur are said to be the constructions of the Muttarayyas and the Irukkuvels in this period. Their follow the early Chola tradition.¹⁶

The Chola Architectural tradition reached a high degree of excellence and perfection during the reign of Rajaraja I, (985-1014 A.D) and Rajendra I (1012-1044 A.D). The Rajarajeswaram temple (Sri Brahadeeswarar temple) at Thanjavur,¹⁷ the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple of Rajendra I, the Rajarajeswaram temple of (Sri Airavateswara) at Darasuram built by Rajaraja II (1146-73 A.D), and Sri Kampahareswara temple at Thirubhuvanam¹⁸ built by Kulothunga III (1178-1223 A.D) stand as distinctive types and most of them are found in the Chola Nadu.¹⁹

The early Chola temples of classical workmanship and excellence are architectural achievements in the Chola tradition. The early Chola temple architecture combines all the mature innovations adopting elegant designs. The outstanding achievement of the architects of the Chola age display a variety of innovations and a wealth of exuberant designs and decorative details. Kailasanatha temple at Sembianmahadevi is one of the best specimens of the early Chola temples.

The study of the architecture of Kailasanatha temple at Sembianmahadevi is interesting for it throws much light on some of the distinctive architectural features that were developed in South Indian. The history of the temple reveals that many of its structures were built in different epochs.

Extensive studies of the history of Kailasanatha temple have been made by the scholars who differ from each other in their conclusions. Douglas Barrett²⁰ claims that Kailasanatha temple may belong to the period of Aditya I (871 A.D. – 907 A.D.) after making a detailed study of the structural forms and style of the first *tala* of the superstructure of the Aiyaruappar shrine and its *ardhamandapa*. Stylistically, Kailasanatha temple might have been built a little earlier than 890 A.D. But the rule of Aditya I was between 871 A.D. and 907 A.D. Aditya I had several Siva temples on the banks of the Cauveri renovated and such reconstructions may have brought in those structures introducing that style adds S.R. Balasubramaniam.

The *ardhamandapa*²¹ adjoining and in front of the *garbhagraha* is supported by four square pillars. They are formed of three cubical parts *sadurams* and two prismatic parts each facet of which is called *pattai*. The decorations on the exterior wall of this *mandapa* have the same type of *adhithana* in continuation of that of those *vimana* of the central shrine. But the *devakoshthas* are absent. The door is flanked by pilasters. The pillars and pilasters belong to the early Chola period. The lintel of the door frame of this *mandapa* has been decorated by the minutely sculpted figure of Sri Gajalakshmi with elephants. There are two *dvarapalagas* (door-keepers) guarding the entrance to this *mandapa*. Beyond the *mandapas* there are two *karnadvara* leading to the first *prakara* on the right and left side of the *mandapa*. The *garbhagraha* and the *ardhamandapa* are enclosed by a wall.

All these comprise the main shrine of Kailasanatha temple. The existence of this shrine in the days of Nandivarma III is attested by an inscription of his (846-869 A.D.) which mentions a sale of land.

The *sanctum* of Kailasanatha Temple is square in shape the sides measuring (3.35 metres).²² A cylindrical ‘linga’ on a circular *pita* is installed inside the sanctum. The plinths of the sanctum and the *ardhamandapa* are similar in shape of style. The *adhishthana* consists of an *upana* followed successively by the *mahapadma*, *vrittakumuda* with *padma* varis and a *yali* frieze with gaping *makaras*. The *makara* heads hold warriors in their mouths and riders on their back are specimens of excellent workmanship. A *Vedika* is also found above the *yali* frieze and there are in its corners specially sculpted vignette panels.

Above the *adhithana*²³ raises the *bhitti*. The wall are decorated with three *devakoshthas* and *vishnukanta* pilasters. The niches of the *koshtas* contain Sri Dakshinamurthi on the south,

Sri Brahma on the north and Sri Lingothbava on the side (the image of whom is now missing). On either side of the niche are semi pilasters and above them are the *makarathoranas*. The pilasters consist of *kal, padmabandam, kalasam, tadi, kudam, idal, munai, palagai, kandam, and sadabodigai*.

The architectural motifs of the *prastara* part are of interest. The shape, style and decoration of the *prastara* are very similar to those of the sanctum, in the *ardhamandapa* and in the *mukhamandapa*. It has been ornamented with a highly decorated cornice above below which run the *gana frieze* and *yali frieze* respectively. The *gana* frieze contains various human forms in fascinating postures such as playing on musical instruments, dancing, doing somersaults and even fighting. The cornice is decorated with *kudus*. At the centre of these *kudus* are carved small figures such as the fish, swan, lotus, cow and the snake. The *yali* frieze is also well decorated.

The shrine of Kailasanatha is an *ekatala* structure with a spherical *stupi*. The superstructure rises in two tiers over the *aditala*. The *hara* shows *karnakudus* and *sala* over the projected central bay. The cornice is present above the *sala*. There are images of *nandis* on the four corners of the second *tala*. A circular *griva* rises from the second storey and above this there is globular *sikhara*. It has a projecting *kudu* crowned by a lion face (*simhalalata*). The *sikhara* is topped by a *stupi*, of copper.

In the Later chola period the *gopura* becomes the highest and most impressive features of the temple complex and its plan. The architecture entered a distinctive phase during the reign of Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra I in the temple architectural planning, proportions and designs. The Brahadeeswara temple at Thanjavur and the Siva temple of Gangaikondacholapuram are their excellent monuments. In the Later Chola period, the *gopura* becomes the highest and most impressive features in front of the *Vimana* of the temple. The period of Kulottunga I²³ *gopuras* in the complex were raised on the four sides of enclosures each in one direction.

The eastern *gopura* of Kailasanatha temple is popularly called the Vikramachola *gopura*. It is the most ancient of the eight *gopuras* of this temple. This *gopura* is built of stone from the base upto the *prastara*, and the superstructure of brick. The basement of the *gopura* has the *upana* at the bottom. Above it the *jagati*, there edged *kumuda, pattika* and *vedika* are placed respectively. Two monolithic *dvarapalagas*, adorn the entrance of this *gopura*.

The superstructure rises to three stories. The first and the second tiers contain *karnakudu* at the corners and *sala* at the middle. The *Panjaram* is found between the *karnakudu* and the *salai*. Beautiful figures of in stucco of gods can be seen in all the tiers. The *griva* contains niches surmounted by the lion face. The rectangular *sikhara* is topped by five *kalasas* (*pancha kalasas*).²⁴ On the basis of epigraphical evidence it is found that this *gopura* was built by Vikramachola.

The stylistic features of this *gopura* are helpful to fix the date of its foundation. The shape of corbels of the pillars and pilasters of this *gopura* show characteristic features of the post Chola architecture of about the 13th century A.D.²⁵

A study of the style of architecture of Kailasanatha temple of Sembianmahadevi clearly shows that the temple is centuries old and has been added and modified during the reigns of some powerful dynasties which ruled in South India. It is evidence of the great zeal evinced by our ancestors in temple building and of the efficacy and superiority of their style of building construction. Kailasanatha temple has been laudably preserved by the administrators right from the time of the Pallavas, the later Cholas, Pandyas Vijayanagar and the Nayakas kings down to this day with multifarious additions, renovations, repairs, changes and such like from time to time. Kailasanatha temple even as it is paramount as a monument of religious faith in the art of temple building.

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