

3. The Cholas

4. Fine Arts

Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music Iconography Dance, Drama

"The characteristic features of Chola temples are their graceful animation, the consummate skill in executing, ingenuity of the technique employed and the excellent building materials employed. The Cholas conceived like giants and finished like jewellers."

Fergusson.

The rich Pallava heritage was passed on to the Cholas under whom the Temple architecture entered a brilliant and distinctive phase during the Chola period, Magnificent Temples were constructed, in which Sculptures were carved out; beautiful sceneries were painted: hymns were sung: dramas and dances were performed in the theatres.

I. Architecture

The Architecture of the Cholas may broadly be divided into three divisions, i. *Early Cholas*, ii. *Mediaeval Cholas* and iii. *Later Cholas*

1. The Early Chola Architecture

There are two phases of this architecture. The features of the first phase (*Vijayalaya to Aditya*):

1. Stone was used for the construction of the temples,
2. Garbhagraha is generally square and rarely circular
3. Vimana, found on the square Sanctum, is in diminishing tiers.
4. *Griva*, *Sikara* and *Stupi* are the topmost parts of the Vimana.
5. There was no separate shrine for Devi.
6. A number of subsidiary shrines are there. They are detached from the main Sanctum, but facing the main shrine and its axis.
7. These temples are enclosed by a *big wall* (*Perumatil*) with a *gopura* in front. Examples:

Vijayalaya

1. Nisumbasudani temple at Thanjavur,
2. Thantonrisvara temple at Thiruvilimilalai, Cholisvaram-mudaoyar temple at Tiruppur,
3. Vijayalaya cholisvaram at Narattamalai, and
4. Siva temples at Kaliyapatti and Mannarkudi are the temples of this type.

Narattamalai - Vijayalaya Cholisvaram

It is the largest and the most impressive among all the early foundations in the Chola empire. The temple was constructed by *Chattana Pudi*. This *tritala* vimana is divided into *Karna*, *Pratikarna bhadra*. The total width of the vimana is over 9mts. The inner shrine and *sanctum* are circular; four-pillars are placed at the sub-cardinal points. In the *ardha-mandapa*, there are two rows of three columns each in the interior. There are six sub shrines facing the main shrine. They are detached from the main shrine.

Aditya

Anbil copper plates narrates that Aditya constructed several Siva temples on both the banks of the river Kaveri. He constructed more than fifty temples. Seven temples are found surrounded by the main shrine viz, Sun, Ganapathy, Saptamatrikas, Subramaniya, Jeshta, Chandeswara, and Chandra.

1. Korankanatha Temple at Srinivasnallur

This temple which was defied by a monkey and was therefore not consecrated. There is less of ornamental details. The Karbagraha is 7.5 square mt. The vimana over it is 15 mts, and it is found in burnt bricks with two tiers. The pilasters of the outside wall contains the figures of Brahma Siva etc.

2. Chandrasekara temple at Tiruchendurai :

The tiers with square size vimana is the special feature of this temple. Pudi Aditchapidari built the temple during the rule of Aditya.

3. Vaidisvaraswamy temple at Thirumalaippadi :

This temple was sung by the Devaram trio. Later, it was converted into stone by Rajaraja and Rajendra.

4. Saptarisvara swamy temple at Tiruttavatturai :

It was originally built by Nandivarman III and later it was converted by stone during the rule of Aditya.

5. Siva Temple at Kilaiyur.

6. Siva Temple at Kilaippaluvur.

7. Sundaresvara temple at Sendalai.

8. Nagesvaraswamy temple at Kumdakonam : It is a famous temple for its sculptures.

9. Tiruvenkattu temple : It was built by Aditya and renovated by Rajaraja I.

10. **Balasubramaniya temple at Kannanur :** Only one tier vimana is found. Both Garbagriha and Arthamandapa are square. Subramanya is sitting on an elephant.
11. **Sundareswara temple at Thirukkattalai :** Vimana is found in two tiers and it has seven subsidiary shrines.

SECOND PHASE I (PARANTAKA I TO RAJARAJA I)

1. *Antarala* becomes a communicating passage between Mahamanda and garbagraha.
2. *Kumudam* is found on the basement,
3. Kapotam starts like a projecting tier and
4. Lion motif disappeared.

Places :

1. **Chittur :** It is very near to Chittur, In this temple Griva, Sikara and Stupa are found in square.
2. **Thiruppullamangai:** Durga is depicted on a buffalo's head.
3. **Thirunamanallur :** A temple found near Panrutti.
4. **Allur :** Panchanathisvaram and Pasupathisvara temples.
5. *Anantisvara temple* at Chidambaram and
6. *Viranarayana Temple* (Thirumal) at Kattumannar koil.

UTTAMA CHOLA AND SEMBIYANMADEVI

Sikaras became circular, (some octakonal)

1. Karanthai temp e.
2. Apatshayesvara temple at Adudurai.
3. Umamahesvara temple at Konerirajapuram.
4. Uttaravedisvara temple at Kuttalam.
5. Siva Temple at Thirukkoti Kaval.
6. Nacciyar temple at Thirunaraiyur.

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7. Kailasanatha temple at Sembiyanmadevi.
8. Vridhakisvara temple at Virudhachalam.

II. The Mediaeval Chola temples

(Rajaraja to Kulottunga I); Maturity of experience and high degree of excellence and perfection were reached in this period. *Features.*

1. *Garbhagraha* seems to be very big.
2. The majestic *Vimana* reached upto 13 tiers.
3. Entrances are provided on the sides of the *Maha mandapa*
4. Pillars are provided out side the *Sanctum*.
5. *Subsidiary shrines* are found in large numbers.
6. There is a huge *outer wall* enclosing the entire temple.
7. However *Gopuras* are relatively smaller than the *Vimanas*.

Rajendra I

With the accession of Rajaraja I the farsighted ruler, the Chola empire witnessed glory and grace for two hundred years in all fields. His rule formed a new chapter in the history of the development of Art and Architecture. Brihadishvara temple the finest mounment of a splendid period of South Indian history and the most beautiful specimen of Tamil architecture at its best, was constructed during the rule of Rajaraja I. It is the largest, highest and most ambitious production of its kind hither to undertaken by Indian builders.

The temple is composed of several structures combined axially all of them aligned in the centre of a spacious walled enclosure. The mangnificent, majestic *Vinana* built for durabilty alone has a powerfully adjusted volume and a senes of graceful balance. The temple complex covers an area of

rectangle of 240.78 mts east to west and 11.95 mts North to South. It consists of the *Srivimana* (63.41 ms), the garbhagriha (30.1 square ms) the *Pradhanamandapa*, the *Mahamandapa*, the *Muhemandapa* and a *Nandimandapa* in front. A monolithic Nandi in huge size is found. A big sized Linga has been erected inside the garbhagriha.

Vimana : The grand Vimana rises in 13 diminishing tiers all carrying rich sculptures crowned by a huge monolithic bulbous dome of 80 tons weight forming a fitting finish to its soaring character. Subsidiary shrines are found in large number.

Rajendra I

The temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, constructed by Rajendra I as a mark of his victory over the Ganges, was supposed to be an emulation of the Tanjavur temple and was even intended to excel it in richness and grandeur. The height of the *Linga* in the sanctum is 3.06ms. The temple covers an area of main shrine in the middle, two subsidiary shrines to its north and south called *Vatakailasam* and *Thenkailasam* respectively, a shrine for *Chandevaram*, one for *Mahisasuramardini* a rather large step well called the *Simhakeni* (lion well) a massive *Stucco Nandi*, a *balipita*.

Vimana : The Gangaikonda cholapuram is almost a replica of the Tanjavur temple. The Vimana is curved and so it is feminine in character.

III. The Later Chola temples

1. The subsequent decades after Rajendra saw the emphasis shifting from the Vimana to the supplementary outlying portions of the temple scheme.

2. The Gopurams came to occupy the prominent place
1) The Suriyanar temple, 2) The Darasuram temple and
3) The Kambhakesvara temple are examples of the group.

Chidambaram temple : Chidambaram temple was vastly improved and vividly beautified during the rule of Vikrama Chola. From the bulk of the revenue and other booty, he remodelled the temple. His son Kulottunga completed the work and requested Sekkilar to compose the services of the Nayanars.

1 Kulottunga I : Kulottunga's occupation brought cultural combination, resulted in the free fusion of new sect in the growth of Saivism. Amirta Ghatesvara at Melakkadambur was built by him by about 1113 AD. The temple itself has been constructed in the shape of a chariot with two wheels on each side. His rule witnessed the development of Sauram. Kulottunga I constructed a temple to the Sun god and the attendant planetary deities at *Suryanarkoil* in Tanjavur district. The God is named Kulottunga Chola Marttandalayattu Suryadevar.

2. The Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram : It was built by Rajaraja II. The whole temple is constructed upon a raised platform. The Vimana has five storeys.

3. The Kambahareswara temple at Tribhuvanam : It was constructed by Kulottunga III. He built *Mukha mandapa* of Sabhapati and the gopura of the shrine of the goddess Sivakami Amman (towards the west of Siva Ganga) and, the Verandah enclosing the Central shrine. The Vimana is a conical Pyramid of six-tiers.

2. Sculptures

Beautiful sculptures are carved out during this period. The sculptures may be classified into

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Sculptures of God and Goddesses | 3. Nayanars |
| 2. Human beings | 4. Dancing girls and musicians |
| 5. Dwrapalakas | 6. Figures of Animals and |
| 7. Pillars | |

The following sculptures are some of the second Tala of *Gangaikonda Chola* temple:- Agni, Surya, Kalantaka Siva, four armed deity, Dakshinamurthy, Bhiksatana, Vishnu, Lingodhbhawa, Brahma, Bhuvараha, Kartikeya, Chandra, Siva Gajari, etc.

2. The figures Chola kings and Queens.

3. Nayanmars figures are found both in the form sculptures and bronzes,

The Darasuram temple consists of most interesting sculptures depicting stories from Periyapuram on the short plaster strips on the base of the garbhagriha. The Chandesa-nugraha murti the best of the chola period is found on the north wall.

Dancing girls : Figures of dancing girl are carved out at Chidambaram, Tribuvanam, Thanjavur and other places. The eastern gopura of the Chidambaram temple contains 108 poses of the dancing girls.

Tribuvanam, Thanjavur and other places, Rajarajagambhira Tirumanadapa of Darasuram temple is built as to simulate a chariot on wheels drawn by elephants. The temple also consists of most interesting sculptures, depicting stories from Periyapuram on the short plaster strips on the base of the Garbhagriha.

Kambaharesvara temple is covered with sculptural panels and decorative designs.

Bronze: The Chola period was remarkable for the production of numerous bronze images of superb beauty, images of 63 Nayanars and the Utsava Murthi in each temple and various forms of Siva, Vishnu and Goddess are found. But many groups recorded in the inscriptions have been lost. Of all the bronzes the most famous is the Nataraja, Different types on this form are available.

The sculptures of this period are perfect, graceful, lively, vivacious yet modest, radiating the divine personality. Erotic sculptures are not found.

Iconometry was a perfected science and a live art. The measurement and form for each deity were laid down. Goddesses were to be slightly *shorter* and more slender than gods. The unit was the Tala, the dimensions of the face. The central line of the body was called the Brahasudra while the side line was the Pakshasutra. The poses of the body were also regulated. Standing straight was *Raju*. Slight curving was *Abhanga*, double curve was *Dvibhanga* while a triple or *Sourve Triphanga*. Excessive curve was *Adidhanga*. The painted walls of the big temple consist of many panels. In one of the panels, Lord Siva is depicted as yoga Dakshinamurthy calmly watching the dance of two apsaras. The figures of these apsaras are different poses and styles (with their slender waists, supple forms and graceful poses) of the body, mark a land mark in the art styles.

3. PAINTING

Paintings, found at Thanjavur, Tirumaiyam, Narattamalai Malayadippatti etc., are remarkable. Paintings of marriage of the Saint Sundarar; a domestic scene, around a peasants home; mount Kailasa where Siva is found with his group; Nataraja; Siva burning Tripura and dancing group are remarkable. The feminine type is characterised by the almond shaped languishing eye, luscious lips, full breasts and swaying hips. But the painter took care to ensure that even the most sensuous langorous form of feminine beauty was effectively draped.

An ardent devotee of Siva, Rajaraja has also been depicted worshipping Siva along with his queens. Another portrait is the marriage of the saint Sundarar. Many persons have surrounded to witness the marriage. Siva is represented as an old man. He points out Sundarar as his slave on the basis of a document. He holds Palm leaves in one of his hands. He

seeks to stop the wedding. Sundarar's face expresses surprise. The people also express surprise mingled with apprehension.

Another scene is mount Kailasa. Siva is seated on a tiger skin. The Nandi is in front. The Rishis and Ganas stand all around. Some apsaras are dancing. A little to one side saint Sundaramurti and Cheraman Perumal are painted. The former is mounted on a white elephant and is surrounded by Kandarvas, chanting divine hymns. He is on his way to Kailasa. Sundarar's friend Cheraman is astride, a charging white horse, which is impatient and anxious to keep ahead of the elephant.

"The freshness of style and the revivification of that style from the dormant state were the keynotes of transition. Their architectural achievements constitute lithic testimonies to their religious devotion and dignified majesty." While the Pallava figures were comparatively more attracted, the Chola figures were delicate in outline with what has been called a subtle rhythmic quality

4. Music :

During the Chola period it is obvious that music must have been a harmonious synthesis and inter relation of song, dance and expression. The Devaram hymns are the cream of sacred music. Each hymn was set to Raga and Tala. The musical instruments of this period may be broadly divided into:—

1. percussion
 2. wind
 3. stringed and
 4. metal.
- Beautiful sculptures of the musicians are found with their musical instruments almost in all temples.

5. Dancing

Siva of Tiruvidaimarudur is called Nataraja Manikkakuttar and Adal vidangadevar. Nattuvans and dancing girls were appointed in the temples. The dancing girls were transferred, 400 dancing girls from 59 villages were transferred to the big temple. They performed Tamil kuttu.

Aryakkuttu, Sakkaikkuttu, etc on the festival days. The dancing girls were called *Patiyilar*, and *Taliccheri pendukal*.

6. Drama:

For the performance of Dance and Drama a theatre was maintained in almost all the big temples. The theatre is called *Natakasalai*, or *Nanavita nataka salai* (different kinds) During the rule of Rajaraja I, two types of Dramas were performed in the big temple. They were *Sri Rajaraja Vijayam* (glorification of the king) and *Rajarajasvara Natakam*. *Pumouliyur drama*, and *Tirumula Nayanar drama* were other types narrating the stories of the Nayanars.

Brihadisvara Temple (Thanjavur)

The circumambulatory path of the Brihadisvara temple has fifteen chambers, which served the purpose of lithic canvas for exuberant chola paintings. Originally there were many Nayak paintings. When upper portion was removed in 1934, the Chola paintings were discovered. (This discovery was only in the western side)

The temple was completed on the 27th day of the 25th year of Rajaraja I. He dedicated the copper pot (*Kalasa*) at the top of the Vimana.

Nandi Pavilion : After crossing the moat a gopura and another small Gopura built by Rajaraja are seen. Then we can see the Nandi Pavilion. This is a monolithic Nandi. The height of it is nearly 3.5 mts. The stone for it was brought from Pachchaimalai. The Nandi facing the temple rests on a moulded platform of chola design. This temple has three entrances viz. Keralathankan entrance, Rajaraja entrance, Thiruvanukkan entrance.

Garbagraha :- A close study of many of the sculptures of this period reveals how much of the artistic spirit has been infused into them. The Chola sculptor was a stone carver not a modeler. The figure of Lakshmi found in many temples is one such. It is a perfect figure, graceful, lovely, vivacious yet modest, radiating the divine personality. The posture is fine. It has sensuousness and beauty and incorporates vanities, passions, tenderness and love of womanhood. The dancing figures are so beautifully carved out. With the perfect long nose, the slim waist, broad hip, full breasts, long artistic figures, long lashes, expressive eyes, the figure almost comes alive. The absence of erotic sculptures in temples is another characteristic feature of Chola sculptures. The Chola works are conspicuous for their serenity and love was considered as a sacrament.