The Chola Architecture: A Dravidian Style Gleand from Kailasanatha Temple at Sembianmahadevi

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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 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. 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 knowledge of architecture.

Temple architecture in Tamil Nadu is largely theocentric. The absence of any stone monuments or inscriptions introduced by the various ruling dynasties of the Tamil country in the growth and development 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 knowledge of architecture.

Key Words: Agamas, Silpasatra, Ardhamandapa, Garbhagriha, Sanctum, Adhishtana, Mukhamandapa & Gopura.

The term ‘Architecture’ is derived from the Latin word *architectura*, meaning the leading worker or a skilled artisan or craftsman. It is an art blending to technical skills, imagination and beauty. 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. 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 for exposure of human feelings; the Italian for intellectualism and the Indian for spiritualism. It is considered that God and his temple correspond to the soul and body of a human being. Different kinds of authoritative texts reveal details of Indian architecture. Out of them only a few are available to us such as the *Mayamata, Manasaras, Visvakarmiya, Indramatu and Kasyapam*. 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. 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 *Silpasatra*, the Indian style of architecture is classified into three types. They are the *Nagara, Vesara* and the *Dravidida*. 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. 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. Even in ancient times Indians had the knowledge of architecture.

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. 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 that 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, Movarkoil at Kodumbalur are said to be the constructions of the Mullarayas 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 Rajarajeshwaram temple (Sri Brahadeeswarar temple) at Thanjavur,17 the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple of Rajendra I, the Rajarajeshwaram temple of Sri Airavateswara at Darasuram built by Rajaraja II (1146-73 A.D.), and Sri Kampahareswara temple at Thirubhuvanam are built by Kulothunga III (1178-1223 A.D.) stand as distinctive types and most of them are found in the Chola Nadu.18

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. Balasubramaniyam.

The ardhamandapa adhishthana 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 of which is called pattai. The decorations on the exterior wall of this mandapa have the same type of adhishthana 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 dvaramalas (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 Nandivarman 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, vritattakumuda 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. AVedika is also found above the yali frieze and there are in its corners specially sculpted vignette panels.

Above the adhishthana23 raises the bhatti. 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 makarakthoranas. The pilasters consist of kal, padmabandam, kalasam, tadi, kadam, 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 kudas. At the centre of these kudas 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 adithala. The hara shows karnakudas 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 a 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 infront of the Vimana of the temple. The period of Kulottunga I 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 up to 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 sala. 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). 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.

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 he reigns of the 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 for many centuries. It is evidence of the great zeal evinced by our ancestors in temple building and of the religious faith in the art of temple building.

References:
3. Ibid., No. 613.
23. E.I., Vol. XVIII, pp. 120 and 123.
The Kailasa Temple [known also as the Kailasanatha (which translates as “Lord of Kailasa”) Temple] is an ancient Hindu temple located in the western Indian region of Maharashtra. This temple is part of the Ellora Caves, a religious complex consisting of 34 rock-cut monasteries and temples. This temple derives its name from Mount Kailasa, the Himalayan abode of the Hindu god Shiva. It is generally believed that this temple was constructed in the 8th century AD, during the reign of Krishna I, a ruler of the Rashtrakuta Empire. As the Kailasa Temple is supposed to represent the sacred mountain of Dravidian architecture is an architectural idiom in Hindu temple architecture that emerged in the southern part of the Indian subcontinent or South India, reaching its final form by the sixteenth century. It consists primarily of Hindu temples where the dominating feature is the high gopura or gatehouse; large temples have several. Traditional Dravidian architecture and symbolism are also based on Agamas. The Agamas are non-vedic in origin and have been dated either as post-vedic texts or as pre-vedic compositions. The Hoysala architecture style is described as Karnata Dravida as distinguished from the traditional Dravida, and is considered an independent architectural tradition with many unique features. The Kailasa Temple was carved over dozens of years out of a single piece of stone. It's stood the test of time and become one of the most famous temples in the world. Kailasa Temple in Ellora, Maharashtra, India, is the world’s largest monolithic piece of art. Master craftspeople carved the gigantic structure from a single piece of solid rock in a cave on a mountainside. The entire building took more than two decades to carve. There are plenty of other mind-boggling facts about this ancient wonder while some of the history behind the temple has a bit of controversy attached to it. Hindus created the temple to honor Lord Shiva, and they intended to mimic his home on Mount Kailash in the Himalayan Mountains. Nagara, Dravida and Vesara Temple Architectural Style along with Buddhist and Jain architecture will be covered. When you browse our earlier articles on Hindu Temple Architecture, you would realize one thing. It was a gradual evolution starting from the rock cut- cave temples to monolithic rathas which finally culminated in structural temples. The basic form of a Hindu structural temple consists of the following. 1. Garbhagriha: It literally means “womb-house” and is a cave like a sanctum.