

History of Architecture and Culture – II

Unit 4

Temple Architecture – Southern India

Lecture 1

Brief History of South India

First, let us look at the various dynasties that ruled south India, to understand the history behind them. There were three major dynasties that ruled them; the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Pandavas.

If you look at the map, the Chalukyas dominated along the Central portion of the Indian subcontinent. So, they ruled parts of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, upto Maharashtra as well. So almost the central parts of India were dominated by the Chalukyan dynasty. The Pallavas domination existed during the 7th Century, they ruled parts of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The Pandyan Empire ruled major portions of Tamil Nadu extending to Andhra Pradesh and even parts of Sri Lanka.

It was these three major dynasties that fought against each other to capture control over the entire South India. South India was mostly facing battles between these three major empires, it was either Pandyas/ Pallavas or Pallavas and the Chalukyas. Though, these three were fighting amongst themselves, they also contributed toward temple Architecture, to a major extent. So, during the 7th century, in Tamil Nadu, a movement started, which was called the Bhakti movement.

The Bhakti movement refers to the theistic devotional trend that emerged in medieval Hinduism. Bhakti is actually a Sanskrit word which means undivided devotion to only one idol. So when you focus all

your attention on something, that is known as; Bhakti. This Bhakti movement gained strength during the 7th Century, basically originated from Tamil south India (now parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala) and spread northwards. What is the basic principle of this movement is that, they started worshipping one particular idol be it Shiva or Vishnu. There were mainly two groups, shaivites and vaishnavites and the major worshipping happened between these two idols. So, this movement started gaining strength mainly to challenge the rising influence of Jainism and Hinduism. So, as opposed to the Vedic civilization, during the Vedic times and there was a domination of the class system, caste system. However, during this revival period, irrespective of your caste or gender, the idol was open to worship by everyone.

There are poets or these were saints known as Saiva Nayanars and the Vaisnava Alvars. If you visit a shiva temple, you would find statues like these along the pradakshina patha. Their efforts ultimately spread bhakti poetry and ideas throughout India by the 12th - 18th Century CE. The image on the right are statues of 12 Alvars that you can find in the Vishnu temple and the image on the right are 63 Nayanars that you can find in the Shiva temple along the pradakshina patha. Those 12 statues are depictions of people who were deeply involved in the bhakti movement, poets and who spread Hinduism. It was through literature and songs, poems that people spread the Bhakti movement to a large extent.

How did Bhakti Movement impact architecture?

Initially there was a worshipping philosophy of worshipping shrines, idols and various elements of nature. But now, every energy was focussed on one idol and irrespective of one's caste, creed or gender, he was open to

worship as he pleased. So what happened was the idol was becoming more close to the public, more approachable. So, this demanded various rituals, to be performed in the temple which in turn demanded more space and organisation of space in the temple architecture. What happened was, they started having processions of idols, and the chariot festivals brought the temple closer to the people. All these found their place in the conceptualisation of temple but were directly connected with the execution of the structure. The idol was thereby becoming more accessible to the public. So, this directly impacted the architecture of the temple also. So, what began as a very monolithic temple structure in the early stages, started to develop into huge complexes. In the initial lectures, we saw about the rock cut architecture, in which there were no circumambulatory passages, worshipping happened in one direction. In the later stages, huge circumambulatory passages were built around the temples which symbolically represented that we human beings are exposed to huge worldly things. So, when a worshipper goes around a pradakshina patha, he has the sense or gets an idea of other celestial objects. So this was the symbolical representation. The temple complex, itself started to expand in size as there was demand for space to perform various rituals and ceremonies. This was one of the main reasons why rock cut architecture was evolved into temple architecture.

If you look at the South Indian temple architecture, it actually began, from the rule of the Pallavas in the 7th Century A.D. They are the ones who laid the foundation for temple architecture in South India and then it continued to develop during the 9th to 10th Century, during which the Chola Empire was at their peak. (900 - 1150 A.D.) Then later the Chalukya and the Hoysala came into power and then the Pandyas again came to power, Period (1100 A.D. to 1350 A.D.) The later period saw the rise Vijayanagar kings and Nayak kings. So this is the chronology in

which the temple architecture evolved in South India from the Pallavas to the Nayaks.

If you see the South Indian temples, they were not only meant for worship but also, public gatherings. They were meant for huge gathering where people used to come and talk about / discuss various political purposes or even educational purposes. They were centres for music, dance and drama. They had schools and colleges attached where free secular and religious instruction were given as per the Agama Shastras, they maintained people of various crafts and occupations as temple staff to serve the needs of the community. Temples were given multi-dimensional functionalities. Therefore, this also impacted the architecture of the temple it was not only meant for worship but also for other public activities where people came to gather. And this later evolved into the development of temple towns itself. What became as a single monolithic structure gradually grew into a town. Temple became a part of a city planning itself. It clearly shows that temple was not just a religious factor but infact it was part of the city planning itself. In that level, a temple was an integral part of the social life of the people. So now, the need for more idols came into picture and so, because of this, the architects used this need to develop various kinds of architecture. They did it so well, that even surpassed the Buddhist architecture.

The Saiva the Vaishnava (Brahmanical) structures initiated from the Gupta period evolved a style of directly comprehending with the sculpturally oriented rock-cut architecture under the Chalukyas and the Pallavas. The Hindu architects exploited the function of the architecture to house several other idols by creating various expressions. The form of the temple in the rock-cut architecture style was potentially used with the available material. The Hindu rock-cut architecture thereby,

superseded the Buddhist architecture in form, function, constructional techniques and the size of operation.

Basically Hindu temples are of three types namely; Nagara - this style is mainly practiced in the north; the Dravidian - is a southern style and is found in the south and the Vesara - also known as a hybrid style, seen mostly in Deccan, the central parts of India. The main difference can be found in the form of a tower i.e Shikara/ Gopuram, you can see how it varies in these three styles. These are the three types of Hindu temple.

Pallava's Contribution to Hindu Temple Architecture

Let us start with how Pallavas contributed to Hindu architecture.

Most important features of the Pallava architecture:

It was during the 7th century when the Pallavas ruled, they were not only good rulers but their kings were also very appreciative of art and architecture.

The Pallava Architecture shows the transition from the Rock cut architecture to the stone built temples. The earliest temples of the Pallava Rock cut temples of the 7th century AD, while the later examples are of structural temples built in 8th and 9th Century. The rock cut reliefs of the Pallavas are the earliest surviving royal portraits after the Kushana images.

The Pallava kings are known to be the greatest patrons of art, music, architecture, dance and literature. There was this King called Mahendravarman who appreciated art, was into poetry and a playwright himself. He encouraged the development of architecture to a great extent. This is one example of the Pallava architecture very initial stages. This is the shore temple at Mahabalipuram.

Pancha Rathas (also known as Pandava Rathas) is a monument complex at Mahabalipuram. Pancha Rathas is an example of monolithic Indian rock - cut architecture. Dating from the late 7th Century, it is attributed to the reign of King Mahendravarman and his son Narasimhavarman (630-68 A.D; also called Mamalla, or great warrior) of the Pallava Kingdom. An innovation of Narasimhavarman, the structures are without any precedent in Indian architecture.

The temples which are different in forms, plans, elevations were cautiously cut out from a huge rock, sloping from south to north. These individual 'rathas' are named after Pandava brothers Yudhisthira (Dharmaraja); Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva of the epic Mahabharata and their wife Draupadi. Besides these rathas, the sculptures of an elephant (the vehicle of Indra), lion (the vehicle of Durga) and Nandi bull (the vehicle of Shiva) are structurally displayed. Though these temples are named after the Pandava brother, they are not in any way related to Mahabharata.

You see the plan, of Pancha Rathas; these are the five Rathas that are located; Draupadi Ratha, Arjuna Ratha, Bhima Ratha, Dharmaraja ratha and Nakula Sahadeva Ratha. All these structures are carved out of a single rock itself. They are all monolithic structures, apart from these five temple, there are other sculptures of a lion, elephant and a bull over here. These five temple are named after the characters from Mahabharata about the Pandavas. Though, they are named after them, there is no relation between this particular temple and Mahabharata. You can see the orientation in this particular plan. If you see, the Draupadi Ratha and the Arjuna ratha are squarish in plan. The Dharmaraja is also squarish in plan. The Bhima ratha is an elongated

rectangle and the Nakula Sahadeva ratha is an apsidal in nature. If you see all these, all the rathas are facing the west are the Arjuna and Draupadi rathas which are dedicated to Shiva and Durga respectively. Only the Nakula Sahadeva ratha is facing the southern direction and alongside this ratha, there is the sculpture of the Elephant. Here, towards the north you have the sculpture of the lion and towards the east, you have the sculpture of the bull.

Let us see about the Rathas one by one. First is the Draupadi Ratha, you can see in the image, it is replicating the typical hut like structure as we have seen in our olden days. Draupadi is named after the wife of the pandavas. You can see, it is a simple squarish structure, which has a small base plinth. You can see it is submerged in the sand. You can take a closer look. So, even the base of the structure is carved and decorated. So, outside the entrance you have two statues of Durga. Above the door, there are carvings to denote the archway. So even the roof of the shrine is more like a hut shaped roof. Inside the shrine also, there is one idol of Durga. So, it is a very simple structure.

Next is the, Arjuna Ratha, again it is squarish in plan but if you see the roof structure of the shrine it is very different from what we saw in the Draupadi Ratha. It is a pyramidal structure and it is topped by an octagonal dome shaped structure. If you see this shrine, this serves as a model to various Hindu temples that develop later. If you find any Hindu temple that is located in South India, the Dravidian style of Hindu temples, you will see that they all have pyramidal kind of Gopurams i.e. towers, topped by an octagonal dome. This was probably the first model that was developed by the Pallavas. This house is a shrine of Shiva, with pyramidal roof structure.

This is a Bhima Ratha. The Bhima Ratha as we already saw in the plan, is a rectangular structure with a barrel vaulted roof. It has four columned porch in the facade has seated lions carved in front of the pillars. The lower part of the structure is unfinished. If you see the column, it is a typical Dravidian order developed during the Pallava times i.e. it has a lion base, above which the column is built. This is an early form of the Dravidian pillar with a lion base column. In Draupadi Ratha, we saw that the base of the shrine was decorated but here the base seems unfinished. It has two stepped roofing with an elongated barrel wall roof on the top. You can see the elevation here.

Next, is the Dharmaraja ratha. This is the largest shrine of all the five shrines. It is square in plan and it is similar to Arjuna Ratha where we saw it was pyramidal in nature with an octagonal door. It was similar to that. The exterior of the roofing structure is adorned with sculptures, faces, even false windows. You can see how the pyramidal roof is constructed in different layers, topped with the octagonal dome. So, in every corner of shrines, there are sculptures of idols located. However, in this particular shrine, in one corner there is an idol of King Mahendravarman himself, also known as King Mamalla. You can see in the picture here. Also there is a shrine of, a sculpture of 'Ardhanarishwara' (means half man and half woman) on the walls of the Dharmaraja ratha with perfectly balanced carvings of the masculine and feminine creatures is considered to be one of the finest specimens of early Pallava plastic art. It is said to be one of the finest sculptures of the Pallava period.

Finally, the Nakula Sahadeva Ratha, it is a very simple elongated plan with an apsidal ending. In contrast to the other rathas which all face the western direction. This Ratha faces the south direction. This image you

can see the various stages of evolution of Dravidian order. The Dravidian order is nothing but how the columns have evolved through various stages. So, initially, there was no particular base, just a simple column with a simple capital and then there was development of bracket like structure above the capital and then the lion base we saw in the rathas, this was developed during the Pallava period. Slowly, they started expanding the length of the pillars and the height of the lion increased. This is actually a predecessor to the Yalli like structure which we will see in our later lectures of the nayak styles.

Now, we will one more example of the Pallava rock-cut architecture is the; Kailasanatha Temple, Kanchipuram.

The great Kailasanatha temple was built by the ruler Rajasimha (A.D 700 - 728) at the beginning of the 8th Century, this is the first structural temple built in South India. Apart from the shrines and the rathas we saw in Mamallapuram are more like models that were built to exhibit by the king which can be later replicated into larger scales of temples. This Kailasanatha temple is a proper temple structure that was built for the first time in South India. In this image, you can see the plan of the temple. As any temple, the garbhagriha faces the eastern direction. This is how you approach the temple. There is a huge mandapa in front of the garbhagriha which is the pillared hall. Again, it leads to another mandapa with the pillared hall. The garbhagriha is topped by a tower which is a four-storeyed pyramidal tower. In all these pillared halls, the pillars have exclusive carvings of Yallis and other figures. So, this is the image of the temple, as you can see how the pillars have evolved from the short lion base to the figure called the Yali. You can see here, how the column has evolved. This temple again has a pyramidal roof structure which is a step pyramidal structure, again this octagonal

dome with the finial on top. This is the mandapa in the front. This is the first type of temple structure that was built. If you see later temples that were built, even during the Chola period namely; the tanjore Brihadeshwara temple, this also seemed to be inspired by this Kailasanatha temple and even some instances of instances of Calligraphy is found here. Outside the garbhagriha and the mandapa, you have this circumambulatory passage in the exterior and along this temple wall, there are various shrines placed for other idols. Usually there are Gopurams at the entrance and over the Garbhagriha. Here you can see the image of the entrance, the Gopurams or the garbhagriha and these are the images of shrines that are around the temple.