



SOUTH INDIAN TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

Hello everybody today we are going to travel through the south Indian temple architecture, which can also call as Dravidian temple architecture style.

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The finest examples of Dravidian style of temples are from Tanjore, Madurai, Mahabalipuram, Badami, Pattadakal and Kanchipuram.

Dravidian style temples consist almost regularly of the four following parts, are different only according to the age in which they were created:

The main part, the temple itself, is called the vimana. It is always square in plan and surmounted by a pyramidal roof of one or more stories; it contains the cell where the image of the god or his emblem is placed.

1. The porches or mandapas, which always cover and lead the door leading to the cell.
2. Gate-pyramids gopurams, which are the principal features in the quadrangular tops that surround the more notable temples.
3. Pillared halls—properly Chawadis -- used for various purposes, and which are the set side dishes of these temples.



Besides these, a temple always contains temple tanks or wells for water (used for sacred purposes or the convenience of the priests), dwellings for all grades of the priesthood are attached to it, and other buildings for state or convenience.

Vimana

The different characteristics are the vimana (tower) and the gopurams (gateways) in the south Indian temple architecture style. The vimana is a tall pyramidal tower consisting of several smaller storeys, the peak of the vimana is called as sikhara in the south Indian temples. This stands on a square base. The temple area consisting of the main shrine and other smaller shrines are within the outer wall called as the prakara.

Along these outer walls are the intricate and wonderful gateways called as gopurams with detailed decorative carvings. These gopurams became taller and taller as you closer to the main shrine and its superstructure is dominating the whole temple complex.

Kalasha

The crowning beauty of the Vimana is its Kalasha, the vase. Some say it is a life giving Amrita-kalasha that emerged out of the milky ocean when it was churned. Kalash symbolizes blessings and well being.

In the development of the Indian temple this feature appears to have come late. The early kalashas were perhaps made of stone blocks, round.



The copper and brass vases seem to have been the later innovations.

Kalasha has several members, such as “the foot-hold” (padagrahi) which is its foothold, the egg (anda) or the belly, the neck (griva), the lotus-band (padma-pashika), the rim (karnika) and the bud (bija-pura). The shape of this unit could resemble the bell, the flower bud, the lump, coconut, alter or pot, all these shapes represent the potential and the possibilities of life.

Mandapas

The Garbagriha is followed by four types of mandapas or pavilions. Mandapa means any roofed, open or enclosed pavilion (hall) resting on pillars, standing independently or connected to the sanctum of the temple.

The first of the mandapas is the antarala (sometimes called sukanas or sukanasi or ardhmandapa), a narrow pavilion connecting the gharbhagriha and the navaranga. It usually will have niches in the north and south walls, occupied by a deity, with attendant divinities in secondary niches next the central niche. In a few temples the antarala serves as the navaranga too. The next mantapa is nrittamandapa or navaranga, is a big hall used for singing, dancing, recitation of mythological texts, religious discourses and so on. The navaranga will usually be on a raised platform and will have nine *anganas* (openings) and sixteen pillars.



This is followed by Sanapana mandapa, a hall used for ritual purposes. This leads to mukha mantapa the opening pavilion.

Gopura

In the case of major temples, the entire temple area is surrounded by protective walls, the prakaras. The towers erected over the entrance gateways of these walls are the Gopuras. These rectangular, pyramidal towers, often fifty metres high dominate the city level. And, adorned with intricate and brightly painted sculptures of gods, demons, humans, and animals, have become the characteristic of southern architecture, though, strictly, they are not the essential aspect of a temple layout or its structure. The Gopura emphasizes the importance of the temple within the city.

The Gopura is a unique feature of the Dravidian architecture. It had its origin and development in South; and the other schools of architecture do not have the same features.

The beginning of Gopura in Dravidian architecture was rather late. The practice of erecting a Gopura at the entrance gateway to the temple seems to have come into being during the mid-12th century.

And, with the decline of the mighty Cholas and with the increasing threat from invading armies, the temple cities (importantly Madurai and Sri Rangam) found it means to erect a series of protective walls to safeguard and defend their temples, palaces and cities.



Pallavas

The pallavas were involved in designing from rock-cut architecture to stone temples. The earliest examples of pallava constructions are rock-cut temples dating from 610-690 CE and structural temples between 690-900 CE. The greatest activities of the pallava architecture are the rock-cut temples at mahabalipuram.

There are excavated pillared halls and monolithic shrines known as rathas in mahabalipuram.

Early temples were mostly dedicated to shiva.

The kailashnatha temple in kanchipuram and the shore temple built, by narasimhavarman 2, rock cut temple in mahendravarman are fine examples of the pallava style temples.

The five ratha temples are commonly known as the pancharatha or 5 chariots stand grandly on the southern most extreme of mahabalipuram.

Built by the pallava ruler narasimha varman 1 (ad 630-68), each temple is a monolith, carved out of a single rock.

These individual rathas are named after the pandava brothers yudhishtira (dharmaraja), arjuna, bhima, nakula and sahadewa of the epic Mahabharata and their wife draupadi.

Besides these rathas, the sculpture of an elephant (the vehicle of indra), lion the vehicle of durga and nandi bull the vehicle of lord shiva are shown here.



The dharmaraja, arjun and draupadi rathas are square in plans, the bhima ratha is rectangular, and nakula sehadeva ratha apsidal.

Shore temple mahabalipuram

The shore temple is 5 storeyed structural hindu temple rather than rock cut as are the other monuments at the site.

This is the earliest structural architectural temple in south india.

The pyramidal structure of this temple is 60 ft in ht and 50 ft square plan.

There is a porch in front of the temple, in form of a small temple.

It is made of a finely cut local granite.

The whole temple consists of 3 shrines.

The main shrine is dedicated to lord shiva.

The smaller shrine is dedicated to lord Vishnu, in a reclining position.

The entrance is with the barrel vault gopuram.

The shikhara is in a pyramidal form.

The whole structure is richly carved, sculpted beautifully.

On the top there is a large sculpture of nandi, the divine bull.

There is a series of roaring lions on the boundary.

Brihadeshwara temple

The temple from the main gateway to the courtyard, the 60 mtr tower shikhara, touches the sky, shows the richness of imperial cholas.



Built in 11th century, by rajaraja 1, who established the power of cholas.

The whole temple is made up of granite blocks.

In the later stages of South Indian architecture, the Vimanas grew more complex and multi-sided. The six-sided and eight-sided Vimanas became quite common. It is said there are a few temples with their Vimana having as many as sixteen sides. The temple in Madurai is reputed to have as many as 65 sides.

The basic shape of the Vimana is pyramid like. The imagery associated with its shape is that of an inverted tree with its branches spreading downwards. This has reference to the ancient imagery of the universe.

Some of the best examples of the Vimanas come from the huge temples erected by the Chola kings. The Brhadisvara or Rajarajesvara, temple, built at the Chola capital of Thanjavur is a fine example of the greatness and majesty of the temples of this period. The temple construction begun around 1003 and was completed about seven years later. The main walls are raised in two stories, above which the superstructure rises to a height of 190 feet. It has 16 stories, each of which consists of a wall with shrines carved in relatively low relief.

The crowning glory of the Brihadeswara temple is the surprising structure of the Vimana comprising two huge, sculpted, granite blocks weighing 40 tonnes each.

Vertically the vimana is organized by pilasters that break up the facade of the base, creating spaces for niches and windows in



between. However, the temple departs from southern Indian convention in one significant way: the vimana is taller than the gopura (gateways) of the temple's walls. Normally the gopuras are taller than the vimana.

The Vimana rises to a height of about 216 feet, a tower of fourteen storeys. The basement of the structure which supports the tower is 96 feet square. The *Kalasa* over it is 12.5 feet high on the top. It is believed the *sikhara* and the *stupi* does not throw on the ground. The dome rests on a single block of granite, 25.5 feet square.

Another fine example of the Chola temple architecture is the temple in Gangai-konda-chola-puram, which succeeded Tanjore as the capital of the Chola Empire. The Vimanam of this temple, in contrast to the rigid pyramidal structure of the Brihadeswara temple, rises up in a concave manner with fluid lines.

Meenakshi Temple

The Gopuras of the Meenakshi temple at Madurai are of course the most magnificent display of temple towers. There are twelve impressive Gopuras standing over the three tier Prakara walls. The outer four towers dominating the city landscape are truly huge in size and glory.

The nine -storied towers came up between 13-16th centuries during the reign of Madurai Nayaks or kings. The structure of the Gopuras measure 174 ft. from north to south, and 107 ft. in depth. The gateway is 21 ft. 9 in. wide; and the gatepost is 60 ft high, made of blocks of granite, carved with the most beautiful



scroll patterns of detailed foliage. The heights of the Gopuras range from 161 feet to 170 feet.

The Gopuras appear to have influenced revision in the temple design and layout. Such was the importance placed on the eminence of Gopuras that as time went by; the Southern temples came to be designed as a series of courtyards, as if to justify the Gopuras.

The spaces around the shrine became hierarchical; the further the space was from the main shrine, the lesser was its importance. The outermost ring had buildings of a more functional or a secular in nature - shops, dormitories, sheds, workshops etc., thus transforming the temple from a purely place of worship to the hub of a vibrant living city.

A particularly interesting example of this is the Sri Ranganatha temple at Sri Rangam, which has seven enclosure walls and as many as twenty-one Gopuras, halls, other temples and township constructed over several centuries. The seventh, the outer most, enclosure is 3072 feet in length and 2521 feet in breadth; enclosing an area of about six hundred acres.

The grand Meenakshi temple in Madurai is another great illustration of this development which was initiated by the Pandya kings. It was during this period that the building of a temple became the nucleus of a town-planning exercise.

Though the growth of the Dravidian temple architecture delayed for a moment after the fall of the Pandyan Empire, the architectural expression scaled new heights during the reign of the Vijayanagara kings (15th and 16th centuries). Although the



later temples were not huge in size, they often were of very fine workmanship. For instance, the Subrahmanya temple of the 17th century, built in the Brihadesvara temple complex at Thanjavur, indicates the strength of architectural traditions even at that late date.

Sri Rangam Temple

The Gopuram of Sri Rangam temple, completed during the year 1987, is perhaps the tallest in South India. The Gopura with 13 stories is 243 feet high; and with twelve Kalashas adorning its peak.

The temple is dedicated to lord Vishnu.

Symbolically, the Gopura and the entrance to the temple represent the feet of the deity. A devotee bows at the entrance, the feet of the Lord, as he steps into the temple and proceeds towards the sanctum, leaving behind the world of contradictions.

In the Sri Rangam temple the seven concentric prakara walls are said to represent the seven layers of matter-earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind and intelligence-that envelop the consciousness of the living entities in the material world. The gopuras, or gateways through the prakaras, are symbolic of being liberated from the bondage of matter as one enters the temple and proceeds toward the central shrine.



Kamakshi Temple

Kanchipuram, the city of thousand temples, is one of the seven sacred cities of India. The most famous temple of Kanchipuram city is Kamakshi Amman temple.

Kamakshi Amman temple is situated at an area of around 5 acres. It has four entrances on four directions with tall temple towers on all the entrances.

The main shrine of the temple is called as Gayatri Mandapa. There are 24 pillars in this mandapa representing 24 alphabets of Gayatri Mantra. Kamakshi Amman is seated right in the center of Gayatri Mandapa. The idol of Kamakshi Amman is in sitting posture with four arms carrying Pasam (rope), Ankusam (lance), flower and sugarcane. Kamakoti Peeth aka Sri Chakra is found before the idol of Kamakshi Amman. Near the shrine of Kamakshi Amman, there is the idol of Tapas Kamakshi (Kamakshi doing penance).

To the left of Kamakshi Amman shrine, you can find the idol of Arupa Lakshmi (deformed Lakshmi) aka Anjana Kamakshi. In front of Arupa Lakshmi, the idol of Sowbhagya Ganapati (Ganesh) is present.

Next to Arupa Lakshmi, the idol of Varahi is present. The pillar 'Santhana Sthambha' which is believed to grant the boon of progeny is also present inside the Gayatri Mandapa. The idol of Ardhanariswarar (half Shiva and half Shakthi) is also in the Gayatri Mandapa. The idols of Soundarya Lakshmi and Kalvar (a form of Lord Vishnu) are placed inside the Gayatri Mandapa next



to Kamakshi Amman shrine. Kalavar Perumal is one of the 108 Divya Desams (one of the 108 most important Vishnu temples).

The outer entrance of the main shrine has the idols of Naga (snake) and Varasiddhi Vinayak (Ganesha). The inner entrance of the main shrine has the idols of Ganesha and Singara Velan (Karthikeya). The first prakara (roundabout) of Kamakshi Amman shrine has the shrines of Annapoorni, Dharma Sastha along with his wives Poorna and Pushkala, Saraswathi, Gaja Lakshmi, and Adi Shankara. There is a separate shrine for Utsava Kamakshi with Lakshmi and Saraswathi idols on either side. The idol of Thundir Maharaja (the incarnation of Ganesha) and Durvasa Maharishi are also present in the first prakara.

The outer prakara (roundabout) has the idols of Kashi Kala Bhairav, Vishnu Durga and Mahisasura Mardhini. There is a small shrine for Kashi Viswanatha (Shiva). The holy tank is also present in this prakara. Adjacent to the tank, there are three shrines of Lord Vishnu (Bhooda Nigraha Perumal) in three postures - standing, sitting, and sleeping (kindanthaan, irundhaan, and ninraan as mentioned in Tamil language). The interior side of Eastern Raja gopura (the temple tower) has the idols of Hayagreeva (horse faced incarnation of Lord Vishnu) and Agasthya.

Another highlight of the temples is that main shrine of Kamakshi Amman and Adi Shankara have gold plated roofs. You can also find Nuttrukkaal Mandapa (the hall of 100 pillars) with architecturally beautiful sculptures in this temple. There are 2-3



elephants available inside this temple, which is a common sight in some of the big ancient South Indian temples.

Ekambareswarar Temple

Ekambareswarar Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva, located in Kanchipuram in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. The temple is the largest temple in the town of Kanchipuram and is located in the northern part of the town. The temple *gopuram* (gateway tower) is 59m tall, which is one of the tallest *gopurams* in India.

Legend has it that once Parvati, the consort of Shiva was doing penance under the temple's ancient Mango tree near Vegavathi River. In order to test her devotion Shiva sent fire on her. Goddess Parvati prayed to her brother, Vishnu, for help. In order to save her, he took the Moon from Shiva's head and showed the rays which then cooled down the tree as well as Parvati. Shiva again sent the river Ganga to disrupt Parvati's penance. Parvati prayed to Ganga and convinced her that both of them were sisters and so should not harm her. Subsequently, Ganga did not disturb her penance and Parvati made a Shiva Linga out of sand to get united with Shiva. The God here came to be known as Ekambareswarar or "Lord of Mango Tree."

The Vijayanagar kings, during the 15th century, also made lot of contributions to the temple,



Tirupati Venkateshvara Temple

Tirumala Venkateswara Temple is a famous Vedic temple in the hill town of Tirumala, near Tirupati in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh.

Medieval History

The Pallavas of Kanchipuram (9th century AD), the Cholas of Tanjore (10th century), and Vijayanagara pradhans (14th and 15th centuries) were committed devotees of Lord Venkateswara. During the invasion of Srirangam by Malik Kafur in 1310–11 AD, the Ranga Mandapam of the temple served as the shelter for the presiding deity of Srirangam, Ranganatha Swamy.

Later, under the rule of the Vijayanagara emperors, was when the temple gained most of its current wealth and size, with the donation of diamonds and gold. In 1517 Vijayanagara ruler Sri Krishna Deva Raya, on one of his many visits to the temple, donated gold and jewels, enabling the Vimana (inner shrine) roofing to be gilded.

Tirupathi is a fine example of dravidian temple architecture.

Vimanam

The vimanam is a monumental tower with a golden roof. Its inner temple or *vimanam* houses the main deity, Lord Sri Venkateswara.

The deity stands directly beneath a gilt dome called the Ananda Nilaya Divya Vimana. This exquisitely wrought deity, called the



Mulaberam, is believed to be self-manifested, and no human being is known to have installed it in the shrine.

The Lord wears a gold crown with a large emerald embedded in the front. On special occasions, he is adorned with a diamond crown. The Lord has a thick double tilaka drawn on his forehead, which screens his eyes. His ears are decorated with golden earrings.

The right hand resting on his lap. His left hand is akimbo. His body is dressed with yellow clothing tied with gold string and a gold belt with gold bells. He has a yajnopavita (sacred thread) or janeyu, flowing down crosswise from his left shoulder. He bears prithvi Devi on his right chest and Padmavathi Devi on his left chest. His feet are covered with gold frames and decked with gold anklets. A curved gold belt encompasses his legs.

The Ananda Nilaya Divya Vimana was covered with gilt copper plates and surmounted with a golden vase in the 13th century, during the reign of the Vijayanagara king Yadava Raya.

The ancient and sacred temple of Sri Venkateswara is located on the seventh peak, Venkatachala (Venkata Hill) of the Tirupati Hill, and lies on the southern banks of Sri Swami Pushkarini.

It is by the Lord's presidency over Venkatachala, that He has received the title, Venkateswara (Lord of the Venkata Hill). He is also called the Lord of the Seven Hills.

The temple has its origins in Vaishnavism, an ancient sect which advocates the principles of equality and love, and prohibits animal sacrifice.



The sanctum which houses the grand idol of the Lord of the Seven Hills is situated in the main temple complex of Tirumala.

Garbha Gruham

The Garbhagruha or sanctum is where the idol of Lord Sri Venkateswara is placed. The idol stands majestically in the Garbha Gruha, directly beneath a gilt-dome called the "Ananda Nilaya Divya Vimana".

This idol, called the Mulaberam, is believed to be self-manifested. As there does no known sculptor possess the capability to sculpt idols of god so proportionately. Further, no human being is known to have installed it in the shrine.

The idol of the Lord wears a gold crown (Kiritam), which has a large emerald embedded on its front. On special occasions, it is replaced with a diamond kiritam. On the forehead of the idol, two thick patches of tilak drawn with refined camphor, almost covers the eyes of the idol. In between the two white patches is a Kasturitolakam made of saffron.

Golden makara kundalas hang to the ears of the idol. The palm of its raised right hand is embedded with a gem-set Sudershana Chakra, and the left palm with the conch (shankha). The slightly outstretched front right hand, has its fingers pointing toward the feet, as if Lord is the only recourse to his devotees to dissolve in him and enjoy eternal bliss. The akimbo of the front left hand implies lord's protection to devotees, and to show that the Samsara Sagara (Ocean of Life) is never deeper than to hip's height, if they seek his refuge.



The body of the Idol is spun with a Gold-stringed-Pitambaram, with a belt of golden-bells. The idol is decorated with precious ornaments. It has a sacred thread (janeyu) flowing down, cross from the left shoulder. It bears goddess prithvi on the right chest and Sri Padmavathi Devi on the left. Naga-bharanam ornaments are on both of the idol's shoulders. The lotus feet are covered with gold frames and decorated with clinging gold anklets. A strong curved belt of gold around the legs.

Padi Kavali Maha Dwara :

The Padi Kavali Maha Dwara or Outer Gopuram stands on a quadrangular base. Its architecture is that of the later Chola period. The inscriptions on the gopuram belong to 13th century. There are a number of stucco figures of Vaishnava gods like Hanuman, Kevala Narasimha and Lakshmi Narasimha on the gopuram.

Sampangi Pradakshinam:

The path for circle-ambulation of the temple is called a pradakshinam. The main temple has three prakarams. Between the outermost and middle prakarams is the second pathway for circumambulation known as the Sampangi Pradakshinam. Currently, this pathway is closed to pilgrims. The Sampangi Pradakshinam contains several interesting mandapams like the Pratima Mandapam, Ranga Mandapam, Tirumala Raya Mandapam, Saluva Narasimha Mandapam, Aina Mahal and Dhvajasthambha Mandapam.



Ranga Mandapam:

Ranga Mandapam, also called the Ranganayakula Mandapam, is located in the south-eastern corner of the Sampangi Pradakshinam. The shrine within it is believed to be the place where the utsava murti of Lord Ranganadha of Srirangam was kept during the 14th century, when Srirangam was occupied by Muslim rulers. It is said to have been constructed between 1320 and 1360 AD by the Yadava ruler Sri Ranganadha Yadava Raya. It is constructed according to the Vijayanagara style of architecture.

Tirumala Raya Mandapam:

Adjoining the Ranga Mandapam on the western side, and facing the Dhvajasthambha Mandapam is a spacious complex of pavilions known as the Tirumala Raya Mandapam or Anna Unjal Mandapam.

It consists of two different levels, the front at a lower level and the rear at a higher. The southern or inner portion of this Mandapam was constructed by Saluva Narasimha in 1473 AD to celebrate a festival for Sri Venkateswara called Anna Unjal Tirunal. This structure was extended to its present size by Araviti Bukkaraya Ramaraja, Sriranga Raja and Tirumala Raja.

It is in this Mandapam, that the utsava murthi Malayappan, holds His annual darbar or Asthanam during the hoisting of the Garudadhwaaja on Dhvajastambham to mark the commencement of Brahmotsavam. Incidentally, the prasadam distributed on this occasion is still called Tirumalarayan Pongal.



Tirumala Raya Mandapam: The Mandapam has a typical complex of pillars in the Vijayanagara style, with a central pillar surrounded by smaller pillars, some of which emit musical notes when struck with a stone. The main pillars have rearing horses with warriors mounted on them. Some of the best sculptures of the temple are found in bold relief in the Mandapam. The bronze statues of Todermallu, his mother Matha Mohana Devi and wife Pitha Bibi, are kept in a corner of the Mandapam.

The Aina Mahal:

The Aina Mahal is on the northern side of the Tirumala Raya Mandapam. It consists of two parts - an open mandapam in the front consisting of six rows comprising six pillars each, and a shrine behind it consisting of an Antarala and Garbhagriha. It has large mirrors which reflect images in an infinite series. There is an unjal in the middle of the room in which the Lord is seated and festivals conducted.