



CHOLA DYNASTY

(Academic Script)

Hello everyone

Welcome to today's episode on Art and architecture during the Chola Dynasty. This episode will mainly emphasize on the temple architecture style that was followed by the Chola rulers along with the most important sculptures and paintings which were made during their rule.

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Chola Dynasty

Succeeding the Pallavas, the Chola rulers began their reign about AD. 850-1280 (nearly 430 years) in India. The Chola dynasty was a prominent Tamil dynasty that ruled primarily in the South India until the 13th century. Rajaraja I, said to have laid the real foundation of the Chola Empire. The Cholas were no less great in the field of administration, culture and art. They are known for building the grand architecture, which are among the greatest temples not only in India but known worldwide. They continued the great architectural and artistic activities of the Pallavas which had already perfected the main outlines of Dravidian temple construction. Wood and brick, was the main material, used in the architectural constructions remained same in both the regions whether it is Northern or South India. This resulted in very few early specimens that have survived with the course of time.

The temple architecture of Dravidian temple evolved from the early cave temples and monolith temples of Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) to the Kailashnatha and Vaikuntaperumal temples of Kanchipuram. The excavation of rock cut temples and the erection of structural temples,



either in stone alone or in stone and brick, all the important component parts of the temple architecture like the Garbhagriha, the Ardhamandapa, the pyramidal Vimana, the Shikhara, the devakoshtas, the shrines of the parivara devatas, the Nandi mandapa, the dhvajasthambha, and Gopuram, were already established by the decline of the Pallava rule.

Most of the greatest Dravidian art and architecture were erected during the Chola Dynasty, it touched the highest watermarks of Dravidian Monument and sculptures in stone and Bronze was of equal quality. Most of these temples are dedicated either to Lord Shiva or Lord Vishnu, which were built according to the Vastu Shashtra. Several Shaivite and Vaishnavite temples were built by the early Chola period during the rule of Aditya I and Parantaka I.

Among the rulers, Karikala Chola was the most famous, while Rajaraja Chola, Rajendra Chola and Kulothunga Chola I, were well known among the medieval emperors.

These rulers are famous for developing the Tamil literature along with the art and architecture. They are said to have built the temples not only for religious activities but also for the economic purposes.

Characteristics of Chola architecture

- **The Sanctum of the Chola temples is both circular and square in size.**
- **Inner side of the external walls and the sanctum were beautified with the sculptures.**
- **Special Vimanas were built on the upper side of the sanctum.**
- **On the top of the Gupurams, dome shaped shikhara and Kalasa were also there. The gopurams in Pallava dynasty were comparatively dwarfed whereas the Cholas have built huge and tall gopurams.**
- **Features like pillared mandapas namely Ardhamandapa, Mahamandapa and Nandi mandapa were among the important parts of the Temple architecture.**



- Niches were added as one of the most important feature in the temple.
- The rulers of the Chola dynasty have developed the Tamil literature during their reign.
- These temples have stone sculptures in abundance, with their beautiful form and structural quality and depict the Mythological and religious themes.
- The Dvarapalas, or the guardian figures, at the entrance to the mandapa, or hall, which started from the Pallava period became a unique feature of the Chola temple. . The dwarapalas in Pallava architecture were benign, whereas in Chola architecture these became fierce with protruding tusk.
- Early Chola temples on the bank of river Kaveri were smaller and brick made, in comparison to the grand and colossus buildings of the Imperial Cholas.
- The Tallest and the largest temple of India i.e. The Brihadishwara temple at Thanjore is built during the Chola Empire.
- The Chola temples had a beautiful shikhara stone at the top which had carefully made carvings.
- The sculptures of the Chola dynasty depict the social religious ideas.
- The Yali or the lion motif at the base of the pillar was abandoned and Yazhi was added at the base or kudur in other parts of the temple.
- Besides the main shrine, Chola temples were evidences of subsidiary shrines for other deities called parivardevatas which were highly decorated
- The Finial was a little swelling at the top of the Vimana, in the temples built by the Pallavas, whereas this was beautified by Chola artisans into beautiful vases. Pilasters are the magnificent architectural designs which are carved as projected in the walls with placing of deities within in. The pilasters are positioned in both sides of the main Devakusthas.



- **There are two lion heads, which crowns the curved roof of the pilasters. Makara along with warrior heads positions below all the decorative devices.**
- **These are some prominent directions in the Chola temple with architectural design for placing of deities. These are the eight guardians of the directions.**
- **One of the important features is the inscriptions with the architectural design which are visible in the walls of the Chola temples.**
- **Vimana consists of the following parts with the lowest basement**
 - 1. The basement (Upa pita)**
 - 2. The base (adhishtana)**
 - 3. The wall (bhitti)**
 - 4. The roof (Prastara)**
 - 5. The garland of miniature shrine (Hara)**
 - 6. The storey (Tala or Bhumis)**
 - 7. The neck (griva)**
 - 8. The crown (Shikhara)**
 - 9. The finial (stupi)**

The Evolution of Chola art and architecture

There is no doubt that the Pallava rulers have already introduced many innovations in plan of the temple architecture, which was later continued by the Chola dynasty. All the general principles and forms of Pallava architecture was inherited and followed by the early Chola ruler Rajaraja I. This architecture plan consisted of the Vimana, Ardhmandapa and a group of eight shrines, surrounded by a prakara (enclosure wall) with a small Gopurams at the main entrance. The Vimana is normally square with the



Bhadra (wall division) and karna angas, often intervened by the Salilantara (between wall bays) recesses. The Adhishthana

(Mouldings below wall frieze) shows a variety of ornate forms and introduces in the Kantha recess panels of narrative reliefs depicting episodes from the epics, Puranas, and southern religious tradition.

The wall is punctuated by ornate pilasters, usually tetragonal but sometimes octagonal or even circular, and the brackets are normally devoid of Taranga undulations. The bhadra niches of the Vimana display, as a rule, images of Dakshinamurti (south), Ardhanarishwar or Harihara (west) and Brahma (north), while those of the ardhmandapa containing Durga (north) and Ganesha (South) but variation are quite frequent in later phases.

The Apsaras, or adoring demigods are often exhibited on the recesses of the wall. It is observed that the two or three storeyed vimanas are capped by square shikhara whereas the single storeyed vimanas normally has a circular Shikhara.

With the accession of Rajaraja I and lasting beyond the time of Kulottunga I, architectural development have reached many heights with respect to the plan of the Temple and Sculptural qualities.

The single storey vimanas is now favored, though there is no dearth of two or three storeyed vimanas in both square as well as apsidal shapes.

Most of the temples now added an upapitha at the base, while the miniature vignettes in the kantha recess of the adhishthana lack perfect vitality. The brackets of the pillars and pilasters of the developed tenon like median projection. The vimana and the ardhmandapa is continued to be the same as the old architectural plan, but the sculptural quality showed a great development. This great variety of sculptural embellishment is witnessed in these temples, which were built by the Chola rulers.

These great structures reflecting the glory of the Imperial Cholas now include additional temples, cloisters with Dikpala shrines, and extensive enclosure walls with Gopurams.



Early Chola

The early Chola architecture was built along the banks of the Kaveri River, mainly dedicated to Lord Shiva or Mahadeva. Aditya I and Parantaka I built many temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Vishnu, those are recorded in the inscriptions of Aditya I.

These temples constructed in bricks were much smaller as compared to the huge colossal structures that were built later Cholas in stones. The Vijayalacheswaram, Pudukkottai in Tamil Nadu is a perfect example of this kind of art.

Vijayalacheswaram, Narttamalai, Pudukkottai

It is one of those buildings which were built by the early Chola dynasty rulers. It shows the style and structure which clearly follows the Pallava influence in the design. It is located near Pudukkottai in Tamil Nadu. This temple shows the early Chola architecture, it is built on a rocky eminence in c. AD 850, is a square on plan, externally, preceded by a closed mandapa but the inner wall enclosing the sanctum is circular. A circular garbhagriha where the deity resides within a square prakara- circumambulatory corridor. Above rises the three storeyed Vimana, the second tala of the vimana is square but the third tala together with the neck and shikhara is again circular. (The whole structure of the temple is surmounted by a dome which in turn is topped with a stone Kalasa. The wall of vimana and the mandapa has no sculptures rather it shows plain pilasters, while the strings of Kuta, sala, and panjara on the vimana talas are faced by sculptures of deities. The Griha (neck) is adorned with images of Skanda (east), Vinadhara Dhakshinamurti (south), Umasahita (west) and Brahma (north), besides Nandi figures. The temple had eight parivara shrines, of which six are preserved, these all are with circular shikharas.

The other two temples Nageswaraswami temple, Khubhakonam and Muvarkovil Kodumbalur temple are also from the Early Chola architecture.

Koranganatha Temple, Srinivasanallu



This two storeyed temple was built in c.A.D. 927; during the Parantaka Chola has a remarkable quality of decoration and sculptural embellishment of the Jangha Niches and the images of Bhadras.

Apart from these above mentioned temples three temples, the Chola dynasty has constructed three grand structures which are important for discussion. These three Chola temples are exemplary production in the Dravidian style of temple architecture.

The Brihadishwara Temple, Thanjavur(Tanjore)

The Brihadishwara temple at Thanjavur, is known for its grand structure that was built under the Chola dynasty, As known from the inscriptions it was called Dakshina Meru, the construction of this Dravidian style temple was started by the Chola king, Rajaraja I (985-1012CE) and consecrated by his own hands. This temple was named as Rajarajesvaram and the deity Shiva in Lingam form as Peruvudaiyar, the temple is also known in the deity's name as Peruvudaiyarkovil (in Tamil Nadu). Later the Temple came to Known as Brihadishwara temple (briha in Sanskrit means big) or the big temple during the Nayak and Maratta rule because of its gigantic proportions of its Vimana, Lingam, Nandi, and dwarpalas.

The temple embodied the highest achievement in architecture, art of sculpture in stone and bronze, painting, dance and music, iconography and calligraphy, jewellery and lapidary etc.

The Brihadishwara temple is crowned by a pyramidal 59.82 meter Vimana, which is hollow in the interior.

The massive cylindrical Lingam in a double walled , box like sanctum, is 1.66 meters in diameter and is mounted on Avudaiyay (Yoni pitha), which is 5.25 m in diameter. The Lingam rises to a height of two storeys. It is the tallest vimana ever built and has 13 talas and is surmounted by an octagonal shikhara. This temple is an architectural marvel built of interlocking stones. Its monolith Shikhara weighs **80tons**, while its gold plated copper stupi of 12.5 ft high. At the top of the pyramid above the 13th stage, 8 Nandis are present at the corners, near the neck of the Gopuram. The east facing vimana enshrine a colossal Shiva Lingam is preceded by



Ardhamandapa, mahamandapa and Nandi Mandapa, containing a 12fts a high image of Nandi, carved from a single stone. The Nandi mandapa, resting on sixteen pillars is in between the Rasarasan gateway and the Mahamandapa. It is encompassed by the smaller fort called the Shivaganga fort, which is believed to have built by Sevappa Nayak.

The interior shell is an Arupalingam, which starts as square and end as a circle. The entire interior of the ground floor ambulatory has been covered with mural paintings, extensively overlaid in the 17th century by Nayaks. The Chola paintings were over painted by the Nayaks during their rule, the upper layer of the Nayak Paintings had actually protected the Chola paintings underneath from further damage.

The second tala shows 108 panels depicting Shiva demonstrating the 108 dance poses, as mentioned in the Bharatmuni's Natyashastra.

The paintings depict a variety of religious and historic themes as Shiva destroying the Tripura, king worshipping lord Nataraja at the Shrine of Chidambaram, king's religious preceptor, Shaiva saints, birds, animals and scenes of dance and music. The walls of this temple are covered with heavily decorated sculptures, which depict the Indian religious and mythological scenes. The temple being the rarest has the idols of Ashta – dikpalas or guardian of the directions can be found here. The sculptures of Agni, Varuna, Indra, Yama, Isana, Kubera and Nirriti are placed in a separate temple.

The temple is also embellished with colossal images of door guardians at the door entrance and numerous highly artistic and dignified images, among these are some life-size images of deities depicted in a significant position.

On the front side of the vimana, sculptures of abode of Shiva called Mahameru can be seen. The niched images on the walls of vimana (ground floor) portrays many images of Shiva as Lingodbhava, Bhikshantana, Kalari, Nataraja, Gangadhara, Ardhanarishwar, Harihara, UmaLingamna, Chandrasekhara, sculpture of Saraswati, Ganesha



On the north of the stands the coeval square two storey shrine of Chanikesvara, the favourite attendant of Shiva, Inside the court, south facing, Shrine dedicated to Brihannayaki, the consort of Brihadishwara is believed to be dated 15th century, A Sabhamandapa of Nataraja and Ganesha and Subhramanya Shrines. The temple had a total of 250 Lingams in its compound. The two gupuram of the temple Keralaanthagan Gopuram and Rajarajan Gopuram. The Keralaanthagan Gopuram has five stages where various forms of Shiva, Rudratandava pose (a fierce Shiva in dancing form), Shiva with Parvati, Bichandanar (Shiva as a beggar) can be seen, whereas on the rear side of the Gopuram, Krishna Leela, Mahavishnu, Narsimha combating, On the top Shiva and Vishnu sculptures can be seen. On the second Gupuram, Rajarajan Gopuram, shows two huge 15 feet monolithic Dwarpalas on either side of this entrance. This is bigger than the other gopuram.

Brihadishwara temple, Gangaikondacholapuram, 11th century The Brihadishwara temple at Gangaikondacholapuram was built by Rajaraja's and successor Rajendra Chola (A.D 1012-1044). It was the king's new formed capital after his conquests of the Ganga region of the north and this temple was built exactly with the same plan and design as the Brihadishwara temple in Thanjavur. This structure too has massive Vimana which rises to a height of 170 ft and is characterized by rich curves instead of straight lines than the Thanjavur temple. The sanctum enshrines the main deity is encased by an inner wall and the inner sanctum houses a very big Shiva Lingam rising to a height of thirteen feet. The entrance of the sanctum is guarded by massive Dwarpalas.

The Vimana is flanked on either side by small temples, the goddess temple in the north is well preserved and the small shrine of the Chandikesvara is in the north of the steps. In the north there is a shrine of Durga and a well called Simhakeni, with a lion figure guarding its steps. Nandi is in the east facing the shrine. From the present remaining structure, it may be seen that it had one enclosure wall and a Gopuram in comparison to Thanjavur temple. The prakara follows the Thanjavur layout, it had a two storeyed Cloister running all around, but only a part of this has survived in the north. The Vimana is embellished with large number of sculptures of Shiva and



other Brahmanical deities which are equally artistic as the Thanjavur temple.

The temple has ancient relics, inscriptions on the temple, which are the primary source of information about the architecture and its history.

Sculptures of Gangaikonda choleshwaram are known for their boldness of conception and excellent execution. These sculptures are full of expression, rhythm and life. The Coronation of Rajendra Chola

The sculptures of Nataraja and Saraswati are undoubtedly among the master creations of the temple. The images of the southern Kailasa and northern Kailasa occupy identical images in its niches.

Lingodhbhava or Vishnu and Subrahmanya are sculpted on the back of the garbhagriha. The image of Chandesanugrahamurti occupies the north eastern niche. Apart from these images of Dikpala, eleven Rudras (Ekadas Rudra), the twelve Adityas, the eight Vasus, the eight Vidyasvaras, the eight murthis are sculpted.

Other sculptures which are sculpted on the east wall of the Vimana are Kankaladhara, is six armed standing figure in tribhanga pose. The Plaster and painting on the figure belongs to a later period. On the wall to the right of Shiva are shown Surya on top and Bhutaganas in the middle and wives of sages at the bottom. The wall on the left of Shiva carries Chandra on the Top, ganas in the middle and wives of Sages at the bottom. The niche carries a bas relief of Uma Maheshvara in the middle.

The south wall of the Vimana has a Ganesha dancing with four arms. The right leg is lifted in a rhythmic pose. Below his feet are four Ganas, playing maddala, cymbals and **conch**.

Sculpture of Ardhanarishwar on the south wall of the Vimana is an important among these. A standing figure in Tribhanga poses with three arms, two to the right and one to the left. The upper right holds a Parasu, while the lower right rests on the head of a bull standing beside it. The only left carries a full blown flower. A parrot seated on the arm is seen pecking the pollen. The right side of the head is adorned with a Jatamakuta and the left with a Kesabandha.



A lion Pendant in the right ear and a roll pendant on the left are seen. A parasol above and one fly whisk on either side are shown. The breast is shown pronounced on the left, emphasizing the feminine aspect. The left leg wears a sari extends up to the knee. The right wears Bringipada. This figure of Ardhanarishwara is particularly charming with a captivating smile on its face.

Other sculpture like Dakshinimurti, Harihara, Nataraja (Adavallar),

On the west wall intricately sculpted images of Gangadhara, Lingodbhava, Mhavisnu, Subhramanya, Vishnu Anugrahamurti , on the north wall are Kalandhaka, Durga, Brahma, Bhairava, Kamantaka, on the east wall are Chandesanugrahamurti, Saraswati and Lakshmi.

The Airavatesvara Temple, Darasuram, Thanjavur The Rajarajesvara temple now known as the Airavatesvara temple was built by Chola king Rajaraja II (1143-1173 C.E), was built over a century later than the two Brihadishwara temples i.e in 12th century. The temple named after the Airavata, the white elephant of indira, cursed by some saint Airavata worshipped Lord at the temple. It is much smaller in size as compared to the other two temples and differs from them in its highly ornate execution. This temple is a notable monument of the later Chola with an all stone Vimana. The Vimana is 80 feet in height. In front of the temple there are stone panels, which produce sound or tunes when struck. This temple consists of a sanctum without a circumambulatory path and axial mandapas. The Front mandapa known in the inscriptions as Rajagambhiran Tirumandapa, is in the form of a huge chariot with large stone wheels drawn by horses. The plinth of the vimanas is embellished with narrative panels depicting the lives of the 63 Shaiva Nayanmars according to the text of the Periya Purana. The whole structure is in an open court, enclosed by a double storeyed cloister and prakara wall with a gupuram entrance on the east. The complex also has a Nandi mandapa, Chandesa Shrine, and balipitha. The niches of Ardhamandapa contains sculptures of Ganesha, Durga, Mahishasurmardini and Bhikshatana along with reliefs of Kiratarjuniya and Ravananugraha episodes. The pillars are highly ornate. The stairway entrances stimulate elephant figures with swaying trunks, a few pounced upon by lions. The Daivanayaki Amman temple is



built in a separate enclosure which has its own gupuramentrance in north of Airavateswara complex. With three stored rectangular vimanas and is preceded by an ardhmandapa and a mahamandapa. The upper talas are adorned with sculptures showing new types of Shakti images.

Sculpture is magnificiently carved in this temple.

Sculptures

There is plenty of Sculpture in Stone and Bronze from the Chola dynasty, as each and every part of the Chola architecture is decorated marking their own importance in the temple architecture. One of the main features of the Chola sculptures was the most minute details were taken into account, these sculptures were carved in stone that was usually granite.

Apart from the usual image of the Deities, depiction of Foliage sculpture, perforated windows, animal imageries and motifs can be seen. The Chola temples were composed of sculptures and motifs that are highly magnificent and reflect a maturity in the style of the Chola Art. The sculptors of Chola dynasty had followed the Indian “Shilpa shashtra” which is shown through their beauty, elegance, expressive visages and rhythmic movements. The walls, pillars and roofs are decorated with beautifully carved sculptures. Scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharat Puranas and lives of the Sixty three Nayanmars are depicted in narrative panels on the walls of temples.

While the stone sculpture and the inner sanctum image, empowering the temple remained immovable, a new change was introduced in the religious concepts during the tenth century, the statues of god now carried out in public during the festivals and religious processions.

The large bronze images were created to be carried outside the temple to participate in daily rituals, processions and temple festivals. As a result the lower class people, who were traditionally not allowed to enter the temple, can see them and get their blessings.

The Nataraja sculpture is famous worldwide for its beauty and its spiritual meaning. Not only this, the Idols of Vishnu which are placed in the Vishnu temples of the South India has their own beauty and importance.



Bronze Sculptures in Chola temples

Bronze casting has been done in India since early centuries, but a much larger and much greater number of Bronzes were created during the Chola dynasty.

Among the most spectacular works of Indian sculptural art are the temple bronzes, which were produced in Tamil Nadu during the Chola dynasty during the ninth and the thirteenth century. The first production of the Bronzes sculpture was originally started during the late Pallavas but this specialized art rose to its prominence during the Chola rule. One of the earliest examples of bronze sculptures is of a mother goddess from Ashichchanallur.

The iconography of various Saivaite images is taken from the works of Agastya and Kasyapa, the most important of which are Nataraja, Ardhanarishwara, Kalsanhara, Tripurantaka, Gangadhara, Virateswara, Gajhamurti, Some of these are among the important features of the south Indian Saivism.

The Chola bronze sculptures are simple to look, elegant, expressive and exquisitely beautiful. Apart from the Mudras the artisans have taken care of other details like the image of a god or goddess is shown with their weapons and vahana.

South Indian temple bronze during the Chola period were created through the lost wax technique.

Nearly around the sixth century, a very interesting and a unique development have taken place in the South India, where the deity began to be visualized as assumed as a public figure but not as a human ruling monarch. For this, the deity has to be in the public, by giving Darshan; the deity has bestowed his blessings to the devotee who had come to see the procession. These bronze sculptures are covered with silk cloths, garlands and jewels put on a palanquin, or temple chariot through the streets.

Shiva as Nataraja, the worship of Shiva as a Nataraja, is a special cult peculiar to south India, the artisan who were working under the Chola



rulers, have devoted their best skill in casting the image of the 'Dance of the Lord'.

Shiva in Rishabaandika pose, where Shiva is depicted standing with one leg crossed across the other leg to the other side. The way in which his figure is leaning on something is that he is leaning on his Vahana that is Nandi. The figure of Ardhanarishwara is considered as a remarkable piece of Chola bronze sculpture. This image is of half male i.e. Shiva and half Female i.e. Parvati.

The later Chola bronze sculptures said to have lost their beauty in terms of the rhythmic movements and vibrancy. After the downfall of Chola Empire stone was again evolved as the accepted material for sculptures.