



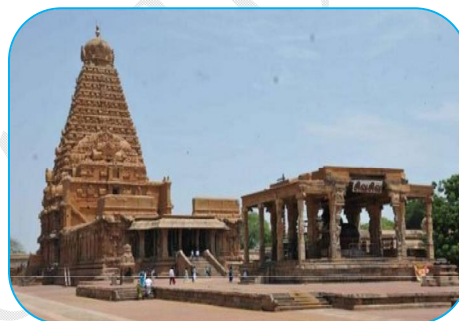
## ARCHITECTURE OF THE MEDIEVAL CHOLA WITH REFERENCE TO RAJARAJA I AND RAJENDRA I

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### ABSTRACT:

*In South India, the period of imperial Cholas (c. 850 CE-1250 CE) was an age of continuous improvement and refinement of Dravidian art and architecture. The Cholas continued to followed the rich Pallava heritage and their religious faith gave big fillip to temple building and temple architecture and so does the temple architecture enter a brilliant and distinctive phase during the Cholas period. The Chola temples of classical workmanship and excellence are architectural achievements in the Chola tradition. The temple architecture of the Cholas combines all the mature innovations adopting elegant designs. They utilized their wealth earned through extensive victory and conquest in building magnificent and lasting temples and exquisite bronze sculptures, almost exclusively in a Hindu setting. The outstanding achievement of the architects of the Chola age display variety of innovations and wealth of exuberant designs and decorative details. Though the period of Chola can be divided into period as Early, Medieval and Later Chola period, here in the paper, we will be discussing about the architecture of Medieval Cholas with only reference during the reign of great king Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. The paper discusses about the magnificent temple architecture of the period which an excellent example of the major heights achieved by the medieval Cholas kingdom in Dravidian temple architecture.*



**KEYWORDS:** Architecture, medieval Chola, South India, Rajaraja, Rajendra, temples.

### INTRODUCTION

The term 'Architecture' is derived from the Latin word *architectura*, meaning the leading worker or a skilled artisan or craftsman.<sup>1</sup> It is an art blending to technical skills, imagination and beauty.<sup>2</sup> Architecture is the scientific knowledge of the people.<sup>3</sup> 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 exposure of human feelings; the Italian for intellectualism and the Indian for spiritualism.<sup>4</sup> It is considered that God and his temple correspond to the soul and body of a human being.<sup>5</sup> Different kinds of authoritative texts reveal details of Indian architecture. Out of them only a

few are available to us such as the *Mayamata*, *Manasara*, *Visvakarmiya*, *Indramata* and *Kasyapam*.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> Religion was instrumental to architecture in the beginning. But its

development has been associated with the emergence of humanism reflecting human feelings and imagination. India has been hailed through the ages as a “land of wonders”, and it is still so because of the large number of her temples both rock-cut and structural.<sup>8</sup>

In course of time Indian architecture which 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 *Silpasastra*, the Indian style of architecture is classified into three types. They are the *Nagara*, *Vesara* and the *Dravida*.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> Even in ancient times Indians had the knowledge of architecture.<sup>12</sup>

During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Cholas began to expand their power base as one of many local chieftains in the Kaveri region to become one of the most important dynasties in India. The height of Chola power was in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when Cola kings dominated most of southern and central India and Northern Sri Lanka. Chola navies were also dominant in the Indian Ocean region. The Chola period was the Golden age of the Tamil South which saw the flowering of a Tamil culture based upon an amalgam of both Sanskrit (Aryan) and Tamil (Dravidian) elements. As Romila Thapar puts it, the Chola period was the period of the “South in the Ascendant”.<sup>13</sup>

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. Fergusson 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<sup>14</sup>, 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 who designed the original forms. Among the early Chola kings, Aditya I (871-907 A.D) was considered as the real founder of the Chola architectural tradition.

In the evolution of the Chola temple architecture we can broadly classify into three major phases, i.e. i) the Early Cholas, ii) the Medieval Cholas and ii) the Later Cholas. However, in this paper we will be discussing about the Medieval Chola architecture.

### The Medieval Chola temples:

The Medieval Chola periods entered into the period of Rajaraja I to Kulottunga I. The Chola architectural tradition reached a high degree of excellence and perfection during the medieval Chola period especially during the reign of Rajaraja I, (985-1014 A.D) and Rajendra I (1012-1044 A.D). The Rajarajeswaram temple (Sri Brihadiswarar temple) at Thanjavur built by Rajaraja I, and the Gangaikondacholapuram temple of Rajendra I stand as distinctive types and are found in the Chola Nadu. Architectural maturity of experience and high degree of perfection were reached in this medieval period of Chola. Some of the features of medieval Chola architecture maybe mentionsuch as;

1. *Garbhagraha* were increases in size,
2. The majestic *vimana* reached up to 13 tiers,
3. On the sides of the *Mahamandapa*, entrances were provided,
4. Outside the sanctum, pillars were provided,
5. Subsidiary shrines were found in large numbers,
6. Enclosing the entire temples, there is huge outer wall etc.,

### Rajaraja I:

Rajaraja (985-1014 CE) was one of the great emperors of Medieval Chola who laid the foundation of Chola Kingdom to Mighty Empire. During his reign, he ruled over the Chola kingdom of medieval Tamil Nadu, parts of northern India, two thirds of Sri Lankan territory, Maldives and parts of East Asia. In his reign, the Cholas kingdom also expanded beyond the Kaveri delta with their domains stretching from Sri Lanka in the south to Kalinga (modern-day Odisha) in the north. Known as *Arumoli Varman* until this point, but with his great conquest and achievements, he adopted the name Rajaraja, which literally means "King among Kings". Though a great conqueror, he is also a patron of arts and religions, organizational and political genius.

With the accession of Rajaraja I, the Chola empire witnessed glory of excellence for about two hundred years in regards of all fields. In the history of Chola, the ruling period of Rajaraja I entered into a new chapter in the development of art and architecture. During the period of emperor *Arulmoli Varman*, popularly known as Rajaraja I, the finest temples of Brihadisvarar temple was built in 1010 CE dedicated to Lord Shiva. which depicted the splendid and beautiful specimen of Chola architecture. The temple was built by the emperor to grace the throne of the Chola empire in compliance of a command given to him in his dream. It is the largest, highest and most ambitious production of its kind hitherto undertaken by the Chola builders. It is also known as *Peruvudaiyar Koyil* and *Rajarajeswaram*. It is located at Thanjavur in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and is the world's first complete granite temple and an excellent example of the major heights achieved by the medieval Cholas kingdom in Dravidian temple architecture.

### Brihadisvarar Temple:

The temple is composed of several structures axially, all of them aligned in the centre of spacious walled enclosure. The magnificent *vimana* built for durability alone has a powerfully adjusted volume and a sense of graceful balance. The temple complex covers an area of rectangle of 240.78 ms east to west and 11.95ms North to South. It consists of the *Srivimana* (63.41ms), the *garbhagriha* (30.1 sq. m), the *Pradhanamandapa*, the *Mahamandapa*, the *Muhamandapa* and a *Nandimandapa* in front. A monolithic Nandi of huge size is found. Moreover, 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 carved out of a single rock and weighs around 80 tons weight forming a fitting finish to its soaring character. Subsidiary shrines were also found in large numbers. The circumambulatory path of the Brihadisvarar temple has 15 chambers, which served the purpose of lithic canvas for exuberant Chola paintings. The temple was completed on the 272th day of the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Rajaraja I. He dedicated the copper pot (*kalasa*) at the top of the *Vimana*. The entire temple structure is made out of granite.

### Nandi Pavilion

After crossing the most of the *gopuras*, an another small *gopura* built by Rajaraja are seen. Then after that Nandi pavilion can be seen. This is a monolithic Nandi. The height of it is nearly 12 feet. The stone for it was brought from *Pachchaimalai*. The Nandi facing the temple rests on a moulded platform of the Chola design. This temple has three entrances viz, *Keralathankan* entrance, Rajaraja entrance and *Thiruvannukan* entrance.

### Garbagraha

With the study of the sculpture and arts of the period, it reveals the artistic spirits of the period. The Chola sculptor was a stone carver not a modeler. The figure of Lakshimi found in many temples is one such. It is a perfect figure, graceful, lovely yet modest, radiating the divine personality. The posture is fine as it has sensuousness and beauty and incorporates vanities, passion, tenderness and love of

womanhood. The dancing figures are so beautifully curved out. With perfect long nose, the slim waist, broad hip, full breasts, long artistic figures, long lashes, expressive eyes, the figures almost come 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.

According to Davis, Rajaraja had proclaimed his universal lordship by offering Siva a new home paralleling his Himalayan abode.<sup>15</sup> The message was clear to all those who visited the temple. Rajaraja was claiming to be the lord of this earth paralleling Siva's lordship over all of creation. In its monumental grandeur, the Rajarajesvara proclaimed that Rajaraja was now the great kings of kings. The construction of Rajarajesvara therefore is a concrete manifestation of the growing power, both in theory and in practice, of the Chola king over local power holders. The temple was the residence of the god just as the palace that was located nearby was the residence of his chief devotee- the king- and both were supreme within their own space. Rajaraja died in 1014 CE and was succeeded by his son Rajendra Chola who followed the foot prints of his father and glorified the Chola Empire even more.

### Rajendra I

Rajendra Chola I or Rajendra I was one of the most successful monarchs of the South Indian Chola Empire who succeeded his father Rajaraja I to the throne in 1014 CE. He expanded the Chola Empire from where his father Rajaraja Chola had left. Apart from reaching northwards to River Ganges and moving overseas to Maldives and Sri Lanka, he also invaded the Southeast Asian territories of Srivijaya in Malaysia, Indonesia and southern Thailand. He continued to maintain and improve commercial relations with China, started off by his father. He established a new capital Gangaikonda Cholapuram, where he constructed a famous Shiva temple, resembling the Brihadiswarar Temple built by his father Rajaraja Chola at the previous capital Thanjavur. Like his father, Rajendra was also a patron of arts and architecture.

The temple at Gangaikondacholapuram, constructed by Rajendra I was to mark of his victory over the Ganges and was supposed to be an emulation of Thanjavur temple and was even tented to excel it in richness and grandeur. The height of the *Linga* in the sanctum is 3.06ms in which the temples covers an area of main shrine in the middle, two subsidiary shrines to the north and south called *Vatakailasam* and *Tenkailasams* respectively, shrine for Chandisvarar. One for Mahisasuramardini a rather large step well called the *Simhakeni* (lion well) a massive stucco Nandi, a *balipitha*.

### Vimana

The Gangaikondalam is almost a replica of the Thanjavur temple. The *vimana* is curved and also it is feminine in character. The building of the new Chola capital Gangaikondacholapuram and the temple Gangaikondacholesvara and the great temple by Rajendra Cola, son of Rajaraja was a statement about his claim to be the greatest of all the Cholas- even greater than his illustrious father. Royal temples such as the Rajarajesvara and Gangaikondacholesvara dominated the surrounding township and country side and even today convey an air of great power and authority. According to one authority, Rajarajesvara and Gangaikondacholesvara are five times the size of any temple from the previous century.<sup>16</sup> Their sheer size sets them far above other different temples just as their royal builders claimed to be far greater than the buildings of other temples. The sight of the great *Vimana* of Gangaikondacholesvara rising from the surrounding paddy field is still a striking testament to royal power and evokes powerful images of supreme authority.

The sight of the great royal temples must have been even more awesome during the height of the Chola power when they were surrounded by the royal palace and other buildings of the nobility and common folk. In the words of Nilakanta Sastri, the temples such as Rajarajesvara and Gangaikondacholesvara "proclaimed to the world the mighty and majesty of the greatest empire of the Tamils."<sup>17</sup>

The massive Nandi bull, the vehicle of Siva, at Gangaikondacholesvara and other Chola temples are further symbols of the might of the king and of male power and virility, attributes associated with the mighty of the king. Building royal temples was therefore, not only an expression of devotion to Siva



but also made a visible statement about great power of the king who built them. Moreover, above his architectural achievements, Rajendra I also built a vast empire and a strong military and naval force. His rule came to be known as the 'Golden Age of Cholas'. He was succeeded by his son Rajadhiraja Chola, who was then followed by his other two sons – Rajendra Chola II and Virarajendra Chola.

Thus, the period of imperial Chola (c. 850 CE- 1250 CE) in South India was an age of continuous improvement and refinement of Dravidian art and architecture. Magnificent temples were constructed. Though the Cholas were great builders, they did not pay any attention to secular architecture like building private residences, gardens or parks. As Professor Krishnamurthi has pointed out "there was no effort to recapitulate political events in any of their wonderful architectural edifices. But Fergusson is of the opinion that "the characteristic features of Chola temples are their graceful animation, the consummate skill in execution, ingenuity of the technique employed and the excellent building materials employed. The Cholas conceived like giants and finished like jewelers". But there is difference of opinions amongst scholars relating to the stages of the development of architecture under the Cholas. According to Jouveau Dubreuil<sup>18</sup>, the phase or period of the Chola architecture falls in between 850 A.D. and 1100 A.D. and the Pandya phase covers the period between 1100 and 1300 A.D. Because of this classification the Pandya period begins even when the Cholas had not cleared the stage. Sivaramamurti<sup>19</sup> and Gravely<sup>20</sup> have classified the development process of architecture into two periods viz., the early Chola and the later Chola Style, on the other hand, Nilakanda Sastri differed from this classification.

## CONCLUSION:

However, it would be incorrect to say that the construction, endowments and support of Chola temples, and the patronage of sacred art and the worship of Siva by the Chola kings as purely politically motivated as stated by many scholars. But equally it would be naïve to ignore the political, economic and ideological elements that underpinned and supported such artistic activities. Analysis of the religious art of the Chola complements other historical evidence in creating a picture of the complexity and reality of Chola power. Chola kings such as Rajaraja and Rajendra were very powerful monarchs particularly in the regions closet to the center of their power. Their great temples such as Rajarajesvara and Gangaikondacholesvara were concrete manifestations of the great economic resources at their disposal and their ability to command obedience through force.

Chola rulers were intrepid warriors and great conquerors but at the same time they were not dead to art and literature. Under the Cholas and the Pallavas, art in the Deccan reached the height of its glory. The Cholas greatly encouraged sculpture, architecture and painting. The Cholas founded many new cities and constructed many palatial buildings. The beautifully erected temples served as the conference houses for the assemblies. These temples were at the same time educational institutions. These architecturally designed buildings and the beautiful chiseled statues and idols reveal that under the Cholas art and architecture had made wonderful progress. The temples of Tanjore are artistically painted and bear wonderful architectural designs. Even artificial lake in Gangaikondacholapuram is specimen of high art.

The Chola culture and art may be called as the Gift of Kaveri. The Chola rulers of Tanjore developed the Dravidian style of temple architecture almost to perfection. A special feature of the Chola architecture is the purity of artistic traditions. As describe above, among the two magnificent temples Rajarajeswaram temple of Shiva at Tanjore is the best Chola art. This temple was built of stone which might have been brought from a hillock called *Mammalai*, eight miles from Tiruchirapalli and about thirty miles from Tanjavur. This temple is also known as Brihadieswarar of Shiva in Tanjore built by Rajaraja Chola in 1010 A.D. and it is the highest and the largest Chola temples and stands as a symbol of Chola greatness. Constructed in granite, the main structure of the temple has square base about 52 metres high and its lofty *shikara* of 13 successive storeys is 57.7 metres high. A huge stone dome nearly 8 metres high and weighing about 81 tons crowns the *shikara*. The temple from the top of the base is covered with exquisite sculptures and mouldings. The plinth is covered with inscriptions in Tamils. The niches on the three sides of the main shrines contain idols of various gods and goddesses. The *gopuram*

on the entrance gates are decorated with beautiful sculptures. The temple stands in a spacious enclosed courtyard and pavilion with one of the largest monolithic *nandis* in south India, a largest assembly hall and a pillared portico.

Thus the grandest temple is considered as the master piece of the Chola art, not only that but also it is the rich heritage of Tamils.

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