

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF STRUCTURAL TEMPLES

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Abstract

Temples, primarily centers of worship have many historical and art historical dimensions, of which architecture is one of the most important aspects since it provides a wide scope to study and analyze the plan elevation and details of the temples. The architectural characteristics of the temples have been analytically and comparatively studied to understand the temple architecture in Tamil Nadu under both the Chola and the Pandya dynasties. The four important styles of temple architecture viz., Pandya, Chera, Chola, and Vijayanagara beautify the temples. The structural temples have a massive structure with lofty mandapas. Its present form was constructed by the early Pandyas and the Cholas. Later, Nayaks constructed more mandapas. So this type of temple has the architectural impact of Pandyas, Cholas, and the Nayaks of Madurai. Generally, as per the Hindu agamas, temples are being constructed facing the east. This temple was exclusively constructed with stones. On its original layout, the Structural temple has a square sanctum and Ardhamandapa. However, the layout of the moderate shrine was expanded by the addition of a square maha mandapa. The garbhagriha and the antrala constitute one unit on a common plinth, while the ardhamandapa is at a lower level, from which the antarala is reached by a flight of three steps. There are four pillars in the ardhamandapa in the traditional Imperial Chola style, round and capped by a plain corbel with beveled edges. The structural temple has the padabandha base, comprising the usual moldings such as jagati, tripatta kumuda, kanta, and pattika. The Indian temple is an abode of god, forming the link between God and man and also a place of worship. It is also the cradle of knowledge, art, architecture, and culture. The practices and traditions of temples have their influence on the social, economic and traditional value system in India even today as it was in ancient times.

Keywords: Temples - worship - Art and Architecture - dimensions - components - experimentation - Pandya - Chera - Chola - Vijayanagara - Nayaks - Nayanmars - Alwars.

Introduction:

Temples, primarily centers of worship have many historical and art historical dimensions, of which architecture is one of the most important aspects since it provides a wide scope to study and analyze the plan elevation and details of the temples. The study of the temple architecture helps to understand how the variegated architectural components of temples underwent development, experimentation, influence, mutual exchange, and standardization due to various factors in different chronological phases. In the Tamil country, the new religious fervor created by the Saiva Nayanmars and Vaishnava Alwars through their devotional hymns were soon transferred to visual arts by the artists patronized by the Pallava and Pandya Kings (c.600-850 A.D) and their successors.

Structural Temple:

The structural temples, based on their dynastic affiliation and chronology, have been divided into two groups of architecture. The architectural characteristics of the temples have been analytically and comparatively studied to understand the temple architecture in Tamil Nadu under both the Chola and the Pandya dynasties. The four important styles of temple architecture viz., Pandya, Chera, Chola, and Vijayanagara beautify the temples. The structural temples have a massive structure with lofty mandapas. Its present form was constructed by the early Pandyas and the Cholas. Later, Nayaks constructed more mandapas. So this type of temple has the architectural impact of Pandyas, Cholas, and the Nayaks of Madurai. Though the exact date of the construction is not known, various rulers constructed several structures and mandapas at various times. Generally, as per the Hindu agamas, temples are being constructed facing the east. This temple was exclusively constructed with stones. The layout is the beginning stage for the art of construction of the temple. This is the first stage following the principles laid down by the Saiva Agamas.

Temple Plan:

On its original layout, the Structural temple has a square sanctum and Ardhamandapa. However, the layout of the moderate shrine was expanded by the addition of a square maha mandapa. The ground plan of the temple also shows an expansion with the addition of an antarala between the sanctum and ardhamandapa. The ardhamandapa is with a circumambulatory passage and a tiruchchurru maligai. In the front, there is a covered hall (maha mandapa) supported by three rows of six pillars each. The garbhagriha and the antrala constitute one unit on a common plinth, while the ardhamandapa is at a lower level, from which the antarala is reached by a flight of three steps. There are four pillars in the ardhamandapa in the traditional Imperial Chola style, round and capped by a plain corbel with beveled edges. On the outer front of the ardhamandapa one on either side of the entrance, are two beautifully carved Rajaraja style dvarapalakas, measuring about 1.22 cm (4') in height. There are no niche figures in the three niches of the garbhagriha, which are shallow, with little scope for housing any Koshta deities. There is a sparsely distributed bhutagana frieze below the cornice. On the southern side, there is a Dakshinamurti niche figure and some fine bronzes on the eastern walls of the arthamandapa.

Garbhagriha

The main part of the temple is the sanctum-sanctorum. The walls of the sanctum contain devakoshtas and pilasters. The entire parts are enclosed by an inner enclosure wall which has the main entrance on the eastern side. The sanctum sanctorum houses the stone image of Siva in the form of linga. The sanctum is square and the adhistana has some principal features. They are the upana, jagati, tripatta, kumuda kanda, patti, wall kanda and vari. On the two feet height stone platform, Lord Structural is seen in the linga posture. The sanctum measures 35 feet in length and 35 feet in width with nine feet in height. The characteristic pyramidal tower of the gopura rests on a four-storeyed oblong base. The sanctum-sanctorum (Karuvarai) is enclosed with walls on three sides except at the front fitted with double haloes doors to open and shut. Thus the moolavar (the primary deity) is kept under protection around it prakaras are provided.

Base

The structural temple has the padabandha base, comprising the usual moldings such as jagati, tripatta kumuda, kanta, and pattika. The panels of kanta, also called galapadas are adorned with miniature relief sculptural and floral carvings as seen in Chola monuments of Cholamandalam. A upapita having upana, padma, jagati, kanta, and kapota embellished with mango leaf designs and simhamukha Kudu motifs supports the base of the shrine. The yali friezes of the temple show full yalis occasionally mounted by warriors holding swords and shields, and miniature relief carvings of opposing warriors or opposing yalis or pearl strings in the gaping mouths of the makaras. Mouldings of wall-kanta and vari, either lotus-petalled or plain, run above the base of the temple. The panel is adorned with miniature relief sculptural and floral carvings. The pranela of the temples are inserted into the kapota of the upapita and it shows a high relief sinhavaktra at the root with grooves throughout the channel area and a lotus bud at the terminal. Apart from these advancements, the pranala of the temple is supplemented by a shallow, circular, and spouted sink below to collect the sacred water from the sanctum, and this system of providing a water-reservoir is represented in some of the contemporary Chola monuments of Rajaraja I. While analyzing the base of the temple, one can conserve the blending of the Chola characteristic with the existing native Pandya elements. The decorated panels of the Kanta, padmajagati, Vrtta kumuda, mango leaf design on the Kapota, mounted warriors holding swords and shields in the yali friezes, advanced pranala with water-reservoir are the important Chola characteristics which have got mixed with the prevailing contemporary native Pandya features as straight jagati, tripatta kumuda and full yalis.

Pilaster

Unlike the Chola counter-parts in the Chola mandalam, the pilaster of the Structural temple has a uniform square variety which might have been freely adapted from the Early Pandya structural temples. Though this temple freely adopted the native Pandya square pilasters, it did not blindly copy them, it rather incorporated several Chola characteristics, to make the pilasters a 'mixed' one. The pilasters of the temple bear all the regular parts and are topped by beveled corbels as in the Early Pandya Structural edifices. While closely looking at the pilasters of the temple, it is evident that apart from the usual embellishment found in the Early Pandya temples, new decorations also appear in some of the pilasters. The most important among them are miniature relief carvings, opposing Yalis, opposing cranes and a female dancer inside the malasthana, pearl-garland decorations at the center of the padmabandhas and the top of the Kalasas; and mango leaf design at the top, diamond design in the middle and lotus-petals at the bottom of the Kumbhas.

Niches

Like the early Pandya temples, the niches of most of the Chola shrines in the Pandya country are empty which proves the fact that Chola monuments freely borrowed the Pandya architectural characteristics. Niches are placed on pattika in the case of padabandha bases and on yali frieze in the case of pratibandha bases and a similar arrangement on niches is found in the early Pandya temples. Several kinds of decorations are seen at the top of the niches. Here in the Structural temple, the niches are instead usual, upholdingkapotas with floral-headed kudus. The Kapotas support the toranas on all sides, and the semi-circular cavities inside the Kapotas are blank. However, there is a Dakshinamurti niche figure. The niches of the temple have a modern structure to house an old and fine stone sculpture of Yoga-Dakshinamurti. The decorated Kapotas carry makara toranas on all sides, often depicting riders mounted on the makaras and rows of simhas emerging from the mouths of the makaras as seen in several other Chola monuments in the Pandya country.

Koshtapanjaras

The Koshtapanjaras which were first introduced in Tamil Nadu by the Pallavas at Mamallapuram later became developed elaborately in a fascinating form under the Cholas and the Nayaks. The Cholas frequently employed this wall embellishment in the recesses of the sanctum walls of their moderate and higher constructions. The shallow and empty niches, square pilasters, simple padma, small palaka, and beveled corbel are some of the native Pandya features borrowed by the Chola monuments. Kapotas instead

of toranas, advanced makara toranas with a row of simhas replacing the usual motif, new varieties of decorations in the various mouldings of the pilasters, very large padma with sharp petals projecting out of the palaka, and tenon-boss corbels are some of the designs in the temple.

Entablature

Among the entablatures, the kapotas and yali friezes of the Structural temple are later accretions after the loss of the originals. The structure and details of these later replacements do not display the existing architectural features; they rather show certain typical Vijayanagar-Nayak characteristics. The fragmentary pieces of the ruined originals thrown generally in the adjoining streets of this temple also indicate the possible fashion of entablatures of this temple during the Vijayanagar-Nayak period.

Vajanas

The vajanas of the Structural temple are decked with rows of lotus petals like some of the contemporary Chola monuments in the nearby areas. The Vajanas are beautified with hamsa and bhuta friezes and also the usual pictures of dancing, fighting, merry-making, playing distinctive musical instruments, and aerobatics.

Kapotas

The Kapota is of uniform manner. It bears kudas above the corner pilasters. The finials of the kudas have been lost, but the sockets found on the top of the kudas indicate that they might have carried simhamuka finials made out of a separate piece of stone. The circular cavities of the kudu are empty. Some of the circular bosses, a surviving example of the nail-heads in the Chola architecture, runs along the bottom edge of the kapotas in the Structural temple. The frames of the kudas in the temple exhibit exuberant scrollwork.

Vimana

On the top of the garbhagriha, vimana is constructed. It is twenty feet height. The Padapantha includes jagati, tripatta, kumuda, kantha, and pattika are erected under the base of the sanctum. The vimana situates on the terrace of the sanctum. It is of ten feet height from the terrace and the vimana measures twenty feet height. The total structure is thirty feet in height. It has four storeys. Griva, sikara, and stupi of the vimana are circular in shape. The vimana has six parts namely, Adhistana, Bitti, Brasthara, kriva, Sikara, and kalasa as six parts of the human body such as feet, leg,

shoulder, neck, head, and hair. The structural temple has Padapantha Adhistana. Vimana situates on the padapantha adhistana. Three devakoshtas and sixteen pilasters are erected on the walls of the vimana. Pranala provides an outlet for holy puja, abhisekha Tirumanjana water of the idol Mulavar leading to the northern wall of the sanctum through a hole reaching outside prakara enclosing karuvarai. This pranala is situated in the upapitha kapota and also under Devakoshta. This can be noticed in the temple. Pilaster decorations provided in the wall of karuvarai and their front portion alone is visible and the other half is covered inside the walls. Square size appears under the bottom of the pilasters on its Nagabandam, malasudanam, padmabandam, kalasam, Thadi, palakai, veerakantham, and potikai are situated. Flower-edged potikai engraves on the top of the pilaster. Devakostas are erected on the north, south, and west of the sanctum walls of the temple. Kapota is fixed facing downwards at the basement to prevent the entry of rainwater on the walls of the sanctum. Griva is situated on the prastharam. Sudai images of Vishnu, karunakudu, guardian deities, Dhakshinamurti, and simhalada are decorated on the southern side of the vimana. On the western side, Narasimha, karunakudu, sitting pose of Nandhi, Lakshmi sitting on the lap of Vishnu are decorated. The sitting pose of Vishnu and four-headed Brahma are erected on the north. Indra on the elephant's back and sitting pose of Vishnu are installed on the eastern side of the vimana. Sikara is the place ending with vimana top. It is provided with kalasa on which poured from the pots containing water sanctified in puja at kumbabisekham celebration. It is circular, kalasa is also to check the power of rain, thunder, and lightning. Generally, the primary idol mulavar is on a standing pose having the square shape vimana. The kalasa on the sikara is gold-plated and placed on an inverted lotus on the top of this temple vimana sikara.

Arthamandapa

The arthamandapa reflects similar architectural characteristics in the concerned sanctum in all aspects, except the walls and kapotas. The walls as they have been shrunk, always avoid niches and carry lesser number of pilasters than the sanctum. The arthamandapa is rectangular and is with a circumambulatory passage and tirru-churrumaligai. The garbhagriha and the antarala constitute one unit on a common plinth, while the arthamandapa is at a lower level, from which the antarala is reached by a flight of three steps. There are four pillars in the arthamandapa in the traditional Imperial Chola style, round and capped by a plain corbel with beveled edges. The Arthamandapa is considered as the shoulder of the deity of the shrine.

The flat roof (42x45) of Arthamandapa which remains part and parcel of the cell arises at a height of about nine feet from its interior ground level. It is covered with walls on all four sides and at the front wall, the entrance door is fixed. There are eight pillars in two rows in the Arthamandapa with a height of nine feet each and two feet in width. The pillars have a gap of seven feet to each other. Icons are kept on the northern side of the Arthamandapa. Devotees stand to worship the Lord in this mandapa. On the outer-front of the arthamandapa, one on either side of the entrance, are two beautifully carved Rajaraja style dvarapalakas, measuring about 1.22 m(4') in height known as Chandi and Mundi. They are pleased to receive devotees and to extend welcome and they report to God about the presence of devotees.

Door-ways

The architects of the structural temple left their art-imprints not only on the exterior parts of the temple but also on the door-ways. The refined and delicate doorways of the temple are to be appreciated. While the jambs and lintel of the sanctum door-way display wonderful foliage patterns throughout the jambs and lintel of the sanctum entrance, besides the foliage designs show creeper patterns with miniature sculptural carvings at the bottom of the jambs. The jamb and lintel of the arthamandapa door-way exhibit foliage patterns.

Mahamandapa

In front of the Arthamandapa, there is a covered hall known as the Mahamandapa supported by ten stone pillars in two rows and the height of each pillar is ten feet and two feet in width. The pillars have a gap of ten feet to each other. The Mahamandapa consists of 35feet in length and 50feet in width. All the pillars have floral designs and a variety of animal structure decorations. In the middle of the northern wall of Mahamandapa, the Natarajar shrine is situated. Kalabairavar shrine is located next to the Natarajar shrine towards the north-eastern side. At the right-inner side of the Mahamandapa eastern wall, the statue of Chandra is kept and on the left inner side of the eastern wall, Adikaranandhi and Surya statues are placed. On the western corner of Mahamandapa and in front of the Arthamandapa, sitting pose Nandhi is erected.

Arthamandapa

The Arthamandapa of the Amman shrine situates in front of the sanctum. A sitting pose of Nandhi is erected in front of the sanctum door-entry and middle of the Arthamandapa. In the middle of the northern wall of the Arthamandapa, palliyarai is situated. Karuvarai prakara of the Amman shrine is located around the walls of sanctum and Arthamandapa. The door-entry of the same is situated both on the southern and

northern side of the Mahamandapa. The Arthamandapa of the temple is rectangular in size consisting of seventeen feet in length and seventeen feet in width supported by eight pillars of two rows. In front of the Arthamandapa, there is a covered hall known as Mahamandapa. It is 40feet in length and 40 feet in width. The Mahamandapa is supported by twenty pillars of four rows each five with decoration. There is a separate mandapa called Unjalmandapa of fifteen feet length and fifteen feet width with a height of seven feet is located in front of the mahamandapa. This mandapa is situated on the two feet height platform. The four pillars of the Unjal mandapa are decorated with swan, dancing girls, women holding lamps, and the designs of Nayak representatives. Floral decoration with Valaipu potigai is a special feature on the top of the four corners of the Unjalmandapa. In front of the Unjalmandapa, Kampathadi mandapa is situated. It is supported by twenty-eight pillars of four rows having seven pillars each.

Alankaramandapa

Another important mandapa of the temple is the Alankara mandapa which is situated between the southern side of the kodimara mandapa of the Amman shrine and the northern side of the Muka mandapa of the main shrine. It is supported by thirty pillars of four rows. In between the second and third pillars, two feet height platform is erected. The compound wall of the temple is of 103feet in length and 103 feet in width.

Mukamandapa

Next to the Mahamandapa, Mukamandapa is situated. It is supported by 36 pillars of four rows with nine pillars each. At the entrance of Mahamandapa and the western wall of Mukamandapa, the image of Vinayaka and Subramanya are erected on both sides of south and north respectively. This mandapa is 73 feet in length and 63 feet in width.

Sculpture

In Hindu temples, architecture and sculpture are the two inseparable entities like the body and the soul. Since the sculptures are an integral part of the temples, they are inevitable in temple studies. The sculptures with their different hasthas, asanas, ayudhas, vahanas, and bhangas have a message for the onlookers. They provide a variety of concepts, themes, and myths found in Hindu religious kinds of literature. They also shed light on the dress, costumes, and fashions of the bygone times. Relief sculpture on the other hand is mainly utilized for decorating the wall surface. Images are also divided into two types. The first one is movable (cala) and the second is immovable (acala). Among cala images, there are again four kinds (a) those that are

meant for worship (arcane) called Kautukaberas, (b) those that are taken out in vahanas on festive occasions called the utsavaberas, (c) those that are intended for daily services in offering Bali, are called bali-beras and (d) those that are employed in bathing ceremonies called snapana-beras.

Dvarapalakas

On the outer front of the ardhmandapa one on either side of the entrance, are two beautifully carved Rajaraja style dvarapalakas, measured about 1.22 ms (four feet) in height. The right hand of the dvarapalaka image is in the danda pose and the left hand is placed on the mace of the gada. He stands on the right leg firmly and the left leg is placed on the mace. The udarabandha is flat and is pearl-designed. The flexions of the body portray artistic excellence and workmanship. The dress is up to the thigh level only. The dress is treated with creeper and flower designs. The knot of the dress flows over the right thigh. The Kundalas of the ears in the center has awe representations. The makuta are well fitted. The protruding teeth are no way adds a dreadful look as the other features are executed with artistic grace and refinement. In the case of the right side dvarapalaka, the right hand is raised to the head level and is in the vismaya pose and the left hand is in the gajahasta pose and its wrist is well placed on the mace. The face is not frontal but in profile. The ear ornaments are not visible due to the oiling of the figure. A long garland of bells gives a combined and coherent beauty to the whole figure.

Conclusion:

The Indian subcontinent in its long and varied history dating from the early period to the colonial period has left behind in the form of its architectural legacy different types of buildings in a variety of architectural styles. The diversity of Indian culture is evident from the different forms of artistic expressions in its built heritage. Among them is the temple architecture of India which has given India a truly magnificent form of architecture. The temples in India are found everywhere varying from small villages to the developed metropolitan cities. The Indian temple is an abode of god, forming the link between God and man and also a place of worship. It is also the cradle of knowledge, art, architecture, and culture. The practices and traditions of temples have their influence on the social, economic and traditional value system in India even today as it was in ancient times. Many temples continue to follow age-old traditions and rituals.

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