

An Evaluation of Rajendra Chola's Temple Architecture

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Abstract:

An important source of knowledge for archaeological research on ancient Indian history is temples. When discussing ancient India, the Chola dynasty is one that is both significant and underappreciated. The oldest records of cholas date back to the third century BCE, but the Chola dynasty ruled over southern India from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries AD. Rajendra Chola was one of the empire's well-known monarchs. He was a maritime genius as well as a military force. Beginning as a general in his father's army, he later became an imperialist and conquered parts of Peru, Cambodia, Thailand, Laccadives, and Sri Lanka. His military prowess was not the only admirable thing, however. Rajendra Chola also supported architecture and the arts.

During this time, south India had a thriving cultural legacy. There were temples involved. The Dravidian style, commonly known as the south Indian style of temple building, was the predominant architectural style used in temple construction. Even though the Pallavas founded the Dravidian school, numerous Chola rulers, like Rajendra Chola and his father Rajaraja Chola, incorporated the Dravidian architectural style into their temple designs. Kingly temples are an important and indisputable source of knowledge. This makes the temples constructed by a monarch as powerful and magnificent as Rajendra Chola significant in history. The following document tries to assess the temples constructed under Rajendra Chola's reign.

Keywords: Dravidian style of temple design; Rajendra Chola; Brihadisvara temple; Gangaikonda Cholapuram

I. INTRODUCTION

The large Brihadisvara temple in Thanjavur was constructed by the renowned Chola monarch Rajaraja I, who unfortunately did not survive to see it finished. The next Chola ruler, Rajendra I, succeeded his proud father Rajaraja I a few years after the temple was constructed (1014 to 1044). Up to his death in 1016, he and his father had joint authority. Under his father's guidance, he had commanded several victorious wars as a military commander.

Rajendra Chola was more determined to conquer India's north and northwest. In 1021, he started his military campaign in this way and took control of Chhattisgarh's south. Subsequently, he sent a portion of his army towards the northern Ganges River and another portion towards the northwest. He set up shop in South Chhattisgarh at the same time and remained there until both missions were finished. They advanced to the Gates after conquering parts of modern-day Bangladesh, Jharkhand, northern Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. The voyage to the Chola Indian Mainland came to a conclusion in

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1022. Rajendra was bestowed with new titles upon his return, including "Gangaikondaan" and "Gangaikonda Cholan" (the Chola who conquered the Ganges). He also founded a new capital city, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, also known as Gangaikondacholeswaram, which is located roughly 70 km from Thanjavur, and had a royal temple of the same name constructed there. These days, the temple is referred to as Brihadisvara temple. For the following 250 years, Gangaikonda Cholapuram served as the capital of the Cholas.

The city was initially mentioned by name in an inscription dated 1029. Rajendra's voyage towards the Ganges is mentioned in an inscription dated 1023, and the first gift to the freshly constructed Gangaikonda Cholapuram is dated 1035.

Brihadisvara Temple, Gangaikonda Cholapuram (Floor Plan)

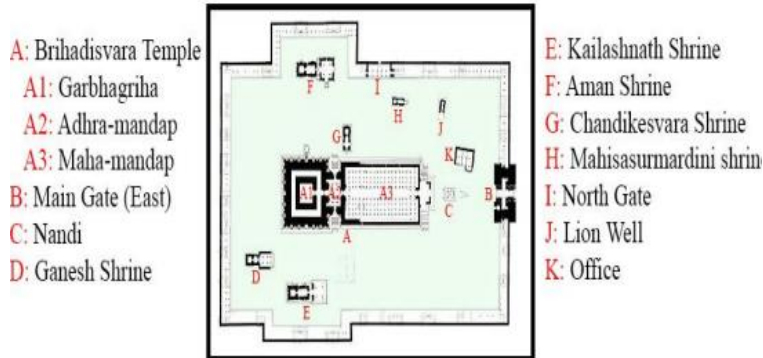


Fig.1 Floor plan of the Brihadisvara temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram



Fig.2 aerial view of Brihadisvara temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram

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II. The Brihadisvara Temple's Architecture in Gangaikonda Cholapuram

The majestic city and temple devoted to Lord Siva at Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple are the crowning accomplishment of Rajendra I, the powerful Chola King, who erected his new capital here. The temple, like many other temples in southern India, is built in the Dravidian architectural style.

The temple is enormous and has intricate carvings. Unlike the typical plain form of the Cholas, the building has intricate carvings on the rough granite stones. Gangaikonda Cholapuram's walls and ceilings are decorated with magnificent sculptures. The temple is well-known for its towering size, Nandi representation, artwork on the walls, and bronze statues. The temple is famous not just for being constructed by Rajendra I but also for having several inscriptions, none of which are his.

While not as large as the Thanjavur Big Temple, the Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple is still more elegant. This temple is sometimes referred to as the feminine counterpart of the Thanjavur temple due to its delicate beauty and graceful curvature.



Fig. 3 East entrance of Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple

The temple complex is accessed by the "Mahaduvar" east entrance. It is situated on the east of the temple grounds, as the name implies. The temple's strong walled enclosure is a key component of Dravidian design. The east entrance encircles the temple walls, as seen in Fig. 3.



Fig. 4 Dvaja sthamba or Flag post placed in front of the temple

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A Dvaja sthamba, or flag post, is the next thing we encounter as we approach the temple from the east entrance. It is positioned at the temple's front. Standing 40 feet tall, it has a brass plating. Siva Parvathi, Lord Karthikeya, Nandi, and Lord Ganesh are the four carved statues on this flag pole.



Fig. 5: Nandi's seated statue facing the inner chamber of the temple

A statue of Lord Siva's obedient mount, Nandi (Fig. 5), stands in front of the flag post. The "Couchant bull," or Nandi, is oriented with its back to the west, facing the Garbhagriha, or main sanctuary of the temple, and is positioned axially 200 metres or 660 feet away.



Fig. 6 The lion well

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Singhamukha Kinaru, also known as the Lion Well, is located to the east of the Nandi. (Figure 6) There are stairs going to the water level at the well's lion-facing entrance. Rajendra Chola insisted that the vanquished countries bring jars of water from the sacred river and pour them into the temple well after his victory in the Ganges.



Fig 7 the Globular Shikhara



Fig.8 the Sri Vimana

As we pass the lion well, the temple's Sri Vimana comes into view. Above the temple's sanctuary, there is a building resembling a pyramid (Fig.8). The height of the temple tower, or Vimana, is 180 feet, or 55 metres; this is 3 metres, or 10 feet, less than the Vimana of the Thanjavur temple. Historians believe that Rajendra Chola purposefully maintained the Vimana's height lower than the Thanjavur temple as a tribute to his father, Rajaraja Chola.

This Sri Vimana's construction differs from Thanjavur's in that it is more feminine in character, while Thanjavur's Vimana is more masculine. Thanjavur's vimana is four sided (quad agonal), but this one has eight sides (octagonal). While the Thanjavur temple has thirteen stories, the Sri Vimana at Gangaikonda Cholapuram is nine storeys (talas) tall.

The sculptures found in the lower courses of the Sri Vimana portray several facets of Siva as well as the secondary deities, which are completed by Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Durga in the niches of the great mandapa and include Ganesha, Vishnu, Subrahmanya, Durga, Brahma, and Bhairava. The statues were fashioned one at a time and placed into the niches.

The Shikhara, the globular part atop the Vimana, is said to be composed of a single stone that weighs many stones, as per legend (Fig. 7). But the truth is that it is moulded to serve the intended function

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and composed of several bits of cut stone. The metal vase, known as the Kalash, with the lotus blossom pattern at the top, is the item that is highest.

III. Comprehending The Main Temple

The main temple is composed of the Sri Vimana sanctuary tower, the large rectangular mandapa known as the mahamandapa (Fig. 9), and the Ardha mandapa, a narrow passageway connecting the mahamandapa and the main sanctum (Fig. 9). The main temple is a 560 by 320-foot courtyard situated on an elevated building. Steps go up to the big mandapa's front door from both the north and the south. The stairs climb to a significant height, creating a lofty platform in front of the mandapa due to its elevated flooring.

The temple is 100 feet broad and 340 feet long. This results in the 100-foot-long sanctuary, or Garbhagriha, the 65-foot-square Ardha mandapa, and the 175-foot-long mahamandapa.

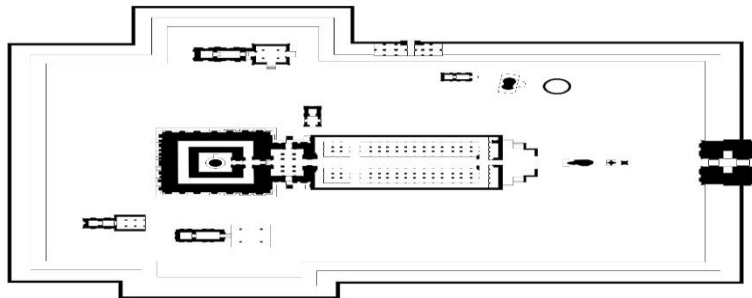


Fig.9 Map of the temple

Mahamandapa and Ardha mandapa

Had the original mahamandapa been conserved, its grandeur and beauty would have been maintained. As it is, just the part that goes up to the main base is authentic. Nonetheless, a portion of the original structure remains intact, reaching the western end's ceiling. It is evident from the remaining part that the ground floor (adi bhumi) of the main Vimana and the mahamandapa's roof (prastara) were level.

As it is, the inner side of the mahamandapa has two elevated platforms on each side, a corridor around it, and a central passage that leads from the front to the sanctuary. The vast hall (mahamandapa) and the sanctuary, or Garbhagriha, are connected by this Ardha mandapa. The entrance to Mukhamandapa is guarded by two enormous Dvarapalas (see to Fig. 10).

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Fig.10 the two dvarapalas guarding the northern entrance to Ardha mandapa

Brihadeshwara Shiva in the form of a Lingam is the primary deity of the temple, housed in the main sanctuary, or Garbhagriha. A massive Siva lingam, measuring around thirteen feet, is kept in the inner sanctuary. According to legend, it is the largest lingam in a south Indian temple's sanctuary. Dvarapalas, the enormous doorkeepers, stand watch at the sanctum's entrance. Steps go up to the mandapa that immediately precedes the sanctum from the large mandapa in the east as well as from the north and south.

IV. The surrounding shrines of Brihadisvara Temple

There are a few minor shrines scattered across the temple complex in addition to the Brihadisvara temple. These include the Kailashnath temple, the Amman temple, the Chandikesvara temple, and the Ganesha shrine.

The shrine dedicated to Ganesh:

A little shrine may be seen in the main temple's southwest corner. Refer to Figure 11. There is a little temple there devoted to Lord Ganesha. It features a sanctuary that is recessed by a mandapa, much like a typical Dravidian temple. Based on the style, it could be a 13th-century building.



Fig.11 the Ganesha shrine, at the southwest of the main temple

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The temple of Chandikesvara:

It is situated northeast of the main temple and close to the Brihadisvara's northern entrance. Refer to Figure 12. Chandikesvara, the saint of Siva, is the subject of this little temple. The side stairs go up to this temple's sanctuary. An image of the temple's coeval Chandikesvara is housed within the shrine. The statues of Chandikesvara are displayed on the temple's exterior walls. He is the main secondary god in the temple, and up until the thirteenth century, all important decisions were made in his honour. For this reason, he has his own shrine.



Fig.12 Chandikesvara temple

The Temple Amman:

The major shrine is located to the north of it. Refer to Figure 13. It is home to Goddess Brihannayaki, Gangaikonda Cholesvara's consort. The temple is known as Uttar Kailasa since it is completely similar to southern Kailasa. It features a sanctuary with stairs on the side that is preceded by the mandapa. In contrast to its counterpart in the south, the mahamandapa, or great hall, is beautifully maintained in front of it.

Despite the fact that the individual shrines were constructed only during Rajendra I's reign, it is evident that this temple was added later to the complex. Where the lovely figure of the goddess presently stands, the original temple should have had depictions of Siva lingam.

Fig.13 Amman temple, dedicated to Goddess Brihannayaki



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The temple of Kailashnath.

Far to the north of the main temple lies the Kailashnath temple. Refer to Figure 14. It is also referred to as the Dakshina Kailasa or the southern Kailasa. The Lingodhbhava is located in the west of the temple, while Dakshnamurti is located in the south. The temple's interior sanctuary and other areas are now in ruins.



Fig.14 the Dakshina Kailasa or the Kailashnath temple.

V. The Brihadisvara Sculptures

It has come to light that the Brihadisvara temple is an incredible work of building. The Rajendra Chola temple is home to many amazing features than only its stunning design. This temple has similarly astounding carvings. The sanctum's walls are adorned with over fifty statues. The sculpture collection has representations of several deities, including Siva, Parvathi, Ganesha, Nataraja, Karthikeya, and Nandi.

Located close to the northern entrance of Ardha Mandapa, outside the main sanctuary, is the most well-known tableau carved inside the temple complex, as seen in fig. 15. This sculpture depicts a sitting Siva holding a garland that belonged to Chandikesvara. In the meanwhile, Chandikesvara is shown with both hands folded in a position of adoration. There is a suggestion that King Rajendra sculpted his own figure and shown his kindness to Siva.

The sculpture of the Goddess of wisdom, Saraswati, is located on the west wall (see Fig. 16). She is shown as sitting on a four-armed lotus throne. She has the Amrit Kalash in her other upper hand and the Mala in her other. One lower hand is in the china mudra position, holding a palm leaf.

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Fig.15 Siva and Parvathi, with Chandikesvara



Fig.16 Goddess Saraswati

VII. Conclusion

Based on current study, it can be concluded that King Rajendra Chola's Brihadisvara Temple is a magnificent creation. It is a typical Dravidian temple, often seen in southern India. Constructed to commemorate Rajendra Chola's triumph in the Ganges, the temple was modelled after Rajaraja Chola's Brihadisvara temple at Thanjavur. It has every characteristic of a Dravidian temple. There is a 180-foot-tall Sri Vimana, a Garbhagriha that holds the temple's deity, and a mahamandapa, or vast

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hall, which is located before the sanctuary. A wall or other enclosure around the temple is a key feature that separates a Dravidian temple from a Nagara temple. This is satisfied by the wall next to the eastern entrance.

Though it was constructed after the Rajaraja temple dedicated to Brihadisvara, the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple differs greatly from it. The Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple is sometimes cited as the feminine counterpart to the Thanjavur temple, which is considered male in character. The design of Sri Vimana clearly reflects this feminine aspect. This temple's curved shape, which is somewhat concave towards the top, giving it a feminine appearance in contrast to the Thanjavur Temple's straight outlines. The largest Lingam ever kept in a south Indian temple is kept in the Garbhagriha of this one. This lingam is thirteen feet long. The complex has several lesser temples to Ganesha, Kailashnath, Brihannayaki, and Chandikesvara in addition to the main temple.

The construction of a well inside the temple complex was one of Rajendra Chola's most significant architectural innovations. He insisted that the vanquished monarchs bring jars of Ganges water and fill this well with it. The sculptures in the temple are just as beautiful as the complex's architecture. One of the most well-known sculptures in this area is one outside the main sanctuary, which shows King Rajendra Chola in a position of adoration. King Rajendra is credited with carving the sculpture personally. He did this to express his love to Siva.

The Brihadisvara Temple therefore serves as a testament to King Rajendra's appreciation of both art and architecture. Like other Dravidian temples, this one is devoted to Siva and is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

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