



## TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE IN TAMIL NADU

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### Introduction

A temple (from the [Latin](#) word *templum*) is a building reserved for [religious](#) or spiritual rituals and activities such as [prayer](#) and [sacrifice](#). Tamil Nadu is rich in its various art forms, and each form is unique and has its own merits. The different phases of growth and development of a society find their expression in art and culture. They are also measures of cultural uniqueness and accomplishments of linguistic and ethnic groups. Tamil Nadu was subject to the rule of four great kingdoms: Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas and Pallavas. Nearly 33,000 ancient temples, many at least 800 to 2000 years old, are found in [Tamil Nadu](#). The temples remain the very essence of the culture and heritage of [Tamil](#) land, with historical records dating back to at least 3,000 years.

### Pallavas Architecture

The Pallava dynasty was an Indian dynasty that existed from 275 CE to 897 CE, ruling a portion of [southern India](#). The Pallavas ruled between the 6th and 8th centuries AD over a large portion of Tamil Nadu with Kanchipuram as their base. Pallavas are most noted for their patronage of architecture, the finest example being the [Shore Temple](#), a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) in [Mamallapuram](#). The Pallavas, who left behind magnificent sculptures and temples, established the foundations of medieval South Indian architecture. They developed the [Pallava script](#) from which [Grantha](#) ultimately descended. The Pallava script gave rise to several other southeast Asian scripts. Pallava art and architecture considered as an early stage of Dravidian art and architecture. The first stone and mortar temples of South India were constructed during Pallava rule and were based on earlier brick and timber prototypes. The earliest examples of Pallava constructions are rock-cut temples dating from 610 – 690 CE and structural temples between 690 – 900 CE. A number of rock-cut cave temples bear the inscription of the Pallavaking, Mahendravarman I and his successors.

The greatest accomplishments of the Pallava architecture are the rock-cut Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, including the Shore Temple. Pallava sculptors later graduated to free-standing structural shrines which inspired Chola temples of a later age. Some of the best examples of Pallava art and architecture are the Kailasanathar Temple at Kanchipuram, the Shore Temple and the Pancha Rathas of Mahabalipuram. Akshara was the greatest sculptor of their time.

The **Kanchi Kailasanathar temple** is the oldest structure which is located in [Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India](#). It is dedicated to the Lord [Shiva](#), and is known for its historical importance. The temple was built from 685-705 CE by a **Rajasimha** (Narasimhavarman II) ruler of the [Pallava Dynasty](#). There was a [sandstone](#) compound contains a large number of carvings, including many half-animal deities which were popular during the early Pallava architectural period. The structure contains 58 small shrines which are dedicated to various forms of Shiva. The temple is one of the most prominent tourist attractions of the city.

Architecture of the temple has retained the Pallava architecture in its original stylized form with influence of the later styles developed by the Chola Dynasty and Vijayanagara Emperors. It is of stone built architecture unlike the rock cut architecture built into hallowed caves or carved into rock outcrops as in Mahabalipuram. The temple complex is complete in all respects as it has *garbagriha* (sanctum, sanctorum), antarala (inner enclosure), mandapa, a high compound wall, and an entrance gate, the gopuram. The mandapa, which was initially detached, was made part of the main shrine by interposing an *ardhamantapa* (smaller hall). The pillars of the mandapa have the repetitive features of mythical lion mounts.

Architecture of the Shore Temple (built in 700–728 AD) is so named because it overlooks the shore of the [Bay of Bengal](#). It is a structural temple, built with blocks of [granite](#), dating from the 8th century AD. At the time of its creation, the site was a busy [port](#) during the reign of [Narasimhavarman II](#) of the [Pallava dynasty](#). As



one of the [Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram](#), it has been classified as a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) since 1984. It is one of the oldest structural (versus [rock-cut](#)) stone. All the three Temples of the Shore Temple complex are built on the same platform. Viewed from the northern end, the temples appear to be a replica of the DharmarajaRatha. The main Shore Temple, which faces east so that the sun rays shine on the main deity of Shiva Linga in the shrine, is a five-storied structural Hindu temple rather than rock-cut as are the other monuments at the site. Built with sculpted granite stones hauled from a nearby quarry, it is the earliest important structural temple in South India. Its pyramidal structure is 60 feet (18 m) high and sits on a 50 feet (15 m) square platform. There is a small temple in front which was the original porch. It is made out of finely cut local granite. The shore temple is also one of the most popular temples. Recent excavations have revealed new structures here under the sand.

The temple is a combination of three shrines. The main shrine is dedicated to Shiva as it is the smaller second shrine. A small third shrine, between the two, is dedicated to a reclining Vishnu and may have had water channelled into the temple, entering the Vishnu shrine. The two Shiva shrines are orthogonal in configuration. The entrance is through a transverse barrel vault gopuram. The two shikharas have a pyramidal outline, each individual tier is distinct with overhanging eaves that cast dark shadows. The outer wall of the shrine to Vishnu and the inner side of the boundary wall are extensively sculptured and topped by large sculptures of Nandi. The temple's outer walls are divided by pilasters into bays, the lower part being carved into a series of rearing lions. The temple walls have large sculptures of Nandi.

### **Pandya architecture**

The Pandya Dynasty, also known as the Pandyas of Madurai, was a dynasty of [south India](#) and [Sri Lanka](#), one of the three ethnically [Tamil lineages](#), the other two being the [Chola](#) and the [Chera](#). After the close of the Sangam age, the first Pandyan empire was established by Kadungon in the 6th century by defeating the Kalabhras, The empire existed between (6th – 10th century AD).The Pandyas contributed more for the development of architecture. Gopuras, Prakaras, Vimanas, Garbagrahas are the special features of the Pandya temple architecture. Temples at Madurai, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Thiruvannamalai, Srirangam are good examples for the development of Pandya architecture. The images of horses and other animals are carved on pillars. According to historian A.L .Basham, The zenith of Pandya architecture are Meenakshi temple at Madurai and Aranganathar temple at Srirangam.The Pandyan kingdom was an ancient [Tamil](#) state in South [India](#) of unknown antiquity. In pandyan art and architecture Rock cut and structural temples are significant part of temple architecture. The [Vimana](#) and [mandapa](#) are some of the features of the early [Pandyan](#) temples. Groups of small temples are seen at [Tiruchirappalli district](#) of Tamil Nadu. The Shiva temples have a [Nandi bull](#) sculpture in front of the *mahamandapa*. In the later stages of Pandyas rule, finely sculptured idols, [gopurams](#) on the [vimanas](#) were developed. Gopurams are the rectangular entrance and portals of the temples. The portions above the entrance is pyramidal in shape. Gradually gopurams were given more importance than Shikharas. Most important some pandyan style of temple architecture are :

### **Nellaiappar Temple**

Nellaiappar Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to the deity Shiva, located in Tirunelveli, built by Pandyas and the sanctums of the temple were constructed by Nindraser Nedumaran who reigned in the 7th century. The manimandapam with its famous musical pillar was built by Later Pandyas in the 7th century. Nellaiappar temple is spread over 14 acres. The gopuram of this temple is 850 feet long and 756 feet wide. SangiliMandapam built on 1647 by vadamalaiyappapillayan connects the Ganthimathi Amman and Nellaiyappar temples. From the inscriptions of KulasekkaraPandiyana we learn that he defeated the Chera, Chola and Hoysala kings and built the outer walls of the temple with the war booty.

### **Kalugumalai temples of Pandya**

The temples in Kalugumalai, a rocky hill in Thoothukudi district in southern Tamil Nadu. Kalugumalai houses the 8th century Jain Beds, VettuvanKoil and Kalugasalamoorthy Temple, a Murugan temple at the



foothills. The rock-cut temples, sculptures and the carvings are exemplary of early Pandyan architecture. The Jain beds are dedicated to the Jain and Hindu religious figures. Constructed in rock cut style, the unfinished temple was built during the reign of Pandyan king Parantaka Nedunchezhiyan (768-800 CE).

### **The Chola architecture**

The **Great Living Chola Temples** is a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) designation for a group of [Chola dynasty](#) era [Hindu temples](#) in the Indian state of [Tamil Nadu](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup> Completed between early 11th and the 12th century CE, the monuments include the [Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur](#), the [Temple of Gangaikonda Cholapuram](#) and the [Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram](#). The Brihadisvara Temple was recognised in 1987; the Temple of Gangaikondacholapuram and the Airavatesvara Temple were added as extensions to the site in 2004. The Chola kings ruled from AD (848–1280) and included RajarajaChola I and his son RajendraChola who built temples such as the Brihadeshvara Temple of Thanjavur and Brihadeshvara Temple of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, the Airavatesvara Temple of Darasuram and the Sarabeswara (Shiva) Temple, also called the Kampahareswarar Temple at Thirubhuvanam, the last two temples being located near Kumbakonam. The first three among the above four temples are titled Great Living Chola Temples among the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Cholas were prolific temple builders. The first king VijayalayaChola after whom the eclectic chain of Vijayalaya Chozhisvaram temple near Narttamalai exists. These are the earliest specimen of Dravidian temples under the Cholas. His son Aditya I built several temples around the Kanchi and Kumbakonam regions.

The maturity and grandeur to which the Chola architecture had evolved found expression in the two temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. He also proclaimed himself as Gangaikonda. In a small portion of the Kaveri belt between Tiruchy-Tanjore-Kumbakonam, at the height of their power, the Cholas have left over 2300 temples, with the Tiruchy-Thanjavur belt itself boasting of more than 1500 temples. The magnificent Siva temple of Thanjavur built by Raja Raja I in 1009 as well as the Brihadisvara Temple of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, completed around 1030, are both fitting memorials to the material and military achievements of the time of the two Chola emperors. The largest and tallest of all Indian temples of its time, the Tanjore Brihadisvara is at the apex of South Indian architecture. In fact, two succeeding Chola kings Raja Raja II and Kulothunga III built the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram and the Kampahareswarar Siva Temple at Tribhuvanam respectively, both temples being on the outskirts of Kumbakonam around AD 1160 and AD 1200. All the four temples were built over a period of nearly 200 years reflecting the glory, prosperity and stability under the Chola emperors.

The Chola emperors patronized and promoted construction of a large number of temples that were spread over most parts of the Chola Empire. These include 40 of the 108 Vaishnava Divya Desams out of which 77 are found spread most of South India and others in Andhra and North India. In fact, the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam, which is the biggest temple in India and the Chidambaram Natarajar Temple were two of the most important temples patronized and expanded by the Cholas and from the times of the second Chola King Aditya I, these two temples have been hailed in inscriptions as the tutelary deities of the Chola Kings.

### **Brihadishvara Temple**

It is also called Rajarajesvaram or Peruvudaiyar Kovil, it is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva located in South bank of Kaveri river in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India. It is one of the largest South Indian temples and an exemplary example of a fully realized Dravidian architecture. It is called as Dhakshina Meru (Meru of south). Built by Tamil king Raja RajaChola I between 1003 and 1010 AD, the temple is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Great Living Chola Temples". The original monuments of this 11th century temple were built around a moat. It included gopura, the main temple, its massive tower, inscriptions, frescoes and sculptures predominantly related to Shaivism. The temple now stands amidst fortified walls that were added after the 16th century. The vimana tower above the sanctum is one of the tallest in South India. The temple has a massive colonnaded prakara (corridor) and one of the largest Shiva lingas in India. It is also famed for the



quality of its sculpture, as well as being the location that commissioned the brass Nataraja – Shiva as the lord of dance, in 11th century. The temple is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Tamil Nadu. Brihadeshvara temple plan and development utilizes the axial and symmetrical geometry rules.

It is classified as Perunkoil (also called Madakkoil), a big temple built on a higher platform of a natural or man-made mounds.<sup>[27]</sup> The temple complex is a rectangle that is almost two stacked squares, covering 240.79 metres (790.0 ft) east to west, and 121.92 metres (400.0 ft) north to south. In this space are five main sections: the sanctum with the towering superstructure (srivimana), the Nandi hall in front (Nandi-mandapam) and in between these the main community hall (mukhamandapam), the great gathering hall (mahamandapam) and the pavilion that connects the great hall with the sanctum (ardhamandapam). The temple complex integrates a large pillared and covered veranda (prakara) in its spacious courtyard, with a perimeter of about 450 metres (1,480 ft) for circumambulation. Outside this pillared veranda there are two walls of enclosure, the outer one being defensive and added in 1777 CE by the French colonial forces with gun-holes with the temple serving as an arsenal. They made the outer wall high, isolating the temple complex area. On its east end is the original main gopuram or gateway that is barrel vaulted. It is less than half the size of the main temple's *vimana*. Additional structures were added to the original temple after the 11th century, such as a mandapa in its northeast corner and additional gopurams (gateways) on its perimeters to allow people to enter and leave from multiple locations. Some of the shrines and structures were added during the Pandya, Nayaka, Vijayanagara and Maratha era, before the colonial era started, and these builders respected the original plans and symmetry rules. Inside the original temple courtyard, along with the main sanctum and Nandi-mandapam are two major shrines, one for Kartikeya and for Parvati. The complex has additional smaller shrines.

The Brihadisvara temple continued the Hindu temple traditions of South India by adopting architectural and decorative elements, but its scale significantly exceeded the temples constructed before the 11th century. The Chola era architects and artisans innovated the expertise to scale up and build, particularly with heavy stone and to accomplish the 63.4 metres (208 ft) high towering vimana. Koneswaram temple of Thirukonamalai Konesar Temple – The Temple of the Thousand Pillars and Dakshina-Then Kailasam is a classical-medieval Hindu temple complex in Trincomalee, a Hindu religious pilgrimage centre in Eastern Province, Sri Lanka. The most sacred of the PanchaIshwarams of Sri Lanka, it was built significantly during the reign of the early Cholas and the Five Dravidians of the Early Pandyan Kingdom atop KonesarMalai, a promontory overlooking Trincomalee District, Gokarna bay and the Indian Ocean. Its Pallava, Chola, Pandyan and Jaffna design reflect a continual Tamil Saivite influence in the Vannimai region from the classical period. The monument contains its main shrine to Shiva in the form Kona-Eiswara, shortened to Konesar and is a major place for Hindu pilgrimage, at its height of fame labelled the "Rome of the Gentiles/Pagans of the Orient". Connected at the mouth of the Mahavilli Ganga River to the footprint of Shiva at Sivan OliPadamMalai at the river's source, the temple symbolically crowns the flow of the Ganges River from Shiva's head of Mount Kailash to his feet.

Developed from 205 BC, the original kovil combined key features to form its basic Dravidian temple plan, such as its thousand pillared hall – "AayiramKaalMandapam" – and the Jagati expanded by King Elara Manu NeedhiCholan. Regarded as the greatest building of its age for its architecture, elaborate sculptural bas-relief ornamentation adorned a black granite megalith while its multiple gold plated *gopuram* towers were expanded in the medieval period. One of three major Hindu shrines on the promontory with a colossal gopuram tower, it stood distinctly on the cape's highest eminence. The complex was destroyed in colonial religious attacks between 1622 and 1624 and a fort was built at the site from its debris. A 1632 built temple located away from the city houses some of its original idols. Worldwide interest was renewed following the discovery of its underwater and land ruins, sculptures and Chola bronzes by archaeologists and Arthur C. Clarke. It has been preserved through restorations, most recently in the 1950s. Granted ownership of villages in its flouit to form the Trincomalee District, Trincomalee village is located on the cape isthmus within the compounds. The modern temple has been a source of conflict between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils due to its position in a geostrategically important area. Revenue from the temple provides services and food to local residents

The shrine is described in the Vayu Purana, the KonesarKalvettu and Tevaramhymns by Sambandhar and Sundarar as a Paadal Petra Sthalam along with its west coast Ishwaram



counterpart Ketheeswaram temple, Mannar, it is the birthplace of Patanjali, the compiler of the Yoga Sutras and was praised for its tradition by Arunagirinathar upon his visit. The Dakshina Kailasa Puranam and Manmiam works note it as Dakshina/Then Kailasam (Mount Kailash of the South) for its longitudinal position and pre-eminence, it lies directly east of Kudiramalai west coast Hindu port town, while it is the easternmost shrine of the five ancient Ishwarams of Shiva on the island. Mentioned as a widely popular bay temple of the island in the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Yalpana Vaipava Malai, the Mattakallappu Manmiam confirms its sacred status for all Hindus.

### **Conclusion**

This study focuses on Tamil Nadu temple architecture. The rulers of Tamil Nadu viz., Pallavas, Cheras, Cholas and Pandiyas architectures adorn the coastal Tamil Nadu.

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