UNIT 12: ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF SOUTH INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain the development of art and architecture in South India under the Pallavas, Chalukyas and Cholas,
- discuss the features of the dynastic art and architectural style and
- analyse the contribution of the South Indian art and architecture.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we discussed about the Bhakti Movement and the contribution of the Movement. We also discussed about women *bhakts* as well as the different scholars of this Movement.

In this Unit, we shall discuss the development of art and architecture in South India under the Pallavas, Chalukyas and Cholas. The Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Cholas were the three great powers of Southern India in the early medieval period. Apart from political and administrative progress in South India, they made significant contributions towards the

development of art and architecture. The art of building temples and sculptures in South India by the Chalukya, Pallava and Chola rulers were extraordinary for their beauty and grace.

The Pallavas established the foundations of the Dravida style of architecture by commissioning the construction of magnificent temples and sculptures. They accomplished the art of stone building without using mortar by carving monolithic temples. It was under the Pallavas that the first structural temples were also built in South India or Dravida Desa. Temple architecture witnessed an evolution under the patronage of the Pallava rulers. These structures were embellished with beautiful sculptures.

The Chola kings like the Chalukyas and the Pallavas were great builders. The Dravida style of architecture made remarkable progress under the patronage of the Cholas. They built temple at the heart of each city, usually of Lord Siva. Besides it, paintings and sculpture made a considerable development in the Chola period. The bronze Nataraja figures of the Cholas are considered as masterpieces of Indian sculpture.

The Chalukyas were not only famous for their political achievement but also for their contribution to the progress of art and architecture of South India. The Chalukyas of Vatapi developed the Deccan or *Vesara* style in building of structural temples which had features of both the Nagara and Dravida styles.

12.3 DEVELOPMENT OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

- **The Pallavas**

The Pallavas rose to power in the Krishna-Guntur region in the fifth century CE. During the reign of Mahendravarman I and Narasimhavarman I, the Pallavas became a major power in South India. Pallava rule was most important for their patronage of architecture and sculpture.

According to Percy Brown, “Of all great powers that together made the history of Southern India, none had a more marked effect on the architecture of their reign than the earliest of all, that of the Pallavas, whose productions provided foundations of the Dravidian style”.

There was a gradual evolution of the Pallava temple architecture

over a period of time. Pallavas temple architecture can be divided into two categories: rock -cut temples and structural temples.

The first style is known as the Mahendra style that flourished from about 600-630 CE. The Pallava king Mahendravarman I started the technique of excavating stone temples out of solid rock. The solid rock-cut mandapas and the circular lingams and cubical pillars are the main features of the Mahendra style. These mandapas were carved out of solid rock at Mahaballipuram and consisted of a hall preceded by a pillared porch. The Mahisamardini Mandapa is the most famous and provides the first sculptural evidence of the Goddess Durga as Mahisamardini carved on the right wall of the mandapa.

The next stage, represented by the Mahamalla style, flourished from about 630 to 668 CE under Narasimhavarman popularly known as Mahamalla. "Descent of the Ganga" and the Seven Rathas of Mahaballipuram were executed during this period. The Rathas are actually six monolithic shrines, cut out of solid granite rock. They are named after the five Pandavas – namely Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula-Sahadeva and their common wife Draupadi. The sixth Ratha is at a little distance away and dedicated to Ganesha. The Mahamalla style has also been found in the reliefs and panels. The Varaha cave temple represents different reliefs of Varaha-avatara, Surya, Durga and Gaja Laxmi. A unique masterpiece of Pallava sculpture is 'Descent of Ganga'. It portraits the River Ganga coming down to the earth with gods and animals. According to Grousset, "Descent of the Ganga" is a vast picture, a regular fresco in stone. It is a masterpiece of classic art which draws all creatures together round the beneficent water".

The third style or the Rajasimha style, developed in between 700-728 CE under Narasimhavarman II who initiated the art of building structural temple in stone as represented by the two small Shore Temples that stand back to back on the shores of the Bay of Bengal at Mahaballipuram. These were the structural representation of the Dharmaraja and Arjuna Rathas. He next built the Kailashnath temple and the Vaikuntha Perumal temple at Kanchipuram on a much grander scale.

The Kailashnath temple at Kanchi contains the life-size portraits of the Pallava kings and queens. It has a pyramidical shaped Vimana and a flat-roofed mandapa. Adjoining the temples there are seven small temples. Numerous pillars, whose bases consist of rampant lions signifying the expanding Pallava kingdom, constitute the mandapa. The Vaikuntha Perumal temple at Kanchi is a Vishnu temple. The Pallava temple architecture attained its perfection in this temple.

The fourth style is Aparajita style that flourished in the 900 CE. At this stage, the Pallava architecture came closer to the Chola architecture. The lingas of the Siva temples became cylindrical and the abacus above the capital became more conspicous. The Mukteswara and Matungeswara temple at Kanchi, the Vedamallisvera temple at Oragadam, the Virattaneswara temple at Tiruttani and Perasurameswara temple at Gudimallan were built in the later stage of the Pallava rule.

Paintings- Some elegant and beautiful paintings of the time of the Pallava king Mahendravarman have been found in the cave temple at Sittannavasal in Pudukottai (Chennai) dedicated to a Jain tirthankara.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Which Pallava king initiated the Rajasimha style?

_____

Q.2. Name a unique masterpiece of Pallava architecture?

_____

Q.3. In which monument did Pallava temple architecture attain perfection?

_____

- **The Cholas**

The Cholas were one of the ancient dynasties of India. There is a reference to the Cholas in the account of Megasthenes and also in an inscription of the Mauryan king Ashoka. In the Sangam age, the Chola kingdom became powerful under Karikal. But, soon they lost their glory and

became mere feudatories under the Pallava, Chalukya and the Rashtrakuta dynasties. Towards the middle of the ninth century CE Vijayalaya, a powerful feudatory of the Pallavas, revived the Chola kingdom. The Cholas completely defeated the Pallavas and weakened the Pandyas by capturing Tondamala (Tamil Country) from them.

They further developed the Dravidian style of architecture initiated by the Pallavas. Fergusson opined that the Chola artist conceived like giants and finished like jewellers.

The temple of Koranganatha at Srinivasanallur was built by Parantaka I. A unique feature of this temple is that it contains many magnificent sculptures of Hindu gods and goddesses on the surface of the *Vimana* wall. Rajaraja, the Great built the Brihadesvara temple at Tanjore. This beautiful temple consists of many structures such as a Nandi-Pavilion, a pillard portico and a large assembly hall. According to K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, the Tanjore temple is "the finest monument of a splendid period of South Indian history and the most beautiful specimen of Tamil architecture at its best." In 1025 CE Rajendra Chola also built a magnificient temple in his new capital city of Gangaicholapuram. It is known as Rajarajeshwara after him. Both the Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram and the Subrahmanya temple at Tanjore were built under the Chola patronage.

Sculpture: The Chola temples are adorned by sculptures on the walls, pillars, roofs and other surfaces. At the same time the artists of the Chola period took care not to overcrowd the plain spaces on the temple walls with too many figures. They focussed upon the rich iconography representing the stories of the Nayanars and Alwars. Their narrative sculptures in stone were generally employed in small panels.

Besides stone sculptures the art of metallurgy advanced considerably resulting in the production of beautiful bronze sculptures in the Chola period. The Nataraja image in its various forms can be considered the best among the Chola bronze images. The Nataraja image in the Nagesvara temple is one of the largest and the finest creation of the period.

The Chola rulers were also great builders of irrigation dams, reservoirs and roads. The famous artificial irrigation lake Cholagangam was

built by Rajendra I. They constructed dams for irrigation purpose by throwing huge blocks of stone across the Kaveri and other rivers to divert the water.

Painting- The Cholas followed and developed the Pallava-Pandya tradition of painting. Chola paintings of the eleventh century CE are found in the great Siva temple at Tanjore. The interior walls of the temple corridor and sanctum are decorated with fine paintings. Their high quality and grace recall the paintings of Ajanta.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4. Which Chola king revived the Chola Empire in mid-ninth century?

_____

Q.5. Who built the famous artificial irrigation lake 'Cholagangam'?

_____

Q.6. Which Nataraja image is the best among the Chola bronze?

_____

- **The Chalukyas**

In the period from the sixth century to eighth century CE the Chalukyas of Badami became a major power in the Deccan. Following the death of Pulakesin II and the sack of Vatapi by the Pallavas, there was an eclipse in their fortunes. However, they again revived their power from the tenth to twelve century CE. Their main base was northern Mysore at Badami (Vatapi), adjacent to Aihole. Later they moved northwards and annexed Nasik and upper Godavari from the Vakatakas. The Later Chalukyas had their headquarters at Vengi.

The Chalukya kings were patrons of art and architecture. They built many magnificent temples at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal. Aihole is called 'the cradle of Indian temple architecture'. The Ladh khan Temple, the Durga Temple and Hucchimalligudi Temple are the three famous temples at Aihole of the early phase of Chalukya architecture.

The Chalukyas also excavated cave temples of Hindu gods out of solid rocks. King Mangalesa excavated a beautiful cave temple at Badami.

Some of the later Chaitya halls at Ajanta cave were probably executed in the time of the Chalukyas as a painting in the first monastic hall at Ajanta cave represents the reception of an embassy of Pulakeshin II by the Persian king Khusrau II.

The Chalukyas also built many structural temples of stone without using mortar. The Siva Temple at Meguti is a magnificent structural temple of stone. It contains the Aihole-Meguti *Prasasthi* (eulogy) of Pulakeshin II composed by Ravikirti. The Durga Temple of Aihole is built in stone in the Buddhist Chaitya hall style.

A new style of rock-cut halls was initiated by the Chalukya kings during the seventh century CE. That is represented by as many as ten temples at Pattadakal. The most important temple at Pattadakal is the Virupaksha temple. It was built by Lokmahadevi, the queen of Vikramaditya II.

The Later Chalukyas inaugurated a new style of temple architecture from the tenth century CE onwards known as the Vesara style. It had the typical features of a Nagara temple of North India but the main shrine had a pyramidal tower similar to that of the Dravida style. Most important among them are the Mallikarjuna group of temples and the Kasivisvesvara temple. This style was further developed under the Hoysalas of Dvarasamudra who built star shaped temples like the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, of which now only the base remains. The twelfth century Chennakesava temple however still stands in all its glory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.7. Where was the main centre of Chalukya power?

_____

Q.8. Mention the name of three famous temples of Aihole.

_____

Q.9. Who composed the *Prasasthi* on the Chalukya king Pulakeshin II?

_____

12.4 BASIC FEATURES

The Pallava art and architecture constitute the most glorious chapter in South Indian history. The Pallava architecture and sculpture have many unique features which can be defined as the Pallava style. Their temples have a multi-storied Vimana at the top of the sanctum-sanctorum (garbha-griha) that rises up in the form of a stepped pyramid. Each upper storey is smaller in size than the lower storey. The sanctum-sanctorum is square in shape and surrounded on all four sides by a varandah which is called *Parikrama* or *Padakshina*. There is a highly decorated Gopuram on the entrance to the temple complex and a Mandapa in front of the sanctum-sanctorum.



LETS US KNOW

***Vimana*:** The main temple consisting of *Garbhagriha* and *pyramidal tower.*

Gopuram: Large entrance gateways, peculiar to South Indian or Dravida temple architecture.

The Bhima and Sahadeva Rathas of Mahaballipuram form an interesting link between the Buddhist cave temples and the structural *Dravidian* temple.

The early phase of Chola temples that date from the ninth to the first half of the tenth century were built entirely in stone and were smaller in size. The Chola temple of this stage consisted of a *vimana* and an *ardhmandapa* surrounded by a *prakara* with a small *gopuram* at the main entrance. In the next phase the Chola kings built large, grand temples with multiple stories. Under the Cholas an important change took place in the Dravidian architecture. And that was the addition of a huge gateway called Gopuram to the enclosure of the temple.

The main features of Chola sculpture are portraits, icons and decorative sculpture. Portraits are few but icons are many in number. The theme of the Chola paintings in the Pradaksina passage round the sanctum of the Tanjore temple is religious.

The Chalukyas excavated many cave temples of Hindu gods. One basic feature of the Chalukya architecture is the building of structural temple of stone without using mortar. The Vishnu temple of Aihole was constructed in the Buddhist Chaitya Hall style.

12.5 CONTRIBUTION

The Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Cholas together greatly contributed to the art and architecture that constitute a glorious chapter in the history of South Indian art.

Pallavas: It can be said that in South India, the Pallava kings initiated a movement in temple architecture. At Mahabalipuram, Mahendravarman I started the technique of excavating stone temples out of solid rocks and made it "the birth-place of South Indian architecture and sculpture." The Rathas and the Shore temple at Mahabalipuram occupy a high position among the best specimen of ancient Indian architecture.

The Dravidian style of temple architecture of the Pallavas largely influenced the architecture of the Indian colonies in the Far East. The Dravidian type of *Vimana* is found in the temples of Java, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Cholas: The Brahmapurishvara temple at Pullamangi is one of the finest examples of the early Chola architecture. The Dravidian temple style reached its supreme expression in the temples of Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram built by the Rajaraja, the Great and Rajendra Chola. The walls of the Brihadesvara temple of Tanjore and that of Gangaikondacholapuram contain numerous icons of large size and forceful execution.

In the field of sculpture, the Cholas used portraits, icons and decorative sculptures. In comparison to icons, portraits are few in number. According to Ajit Ghose, "a new and attractive conception of life and beauty had dawned in the Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam. These Chola ladies are picturesque and realistic human figures, full of feminine grace and joy of life. This humanism is the Chola's principal contribution to South Indian art".

Chalukyas: Some of the finest specimen of the cave frescos that are found in Aihole temples belonged to the Chalukyas. The Papanatha temple built by the Chalukyas is the most notable among the temples of northern style. The Chalukyas attempted to combine northern and southern features in one structure.

The Virupaksha temple of Pattadakal is one of the magnificent remains of Chalukya architecture. According to Havell, "The temple combines the stateliness of the classic design of Europe with fervid imagination of Gothic art."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 10. What is a *Gopuram*?

_____

Q. 11. Name a temple built by the Chalukyas.

_____



12.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you have learned that-

- The rock-cut temple and the structural temple are the two basic features of Pallava temple architecture. Some fine paintings were also executed during the reign of the Pallava king Mahendravarman.
- Art and architecture made remarkable progress under the Cholas. They built some magnificent temples at Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram. Besides this, some of the bronze figures of Nataraja and wall paintings of the Siva temple at Tanjore received high admiration of art critics.
- Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal are the main centre of Chalukyan architecture. The beautiful temple of Aihole and Pattadakal still reminds us of the political strength, love for the art and architecture of the Chalukyas.



12.7 FURTHER READING

1) Majumdar, R.C. (1995). *Ancient India*, Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidas.

2) Maiti, Provatansu. (2014). *Studies in Ancient India*, Kolkata, India: Shreedhar Prakashan.



12.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Narasimhaverman II.

Ans to Q No 2: The Descent of the Ganga.

Ans to Q No 3: The Vaikuntha Perumal Temple.

Ans to Q No 4: Vijayalaya.

Ans to Q No 5: Rajendra I.

Ans to Q No 6: The Nataraja image in the Nagesvara Temple.

Ans to Q No 7: Badami

Ans to Q No 8: The Ladh Khan temple, the Durga temple and the Hucchimalligudi temple

Ans to Q No 9: Ravikirti.

Ans to Q No 10: Large entrance gateways, peculiar to South Indian or Dravida architecture.

Ans to Q No 11: The Papanatha Temple



12.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each within 50 words)

1. Which south Indian dynasty developed the *Vesara* style in temple building?
2. Who built the Virupaksha Temple at Pattadakal?
3. In which temple do we find the life-size portraits of the Pallava king and queen?
4. Who built the Brihadesvara Temple at Tanjore?

B) Short Questions (Answer each within 150 words)

1. What are the features of the Mahamalla style of Pallava architecture?
2. Write a short note on Pallava paintings.
3. Give a brief account of Chola sculpture.

C) Long Questions (Answer each within 500 words)

1. Discuss the development of art and architecture under the Chalukyas.
2. Examine the different types of Pallava temple architecture.
3. Discuss the growth of architecture and sculpture under the Cholas.

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