



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the distinguishing features of Dravidian temple architecture and analyze the significant role played by the Chola Dynasty in shaping this architectural style. (250 words)

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Approach:

- **Introduction:** Start your answer with introducing Dravidian Style of Architecture
- **Body:** Mention the features of Dravidian architecture and Chola Dynasty's contribution to it.
- **Conclusion:** Summarize the main points

Introduction:

- Dravidian temple architecture is a style of temple architecture that emerged in the southern regions of India, primarily in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. It is characterized by certain distinguishing features that set it apart from other architectural styles in India. The Chola Dynasty, which ruled over a significant portion of southern India from the 9th to the 13th centuries, played a crucial role in shaping and popularizing the Dravidian temple architecture.

Body:

Features of Dravidian Temple Architecture:

- **Vimana:** One of the key elements of Dravidian temple architecture is the vimana, also known as gopuram or shikhara. It is the towering, pyramid-like structure above the sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha) of the temple. Vimanas are typically adorned with intricate carvings, sculptures, and often have multiple tiers.
- **Mandapas:** Dravidian temples feature pillared halls called mandapas, which are used for various purposes, including religious rituals, gatherings, and cultural events. The mandapas are characterized by intricately carved pillars and ceilings, showcasing scenes from Hindu mythology.
- **Shikhara:** The shikhara is the pointed, pyramidal roof or spire that crowns the vimana. It is often adorned with decorative elements such as miniature shrines, sculptures, and elaborate finials.
- **Temple Towers (Gopurams):** Dravidian temples are known for their elaborate entrance gateways, called gopurams. These towering structures are usually highly ornate and embellished with intricate sculptures depicting gods, goddesses, mythical creatures, and scenes from Hindu epics.
- **Goshtams:** The goshtams are deities carved in niches on the outer side walls of the garbhagriha. They are usually associated with the main deity of the temple and represent various aspects or forms of the divine.

Role of the Chola Dynasty in Shaping Dravidian Temple Architecture:

- **Patronage and Construction:** The Chola Dynasty played a pivotal role in promoting and constructing numerous grand temples, thus contributing to the development, and spread of Dravidian temple architecture. The rulers of the Chola Dynasty, particularly Rajaraja Chola I and

his successor Rajendra Chola I, constructed iconic temples like the Brihadisvara Temple and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple.

- **Innovations in Architecture:** The Chola Dynasty introduced several architectural innovations that became hallmarks of Dravidian temple architecture. They expanded the concept of vimanas by introducing larger and more elaborate structures. The Brihadisvara Temple, built by Rajaraja Chola I, stands as a testament to the architectural brilliance of the Chola Dynasty. Its towering vimana, constructed using a single granite block, is a significant engineering feat of its time.
- **Iconography and Sculpture:** The Cholas were great patrons of art, and their support led to the proliferation of intricate sculptures and carvings in Dravidian temples. They encouraged the depiction of various deities, celestial beings, and mythological scenes in their temples. The sculptures in Chola temples, such as the Nataraja, exhibit exceptional artistry and devotion.
- **Temple Administration and Rituals:** The Chola Dynasty established a well-organized temple administration system. They played a crucial role in preserving the architectural and cultural traditions associated with Dravidian temples.

Conclusion:

- Dravidian temple architecture exhibits distinctive features such as vimanas, mandapas, gopurams, intricate carvings, and sculptures. The Chola Dynasty significantly influenced this architectural style through their patronage, construction of grand temples, architectural innovations, encouragement of sculptural art, and establishment of a systematic temple administration. Their contributions played a vital role in shaping and popularizing Dravidian temple architecture, leaving a lasting legacy in the southern regions of India.

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