



Mains Practice Question

Q. The Chola temples represent an outstanding creative achievement in the conception of the Dravidian style of architecture. Explain. (250 words)

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Approach

- Briefly mention the main characteristics of Chola temples.
- Explain how Chola temples brought about improvement and refinement in Dravidian style architecture.
- Illustrate these improvements with a few suitable examples.
- Conclude by summarizing your answer and highlighting the importance of Chola temples as UNESCO world heritage.

Introduction

The Chola kings utilised their wealth earned through their extensive conquest in building exquisite monuments. It is due to this, the Chola period witnessed the culmination in evolution of dravidian temple architecture making the Chola temples of that era artistically elaborate and sophisticated. Chola temples are characterized by:

- Circular and Square Sanctums.
- Beautified inner side of the external walls.
- Special vimanas on the upper side of the sanctum.
- Dome shaped sikhara and kalasa on the top of Gopurams.
- Intricate sculptures and inscriptions on the walls of these temples.
- Pillared mandapams namely ardhha mandapa, maha mandapa and nandi mandapa.

Body

Contribution of Chola in the development of temple architecture

- **More elaborative structures:** The temple architecture evolved from the early cave temples and Monolithic temples of Mamallapuram to more elaborate and complex in the Chola period. Example: Brihadeshwara temple.
- **Stones replaced bricks:** During this period stones were used instead of bricks for making temples. This added aesthetics and value to its temples.
- **Gopurams become meaningful:** In the chola period simple gopurams evolved into more exquisite and well composed structures with carvings and series of effigies on them.
- **Elaborate pyramidal storeys:** Pyramidal storey about the deity room depicts the maturity and grandeur Cholas brought in the temple architecture. Example Shiva temple of Thanjavur depicts the material achievement of the Chola Temple.
- **Monolith shikaras:** The Chola temples have evolved beautiful shikharas at the top with elaborate meticulous carving. Example: Octagonal shikhara of Gangaikondacholapuram temple.
- **Dwarapalas became permanent:** The guardian figures (dwarapalas), at the entrance to the mandapa, or hall which started from the Pallava period, became a unique feature of the Chola

temples.

- **Polished sculptures:** During this period the architectural development reached its zenith. The temples were decorated with artistic stone pillars and wall decoration. Emphasis was on elongated limbs and polished features. Example: Carvings of the wheel chariot in Airavatesvara Temple are so fine that all the minute details are visible.

Conclusion

Thus, Chola temples flourished under the royal patronage of imperial Chola kings. The artists patronised by them, through their influences from Amravati at school and various other contemporary schools, elevated the Dravidian architecture styles to greater height. Due to their grandeur, Chola temples have been recognised for their international importance and therefore get special protection as world heritage by UNESCO.

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