

## The Dravida Temple Style

- Unlike the nagaratemple, the dravidatemple is enclosed within a compound wall.
- The front wall has an entrance gateway in its centre, which is known as a gopuram.
- The shape of the main temple tower known as vimanain Tamil Nadu is like a stepped pyramid that rises up geometrically rather than the curving shikharaof North India.
- In the South Indian temple, the word ‘shikhara’is used only for the crowning element at the top of the temple which is usually shaped like a small stupikaor an octagonal cupola— this is equivalent to the amlak and kalasha of North Indian temples.
- Whereas at the entrance to the North Indian temple’s garbhagriha, it would be usual to find images such as mithunas and the river goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna, in the south you will generally find sculptures of fierce dvarapalas or the door-keepers guarding the temple.
- It is common to find a large water reservoir, or a temple tank, enclosed within the complex.
- Subsidiary shrines are either incorporated within the main temple tower, or located as distinct, separate small shrines beside the main temple.
- The North Indian idea of multiple shikharas rising together as a cluster was not popular in South India.
- At some of the most sacred temples in South India, the main temple in which the garbhagrihais situated has, in fact, one of the smallest towers.
- This is because it is usually the oldest part of the temple.
- With the passage of time, the population and size of the town associated with that temple would have increased, and it would have become necessary to make a new boundary wall around the temple.
- This would have been taller than the last one, and its gopuramswould have been even loftier.
- So, for instance, the Srirangam temple in Tiruchirapally has as many as seven ‘concentric’ rectangular enclosure walls, each with gopurams.
- The outermost is the newest, while the tower right in the centre housing the garbhagrihais the oldest.
- Temples thus started becoming the focus of urban architecture.

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- Kanchipuram, Thanjavur or Tanjore, Madurai and Kumbakonam are the most famous temple towns of Tamil Nadu, where, during the eighth to twelfth centuries, the role of the temple was not limited to religious matters alone. Temples became rich administrative centres, controlling vast areas of land. Just as there are many subdivisions of the main types of nagaratemple, there are subdivisions also of dravida temples.



*Image of Dravida Temple Style*

- These are basically of five different shapes: square, usually called kuta, and also caturasra; rectangular or shala or ayatasra; elliptical, called gaja-prishta or elephantbacked, or also called vrityayata, deriving from wagon vaulted shapes of apsidal chaityas with a horse-shoe shaped entrance facade usually called a nasi; circular or vritta; and octagonal or ashtasra.
- Generally speaking, the plan of the temple and the shape of the vimana were conditioned by the iconographic nature of the consecrated deity, so it was appropriate to build specific types of temples for specific types of icons.
- It must, however, be remembered that this is a simplistic differentiation of the subdivisions.
- Several different shapes may be combined in specific periods and places to create their own unique style.
- The Pallavas were one of the ancient South Indian dynasties that were active in the Andhra region from the second century CE onwards and moved south to settle in Tamil Nadu.
- Their history is better documented from the sixth to the eighth century, when they left many inscriptions in stone and several monuments.
- Their powerful kings spread their empire to various parts of the subcontinent, at times reaching the borders of Odisha, and their links with South–East Asia were also strong.

- Although they were mostly Shaivite, several Vaishnava shrines also survived from their reign, and there is no doubt that they were influenced by the long Buddhist history of the Deccan.
- Their early buildings, it is generally assumed, were rockcut, while the later ones were structural.
- However, there is reason to believe that structural buildings were well known even when rock-cut ones were being excavated.
- The early buildings are generally attributed to the reign of Mahendravarman I, a contemporary of the Chalukyan king, Pulakesin II of Karnataka. Narasimhavarman I, also known as Mamalla, who acceded the Pallava throne around 640 CE, is celebrated for the expansion of the empire, avenging the defeat his father had suffered at the hands of Pulakesin II, and inaugurating most of the building works at Mahabalipuram which is known after him as Mamallapuram.
- The shore temple at Mahabalipuram was built later, probably in the reign of Narasimhavarman II, also known as Rajasimha who reigned from 700 to 728 CE.
- Now it is oriented to the east facing the ocean, but if you study it closely, you will find that it actually houses three shrines, two to Shiva, one facing east and the other west, and a middle one to Vishnu who is shown as Anantashayana.
- This is unusual, because temples generally have a single main shrine and not three areas of worship.
- This shows that it was probably not originally conceived like this and different shrines may have been added at different times, modified perhaps with the change of patrons.
- In the compound there is evidence of a water tank, an early example of a gopuram, and several other images.
- Sculptures of the bull, Nandi, Shiva's mount, line the temple walls, and these, along with the carvings on the temple's lower walls have suffered severe disfiguration due to erosion by salt-water laden air over the centuries.
- The magnificent Shiva temple of Thanjavur, called the Rajarajeswara or Brihadiswara temple, was completed around 1009 by Rajaraja Chola, and is the largest and tallest of all Indian temples.
- Temple building was prolific at this time, and over a hundred important temples of the Chola period are in a good state of preservation, and many more are still active shrines.
- Bigger in scale than anything built by their predecessors, the Pallavas, Chalukyas or Pandyas, this Chola temple's pyramidal multi-storeyed vimanarises a massive seventy metres (approximately two hundred feet), topped by a monolithic shikharawhich is an octagonal dome-shaped stupika.

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- It is in this temple that one notices for the first time two large gopuras (gateway towers) with an elaborate sculptural programme which was conceived along with the temple.
- Huge Nandi-figures dot the corners of the shikhara, and the kalasha on top by itself is about three metres and eight centimetres in height.
- Hundreds of stucco figures decorate the vimana, although it is possible that some of these may have been added on during the Maratha Period and did not always belong to the Chola Period.
- The main deity of the temple is Shiva, who is shown as a huge lingam set in a two storeyed sanctum.
- The walls surrounding the sanctum have extended mythological narratives which are depicted through painted murals and sculptures.