CHAPTER - X

PRĀKĀRA-GŌPURA

PRĀKĀRA/ENCLOSURE WALL

Prākāra is an enclosure wall built surrounding a structure. This is an optional member. Texts on temple architecture give an elaborate description of the construction of prākāra wall\(^1\). Texts prescribe that the prākāras are built for security, for enhancing the beauty, and for accommodating the parivārālayas. prākāras are often concentric in nature. Their number may range from one to seven. The Texts also mention the dimensions of the prākāras.

The height of the prākāra wall, according to the Texts, can be up to the height of the architrave of the main shrine or the corbel of the pillars or the capitals of the pillars\(^2\). Texts prescribe the medium of construction for the prākāra to be stone or brick and mortar (saṅkīrṇa)\(^3\). The prākāra can be provided with an adhiṣṭhāna\(^4\). Colonnaded pavilions can be built attached to the inner side of the prākāra. These pavilions are called by the name āvṛtamāntapas\(^5\). This may be constructed like a mālīka or a long verandah. The āvṛtamāntapas may be one or two or three storeyed. Subsidiary shrines (khaṇḍahārmyas) can also be built buttressing the prākāra\(^6\). Instances of providing niches on the inner face of the prākāra are also noticed. These shrines should possess all the essential members like the adhiṣṭhāna, bhitti, prāstara, grīva, śikhara and stūpi thus making it a miniature saḍvarga shrine. The coping of the prākāra may be decorated with rows of seated bulls or gaṇas\(^7\).

The construction of prākāra is an ancient practice, which is noticed as early as the Pallava and the Badami Chalukya times. The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi and the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal have prākāras built around them. Both the above-cited temples have khaṇḍahārmyas built buttressing the prākāra wall. The prākāra of the Virupaksha temple has the motifs of śāla, kūta
and *pañjara* pavilions as their crestings. The shore temple at Mahabalipuram has a row of seated bulls as the coping for the wall.

Now, coming to the region of our study, majority of the temples have *prākāras*. A few temples do not possess a *prākāra* at all. In some of the temples the original *prākāras* are dilapidated and their traces can be noticed. Of the temples having *prākāras*, many have been renovated during the modern times and as such, they have lost their original form. The *prākāras* provided for the temples of the region are usually single. In a few temples double *prākāras* are noticed. Nowhere, a temple possessing more than two *prākāras* is noticed in the region.

Five temples possess double *prākāras*. Of these, two temples are worth mentioning. They are the Kamanatheshwara temple at Aragalur and the Kailasanatha temple at Taramangalam. The former example is earlier in date. It belongs to the late Chola period (see plan-). Both the *prākāras* have *gopuras*. The first *prākāra*, which surrounds the main shrine, has an *āvṛtamantapa* built closer to the shrine in the typical Chola style. The *parivāradēvatas* are enshrined in the *āvṛtamantapa*. The second *prākāra* is very spacious. The Amman shrine is built in the second *prākāra*, to the left of the main shrine, and slightly behind the main shrine. A *raṅgamanṭapa* is built attached to the inner wall to the northeastern corner of the temple. Another *maṇṭapa*, which is just a four-pillared pavilion, is built to the right side of the first *prākāra*. This might serve the purpose of a *kalyānamanṭapa* or a *dōlōtsavamanṭapa*. The *nandimanṭapa* and the *dhwajasthambha* are built in the second *prākāra* on the main axis of the temple. The second *prākāra* has two gateways, but only the one built on the main axis has a *gopura* above it. The outer wall of the second *prākāra*, in the front, possesses a *mukhamanṭapa* built adjacent to the *mahādwāra* on both its sides.

In the second example, both the *prākāras* built are of a later date than that of the main shrine (see plan-). They can be dated to 16th century. The first
prākāra, built surrounding the main shrine, is extended in the front like a mahāmaṇṭapa, inside which the Amman shrine, shrine for Subrahmanya and the śayyamaṇṭapa are built. Inner walls of this prākāra are provided with a mālika. The interspaces of bhadraka pillars of the mālika here have kōstas enshrining the parivāradēvatas. Another special feature of this prākāra is the life size sculptures of divinities and saints, all carved attached to the shafts of the bhadraka pillars all-round. The rear wall of this prākāra has a jālavātāyana fixed to it. This prākāra also has two entrances, one on the main axis and the other towards the south. The southern entrance has an ordinary mukhamaṇṭapa, while the main entrance on the west has an oblong mukhamaṇṭapa, described already in the chapter on ground plan.

The second prākāra of this temple is also very spacious. There are two separate shrines built dedicated to Shiva. The inner wall of this prākāra has mālikas on its right and the rear walls. The pākaśāla is built in the northeastern corner. The nandimaṇṭapa and the dhwajāsthambha are built in this prākāra on the main axis of the temple. A huge mahādwāra with a tall gōpura is provided for the second prākāra, while no gōpura is provided for the first prākāra. The second prākāra has two entrances, one on the main axis and the other at the rear wall.

Majority of the temples, as stated earlier, have only one prākāra. But their chronological arrangement is difficult. These prākāras may be contemporary with the date of construction of the temple, or a later addition. All these prākāras are simple and almost the same in their features. Therefore, their description is not given here.

**Gōpura/GATEWAY TOWER**

Gōpura is a tower built above the mahādwāra of the temple. This term is also applied to the towers built above the gateways of the houses, palaces and Buddhist monasteries. Gōpura in Sanskrit means a town- gate. The etymology
of this term is very obscure. The Texts on architecture mention extensively about the construction of gopuras. The prescriptions given in the Texts, it is opined, are difficult to interpret properly, and these prescriptions are, generally not followed by the architects.

The Texts classify the gopuras into three categories i.e. adhama, madhyama and uttama. These are based on the measurements of the gopuras. The classification of three categories mentioned as adhama, madhyama and uttama is also based on the number of talas built above the mahāḍwāra. If the gateway towers are built beginning from one tala and goes up to three talas, it is considered as adhama. If the gateway towers are built beginning from two talas and goes up to five talas, it belongs to madhyama class. If the gateway towers are built beginning from three talas and goes up to seven talas, it belongs to uttama class. This is to say that, if the temple has three prākāras and the tower above each gateway of the prākāra, increases by one tala, then it is adhama. Likewise, in the madhyama class there shall be four prākāras, the towers are to be built above their gateways, beginning from two talas up to five talas. If there are five prākāras, with their gateways towers possessing talas beginning from three and goes up to seven it belongs to uttama class. But strict adherence to these rules is not followed by the architects in the region of our study.

Further, Texts also mention five types of the gopuras. They are:

1) Dwāraśōbha
2) Dwāraśāla
3) Dwāraprāśāda
4) Dwāraḥarmya
5) Dwāragōpura

These are the names given to the towers built above the gateways of the prākāras of the temples. Though the Texts mention that the prākāras can be built
up to seven in number, only five types of gopuras are prescribed. Traditionally, the terms dwāramaryāda and mahāmaryāda are designated terms to the gopuras of the sixth and seventh prākāras. But the Texts do not make any mention about this.

Texts prescribe that the shape of the coping of the gopura should be of sabhākāra$^{12}$ i.e. rectangular on plan and the coping is of śāla type. Texts also prescribe that they can be provided with gavākṣas and jālakas. Various types of gopuras are mentioned in the Texts. They are:

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<tr>
<th>Śrīkara</th>
<th>Kēśaviśālaka</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ratikānta</td>
<td>Swastika</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kāntavijaya</td>
<td>Dwiswastika</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vijayaśālaka</td>
<td>Mardala</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viśālālaya</td>
<td>Mārtāṇḍa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vipratīkānta</td>
<td>Śrīviśāla</td>
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<td>Śrīkānta</td>
<td>Śrīkēśa</td>
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<td>Caturmukha</td>
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But the descriptions given about these types in the Texts are obscure$^{13}$ and these descriptions cannot be applied at present for the identification of the existing types of gopuras of the region.

The building of the gopuras is an ancient practice seen from the days of Pallavas$^{14}$, and the Badami Chalukyas$^{15}$, The Rashtrakutas$^{16}$, the Gangas$^{17}$, the Cholas$^{18}$ and the Hoysalas$^{19}$ continued this tradition. The towers above the gateways during these periods were mainly built out of stone and they possessed only one tala$^{20}$. These gopuras obviously possessed sabhākāra coping.$^{21}$

It was during the Vijayanagara period, that the gopuras were built on a very large scale and in large numbers in a magnificent manner. Even many of the existing temples were provided with gopuras. The media of construction used at
this time for the *gōpuras* were brick, mortar and wood. Therefore, their dimensions increased in a notable manner. *Gōpuras* having up to eight *talas* were built from this period. The term *gōpura*, became popular as “*rayagōpura*”. This signifies the importance given to the construction of *gōpuras* by the Vijayanagara rulers, who were referred to as *rāyas*.

The practice of constructing the gateway to the *prākāra* and a tower above it, as already stated, goes back to the time of Pallavas and Badami Chalukyas. The gateways of the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi and the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal have a pavilion built at the entrance of the *prākāra*. They are actually built on the principle of the *saḍvarga* class of structure. They have an *adhiṣṭhāna*, *bhitti*, *prastara*. Above the *prastara*, a small coping of *śāla* variety is built above the *grīva*. No remnants of the original *stūpis* are found there. These structures may be considered as the embryonic form of the *gōpuras* (gateway towers) of the later period.

The same practice was continued by the Cholas and the Hoysalas. The Brihadishwara temple at Tanjore has an entrance gate with a small tower built above. The structure is fully built out of stone. It is oblong on plan. The central part of the longer side of the entrance has the gate or the *dwāra*. This entrance gate was built always in a particular method. It is again a *trivarga* structure raised on two separate plinths built side by side at a distance. The gap between was the pathway of the gate. The two plinths, which flanked the path, supported the wall with all the decorative details of a regular temple wall. The space in between the two walls was covered by the roof built commonly for the side structures. Above this, the parapet was built. This part is identified as *dwāramanṭapa* or the gateway pavilion.

The gateway pavilion is not a completely solid structure. It consists of two recessed cellas facing each other on the two sides of the pathway inside. The façade of these cellas may have a pillar or two supporting its roof. These cellas are in an elevated level as they are built above the *adhiṣṭhānas* provided for the
sometimes, these cellas may be two storeyed also. These cellas contain a staircase to go to the top of the dwāramantapa.

the etymology of the term gōpura, as said above, is obscure. the word obviously presents a sense connected to ‘gō’ i.e. cow. it is possible that all the towers of south indian temples possess, at the two ends of their coping, a pair of semi circular cresting in the form of a cows horn. it is possible that due to this ornamental member, the name gōpura is given for this structure.

it is interesting to note that the śāla towers above the garbhagrhas of the temples are never provided with the cow horn cresting at the ends of their copings. it is possible that to differentiate the two towers, namely the tower of the sanctum and the tower of the gateway, probably, this motif was used exclusively for the gateway towers.

above the dwāramantapa, often, a superstructure is raised. obviously this superstructure is named as gōpura in dravidian terminology. this structure will also be oblong on plan. the principle in which the super structure is built above the dwāramantapa is similar to the method of building prāsāda above the garbhagrha of the temples, the only difference being, the tower above the gateway will always be rectangular on plan. the prāsāda of the gōpura also consists of several horizontal tiers built one above the other. each tala gets reduced in its size as it goes up, but in the case of the gōpura all the tiers are built hollow and all these tiers are interconnected through a staircase or a ladder provided inside. each tier is provided with a small door opening in the centre of its longer sides corresponding to the pathway provided at the bottom of the tower. above the final tier of the prāsāda a rectangular vēdi and/or grīva is constructed. above the vēdi/ grīva rests a wagon vaulted (śāla) coping. the two gable ends of the śāla are decorated like huge nāsis (mahānāsi), super-imposed by an imposing kīrtimukha. adjoining the back of the kīrtimukha, two semicircular vertical ‘cow horn’ like cresting are placed. in the interspaces of these ‘cow horns’ on the ridge of the coping, kalaśas are placed,
which may generally vary in number from one to seven (instances of more *kalaśas* placed in more number is also known.), but they will always be in odd numbers. But the Texts prescribe that they mat be in in even numbers also.

During the Chola period, clear-cut practice of constructing towers above the gateways is noticed. The gateway towers of the Chola period are very few in number. They are generally built of stone. But the same during the late Chola and Vijayanagara periods were constructed out of brick, mortar and wood.

Likewise, under the rule of Hoysalas also, practice of constructing *dwāramantapas* and towers was in vogue. The towers above the *dwāramantapas*, built by Hoysala architects, are not available in their original form in the heartland of the Hoysalas. But one specimen of the Hoysala gateway tower is found at Jambukeshwara temple at Tiruvanaikkaval. It is a structure having a stone base and the tower above the base is of brick and mortar. This instance shows that even the Hoysalas built *gōpura* to the temples they built in Tamilnadu following the prevailing practice of the region.

During the Vijayanagara period, practice of constructing the *gōpura* with mixed material becomes a common feature. The vertical base of the *gōpura* was constructed invariably out of dressed stone. The super-structure i.e. the different *talas* of the *prāśāda* and the coping were constructed out of brick, mortar and wood.

The exterior of the body of the *prāśāda*, during the Vijayanagara times was decorated with architectural and sculptural themes. In the background of the architectural members of the different *talas*, life-size sculptures, made of lime mortar, with themes from Hindu mythology, floral, faunal figures, *mithuna* sculptures, etc. were placed for the decoration. They were even painted with different colours.
Now, coming to the gopuras of the region of our study, almost all the temples of this area have gopuras built above the gateways. Of these only five gopuras are original, while the rest are built or renovated during the modern times. The earliest gopuras are noticed in the Kamanatheshwara temple at Aragalur of the late Chola period (pl-170). Of the five gopuras two are built for the above cited temple itself. The others are found built for the Karivaradaraja temple at Aragalur (pl-171), Penneshwara temple at Penneshwaramadam and Kashi Vishweshwara temple at Velur (pl-172). The identification of these gopuras according to the Texts is difficult, because of the reasons mentioned already.

While dealing with the gopuras of the region, a mention of the mahādwaras is not out of place. As all these gopuras are of late Chola and Vijayanagara period, huge mahādwaras were constructed to bear the weight of the lofty gopuras built above. The mahādwaras, in their elevation, consist of upapīṭha, adhiśṭhāna, bhitti and prastara (pl-173). They are of two varieties, non-ornate and ornate. In the non-ornate variety, the mahādwaras contain a simple upapīṭha, pādabandha adhiśṭhāna, bhitti with bhittipādas and occasionally tōraṇas (pl-174) and a kapōta.

The ornate variety of mahādvara contains upapīṭha of the pratibhadra or vēdibhadra types. Occasionally double upapīṭhas are also noticed22. Over the upapīṭhas, adhiśṭhānas generally of the śrībandha or śrībhōga types are constructed. The bhitti possesses varieties of bhittipādas like the viśnukānta and saumyakānta. kumbhapaṇjaras are carved on the outer faces of the bhitti of the mahādvara (pl-175). Even the bhitti may consist of two horizontal, equal parts, one above the other. They are called adhōjaṅga and ūrdhvajaṅga (pl-173). The prastara contains an ornate kapōta and nāsis. The gāḍha of the nāsis are decorated with figures of divinities and devotees, floral, faunal and decorative motifs. These mahādwaras possess ornate dwārabandhas, which have already been discussed.

On plan, these mahādwaras also possess angavibhaktis like the bhadras, karnas and the pratikarnas. The karnas and the pratikarnas possess tōraṇas, while
the saliläntaras are decorated with kumbhapañjaras. The doorways are always provided in the centre of the longer side of the plan. Of the ornate mahāḍwāras of the region, the mahāḍwāras of Kailasanatha temple at Taramangalam (pl-173), Kailasanatha temple at Tiruchengodu and the Kandasami temple at Kalipati are highly ornate. The mahāḍwāra of Kailasanatha temple at Taramangalam has two jaṅgas, which are built out of two varieties of stone. The entire mahāḍwāra is constructed on a plain upapītha common to both the plinths of the gateway.

The mahāḍwāra of the first prākāra of Kamanatheshwara temple at Aragalur has two niches on either side of the doorway, housing the sculptures of dwārapālakas (pl-170).

REFERENCES

1 Mānasāra Ch-31, Mayamata Ch-23, Śilparatna Ch-40, Iśānaśivagurudēvapaddati Ch-44.
2 Ibid verse-20.
3 Mānasāra Ch-31, verse-36.
4 Mayamata Ch-23, verse-21a.
5 Ibid verse-26
6 Ibid verse-30
7 Shore temple at Mahabalipuram has a row seated bulls carved on its prākāra.
8 JC Harle – Gate way of South Indian Temple. pl-2
9 Amarakosha-Kanda II-ii, verse-16
10 Kāmikāgama-Ch 35, Mayamata- CH 26, Mānasāra- Ch 31, Śilparatna-Ch 41, Iśānaśivagurudēvapaddati Ch 35,75-120.
11 Vidwan Ganapathi Shastri, Agama professor, Sanskrit college, Bangalore.
12 Kāmikāgama Ch 35, verse-
13 These types of gōpuras are identified mainly on the basis of the decoration of nāṣis found on their body. The Texts mention an expression as follows "mukhemukhe mahānāsi". This expression is very ambiguous. It does not mention the meaning of the usage "mukhemukhē". Even the experts on vastusastra and agama are unable to explain what exactly the expression means and where exactly this expression has to be applied.
14 Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi.
15 Papanatha temple at Pattadakkal.
16 Kailasa temple and the Indrasabha at Ellora.
17 Someshwara temple, Gangavara.
18 Brhadishwara temple at Tanjavur.
19 Jambukeshwara temple at Tiruvannaiakkaval.
20 The gōpura of the Jambukeshwara temple at Tiruvannaiakkaval has seven talas and its construction by Virasomeshwara is evidenced by an inscription.
21 Indrasabha at Ellora.
22 The mahāḍwāra of the main gate of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi.