

PALLAV ARCHITECTURE

The great Pallavas of Kanchi rose to power in the latter of the sixth century. Their coming marks an important epoch in the history of south Indian architecture. Politically and Geographically they dominated the southern region continuously until the ninth century A.D. Mahendravarman I (C. 580 – 630 A.D) inherited from his father SimhaVisnu a vast empire extending from the river pennaras far as the Kaveri.

The First rock-cut architecture of Mahendra Varman I was the Laksitayatana Trimurti cave temple at Mandagapattu, hewn out of granite. The inscription in this cave states: "This brick less, timber less, metal less and mortar less abode of laksita was caused to be made by king Vicitracitta for Brahma, Isvara and Vishnu. King Mahendra caused nine temples, similar to the Laksitayatana cave temple Mandagapattu, to be excavated, they are:-

The Pancha Pandava cave at Pallavaram the Rudralisvaram or cave temple no. 2 at Mamandur.

The Kalmandapam at Kuranganilmuttam the vasantesvara or the larger cave temple at vallam.

The Mahendra Visnugriha at Mahendravadi the Visnu cave temple at Mamandur the Lalitankura Pallavesuaragriha (upper cave) at Tiruchirapalli.

The Satrumalles Varalaya at Dalvanur and the Avinabhajana Pallavesvara Griha at Siyamangalam.

These cave temples imitated the interiors of structural buildings made out of more perishable material like wood. The mandapa is divided into the Mukha and ardha mandapa.

Under the patronage of the successors of Mahendravarman I, namely Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha a series of cave temples were excavated. Since they follow Mahendra's style rather closely, they are designated as belonging to the post-mahendra style. They differ only in a few aspects while the general layout of the cave temple remains unchanged in having a mukha and ardha mandapa with a shrine behind the latter projects more into the ardha mandapa.

Narasimhavarman I Mamalla the successor of Mahendravarman built the new coastal town 51 kms south of Madras named after him as Mamallapuram. Moreover he introduced a completely novel method of hewing out temples the monolithic vimanas or rathas, all at Mamallapuram.

The Mamalla style cave temples display many changes in the design of the interior, such as introduction of more profuse relief sculpture and the development of the pillars representation of the facades.

Mamalla style cave temples, all at Mamallapuram, and in varying stages of completion, include-

1. The koneri Mandapam.
2. The Mahisamardini or yamapuri mandapam.
3. The unfinished cave temple next to the koneri Mandapam.
4. The panch pandava Mandapam.
5. The Adivaraha Temple.

At the southern end of Mamallapuram stand the Draupadi, Arjuna, Bhima, Dharmaraja and Nakula- Sahadeva rathas.

The small Draupadi ratha, facing west and dedicated to Durga, is the simplest and most elegant of the group. Shaped like a kutagara (hut), it is very much a stone model of the wooden original.

The Arjuna ratha, dedicated to Siva, stands next to the Draupadi ratha. It is also faces west. It has a dvitala (two-storeyed) vimana of the Dravida order.

The central section of the original whale back rock formed an ideal situation for the rectangular Bhima ratha, an ekatala (one storeyed) vimana with a sala type wagon roof. A row of stupis (finials) crowned its basal parts uncarved.

The Dharmaraja ratha, a tritala (three storeyed) vimana, square in its talas (storeyed) but octagonal in the griva sikhara region, faces west. In style, it resembles the arjuna ratha.

The Nakula-Sahadeva ratha, carved out of an independent boulder, stands near the Arjuna ratha and faces south. It has a dvitala (two storeyed) Vimana with an apsidal end in both its storeys, crowned by a wagon vaulted roof also with an apsidal end. The base remains incomplete. An ardha mandapa projects in front. Its roof supported by a pair of lion-based pillars.

The Dharmaraja and Arjuna rathas, which influenced the later forms and development of southern temple architecture, are the most important rathas.

The Monolithic Ganesa ratha is the most finished and ornate of all the rathas. This dvitala (two storeyed) vimana, hewn from a tree-standing boulder near the northern end of the main hill at Mamallapuram, resembles the Bhima ratha with its wagon vaulted roof and three nasikas- the one in the centre large and two at the extreme side small.

According to its inscription, the temple was dedicated to Siva. It faces west. The ardha mandapa in front has the same size as the shrine behind. Vyalabased pillars and pilasters adorn the façade.

The Bhima and Ganesha rathas may have served as models for the form and development of the gopurams (temple gateways)- the most characteristic features of the south Indian temple complex.

STRUCTURAL TEMPLES

Pallava rulers made large size structural temples which are examples of early Dravida temple. These temples were made at Mahabalipuram and Kanchipuram. This mode of architecture was started by Narasimhvarman II also known as Rajasimha. The first major example of this style was Shore temple. These temples are called Rajasimheshwara temples. There are two shrines in this complex. The smaller shrine is dedicated to Vishnu. The larger shrine belongs to Shiva. This temple is made of blackish leptinite. These temples have prakarabhiti but it has no gopuram (gateway).

There have been installed images of Nandi on the Prakarabhiti in south Arcot District. This temple has an unusual plan. The vimana of this temple has four storeys at Kanchipuram.

At Kanchipuram, their capital, the Pallava kings, Rajasimha and his son Mahendravarman IIIrd erected the Kailasanatha temple.

Built with the local variety of weak sandstone, its plan elaborates the features of the Talagirisvara.

The main vimana has four storeys. Its plan is square, but the Griba and sikhara have eight sides. The double walls of the shrine provide a circumambulatory passage in between. Like the Talagirisvara temple, it has two-storeyed oblong shrines joined to the middle of each side of the main one. In addition, however, it has two storeyed square ones at each of the corners as well. While the corner shrines have kuta sikharas. The platform on which the temple rests has similar extensions corresponding to the projecting shrines. The passage on the eastern side serves as an antarala to the sanctuary.

The main sanctuary has the usual somaskanda relief panel on its rear wall, in addition to a large fluted linga on the floor.

The exterior walls of the vimana and shrines have the usual pilasters with rearing vyala at the base, so characteristic of Rajasimha temple.

The Vaikuntha Perumal temple also at Kanchipuram, was erected by Nandivarman Pallavamalla and dedicated to Vishnu. Built of sandstone, it stands on a well-moulded adhisthana with granite for its top and basal courses. Square in its lower talas, the temple becomes octagonal in its lower talas, the temple becomes octagonal in its griba and sikhara.

Three walls, one within the other, surround the main shrine. The innermost wall rises to the height of the third storey, the intermediate one to the tala. Thus a pair of covered pradaksina paths surround the ground floor. At the rear, the inner circumambulatory also provides access to the first storey. The outer prakara surrounding the whole temple has a pillared cloister raised on a platform. This provides another pradaksina patha.

The other temples at Kanchipuram belonging to this period, the Muktesvara, Matangesvara, Airavatesvara, Valisvara, Iravatanesvara and Piravatanesvara are much smaller, but interesting as examples of later Pallava structural temples.

PALLAVA PAINTING-

The finest example of Pallava painting has been found in the Kailashnath temple of Kanchipuram. This painting is based on mural technique also called tempera. In Sanskrit it is called Bhiti chitra. This style and technique is similar to Ajanta painting. The theme is Shaivism. Actually, this painting depicts story of Shiva described in Shivapurana. This painting has remained only in riches of the prakarabhiti. It is badly damaged.

The whole painting work has been done on wall that is plastered with lime. This lime coating is called Bhumibandhana. Some of the remaining paintings depict somaskanda pratima, Uma Mahesvaramurti and Nataraja.

This painting is rare and it throws light on the continuation of the Ajanta tradition.

THE PALLAVAS ART

The first king of the Pallava dynasty named Mahendavarman patronized different art-forms. His son Narasimhvarman also patronised art. At Mahabalipuram there is depiction of Kirita Arjuniyam/ Gangaavtaran

Pallava images have features of Amravati art the sculptures of this period are simple but impressive. These are natural in their outlook.

The images have long bodies. They are slender and thin. The female figures are so on cleaning on the broad shouldered male partners.

They look very simple and submissive. They are much slighter with narrow chest and have slender waists. Their ornaments and dresses are scanty.

The most important example of pallava art is the scene of Ganga avataram. Another, important panel is the figure of Mahisasur Mardani in a mandapa at Mahabalipuram. This mandapa has also a figure of seshasai Vishnu also called yog Narain the varah mandapa has beautiful sculptures of Vishnu as varaha (boar). There is another panel of Gaj Lakshmi in this figure Lakshmi has been shown with Lotus in her hand and reclining postures. The pallava sculptures worked as models or the Chola art.

Another important Panel in a mandapa depicts Goverdhan Dhari Krishna.

The Arjun rath has very impressive figures of dwarf palas. Pallava temples have lion based pillars. The best sculptures are related to Lord Shiva such as

- Shiva Vinadhara
- Shiva Gangadhara
- Shiva Kalarimurti
- Shiva Andhkari
- Shiva with Nandi
- Shiva as Somskanda
- Shiva with Tanduv
- Shiva and Chandesh, etc.

The Richest temple in art is the Kelash Nath Temple of Kanchipuram. It has the best sculptures of Pallavas period in the Devakoshtas there are images of gods and goddess. It has a beautiful image of dakshin murti Shiva. There is another figure of Lingodabhawa murti. The Kelashnath Temple also has image of Durga with her Vahana Lion. The most attractive figure is that of Natiraja (Dancing Shiva).

The Vekunta Perumal Temple of Kanchipuram has images of Vishnu. In standing, sitting and reclining postures. The Pallava Sculptures worked as models or the Chola art.