

PALLAVA ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Dr. M. Kala,
Assistant Professor of History
Government College for Women (A)
Kumbakonam

Abstract

The character of Hindu temples reflected local architectural styles and the material and skills to which they related. The information which survived explains that the temple building, especially in stone and brick was carried out as a result of royal patronage. The building of the temple in stone was an expensive affair and expresses the physical power and economic resources of the ruler. The distinctive architectural styles of Hindu temples have so developed due to broad geographical, climatic, cultural, racial, historical, and linguistic differences between the northern plains and the southern peninsula of India. Hindu temples have been classified into three different orders; the Nagara or 'northern' style, the Dravidian or 'southern' style, and the Vesara or hybrid style which is seen in the Deccan between the other two. During Pallava period, a cultural temple is not only a place of worship but they act as a center for an intellectual and artistic life. The temple complex housed schools, hospitals, and courts for the community. The construction of the temple is an art, a science, and a complicated creative study with a blend of mathematics, logic, geography, geology, science, ecology, art, sculpting, music, light and sound, religion, social sciences, and astrology. The historical information about the construction of temples which is available today is mostly inscribed on the stones slabs, metal plates, palm leaves, and manuscripts. The knowledge and skills of the construction techniques were passed on verbally from generation to generation among the temple architects. The fact that Pallava craftsmen had to deal with entirely new material of unknown potentialities may account for the bare, almost archaic interior of the Mahendra cave temples. The Pallava period became the origin of many such fields. The achievements of the Pallavas in the field of architecture are very important. It was the period of the origin of Dravidian architecture. Several kinds of religious buildings were constructed. Generally, they are classified into cave temples and structural temples.

Keywords: Pallava - cultural - Hindu temples - historical - Nagara - Dravidian - Vesara - craftsmen - Mahendra - architecture - manuscripts - community - worship - architects.

Introduction:

A large variety of Hindu temples was constructed throughout India through the ages with distinction in scale, techniques of building, and particularly the deities that were worshipped, which were the result of the differences in political, cultural, and prosperity between the towns and villages. The character of Hindu temples reflected local architectural styles and the material and skills to which they related. It is not easy to distinguish these temples due to the limited information that has survived about the Hindu temples and their builders which are mostly inscribed on the stone slabs and metal plates and manuscripts written on the palm leaves. The information which survived explains that the temple building, especially in stone and brick was carried out as a result of royal patronage. The building of the temple in stone was an expensive affair and expresses the physical power and economic resources of the ruler. Other than royal patrons, an association of wealthy merchants and a group of individuals played an important role in the construction of temples. However, apart from the royal patrons and the merchants, every individual donated something to the temple

such as they might donate a field or water tank, or fund a perpetual lamp, or give two sheep to supply milk to make ghee to keep the lamp burning.

Architectural Styles in India:

The distinctive architectural styles of Hindu temples have so developed due to broad geographical, climatic, cultural, racial, historical, and linguistic differences between the northern plains and the southern peninsula of India. Broadly based on geography, Hindu temples have been classified into three different orders; the Nagara or 'northern' style, the Dravidian or 'southern' style, and the Vesara or hybrid style which is seen in the Deccan between the other two. There are also other distinct styles in peripheral areas such as Bengal, Kerala, and the Himalayan valleys.

Pallava Architecture:

During the period of the Pallavas, the cultural temple is not only a place of worship but they act as a center for an intellectual and artistic life. The temple complex housed schools, hospitals, and courts for the community. The spacious halls of the temple were the places for the recitation and listening of folk tales, Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and debates. Music and dance were part of daily rituals in the temple. The presence of these activities eventually gave the people more knowledge about the traditions and made them appreciate the older practices. The temple also owned cultivable lands which were leased out and revenues were earned. By this method, the temple was sustaining the maintenance of the temple and also able to support the needful during poverty and emergency. Temple provided means of livelihood for a large number of persons and greatly influenced the economic life of the community. The written evidence of Brihadeshvara temple, Thanjavur (1010 AD) shows that the temple had 600 employees. The temple is the center of all aspects of the life of the community and every member of the community contributed to the keeping up and building of the temple. Although the temple is the hub of different religious and cultural activities, the nucleus is the main shrine.

Elements of the Pallava Temple

It was the latter half of the 7th century that the Pallavas temple structures of South India began to acquire a definite form. Similar to the terminology used to distinguish the basic components of a Gothic Church (for example nave, aisles, chancel, spire, etc), the common elements of a Hindu temple which are known in their original Sanskrit words are as follows. The temple as a whole is known as the Vimana that

consists of two parts. The upper part of the Vimana is called the Sikhara and the lower portion inside the Vimana is called the Garbhagriha (cella or inner chamber).

Dravidian Style of Pallava Architecture

Temple development in southern India took its momentum during the Chalukya rule in the early 7th century. These temples followed the designs to some extent from the Buddhist architecture. The temples evolved from simple rock-cut shrines to large and complicated structures. The temples in this period were large square buildings with a projecting porch and decorative pillars. The roof of the temple had a small structure which later emerged as the sikhara. The entire temple is simple with minimal decoration. Some of the examples from this period are the Lad Khan temple and Durga temple of Aihole. The rock-cut structures were developed during the 7th and 9th century A.D. under the rule of the Pallavas. The Pallava rulers led the way of the Dravidian style of temple architecture and they built the temples at places like Kanchipuram and Mamallapuram. During the Pandyas rule, the South Indian temples were added with lofty gateways, gopurams at the entrance with the basic temple composition. The gopurams made the temple visually attractive and also provided the temples with an enclosure. The gopurams evolved from a rectangular base with a pyramid crowned with a barrel-vaulted form. During 11th century, the Chola rulers built one of the tallest temples of that time the Brihadeeshvara temple, Thanjavur with a height of 60 m. In the later period, the temples were extended and became more intricate. More mandapas were included for various activities like dancing, assembly, dining, marriages, etc. The Dravidian style proceeded in a series of extended temple cities or townships. The finest example of the temple township is the temple at SriRangam and Madurai with several concentric enclosures⁶.

Technology of Pallava Architecture:

The construction of the temple is an art, a science, and a complicated creative study with a blend of mathematics, logic, geography, geology, science, ecology, art, sculpting, music, light and sound, religion, social sciences, and astrology. The historical information about the construction of temples which is available today is mostly inscribed on the stones slabs, metal plates, palm leaves, and manuscripts. The knowledge and skills of the construction techniques were passed on verbally from generation to generation among the temple architects. One of the most important surviving records about the construction of the temple is in the palm leaf manuscript which explains the details of the building operation of Pallavas.

Significance of Pallava Architecture

Mahendravarman I inherited the Pallava throne from his father Simhavishnu and with it a large and settled empire extending from the Krishna river in the north to the Kaveri in the south. He was an exceptional and unorthodox king, whom Dubreuil referred to as one of the greatest figures in the history of Tamil civilization. A many-sided and gifted personality, musician, poet, builder, and statesman, it was he who called forth the immense flowering of culture and art which would spread all over South India and overflow to other countries of Asia and finally even survive the decline of his dynasty and empire. Pallava's conquest and expansion of power came to a standstill in his time. His fame in history was not achieved on the battlefield but by the fact that he was the first under whom cave temples were carved into the granite rocks of the South-cave temples of a specific and unmistakable style named after him. Into those temples, he recorded his expressive inscriptions in fine Sanskrit and in the beautiful letters of his time, which afford some insight, no matter how little, into his uncommon character. The inscription of his first cave temple at Mandagapattu where he calls himself 'the inventive or curious minded' (vichitra-Chitta) is but one example: "this brick-less, timber-less, metal-less and mortar-less mansion of Lakshita was caused to be made by King Vichitra Chitta for Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu." "Brick-less, timber-less, metal-less. "one can almost read it as an exultant exclamation, ringing through the centuries and announcing the triumph of a man who had attempted something new and had attained it, most probably against much resistance, secret or open, of the local craftsmen who were attached to their traditional ways. The fascination of carving whole temples into the living rock which spread over India during the first millennium AD had not yet seized the South by the end of the 6th century. Even as a building material, the stone was not or rarely used here, possibly because of its strong association with funerary customs (viz. the erection of stones to venerate the dead). The materials in use were brick, mortar, and thatch perishable substances of which nothing has remained. No architectural structure of a period earlier than Mahendra's reign has survived in the Dravidian country. Our knowledge of its early architecture and style, secular and sacred, is based on a few general references in the Sangam literature and sculptural representations at Buddhist Stupas. Pallava cave temples, their particular style, and the birudas (honorific names) and inscriptions engraved into them. It seems worthwhile to dwell for a moment on his birudas as they convey, like nothing else, the attitude of this emotional, almost revolutionary king who loved new ways, challenge, and adventure in the realm of the spirit.

The fashion of assuming birudas instead of using the proper name was initiated by him and abundantly taken up by his successors. His birudas, however, are the most expressive ones and often convey in a few words a wide and deep meaning. They never seem to be the arbitrary or vain flatteries frequently found in later times, but always have an obvious reason behind them and express a thought or a mood of the king. Very often, they emphasize the firmness of his character which would not yield to hostile circumstances and be unflinching in termination and action. Pallavas absolute unconcern about gossip behind his back is expressed in an inscription found on a detached pillar in a ruined mandapa of the Ekambaranatha temple at Kanchipuram where he calls himself '*brhantah akari*' or 'the mad man who has caused it to be made. Probably, he was thus secretly called by others and when he came to know about it, he carved his nickname with a fine sense of humor into the stone— '*brhansix-foldi*'. Other significant birudas are: "With his six fold forces, the hereditary troops and the rest, who raised spotless cowries, hundreds of flags, umbrellas and darkness (the darkness raised by the troops is dust), and who churned the enemy elated with the sentiments of splendor energy (power), he (Pulakesin) caused the splendour of the lord of the Pallavas, who had opposed the rise of his power, to be obscured by the dust of his army and to vanish behind the walls of Kanchipuram.

Rock Architecture

Naturally formed caves under piled-up boulders or in the steep rock faces of the mountains as a refuge for rishis and monks were known in India since very ancient times. In the 2nd century BC, Buddhists began to carve planned temples and monasteries into the rocks and gave them the shape of their structural architecture their chaityas, viharas, and stupas. Soon the Hindus followed and carved temples with pillared halls and rectangular sanctuaries into the mountains. They too copied architectural designs and ornaments from contemporary structures so that those cave sanctuaries resembled in all details their brick and timber originals. Elaborate temples and tombs carved from the rocks are found in other world cultures too, dating back to much earlier times than in India. But nowhere had this fascination of worshipping God in the heart of the mountains seized men with such an intensity as here, inspiring them to the most extraordinary and bold architectural achievements. Between 200 BC and 800 AD, approximately, one thousand cave temples of the great diversity of plan and style came into existence in India. Among them are two and three-storeyed rock temples with vaulted or flat roofs, with verandahs and large halls, labyrinthine with their numberless pillars and dark shrine caves at their far ends. The wealth of ornaments is bewildering and so is the number of sculptured relief figures which emerge from the walls and seem to be filled with the very breath of life; sometimes the rough

stone walls were plastered to a silken smoothness and covered with marvelous fresco paintings, allowing a rare insight into the ways of life, the ornaments, dresses and the expression of men in ancient times. Nothing seemed impossible for the Indian architect and craftsman who brilliantly met the challenge of his first encounter with the material stone. Sandstone and trap formations were among the kinds of stones which were chosen most frequently, the latter particularly by the architects of early rock architecture (Ajanta, Karle, Bhaja, etc.). The soft sandstone, easy to work with, was used by the Chalukyas for their rich and intricate architecture. Its frequent occurrence made it the most employed material for rock architecture and sculpture. In the Krishna valley, it was the marble-like limestone that was used for the stupas and sculptured slabs at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Another kind of stone is the dark bluish soapstone which served the Hoysalas for their elaborate creations. In the Tamil land, it was the granite, the hardest of all rocks, which prevailed all over the country and had to be chosen. The quarrying of monolithic cave temples from granite had not been attempted since the time of Ashoka, certainly because of its extreme hardness and brittleness. Thus, it was after almost a millennium that granite was quarried in India and cave temples carved from it this time by the Pallavas.

Mahendra's Rock Architecture :

The fact that Pallava craftsmen had to deal with entirely new material of unknown potentialities may account for the bare, almost archaic interior of the Mahendra cave temples. There is nothing labyrinthine about them and their pillars are few; No wealth of ornament and sculpture bewilders here, but rather, the resemblance with early Buddhist architecture with which they share the spirit of austerity. Rectangular of the plan with a pillared hall in front of one, three, or five shrines, their most specific feature is the shape of their massive pillars. With contemporary places of worship, all Mahendra cave temples have in common their beautiful sites in Nature, in remote areas, far from the crowded roads of men. To visit them nowadays is a journey into the past, to places with an intensely pure atmosphere, serene and peaceful when associated with an ancient tank or a weathered tree, of the grandeur when situated on top of a mountain, of awe when cut into wild lonesome hills. All of them are marked by the centuries that have passed. Those whose sanctity has been maintained are now obscured by halls and other structures added to them at a much later time and style, thus disrupting their original harmonious contact with the landscape. Others have been debased to humbler purposes and serve as shelter for bats and casual wayfarers or as a storage room for farmers. But, despite all these vicissitudes, none of them have lost their dignified aloofness, the spirit in which they were built by their

royal patron, Mahendra Mahendra cave temples resemble in all details several rock temples of the Vishnukundins, whose territory in the Krishna valley bordered of that of the Pallavas with whom they were connected by matrimonial ties. Mahendra, when he was yuvaraja (crown prince), had lived in the northern Pallava territory for some time as it was the custom for royal princes to be sent to distant provinces to rule there as governors or viceroys.

Moreover, it is testified by an inscription carved into the wall of the ancient Kapotesvara temple at Chezarla near Vijayapuri, in the heartland of the northern Pallava provinces. Here, Mahendra is referred to as Mahendra vikrama Maharaja and also by some of his birudas. Once the first cave temple was cut into the rock of Mandagapattu in Tamil Nadu, the fashion spread quickly and also the appreciation for this new mode of architecture. In relatively quick succession, numerous cave temples came into existence. Rock temples have but one external facade; in those of Mahendra it consists of a row of pillars which are comparatively short and massive and without the clear demarcation of the various parts of a pillar which the shastras prescribe. Their plain archaic shape with straight outlines has a certain similarity to Buddhist pillars or railing posts which may have served as a model. It is in strange contrast to other contemporary pillars, for example, those of the Chalukyas at Badami or the Vakatakas of Ellora which are not only elaborately shaped but also, have a rich ornamental and figural decor. Mahendra's pillars have two large, almost cubical parts at the base and the top, with an intervening part which is leveled off at the corners and has thus an octagonal shape. The cubical parts on top and bottom are called 'sadurams', while the octagonal section in between is the kattu. In later times, lotus medallions are found on top and bottom 'sadurams' which resemble the typical Buddhist lotus motif. The corbel sits on the upper 'saduram' and has curved, rarely angular arms, proportionate in size to the massiveness of the pillar. In later cave temples, they are decorated with roll mouldings called taranga. The mandapa in front of the shrine is generally divided by two rows of pillars, one of them forming the temple facade and the other being in the interior; further, by a difference in the floor level which stresses the classical separation of a mandapa into an ardha and mukha mandapa. There are a few simpler carvings too, merely shrine cells carved from the rock without a hall in front, but the mandapa type is the most common among all Pallava (and other) cave temples.

The shrine cells are either cut behind the mandapa, facing the facade of the temple or else into one of its sidewalls. They are excavated on a higher level than that of the hall and entered by one or several rock-cut steps. The shrine chambers are plain and bare of any ornamentation; they contain neither a relief sculpture of

the deity nor a rock-cut linga. Non- monolithic lingas of black polished stone and uncertain age are often found inserted into a socket hole which was cut into the floor at a later time. Another noteworthy feature is the absence of any water outlet (pranala) from the sanctuary. The abhisheka (ceremonial bath) consisting of liquids like coconut water, milk, honey, ghee, etc., was received in a vessel inside the sanctum itself. A rock-cut pedestal or platform is often found at the rear wall of the shrine, suggesting that an image of the deity was placed upon it. Such images were formed of painted stucco or wood or brick with stucco. The tradition of shaping the deity of the shrine in these materials has been preserved to the present day where wooden or stucco mulasthanas are found in South Indian temples. Remnants of paint on the rear wall of some shrines may indicate that the figure of the god was painted there over a thin coat of plaster. This is confirmed by references in the Sangam literature where temples are described as having their deity painted on the hind wall of the shrine. An outstanding feature of Mahendra cave temples, which are otherwise bare of any sculptures, are the doorkeepers or dwarapalas. They represent the guardian figures of the threshold, a very ancient symbol frequently met within the legend and occult literature. There, they have a frightful, sometimes nonhuman appearance, to test the intrepidity of the seeker before they let him pass and continue his quest. Indian temples too, whether monolithic or structural, early or late, have a guardian of the threshold, and very often, they are the most expressive figures in a temple. They are regarded as semi-divine beings, sometimes emanations of the god inside the shrine.

Pallava dwarapalas are two-armed, wear elaborate ornaments and crowns, and those who guard Siva shrines usually have a muscular, even hefty body, clad in beautifully draped clothes. Sometimes one of them has a pair of curved horns which protrude from either side of his headgear; their meaning has been interpreted differently by different scholars. The smile on dwarapala faces is bright and encouraging and often one of their hands is raised in a gesture of wonder or else of abhaya. Their whole attitude when leaning casually on huge clubs expresses friendliness yet restrained physical strength they are kindly giants who do not want to be terrifying. Vishnu shrines are guarded by gentle youths who often look like royal princes. Instead of a weapon, they have a flower in one of their hands with which they point to the shrine. In the centuries following the time of King Mahendra, his successors continued to carved cave temples in a specific style. By continuing his particular style they were honoring him as the first who had carved his temples into the granite of the South. Not only his successors but also the Pandyas, Muttaraiyars, and other South Indian dynasties

followed in their rock architecture the style which had been initiated by him. At the same time, they created their own refined and developed style of rock.

Structural Temple

After the period of Mahendra and Mamalla, king Rajasimha has introduced and made some alterations of construction which are called 'Structural temples'. Structural temple technique made a new revolution in Pallava Architecture. This technique was also accepted and applied by Chola and Pandyas. In the structural temple, method stones are carved independently in square and rectangle shape and arranged one by one to make walls and ceilings. Through this method they constructed 'Muga Mandapa', 'Artha Mandapa', and above the walls 'Vimana' was also constructed. Surround the walls and pillars, sculptures were carved low or high. This type of temple is followed by Rajasimha and followed by Nandivarman.

Characteristics of Pallava Architecture

The Pallava dynasty maintained its varying forms of architecture for some three centuries, from A.D. 600 to 900, and its productions are classified themselves into two phases, the first of these occupying the seventh century, and the second the eighth and ninth centuries. In the former, the examples were entirely rock-cut, in the latter they, were entirely structural. There were four principal rulers during the period of their power, and the works of each phase had been divided into two groups, comprising four groups in all, each of which is named after the king who was ruling at the time. It will be seen from the above that the rock architecture of the first phase takes two forms, referred to as mandapas, and rathas. In this connection, a mandapa is a carving, while a ratha is a monolith. The former is an open pavilion, and, as carved in the rock, takes the shape of a simple columned hall with one or more cellas in the back wall. A ratha is in reality a car or chariot, provided by the temple authorities for the conveyance of the image of the deity during processions. But here, by common usage, it refers to a series of monolithic shrines, which are exact copies in the granite of certain structural prototypes. Beginning with the rock architecture produced during the reign of Mahendravarman, constituting the earlier of the two groups of the first phase, this represents the mode that found favour with the Pallavas in the first half of the seventh century. The examples of the Mahendra group consist of one type only, namely pillared halls or mandapas. In this connection, it is perhaps the only natural to infer that because the surviving relics of an ancient civilization are those formed out of the lasting rock, people were acquainted solely with that method. It will be shown however that a true picture of the time would represent these rock-cut halls supplemented by a very considerable miscellany of other buildings

structurally formed. Although the latter have perished, owing to their impermanent character, the style and certain distinguishing features of their architecture are preserved by copies cut in the rock. But it is obvious from the examples of the early group, which are fourteen in number, and that the architecture, whether structural or otherwise, of the Pallavas at this particular stage was of a primitive type. Each rock-cut mandapa consists of a pillared hall serving as a kind of portico to one or more cells deeply recessed in the interior wall.

Conclusion:

The Pallavas were the powerful rulers of South India from the 6th century to the 9th Century A.D. However the Pallava rule started from the 4th Century A.D. itself. The Imperial Pallavas dominated the history of South India from the 6th century onwards. The rule was not only known for the importance in political activity, but also in the contribution to culture, education, literature, and fine arts like music, painting, dancing, and architecture. The Pallava period became the origin of many such fields. The achievements of the Pallavas in the field of architecture are very important. It was the period of the origin of Dravidian architecture. Several kinds of religious buildings were constructed. Generally, they are classified into cave temples and structural temples.

Reference:

1. Agarwala Vaudeva., *Heritage of Indian Art*, New Delhi, 1964.
2. Champakalakshmi, R., *Vaisnava Iconography in the Tamil Country*, New Delhi, 1981.
3. Chandramouli, C., *Temples of Tamilnadu Kancheepuram District*, Chennai, 2003.
4. Das, R.K., *Temples of TamilNadu*, New Delhi, 1964.
5. Dhaky M.A., *Encyclopaedia of Indian Architecture*, Vol. I, Varanasi, 1982.
6. Dubreuil, Jouveau, G., *Dravidian Architecture*, (Translated Version) New Delhi, 1987.
7. Dubreuil, Jouveau, G., *The Pallavas*, (Translated Version) New Delhi, 1995.
8. Gajendran L., *Temple Architecture of the Tamils Through The Ages*, Madras, 1983.
9. Gangoly, O.C., *The Art of the Pallavas*, Bombay, 1957.
10. Gopalan R., *History of Pallavas and Kanchi*, New Delhi, 1928.
11. Jagadisa Ayyar, P.V., *South Indian Shrines (Illustrated)*, New Delhi, 1982.
12. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Some Contributions of South Indian Culture*, New Delhi, 1970.
13. Krishnaswami S., *Some contributions of South India to Indian culture*. New Delhi, 1981.
14. Lockwood Michael., *Mahabalipuram and The Pallavas*, Madras, 1982.
15. Longhurst, A.H., *Pallava Architecture Part I To Part IV*, New Delhi, 1982.
16. Mahalingam, T.V., *Inscriptions of the Pallavas*, New Delhi, 1988.
17. Maity, S.K., *Master Pieces of Pallava Art*, Bombay, 1982.
18. Meena, V., *The Temples of South India*, Kanyakumari, 1988.
19. Minakshi C., *Administration and Social Life under Pallavas*, New Delhi, 1970.
20. Nagaswami, R., *Art and culture of Tamilnadu*, Delhi, 1980.
21. Rea, Alexander., *Pallava Architecture*, New Delhi, 1995.
22. Satyamurthy, K., *Handbook of Indian Architecture*, New Delhi, 1991.