



SIGNIFICANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PALLAVA ARCHITECTURE

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Introduction

In Pallava culture temple is not only a place of worship but they act as a centre for intellectual and artistic life. It was the later half of the 7th century that the Pallavas temple structures of South India began to acquire a definite form. 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 the 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.

Pallava art and architecture

Pallava architecture is represent an early stage of Dravidian art and architecture which blossomed to its fullest extent under the Chola Dynasty. The first stone and mortar temples of South India were constructed during Pallava rule and were based on earlier brick and timber prototypes. Pallava architecture was sub-divided into two phases: the rock cut phase and the structural phase. The rock cut phase lasted from the 610 AD to 668 AD and consisted of two groups of monuments, the Mahendra group and the Mamalla group. The Mahendra group is the name given to monuments constructed during the reign of Mahendravarman I (610 AD- 630 AD). The monuments of this group are invariably pillared halls hewn out of mountain faces. These pillared halls or mandapas follow the prototype of Jain temples of the period. The best examples of Mahendra group of monuments are the cave temples at Mandagapattu, Pallavaram and Mamandur. The second group of rock cut monuments belong to the Mamalla group in 630 to 668 AD. During this period free-standing monolithic shrines called *rathas* (chariots)

were constructed alongside pillared halls. Some of the best examples of this style are the Pancha Rathas and Arjuna's Penance at Mahabalipuram.

The second phase of Pallava architecture is the structural phase when free-standing shrines were constructed with stone and mortar brought in for the purpose. Monuments of this phase are of two groups - the Rajasimha group (690 to 800 AD) and the Nandivarman group (800 to 900 AD).¹⁹⁾ The Rajasimha group encompasses the early structural temples of the Pallavas when a lot of experimentation was carried out. The best examples of this period are the Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram and the Kanchi Kailasanathar Temple at Kanchipuram both constructed by Narasimhavarman II who was known as Rajasimha. The best example of the Nandivarman group of monuments is the Vaikunta Perumal Temple at Kanchipuram. During this period, Pallava architecture attained full maturity and provided the models upon which the massive Brihadeeswarar Temple of the Cholas at Thanjavur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram and various other architectural works of note were constructed. Pallava architecture can be sub-divided into two phases - the rock cut phase and the structural phase.

The Rock Cut Phase

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Elements of the Pallavas temple

It was the later half of the 7th century that the Pallavas temple structures of South India began to acquire a definite form. Similar 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:

- ❖ **Sikhara** meaning the tower or the spire. It is the pyramidal or tapering portion of the temple which represents the mythological 'Meru' or the highest mountain peak. The shape and the size of the tower vary from region to region.
- ❖ **Garbhagriha** meaning the womb chamber. It is nucleus and the innermost chamber of the temple where the image or idol of the deity is placed. The chamber is mostly square in plan and is entered by a doorway on its eastern side. The visitors are not allowed inside the garbhagriha in most of the temples, only the priests perform the rituals and worship.
- ❖ **Pradakshina patha** meaning the ambulatory passageway for circumambulation. It consists of enclosed corridor carried around the outside of garbhagriha. The devotees walk around the deity in clockwise direction as a worship ritual and symbol of respect to the temple god or goddess.
- ❖ **Mandapa**, is the pillared hall in front of the garbhagriha, for the assembly of the devotees. It is used by the devotees to sit, pray, chant, meditate and watch the priests performing the rituals. It is also known as 'Natamandira' meaning temple hall of dancing, where in olden days ritual of music and dance was performed. In some of the earlier temples the mandapa was an isolated and separate structure from the sanctuary.
- ❖ **'Antarala'** meaning the vestibule or the intermediate chamber. It unites the main sanctuary and the pillared hall of the temple.
- ❖ **Ardhamandapa** meaning the front porch or the main entrance of the temple leading to the mandapa.
- ❖ **'Gopurams'** meaning the monumental and ornate tower at the entrance of the temple complex, specially found in south India.

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 own dynasty and empire. Pallava 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. 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, 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.

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

1st Phase : Mahendra Group, A.D. 610 to 640, Mamalla Group, A.D. 640 to 690.

2nd Phase : Rajasimha Group, A.D. 690 to 800, Nandivarman Group, c. A.D. 800 to c. 900.

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 an carving, while a ratha is a monolith. 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. The second group of the first phase of Pallava architecture, mainly executed during the reign of Narasimhavarman

I (A.D. 640-68), while still adhering to the rock cut method, in addition to a series of mandapas, is also represented by a number of rathas or monoliths.

Conclusion

The rule of the Pallavas witnessed a lot of cultural achievements in southern India. The Pallava kings were great patrons of art and architecture. The temple is the centre of all aspects of the life of the community and every member of the community contributed in the keeping up and building of temple. The first stone and mortar temples of South India were constructed during Pallava rule and were based on earlier brick and timber prototypes.

Reference

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