

ARCHITECTURE OF PALLAVAS IN TAMILNADU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KANCHIPURAM

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Abstract

The architects of the Pallava Dynasty initiated rock carving to create monolithic structures that resemble temples. A monolithic rock-cut temple is chiselled out of a single massive rock in the shape of masonry or wooden temples including embellishment on walls and other areas showcasing fine work of art and engineering skill. The Pancha Rathas or Pandava Rathas of Mahabalipuram situated on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal are the most excellent architectural edifices typifying monolith Indian rock cut architecture. The five structures shaped as rathas or chariots chiselled out of large block of stone of granite dates back to the seventh century and are named after the five Pandava brothers and their common spouse Draupadi from the great Indian epic Mahabharata. It is marked as Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram by UNESCO and enlisted in its World Heritage Sites list; the site showcases varied Dravidian architecture. It has reflections of the Buddhist Viharas and Chaityas and became templates to temples of much higher dimensions built later in Tamil Nadu. In this paper an attempt is made to reveal the Architecture of Pallavas in Tamilnadu.

Key Words: Architecture, Pallavas, Monuments, Temples of Kanchipuram.

Introduction

The art and architecture of the Pallavas form a very brilliant episode in the history of South Indian Art. Their productions provided the foundation of Dravidian style. 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. The Pallavas built large number of temples in Tondaimandalam. Pallava inscriptions describe elaborately about the temples in Kanchipuram. Pallavas were instrumental in the tradition from rock cut architecture to stone temples. Starting with rock cut temples, Pallava sculptors later graduated to free standing structural shrine which inspired Chola temples of later age. Kanchipuram was known in early Tamil literature as Kachi or Kachipedu but was later Sanskritized as Kanchi or Kanchipuram. The city was referred to by various Tamil works with names like Kanchi, Kanchipedu Kachi and Kanchipuram. The Pallava inscriptions and the inscriptions of the Chalukya dynasty refer the city as Kanchipura. Jaina Kanchi refers to the area around Tiruparutti Kundram. During the British rule, the city was known as Conjeevaram and later as Kanchipuram. The municipal administration was named earlier as Kanchipuram, while the district retains the name Kanchipuram. Almost all the Pallava rulers had made substantial contribution to religion and temple building. These religious institutions stand as testimony to the notable development of art and architecture under the Pallavas.

Architectural styles in Tamilnadu

The rock cut structures were developed during the seventh to ninth century under the rule of the Pallavas. The Pallava rulers led the way of 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 the 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. In the eleventh century the Chola rulers built one of the tallest temples of that time the Brihadeeshwara 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. 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 enclosures.

Importance of Pallavas 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 Tamilnadu. He was a many sided and gifted personality, musician, poet, builder and statesman. 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 as the 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 inscription of his first cave temple at Mandagapattu where he calls himself the inventive or curious minded known as Vichitra-chitta is but one example is this brickless, timberless, metalless and mortarless mansion of Lakshita was caused to be made by King Vichitra chitta for Brahma, Siva and Vishnu. 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 post which may have served as a model. 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. An outstanding feature of Mahendra cave temples, which are otherwise bare of any sculptures, are the doorkeepers or dvarapalas. In the centuries following the time of King Mahendra, his successors continued to carve cave temples in specific style. By continuing his particular style they were honouring him as the first who had carved his temples into the granite of the South. In fact, 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 and structural architecture which differed much from that of Mahendra.

After the period of Mahendra and Mamalla, King Rajasimha has introduced and made some alteration of construction which is called Structural temple. This is a technique made as a new revolution in Pallava Architecture. This technique was also accepted and applied by Chola and Pandyas. In structural temple 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 known as Vimana was also constructed. Surround the walls and pillars, sculptures were carved low or high. This type of temples are followed by Rajasimha and followed by Nandivarman.

Of the Rajasimha mode there are some six examples, comprising the Shore, Isvara, and Makunda temples at Mamallapuram; a temple at Panamalai in the Villupuram district; and the temples of Kailasanatha and of Vaikuntha Perumal at Kanchipuram. Three of these are of major importance as each illustrates a stage not only in the style as a whole, but in the development of the temple formation, in much the same manner as that already shown in the contemporary art of the Chalukyas on the other side of the Peninsula.

Kailasanathar Temple, Kanchipuram

Temple building stands in the fields some distance to the west of the town, and a few hundred yards south-west of the great Shiva temple at Kanchipuram. It is, among the group of Pallava temples, by far the most important. For a South Indian temple, its plan is somewhat peculiar. It is unusual, only through comparison with the generally accepted arrangement seen in Dravidian Hindu temples. The plan is

comprised in a large, and a smaller courtyard, with a central group of shrines placed towards the western extremity of the large one. The central shrine is surmounted by a lofty pyramidal tower. Originally, this group of shrines has stood completely detached. The entrance to the central vimana has been from the east, and still is, although now through the modern ardha mandapam. At each corner, and on the north, south and west sides is a smaller shrine. The original door to the vimana, on the east side, was through a porch with a projection similar to these exterior lesser shrines. These shikharas have originally stood with their summits appearing above the wall head of the court, with nandis and elephants placed alternately on the wall head between them. This would form a most effective grouping as a whole, from the outside; but, for purposes of defence, or for some caprice or other, the spaces between these shikharas have been blocked up with masonry, composed of stone, brickwork and mud, so that now the outside of this court, forms a continuous line of dead wall. In the sculptures one can find as before remarks a complete representation of the Saivite mythology. Shiva shown as the great creator and destroyer, with the deities Brahma and Vishnu each severally represented doing tribute to him. The wealth of design, superiority and minuteness of execution so largely shown, are simply marvelous.

Most of the carvings are covered with plaster, and this to a certain extent hides their beauties, but in the many places where it has fallen off, the original work is clearly seen. The plastering must have been done at some late period, for the stonework underneath, has a weatherworn appearance, only traceable to the action of many centuries of time. The stone floral work is most minutely cut, and, in places where the plaster has been laid on, over the stone carvings, the work underneath has been roughly represented by outline impressions made by some implement on the wet mortar, resembling the work which it covers. The plaster has done one good thing, in preserving the stonework from the effects of the weather; for, being in a soft friable material, the carvings would, in most cases, if not thus protected, have been almost entirely worn away. On the east elevation of the temple, as before stated, eight small shrines stand in a row from north to south on each side of the eastern entrance, six on the right, and two on the left. It would seem from the placing of these, that it has been intended to have an equal number on each side- i.e. six on the left, to correspond with the number on the right.

Sri Vaikuntha Perumal Temple

The temple is also known as Paramesvara Vinnagaram built by Nandivarman Pallavamalla Nandivarman II who is also known as Paramesvara in eighth century A.D. In his Periya Thirumozhi, Thirumangai Alvar has mentioned this temple as Paramesvara vinnagar. He pays glowing tributes to the builder of this temple. He mentions the king as Pallavarkon. Like Kailasanatha temple, this temple is also an outstanding creation of the Pallavas and it retains all the characteristic architectural features of the Pallava temple. There are two noted inscriptions in this temple. The temple is facing west, located in the heart of the town of Big Kanchipuram. There is a temple tank situated on the south-west corner of the outside limit of the temple. Besides an incomplete gopura is in front of the enclosure in which the mahamandapa is found, the shrines of Thayar - goddess Vaikunthavalli, Andal and Alvars are located. These are later additions made

during the Chola period. While these additions are in granite stones, the main temple complex of the Pallava period is made of sand stone.

The temple is well known for its sculptural representations both religious and secular. They are of Vishnu in his various manifestations or incarnations on the outer walls and in the niches of the main shrine and are the hall mark of the Vaishnava iconography such as images like Vamana, Trivikrama, Narasimha, Kaliyamardhana, Naranarayana, Adishesha, Gajendravarada, Samudramatanam, Mohini distributing amruta. The most important feature of this temple is the cloister mandapa or pillared corridor, located along the enclosure wall of the main temple and inner prakara the inner face of which carries the series of sculptural panels. The panelled sculptures narrate the history of the Pallavas from their legendary ancestors down to the time of Nandhivarman II, Pallavamalla the builder of this temple. The most important feature noted on the vimana of this temple is that originally there were figures of roaring lions on top, on all four corners near the neck portion which could be seen in the old elevation plan of this temple. But, at present one can notice the figures of Garuda- the vehicle of Vishnu in stucco in place of those lion figures.

Vidya Vineetha Pallava Paramesvara Graham, Kuram

This temple which was part and parcel of Kanchi during the Pallava period is situated in the north western direction in Kuram village about eleven km from Kanchi. This ancient Pallava temple of lord Shiva is known as Vidya Vineeta Paramesvara Pallava Griha as mentioned in the inscription. The original shrine of the Pallava period has been extended with a mandapa with entrance from the south, and the main temple is facing west. There are two lingas inside the sanctum sanctorum, the rear one is with yoni pitha and the front one is only bona linga. The garbhagriha of the original temple is built in granite stone slabs used as veneer stones on either side with brick core in the middle, in gajaprishtha style. The inner part of which above the adhisthana mouldings has been missing and hence rebuilt with brick and mortar above which is a flat roof without tower or vimana. This early Pallava temple is said to be the first structural temple of Tamil country. At present this temple is a protected monument under the care of Department of Archaeology of Tamil Nadu. The copper plate found in this temple is in Sanskrit grantha and Tamil language which gives the genealogy of the Pallava dynasty which starts from Mahavishnu to Paramesvara. It also mentions the grant of devadana brahmadeya to the Shiva temple.

Airavatesvara Temple

The temple is located on the main road from Kanchipuram to Chennai and had a compound wall all round. Though the main entrance is from the east there is another on the western side also with a small tower over it. The ardhmandapa likewise shows Durga and Ganapathi as they are positioned in later temples. The garbhagriha has a central linga and a Somaskanda panel on the back wall. This temple anticipates some features of later temples but certain features relate better to other temples of Rajasimha time; the string above the prastara, for example recalls the Kailasanatha and the Talagirisvara temple. This temple might have been built during later period of Rajasimha.

Piravatesvara Temple

The small but architecturally beautiful shrine built by the Pallava king Rajasimha stands in a vast courtyard, in the midst of dwelling houses, on the Kanchipuram, Chennai main road. There is a dilapidated tank on the northern side of the temple which once upon a time must have been in good condition and served as the holy tank of this temple. This small west facing dvitala sand stone temple has a short upapita with granite pattika. It is Brahmaccanda up to the second tala, the griva is prismatic, and the sikhara is octagonal. The pattika of padabandha adhistana is made of granite. The devakostha niche to the south contains images of Daksinamurthi; on north and east idols of Shiva with Brahma and Vishnu. Figures also fill the space between the side pilasters and the central devakosthas. These contain on the north an image of Durga and on the south an image of Gajalakshmi. Iconographical details suggest that this temple was built prior to Rajasimha's reign.

Muktesvara Temple

Another Shiva temple known as Muktesvara temple in Shiva Kanchi stands on the north west of Vaikuntha Perumal temple. This temple, in all aspects, is similar to the temple of Matangesvara. This temple is built in sand-stone with massive walls around over a raised basement, and facing west and is approached through a flight of steps in front mukha mandapa which has four pillars. The front two pillars are of Yali form and the two rear ones are cylindrical in form. The interior of the mukha mandapa has some beautiful sculptures in panels like the scene of Ravana lifting Kailasa and Gajasurasamhara on the north, and on the western face of the wall the panels of Gangadhar and Natesa are carved.

Tripuranthakeswara Temple

It is a small shrine in one of the streets between the Kachisvara, and great Shiva temple. The shrine is square, and, like the other ancient temples note, is enclosed by very thick walls and the cell contains a linga; the floor of the porch and shrine is several feet above the ground level. On the east side of the shrine is the porch, and, blocking up its east entrance, an unsightly modern brick mandapam erected without any attempt at the introduction of architectural features.

Matangeswara Temple

The temple stands in the midst of dwelling houses on the west of Government Hospital and north-west of Vaikunthaperumal temple in Shiva Kanchi. The temple is facing west and is approached through flight of steps and pillared mukha mandapa. The front mandapa has four pillars of the Pallava type, each with lion base, tails of which is carved up on the back of the pillar, over the lion is an ornamental band with capital and a square abacus above the pillars has twisted rolls, with upright ornamental band on each face, representing pilasters on each side. These pillars show the development in ornamentation during the period of these types. The temple is built of sandstone, in a usual Pallava style, and built over a raised basement. The exterior walls over, are divided by pilasters, placed at intervals; those at the corners have yali and riders. The north and the east walls have sculptures of different manifestations of lord Shiva. As mentioned below,

the walls on the south has places for the figures and carvings. The vimana is in tri-tala (three tires), square in shape, with circular sikhara over which the kalasam is seen.

Architecture of the Pallavas in Tiruchirapalli region

The Rock Fort Temple is situated on 83 metre high outcrops. The Pallavas initially built this temple, but the Nayaks made use of its naturally fortified position and designed it again. It is a long climb up the 344 steps cut into the stone to the top. The temple complex in the fort complex is a collection of three temples. The Manikka Vinayakar temple at the foot of the hill, dedicated to Lord Ganesha, The Ucchi Pillayar Temple at the top of the hill, dedicated to Lord Ganesha, The Taayumaanavar Koyil Shivastalam, a rock cut temple dedicated to a Nayaka era saint, Taayumaanavar. Mathrubutheswarar, dedicated to Lord Shiva, has a lingam which is a projection of the rock itself. It is reached by a flight of steps on the way to Ucchi Pillayar Temple. There are two rock cut temples in the fort, one in the lower part of the fort called Lower Cave temple and other in the complex outside the Thayumanswamy on the way up to Uchi Pillayar Kovil, called the Upper Cave temple. The rock-cut temple in the hill temple complex was built during the Pallava era and is named Lalitankura Pallaveswaram, with several inscriptions attributed to Mahendravarman I. The Cholas, the Vijayanagara emperors and the Nayaks of Madurai have made extensive contributions here. The two-storey-tall Taayumaanava temples are considered to be a masterpiece of construction.

Pundarikakshan Perumal cave Temple at Thiruvellarai

Pundarikakshan Perumal Temple is in Thiruvellarai, a village in the outskirts of Tiruchirappalli in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, is dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu. Constructed in the Dravidian style of architecture, the temple is glorified in the Divya Prabandha, the early medieval Tamil canon of the Azhwar saints from the sixth to ninth centuries AD. It is one of the 108 Divyadesam dedicated to Vishnu, who is worshipped as Pundarikakshan and his consort Lakshmi as Pankajavalli. Pundarikakshan Perumal temple has been built by the Pallavas, as seen from the three inscriptions in its two rock-cut caves. Two of the inscriptions are dated from the period of Nandivarman II 732–796 AD and the other from the period of Dantivarman 796–847 AD. The temple construction completed presumably during the time of Dantivarman. The influence of Azhwars, the Vaishanva saints of the seventh to ninth centuries helped spread Vaishnavism to a greater extent among the public and the ruling Pallava kings, who became temple patrons. Six daily rituals and three yearly festivals are held at the temple, of which the chariot festival, celebrated during the Tamil month of Chitra that is March–April, is the most prominent. The festival is unique in the state as a community feast is offered, a custom stretching back many centuries. The temple is maintained and administered by the Hindu Religious and Endowment Board of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

The Pallava kings were generous patrons of art and architecture. During their reign, long free standing temples appeared in South India, which had previously been lacking. The Pallavas pioneered the Dravidian architectural style. The Pallava reign also saw a shift in temple architecture from Rock-cut temples to Free-standing temples. Pallavas are most noted for their patronage of architecture, the finest example being the Shore Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Mahabalipuram. The Pallavas, who left behind magnificent sculptures and temples, established the foundations of medieval South Indian architecture. It is clear that Pallava architectural features are unique and they are great works of cultural contribution. Undoubtedly, Pallavas were the great masters of the art and were pioneers in this artistic tradition. Their cultural edifices remain as examples of superior craftsmanship and exemplary architecture.

End Notes

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