

CHAPTER - V

**SIGNIFICANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS
OF PALLAVA ARCHITECTURE**

Temple and Society

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 limited information has survived about the Hindu temples and their builders which are mostly inscribed on the stone slabs and metal plates and on manuscripts written on the plant leaves. The information which survived explains that the temple building, especially in stone and brick was carried out as a result of royal patronage¹. Building of temple in stone was an expensive affair and expresses the physical power and economic resources of the ruler. Other than royal patrons, association of wealthy merchants and 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 lamp burning.

¹ S.B.Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Methods*, (London, 1961), p.106.

In Pallava culture temple is not only a place of worship but they act as a centre for intellectual and artistic life.² 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. 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 evidences of Brihadeshvara temple, Thanjavur (1010 AD) shows that the temple had 600 employers. 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. Although the temple is the hub of different religious and cultural activities, the nucleus is the main shrine.

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 form³. Similar to 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:

² K.R. Srinivasan, *The Pallava Architecture of South India*, (New Delhi, 1964), p.56.

³ Sharmin Khan, *History of Indian Architecture, Buddhist, Jains and Hindu Period*, (New Delhi, 2014), p.104..

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

- i. '**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.
- ii. '**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.
- iii. '**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.
- iv. '**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.
- v. '**Antarala**' meaning the vestibule or the intermediate chamber. It unites the main sanctuary and the pillared hall of the temple.

- vi. '*Ardhamandapa*' meaning the front porch or the main entrance of the temple leading to the mandapa.
- vii. '*Gopurams*' meaning the monumental and ornate tower at the entrance of the temple complex, specially found in south India.

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 two⁴.

There are also other distinct styles in peripheral areas such as Bengal, Kerala and the Himalayan valleys. This dissertation focuses on The Nagara or 'the northern style' and the Dravidian or the southern style of Hindu temple architecture.

Dravidian or Southern 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 building with a projecting porch and decorative pillars. The roof of the temple had small structure which later emerged as the sikhara⁵. The entire temple is simple with

⁴ S.Maheswari, & R.Garg, *Ancient Indian Architecture from Blossom to Bloom*, (New Delhi, 2001), p.222.

⁵ Krishna deva, *Temples of North India*, (New Delhi, 1997), p.366.

minimal decoration. Some of the examples from this period are Lad Khan temple and Durga temple of Aihole.

The rock cut structures were developed during the 7th -9th 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 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.

The Construction Technology of Pallava Temple

The construction of 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 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

⁶ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Culture and History of the Tamils*, (Calcutta, 1964), p.102.

techniques were passed on verbally from generation to generation among the temple architects. One of the most important surviving records about the construction of temple is in the palm leaf manuscript which explains the details of the building operation of Pallavas⁷.

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 empire⁸.

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, 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 brickless, timberless, metalless and mortarless

⁷ Alexander Rea, *Pallava Architecture* Vol.I, (Madras, 1995), p.189.

⁸ G.Jouveau-Dubreuil, *Pallava Antiquities*, Vol.I,(New Delhi, 1994),p.23.

mansion of Lakshita was caused to be made by King Vichitra chitta for Brahma, Siva and Vishnu.”

“Brickless, timberless, metalless... “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 ways⁹.

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. 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, as nothing else, the attitude of this uncopied 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

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.59-60.

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 king¹⁰. Very often, they emphasize the firmness of his character which would not yield to hostile circumstances and was unfaltering 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 humour into the stone— '*brhantah akari*'. Other significant birudas are:

<i>aluptakamah</i>	one who will not abandon his quest or desires;
<i>lokasalyah</i>	the arrow to the world (of opponents to his new ways
<i>kalahapriyah pugapiduka</i>	lover of fight or dispute; the thunderbolt that cannot be split;
<i>pravrtta matrah drdhagathi</i>	always progressive alone; of unswerving, persevering gait;
<i>citrakara puli</i>	the tiger among artists;

The last of these may be the most eloquent of his *birudas*, disclosing the king's hidden and probably strongest ambition to be accepted as the great genius of his country.

¹⁰ K.R. Srinivasan, *The Pallava Architecture of South India*, (New Delhi, 1964), p.236.

“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 heroism and 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.¹¹”

Rock Architecture

Naturally formed caves under piled up boulders or in the steep rock faces of the mountains as 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 originals¹².

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 now here 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 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

¹¹ T.V.Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, (Madras,1955),p.177.

¹² *Ibid.*,

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 marvellous 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 stone¹³.

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 which was used for the stupas and sculptured slabs at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Another kind of stone is the darkbluish soap stone 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 brittleness¹⁴. Thus, it was after almost a millennium that granite was quarried in India and cave temples carved from it this time by the Pallavas.

¹³ K.R. Srinivasan, *The Pallava Architecture of South India*, op.cit., p.201.

¹⁴ K.R. Srinivasan, *Cave Temples of the Pallava*, op.cit., p.133.

Mahendra's Rock Architecture

The fact that Pallava craftsmen had to deal with an 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 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 passed¹⁵.

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 storage room for farmers. But, in spite of 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 a number of rock temples of the Vishnukundins, whose territory in the Krishna valley

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

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 Mahendravikrama Maharaja and also by some of his birudas¹⁶.

J.Dubreuil, state that “...it was on the banks of the Krishna, when admiring the caves of Undavalli, Bezwada and Mogalrajapuram that Mahendra entertained the idea of spreading in the Tamil country the mode of cutting temples into the rock.” Be this as it may, the style of the Vishnukundin cave temples and those of Mahendra is exactly the same. 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 post which may have served as a model¹⁷. 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

¹⁶ C. Minakshi , *Kanchi -An Introduction to the Architecture*, (New Delhi, 1974).p.55.

¹⁷ Parul Pandya Dhar (ed.), *Indian Art history -changing perspectives*, (New Delhi, 1996), p.101.

large, almost cubical parts at the base and the top, with an intervening part which is levelled 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 latertimes, 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 carvingstoo, 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 side walls. They are excavated on a higher level than that of the hall and entered by one or several rock cut steps. In Mandagapattu, Mahendra's first excavation, the level difference is just a small step of about three inches; in later cave temples it would grow higher until it would provide the space for a moulded adisthana (base) running along the front wall of the shrines, interrupted only by the rocksteps at their entrance.

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 obviously 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 shrine¹⁸.

An outstanding feature of Mahendra cave temples, which are otherwise bare of any sculptures, are the doorkeepers or dvarapalas. They represent the guardian figures of the threshold, a very ancient symbol frequently met with in 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 dvarapalas are two armed, wear elaborate ornaments and crowns and those who guard Siva shrines usually have a muscular, even hefty body,

¹⁸ T.V.Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, (Madras, 1955), p.147.

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 scholars¹⁹.

The smile on dvarapala faces are 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 carve caves 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 him²⁰. At the same time, they created their own refined and developed style of rock and structural architecture which differed much from that of Mahendra.

Structural Temple

After the period of Mahendra and Mamalla, king Rajasimha has introduced and made some alteration of construction which is called 'Structural temple'. Structural temple technique made a new revolution in Pallava Architecture. This technique was also accepted and applied by Chola and Pandyas. In structural temple method stones are carved independently in square and rectangle shape and arranged one by one to

¹⁹ K.R. Srinivasan, *The Pallava Architecture of South India*, op.cit., p.122.

²⁰ *Ibid.*,

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 temples are followed by Rajasimha and followed by Nandivarman.²¹

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 time²².

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. 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

²¹ Alexander Rea, *Pallava Architecture* Vol.I, op.cit., p.136.

²² *Ibid.*,

here, by common usage, it refers to a series of monolithic shrines, which are exact copies in 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 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.²³ 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 definitely 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.

The exterior presents a facade formed of a row of pillars, each pillar averaging seven feet in height with a diameter of two feet, the shafts being square in section except for the middle third which is made into an octagon. An immense and heavy bracket provides the capital, the composition as a whole suggesting as its origin a very elemental structure in which a ponderous wooden beam and bracket were the main features. So plain and simple is the Mahendra type that in the earliest

²³ L.Gajendran, *Temple Architecture of The Tamils Through The Ages*, (Madras, 1983), p.102.

examples, as at Mandagapattu and Trichirapally, there is not even a cornice above the pillars, but later a roll moulding was added as at Pallavaram²⁴. Afterwards, at Mogalrajapuram, this roll cornice was ornamented at intervals with a motif known as a kudu (acroteria), which is readily identified as the Buddhist chaitya arch much reduced and converted into an object of decoration.

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. Practically all the examples of this group are found on one site, marking the position of the deserted seaport town of Mamallapuram, and named after its royal founder, one of whose titles was Mahamalla. This archaeological record of the one-time might of the Pallavas lies towards the mouth of the Palar river, thirty two miles south of Madras, and indicates that here was the harbour for Kanchipuram²⁵, the capital seat of the dynasty, situated some forty miles up the river. Here the configuration of the coastline was singularly suitable for its purpose, as rising out of the sand near the seashore was, a large rocky hill of granite gneiss, aligned from north to south, measuring half a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide with a height of over a hundred feet. Detached from this main prominence, and towards the south, was another and much smaller rocky outcrop, consisting originally of a whale-backed mound of granite about two hundred and fifty feet long and fifty feet high. It was out of these two formations that the rock architecture of the Mamalla group was carved and sculptured. As already implied, however, in conjunction with the rock productions, there was a large amount of

²⁴ K.R. Srinivasan, *Cave Temples of the Pallavas*, op.cit., p.253.

²⁵ T.V.Mahalingam, *Kanchipuram in Early South Indian history*, (New Delhi, 1968), pp.104-106.

structural architecture of considerable importance. There are still visible foundations of a citadel which may be traced on the heights of the large hill and within this were palaces and similar royal residences, apparently built on raised masonry basements,' while buildings themselves consisted of a wooden framework filled in by brick and plaster walls. As was not a common practice, therefore the secular buildings structural while the halls for religious purposes were quarried out of the natural rock²⁶.

One other feature is observable at Mamallapuram, now almost obliterated, but which when in full use gave the town, and particularly its religious architecture, some' of its character. This was a well designed and extensive water system, drawn from the Palar river, and distributed by means of canals and tanks to all parts of the port. They are indistinct but none the less definite traces of this installation, so that in its palmy days such a constant supply of running water must have made it a very pleasing seaside resort. But this was not provided solely for public use, it was also maintained for ritualistic purposes, as proved by, the design of some of the temples in which cisterns and, conduits appear to have formed an essential part of the scheme.

Of the rock cut examples of Pallava architecture at Mamallapuram, the mandapas may be referred to first: these carved halls are ten in number, and are to be found on various suitable sites on the main hill. In most instances ; .. they are of the same general character and proportions as those of the previous group, but much more highly developed, a proof of the rapid progress that took place during the short period that intervened. None of them is large, their approximate dimensions being as follows :- width of facade 25 feet; height from 15 to 20 feet; depth overall including cella 25 feet; pillars 9 feet high and 1 to 2

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.112.

feet wide diameter; cellas, rectangular and from 5 to 10 feet side. It will be seen from these measurements that the mandapas are relatively shallow halls or porticos, and are remarkable therefore not for their size but for the exceptional character of their design and execution. This character is shown in two ways, first in their architectural treatment, and secondly in the disposal and quality of the sculpture combined with the architectural forms²⁷. As regards the former, except for the pillars which are the main features of the composition as a whole, the actual architectural treatment is of the simplest kind. On the facade there is a roll cornice decorated with chaitya arch motifs (kudu), and above this a parapet, or attic member, formed of miniature shrines, a long one alternating with a short one.

The remainder of the scheme both inside and out consists principally of pilasters of mouldings acting as a framework of the figure sculpture, the display of which appears to have been one of the prominent objects of the mandapa idea. For it is fairly clear that the rock cutter was primarily and fundamentally a sculptor, and these pillared halls were regarded very largely as a means of presenting to the visiting devotees pictures of mythological and other subjects produced in this plastic manner.

Not that the treatment of the architectural features was in any way inferior to the relief work, some of the architraves, cornices and strings courses being as finely wrought as the figures. As an instance the precision with which the basements were designed and executed is admirably shown in the Varaha mandapa, where the stylobate has been sunk so as to form a long narrow receptacle for water. Apart from the manner in which this important part of the facade has been conceived and carried out so as to compel ablutions before entering the temple,

²⁷ Michael Lockwood, *Mahabalipuram and The Pallavas*, (Madras,1982),p.149.

it is an excellent illustration of the artistic handling of a purely material adjunct.

As in all rock architecture of a similar type, the pillars, especially those of the facade, are the principal elements in the composition, and those of the Mamalla group are no exception. The beginning of the Pallava order of the column has already been referred to in the works of the previous reign, but the Mamllapuram mandapas show this feature in its rich maturity. In some of the examples the crude block bracket is still much in evidence, primitive traditions usually die hard, but on the other hand some of the pillars as for instance those on the exterior of the Mahishasura mandapa are singularly graceful conceptions, when the purpose and peculiar technique are taken into consideration²⁸. A further development, with the addition of the heraldic lion forming the lower half of the shaft, is seen in the facade pillars of the Varaha mandapa, one of the most finished examples in the entire group.

But the culmination of this lion form of pillar is represented by the two interior columns of the former mandapa, so different from any of the others, yet refining and combining all their attributions, implying the accomplishment of a craftsman of more than ordinary powers. The lion as a pillar base is not an uncommon motif in the architecture of several civilizations. It is found in late Roman work, and also in Lombardic Romanesque buildings of Europe dating from the eleventh century, but in these occidental examples the shaft is usually supported on the animal's back. In the Pallava type the pillar is made to rest on the sedent animal's head, and, in the case of the lion in the Mahishasura interior, it is not the homed grotesque of the mandapas, but a more natural leonine figure yet sufficiently conventionalised to suit its architectonic purpose. The

²⁸ N.S.Ramaswami (ed.), *2000 years of Mamallapuram*, Vol. I, (New Delhi, 1975),p.155.

remaining members forming this particular class of pillar are equally well designed, the fluted and banded shaft (stambham), the refined necking (tadi), the elegant curves of the “melon” capital (kumbha), and its lotus form (idaie) above, with its wide abacus (palagai), are all so united as to produce an “order” of marked propriety and stability. Passing now to the other type of rock architecture of Mamalla’s reign, namely the series of monolithic temples called rathas, and widely known as the “Seven Pagodas”, these exemplify an entirely novel form of expression. Although in much the same architectural style as the mandapas, they enunciate a completely different idea²⁹.

Each is obviously a replica, quarried out of the whale-backed rock previously mentioned, of a separate type of religious structure evidently common at the time, and built largely of wood, as is shown by the Yama heads, rafters and purlins faithfully represented in the granite reproduction. Each example, with all these features is so well preserved as to be perfectly comprehensible, but the question is to once arises, what was the object and intention of recording so faithfully and with such infinite toil each architectural type, as if it were a full sized model, or to be regarded as a standard pattern for the guidance of the temple builders? Solitary, unmeaning, and clearly never used, as none of their interiors is finished, sphinx-like for centuries these monoliths have stood sentinel over mere emptiness, the most enigmatical architectural phenomenon in all India, truly a co riddle of the sands”. Each a lithic cryptogram as yet undeciphered, there is little doubt that the key when found will disclose much of the story of early temple architecture in Southern India³⁰.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,

³⁰ C.Sivaramamurti, *Mahabalipuram*, (New Delhi, 2004), p.166.

As with all the rock productions of the Pallavas, the rathas are of no great size, the largest measuring only 42 feet long, the widest 35 feet, and the tallest is but 40 feet high. They number eight in all and, with one exception, are derived from the two types of structure hitherto attributed to the Buddhists, the vihara or monastery, and the chaitya hall or temple. The exception is that known as Draupadi's ratha, the smallest of the series, as well as being the simplest and most finished. This example is merely a cell or pansala, and the shape of the roof indicates plainly that it was a copy of a thatched structure, most probably a form of portable shrine belonging to a village community, as shown by its sub structure³¹.

For its base is supported by figures of animals, a lion alternating with an elephant, their attitudes suggesting that they are bearers of a heavy burden. Such an idea is occasionally represented in Indian architecture of the temples and shrines borne along by supernatural creatures, or supported on poles by grotesque human beings, thus implying that these religious constructions were sometimes not fixtures, but could be carried in procession or moved about from place to place.³² The portable shrine represented by Draupadi's ratha may have some connection with certain models of tabernacles depicted on the gable ends of the remaining rathas.

A remarkable feature of the Pallava rock architecture is the fine quality of the figure sculpture which adorns both mandapas and rathas. But in its plastic form it was only part of a movement, which, extending over the whole of southern India, found expression in a school of sculpture of a grand classical order. Most of this is in the rock cut technique, of which that on the Kailasa at Ellora, and at Elephanta, are

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.177.

³² Agarwala Vaudeva, *Heritage of Indian Art*, (New Delhi, 1964), p.188.

rather later examples, but some of the finest and earliest productions were the work of the Pallavas. These figure subjects at Mamallapuram are endowed with that same passionate spirit which pulsates in the Christian art of Europe of the corresponding date, but with even a finer feeling for form and more experienced craftsmanship. There is a notable sense of restraint and refined simplicity specially in the bas reliefs of single figures, yet even more pronounced in several of the larger sculptured dramas. As for instance in the Vishnu panel of the Mahishasura mandapa, which has some of the breadth and rationality shown in the sculpture of the Greeks towards the end of their first period. In view therefore of the superb quality of the Pallava plastic art it is not surprising that the schools of sculpture which developed out of this movement in Java and Cambodia displayed also the same high artistic character.

From the unfinished state of nearly all the rock architecture at Mamallapuram, much of it lacking that final effort which would have made these shrines really serviceable, it would seem as if some unexpected political cataclysm had intervened, causing the rock cutter to throw down his mallet and chisel and hasten away, never to return. History records no such upheaval, so that an explanation must be looked for elsewhere. What these incomplete shrines reveal is that the patronage of Narasimha Mamalla having ended with his death, under his successor Rajasimha a new architectural movement began³³. For with the rule of this king, the rock method ceased, no further labour was put either into the excavated mandapas or the monolithic rathas, in a word as a form of expression it became obsolete.

³³ K.R. Srinivasan, *The Pallava Architecture of South India*, op.cit,p.123.

Instead of the pre eminent yet inflexible carving of the granite, the art of structural building was taken up, as it was being realized that this process gave greater powers to the work man, it provided him with more freedom, so that he could place his structure where he pleased, and make it what shape he liked.” The only limit to his performance was the extent ‘of his knowledge of the principles of the mason’s Craft, and the size and strength of his materials. With the reign of Rajasimha therefore the second phase of Pallava architecture opens, in which all the buildings are entirely structural. The production of the first temples of this phase, and called the Rajasimha Group, began towards the end of the seventh century and occupied the whole of the eighth century, during which period several notable buildings were erected.

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 Chalukyans on the other side of the Peninsula. These three examples are the .. Shore” temple, and the two temples at Kanchipuram. The first Pallava building to be constructed of dressed stone was the” Shore” temple, so named in modern times as it stands on the extreme foreshore of the ancient port.

Although the earliest known production in this technique of the Pallavas, as it dates from the last years of the seventh century, the materials of which it is composed and the manner in which they have been applied indicate a certain amount of latent experience in the art of building construction. As a proof’ of its excellent workmanship for over

a thousand years the "Shore" temple has endured on this exposed spur of rock, buffeted for half the year by the monsoon rollers, at other times³⁴.

Yet even with the ceaseless activity of the sea on the one side, and the insidious menace of the drifting sands on the other, its twin towers are still erect and its shrines remain intact, immutable it stands, a silent record of a great but almost forgotten people.

Owing to its unusual position, and also to the intention of its creators, the plan of the Shore temple is not according to custom. The underlying idea was that the cella should face eastwards overlooking the sea, so that the shrine might be illuminated by the first rays of the rising sun, as well as being plainly observable to those approaching the harbour in ships. For it was a landmark by day and a beacon by night, as out amongst the breakers still rises a stone pillar on which a lamp would be placed to shine across the waters and guide the mariner to his anchorage.

Such an arrangement, however, with the cella actually on the ocean's brim, left no room for a forecourt or assembly hall, and not even for an entrance gateway, all of which had to be placed at the rear of the shrine. In this instance therefore the central building is surrounded by a massive enclosure wall, entry being obtained through the western side of the courtyard which was left entirely open. But quite early in its production this simple scheme was complicated by two additional shrines being attached, rather asymmetrically, to its western end, one of which provides the smaller spire, as well as what at first sight appears to be the main entrance. It is these two supplementary shrines which have converted the Shore temple into a double towered monument; unconventional in its grouping, 'and a little difficult to comprehend.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.147.

While it is quite clear that the 'central buildings comprising the Shore temple are a development of the monolithic rathas of the previous phase, specifically from that of the Dharmaraja ratha, the difference in treatment between the two types of the temple is considerable. The change in technique from the' rockcut to the structural partly accounts for this, and the interval separating the execution of the two productions, although not great, would also have some effect. And there was a new ruler on the throne, whose personal predilections may have had some influence. But even these factors, significant though they may be, can hardly account for the difference not only in temper and in trend, but in the forms as well, which appear in this first structural example of the Pallava period. In principle the monolithic Dharmaraja ratha and the Shore temple are the same, there is the square lower story, and the pyramidal tower in diminishing tiers above in both

conceptions, but there is another and original ideal motivating the design of the Shore temple, particularly noticeable in the shape of the tower³⁵. This is shown in the obvious desire of tile builders to rid themselves of the vihara incubus, and to devise a building more architecturally rational, in a word to shake off the shackles of its prototype and give effect to their own rising genius.

And so we see in the composition of the Shore temple, more rhythm and more buoyancy than in the monolithic rathas, a lightness and a soaring quality that was however not entirely due to the more tractable technique. But there is also another important component in the structural example, which although relatively a matter of detail, was destined to give not a little of its character to the later Pallava art. This is the appearance in the architectural scheme of a very pronounced

³⁵ N.S. Ramasamy, *Seven Pagodas, The Art And History of Mahabalipuram*, (Madras, 1970),p.159.

type of pilaster, a rampant lion in prominent relief, and which finds a place wherever such a structural form with an ornamental support is required. In the Shore temple this heraldic lion, erect and holding up a Dravidian capital, projects from every angle, and is also introduced at intervals around the lower part of the entire building. As the style progressed this motif became more frequent and more characteristic so that it may be generally regarded as the identifying symbol of the Pallava style. As in the case of numerous motifs in Indian art, the origin of this rampant lion pilaster is a mystery, it suddenly appears in the temple design without any marker pre figurement, save for one small representation of it on the unfinished ratha of Valaiyankutai of the previous reign in the shape of an insignificant bracket³⁶. It is strange that from such a rudimentary detail much of the character of the Narasimha architecture should have developed.

There was however considerably more in the formation of the Shore temple than the central buildings described above, as these were surrounded by an outer rectangular enclosure containing many interesting features. In the first place it seems evident that portions of the ground plan of the enclosure consisted of a system of shallow cisterns, which could be flooded on occasion, so that it resolves itself into a type of water temple. Some of the conduits and receptacles may still be traced, and it is clear that they constituted an essential part of the layout. The water to feed this system was brought by a canal and conveyed by sluices throughout the building, any overflow being carried down a rocky cascade in the rear of the shrine and into the sea. The surrounding wall was an imposing structure, its parapet and coping crowned by figures of kneeling bulls, while at close intervals all round

³⁶ *Ibid.*,p.190.

the exterior projected boldly carved lion pilasters; on the western side admission was obtained through a richly ornamented doorway. This doorway was the main entrance and led into a corridor one side of which was formed by the inner face of the enclosure wall, the other by a large rectangular building, probably an outer mandapa, but only the foundations remain. Halfway along each of the long sides of the corridor, there was a pillared arcade containing an altar, possibly provided for Naga worship, as all the courts and passages around could be filled with water. A feature of this corridor was a series of carved panels on the side walls, each containing a figure subject illustrating some.

Not long after the erection of the Shore temple at Mamallapuram, another Siva temple the Kailasanatha was begun at Kanchipuram, the capital seat of the Pallavas, situated forty five miles south-west of Madras. Kanchipuram, in the early centuries of the Christian era, was a place of considerable importance, probably the leading city of the Carnatic if not of Southern India³⁷. As the home of Dharmapala, the great commentator, a contemporary of the famous Buddhaghosa of the fifth century, it appears to have been a centre of intellectual life, while its fine series of temples are proof of its religious activity extending over a long period. For here may be studied the Dravidian style of temple architecture from its genesis under the Pallavas beginning in the 6th century to its culmination at Vijayanagar as late as the 15th and 16th centuries, a period of a thousand years of development. The temple of Ekambaranatha illustrates in one or other of its compartments every feature of this evolution, while a study of the Kailasanatha should form the basis of any investigation of the Dravidian building art. Dealing first therefore with the latter example, the main shrine of this structure was

³⁷ C. Sivamamurthy and B.Narasimhah, *World Heritage Sites, Mahabalipuram*, (New Delhi, 006).p.78.

built during the reign of Rajasimha, so that its approximate date is A.D. 700, although the actual completion of the temple as a whole was undertaken by his son Mahendravarman II, but, with the exception of a few additions to the east end of the enclosure, it is all as originally conceived.

Every aspect of this temple is replete with informative features, as it illustrates in all its parts the trends of the style. The cells comprising the interior of the enclosing wall, the design of the wall with its parapet of cupolas, the sturdy, primitive shape of the mandapa pillars, the constant repetition of the rampant lion pilaster, these, and the composition of the building as a whole, make the grey pile of the Kailasanatha a most fascinating study. Yet undoubtedly its most interesting portion is the pyramidal tower or sikhara for it is in the distinctive treatment of this feature that the development of the Dravidian style may be best observed. From the somewhat compressed forms of the monolithic rathas to the more loosely knit elements of the Shore temple, we now arrive at a further effort to present the sikhara in a suitable architectural form, well proportioned, substantial, yet at the same time rhythmic in its mass and elegant in its outlines. Such was evidently the aim of its designers, and within certain limits some of these desired conditions have been fulfilled. There is still however occasion for more refinement in the shape of this tower, for although it marks another stage of evolution, it obviously falls short of that perfected maturity which was subsequently achieved.

Apart from the main structure of this temple there are certain arrangements in connection with the entrance to the courtyard which are noteworthy. This part appears to have been produced under the direction of Mahendravarman III, and evidently marks a deviation from

the original plan. In place of what should have been the main gateway, a large subsidiary chapel has been introduced, complete with cella, vestibule and stairway approach, the actual doorways into the courtyard being relegated to openings on either side. Although a place of worship, the Mahendravarmanesvara shrine is built in such a manner, as, with its accompaniments, to suggest the beginnings of the gopuram, or entrance pylon³⁸. That the masons were by this time realizing the importance of selection in the matter of their building materials is shown by the fact that in the Kailasanatha” while the foundations of the temple are of granite, the upper portions are of sandstone, thus providing a hard and substructure to carry its weight and a more plastic substance for the sculpture. Unfortunately at a somewhat distant date repairs to the latter became necessary, when these were effected rather ruthlessly by means of concrete.

About a decade later, the temple of Vaikuntha Perumal, also at Kanchipuram, was built, and here the Pallava style of architecture is seen in its most mature form. This temple is slightly larger and more spacious in its proportions than the previous example, and instead of the principal parts such as the cloisters, portico, and sanctuary, being separate buildings, they are amalgamated into one architectural whole. Square in plan, having a side of nearly 90 feet, the eastern or front portion is carried forward 28 feet to provide for an entrance portico. The exterior of this formation presents what might have been a high and somewhat uncompromising outer wall, but its surfaces have been so enriched with semi-structural and ‘ornamental motifs that it blends admirably with the sikhara towering above the whole composition but actually rising from the shrine within. Inside the outer wall are the cloisters consisting of

³⁸ R. Nagaswamy (ed.,) *South Indian Studies*, (Madras, 1978), p.202.

a colonnade of lion pillars, with a passage for processions continued right round the building between thin and the central structure³⁹. The central edifice is in two parts, the sanctuary and its portico, but these are so combined as to form this portion into one building. The portico, of what corresponds to the mandapa, is interiorly a square compartment 21 feet side, having a transverse aisle of eight pillars, and it leads by means of a vestibule to the cella, a rectangular chamber over which rises the pyramidal vimana tower.

This vimana is square in plan, externally having a side of 47 feet, and its tower rises to a height of 60 feet from the ground. It is in four stories, each with a passage round its exterior, a cella in the centre, and a corridor encircling two of these for circumambulation. Although there is not in the Vaikunta temple the living freshness and ingenuousness of the Kailasanatha, yet it has many commendable features, for it displays an economy in the disposal of its parts together with a skilful marshalling of the main elements so as to produce a unity of conception, which has resulted in a building having considerable architectural merit.

Thus, 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 art.

³⁹ C.Chandramouli, *Temples of Tamilnadu -Kancheepuram District*, (Chennai, 2003), p.142.