

## Pallava Art and Architecture

The **Pallava dynasty** was an Indian dynasty that existed from 275 CE to 897 CE, ruling a portion of southern India. They gained prominence after the eclipse of the Satavahana dynasty, in which the Pallavas served as feudatories.

Pallavas became a major power during the reign of Mahendravarman I (571 – 630 CE) and Narasimhavarman I (630 – 668 CE) and dominated the Telugu and northern parts of the Tamil region for about 600 years until the end of the 9th century.

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.

**Pallava art and architecture** 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.

Starting with rock cut temples, built between 695 and 722, and archaeological excavations dated to the 6th century and earlier. Pallava sculptors later graduated to free-standing structural shrines which inspired Chola temples of a later age. Some of the best examples of Pallava art and architecture are the Kailasanathar Temple at Kanchipuram, the Shore Temple and the Pancha Rathas of Mahabalipuram. Akshara was the greatest sculptor of their time.

### PALLAVA ARCHITECTURE

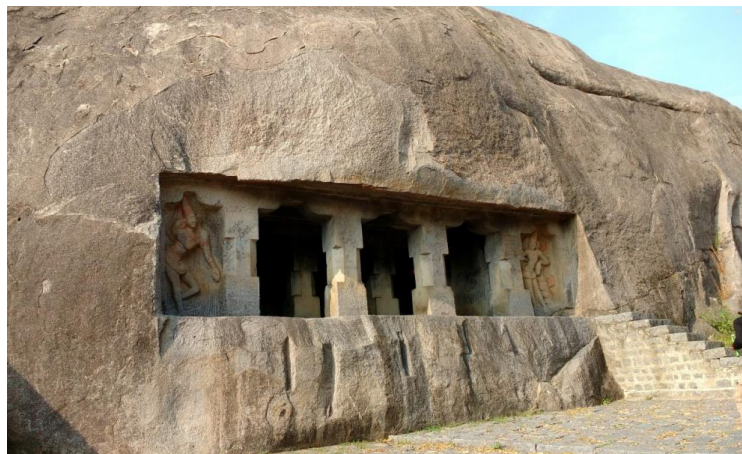
#### History

Pallava architecture can be sub-divided into two phases - the rock cut phase and the structural phase.

- The Rock Cut Phase

The rock cut phase lasted from the 610 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 - 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* were constructed alongside pillared halls. Some of the best examples of this style are the Pancha Rathas and Arjuna's Penance at Mahabalipuram.



The Cave temples at Mandagapattu

- The Structural Phase

The structural phase was 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).<sup>[9]</sup> 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.



The Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram

### **Pallava Sculpture and Architecture Style:**

The Pallavas sculptors had a lot of passion and the slender skills of the artists in the carving of the sculptures can be seen. Pallava dynasty was a famous dynasty in South India. The Pallava kings played a patron role to flourish art and architecture in their kingdom. The present Pallava art and sculptures are dated back to the 610 AD to 690 AD. Probably the rock cut caves also came into existence during the period of Pallavas. The kings of Pallavas encouraged the artists to construct the temples and replaced the old temples with innovative rock sculptures and architecture.

## **Pallavas and Their Style of Sculptures:**

During the rule of Pallavas, the artists improved their skills of excavating temples from the rocks. There were special institutions to teach the techniques of carving the architecture. They brought the Dravidian style of art and introduced in the temple construction. The development of temple and architecture changed from one king to another. They brought the cave based constructing temples to structural temples. The Pallavas constructed many monuments around the temples. According to the Historians, the temple construction styles changed in four stages.

The great Mahendravarma I encouraged the rock cut temples, we can see them at Mahendravadi, Mamandur, Dalavanm, Vallan and some other places in Tamilnadu. We can see the second stage of Pallava style of temples at Mamallapuram. Here the temple's architecture constructed by Monolithic rathas and Mandapas. Narasimhavarman constructed the temples with magnificent architectural monuments. The mandapas in the temples had the decorations with stunning sculptures, which were narrating the stories of Hindu epics.

## **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.

## **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 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 Pallavas.

## 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.

## Mahendra's Rock Architecture

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. 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 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



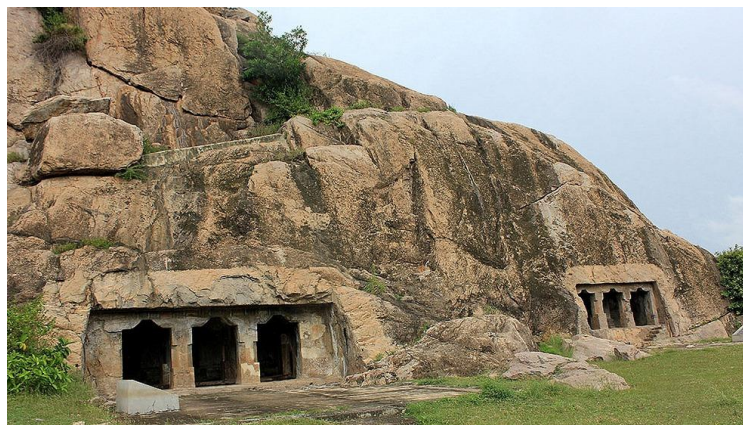
literature where temples are described as having their deity painted on the hind wall of the shrine.

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.



**An example of Dvarapalas in the Satrumalla Pallava Cave Temple**

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.



**Mamandur Cave Temples**

## **Structural Temple**

After the period of Mahendra and Mamalla, King Rajasimha 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 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.

The monolithic rathas and sculptural mandapas constitute the Mamalla style of architecture. The Pallava king, Narasimhavarman I was known as Mamalla. He had converted the port of Mamallapuram as a beautiful city of art and architecture. The Monolithic rathas at Mamallapuram are now called as Pancha Pandava Rathas. Each ratha or chariot was carved out of single rock and hence the name monolithic. These rathas depict the five different forms of temple architecture.

The mandapas or halls at Mamallapuram had also belonged to the Mamallan period. Each mandapa was carved out of single rock. On the side-walls of these mandapas, beautiful sculptures depicting Puranic stories had been carved. The scene depicting the Goddess Durga's attack on Mahishasura is seen in the Mahishasura Mardhini Mandapa. Such beautiful sculptures have also been carved in Thirumoorthi and Varaha mandapas. The most important among the Mamalla style of architecture is the Open Art Gallery. Several miniature sculptures have been carved beautifully on the wall of a big rock. The fall of the River Gange from the head of God Siva and the Arjuna's penance are notable among them. The images of deer, monkey, cat, mouse and other animals are beautifully carved on this huge rock.



**Sri Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal**

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.

## **PALLAVA ART**

The Pallava kings had patronized fine arts. The Kudumianmalai and Thirumayam music inscriptions show their interest in music. Yaazhi, Mridhngam and Murasu were some of the musical instruments of the Pallava period. Both Mahendravarman I and Narasimhavarman I

had remained experts in music. The temple sculptures of the Pallava period reveal that the art of dance was popular in those days. The paintings at Chittannavasal illustrate the nature of Pallava painting Mahendravarman I was known as Chittirakkrapuli. He had composed the book, Thatchina Chitram. He was also the author of the satirical drama Maththavilasam Prakasanam, Thus, music, dance, paintings and drama were popular during the Pallava rule. In this way, the Pallavas had contributed to the growth of culture.

### **THE PALLAVA PAINTINGS AT CONJEEVARAM**

Conjeevaram, the ancient Pallava capital, is situated 45 miles west-south-west of Madras on the South Indian Railway. It is rich in temples and shrines. Of them the most important are the Kailasanatha and the Vaikunthaperumal temples, which contain ancient wall paintings. In the Kailasanatha temple, which was built during the time of the Pallava king, Narasimhavarman I alias Rajasimha (680-722 A.D.), there are paintings of the 7th-8th centuries A.D. on the inner walls of the narrow cells lining the outer walls of the courtyard. They depict scenes from Hindu mythology. But most of the paintings have faded or disappeared through the vicissitudes of time and elements. The few that have survived were covered with lime wash during recent times. But Prof. Jouveau Dubreuil, the French archeologist of Pondicherry, removed the layer of white wash here and there and brought the paintings to light. Nandivarman II alias Pallavamalla (725-790 A.D.) constructed the Vaikunthaperumal temple. The paintings in this temple, probably dating from the 8th-9th centuries A.D., have almost disappeared but for a miniature head under one of the eaves of the central tower or the Vimana. But there are traces of paint everywhere under the eaves and in the niches of the central tower. These Pallava paintings are on the classical or Ajanta style, and represent some of the best specimens of Hindu mural art.

In order to reconstruct the methods and materials used in these paintings, one has to study and experiment on the carrier, the ground, the pigments and the binding medium. 4 Investigations were carried out on some damaged fragments of the painted stuccoes which were collected from the two temples.\* The painted stuccoes consisted of rough plaster of lime, which had been applied to the wall, with two successive coats of fine plaster and of paint applied one over the other. Some of the stuccoes in the Kailasanatha temple were very thin. They had no rough plaster, being made up of a layer of lime wash or fine plaster supporting the layer of paint. The methods of production of the paintings in the two temples are so similar, that a common discussion of their experimental results will suffice.

The inner walls of the cells in the courtyard of the Kailasanatha temple, and the eaves and the walls of the niches of the Vimana of the Vaikunthaperumal temple serve as the mechanical foundation of the paintings directly supporting the ground. They are of sandstone, which are mechanically firm and durable. Their rough surface holds the plaster fast. 5 Their material, being hard and compact, eliminates any possibility of efflorescence occurring on the surface of the paintings. In the Vaikunthaperumal temple, the ground and the paint have fallen down in several places. The carrier has thus become exposed to the elements resulting in further damage to the paintings.

The following pigments were identified in the Kailasanatha and Vaikunthaperumal temples :- Yellow ochre, Red ochre, Terre verte, Carbon, Lime. Thus only a limited number of pigments have been employed by the Pallava artists. This might be due to two causes. Firstly, in the fresco process such as is adopted here--and this will be proved presently--pigments which are sensitive to alkalis should not be used with lime. Secondly, the artists might have employed the locally available pigments, which were probably few in number.





**Mutilated painting showing Somaskanda with two attendants in a niche on the north corridor, Kailasanatha temple, Conjeevaram, Chiungleput District**

### **The Pallava Paintings at Kailasanatha temple**

Though the sculptures of the Rajasimha are fairly well preserved, its paintings have almost vanished. It is said that the walls of the pradakshina -patha of the Kailasanatha temple were once covered with paintings of brilliant colours. But most of that has turned into faint traces. None of the surviving paintings at Kailasanatha is complete; only fragments have remained.

The problem of aging was exacerbated by the coat of white wash applied by the temple authorities on the ancient murals. The conservation work, to rescue the underlying paintings, was taken up during 1936-40 by Shri S.Paramasivan, an archaeological chemist, who was a curator at the Madras museum. And; he encountered a number of serious problems in restoring the paintings in the cells of the Kailasanatha temple. He remarked said, "Since mechanical removal is the only possible means of removing the whitewash, it had to be done with great patience, not just skill". Thanks to the efforts of Shri Paramasivan a few fragments of paintings at Chittannavasal, Thanjavur and Kailasanatha, Kanchipuram, have survived.



The fragments at Kailasanatha along with the remnants at Talagishwara temple at Panamalai are however quite significant, because, these are the only two surviving examples of the Pallava mural paintings. Further, they represent an important stage in the history of development of South Indian paintings.



Benoy K. Behl, the scholar and art historian remarked, “The fragments at Kailasanatha reveal the tenderness and grace that come from the tradition of Ajanta; as well as the glory of great kings. The theme of the family of Siva is also, at another plane, a representation of the royal family. There is an impressive quality in the crowns and in the painted figures, which are not seen in the earlier gentle beings of Ajanta. The idiom, which begins to develop here, is seen to blossom later into a grand imperial style of painting under the Cholas. The ancient Indian murals were also the foundation of the later manuscript paintings and Indian miniatures.

Here we see the high quality of painting of the classical Indian style, with a beautiful rendering of form and volume.”

With reference to the technique of Pallava murals, the painting surface consists two layers of plaster. The first layer was a rough layer of lime and sand. Over this a thin lime plaster was applied and this stuck on to the first layer firmly. Then the plaster ground was given a gentle polish with a trowel or stone. The Pallava plaster – fresco –technique was superior. The plaster from Kanchipuram was 2 to 3 mm in thickness and the two layers of plasters adhered to each other firmly. Because of the high degree of purity in the lime used, gypsum content was negligible and there was no efflorescence on the surface of the painting.



## **PALLAVA SCULPTURES**

Pallava sculptures came into being from the 4th to 9th centuries. It was during the Pallava reign that the rock cut architecture flourished. The earliest specimens of Pallava art and architecture dated back to the 610 to 690 AD. The other temples, on the other hand, were constructed from 690 to 900 AD. In fact, the rock cut caves also came into trend during the Pallava Empire. For the first time the, a predominant feature of the South Indian temples, were fast replaced by the innovative rock architecture and sculptures.

### **History of Pallava sculptures**

Sangam Period’s traditional Manimekalai, features the beginning of the first Pallava King from a connection between the daughter of Naga king of Manipallava, named Pilli Valai with a Chola king Killivalavan. One more description states that "Pallava" was born from the union of the Brahmin Ashvatthama with a Naga Princess also supposedly supported in the sixth verse of the Bahur plates. The Pallavas themselves claimed to move down from Brahma and Ashvatthama. Although to the Manimekalai posits, Ilam Tiriyan as a Chola, not a Pallava, the Velurpalaiyam plates dated to 852, do not bring up the Cholas.

## **Various Pallava Sculptures**

The Pallavas initiated the skill of excavating temples from the rock. In fact, the Dravidian style of temple architecture began with the Pallava rule. It was a regular development starting from the cave temples to monumental rathas and concluded in structural temples. The growth of temple architecture under the Pallavas can be seen in 4 stages. Mahendravarman I introduced the rock-cut temples. This style of Pallava temples are seen at places like Mandagappattu, Mahendravadi, Mamandur, Dalavanur, Tiruchirappalli, Vallam, Siyamangalam and Tirukalukkunram pallava art. The second stage of Pallava architecture is represented by the monolithic rathas and Mandapas found at Mamallapuram. Narasimhavarman I took the recognition for these magnificent architectural monuments. The five rathas, generally called as the Panchapanadava rathas signifies five diverse styles of temple architecture. The mandapas enclose stunning sculptures on its walls.



The last stage of the Pallava art is also represented by structural temples built by the later Pallavas. The Vaikundaperumal temple, Muktheeswara temple and Matagenswara temples at Kanchipuram belong to this stage of structural design. The Pallavas were involved in the evolution from rock-cut architecture to stone temples. The earliest examples of Pallava constructions are rock-cut temples dating from 610 to 690 and structural temples between 690 to 900. A number of rock-cut cave temples bear the message of the Pallava king, Mahendravarman I and his descendants. The Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram and the Shore Temple built by Narasimhavarman II, rock cut temple in Mahendravadi by Mahendravarman are fine examples of the Pallava style temples.

## **PALLAVA LITERATURE**

The contribution of the Pallavas to the cultural development was significant. They had also encouraged the growth of Tamil and Sanskrit literature. The Pallavas had earned name and fame through their magnificent art and architecture. We know that Mamallapuram finds a prominent place in the tourist map of the world. Even today, their temples and sculptures stand testimony to the cultural achievements of the Pallavas.

The Pallava kings were patrons of Sanskrit language and literature. Kanchi, the capital of the Pallavas, was a centre of Sanskrit studies. Poet Bharavi, the author of Kiratarjuniyam, was the court poet of Pallava King Singhabahu or Singhavishnu. Sanskrit scholar Dandin was the greatest litterateur of that period. Pallava King Mahendravarma was himself a great man of letters.

### **Growth of Literature**

The Pallavas had remained great patrons of both Sanskrit and Tamil languages. Their capital Kanchi had remained a great centre for Sanskrit learning. The Pallava monarch, Mahendravarman I himself wrote the Maththavilasa Prakasanam and Bagavatha Ajikkiyam in Sanskrit. Dhandin was a great Sanskrit scholar who lived during the Pallava rule. He wrote Kavyadharsha. Another Sanskrit scholar Bharavi had visited Kanchipuram during the Pallava period.

Tamil literature had also developed during this period. We have studied that the Nayanmars and Alvars had composed their hymns in Tamil. Their contribution to the growth of Tamil literature during the Pallava period was significant. Their devotional songs constitute important religious literature of the Pallava period. Another Tamil scholar, Perundevanar wrote Bharathavenba during this period. Kalladanar had composed a grammar book called Kalladam. Another work Nandikalambakam describes the rule of Nandivarman III but its author is not known. Thus, the Pallava rule had witnessed the growth of both Sanskrit and Tamil literature.

### **Conclusion**

Pallavas were a prominent power in India for more than four centuries between the 6th and 9th centuries. The Pallavas should be specially remembered for their contribution to the cultural, literal, art and archeological history of South India. There was an all pervasive development during this period in literature, music, paintings, religion every walk of life. The Kings of Pallava Dynasty warmly patronised the Sanskrit language. Kanchi became the famous seat of Sanskrit learning In the South. Dandi, Bharavi, Dignaga, the great poet, master of Sanskrit prose and scholar respectively, all came and stayed in Kanchi court. The Tamil literature also received patronage from the Pallava kings. We also know that the Mattavilas Prahasana, the Tamil classic, Tamil Kural were composed in this age. Paintings received patronage of the Tamil kings. The composer of several treaties in music Mahendravarmana was a king of his age.

It should also be remembered that the great religious revival movement which overshadowed the eight century had its first origin in Tamil kingdom. It was the Pallavas who first completed the Aryanisation of South India for them the Sanskrit language and learning and the Brahmanical religion spread in the South. The University of Kanchi became the citadel of Aryan-Brahmanical influence in the South. Kanchi was regarded as one of the seven sacred cities of the Hindus. Though the Pallava Kings were the worshippers of Vishnu and Siva they showed tolerance to other creeds as well. Many great Saiva and Vishnu Saints and the Vaishnava and Saiva literatures had flourished in this age. Though Buddhism could not dominate the Pallavas, Hiuen-Tsang found many Buddhist monasteries in the Pallava Empire.

Reference should also be made of the Pallava architecture and sculptures as these two constitute the most brilliant chapter in the history of South Indian art. The Pallava architecture was undoubtedly greatly inspired by the religious revival movement of the age. We have found several styles in Pallava architecture. There was the Mahendra style, the Mamalla style, the Rajsimha style, the Aparajita style, though the Aparajita style followed the Chola architectural style. There was economic prosperity in the country. The Mamallapuram (also Mahabalipuram) town became an important sea port during the days of the Pallavas. They had friendly relation with the Malaysia, Indonesia and Greater India as well.