



# ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE PALLAVA PERIOD

(Academic Script)

## **Art and Architecture of the Pallava Period**

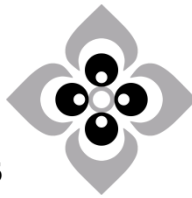
Hello everybody and welcome to today's episode. In this episode you will study the development of art and changes which took place during the reign of Pallavas. Here we will concentrate on the characteristics of art and architecture that flourished during Pallava period. The Subject expert is Ms. Shilpi who is visiting faculty at World School of Design and I am Sakshi Mandwal

### **Introduction:**

South India is the premier area in which we can actually experience the architectural tradition of the Hindu temple. While the timeline for when the Pallavas took power remains uncertain, most scholars place the time of Pallava influence from the 4th to the 9th century C.E.. Many of the specifics what is known was documented by the famous Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang who traveled to the capital city of the Pallavas, Kanchipuram, around 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and stayed there for some time. Inspired by Buddhist sanctuaries and monasteries carved into hillsides in the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE, the Hindu temples of South India represent India's grandest architectural legacy. The glory of the Pallavas remains in their contribution to the art and architecture. They were the pioneers of South Indian art and architecture. They had introduced the stone architecture in the Tamil country.

The walls of the cave temples provide evidences of painting skills also which was practiced during that period and paint can be seen in traces of rich colors. The Kailashnatha temple encloses nearly fifty cells around the inner courtyard and each of them shows evidences of painting.

Perhaps the most well known remains of the Pallava Dynasty are their architecture. Immense architecture of this period still stands as an ever present reminder of that grand past. Monolithic temples carved out of solid



rock first emerged in the Tamil lands under the reign of Mahendravarman I. His inscriptions carved on the stone walls of several temples (however none at Mahabalipuram) have survived and proclaim his authorship.

The earliest examples of temples in the Dravidan style belong to the Pallava period (6<sup>th</sup> century-9<sup>th</sup> century). In the south the Pallavas created beautiful monuments in the seventh century AD. Numerous monuments of architecture and art in Mahabalipuram show gradual movement from rock-cut architecture to structural buildings. The temple architecture of the Pallavas is divided into two groups. First one is the rock-cut which flourished during 610 AD -690 AD and second one is structural which flourished during 690 AD -900 AD.

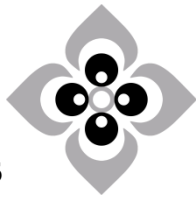
Mahabalipuram, earlier known as Mamallapuram was the flourishing city of Pallava dynasty during the 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In many ways Mamallapuram was the second capital of Pallavas next to the main capital, Kanchipuram. At the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Mahabalipuram experienced unique flourishing of art and architecture. The art and architecture at Mahabalipuram speaks about audacious experiments done by the artists who implemented the natural landscape to create striking, unusual monuments.

Rock-cut architecture:

The rock-cut temples at Mahabalipuram are the best contribution of the Pallavas. These temples are further separated into carved out mandapas and monolithic shrines called rathas.

Varaha Cave Temple is one of the most primal rock-cut structures in Mahabalipuram during the reign of Pallavas. It has been created during the rule of Narasimhavarman I and represents an early stage in Dravidian architecture. The Varaha cave temple is dated to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, a bit after Arjuna's Penance. The pillars at the entrance of the temple have lion bases and the roof is topped by shrine models which are very similar to those carved on the Pancha Rathas.

Temple is entered through mandapa which has beautiful verandah with two pillars and two semi-columns. Entrance in the hall of temple is guarded by two gate keepers.



The walls inside the cave have several striking mythological scenes carved in relief. The inner wall of temple is adorned with four large sculpted panels. The description and modeling of all the figures are noteworthy.

The northern panel which is very large depicts God Vishnu's incarnation of Varaha which similar to wild boar. In this panel Varaha holds up his wife Bhumi, the mother earth whom he has saved from Naga, the snake king who had abducted her under the ocean. Varaha's size in comparison to the other figures and his sensibly modeled features very perfectly illustrate the naturalistic trend of Pallava art.

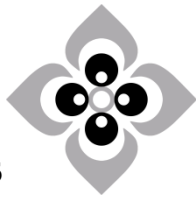
Southern sculpted panel shows Trivikrama which is Vishnu's incarnation as a dwarf with one foot on earth, another placed in clouded sky. Third leg is on autocrat king Bali, pushing him to underworld. Next to Vishnu stand Brahma, Shiva, Sun and the moon.

Eastern panel is known as Gajalakshmi panel which shows goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. Carved in perfect beauty and gracious countenance, she is shown holding a lotus flower and fawned by with two maidens and two elephants. Fourth panel shows goddess Durga standing on a lotus under umbrella.

The next milestone rock-cut architectures we will be talking about are the five rathas sited at Mahabalipuram. The five rathas are named after Draupadi and the Pandava brothers and were built during the reign of Narasimhavarman I (625-645 AD).

The first ratha on the left after entering the gate is the Draupadi Ratha which is in the form of thatched hut, with a square roof. This shrine is devoted to goddess Durga and it shows in the amazing artwork which is a fine carved panel. In this panel goddess Durga is shown on a lotus pedestal and she is encircled by other characters. On the outer wall of the entrance door a stylised sea-monster is carved. On the eastern wall, there is an interesting sculptural group - Durga standing on a head of the killed demon Mahishasura. Some sculptures have not been completed. The one-storied Draupadi Ratha is the smallest among all.

After that, on the same platform, is the the Arjuna Ratha which is devoted to lord Shiva. A huge Nandi, Shiva's vehicle, stands behind. Shiva and other



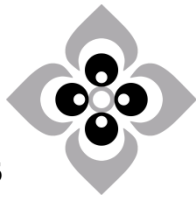
gods are depicted on the temple's outer walls. It is facing towards the east. It has two storey, a small porch and carved pillars. There are no adornments inside the shrine but the outer wall is very rich and carved with interesting details. The portico is decorated with marvelous sculptures, showing gods and humans.

The third shrine is the Bhima Ratha which is the longest of all rathas. The barrel-roofed Bhima Ratha was never completed which is evidenced by the missing rows of pillars on its north side. The larger size of this ratha can be justified by a large relief of Vishnu in the reclining form which is located inside and is unfinished.

The Dharmaraja Ratha is tallest of all the temples and is similar in appearance to the Arjuna Ratha. The unfinished Dharmaraja Ratha is three storied. Pedestal of the three-storey Dharmaraja Ratha is supported by figures of a lion, alternating with an elephant. This shrine is devoted to Shiva and is adorned with one of the best examples of early Pallava plastic art. The carvings on its outer walls mostly represent gods and the most interesting and attractive is a panel, which shows Shiva's reincarnation named Ardhanarishvara (half Shiva, half Parvati) on the east side. There are no stairs leading to the second floor, but the second and third floors are connected with stairs.

The Nakula-Sahadeva Ratha is the only one which is not placed in a sequence; it stands aside from the other four. It is also the only one with entrance facing south. It is dedicated to God Indra and is associated with elephants.

Along with the rathas stand three large sculptures of animals and all are carved out of monolithic stone. The amazing fact is that all three statues are symbolically related to certain rathas. Statue of Nandi bull is not finished. This figurine is connected to Arjuna Ratha which is devoted to God Shiva. Sculpture of lion is approx 2 m high. It is located in the front of Draupadi Ratha as this shrine is devoted to goddess Durga. Elephant stands next to Nakula Sahadeva Ratha which is dedicated to God Indra, a deity possessing the sacred white elephants. The life-size stone elephant is one of the most perfectly sculpted elephants in Indian Art.

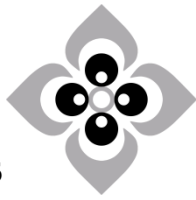


The next rock-cut architecture of this period we will be talking about is the Mahishasuramardini Mandapa dating from the late 7th century. The cave temple is excavated on a rock top above which is constructed a structural temple named Olakneswara Temple which is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The top architrave of the cave shows roughly cut chaitya arches and mini shrines above. The front facade is supported on four pillars and two pilasters. Its inner dimensions are 32 feet in length, 15 feet in width, and 12.5 feet in height.

This Cave Temple consists of a long columned verandah with three sanctums. After entering the cave hall large relief panels on both the side walls can be seen which have made this cave very famed among the visitors as well as the scholars. These large scale reliefs are considered among the masterpieces of the Pallava art by various scholars. This cave temple takes its name from the large sculpture panel on its walls celebrating the triumph of the goddess Durga, the form of the Mother Goddess Shakti who slew the buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura. This bas-relief panel is a masterpiece of Indian art by the means of its naturalistic beauty and sense of movement and it perfectly demonstrates the artistic abilities of sculptors in Pallava times. This panel depicting Durga fighting with Mahishasura, is famous for its fine and delicate carving, grace and beauty. Durga is shown riding a prancing lion and holding her bow stretched and ready to attack. She is followed by army of nine soldiers, eight dwarf ganas and one female. Mahishasura is also shown with his retreating army. All the figures are carved and composed with perfection and represent an ideal sense of liveliness.

Another panel depicts Anantasayana mudra which is Vishnu reclining on king of nagas named Ananta Shesha. This serpent has thousand heads but in the relief it is shown with five. Below Vishnu Bhudevi, Mother Earth is seated near his feet, with her hands joined in adoration. Above the God and below him there are shown four flying dwarfs holding the divine weapons of Vishnu. Near his feet are shown demons Madhu and Kaitabha in attacking mode holding weapons. The flying female figure in the relief may be identified with Yoga-nindra, a form Shakti assumed and entered into Vishnu. This panel is considered to be one of the highest achievements in Indian ancient art.

On the back wall of the cave, three shrines have been excavated. This shrine is also endowed with its own madapa. The mandapa is supported on two



seated-lion pillars and two seated-vyala pilasters. The back wall of the central chamber features a carving of a Somaskanda panel; this panel is carved with images of Shiva and his companion Parvathi in their majestic dress, each wearing a crown known as kirita-mukuta and other ornamentation. Their son Skanda is shown seated between them. This panel also shows the carving of the Shiva's mount the bull named Nandi.

The other magnificent relief dating from Pallava dynasty is 'Arjuna's Penance' or also named 'Descent of the Ganges'. The subject of the massive structure is either Arjuna's Penance or the Descent of the Ganges, or possibly both. Historians and connoisseurs of archeology have not at all settled on one account as there are not sufficient resources or records. This magnificent relief covering a rock face of over 90 feet long and 40 feet high, carved in the mid-seventh century.

While we are talking about this relief we should discuss the stories depicted here in short. 'Arjuna's Penance' is a take out from the epic Mahabharata. It is storying that how Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, completed severe asceticism in order to obtain Shiva's weapon. The concept of the story includes Hindu philosophy where it is believed that one could attain miraculous blessings or boon from the Gods by penance and self-discipline. The 'Descent of Ganges' story describes the penance of Bhagirathi who performed austerities with the intention to bring Goddess Ganges down to earth. Lord Shiva approved to break the force of the descent of the river his hair, because otherwise the force would be too great for the earth to hold. The depiction of the splendid relief supports either fable.

The carving is composed of the representations of the natural world on the left side and celestial world on the right side. Ganga is looked at on either side by gods, demigods, and animals as she moves down from the head of Shiva. The twisting nagas around the headgear of Shiva are shown swimming in the waters of the Ganga. A hollow space in the middle filled with nagas separates the two worlds. In this space water was cause to flow in order to create a natural waterfall which perfectly shows Ganga's Descent. Arjuna in a yogic posture standing on a single leg and his arms raised up can be seen on the left top. Behind him Shiva is portrayed with miniature ganas as attendants.



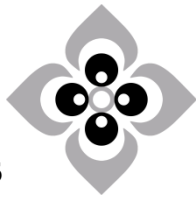
To the right of the hollow gap on the other rock numerous animals and celestial beings are carved with extreme skill. Among the animals the large sized elephants protecting their young are most prominent. Below this there are scenes from Panchtantra tales, like a cat standing doing a penance and tricking a group of rats. This catlike figure put in a comical relief to the whole view. Just right to this delicate relic there is a group of monkeys, playing and preening one another and nursing a baby monkey.

This whole relief is the most striking of the sculptures and all figures are carved with the greatest liveliness, proficiency, naturalism for which the Pallavas are known all over the world. This relief was practically related to the system of water supply at that time. There are apparent traces of carefully planned system of water supply from Palar River to the ancient city.

### **Structural architectures:**

The famous Kailashnatha and the Vanikunthaperumal temples at Kanchipuram are the most excellent example of the structural temples of the Pallavas. The Kailashanatha temple at Kanchipuram was built in 7th century during the reign of Pallava King Narsimhamvaraman. It consists of a sanctum with a pyramidal tower, a mandapa and a rectangular courtyard presenting a series of additional shrines or cells. The temples were finely adorned in the interiors. This temple may be considered as one of the foremost monuments of the early Dravida style. This temple is of great consequence for historic point of view because this temple inspired Rajaraja Chola I to build another great magnificent Brihadeshwar Temple at Tanjore. The direct and close involvement of the rulers started after formation of this temple. Thus, the Kailashanatha temple initiated a new tradition in India where the kings took deep interest in constructing the temples with grand structural design and antiquity to show their power.

The Vaikuntha Perumal Temple is one of the oldest of the temples in Kanchipuram which date to the same time as Kailashanatha Temple. We can say this by the structure and the similarity in the material used for construction and the sculptures. It was built during the reign of Pallava King, Nandivarman. A flat mandapa go ahead to the inner complex. The pillars of the mandapa are adorned with various sculptures. This temple has three vertically aligned sanctums, i.e. garbhagrihas situated one on top of the other. The ground floor sanctum contains a figure of Vishnu in a



seated posture, the other on the first floor preserves the lying down image of Lord Vishnu and on the topmost floor, and there is a standing form of the same deity. There are circumambulatory passages, i.e. pradakshina patha in all the three sanctums.

The sculptures and the various inscriptions of the Pallava dynasty of the Vaikuntha Perumal temple have supported the historians of South India to write about Pallava history and to deal with the chronology of this dynasty. In the Vaikuntha Perumal temple, the religious sculptures of various incarnations of Lord Vishnu can be seen. But most of them are now damaged and disintegrated and exhibit remarkable workmanship and showcase the matchless skill of the Pallava sculptor. At the entrance of the temple complex, the Dvaja Stambha is positioned. There is a widespread belief that the Dvaja Stambha gives an idea to a devotee from a long distance about the idol installed in the temple.

Beside of the two major temples discussed above one more developed structural temple of this period is the Shore Temple built in 7<sup>th</sup> century at Mahabalipuram. It was built during the reign of Narsimhavarman. The Shore Temple creates a distinctive blend of history and natural beauty. The shore temples are the example of pinnacle of Dravidian art and architecture. The temple is made out of a finely cut local granite.

Shore Temple is also accredited for being the earliest stone structure made by Pallavas. Before this, the monuments used to be carved out of the rocks or stones. Different from other monuments of the region, Shore Temple is a five-storied rock-cut structural temple. The spire is widely decorated with carvings and sculptures. The art in the sculptured panels of the temple is full of vivacity and are breathtakingly real and artistic. Shore Temple is a combined complex of 3 shrines; 2 dedicated to Shiva and one to Vishnu. The utmost development in design of shore temple is its 'Sikhara' or spine, which depicts a high, tiered style, gradually tapering to the top, which is completely different from rounded 'Vihara' style.

The Pallavas were not only great rulers but they were also great builders. Their rock-cut and structural temples and other architectural works have a great charm of their own and they occupy a high place among the ancient monuments of Indian. The Dravidian style of temple architecture began with the Pallava rule. It was a gradual progression starting from the rock-cut temples to monolithic rathas which finally culminated in structural



temples. Later on by the 9th century the Chola dynasty to the south was a strong force and the Pallavas at last surrendered to the combined attacks of the Chalukyas dynasty on its northern border and the reviving Chola power in the south.

### **Characteristics of Pallava Art and architecture:**

We will now discuss the prominent features of art and architecture of the Pallava dynasty which are mentioned below:

- The temples that were built have big forms, the anatomy of the sculpted figures were plain and simple, less ornamentation, elongated faces with large eyes, thick lips, broad nose.
- The mandapas and pillars of rock cut temples and ratha temples bear own distinctive characteristics.
- As far as the sculptures of Pallava temples are concerned the figures of mythological gods and goddesses, elephants and warriors are proficiently found on the temple walls.
- The Pallava architecture shows the transition from the Rock- Cut Architecture to the Structural temples.
- The rock cut temples of the Mamallapuram show the influence of Buddhist rock cut caves. In ratha temples also, some ratha follows the Buddhist Vihara model central square hall supported by pillared roof. Some rathas follows Chaitya model with oblong shape bearing barrel roof
- The ratha temples are attempt to free itself from the influence of rock cut 'Chaitya' and 'Vihara' . The structural detailing of the ratha temples imitates wooden timber support which is unnecessary in stone. This shows that they are not able to free totally from earlier wooden structured temples.
- The base of pillars of some structural temples bears architectural motif of lion later depicted by Cholas and this symbol of lion became the royal motif of Pallavas.
- The rock cut reliefs of the Pallavas are the earliest surviving royal portraits after the Kushana images. In the Adivaraha cave , depiction of two portraits of a Pallava king escorted by his son and queens are supposed to be earliest portrait sculpture after the Kushan images from Mathura.

### **Influences of Bhakti movement on Pallava art and architecture:**

The Bhakti movement led to the popularization of musical instruments like the flute, and the dance form of Bharatanatyam at temples. During the Pallava period, we notice some prosperous temples maintaining a group of



dancers. The devotionalism in turn led to the construction of temples on a large scale, which reflected the Pallava style of art and architecture.

### **INTERVIEW OF MRINAL KULKARNI**

In Pallava period Bhakti movement affected all the art forms more strongly. Because of Bhakti movement there was a development in music, there here was development in dance Bharatanatyam development in structure very strongly in this time. There was completely music, dance various art from were considered as offering to the God so this affected the complete Temple architecture they start seeing temple architecture more and more elaborate and the as temple architecture was the Centre of the city most of the religious Bhakti aspect related to it then the business economy all these was centred around the temples so that's why we start seeing the Prasad coming in the temple architecture then various Mandapas developed in the temple architecture like Mukh Mandap ,Rang Mandap. In Rang Mandap were the dance programmer the dance offerings or the music, singing being together congregating for practising prayers and all that is to happen. So that's why the temples architecture becoming more and more vast more and more developing elaborate Manner more aspects were getting connected to it like Ardha Mandap, RangMandap. Mukhmand and Many of those things. Then there is another influence of Bhakti movement which happened in Pallava that is on the myths which were depicted in Many of the Pallavas sculptures. Like because of Bhakti movement as the devotees were more concentrated on one god there was a development in The sectarian Cult in Hindu religion like Shavism developed more strongly as well as the vaishnavism developed and as there was the worshipping of one god there was a strong enmity for the other Gods also,so that's why we start saying development of myths like Lingobhavatshiva where it is a kind of mocking on the other Gods and proving that the Shiva was the great god than Vishnu or Brahma. So these are the certain kind of sectarian impacts affected to various kinds of stories which were depicted in the sculptures and from here onwards sites like Kanchipuram which was actually a place from where the Shankaracharya started his own development of religion which was also the capital of Pallava period we start Seeing development of socialism and as well as of vaishnavism Show one part of the Kanchipuram has all the Shiva temples and another part of the Kanchipuram has all Vaishnavaites Temples. And there are stories which are completely different and we also start seeing because of all these reasons the kind of trade which happened between India and say China because of the Silk was coming from China and these depictions we see in many of the temples



sculptures in Kanchipuram there are many representations of Chinese traders we find in the Pallavas cultures so this is how Bhakti movement affected many of the aspects related to the art and slowly this also defines what we can call as a tamil sensibility in the later phase which becomes more pronounced in Chola period and develop more strongly by 10 century, 12<sup>th</sup> Century and all. But starting on word is the simple aspects which happening in the Chula Period. Bhakti Movement also developed one more respect in Pallava architecture and the economy which was related to the temple economy that is development of Devdas cult where devdaasis were the only women who were earning out of the knowledge which is the knowledge of the Literature the knowledge of dance the knowledge of music and what we know now today Karnataka music this all started from the temple weather is a Kanchipuram weather it's a later on because of various geographical regions and all they had shifted their capital from Kanchipuram to Mahabalipuram now which is also termed as Mamallapuram near to Chennai and start seeing all the development along with that and Pallava Kings also were the ones who represented themselves in sculptures not as a King's but as a devoted to the gods so it is always Kings were the secondary to the Gods and each and every aspect of that thing was related to the temples into the scultura languages which was developing Into The Other kinds of rituals which were connected with the temple development Temple structures like prayers programs musical programs dance programs even the king or even like the whole development of Kanchipuram saris but also related with the temples development which happened after the Bhakti movement.

### **Scholars on Pallava art:**

The famous art historian and critic Percy Brown mention: "of all the great powers that together made the history of Southern India, none had a more marked effect on the architecture of their reign than the earliest of all, that of the Pallavas, whose productions provided the foundation of the Dravidian style".

Art historian Romila Thapar express, "Pallava temples were usually free standing buildings, but the tradition set by the Buddhists for cave temples still continued".

Scholar A H Longhurst writes about the Mahishasuramardini Mandapa , "The visitor to Mamallapuram will be struck by the artistic merit,



originality of treatment and power of execution displayed in most of the sculptures, particularly with regard to these tableaux of Vishnu and Durga.”