Introduction

The period between the latter half of the sixth and first half of the tenth century A.D., an interval of four hundred years, marks an important epoch in the history of South India and its culture. Three important dynasties viz., the Chalukyas of Badami, Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai rose to power. Alongwith their paramount authority the revival of Hinduism was also heralded. These dynasties were the great contributors to the development of art and architecture in their respective regions. In fact they were also rivals in the realm of art, not as the destroyers of each other’s art productions but as patrons. Their keen competition paved the way to the affluent output of permanent artistic monuments in stone. The Pallavas of Kanchi became the central power geographically, politically and culturally. They developed for the first time architecture and sculpture in the hard rock, in this area. The Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas continued the pre-existing tradition of rock-cut art. The Pallava art stood distinct in contemporary styles in material and technique.

The Pallava sculptures are scattered in various places in Tamilnadu, (Madras state) viz., Mandagapattu, Trichinapalli, Siyamangalam, Singavaram, Mamallapuram, Kanchipuram, Kaveripakam, Tiruttani etc. Most of these places are in South and North Arcot districts. But most interesting places of sculptural importance are Mamallapuram and
Kanchipuram where the Pallava artists deliberately and significantly carved the figures by singular concentration and inspiration. Especially Mamallapuram is a source of perennial’ inspiration to the artists and a place of pilgrimage to the art lovers. The rich patronage and encouragement of the cultured kings as well as revival of Saivism and Vaishnavism created an atmosphere where art could thrive. The inspirational surge would have swept over the artists like a tidal wave and their process of creation would have been an intense delight. The result is highly remarkable. Not only were the unknown selfless artists perfect in transmitting their inspiration into effective expression with mastery of technique, but they were well versed in the language and had a keen sense of observation also. The Mamallapuram sculptor reveals the man’s attempts to unveil the secrets of the spirit with the chisel and he left behind his discoveries ingrained in rock that is born in his soul which is an outflowering of the eternal rhythm.

This sea port city is variously called Mamallapuram, Mahabalipuram, seven pagodas etc. It is said that the mythical legend of Balichakravarti took place here, hence this place is called Mahabalipuram. Another name Mamallapuram or Mahamallapuram is mentioned in the *Avanti Sundarikatha* of Dandi. Probably this place is famous for great fighters which is the meaning of the word. Mamalla is the corrupted form of Mahamalla. Another version says that this city was constructed by the great warrior Narasimhavarman I with the title Mamalla and hence it was named, Mamallapuram. But it is proved by the Avanti Sundari katha
written by Dandi during the reign of Simhavishnu that this port city is pre-Narasimhavarman I but it acquired fame during his reign by his indomitable and creditable performances. Now both names i.e., Mamallapuram and Mahabalipuram are in practice.

The phrase ‘seven pagodas’ was probably used by the foreigners who came by the sea. According to some people the shore temple is one of the seven, the remaining six are under sea level but no one has seen them. Others say that the five Rathas plus the monolithic lion and elephant constitute the seven pagodas. Anyway it is a somewhat vague term. There is a cluster of prominent buildings. Probably these buildings were seen as a landmark from off shore and that is perhaps how the phrase originated during the days of the early European navigators; this place now is generally called Mahabalipuram.

A number of sculptures were executed in relief on the Rathas, in the caves and Mandapas and also’ on the open boulders. All the figures are in situ. Nearly thirty or thirty five figures are on Dharmaraja Ratha and Arjuna Ratha and others are in caves and the Mandapas, i.e., Mahishasuramardini cave, Adivaraha cave, Trimurti cave, Krishna Mandapa and the shore temple exhibit a number of beautiful figures.

Kanchipuram had been the capital city of the Pallavas throughout their hegemony, situated forty miles from Madras in South Arcot-district and is one of the holy places of India. It has always been a great seat of learning. This is a meeting place of various religious creeds; the
Vedic-professors lived side by side with Jain and Buddhist priests. It is praised by Kalidasa as *Nagareshu Kanchi.* The great position was attained by the Kanchi under the orthodox rule of the Pallavas and mainly through Saivism which they propagated and favoured. The later Pallavas since Rajasimha started to embellish their capital city by a number of temples. Rajasimha constructed the Kailasanath temple, according to the inscriptions inscribed on the walls of the temple. It is the repository of the Saiva iconography. The walls of the main temple and the *prakara* also are filled with reliefs showing Siva and his forms. Another important edifice is the Vaikuntha Perumal temple which is dedicated to Vishnu whose sponsorship is attributed to Nandivarman Pallavamalla. This is a three storied building showing a further advanced step in the temple architecture. On the walls of the Garbhagriha certain Vaishnava legends are illustrated as, the: boar incarnation. Narasimha, Samudramanthan, the distribution of Nectar by Vishnu in the guise: of Mohini, etc. In the cloisterry some important episodes of the Pallava geneological history viz., the coronations of the various kings, the death of Mahendravarman III, the coronation of Nandivarman, the war with Chalukyas etc., are inscribed. Dance scenes, wrestling matches, etc. are also illustrated.

Mandagapattu, Dalvanur, Mamandur, Siyainangalam, Trichunapalli etc. exhibit the early Pallava sculptures *i.e.*, the Mahendravarman period. These rockcut caves and Mandapas are: examples of Mahendravarman’s ambitious desire to gain esteem’ by some extravagant device to, create something new. These caves contain very few sculptures, *viz.*, certain
Dvarapala figures, the Gangavatara scene in Trichunapalli, Durga in Singavaram. Certain later Pallava figures of the Aparajita period, are available from Kaveripakkam and Tiruttani where Brahma, Vishnu, Surya and Saptamatrika group are sculptured.

Number of scholars like Jouvean Dubreuil in his Pallava Antiquities: Longhurst in his Archaeological Memoirs; O.C. Gangooly and Goswamy in his Pallava Art; K.R. Srinivasan, in his The Cave Temples of the Pallavas’ Alexander Ray, in the Imperial Series about the temples of Kanchi, C. Minakshi in her Historical Sculptures’ of Vaikuntha Perumal Temple, discussed variously. Later K. Nilakantha Sastri, C. Sivaramamurti, H. Zimmer, Father Heras, T.N. Ramachandran, J.Ph. Vogel, Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Hultsch etc., contributed in the field of Pallava architecture and sculpture. Most of these scholars have taken much interest to allot the Pallava monuments among the rulers of the Pallava dynasty mainly based on the epigraphical grounds, i.e., the titles which the rulers adopted like Atiranachanda, Atyantakama etc., adopted equally by Paramesvaravarman, Rajasimha etc.

Dubreuil tried to assign the Rathas and the Mandapas of Mahabalipuram to the’ period anterior to that of Rajasimha posterior to that of Mahendravarman I. He stated that the Atiranachanda Mandapa at Saluvankuppam belongs to Rajasimha and he also ascribed the shore temple, Olakkanath temple and Mukundanayanar to Rajasimha. He accepts the great bas relief as the descent of the Ganges. He says about the art of Mahendravarman I (610-630 A.D.), that it had the origin from the Telugu
country i.e., the Undavalli caves of Vishnukundins. He also enumerates the style in four phases as follows:

- **Mahendra**: 600-630 A.D., Mamalla 630-668 A.D.
- **Rajasimha**: 690-715 A.D., Aparajita 870-890 A.D.

Longhurst has also shown much interest in architecture. He stresses the similarity between the great bas relief and the Isurumiya reliefs at Anurathapura and identifies it as Brahma Kapal in the Himalayas. However, he is not sure about the Telegu origin. He expressed his doubt about attributing the Undavalli caves to Vishnukundins. O.C. Gangooly and Goswamy attribute most of Mahabalipuram works to Narasimhavarman I Mamalla and there is a possibility that Mahendravarman and Simhavishnu may have had a hand in it. They identify the portraits in the Varaha cave temple as those of Simhavishnu and Mahendravarman I and the great bas relief as the descent of the Ganges.

Alexander Ray discussed only the architecture of the temples of Kanchipuram. K.R. Srinivasan’s book ‘The Cave Temples of the Pallavas’ is somewhat comprehensive as he has given equal importance to architecture and sculpturs. He deals with the origin from Mahendravarman I and the evolution upto Narasimhavarman. He remarks that the Pallavas are the first extensive initiators of granite stone for sculptural cum architectural purposes and he identifies, the portraits as Narasimhavarman I and Mahendravarman I. He attributes the Atiranachanda Mandapa to Rajasimha on stylistic grounds.
A.K. Coomaraswami, Nilakanthasastri, Zimmer Rowland and Stella Kramrisch agree that the great relief is the descent of the Ganges. Sivaramamurti, T.N. Ramachandran identify it as Arjuna’s penance and Sivaramamurti ascribes of the monuments, of Mahabalipuram to Narasimhavarman I whose image he says is sculptured on the Dharmaraja Ratha and the royal ‘figures in Varaha cave temple he identifies with Simhavishnu and Mahendravarman I.

Father Heras says that Mahendravarman I built Varaha cave I and he identified the, two portraits as Simhavishnu and Mahendravarman I, he also attributed Dharmaraja Mandapa, Kotikal Mandapa at Mahabalipuram to Mahendravarman I. In conclusion he says that the monuments arted by Mahendravarman and Narasimhavarman finished by Paramesvaravarman I who scribed his name as Atyantakama Paramesvaravishnu griham and he also attributed Ramanuja (mandap and Ganesh Ratha to Paramesvaravarman-I). Very few books are available on the art of the later Pallavas i.e., the works at Kanchipuram. C. Minakshi took pains to identify the figures graved in the cloister of Vaikuntha Perumal temple.

With the help of the works of all these great scholars I have tried to give a stylistic analysis of the Pallava sculpture, its aesthetics technique and the themes. This study covers the span of the, pallava period. The originator of Pallava art is Mahendravarman I. This is the first phase of pallava art dating from 610 A.D. to 630 A.D. The second phase which attains maturity falls in Narasimhavarman I’s period since 630 to 700 A.D. During this period three kings ruled Narsimhavarman, Paramesvaravarman
I and Mahendravarman II. Paramesvaravarman I also lowed the same style and he brought about completion in some of the unfinished works of his edecessors while he caused to be executed the Ramanuja Mandapa and Ganesh Rath.

The third phase started with Rajasimha from 700 and lasted upto 790 A.D. that is the reign Nandivarman. Rajasimha’s son Mahendravarman III who died before winning the throne and probably ruled along with his father, constructed the Mahendravarmesvara temple. Then came Nandivarman the next important king. He ruled for a long time but his rule was full of wars and internal unrest. Nevertheless, he paid attention towards art and built the Vaikuntha Perumal temple.

Rajasimha changed the traditional rock-cut technique and initiated a new structural style in architecture and sculpture. This period is famous for its enormous output of sculpture on the panels of the temples but it lost the virility and lyrical qualities of the previous phase. The decline sculptural quality which started in this period reached its final stage in the Aparajitavarman period. This is the last stage of the Pallava sculpture when it was gradually overwhelmed by the chola traditions at the end of the eighth century and lost its own identity.

The Pallava sculpture started from Mandagapattu Lakshitayatana cave temple where mahendravarman announced that he had constructed without mortar. He had taken the idea of ring out of rock boulders from Undavalli the Vishnukundin caves. His carvings are scattered in various
places including Mahabalipuram. The Pallava sculptural style was started and developed him. However very few examples were sculptured during this period. The Gangadhara panel Lalitankura cave temple from Trichirapalli, the Durga from Singavaram and the portraits of mahavishnu and Mahendravarman are remarkable instances of the period. Started from lakshitayatana cave temple the style progressed from cave to cave. Till the style reached ‘kuranganilmuttam the figures became slim and so that some of the dvarapala figures resembled Padmapani Bodhisatva of Ajanta in its articulation, and gesture. This style reached maturity Trichirapalli which became a proto-type for Narasimhavarman’s large compositions. The mahendravarman’s style is simple, vigorous and ingenious. The delineation of the figure is natural realistic. They derived simplicity of Vishnukundin sculpture and also some of other motifs the horns of the dvarapalas and the standing position etc. In the Avanibhajana cave temple figures are carved on the pillars like in the Undavalli cave where certain figures appear on the pillars. Some of the architectural decorations like the Makara Torana on the niche and lotus blossoms on the pillars derived from Amaravati and the pillars, brackets and the Kudus on the facade were derived from Mughalrajapuram caves.

In the Narasimhavarman period the Vengi idioms are closely followed. The articulation of the figure, female as well as the male that is, their elongated limbs, their thin legs and the hands, the tapering thighs, the narrow waist etc. show progenity in style with carvings at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Just as his father was impressed very much by the
Vishnukundin caves headmired the imposing beauty of the sculptures of the Badami caves of the western Chalukyas. Though he was impressed by their ideas his work is not a case of pure imitation. Narasimhvavar-man’s artists poured their originality and maintained sanctity of the pristine stories from mythology which they handled with command. The same scenes like Trivikrama, Varaha etc., were carved in Badami Undavalli as well as at Mamallapuram. Similarly this period shows architectural forms especially certain ornamentation of the pillars derived from Badami only that these are less decorative than their originals at Badami. Here the Pallava sculptural style reached its maturity and determined a style peculiar of its own. Another problem which we have to deal in connection with the sculpture during the Narasimhavarman period is the sponsorship of Mahabalipuram whether Mahendravarman or Narasimhavarman I. Evidences based on Dandis Avantisundari Katha prove that this is pre-Narasimhavarman site while the extent architectural evidences suggest that most of the examples were Mahendravarman’s work as stated above.

Then comes Rajasimha, who started structural style in architecture and the figures extended over several courses of masonary, plastered to hide the joints and then were painted. This plaster-ing is very inapt, because it was applied indiscriminately so that the original modelling is replaced by a flat and thick coat of mortar. Possibly several layers of plaster were applied in later times and therefore it is hard to judge the effects of the original plaster. Any way, application of plaster on the carved stone shows the decline of the Pallava sculptural glory.
After Rajasimha, confusion and unrest prevailed in the Pallava dominions. Mahendravarman III died as the heir apparent. Next came Paramesvaravarman who died without any issue having barely ruled for three years. A collateral branch succeeded him but soon anarchy prevailed. Nandivarman among the later Pallavas had a long rule; He completed the Vaikuntha Perumal temple. Architecturally it is the final stage of the Pallava style but sculpturally it is not so important. The sculptural panels in the cloisters are devoted to illustrate the Pallava geneological table and historical events connected with them. Incarnations of Vishnu are shown on the walls of the main temple but at present they are all white-washed and are not clear.

Once again after Nandivarman confusion and anarchy prevailed. Internal unrest was created by the dynastic wars. Powerful neighbours took advantage of the internal disturbances. Aparajita had to face all these troubles. In spite of all this he tried to revive the past glory. He constructed a few temples; the Virattanesvara at Tiruttani shows his best attempts to regenerate the Pallava sculptural style, which at that stage was much influenced by the western Chalukya, eastern Chalukya, and Rashtrakuta styles. This style shows approximity with the Chola tradition with which it finally merged along with the Pallava dominions.

They further enclosed the temple by a structure, probably a hall, of which now only six crude stone pillars exist, obstructing the unhindered view of the otherwise intact facade. On either side of this structural hall, in
front of the temple, a staircase was hewn into the rock, perhaps with the idea to create access to its roof.
CHAPTER-1

The Pallavas

HISTORICAL ORIGIN

Who were those Pallavas who broke with such achievement, almost barbaric force, into the mild flowering of Buddhist and Brahmanical culture in Vijayapuri. This question, though often raised, has not been answered to full satisfaction yet. In all probability, they were a clean or family of northern origin who had entered Satavahana service and then became their feudatories as many other small dynasties had done (viz. the Ikshvakus). Sometimes they are identified with the Pahlavas, a Parthian tribe, mentioned in the Puranas which was defeated by the Satavahana king, Gautamiputra Satakarni. This however is a mere presumption and lacks historical affirmation. Early references in copperplates (Mayidavolu) mention them as *kshatriyas*¹ by caste. In later copperplates however (viz. the Kasakudi plates, 8th century) their descendence from Bharadvaja, one of the primordeal seerkings, is stressed which would imply that they were *brahmins*; as they had adopted warfare for their profession, they came to be known as *brahma-kshatriyas*. Their affiliation to the *kshatriya* caste, however, is strongly stressed by the fact that Pallava kings uniformly adopted the caste name ‘Varman’ which is only used by *kshatriyas* and not by *brahmins*.

¹. Sri Aurobindo: The Rennaisance of India, SABCL 14.
All that can be said with some certainty is that they were a distinguished family, serving the Satavahanas as feudatories in the southeastern Deccan. By marriage they were connected with other ruling dynasties of the Deccan and according to Prof. J. Dubrieul, even with the Satavahanas. In any case, their social status was a distinct one. After the disintegration of the Satavahana empire, they are found ruling as an independent family in part of the Satavahana territory in the Krishna valley. In later copperplates, a certain Viracurca almost a legendary figure is mentioned as king of the Pallavas who married a princess of the Chutu-Naga family. The Chutus, also feudatories of the Satavahanas, succeeded them in the western part of their empire. Viracurca must have inherited their kingdom or part of it, as it is said in the inscription that the Naga princess ‘bestowed upon him the insignia of royalty’. He or his sons extended their territory towards the south and seized the city of Kanchi, though it is not known from whom. Thus a remarkable empire was built up and by the end of the 3rd century, it reached from sea to sea and from Kanchi in the south to the Krishna River in the north, though perhaps only temporarily.

The first king to step out of the haze of early Pallava history is Siva Skandavarman (sometimes called Vijaya-Skandavarman) who is known by two copperplate grants in Prakrit of the early 4th century: the Mayidavolu plates and the Hirahadagalli plates. The Mayidavolu plates were written when Siva Skandavarman was heir apparent to the Pallava throne; they record the gift of a village near Amaravati to two brahmans.
The Hirahadagalli plates record that King Siva Skandavarman of Kanchi who belonged to the Bharadvaja gotra had performed great Vedic sacrifices, “the agnishtoma, vajaprya and asvamedha sacrifice” and that he had the tides: “Supreme king of kings, devoted to dharma” and “asvamedha-yajin,” the special attribute of a king who had performed the asvamedha or horse sacrifice. (In later records, Pallava kings were in a general way accredited with the performance of the asvamedha, but only two of them had the tide ‘asvamedha-yajin’.Siva Skandavarman and Kumaravishnu.)

Another contemporary copperplate grant, issued by Charudevi, Siva Skandavarman’s widow, supplies a first genealogical order by stating that his son was Vijaya Buddhavarman and his grandson, Buddhyankura.

Almost nothing is known about how the Pallava kings secured their large empire in the centuries (350-550 AD) following the time of Siva Skandavarman. Probably they tried to strengthen the position of their empire and safeguard its boundaries, particularly in its southern parts where they battled with the Dravidian dynasties for the supremacy of their country. This at least is indicated in the Velurpalayam plates where a Pallava, Buddhavarman, is spoken of as the ‘submarine fire to the ocean of the Chola army’. From an inscription on the Ahmedabad pillar of about the middle of the 4th century AD, it is known that when The Gupta king, Samudragupta, invaded the Deccan and the South, he battled with Vishnugopa, a Pallava king, somewhere north of Kanchi but obviously never entered the Pallava capital.
MYTHOLOGICAL ORIGIN: THE KASAKUDI PLATES

Like most of the ruling dynasties of India and the ancient world, the Pallavas traced their origin to the gods and seers of primordial times, by whom the earth was shaped for the human race. The Kasakudi plates, a copperplate grant of the 8th century, relate the legendary origin of the Pallavas. The actual object of the inscriptions was to record the grant of a village by Pallava king Nandivarman (732-796 AD), to a certain brahmin. As in other inscriptions too, the actual grant is preceded by an account of the king’s ancestry, both mythological and historical.

The original plates, 11 in number, were discovered in 1879 at Kasakudi, four kilometres from Karaikal, by M. Jules de la Fon of Pondicherry. They were strung on a ring on which was soldered the royal seal bearing the figure of the bull which faces left and is surmounted by a linga. The bull was the crest of the Pallavas while their banner bore the figure of Siva’s club (khatvanga). The major portion of the inscription is in Sanskrit, while the particulars of the grant are repeated with additional parts in Tamil. The concluding portion of the inscription is again in Sanskrit.1

The Kasakudi plates open with a benediction to Brahman,... “which is the cause of production, stability and destruction of the three worlds; which is true, without end, without beginning”. After various gods are invoked, Ganapati as the last is addressed thus:

---

1. Episodes of the Buddha’s previous lives.
“May Vinayaka (Ganesa) grant you freedom from obstacles, who is as white as the Kailasa (mountain), whose girdle consists of a huge serpent, who has the face of an elephant, whose ears are large, who has a single big tusk, (and). whose eyes are (half closed as if he were) under the influence of rut.”

It follows a general benediction and then the Pallava genealogy begins with nothing less than the birth of the creator god, Brahma.

“May the race of the glorious Pallavas be protected for long by the supreme lords, those twofold gods whom (they) have worshipped with traditional devotion—the gods in heaven who timely reward gifts, sacrifices and austerities (and) the gods on earth (the brahmanas or bhudevas) who are engaged in the six duties, whose blessings are true and who practice selfcontrol.”

“First, from the lotus which rose from the navel of Vishnu, was born the Creator, whose origin is the (supreme) Brahma; who is selfexistent; who fully knows the meaning of the sacred texts; and who has performed the creation of the whole world.”

“From him was born at the sacrifice a son of the mind alone, Angiras, who fully carried out his promises; who was more brilliant than fire; who, being sinless put an end to sin; who being the chief of seers, obtained a place among the Seven Seers; who reached (the highest degree of) austerities that can be desired; and who was the best axe for cutting the tree of ignorance.”
“From this Angiras (came Brihaspati), who was an ocean of speeches and the father of politics; whom (Indra) the lord of gods and elder brother of Tridhaman (Vishnu), made his preceptor (guru); and relying on the power of whose intellect, the celestial women enjoy at ease amorous pleasure, without thinking of the rising and setting of the sun.”

“From him was born the fortunate and modest Samyu, who destroyed sin and resembled the sun in brilliancy; when fire had disappeared, he became the fire of the gods and performed even the action of fire through his own power.”

“His son was a sage called Bharadvaja, who became the founder of the race (gotra) of the glorious Pallavas by the power of his virtues, and who mastered the three Vedas, which resemble moun-tains by his austerities.”

Among Bharadvaja’s descendants is Asvatthama, the great sage, who accumulated so much yogic power that even Indra became afraid of him. He sent the beautiful apsara Menaka to the earth in order to seduce him, and thus, interrupt his austerities. Asvatthama, seeing the heavenly maid, was seized by the fire of a great passion which he was unable to master and from their union a child was born. As he was lying on a bed of young branches, his father called it ‘Pallava’ which is the Sanskrit term for sprout or shoot or scion. The word ankura means shoot too (or branch or bud) and is therefore a synonym of pallava; it is found in a number of names and birudas of Pallava kings, for example, Buddhyankura which
was the name of an early Pallava king. Mahendra I called himself Lalitankura (of tender sprout) or Nayankura (the sprout of polity). Tatunankura (the young sprout) was a *biruda* of Rajasimha I. We may therefore presume that the traditional account of the birth of the first Pallava on a bed of young branches was known long before it was recorded in inscriptions of later times.

“From him came the sage Asvatthama, who was an incarnation of (Siva), the enemy of Cupid; who deserved the confidence of the inhabitants of the world; and at the rising of whose anger, Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima became terrified and threw down their weapons without any opposition.”

“The glorious Pallava, (during whose rule) the earth was untouched even by the smallest calamity, was suddenly borne to him on a litter of sprouts (*pallava*) by (the nymph) Menaka that had been sent to him by Sakra (Indra), who was afraid of losing his position (on account of the sage’s austerities).”

“Though born from a race of *brahmins*, he possetssed in the highest degree the valour of the *kshatriyas*, which was inherent in him. Does not the thunderbolt possess by nature the quality of burning, though it springs from the cloud?”

In line 34 it is said: “From him descended the powerful, spotless race of the Pallavas which resembled a partial incarnation of Vishnu, as it displayed unbroken courage in conquering the circle of the world with
all its parts, and as it enforced the special rules of all castes and orders, and which resembled the descent of the Ganga on earth, as it purified the whole world.”

The recording of the genealogy and the praise of a number of kings which then follows was of immense value when the Kasakudi plates were discovered at the end of the 19th century as hardly anything was known about the Pallavas up to that time. Particular attention is given to the lines of the ‘great Pallavas’ from Simhavishnu to King Nandivarman “who was chosen by the subjects”. . .

“Thereafter came Simhavishnu, the lion of the earth (Avanisimha) who was engaged in the destruction of enemies, and who vanquished the Malaya, Kalabhra, Malava, Chola and Pandya (kings), the Simhala (king) who was proud of the strength of his arms, and the Keralas.”

“Then the earth was ruled by a king called Mahendravarman, whose glory resembled that of Mahendra, whose commands were respected (by all), (and) who annihilated (his) chief enemies at Pullalura.”

“From him was born the victorious here Narasimhavarman, who surpassed the glory of the valour of Rama by (his) conquest of Lanka, who was a comet (that foreboded) destruction to the crowd of proud enemies, and who imitated the pitcher-born (Agastya) by (his) conquest of Vatapi.”

“From him was born Mahendravarman, whose long arms were fierce thunderbolts to the crowd of enemies, and beginning with whom,
meritorious acts for the benefit of temples and brahmins and (the use of) the vessel of the donor (i.e. the vessel from which libations of water are poured at donations) have higvey prospered.”

“Then came Paramesvarapotavarman, to whose desires the crowd of all kings was subject. This wonderful (king) possessed high prosperity (bhutt), was the lord of men (bhuta), had a bull for (his) crest and a club on his banner, and possessed immovable firmness (thus resembling Siva, who wears sacred ashes (bbuti), is the lord of goblins (bbuta), has a bull for his emblem and a club on his banner, and resides on the mountain)”

“From him was born a complete incarnation of the blessed Paramesvara, who equalled Narasimha both by (the strength of) his body’ and by his name (Narasimha Varman) that spread over the world, This crest jewel of the Kshatriyas bestowed his wealth on temples and brahmins and devoutly caused the goddess of the earth, who was in his possession, to be enjoyed those familiar with the four Vedas”

“From him came Paramesvarapotavarman (II), who obtained desired treasures, (viz,) treasures fame; who conquered the coquettish ways of the Kali age; who led the way of policy, which had been prescribed by Dhishana (Brihaspati); and who protected the worlds.”

---

1. The Term Hinduism is usually applied for the Indian religion after the 6th century AD.
The actual object of the inscription, the grant of the village with a specification of the boundaries, the rights as well as the exemptions of duties connected with the grant, comes at the end and contains the channing sentence, “the donee shall enjoy the wet land and the dry land included within these four boundaries (detailed description) wherever the iguana runs and the tortoise crawls…..”

Plate 1 : The Kasakudi Plates
THE MAURYAS 320-185 BC

Historical Background:

Architectural and sculptural forms dating from before the 3rd century BC present to us only a vague picture because such few examples remain. Later, the picture becomes clearer, with the ascendency of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka to the throne of Maghada in 274 BC. This was an era of great cultural achievements and much evidence of this outpouring has been preserved, virtually intact, to the present day. Ashoka, in an early and decisive turn of his life, had accepted the teaching of the Buddha and declared Buddhism as the state religion of his country. In practice, this meant that he supported and spread the new religion with great personal zeal and all the imperial power at his disposal. He sent missionaries into all parts of his vast empire, to Ceylon and even as far as Egypt and Greece. He carved his famous edicts, which contained Buddhist maxims of right conduct, into rocks and monolithic pillars, and it is believed that he built some 80,000 stupas apart from numerous viharas (monasteries). Buddhism grew with the power of purity and genuine aspiration characteristic of a young religious movement, and its acceptance was wide—first in India and then in other countries of Asia. Under the patronage of the emperor it began its ascendency to the rank of a world religion.

Buddhism is one of the three heterodox systems and shares with the orthodox Samkhya school the distinction of being philosophically the
most developed of the early Indian *darsanas*. Early Buddhism categorically denies that there is anything permanent or everlasting in this world of infinite change, not even a soul. It is often regarded as a system of ethics rather than a religion.

The Buddha (‘the Awakened one’) used to liken existence to a wheel and its twelve spokes (as there are *avidqya* (ignorance), *namarupa* (name and form) *tanha* (desire, thirst) etc.) as the chain of causation. By making this wheel revolve, man becomes inseparably bound to endless successive existences, all marked by *dukha* (suffering), *anica* (transience), *anatta* (non-soulness), and rebirth. To attain liberation from this circle of suffering and rebirth eight rules are laid down in the ‘Eightfold Noble Path’ which the Buddha pointed out in his first sermon at Sarnath and which was elaborated in detail in the remaining years of his life, wandering from place to place. The eight rules to be adhered to are: right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right meditation. The pilgrim following sincerely the ‘Eightfold Noble Path’ will be led beyond the sphere of thinking into a realm where all desires have ceased to exist and perfect peace is attained. Such a person is called an *arhat* and the state he has attained Nirvana—an expression upanishadic in its origin, which means ‘extinguished’. The attainment of Nirvana is the main object in Buddhism. One of its fundamental rules of conduct is *ahimsa* or the non-injury of life. In many fields the influence of Buddhism on Hinduism has been profound and long lasting: in the philosophical realm of logical inquiry
and analysis, in the realm of education, literature, and particularly in that of architecture and art.

The initially small order, subject to simple discipline any rules, grew fast into a considerable community of monks and laymen. After the Buddha’s death however, his reaching and conclusions were differently interpreted. Even the various councils, which were held in the subsequent centuries in order to lay down the monastic order and dogmatize the teaching and its metaphysics, could not prevent the splitting up of Buddhism into Himayana and Mahayana Buddhism. The religious ideals of Mahayana is the Bodhisattvaor rather a pantheon of Bodhisattvas-who, having attained a state of supreme enlightenment would not dwell in it, but turn back to help mankind to free itself out of the nets of samana and ignorance. He represents unlimited compassion and love which evokes the fervent adoration and devotion of man. The high ideal of the arhat, one who has attained Nirvana by his own efforts, had become a teaching of salvation by simple faith and bhakti.

In its endeavour to express its teaching invisible forms and symbols, Buddhism adapted already existing architectural motifs, secular or religions. The stupa for example, the most striking architectural form of this period, was originally, a berial mound and was later transformed into a shrine for relics, encased in its domical structure, or else to a Buddhist memorial. Thus its ancient architectural form was preserved. Another out standing achievement of the Ashokan era was the bodily designed monolithic
pillars almost 50 feet high, which the emperor erected all over the country, particularly on sites which were sanctified by the Buddha. Impressive as they are in the present day, they must have had a tremendous impact on the people at a period when such stone pillars were seen for the first time. This impact was strengthened by the emperor’s edicts. Beautifully carved into the plain and highly polished shafts in letters of the Brahmi script. The animals which crown the shatis, such as a single lion as in the pillar of Sarnath, quadruple lions, are fine representations of their kind, and appear fully evolved out of an unknown past. They herald the exceptional capacity of the Indian artist for the rendering of animals which would become more and more distinct in the following centuries.

To use stone as material for architectural and sculptural purposes, hardly known up to then, became more common in this period. Archaic stone figures from Besnagar, Parlman and elsewhere, probably yakshas, colossal in size, full of physical strength and vigour are but one example; another would be the beautiful chowrie bearer of Didarganj, a masterpiece of sensitive carving. Ashoka’s legendary palace in Pataliputra was compared by Megasthenes with the palaces of Susa and Ekbatana. It must have still existed in the 5th century AD as Fahien, the Chinese traveller of that time, left us with a report of it. He was so impressed that he wrote: “...it was made by spirits who piled up stones, reared the walls and gates and executed the elegant carving and inlaid sculpture which no human hand of this world could have accomplished.” But when Hieun Tsang visited
Pataliputra two centuries later, the palace had fallen to a fire and the place was devastated.

The most interesting achievements of the Ashokan era however are the first chambers and halls, altogether seven in number, which were carved from the hard granitoid rock of the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills near Gaya. Inscriptions in these caves say that they were made by the order of the Emperor Ashoka for the Ajivikas, a sect related to the Jain religion. Many of them have the interesting feature that their axis runs parallel to the face of the rock while the entrance is cut at a right angle to it. Their plan is simple and like that of all other rock architecture copied from contemporary structures. The Sudhama cave consists of two parts—a long antechamber and a round chamber at the end, the wall of which has an overlapping cornice around, and thus follows the plan of a round thatched hut. Another cave, the Lorna Rishi, has an oval room behind the antechamber. Its horseshoe-shaped entrance with inward sloping jambs is copied from wooden structures and topped by a beautifully carved elephant frieze. The excavation of all the caves has been done with great care and exactness and shows a highly developed workmanship. Particular mention has to be made of the lustrous polish of their interior walls, which lends to the hard stone, a smoothness and a mirror like shine typical for the period.

Ashoka died in 232 BC. During his reign, the Mauryan empire extended from sea to sea and from Afghanistan and Kashmir in the north to the Deccan in the south, thus for the first time unifying a vast Indian
empire under one banner. Though his dynasty reigned up to the year 184 BC, the integrity of the empire began to crumble soon after his death, while at the same time, the Andhras (Satavahanas) rose to power in the Deccan.

**THE SATAVAHANAS**

In the Deccan, the Mauryan empire was followed by the rule of the Satavahanas who regarded themselves as descendants of the renowned Andhra race whose kings are listed in the Puranas. Their other name ‘Andhrabhityas’ (Andhra servants) may imply that their ancestors served as feudatories of the Mauryas in the Deccan, and when the Mauryan empire collapsed, seized its territories to rule there independently. The Satavahanas established themselves powerfully and their empire lasted for about four hundred and fifty years; at its greatest extent it covered the whole of the Deccan from coast to coast and spread far into northern and southern India. We may visualize its territory as an area with immense forests, interspersed with regions of cultivated land and numerous villages. Cities in its interior were few, whereas the eastern and western coasts were dotted with port towns, which throbbed with life and trade and connected the empire with the rest of the ancient world. The absence of well-protected roads in its interior however, hindered a developed commerce. The administration of the vast empire was largely left to feudatories who controlled their land and the people with the help of royal officers. (Pliny mentions that the Satavahana kings maintained an
army of 100,000 foot soldiers, 2000 cavalry and 1000 elephants.) Under this dynasty the classical art of India established itself and reached a first summit. In the 2nd century AD, the decline of the empire began. Weakened by long-lasting wars with the Indo-Scythians from the North, it gradually disintegrated along with the powerful unity which had nourished the first intense flowering of Indian culture. By the end of the 3rd century, the Satavahana empire had ceased to exist.

Buddhism, the new religion, began to spread from the 3rd century BC and manifested itself in an enormous building activity all over the continent except in the farthest south. It was supported to an amazing extent by the Satavahana kings who were themselves followers of the Brahmanical religion. Rock architecture flowered everywhere but now in a far more audacious style than that of the first caves in the Barabar and Nagarjuna Hills. Apsidal chaitya halls (Buddhist prayer halls) were carved from the rock, beautifully proportioned, often with long rows of pillars and a monolithic stupa at their end. Their facades were abundantly decorated with horse shoeshaped windows (kudus), galleries, railings and sometimes had a free standing monolithic pillar in front. Viharas (monasteries) were also excavated, usually consisting of a number of individual cells for monks grouped around an assembly hall. Thus, the great rockhewn chaitya halls of Bhaja, Pitalkhora, Karli, Kanheri, Bedsa and Nasik came into existence; likewise the stupa of Sanchi in its present shape with its magnificent toranas. To mention only a few renowned sites, in the lower Krishna valley there were the stupas of Jaggayapeta
and Nagarjunakonda and the celebrated Amaravati stupa in the Satavahana capital Dhanyakataka (the present Amaravati). Rock architecture, however, represented only part of the building activities of the period, as most of the Buddhist structures and settlements were built in perishable materials, wood or brick, and are more or less lost.

The early chaitya halls and viharas in their unornamented designs reflected the ‘world renouncing’ teaching of the Buddha and so did the clear form of the stupa which had become a symbol of enlightenment and transcendence. But the imagination of men, inspired by the images which the young religion evoked in them, would not be content with that. It sought to express its feelings and broke forth in the sculptural and formative art. Here, however, it became obvious that men, though immensely attracted by the figure and teaching of the Buddha, had not yet attained the maturity to rise to his spiritual demands. As Sri Aurobindo puts it: “... nothing is more difficult than to bring home the greatness and uplifting power of the spiritual consciousness to the natural man forming the vast majority of the race; for his mind and senses are turned outward to the external calls of life and its objects....” This is well exemplified at the stupa of Sanchi (1st century BC) where it was the vast scene of universal life, coloured by the symbols and ideas of the teaching which expressed itself in innumerable relief panels. This representation of ‘life’ in its immensities of forms, movements and manifestations would become the inexhaustible subject of Indian art throughout the centuries and would assimilate all other influences and suggestions. Even in Buddhist
representations this deeply rooted trend could not be altered, though the quintessence of the teaching was just the opposite: the abandonment of the scene of life. The toranas of Sanchi are carved all over with never-ending creepers, ageold symbols of the inexhaustible force of life; with archaic yaksha kings, sensuous tree goddesses and fabulous ani-mals, motifs which were borrowed from indigenous cults; with turbulent batde scenes and dramatic episodes of the Buddha’s life and his previous incarnations—the very fullness and exaltation of the vital life. But with the flexibility of the Indian mind this too obvious antago-nism was reconciled by turning all these movements, this exuberant enjoyment of life, into a single rapture of adoration in which all beings could participate: the gods showering flowers from above, the kings offering their riches in spectacular processions and common men prostrating themselves enthusiastically before the symbols of the Buddha. Even the animals participate naturally and free in this overwhelming movement.

The stupa of Sanchi has been preserved to our day in almost its original form, but of the stupa of Amaravati (Dhanyakataka) only the foundation is left and its famous sculptural slabs are scattered in the muselims of the world. Its origins go back to the time of the Emperor Ashoka, after which it passed through several phases of development. In the first century AD, we find the Buddha who up to then had been shown only by his symbols (tootprints, throne, tree etc.) represented in his human figure. After 150 AD, the wellknown and masterfully carved panels came into existence, marked by nature conception and execution.
Buddhist relief sculpture reached a first culmination here. The main subject, similar to Sanchi, are significant episodes of Buddha’s life and his previous manifestations, represented here with greater subtlety and refinement; even the choice of themes shows more originally. Some of the represented Jatakas\(^1\) are particularly interesting as they illustrate certain texts of which the original version is lost. The archaic traits of anchi are overcome, the natural charm and intensity of these early representations belong to the past. Now the human body is filled with streams of a higher emotional life and the enthusiastic adoration of Sanchi evolves into a deep devotion and faith. Graceful figures are visibly touched by strong emotions, spiritually hued, which at times takes pathetic or ecstatic forms. The environment in which they move is marked by sophistication and elegance. As in Sanchi, the predilection for crowded scenes predominate, but now distance and perspective are attempted for the first time.

Instances of Brahmanical art, albeit few, have survived as well. The earliest phase of Satavahana art at Bhaja is non-Buddhist and represented by relief panels of the Sun God in his chariot and Indra on his elephant. Another highly interesting figure of ‘the earliest phase of Saivaism is the Siva of Gundimallam, carved from a black, highly polished stone and marked by the wild, archaic features of Rudra, the Sacrificer.

Brahmanism or Hinduism\(^2\) sees itself as a continuation of the Vedic religion and accepts the Veda as ultimate and eternal revelation.

---

2. The comparison with Siva is based on the name of the king, Paramesvara, which is at the same time one of the names of Siva.
But actually great transmutations had taken place, in the course of which, Brahmanism would emerge as a synthesis of Aryan, Dravidian and tribal cults, the latter however, never being totally integrated. The old Vedic gods like Agni, Indra, Surya and Varuna lost much of their former importance, while other deities like Vishnu and Siva came to the fore. A vast body of literature sprang into existence (*smriti*) which was regarded as the fifth Veda. Part of the *smriti* are the two great Epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharatha which re-count the adventures and life of ancient heroes, set in a moral and ethical background; the Puranas belong to the *smriti* as well and consist of a vast compendia of ancient legends, religious instructions, genealogies of gods, solar and lunar dynasties etc. Both Epics and Puranas with their impressive images gave a powerful impulse of expression and richness to Indian life, its thought and particularly to its art.

Under the Satavahana rulers Brahmanism and Buddhism coexisted peacefully side by side. Buddhism with its ethical demands and spectacular architectural achievements was certainly much in the foreground, being widely partonized by kings, nobility and powerful merchant com-munities. As a third religious trend, coexisting with the two great religions, mention must be made of the cult of the tribal people who lived in the densely forested areas of ancient India and worshipped their own godheads.

In this religiously manifold society, no traces of mutual intolerance can be discerned anywhere. The absence of religious fanaticism, the high esteem in which religion and its expression in art were held by the
Satavahana kings and their attitude of being equal protectors of the different religious trends in their country was not only a characteristic of their own dominion but set a noble example which was followed in the centuries thereafter. Sri Aurobindo has said: “Indian civilisation did not develop to a last logical conclusion its earlier political and social liberties,—that greatness of freedom or boldness of experiment belongs to the West; but liberty of religious practice and a complete freedom of thought in religion as in every other matter have always counted among its constant traditions. The atheist and the agnostic were free from persecution in India. Buddhism and Jainism might be disparaged as unorthodox religions, but they were allowed to live freely side by side with the orthodox creeds and philosophies; in her eager thirst for truth she gave them their full chance, tested all their values, and as much of their truth as was assimilable, was taken into the stock of the common and always enlarging continuity of her spiritual experience\textsuperscript{1}.

Before closing the chapter on the Satavahanas, mention should be made of a great representative of their era, the philosopher and apostle of Mahayana Buddhism, Nagarjuna, who was a close friend of several Satavahana kings. He was the founder of the Madhyamika, the ‘middle path’ which regards the phenomenal world as neither absolutely real nor unreal—an idea which he developed into the doctrine of sunyata, the absolute state, where all contradictions are reconciled. This interfusion of

\textsuperscript{1} Narasimhavarman II took a different name at the time of his coronation and was known as King Rajasimha.
Brahmanical and Buddhist thought contributed much to the tolerant understanding which Buddhism enjoyed in his time and long afterwards. Royal benefactors who held him in high esteem carved a monastery for him into the mountain Sri Parvata. The description of it by the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang exemplifies vividly how deeply people were impressed by the bold achievements of Buddhist rock architecture:

“To the south of this country (Daksina Kosala) above 300 li from the capital was a mountain called Po-lo-mo-lo-ki-li (skrt. Brahmagiri) which rose loftly and compact like a single rock. Here King Sadvaha (Satavahana) had quarried for Nagarjuna a monastery in the mountain, and had cut in the rock, a path communicating with the monastery for about 10 li. The monastery had cloisters and lofty halls; these halls were in five tiers, each with four courts with temples containing gold life size images of the Buddha of perfect artistic beauty. It was well supplied with running water and the chambers were lighted by windows cut in the rock. In the formation of this establishment the king’s treasury soon became exhausted and Nagarjuna then provided an abundant supply by transmuting the rocks into gold. In the topmost hall Nagarjuna deposited the scriptures of Sakyamuni Buddha and the writing of the P’susas. In the lowest hall were the laymen attached to the monastery and the stores, and the three intermediate halls were the lodgings of the Brethren. The pilgrim learnt that when the king had finished the construction of this monastery an estimate of the maintenance of the workmen came to nine koti (crores) of gold coins.
THE IKSHVAKUS

The collapse of the Satavahana empire towards the end of the 3rd century AD led to the division of their territory between their feudatories, small dynasties of whom little is known, with most of them ruling only for a short time. Prominent as heirs to the Satavahana tradition and culture became the successors of their successors, the Vakatakas in the Central provinces, the Guptas in Maghada and the Pallavas in the southeast. The only dynasty of fame among the immediate Satavahana successors were the Ikshvakus. An ancient family, they claimed descent from the solar dynasty of Kosala (Ayodhya) and Ikshvaku, the eldest son of Vaivasvatu Manu, the primeval king of India. Like the Pallavas they had come from the North, their original homeland being somewhere in the valley of the upper Indus. Before the 3rd century BC they were independent rulers in the Krishna delta and from the 2nd century BC, they are found as viceroys of the Satavahanas in their eastern dominions. After the death of the last Satavahana king, Pulomavi IV, the Ikshvakus succeeded the Satavahanas in their own viceregal region. Their capital Vijayapuri (the present Nagarjunakonda) was situated west to the hill Sri Parvata—hence their synonym ‘Sriparvatas’ by which they are mentioned in the Puranas.

The rule of the Ikshvaku kings in the lower Krishna valley was short and politically rather uneventful. Their prominence in history is due to the cultural achievements that were attained in the less than hundred years of their reign. During that time, Vijayapuri and its surroundings
flowered with architectural and sculptural accomplishments of Buddhist and Brahmanical art. For Buddhism it was the last flowering in the Krishna valley—as a religious teaching and as a school of art, it was passing through its zenith.

Among the numerous Buddhist stupas, monasteries and apsidal temples in the Ikshvaku capital, particular mention has to be made to the great stupa or mahachaitya in which a tooth relic of the Buddha was encased. It shows the typical patterns of the Amaravati school with qyaka platforms at its four cardinal points, which served as altars for the offering of flowers, lamps and incense. An innovation was the wheelshaped base with a central column where radial walls met the circular wall of the stupa. Relief sculpture on long slabs continue the tradition of Amaravati, expressing pathos and emotion in the various scenes of the Buddha’s life. Particularly interesting are the mithuna couples (pairs in attitudes of mutual affection) which show a remarkable sculptural maturity and add a sensuous flavour to the religious background of the representations.

Almost all royal ladies were of Buddhist faith and patronized this last, intense flowering of Buddhist culture in the Krishna valley. The Ikshvaku kings, though they supported Buddhism in the same way as the Satavahana kings had done before them, were themselves followers of the Brahmanical religion and performed spectacular Vedic sacrifices. Under their reign were erected the first Brahmanical stone temples of which we know, thus opening the history of temple architecture in the Deccan and the South. Deep transformation of Vedic thought and religion had preceded
this new beginning. Though great yagnas continued to be performed, worship in the temple had begun to relegate Vedic fire sacrifice. Even different gods had come to the fore; Siva as Sarvadeva and his son Kartikeya were powerful godheads in Vijayapuri and many temples were dedicated to them. But the erection of Brahmanical temples marks another profound development: the gradual transition from Buddhism to Brahmanism and the ever growing expansion of the latter. Buddhism after the 4th century AD began to wane all over India but particularly in the lower Deccan. For the next half millennium it would confine its still great popularity to select centres in the peninsula, while Brahmanism began to shape the social picture, the culture and art of the time.

For the erection of Brahmanical temples, architectural patterns (for example the apsidal form) and ornaments were now freely borrowed from Buddhist models, and continued to do so in the centuries that followed. (Or as Ananda Coomaraswamy puts it: “...style and technical achievement of Indian art can never at any stage be described in sectarian terms.”) The layout of these temples shows intricate designs with single or several sanctuaries, apsidal or rectangular, each with a pillared hall in front (mandapa) and sometimes surrounded by subsidiary shrines. One example would be the Pushpabhadraswami temple which was built on an apsidial plan with solid stone pillars, auxiliary shrines and a prakara wall with three gates. The sudden appearance of each complicated and evolved architectural plans is surprising and indicates a foregoing development of which we have no knowledge.
Secular remains found in the Ikshavaku capital also disclose a highly developed culture and style of life. Stepped tanks, public baths and wells were connected with an intricate water system, provided with underground drainage and arrangements for the overflow of water. An ampitheatre open to the sky with sixteen tiers enclosing a rectangular space provided room for more than one thousand spectators. The large bathing *ghat* by the side of the Krishna river entirely encased with Cudappah slabs was a marvel of Ikshvaku architecture.

Into this Indian summer of intense creativity—Buddhist and Brahmanical—broke the Pallavas like an untimely frost. Little is known about their attack and away over the Ikshvaku territory. It turned out to be a deadly blow for the Ikshvakus, this ancient and highly cultured family, and nothing is known about them thereafter. We may suppose that their territory was merged into that of the Pallavas and that they were reduced to the status of vassals. But strangely enough, Buddhism too suffered from the onslaught of the Brahmanical Pallavas. Though seemingly in full bloom, impelling and inspiring by its existence a great movement of art, it gradually withered as if its life sap had been dried up and it could not exist without the protecting and beneficent hand of the Ikshvaku sovereigns. When Hieun Tsang visited Vijayapuri a few centuries later, he found most of the Buddhist monasteries deserted.
**Pallava Sculpture**

**RELIEF SCULPTURE - LANDMARK: OF THE ERA**

Pallava sculpture had its culmination in the 7th century, when it bloomed in great beauty and expressiveness. It was a spontaneous flowering, an outburst, the sudden appearance of a fully formed and evolved blossom, which apparently absorbed its life sap from much earlier centuries of consummate creations (Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda). It was something unique in Indian art. Never afterwards would granite so willingly yield to the sensitive hand of the sculptor, never afterwards would the mood of a moment, the thoughts behind a face, the eloquent gesture of a hand be so genuinely wrested from the stone. And never afterwards would the vital forces which impel life be expressed with so much discretion. To eschew effects which result from the depiction of violent movements, the gende undertones, the inner throbbing of life, the soulforce made visible in manthese are the characteristics of Pallava sculpture in this period.

A foretaste of the inborn sculptural talent of the Pallava artist is offered by some of the *dvarapalas* in the otherwise bare Mahendra caves. The elegant bent of their bodies, at once vigorous and delicate, the ease with which they lean on their clubs and yet express utter vigilance and self-confidence, are the first indication. Another and more conspicuous one is the Gangadhara panel in the upper Trichy cave temple, which unfolds before us in solitary perfection, balanced and firm, full of inner
strength and repose, as if created by a master, who, steeped in an age-old tradition of stonecarving, had filially reached this culmination of his talent. And yet, it is the first relief composition in stone in a Pallava cave.

It was, however, nothing but a prelude to the outburst of sculptural creativity in Mamallapuram, which is full of magnificent sculptures, carved from their natural background, the walls of the monolithic temples and cave temples—slim and elegant figures, lyrical in their absorption, noble in their restrained strength, irresistible in action and sophisticated when just posing for the sculptor. In this creative abundance we find profile studies with new possibilities of expression, excellent portraiture and outstanding animal representations. Large relief panels illustrate ancient mythological themes of the Puranas which were written down in those days and had a strong influence on the consciousness of men.

It was one of the rare moments in the history of art; on the one hand there is a continuous line of great and cultured kings, religious minded and with a strong artistic bent, who patronize art and architecture in the most generous way. On the other hand, there is a young religious movement not yet bound by the symbolism and orthodox rigidity of later centuries, giving the artist all the freedom to create to express his visionary inspirations or psychic curiosity or whatever it was by which his imagination was kindled.

One of the most typical characteristics of Pallava sculpture of this period is the play with subtle vibrations, art being tuned to the expression
of inward movements, be it a deep inner joy or tenderness or rapturous delight, vibrations which arise from the soul in man. This could not be better expressed than by a panel in the Adi Varaha cave temple, representing a Pallava king with his two queens. The king with an expression of gentle reverence is turned towards the shrine of the temple to which he is pointing with one hand. With the other he clasps the wrist of one of the two queens, leading her to the shrine chamber, while the second queen follows. Both ladies have delicate and slim figures, their transparent dresses are but indicated, and except for the tall crowns and large earrings, their ornaments are extremely plain—no importance being given to the outer decor by the sculptor who is concentrated alone on the inner moving force which animates the figures. The natural intimacy of this royal family scene is not only unique in Indian art; it is also an example of the exalted and de-voted mood of the time.

The Pallava style of sculpture had its actual culmination in the 7th and 8th century, but is found in its essential qualities of gracefulness and inwardness throughout the Pallava period (till the middle of the 10th century). Even in the late Pallava figures, which are already marked by a different and more static sculptural conception, it is distinctly perceivable. In the centuries following the decline of the Pallava era, its specific style was gradually obliterated; it still had a strong influence on the art of bronze casting, especially on the masterpieces, the early Chola bronzes between the 10th and 12th century. However, in the art of Further India, Java, Cambodia, it found its continuation and exerted a long lasting and fundamental influence.
DRESSES AND ORNAMENTS

Men of old did not seem to regard their body as something to be hidden—a fact which is amply demonstrated in Indian sculpture since the 3rd century BC but rather to be embellished, adorned and decked with ornaments and flowers. This predilection seems to be a very ancient movement in man and certainly dates back to times of which neither pictorial nor literary evidence exists. It reveals itself first in the findings of Mohenjodaro where the quantity of jewellery unearthed indicates that its people loved to adorn themselves. From the 3rd century BC onward, meticulous descriptions of different kinds of jewellery are found in Tamil as well as in Sanskrit literature and the sometimes, central importance given to this subject, infers that our ancestors were much preoccupied with their ornaments. We come to know about a classical variety of nine gems called navaratnam (diamond, sapphire, pearl, topaz, cinnamon stone, coral, emerald, lapis lazuli and ruby) used in certain ornaments which were to be distinguished from mere gold ornaments.

Cloth is worn as an adornment too, made of the finest thread and absolutely transparent of cotton cloth it is said that it was as thin as the slough of a snake or a cloud of steam and so finely woven that the eye could not follow the course of the thread. This was the fabulous South Indian muslin, highly praised and in great demand all over the ancient world. In Indian art it appears on figure sculptures, being wrapped in a diaphanous and most artistically folded cloth which leaves the body beneath visible, viz. certain Buddha statues from Sarnath and Mathura. A
few centuries later it is found in Pallava sculpture too, though it is less conspicuous here.

Figures in Pallava sculptures are young and handsome, men and women alike, with tall and slim and almost nude bodies, the differences of sex being contrasted as little as possible. The upper part of the body is left bare, whereas the lower is partly covered by a piece of cloth, ingeniously folded and draped around waist and thighs in various ways. Following an ancient dharmic rule, the Hindu of old did not wear stitched fabric; thus the people were habituated to an elaborate folding and draping of their cloth according to an ageold tradition. Ornaments and dresses are almost the same for ladies and men elaborate crowns (makuta), huge ear ornaments (kundalas) worn in pierced and elongated lobes, often of different shape on either side; necklaces and garlands, bracelets of conch shell or gold anklets of different kinds, the latter worn only by ladies. All ornaments are simple and unpretentious, adorning the otherwise almost nude body in a most becoming way. The two queens in the Adi Varaha cave temple may serve as an example—their few ornaments except of the crowns and heavy kundalas are of the simplest kind, suggesting that the predilection for rich and heavy adornment, so typical for later periods, did not yet exist.

Different ways of wearing folded cloth: The lower garment or vesti consists of a piece of cloth of various sizes, which is either worn as a long skirt with or without pleats, covering knees or ankles; it is usually found in representations of Vishnu or of rishis. This piece of cloth, when slung between the legs, forms a garment, similar to a pair of modern close
fitting shorts (*kaccha*) often with fine pleated folds. Very often it reaches only to the thighs or becomes even scantier, clinging tightly to waist or loins (*kauPina*). Or it becomes a simple loincloth, frequently worn by ladies, fastened at the back with the loose ends hanging down on either side. All these different ways of wearing the lower garment are secured at the waist by a belt, sometimes with a beautiful clasp or else by a piece of folded cloth, the free ends of which, after passing round the body, hang fanwise down on either side of the back. Another long piece of cloth, wound around the thighs to fall in one or several loops in front is called *vastra* and found on numerous figures. The cloth which is used for the different kinds of drapings is thin and transparent without heavy crease lines, so much so, that it is often hardly visible and discernible only by the slight hemline around thighs, knees or ankles. Sometimes a folded cloth is thrown over the left shoulder of male figures, passing under their right arm, similar to the sacred thread. The sacred thread (**yajnopavita**) is exclusive for male figures and worn in different ways. There are three modes of wearing it-for rites relating either to the gods or the humans or the manes, (**upavita**, **niviti** and **pracinaviti**.) The most common is when it crosses diagonally the chest, passing from the left shoulder below the right arm or sometimes above it; this mode is called **upavita**. The sacred thread may consist of a string of beads, a band of deer-skin, a rolled cloth or a garland of flowers and can be studied in its different ways at the figures of the Dharmaraja Ratha. Sometimes it is replaced by two strings, crossing diagonally the chest; this form is worn by goddesses too. Male figures are sometimes seen with a stomach band.
Among the ornaments the earrings (*kundalas*) and crowns (*makuta*) are most prominent. There are different types of crowns, the short or tall *kirita makuta*, which is a cylindrical crown with a knob on top. The tall *kirita* is worn by Vishnu in the Dharmaraja Ratha. Very often the hair itself is arranged in the form of a crown, viz. the *karanda makuta* of Laksmi in the Adi Varaha cave temple. *Thejata makuta* is Siva’s hair crown, elaborately formed by his tresses; some-times when they are laid around the head like a turban, this crown is called *jata-bhara*.

Such crowns, formed by the hair, are kept together and in place by diadems and side plaques. The *kirita makuta* is kept secure by a band tightened at the back of the head with a buckle (*siras chakra*).

Necklaces (*haras*) and garlands (*malai*) are worn by men and women alike, just as a variety of ornaments covering the upper and lower arms and wrists, viz. the simple arm bangle, the spiral *kryura* etc. Bracelets are either of conch shell, gold or other metals. Anklets are worn by ladies only.

Some of the men have shaved heads with a small tuft while moustaches are typical for warriors. *Rishis* have beards and royal and divine figures smooth faces.

The ear ornaments in the elongated lobes are unusually large and heavy, sometimes touching the shoulders, sometimes extending below shoulder level, reaching the size almost as large as the face.
ANIMAL SCULPTURE

“Animal sculpture, in fact, is one of the finest chapters of Indian art. A feeling of profound fellowship and comradeship with the beasts and with all living things, has inspired Indian thought throughout the ages and was certainly present in the pre-Aryan period. The most significant outcome of the attitude was the commandment not to injure any living being (ahimsa) which is one of the basic laws of Buddhism, Jainism and many kindred Indian sects. In the resultant art the animal organism was not observed from without, but was felt as it were from within, the form itself being seen as a mask of the universal life force and substance that inhabits equally the human frame. For according to this view there is no decisive gap between the two modes of existence, animal and human. Through countless lives in the round of rebirths the transmigrating lifemonad that imperishable spark or principle which gives life to every living thing—passes again and again through various forms, entering the bodies now of beasts, now of men, now of superhuman beings. This is the meaning of the Indian concept of the lifestream without end (samsara). There has sprung from it a feeling for the soul of the animal, that has conduced to a sympathetic apprehension of the behaviour of the body frame—its attitude and gestures: a kind of intuitive physiognomy, the sensibility of which is unsurpassed in the history of art.

Both, the human organism and the animal are experienced in Indian sculpture from within. Welling from an interior life centre, a current pervades and animates the body, pressing out against the surface and
pervading the sensitively modeled limbs. The frame created by the profile and its outline is not allowed to predominate over the body substance; the material itself gives up its quality of stone or metal and is transubstantiated into life. This particular miracle of Indian sculpture is first made evident to us in the animal symbols of Mohenjodaro. It is next made evident, millennia later, in certain masterpieces of the Maurya period (3rd century BC) for example in the bull of an Ashokan pillar. And the same profound sensitivity still is evident after another thousand years in the recumbent bull in the Krishna cave of Mamallapuram (7th century AD), which is a work of the Pallava craftsmen of the South. In such an art the distinction between sculpture in the round and relief is obliterated. Though defined by a profile of bold and simple contours, the figure emerges fully from its background and there is such a balancing of the typical generic traits of the beast, that an illusion is created of individual animation. A gently glowing vitality throbs from a centre of interior force, subdued by the meek and quiet nature of the ruminant. The repose of the magnificent figure is filled with the pulse and warmth of actual life.

**Pallava Rock Architecture**

The second phase of Pallava architecture, the so-called Mamalla period, comprises the reign of Narasimha Mahamalla and that of his grandson Paramesvaravarman, i.e. the time between 630 AD to 700 AD. Of this period too, only the rock architecture has remained cave temples and, as an innovation, the fully carved out monolithic temples, the so-
called *rathas*.\(^1\) All of them are found at Mamallapuram, the busy and populous port town of the Pallava empire situated near the mouth of the Palar river. A large granite hill there, aligned from north to south and measuring about half a mile long and quarter of a mile wide, formed the matrix, from which the cave temples were excavated, whereas the *rathas* were carved from another smaller granite rock a little farther south. Rock architecture and sculpture however, were only part of the enormous building activity in Mamallapuram at that time, in course of which a great number of structural brick and timber buildings were erected. For example, the new harbour or the citadel on top of the above mentioned granite hill, with houses, palaces and the royal residence, of which only a few foundations have remained. Another architectural feature of Mamallapuram, of which definite traces have been found, was a developed water system of canals and tanks, by which running water was probably supplied to the town. All these various architectural achievements and building activities indicate the great importance Narasimhavarman Mahamalla attached to his port town, which soon became the artistic and economic centre of his empire, from which farreaching impulses spread. Most beautifully situated on the sea, connected by its ships with Further India, Java and other islands in the Indian Ocean, it must have been an interesting township, imbued with the atmosphere of creative activity and throbbing with cosmopolitan life an ideal place for the unfolding of

---

1. The space in front of the shrine cell is called *ardha mandapa* and the space between the facade pillars and the interior row of pillars is called *mukha mandapa*. In temple architecture in general the *mukha mandapa* is the first or frontal of a number of *mandapas* which lead to the shrine.
an era of artistic endeavour. And presumably, more than the orthodox
Kanchi with its climate of religious dispute and contest, it was the actual
and vital heart of the Pallava empire in this period.

CAVE TEMPLES AND RATHAS: GENERAL FEATURES

Cave temples are stone copies of contemporary structural shrines
with every detail of the original building being reproduced faithfully,
even those parts, which in monolithic architecture would actually have
neither place nor function, viz. the ribbing below cornices, the curved
rafters below domes and vaults etc. Such an imitative reproduction of
architectural forms, which were actually based on the working of wood
or thatch, is already found in the earliest cave temples of India in the
Barabar and Nagarjuna hills; it is found in the first rock-cut Buddhist
chaitya halls of Bhaja, Guntupalle etc. and was continued throughout the
centuries up to the Pallava cave temples of the 6th and 7th centuries AD
and later.

The cave temples of the Mahendra period were marked by a great
austerity, simplicity of plan, ornament and execution; the few decorative
elements in them and the shape of their pillars were derived from
Buddhist art. Cave temples excavated during the Mamalla period and in
the specific Mamalla style have only the plan in common with the
Mahendra caves, but in their architectural details they are much more
developed. Dravidian style elements become more and more prominent
and coexist now side by side with the traditional Buddhist motives. The
The most outstanding feature of the Mamalla rock architecture is the wealth of monolithic relief sculptures which emerge from the walls in such an abundance, that they seem to have become the main object for the excavation of cave temples altogether.

One example for the assimilation and integration of Dravidian style elements are the miniature shrines. It is usually a string of shrines, called *hara*, surrounding the different storeys of the South Indian temple. They seem to be adopted from the contemporary local architecture and are already mentioned in early Tamil writings, where they are called *aramfyam* (*harmya*). Mention has however to be made to the fact that a number of scholars relate their origin to the Buddhist architecture where individual cells for monks surrounding a prayer hall as on a string belonged to the common designs of a Buddhist monastery. Though the similarity seems to be striking it has to be remembered that Buddhism spread in the Tamil country long before the Pallavas settled there and that since then, Buddhist forms had melted together with those of the Dravidian style to become inseparably one with them. A final answer to the question about the origin of a style element is thus not possible.

In the monolithic architecture of the 7th century and later in the structural temple, the miniature shrines become part of the parapet walls, by which the accessible or inaccessible storeys of a Dravidian temple are marked off. Even at the facade of many cave temples they are faithfully reproduced, usually as a line of oblong shrines above the cornice. There are three types of miniature shrines: the square shrine or *kuta* (when
coinciding with the corners called *karna kuta*), the *sala* or oblong plan and the *panjara* (or *nida*), which is the apsidal miniature shrine. They are interconnected by recessed parapet-like parts called *harantara*. In the fully carved out monolithic architecture (rathas) and in the structural stone temple of the following centuries, this string of miniature shrines may stand apart from the wall of the temple, leaving a circumambulatory passage in between. The storeys of such temples are accessible and functional and have a shrine chamber on each ascending plane (viz. the Dharmaraja Ratha, the Vaikunthaperumal temple in Kanchi, or the Sundaravaradaperumal temple at Uttaramerur). But this kind of temple is rare, whereas temples with nonfunctional and inaccessible storeys, which allow a loftier height of the superstructure, are the most common in Dravidian architecture. Here, the miniature shrines are connected with the temple walls directly without any space being left in between (viz. the Arjuna Ratha or the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram).

A short reflection on the symbolical background of architectural forms is interesting. To the ancient mind, God was one and no other manifestations of Him were needed to comprehend His all-embracing vastness. With the declining ages this infinite Oneness had to be made visible—visibly filled by His infinite multiplicity, without losing its impact. In Dravidian architecture we find this idea expressed by an immense fullness and wealth of architectural forms, ornaments and figures which are repeated on each storey and stage of the diminishing planes of a temple. “To find the significance we have first to feel the
oneness of the infinity in which this nature and this art live, then see this
thronged expression as the sign of the infinite multiplicity which fills this
one-ness, see in the regular lessening ascent of the, edifice the subtler and
subtler return from the base on earth to the original unity and seize on the
symbolic indication of its close at the top. Not absence of unity, but a
tremendous unity is revealed.

The most distinctive feature in the architecture of the Mamalla
period is the new type of pillar which has an entirely different shape. The
Mahendra pillar had its origin in the Buddhist architecture of the Krishna
valley, whereas the prototype of the Mamalla pillar was the Dravidian
column carved from wood. The Mamalla pillar has tall and slender shafts,
which are clearly set off from the upper moulded parts, the capital, by
bands of floral designs, imitating the embossed metal rings of wooden
pillars.

These bands at the apex of the shaft are called *malasthana* and
*padma bandha*. The moulded parts above, called the capital, consist of the
*kalasa*, a saucer shaped part called *tadi*, a cushion shaped member, the
*kumbha*, with a lotus shaped part above, the *pali*, forming the underside
of a thick and square abacus or *phalaka*. From the abacus projects the
*virakantha*, which in the original wooden pillar was a metal rod, inserted
in the capital and connecting it with the corbel bracket or *potika*, which
carries the beam or *uttira*.

The lower part of the pillar was sometimes plain and decorated
with a band of floral designs, *madhya bandha*; very frequently however,
it was shaped into the form of a squatting lion or else a vyala, a mythological animal... in the form of a horned lion sometimes with a beaked face, so much so, that the lion on a vyala-based pillar, simha stambha, became a typical feature not only of the Mamalla period but also of Pallava temples in the centuries to come. The lion or vyala motif as such, however, underwent slight variations of style and form in course of time.

Another graceful ornament of the Mamalla period is the makara torana. In its original form it is an arched festoon mounted over two columns and representing a stambha torana entrance. It was employed in ancient architecture, in houses and palaces, where torana entrances preceded gopuram entrances. Although the gopuram entrance as an architectural form prevailed in the South, the torana motif was not lost but used to top niches and entrances of a temple. It makes its first appearance in the late rock architecture of the Mahendra period (Dalavanur, Siyamangalam); at the cave temples and rathas of the Mamalla period it is found more frequently to become an inevitable ornament at the structural temple of the centuries to come.

Themakara torana is formed by voluted garlands of flowers or pearls which issue from the mouths of two or four makaras, opposite to each other to form one or two ornamental arches. The long tails of the makaras are often elaborately shaped like the ripples of waves\(^1\). The

\(^1\) Epigraphia India XVII.
makara, a mythological animal, is a very ancient decorative motif, frequently found in Buddhist art. It is represented as a seamonster with an elephant or crocodile head and as it is related to water it symbolizes fertility and the force of life. It is the vehicle of god Varuna and the goddess Ganga, but appears also on the banner of Kama, the god of love.

The facades of Mamalla rock temples are not plain like those of Mahendra, but have a fully represented entablature, showing all the architectural parts above the beam: for example, the rounded cornice or kapota decorated with horseshoe-shaped arches or windows (kudu) which usually frame the faces of celestials. Horseshoe-shaped forms (gates, windows) are abundantly found in sculptural panels of Bharhut and Sanchi and at all Buddhist rock architecture of subsequent centuries, so much so, that it would be unthinkable without them. In Pallava architecture, kudu-arches decorate the cornices of cave temples and temples. Essentially the horseshoe form is derived from the flexed bamboo forming the frame of a thatched hut. The hamsa or bhuta friezes below the kapota and the vyala friezes above it, form parts of the entablature and appear for the first time in stone.
Plate-2: Ashoka Pillar, Vaisali, Bihar
Plate-3: Lion capital (detail), Vaishali, Bihar.
Plate-4: The entrance to the Loma Rishi cave.
Plate-5: The Siva of Gundimallam represented as Rudra.
Plate-6: The yaksa Sankanidhi holding a full purse
(Museum of Nagarjunakonda)
Plate-7: Lon limestone slabs covered with panels decorated the body of the great stupa
Plate-8: Lalitankura cave temple at Trichi: Siva as Gangadhara.
Plate-9: Arjuna Ratha, dvarapala; "...profile studies with new possibilities of expression."
Plate-10 Dharmaraja Ratha, Siva Veenadhara: "...slim and elegant figures..."
Plate-11 : Arjuna Ratha, southern wall, a Pallava king: "...noble in their restrained strength..."
Plate-12 : Dharmaraja Ratha, Siva playing his Veena: "...lyrical in their absorption..."
Plate-13: Mahisasuramardini cave temple, the goddess
Durga: "...irresistable in action..."
Plate-14: "...sophisticated when just posing for the sculptor..."
Plate-15: The Pallava style of sculpture in its essential qualities predominates throughout the Pallava period up to the middle of the 10th century.
Plate-16: The Pallava style of sculpture in its essential qualities predominates throughout the Pallava period up to the middle of the 10th century.
Plate-17: In the following centuries the Pallava style of sculpture influenced the art of bronze casting, especially the masterly Chola bronzes between the 10th and 12th centuries.
Plate-18: Stupa of Sanchi, eastern torana, tree-emph.
Plate-19: Monkey, near the open-air relief: "There has sprung from a feeling for they soul of the animal"
Plate-20: Guntupalle, monolithic chaitya, 200 century BC.
Plate-21: Miniature shrine which from the parapet walls of the accessible storeys of the Dharmaraja Ratha.
Plate-22: Kanchipuram, Kailasnatha temple (8th century), one of the largest Pallava temple complexes with inaccessible storeys.
Plate-23: The makara is an ancient decorative motif and represented as a mythological animal.