CHAPTER-3

Mamalla Style or Narasimha Varma (630-668 AD)

Historical Background

Let us briefly recall the historical scene of the time, when Mahendra’s son, Narasimha Mahamalla, also known as Mamalla, ascended to the Pallava throne to mark an era with the stamp of his personality. The Chalukyas, the ever hostile neighbours of the Pallavas, were continuing their policy of aggression, and had occupied the northern provinces of the Pallava empire, the Vengi area, the country between Krishna and Godavari-delta, and then invaded the central Pallava territory, where they could not be stopped till they had almost reached Kanchi. Although they were finally thrown back, the northern provinces, the actual homeland of the Pallavas where. They had reigned as feudatories of the Satavahanas, were permanently lost to them. Strangely enough, the Pallavas never tried to reconquer the land of their ancestors, not even in politically favourable moments, which may indicate that by now they were firmly rooted and integrated in their new land and empire in the South.

The land, in which the Pallavas gained such a strong foot-hold and which had been demarcated and conquered by their ancestors, is described by the famous Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang, who visited it in about 642 AD and left us with a report which is a unique and rare document of the
time.¹ Hieun Tsang says that the soil of the land was fertile and regularly cultivated, producing an abundance of grain, flowers and fruit and that the earth was rich with precious gems. He describes the people as being courageous and deeply attached to the principles of honesty and truth and mentions the high esteem in which they held learning and education. With regard to Buddhism, the pilgrim found some hundred sangharamas (Buddhist monasteries) in Kanchi and 10,000 priests, all of whom studied the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism. He mentions the existence of about 80 Hindu temples and remarks that the Jain sect of Digambaras (sky-clad) had many adherents. Hieun Tsang also refers to the current tradition that the Tathagatha (Buddha) had often visited this country, preaching the law and converting the people there and that for that reason Asokaraja, the Buddhist emperor, built many stupas at all the sacred spots where traces of the Tathagatha’s presence could be found. He refers also to the tradition that Kanchipuram was the birthplace of Dharmapala, the famous Buddhist metaphysician, who became the head of the University of Nalanda.²

Kanchi, the capital of the Pallava empire, as described by Hieun Tsang, was an orthodox religious centre of the ancient Indian world, where diverse religious trends coexisted side by side. Buddhism, though inwardly declining, showed itself outwardly as a fully established religion with numerous monasteries, ruled by a hierarchy of abbots, priests and

¹ S. Beal : ‘Buddhist Records of the Western World’, vol. II.
² Nalanda, a famous seat of Buddhist learning in the 7th century AD is situated near modern Rajgir in Bihar.
monks. The diverse philosophical schools, generally of Mahayana Buddhism, were taught and discussed there. Kanchi had been a seat of Buddhist learning and culture long before Pallava times and, according to Hieun Tsang, Buddhism there could be traced back to the days of its founder. Jainism too, a religion of great antiquity, had taken deep roots in Tamil soil. This celibate order followed a teaching of extreme asceticism and strict *ahimsa*. It had many centres of teaching in Kanchi and all over the country, usually at selected solitary places in Nature, suitable for study and contemplation. The goal in Jainism, similar to that of Buddhism is the liberation of the soul from its sensuous fetters which would lead it finally to the attainment of perfection. But Kanchi was at the same time a centre of Hinduism and Vedic teaching. The famous *ghatika*, an institution where Vedic Sanskrit was taught by learned *brahmins* to the twiceborn and which was specifically patronized and supported by the Pallava kings, had its seat there. People belonging to different religions and sects were found living in a peaceful fellowship in the Pallava capital. Right from the beginning, the Pallava kings, noble heirs to the Satavahana tradition, were absolutely tolerant in their religious policy and also equally generous towards the followers of different faiths.

Behind the seemingly firmly established facade of old religions, a gradual development had taken place, which in the end would cause a great change in the religious picture of the time, relegating Buddhism and Jainism to the background while transforming Vedic Hinduism into “Puranic” Hinduism or Brahmanism. This transformation has been
described by Sri Aurobindo thus: “This lasting line of change moved forward not by any destruction of principle, but by a gradual fading out of the prominent Vedic forms and the substitution of others.... The Vedic gods rapidly lost their deep original significance. At first they kept their hold by their outer cosmic sense but were overshadowed by the great Trin-ity, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva, and afterwards faded altogether. A new pantheon appeared which in its outward symbolic aspects expressed a deeper truth and larger range of religious experience, an intenser feeling, a vaster idea. The Vedic sacrifice persisted only in broken and lessening fragments. The house of Fire was replaced by the temple; the karmic ritual of sacrifice was transformed into the devotional temple ritual; the vague and shifting mental images of the Vedic gods figured in the Mantras yielded to more precise conceptual forms of the two great deities, Vishnu and Shiva, and of their Shaktis and their offshoots. These new concepts, stabilized in physical images, were made the basis both for internal adoration and for the external worship which replaced sacrifice. The psychic and spiritual mystic en-deavour which was the inner sense of the Vedic hymns, disappeared into the less intensely luminous but more wide and rich and complex psychospiritual inner life of Puranic and Tantric religion and Yoga.”

It was the emotional nature of man on which this movement laid hold and its most powerful means in this process was the Puranic Word, the epic myths, conceived and formulated by ancient seers who evoked

before man a brilliant cosmic show of gods fighting *asuras* and the universe serving as a battlefield, the eternally circling wheel of victory and defeat, the earth being saved time and again and finding itself a new in deep distress-powerful images, which aroused a strong fascination in man and inspired his imagination. Outwardly, this turn expressed itself in an outburst of high intelligence, an immense impulse of creativity in all domains of art, philosophy and literature and in the evolution of a complex society. Its strongest formulation, however, was the wave of *bhakti*, which swept over India and seized the Indian heart and mind like a deep and long awaited passion. *Bhakti* is Oneness with God by abso-lute adoration, surrender and love. In the South, this *bhakti* movement found its expression in the ecstatic songs of saintly singers, who wandered through the country from temple to temple followed by awed crowds, whom they moved deeply with their enraptured songs about the sweetness of Divine Love.

It has been said, that they sang Buddhism out of the country—and there may be some truth in it.

*NARASIMHAVARMAN MAHAMALLA (630-668 AD)*

Narasimhavarmman Mahamalla, son of Mahendravarman, led the Pallava empire to an unprecedented height of power, prestige and cultural achievements. His fame is strongly associated with his conquest of the Chalukya empire and its capital Vatapi (the present Badami), which he occupied for more than a decade. It appears, however, that his re-
establishment of the ancient port Kadal Mallai, named Mamallapuram after him, was much more significant and of a more farreaching consequence. Obviously the port of this old township was already known in the ancient world. In the 2nd century AD, the Grecian geographer Ptolemy refers to it under the name Maliarpia; the Romans too must have sent their ships to its port, as is evidenced by the finding of Roman coins there. Narasimha recognized the importance of a strong port for eventual naval expeditions and for his overseas con­nections with Further India and therefore fortified, enlarged and embellished the ancient town with an immense engagement of means and labour. It soon became a frequented port, from where the ships set sail for Ceylon and other places. The Vaishnava saint, Thirumangai Alvar, refers to it in one of his hymns, saying that in its harbour vessels ride at anchor “bent to the point of breaking, laden with wealth, big trunked elephants and nine gems in heaps”. Ships however were not only sailing to Ceylon, but across the Indian Ocean to Cambodia, Java and other islands, not only laden with merchandise, but carrying with them the knowledge of indian culture, of architecture and sculpture, of music and dance and the traditions in which they were rooted. In course of time, important schools of art and architecture came up in those countries, the origin of which can be traced back to the Pallava art of Mamallapuram in the 7th century.

Simultaneously with the fortification and extension of its port, Mamallapuram became the centre of rock architecture and sculpture of this period, a highly creative movement of art, from which great influence
spread all over India. Under Narasimha’s patronage the style of cave temples developed a much more differentiated form than under his father Mahendra cave temples which acquired specific and elegant pillars and were full of magnificent sculptures and large narrative reliefs. Creative and open to new ideas, he initiated the fully carved out rock architecture monolithic temples, cut entirely from the raw rock which represent a sort of crystallization of the various forms of brick and timber shrines in Dravida-desa at the beginning of the 7th century, of which otherwise nothing would be known.

Narasimha was like his father a many-sided personality, statesman and king. An ideal patron for an unfolding era of art, a ruler who tightened the reins of administration in his expanding empire, he was above all a great warrior who fought many victorious battles. His main antagonist and equal on the battlefield was the Chalukya king Pulakesin II. Narasimha is represented at the Dharmaraja Ratha in an expressive sculpture, broad-shouldered and determined, a man with his feet firmly planted on the ground. In the Kuram copperplates\(^1\) he is thus described:

“...Narasimhavarman, (who arose) from the kings of this race, just as the moon and the sun from the eastern mountains; who was the crest jewel on the head of those princes who had never bowed their heads (before); who proved a lion to the elephant-herd of hostile kings; who appeared to be the blessed Narasimha himself, who had come down (to earth) in the shape of a prince; who repeatedly defeated the Cholas,

\(^{1}\) South Indian Inscriptions vol I.
Keralas, Kalabhras and Pandyas; who, like Sahasrabahu (i.e. the thousand armed Kartavirya) enjoyed the action of a thousand arms in hundreds of fights; who wrote the (three) syllables of (the word) *vijaya* (i.e. victory) as on a plate on Pulakesin’s back, which was caused to be visible (i.e. whom he caused to turn his back) in the battles of Pariyala, Manimangala, Suramara etc.; and who destroyed the city of Vatapi, just as the pitcher-born (Agastya) (the demon) Vatapi…”

Soon after his ascendance to the throne, he had to defend his kingdom against the Chalukyas, who under Pulakesin II had invaded its territory again and once more threatened its capital Kanchi. Narasimha, however, defeated them in several battles and compelled them to retreat. Encouraged by this success he started a counter invasion into the Chalukya territory. This campaign was led by his general Paranjothi, who later in his life became a Siva saint with the name Siruttondar. After a long siege, the city of Vatapi was captured and much precious booty was won.

The fact that Vatapi and part of the Chalukya territory remained occupied by the Pallavas for some time (approximately 13 years) threatened seriously the existence of the young Chalukya kingdom and its ruling dynasty. Pulakesin was dead, probably killed on the battlefield. His feudatories had declared their independence and even two of his sons, ruling as viceroys, became disloyal. Finally his youngest son, Vikramaditya, compelled the Pallavas to withdraw from Vatapi, defeated the rebellious feudatories and restored the unity of the disrupted kingdom. Around 654 AD he proclaimed himself king of the Chalukya Empire.
Narasimhavarman had returned to Kanchi around 642 AD. Another memorable event of his life was his expedition to Ceylon, the details of which are gathered from the Mahavamsa. It reads like an ancient tale of noble magnanimity and friendship. Manavamma, a Ceylonese prince had to flee his country and, seeking refuge in India, entered the service under Narasimhavarman. In the Mahavamsa is described how he proved his trust worthiness by bravery and loyalty, which won Narasimha’s esteem and finally his friendship. When the prince prepared to return to his country Narasimha gave him an army with which he was able to secure the throne of Ceylon for himself. The initial success of this expedition, however, did not last long. Deserted by the army, the prince again had to seek refuge and help at the Pallava court. Narasimha, in a true royal gesture, once more equipped a naval expedition, much bigger than the first one and accompanied him in person to his port town Mamallapuram, from where the ships set sail for Ceylon. This time, Prince Manavamma was firmly installed on the throne of Ceylon, though after Narasimha’s death he again had to seek refuge at the Pallava court. The second naval expedition with all its display of martial pomp must have been a spectacular demonstration of the Pallava power and certainly did not fail to make a deep impression on the contemporary South Indian kingdoms.

Narasimha had a grandson Paramesvaravarman, who in his character and inclinations resembled him strongly. He not only continued the feud with their arch enemy, the Chalukyamas, but also completed to a great extent

1. Mahavamsa or the “Great Chronicle” is a history of Ceylon, written during the reign of the Ceylonese king, Mahavama.
his grandfather’s large-scaled beginnings in the field of rock architecture. With him this era would come to a close an era in which man had chosen nothing less but the oldest and hardest rock on earth, granite, to formulate his godward feelings.

**MAHENDRAVARMAN II (668-672 AD)**

Narasimhavarman was succeeded by his son Mahendra II around 668 AD. Very little is known about this king and no inscriptions have been found, dated during his short reign. The Kuram plates refer to him as having thoroughly enforced the law of the castes and orders. If Dr. Minakshi’s interpretation of the historical panels in the Vaikunthaperumal temple is correct, he may have renounced the throne in favour of his son Paramesvaravarman.¹ According to other records he may have sustained defeat and death in the battle against the Gangas near Mysore.

**PARAMESVARAVARMAN I (672 -700 AD)**

Paramesvaravarman was a great builder and a valiant warrior. He is eloquently described in the Kuram plates:²

“Paramesvaravarman, whose beauty (darsana) sur-passed (that of) all (others, just as Paramesvara (Siva) has one (eye) more than all others; who like Bharata was a conqueror of all; who avoided improper con­duct, just as Sagara abandoned (his son) Asamanjasa; who possessed a strong body, just as Karna was king of the prosperous Angas; who was fond of

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¹. Panel XIX of wall 5, upper row: an old king without crown sits on the throne, watching the young son’s coronation.
². South Indian Inscription vol. I.
poems, just as Yayati of Kavya; whose command always caused pain to haughty kings, like a chaplet (forcibly placed on their heads), but gave splendour to the face of friends by reaching their ears like ear-rings; who was constantly clever in the sport of fine arts Gust as) the moon is charming in the beauty of her digits; who resembled the string of pearls on the breast of Cupid, but who at the same time avoided unlawful (intercourse) with women (even) in thought.”

His bravery and intrepidity is best expressed in the short sentence of Homeric dimensions, “. . .he, unaided, made Vikramaditya whose army consisted of several lakshas, take to flight, covered only by a rag”.\(^1\) Paramesvara, after his ascension to the throne, found himself in an extremely difficult situation. His great contemporary and foe was the Chalukya king, Vikramaditya I, son of Pulakesin II, a veteran soldier and able commander, who once had saved his kingdom from subjugation by the Pallavas. This time Vikramaditya had invaded the Pallava territory and was encamped at Malliyurgrama near Kanchi. According to the Gadval plates, he defeated Paramesvara, conquered Kanchi and destroyed the Mamalla family thus taking terrible revenge for Narasimha’s raid on Vatapi. In a Chalukya grant an interesting description of the fortification of Kanchi is found:

“…this lord of the earth, conquering Isvarapotaraja (paramesvara 1) took Kanchi, whose huge walls were insurmountable and hard to be broken, which was surrounded by a large moat, that was unfathomable

\(^1\) Kuram plates.
and hard to be crossed and which resembled the girdle (Kanchi) of the southern region.”

Paramesvara had to flee and Vikramaditya continued his invasion and conquest of the Pallava territory and finally reached the river Kaveri, where he encamped at Uraiyyur, the old Chola capital (near Trich). There the Pandya king, his ally, joined him with his army. Paramesvara, undaunted, collected his beaten and dispirited troops and led them personally against Vikramaditya, whose army outnumbered his own by far. A fierce battle was fought at Peruvallanur (674 AD), of which we have a vivid account in the Kuram plates. It resulted in the complete defeat of the powerful Chalukya army and Vikramaditya had to evacuate the Pallava territory immediately afterwards.

Earlier in 672 AD, Paramesvara had led a campaign against the Ganga king, Bhuvikrama, an ally of Vikramaditya I. This battle at Vilande went against him and he lost to his enemy a valuable crown jewel, a necklace containing the famous gem Ugrodaya.

Paramesvaravarman, as already mentioned, continued the work of his grandfather Narasimhavarman in the field of rock architecture, to which he added his own temples and cave temples in almost the same style. During his reign the Ganesha Ratha and the Ramanuja Mandapam were excavated, the Dharmaraja Ratha and other rathas were brought to their present state of completion, and the Draupadi Ratha and Adivaraha cave temple were completed. The two structural temples built in his time,
one in Kuram and the other in Sirrambakkam, are regarded as early attempts in the construction of stone temples.

**Cave Temples of the Mamalla Period**

- The Koneri Mandapam cave temple - five celled rock-cut cave temple with features of the Mahendra and Mamalla style.

- The Mahisasuramardini Mandapam cave temple - in which the Somaskanda panel indicates the completion by Paramesvara.

- The pulipathan - completed probably in the Mamalla period with the last stages of excavation still incomplete.

- The Adi Varaha Mandapam cave temple - completed by Paramesvara in the earlier part of his reign.

- The Ramanuja Mandapam cave temple - belongs according to its inscriptions entirely to the time of Paramesvara.

- The Trimurthi cave temple - is to be attributed to Paramesvara.

- The Panchapandava Mandapam cave temple (unfinished) - would also fall in the period of Paramesvara.

- The Yali Mandapam of Saluvankuppam - which belongs to the period of Rajasimha. It is mentioned here only as part of the rock architecture of Mamallapuram. The Trimurthi cave temple at the northern end of the large granite hill represents the variation of an old theme in the many-tuned symphony of rock architecture at Mamallapuram.
3.1 MUMOORTHY MANDAPA

Inexhaustible was the creative urge in this short era. Here, the cave temple with three contiguous shrines is given a new shape, differing from those of Mahendra as it has no pillared hall in front; instead the three shrines themselves form the facade. The idea of three shrines or *vimanas* aligned and connected by a common base appears again in the centuries of the structural temple. In the south, the Muvarkoil of Kodumbalur (early Chola) with three separate, almost identical *vimanas* on a common platform, is but one example.

It is a beautiful cave temple. Unobscured by later additions, its outlines follow faithfully the shape of the rock into which it was carved. The boulders in front of it were obviously left behind, in the abrupt termination by which all rock architecture here is marked. To sit on one of them and contemplate the forms of the temple or regard the figures of the doorkeepers representing the typical Mamalla style at its best, conveys a feeling of deep satisfaction and joy.

The doorkeepers or *dvarapalas* are carved in full or three-quarter profile, their faces being slightly turned outward. The northern shrine dedicated to Subramanya (and not to Brahma as in the three-celled Mahendra cave-temples) has two *rishis* for guards, imposing figures with long transparent garments and the sacred thread in the form of a folded cloth over their shoulders. Their bearded and stern faces are marked by the self-conquest of yogic life. Both of them express convincingly the
authority and dignity of a *rishi* in ancient India. The two guardians of the central shrine dedicated to Siva are the graceful princely youths so typical of the Mamalla period. Their musing faces are illumined by a beatific smile, as if they were listening to an inner voice or strains of heavenly music. Pure personifications of gentleness and devotion, they seem to be unable to use a weapon; thus the lance and club by their side are mere symbols to identify them as guardians of the Siva shrine. The next shrine dedicated to Vishnu has two similar, even more delicate youths at its entrance. The southernmost, almost in full profile, is completely withdrawn, lost to inner vision. His ornaments, the spiral bracelets, the heavy necklace and a stylish crown of the *kirita* type are more elaborate than those of other *dvarapalas* of the period. Even his dress is folded and draped in a special way. The serenity and refined emotionality of all these youths is singular in Indian art.

This group of figure sculptures is joined by an eight-armed Durga standing in *sama-bhanga* (erect pose) on the severed head of Mahisasura in a niche at the extreme southern end of the temple facade. Durga is a youthful goddess; her face though much eroded, expresses vividly her victory without being triumphant. It is one of the first panels of the kind, a forerunner (together with the Durga panels at the Draupadi Ratha) of numberless similar representations at the Dravidian temples of subsequent centuries, there however, getting more and more conventional and missing the crisp freshness of this early Pallava Durga. She wears a *kirita makuta*, large earrings, a breast and stomach band, a long garment (*kaccha*)
secured at the waist by a broad belt and a cloth around the hips which forms the two loops in front of her. The Durga niche is spanned by a *makara torana* with a double arch—looping garlands which break forth from the mouths of two opposite *makaras* form a trough right over the centre of the niche when they are supported by a lotus bracket. The trough is filled by a *simha-mukha* or face of glory. The *simha-mukha*, a significant symbol at every Siva temple of future centuries, appears here for the first time in Pallava architecture. The tails of the *makaras* end in elegant curls and ripples and fall down over the capitals of the pilasters at either side. Little *ganas* ride on them as in Dalavanur but all are indistinct now by erosion. Two rock-cut steps with curved parapets (*surubalz*) lead to the niche as if it were a separate shrine.

The three shrine cells with the central one projecting and the Durga niche are linked together by a moulded base (*adhi-sthana*) and a flexed cornice, both running along the whole front of the temple. A small stair of three steps enclosed by a low parapet leads to each of the shrines. All shrines are without jambs, lintels and sills and thus directly flanked by the slim pilasters of the period. The cornice is decorated with *kudu-arches*, framing little *gandharva* heads. Above the cornice is a string of miniature shrines.

The figures inside the three shrines, representing the gods Subrahmanya, Siva and Vishnu are in striking contrast regarding expression and form to the sculptures of the facade. (The same difference of style and conception is already found at the Dharmaraja Ratha between the ground
floor figures and those in the upper storeys.) All the three gods are standing idol-like in *sama-bhanga*, holding their weapons and attributes. Their faces are marked by a serene, though imperious and impersonal equanimity, again much in opposition to the outside figures.

The northern shrine is dedicated to Subrahmanya in his aspect of Brahmastata, where he humiliates the pride of Brahma by exposing his ignorance of the Vedas. Subrahmanya has, in accordance with the Agamas, one head and four arms and holds in his back hands the *aksha-mala* (rosary) and *kamandalu*. Two *rudraksha* garlands (*rudraksha* are berries of a tree sacred to Siva) are crossing his chest and going round both the elbows in the manner of the sacred thread. Siva too is four-armed, holding in his upper hands the *parasu* and *aksha-mala*. On either side on top of him are two *ganas* with one hand raised in adoration. Two worshiping figures with flowers in their hands are kneeling at his feet. Vishnu, in a long garment with a pleated fold in the centre, is holding his *chakra* (wheel) and *sankha* (conch) in his upper hands. It is one of the rare instances where *ganas* are associated with him, here flying on either side of him while two devotees are kneeling at his feet.
3.2 THE MAHISASURAMARDINI MANDAPA

The cave temple is carved into the eastern face of a boulder on the ridge of the main hill on its southern end, towered above only by the Ollakkanesvara temple. The once lofty elegance of its facade has been mutilated by the removal of one of its pillars which was replaced by a simple stone pillar. The cave temple has three shrine cells cut into its back-wall and a large lion-pillared porch in front of the central shrine which dominates the archi­tecture of the interior. But even more dominating are the two extremely fine panels on the opposite side-walls which captivate the spectator from the first moment he enters the cave. Their impact is so strong that the architectural features seem to recede into the background and are seen only as a frame for these sculptural master­pieces. The panel on the northern wall shows Durga as Mahisasuramardini battling with Mahisasura; the other one represents Vishnu in his cosmic sleep as Anantasayi, reclining on the coils of the world-snake Adisesha.

The story underlying the dramatic encounter between Durga and Mahisasura can be found in the Devi Mahatmya, part of the Markandeya Purana. Devi Mahatmya means the description of the great (maha) self (at man) of the goddess (devz). Once again, a power­ful demon had acquired invincible strength. Assuming the shape of a buffalo, he expelled the gods from their spheres of power and exerted his selfish tyranny over the universe. The gods with Brahma in the lead went to Siva and Vishnu and asked assistance from these most powerful deities. Siva and Vishnu were filled with anger and wrath and flames of energy poured out from their
mouts. Other gods had similar reactions as well. All these fires grew and condensed into a single flame and finally assumed the shape of the Great Goddess.

“By Siva’s energy her face was developed, and by Yama’s energy grew her hair, and her arms by Vishnu’s energy, by the Moon’s her twin breasts; and her waist came into being by Indra’s energy, and by Varuna’s her legs and thighs, by the Earth’s energy her hips, by Brahma’s energy her feet, her toes by the Sun’s energy, and by Vasu’s energy her hands and fingers, and by Kuvera’s her nose; and her teeth grew by Prajapati’s energy, and three eyes were developed by Agni’s energy; and her eyebrows were the energy of the two twilights, and her ears Vayu’s energy; and this coming into being of the energies of the gods became the auspicious goddess. Then gazing at her, who had sprung from the combined energies of all the gods, the Immortals, who were afflicted by Mahisa, felt a keen joy.”

Thus, the limited powers of the various gods became unified in an apparition of the Divine Mother. Then the gods bestowed upon her their numerous weapons, ornaments and symbols, placing them in her numerous hands and limbs:

“The bearer of the bow Pinaka, drawing a trident forth from his own trident, gave it to her; and Krishna gave a discus, pulling it out from his own discus; and Varuna gave her a conch, and Agni a spear.. .Indra,

1. Markandeya Purana, 82, translated by Pargiter.
Lord of the Immortals, gave a thunderbolt, pulling it out of his own thunderbolt... Honoured by other gods also with gifts of ornaments and weapons, the goddess uttered a loud roar, blended with a horselaugh, again and again. The whole welkin was filled with her terrible roar. By that penetrating and exceedingly great roar a great echo arose, all the worlds shook and seas trembled, the earth quaked and all mountains moved. And “Conquer thou!” exclaimed the gods with joy to her, who rode on the lion, and the holy sages extolled her as they bowed their bodies in faith”

Hearing the great roar of the goddess and seeing the agitation of the universe, the demon rushed to the focus of disturbance with his armies following him. Then the great battle between the goddess and the enemy of the gods ensued, which is thus described in the Markandeya Purana:

“And the deep breaths, which the goddess, fighting in the battle, breathed forth, came into real being at once as troops by hundreds and thousands. These fought with axes, with javelins, and swords and halberds, destroying the asura bands, being invigorated by the goddess’s energy. And of these bands some raised a din with large drums, and others with conchs, and others with drums in that great battle festival. Then the goddess with her trident, her club, with showers of spears, and with her sword and other weapons slaughtered the great asuras in hundreds, and laid others low who were bewitched with the ringing of her bell; and

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binding other *asuras* with her noose, she dragged them along the ground. Others, split in two by sharp splashes of her sword and crushed by blows from her mace, lay on the ground; and some, grievously battered by her club, vomited blood. Some were felled to the ground, pierced in the breast by her trident. Some, being closely massed together, were cut to pieces by the torrent of her arrows in the battlefield. Some were cloven by the goddess into two parts, with a single eye and arm and foot to each part; and others fell and rose again, although with heads cut off. Head-less corpses, still grasping the finest weapons fought with the goddess; and others danced there in the battle, keeping time to the strains of the musical instruments. Corpses, with heads severed, still held swords and spears and lances in their hands; and other great *asuras* were shouting to the goddess, ‘Stand, Stand!’ With the prostrate chariots, elephants, horses and *asuras* the earth became impassable, where the great battle took place. And large rivers formed torrents of blood, straightaway flowed along there amidst the armies of the *asuras* and among the elephants, *asuras* and horses. Thus the goddess brought that great army of the *asuras* to utter de-striuction in a moment, even as fire utterly consum-ing a huge pile of grass and timber. And the lion with quivering mane stalked on, roaring aloud.”

After this terrible battle was over, the goddess met the great *asura* and crushed and severed his head.

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1. Dr. Sivaramamurthi interprets the scene in a different way. According to him, it represents Siva sa Kirata and the submissive, Arjuna receiving the *pasupata* bow which he identifies as the serpent-like object in Siva’s hands.
Though the origin of the Puranas coincides approximately with the Pallava time, the sculptural conception is marked by an entirely different spirit. All the sanguinary effects dwelt upon there with such eloquent emphasis, are completely avoided here. Durga has no archaic or terrible features, she is a beautiful goddess, young and maiden-like, riding gracefully and erect on her lion, impelled by an irresistible forward movement—impossible to think of her uttering a horselaugh. Eight-armed, she draws the bowstring to the full and swings some of the weapons bestowed upon her by the gods in the other hands. A figure of light, of effortless and swift force is she, forming one centre of the panel. The other centre is the huge figure of Mahisasura, who is supposed to be greater in strength and stature than all the gods. Far from being defeated, the parasol of universal kingship still being held over his buffalo head, he stands there in all his earthbound strength and power, a dark figure, his feet defiantly planted on the ground. With his body slanting backward and weighing the huge club in his hands, he is waiting for a suitable moment to strike.

Durga’s army consists of her ganas—potbellied beings of dwarfish appearance, belonging to Siva’s retinue on Mount Kailash. They are his ever joyful and noisy horde, somewhat mischievous and very fond of music and dance. In sculptural art they are associated especially with Siva, with Parvati and Durga and sometimes with Vishnu too. They participate enthusiastically and with ardent zeal in the battle, swinging swords and shields and bows, holding her parasol and chamara, but at the
same time leave no doubt that it is the goddess alone who will have to win the victory. Only the yogini Jaya subtle and graceful as the goddess herself, may stand effectively by her side. The army of the asuras, dark, defiant figures, is as if bereft of any inner strength and will to fight.

One of them is already slain, another is being precipitated headlong from somewhere and yet another is kneeling before the goddess, while the rest are falling back, seeking safety in flight.

It is a random and indecisive moment of the great and terrible battle that is represented in the panel and yet, the way it is shown leaves no doubt of the final outcome. Although the demon has not yet been touched, one sees that ultimately he will be overcome. The exuberance of valour and soulforce on the side of Durga in opposition to the self-centered and material strength of the demon army is like an opposition of the great antagonistic world-powers, light and Darkness. Or, in a more limited conception, it may symbolize the victory of the female principle, the Mother, reestablishing order and harmony, against the unbridled and destructive manly force. In the history of religion, the ascendancy of this female principle or the Goddess over the gods who willingly yielded their weapons and symbols to her, even created her a new from their combined energies, marks the return to power of the Ancient Mother, who had reigned in the Neolithic age and was relegated to the background by the Aryan gods, with Indra as their king.

On the opposite side, covering the southern wall of the cave is a panel of similar size, but in striking contrast to the tension of the
tumultuous battle scene just described. It represents Vishnu as Anantasayi, reclining on the coils of Adisesha, who protects him with his hoods. Vishnu, two-armed without his attributes and crown, is completely relaxed, his head slightly raised, his legs out-stretched and somewhat parted and his one arm thrown back over the coils of Adisesha. He is immersed in his deep cosmic slumber between two Brahma days, his yoga-nidra, having withdrawn into himself Time and Existence. Out of this slumber the new world will be born.¹

But this picture of infinite calm and peace is deceptive. At the feet of the god, breaking the horizontal line of his slumbering figure, grows upwards, the dark and threatening mass of the two asuras Madhu and Kaithaba, armed with clubs and obviously conspiring with each other how the new world is to be destroyed. Although Bhudevi, kneeling at his feet, implores her Lord to wake up, it seems that Vishnu has passed beyond all states of sleep and cannot be roused from his absorption. In this moment of acutest danger his personified weapons (ayudha purusa) materialize in order to defend their lord: Sudarsana (his discus) and Nandaka (his sword), two gentle youths emerge from the waters while the other two beings, floating through the air, are the dwarfish Panchajanya, representing his conch (sankha) and Kaumodaki, a female figure, representing Vishnu’s club (gada) The female figure, shown as if flying away could also be the personification of yoga-nidra, Vishnu’s cosmic sleep. Sakti had assumed this form and by entering Vishnu had made him

¹. The lotus growing out of his navel with Brahma, the creator god, seated on it, is not shown in this panel.
assume the state of *yoga-nidra* at the end of the *yuga*. Now, by withdrawing herself, Vishnu would be roused and would kill the *asuras*.

As in the opposite panel, the clash between the two antagonistic powers and the final outcome of their encounter is not shown, but rather conveyed by the way of representation: the reclining figure of Vishnu, all Peace, all power is surrounded by an immaterial yet distinctly perceivable aura of light and Strength into which the dark forces will never be able to enter. The new world is not endangered, it will be born. This message of affirmation is conveyed by the panel of Vishnu’s cosmic sleep.

In both the panels the mythological story is reduced to a single moment which, much more than the eloquent texts, expresses the everlasting struggle between the Gods and *Asuras*, between light and Darkness, between Creation and Destruction by which the Evolution of Life is worked out.

Obviously the cave temple had an eventful history which cannot yet be traced in all its details. Its three shrine cells were originally dedicated to the trinity Brahma, Siva, Vishnu with the central shrine reserved for Vishnu. At a slightly later time, perhaps under Paramesvaravarman, when Saivaism was in its ascendancy, the cave temple with all three shrines became Saivaite; probably at that time the Somaskanda panel was sculptured from the back-wall of the central shrine. Still later on, the Vaishnavas took over the cave temple and carved their emblems (conch and discus) on the two pilasters of the facade.
Architecturally, the cave temple is to be placed between the Koneri and Varaha Mandapam cave temple.

Striking are the many levels of the rough and unfinished floor, a first indication of the architectural complexity which would set in at a slightly later period. The two outer shrines have the highest floor level, the level of the central shrine being slightly below. The porch level is yet one more step below the shrine. Into its floor an oblong pit has been carved at a later time with a square socket behind it. This was probably done after the Vaishnavas had taken over the cave for the purpose of putting up an image of Vishnu which would have covered the door of the central shrine together with the Saivaite Somaskanda panel in its interior. The mandapa floor, two steps below the porch, is cut at a height of about five feet above ground level. According to the original plan, two flights of steps would have ascended laterally from opposite sides to a central projecting landing in front of the facade. This landing was removed later but remnants of it can still be seen. At present one enters the cave temple by a flight of modern stone steps.

The porch has two beautifully shaped front pillars with lions sitting on round pedestals (not ryalas as in the Varaha Mandapam, but the typical Pallava lion with spiral locks) and two ryali-based pilasters, projecting from the front wall of the shrine. From the heads of the lions springs the apex of the shaft, marked by a broad band with floral designs (padma bandha). Above the padma bandha rises the moulded and faceted capital of the pillar, having all parts of the shastric order (even an abacus, which is still absent in the Koneri Mandapam). Cross-corbels carry the crossbeams
on top. Above them a flexed cornice with shovel-shaped *kudu-arches* is carried around the porch and along the back-wall of the cave and extends still further above the panels on the northern and southern walls. A moulded base (*adisthana*) in different stages of completion also runs round the cave and below the panels.

The rear wall of the central shrine chamber is filled with a bas-relief of Somaskanda, which was probably sculptured at a slightly later time than the rest of the cave. Parvathi, at the side of Siva, has Skanda sitting on her lap, while one leg of each of them rests on the recumbent Nandi below; The devotee kneeling at Nandi’s side is possibly Chandikesvara, who normally does not appear in a Somaskanda group. Brahma and Vishnu are seen behind the divine couple and on top, between their heads, is Surya. The circular socket in front of the Somaskanda group was cut at a later time to install a non-monolithic *linga* and its receptacle here.

All three shrine entrances are devoid of jambs, lintels or flanking pilasters. The doorkeepers of the southern and central Saivaite shrines have a club in one hand and one of each couple has horns protruding from either side of his crown. The doorkeepers of the northern sanctum are different, wearing long skirts with a central fold and pointing with a flower to the shrine entrance.

The facade of the cave temple has five lofty bays be-tween four pillars and one corresponding pilaster at each side. As already mentioned,
one of the central pillars was cut out and replaced by a simple stone-cut pillar, the other central pillar was mutilated by the removal of the square abacus, which was perhaps done with the intention of removing this pillar too, in order to create a wide gap as entrance. We do not know the reasons why the original architecture has been altered in this way, but it has considerably impaired the once harmonious elegance of the cave facade. The southern pillar, complete in all its details, may serve as a model to visualize the rest of the pillars. It has a decorative band at about the middle height of the faceted shaft (*madlija bandha*) and another one on top of it (*padma bandha*). Above rises the moulded capital with all parts typical of the Mamalla pillar. The corbel has no roll ornamentation.
3.4 RAMANUJAR MANDAPA

The Ramanuja Mandapam cave temple on top of the large granite hill is facing east. It is ascribed to King Paramesvara whose imprecatory verse, in which every-one who does not worship Rudra is cursed, is engraved into the floor between the two facade pillars:

‘Six times cursed be those in whose hearts does not dwell Rudra (Siva), the deliverer from the walking on the evil path.’

The cave temple, originally dedicated to Siva, was badly mutilated by the Vaishnavas who in an outburst of iconoclastic zeal, basically alien to the Indian mind, be-gan to lay their hands on a number of cave temples in the centuries following the Mamalla period. Dvarapalas were chipped off in the Koneri Mandapam cave temple and a pillar of the Mahisasuramardini Mandapam cave temple was removed, probably with the intention of further alterations; but in the Ramanuja Mandapam cave temple the mutilation was worst. Here, the Vaishnavas were carried away by their endeavour to reshape the temple for their own purposes. They removed the separating walls of the three shrines with the intention to extend the mandapa and chipped off the Saivaite panels from the walls. All that remained of them are some vague outlines in the rock—the contours of a once graceful dvarapali ka leaning on her bow and what seems to have been an elephant or bull with a rider on it. 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.

The original design of the cave temple was that of a rectangular hall with three shrines carved into its back-wall. The facade consists of two heavy pillars and two pilasters at either end with beautifully shaped zyalas at their base. The two dvarapalas beyond the pilasters were chiselled off. A unique feature of this excavation are two small temples beyond the dvarapala niches on either side which resemble in all details the one-storeyed vimana of the open-air relief (‘The Descent of the Ganga’) in front of which Bhagiratha meditates. Corbels with roll ornamentation carry the beam of the facade. From the moulding above the beam, a frieze of dancing bhuta ganas was carved, who carry a heavy but now eroded garland on their shoulders. One of them, dancing in their midst, has an elephant head and is probably an early representation in stone of Ganapati, the lord of the ganas. Above is the heavy projecting cornice with rafters beneath carved from the rock—an imitation of the ribs in wooden structures. The flexed surface of the cornice is decorated with kudu-arches which are filled with floral designs. A zyala frieze and the miniature shrines on top of the cornice (two central and two corner salas with prominent nasikas and long harantara members) complete the architecture of the facade. In the interior all that remains of the original layout are some fragments of the shrine walls, of the cornice above and the moulded base below:
3.5 PULIPATHAN MANDAPA (TIGER CAVE)

One feels like asking whether the Pallava kings used to come to this place, which is outside the town and by the side of the sea to watch performances like dance and drama and enjoy themselves. But this is actually a rock-cut shrine of Goddess Durga, the consort of Shiva. This cave belongs to the period of Rajasimha, the Pallava king. The facade does look like a stage, conveying the fact that perhaps the temples evolved only out of the development in arts. “All the world is a stage and we are all actors” said the English dramatist William Shakespeare. If the world itself is a stage, then can’t a temple be like one? Let us have a good look at this cave... slightly below the ground level and buried to some extent in the sand, this artistically designed cave has been scooped out of a big rock.

There are steps to climb up to the cell at the centre; decorated pilasters supported by rampant lions on both sides; heads of roaring lions all around the cell; two other smaller tells on the side, with elephant heads carved beneath them - thus the beauty of the cave is just worth enjoying. We can also find there at a distance closer to the sea, the latest find of the archaeologists. It is a temple of the Pallava period, believed to be dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya, the son of Lord Shiva. But what remain now are only debris. There are only Shiva, Vishnu and Durga temples that are generally found in Mahabalipuram. This temple is a good evidence to show that even Subrahmanya worship being done in those days. This Cave is at a distance of about 3 km to the north of Mahabalipuram on the route to Chennai. Not a big distance at all, when we consider the great interest we all have in seeing such monuments.
3.6 THE KONERI MANDAPA

The Koneri Mandapam cave temple excavated at the beginning of a new era is an interesting work of transition in which different trends and style elements are found side by side. The most striking examples are the two types of pillars, those of the facade belonging to the Mahendra time and those of the hall to the Mamalla time—the latter making their first graceful appearance as fully formed pillars. The hall is marked by the austere and archaic character which was predominating in the Mahendra caves; its floor and walls are roughly excavated and cracks in them spread like a cobweb. The back-wall however, with five variously projecting shrine cells and an elaborately shaped cornice, herald the artistic ambition of a new period of art. The dvarapalas, though still of the conventional type of the Mahendra time, show a distinct development of carving—here and there even an enraptured expression is attempted which soon would become the outstanding feature of the doorkeepers at Mamallapuram.

The cave temple carved from the western side of the great granite hill, almost at its northern end, overlooks the Koneri Pallam tank from the east. A huge tree on its banks reminds one of the traditional associations of a cave temple with *vrksa* (tree) and *tirtha* (water) so often met with in the Mahendra time but hardly found in the Mamalla period. It is entered by several rock steps to which some masonry steps were added in modern times. The facade consists of the already mentioned Mahendra pillars, four in number, here however, tall and slim and having only the outlines in common with the heavy type of pillars found in early Mahendra caves.
They are protected from the rain by a flexed and projecting cornice decorated with *kudu-arches* which frame the faces of *gandharvas*. Above the cornice, miniature shrines of the *sala* type connected by cloisters (*harantara*) are carved from the rock. The *Mamalla* pillars in the interior belong to the plain type without lion or *ryala* base and have two floral bands, the *madya bandha* in the middle of the shaft and the *padma bandha* marking its end. The capital has all the parts of the classical *Mamalla* pillar—*kalasa*, *tadi*, *kantha* and the cushion shaped *kumbha*, but is without the *padma* and *phalaka*. The pilasters at either end of the facade pillars are plain whereas those of the second row of pillars are shaped in the *Mamalla* style. The corbels of pillars and pilasters have roll ornamentation. The floor of the hall is sloping from the back-wall towards the facade but is without the step or marked level difference which in the Mahendra caves separates the *mukha mandapa* from the *ardha mandapa*.

Well above the floor level of the *mandapa*, five shrine cells were carved from the back-wall and linked together by a moulded base (*adhisthana*) and a flexed cornice above, the latter following in most elegant bends the course of the various shrine projections. The continuity of the base is broken by fragmentary rock steps, which lead to each of the shrine entrances. Pilasters with slender shafts shaped in the *Mamalla* style frame the shrine entrances as well as the corners of the projecting shrines. The masterly shaped surface of the cornice is decorated with scrollwork and prominent *kudu-arches* from which celestials look out. Over the
corners of the projecting shrines rearing vyalas, indistinct now, seem to support the cornice. Below the cornice runs a second member, the valabhi decorated with a frieze of hamsas.

Almost all the dvarapalas on either side of each shrine entrance are represented in the classical attitude with one hand resting on the hip while the other is raised in a gesture of adoration or points to the shrine, the northernmost of them even almost chipped off. In some of them, the dreaming nonchalance of Pallava dvarapalas and their elegant bearing find a first, yet still vague, expression.

From the back-wall of each shrine cell a shallow niche was carved, probably for the image of the contemporary deity. According to K.R. Srinivasan! the temple was dedicated to Siva in his five aspects as Isana, Tatpurusha, Aghora, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. The Vaishnavas must have occupied the cave temple in subsequent centuries as their emblems are found engraved into the walls near the facade pillars.
3.7 OTHERS

THE YALI MANDAPAM OF SALUVANKUPPAM

The Yali Mandapam of Saluvankuppam, popularly known as ‘Tiger Cave’, was built by King Rajasimha, Paramesvara’s son. It has nothing in common with the classical style of rock architecture prevailing at Mamallapuram but is marked by an entirely different spirit where the joy in grotesque forms prevails. But as it belongs to the cave architecture of Mamallapuram it is mentioned here briefly.

The huge, expressive vyala faces carved with much skill from the rock and surrounding the facade, the two elephants which seem to carry howdahs in the form of two kudu-shaped shrines and the vague outlines of what was to be a horse and a pillar (stambha) are elements which are probably derived from the contemporary local architecture. K.R. Srinivasan associates this strange rock cave with the popular Indra festival which was held on the seashore, here and elsewhere in the Tamil country, and which is described in detail in the ‘Silappadikaram’. He says, “This excavation, therefore, is nothing more than an utsava-mandapa, where the pro-cessional deity, Indra or Indra-mandapa, was brought and placed during the festival on the seashore, or from where the king watched the festival. A later Tamil inscription in the vicinity of this present fishing-hamlet, 2 miles north of Mahabalipuram on the sea, refers to this place as Tiru-veluchchil, which means the place where divine or holy processions were conducted, or which the king graced by his royal presence (camped).
Such a place will be appropriately Tiru-veluchchil or Tiruveluchchilur or Tiruveluchchiyur, forming part of the port-city of Mahabalipuram.¹

The excavation consists of a small and empty cell with two deep niches at either side. A high base provides the space for a moulded adhistrhana. It is entered by a flight of rock steps with curved parapets at either side. The entrance is flanked by two short pillars, roughly shaped, their shafts consisting of rearing lions each with a rider on its back. It is topped by a heavy and unornamented cornice. Enormous vyala faces, eleven in number sur-round the central shrine in a semi circle and dominate the exterior of the facade.

This excavation, complete as such, has a sort of annexe to the south where two elephant heads are carved from the gentle sloping end of the boulder. Two deep niches above them with kudu-arched openings look like how-dahs carried on the back of the elephants. By the side of the elephants are the vague outlines of the above-men-tioned horse and those of a stambha.

1. ‘Cave temples of the Pallavas’ p. 182.
Plate-47: The unique feature of this cave temple are two types of pillars in it.
Plate-48: Mahisasura, his body slanting backwards, weights the club in his hands and waits for a suitable moment to strike.
Plate-49: Durga, young and maidenlike, is a figure of light and effortless force.
Plate-50: For from being defeated, the buffalo demon stands in all his earthbound strength, the parasol of universal kingship still being held over his head.
Plate-51: Durga's companion Jaya, subtle and graceful as the goddess herself.
Plate-52: Vishnu, detail.
Plate-53: Facade of the Remanuja Mandapam cave temple, facing east.
Plate-54: The beautiful pillars and pilasters of the Ramanuja Mandapam cave temple.
Plate-55: The northern shrine of Subrahmanya is guarded by two rishis who express in a convincing way the dignity of a rishi in ancient India.
Plate-56: Youghful dvarapalas in the typical Pallava mood of enraptured contemplation guarding the shrines of Vishnu and Siva.
Durga in the southern niche of the facade belongs to the finest representations of the kind.
Plate-58: Durga, an enigmatic smile on her face.
Plate-59: Durga riding in an irresistible forward drive against the huge and dark figure of the buffalo demon.
Plate-60: On the opposite wall, Vishnu as Anantasayi, immersed in his cosmic sleep.
Plate-61: An imprecatory verse, cursing everybody in whose heart does not dwell Rudra, is carved into the floor between the two central facade pillars.
Plate-62: The Trimurthi cave temple without a mandapa in front of its three shrine cells.
Plate-63 : Landscape at Mamallapuram.