

4. Fine Arts

Architecture—Sculpture—Painting

“Architecture reached its culmination under the Pandyas and marks the transition from the Chola to the extravagant products of Vijayanagar”

—A. L. BASHAM

During the rule of the Pandyas, they tried to introduce their own ideas; that resulted in the construction of *Gopura* in diminishing storeys at an angle of 25°. The *Prakara* received attention in this period. Due to this *Gopura*, the temple took a different form. Huge *halls* were built. The temple was surrounded by huge walls.

The *Vimana*, sanctum and sanctorum lost their importance. Both the interior and exterior have platforms, provided very near to the wall, which are meant for soldiers. So temple became an important institution by giving protection to people.

The *Vimana*'s last tier (top) might be octagonal or four faced. So it has one *kalasa*. But *Gopura* is rectangular and so it has seven or nine *Kalasa*s. It is oblong structure with number of tiers. The top of the tower is carved like *chaitya* halls. Basement of the structure is stone.

Gopuras provide entrance and niches where a number of sculptures of gods, goddesses and *ganas* are found.

The architecture of the Pandya period may broadly be divided into two divisions, viz *Cave temples* (Early Pandyas) and *Structural temples* (Early and Later Pandyas)

A.L. Basham says, “The Zenith of Pandyan architecture are the Minakshi temple at Madurai and Vaishnava temple at Srirangam. The Minakshi temple was the wonder of Tamil art traditions, destroyed by the Muslim vandals and rebuilt by the Nayaks of Madurai. The Ranganatha temple at Srirangam

with six inner walls inconcentric square is a grand product of Dravidian workmanship.

The Cave temples

1. **Malaiyadi-k-Kurichi** in the Tinnelveli district would appear to be the earliest known Pandya cave-temple of the mandapa-type with a single shrine cell on the rear. It was built by Maran-sendan.

2. **Narasimha cave temple** at Anaimalai (770 A D) is nearer to Madurai. This was built by Maran Sadaiyan the minister of Nedunjadaiya Parantaka.

3. **Subramaniya temple** at Tirupparankundram, the four-shrined temple was built by Sattan Ganapathi, another minister of Nedunjadaiya Parantaka. Vishnu, Subramaniya, Durga, Ganapathi and Siva are found in separate shrines. The sculptures of Gajalakshmi and Bhuvaneshvari are also found. The Sittannavasal cave temple is a typical Pandya version of a Mahendra style cave-temple with the facade pillars carrying *aranga* corbels.

Satyagirisvara temple at Tirumayam, the Southern cave-temple at Malayakkovil. the *Siva temple at Tirtumalpuram* cave temple at Trichy etc are other examples.

4. **Kalugumalai** : The oldest surviving early Pandya shrine is the rock cut temple of Siva at *Kalugumali*. The temple is unfinished. It is dvitala vimana temple with richly carved art.

5. **A Jain cave temple at Sittannavasal** : It is in Pudukkottai district. It has Bas-relief Jain Tirtankaras sculptures on the hind wall of the shrine and in the niches on the lateral walls of the mandapa in front. The facade Pillars carrying *taranga* corbels is a typical Pallava style.

These cave temples, like the Pallava temples, are excavated into the hard local rocks and essentially similar to the Mahendra style exavations in plan and design. But they have their own design in respect of their sculptural make up and iconography.

The simple cave temples of the Pandyas consist of a Pillared verandah with *shrine cell* or *cells* cut into either the rear or the side walls of the verandah or hall, depending on which way the main facade of the *verandah* or *Mandapa* faced. They are essentially *mandapa* type of temples.

They have massive Pillars on the facades, essentially square in section at the base and top, with an octagonal middle section, carrying heavy *Potikas* or *Corbels*, usually with a straight bevel, resulting in angular profile. There are some examples with Pillars of other types and corbels with a curved profile and *taranga* moulding.

All the cave temples lack a well-defined *Kopota* in the architrave over their *mandapa* facades. Some of the caves are merely shrine-cells scooped directly into the rock-face, without a rock-cut *mandapa* in front.

Structural Temples

The structural temples of the Pandyas are simple, containing *Sanctum* and *Sanctorum*, *Artha mandapa*, *Muha mandapa*. Some of the temples are as follows.

1. Chakkalingesvara temple and *Vadavayil*
Amarthan temple at *Ukkirankottai*
2. Buvanathaswami temple at *Kovilpatti*
3. Gopalaswami temple at *Mannarkovil*
4. Valisvara temple at *Valisvaram*
5. Thennalahar temple at *Kovilkulam*
6. Manonmanisvara temple *Vijayanaryanan*
7. Kudal Alakar koil at *Madurai*
8. Sowmianarayana temple at *Tirukkottiyur*
9. Aalkar koil at *Thirumaliruncholai*
10. Alakar koil at *Savalapperi*
11. Nambi koil at *Thirukkurunkudi*

12. Siva temple at *Enathi*.
13. Thirumalainathar and Erichcha Vudaiyar temples at *Ambasamudram*.

Thirumulanathaswamy temple

This temple measuring 195' X 234' was worshipped by the Sage Agasthya. It has a Garpagraha, Artha mandapa and Maha mandapa.

Rajagopalaswamy temple at Mannarkoil

Kulasekara Alvar, one of the twelve reputed Alvars spent his last days and attained mukti here.

Buminathaswami temple at Viranallur

The temple was built by the reputed Pandya King Adhivira Pandya as a token of his great victory over his rival King Vagulathaman through the grace of Buminathar who helped him.

The Later Pandyas gave importance to the outlying portions of the temple scheme. The gopuras occupied a prominent place.

Chidambaram Temple: In plan the eastern gopura called *Sundra Pandya gopuram* of the Chidambaram temple occupies a rectangular 90' X 60', while two tiers comprising its vertical substructure are together 35 ft high, the total height of its seven tiers including the roof being 135 feet.

Minakshi temple at Madurai, Visvanatha temple at Thenkasi, Nellaiyappar temple at Tinnelveli, etc. received the benefactions of *Kulasekara Pandya*.

Sculpture

The temple at Kalugumalai is perhaps the first in Tamil Nadu to show a number of iconographic distribution of deities particularly in the Sala and Griva. The cloister of the first

Tala contains the figures of Dakshinamurthy, Vishnu, Devas, Chandra, Skanda, Siva more than five the second has Surya, Uma Mahesa, Dakshnamurthy, Brahma etc.

The lower rock-cut cave temple at Trichy, the two lateral shrine cells are dedicated to Siva and Vishnu, the rear wall of the mandapa has five niches enclosed by pilasters, the central one with *Brahma* and the others with *Ganesa*, *Subramanya*, *Surya* and *Durga*. With Siva and Vishnu these would form the gods of the Shanmata (Saivam, Vainavam, Ganapatyam, Kaumaram, Sauram and Saktam) Regarding the vaishnava cave-temples the reclining form of *Vishnu* is the principal icon at Tirumayam, Malaiyadippatti and Namakkal, *Yoga Narasimha* at Anamalai and Namakkal.

A Nandi with human body is found at *Thirupparankuntram* This is not found in the Pallava sculpture. In most of the Pandya (also Muttarayar) cave temples, a small cistern or pit is cut into the floor of the sanctum below the spout of the *linga pitha* in order to receive the ablution water. Usually a gutter or channel takes the overflow outside through the *Mandapa*. It is absent in the Pallava Cave or structural temples.

The *Pillaiyarpatti* Cave (700 AD) has a two-armed *Ganesa*. He has a trunk curled to his proper right. This variety is ubiquitous in the Pandya Muttarayar Cave temples. The unusual *Hari Hara* is flanked by *Nandi* and by *Garuda* in human form.

At *Thirumaiyam* the saluting king wears rudraksha beads. A beautiful Lingodbhavamurti (Satyagirisvara cave, Thirumayam) the fiery pillar, from which Siva emerges, reaches from the floor to the roof of the Cave.

Two gigantic dvarapalas occupy the lateral walls of the mandapa, one wears a sacred cord of rudraksha beads.

Kalukumalai : The unfinished monolithic temple chiseled from the top to the bottom, called *Vettuvankoil* is a jewel of an dya Sculpture.

The luxuriant sculptural decoration with its abundance of ganas making music, dancing, and singing and of heavenly damsels or *apsaras* resembling local beauties is typical Pandya. Dome and neck (griva) of the square *Vimana* are *Octagonal*. The top storey of the four corners have four Nandis one on each side. They wear the *Chalukya Bell chain*. Between them, Facing the four quarters, there are *uma-Sahita* (East) *Dakshinamurthy* (South), *Narasimha* (West, and *Brahma* (North) They are supported by a freize of *Vyalas*.

The Pandya structural temples have no *devakashtha* icons on their *Vimana* and *mandapa* walls.

Sittnannavasal : The ceiling of both verandah and sanctum, as also the under surface of the beam and cornice projected in front provided extensive ground for plastering and painting on. The two pillars and pilasters were plastered over and painted and the faces of their top *Sadurams* (3ft × 2 ft) offered scope for portrait painting, ten in all, of which three alone survive, with teli-tale pigments on them here and there.

These paintings are closely related to Jain themes and symbology. The ceiling of this cave-temple depicts a *Padma vana*, a magnificent lake. Swans, fish, buffaloes and lotuses are the highlights of these paintings. The king and queen and dancing *apsaras* with grace and elegance are a pleasing sight to see. Brilliance of colours, richness of expression, pulsation with life and happiness and delicacy of feeling in these jain paintings have given supremacy to this art for all times.

It is a depiction realistic in all sense, of a wide lotus pool, filled primarily with the lotus and lily in bud and bloom in natural lines and drawn with all delicacy of details, including the fine nerves of the petals, amidst the circular lotus and cleft lily leaves, peltate on their stalks, the various stages of unfolding from the rolled up young leaves exhibiting their pale green and prominently veined under surface, over the water level, the mature ones quite circular, dark green and placidly

floating on the water surface. The pool teems with animal life of all kind *fish* of diverse type cleaning through, and shooting out of the water, birds (*cakora*) in pairs dallying with their mates, plying over the water *elephants* wading through and buffaloes wallowing in the water.

There are two youthful looking persons clad in coin-cloth near each other at the south west corner on the front face of the upper saduram of the Southern pillar.

An exceedingly beautiful apsara maiden, a celestial dancer in a graceful dance movement. She with a twist of the body (*bhanga*), with a pretty face turned front and eyes following the movement and lips pouted and head tilted jauntily at the neck to her right, is executing a dance movement (ghajahasta) pose) Her coiffeur is decked with ornaments and flowers Her earlobes have circular rings. The neck and torso are adorned with necklaces and pearl earlands, and arms with armlets over the elbow and bracelets on the waists, while she wears a bikini-like waist cloth, her twisting torso is bare, exposing her heavy full bosom.

4. The Pandyas