

Pallava Art and Architecture

UPSC Notes

A part of southern India was ruled by the Pallava Dynasty, an Indian monarchy that lasted from 275 CE to 897 CE. After the Satavahana Dynasty, in which the Pallavas served as feudatories, was overthrown, they rose to prominence. The Pallava Dynasty rose to prominence during the reigns of Mahendravarman I (571–630 CE) and Narasimhavarman I (630–668 CE). They ruled the Telugu and northern regions of the Tamil area for almost 600 years till the end of the ninth century.

- The Shore Temple in Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the best example of the Pallavas' patronage of architecture.
- The Pallavas laid the groundwork for South Indian mediaeval architecture, leaving behind stunning statues and temples.
- In addition to building cave and structural temples, such as the monolithic rathas and stone carvings of legendary themes in Mahabalipuram, the Pallavas promoted the study of art.
- The Pallavas provided the foundation for the style by creating the rock cut and the structural, two of its forms.

The Kailasanathar Temple in Kanchipuram, the Shore Temple, and the Pancha Rathas of Mahabalipuram are some of the finest specimens of Pallava art and architecture. The best sculptor of this period was Akshara.

Pallava Art and Architecture: Background

The period's religious resurgence sparked an interest in architecture. The Pallavas made significant contributions to Indian architecture and art. In actuality, the Dravidian architectural style of southern India was founded by the Pallavas. There was a progressive evolution from cave temples to monolithic Rathas and finally to structure temples.

- The Pancha Pandava Rathas (Rock-cut Rathas), also known as the Five Rathas, in Mamallapuram have five distinct architectural styles.
- The outstanding examples of Pallava structural temples are the Kailasanatha temple in Kanchi and the Shore temple in Mamallapuram. The Kailasanatha temple is the greatest architectural achievement of Pallava art.
- The Pallavas contributed to the development of sculpture as well. The Mandapas' walls are adorned with lovely sculptures.
- A masterwork of classical art is the sculpture at Mamallapuram that shows the "Descent of the Ganges or the Penance of Arjuna." Under the Pallavas' patronage, the arts of music, dance, and painting had all blossomed.
- The Sittannavasal caves' paintings originate from the Pallava era.

Pallava Architecture

Pallava architecture can be sub-divided into two phases:

The Rock Cut Phase

The Mahendra group and the Mamalla group were the two groups of monuments that made up the rock cut phase, which lasted from 610 to 668 AD.

- The structures built under Mahendravarman I's rule are the Mahendra group (610 - 630 AD). This group's monuments are almost often pillared halls carved out of mountain faces.
- These mandapas, or pillared halls, are modelled after the Jain temples of the time. The cave temples in Mamandur, Pallavaram, and Mandagapattu are outstanding examples of the Mahendra group of monuments.
- The second collection of rock-cut monuments dates from 630 to 668 AD and is from the Mamalla group.
- In addition to pillared halls, free-standing monolithic shrines known as rathas were built during this time. The Pancha Rathas and Arjuna's Penance at Mahabalipuram are two of outstanding illustrations of this style.

The Structural Phase

Free-standing shrines were built during the structural phase using specially imported stone and mortar. The Rajasimha group (690 to 800 AD) and the Nandivarman group have monuments from this time (800 to 900 AD).

- The Pallavas experimented extensively in their early structural temples, including in the Rajasimha group. The Shore Temple in Mahabalipuram and the Kanchi Kailasanathar Temple in Kanchipuram, built by Narasimhavarman II, also known as Rajasimha, are the best specimens of this era.
- The Vaikunta Perumal Temple at Kanchipuram best represents the Nandivarman group of monuments.

The impressive Brihadeeswarar Temple of the Cholas at Thanjavur, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and other notable architectural works were built on models of Pallava architecture, which was at its peak at this time.

Characteristics of Pallava Architecture

From A.D. 600 to 900, the Pallava dynasty maintained its many architectural styles. Its creations can be divided into two periods, the first in the seventh century and the second in the eighth and ninth centuries. The examples in the former were fully rock cut, whilst the latter was entirely structural. The works of each phase were separated into two groups, totalling four groups, each of which was called after the monarch in power at the time. There were four prominent kings during the period of their rule.

- **1st Phase:** Mahendra Group, A.D. 610 to 640; Mamalla Group, A.D. 640 to 690.
- **2nd Phase:** Rajasimha Group, A.D. 690 to 800; Nandivarman Group, c. A.D. 800 to c. 900.

Rock Cut Architecture Under Pallava Dynasty

The Pallava dynasty was the apex of rock-cut architecture, carving enormous rocks into various sizes and shapes that were then utilised to construct temples. The front side of the rocks that serve as the 'Mandapa' are cut with pillars, and the back side is left unfinished to construct the Sanctum of the Gods.

- Mahendravarman I was a renowned supporter of the arts and built many beautiful buildings. He also authored a drama in Sanskrit called "Mattavilasa Prahasana."
- Many temples replaced the design of rock-cut temples after Mahendravarman I's reign.
- The first rock-cut temples were made entirely of rock; they lacked any bricks, metal, or other building materials.
- Dwarapalakas, or royal gatekeepers, were carved in this temple's entryway and thereafter appeared in most south Indian temples.

Pallava Art

The Pallava kings were supporters of the arts. Their passion for music can be seen in the Kudumianmalai and Thirumayam music inscriptions. Some musical instruments used throughout the Pallava era included the Yaazhi, Mridhangam, and Murasu. Mahendravarman I and Narasimhavarman I were both still musically accomplished. The Pallava period's temple sculptures show how well-liked dance was at the time. Mahendravarman I was referred to as "Chittirakkarapuli", and his paintings at Chittannavasal are examples of the style of Pallava painting.

Mahendravarman wrote Thatchina Chitram and the satirical play Matthavilasam Prakasanam,. Therefore, drama, music, and dance were quite popular during the Pallava era. The Pallavas had positively impacted the development of culture in this way.

Pallava Painting at Conjeevaram

45 miles west-southwest of Madras in Conjeevaram, the former Pallava capital, which has several temples and shrines. The Kailasanatha and Vaikunthaperumal temples, which have historical murals, are the most significant of these.

- Paintings from the 7th and 8th century A.D. can be found on the inside walls of the little cells that line the outside walls of the courtyard of the Kailasanatha temple, which was constructed during the reign of the Pallava king Narasimhavarman alias Rajasimha (680–722 AD).
- Images from Hindu mythology are shown in them.
- Except for a tiny head under one of the eaves of the main tower, or the Vimana, the paintings in this temple, which are thought to have been created during the eighth and ninth century A.D., are all but gone. However, paint remnants can be found under the eaves and in the niches of the main tower.
- The mechanical foundation of the paintings immediately supporting the ground is made up of the inner walls of the cells in the courtyard of the Kailasanatha temple, as well as the eaves and walls of the niches of the Vimana of the Vaikunthaperumal temple.
- The Kailasanatha and Vaikunthaperumal temples include the colours Yellow ochre, Red ochre, Terre Verte, Carbon, and Lime.

Pallava Paintings at Kailasanatha Temple

Although Rajasimha's sculptures are still intact, its paintings are all but gone. There are rumours that vibrantly coloured murals previously covered the walls of the Kailasanatha temple's pradakshina-patha. However, the majority of it has been reduced to traces.

- At Kailasanatha, there are no complete paintings; only remnants have survived.
- However, the vestiges at Talagishwara temple in Panamalai and the fragments at Kailasanatha are significant because they are the only two remaining instances of Pallava mural paintings.
- Additionally, they represent a critical period in the evolution of South Indian painting.

Pallava Art: Sculptures

Pallava sculptures were created between the fourth and ninth centuries. The era of the Pallavas saw a boom in the development of rock-cut architecture. Pallava art and architecture were first documented between 610 and 690 AD. Contrarily, the other temples were built between 690 and 900 AD. The Pallava Empire also saw a rise in the popularity of rock-cut caves. For the first time, the unique rock construction and sculptures quickly displaced the prominent component of the South Indian temples.

