

THE CAVE AND STRUCTURAL TEMPLES OF PANDYAS: THE BASIC UNDERSTANDINGS

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Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore says that “**The Tamils known for great artists and they could sing, design and construct**” The Pandyas contributed more for the development of architecture. Gopuras, Prakaras, Vimanas, Garbagrahas are the special features of the pandya temple architecture temples at Madurai, Thirvanamalai, Srirangam are good examples for the development of Pandyan architecture.

On the basis of Art and Architecture under the first Pandyan Empire divided into two. They are as follows:

1. Rock-cut cave temple
2. Structural temple.

Rock Cut Cave Temples

The pandya period is marked as renaissance period in the field of rock cut temples. The rock cut cave temples are known for their merit. More than 50 rock-cut cave temples were excavated from the pandyan Kingdom. More rock-cut cave temple found in Thiruparankundram, Anaimalai, Karaikudi, Kalugumalai, Malayadikurichi and Trichy. The temples are constructed for Lord Shiva and Vishnu.

Special Features of Pandyas Cave Temples

- The upper and lower Portions of the Pillars are Square in shape and the interviewing portion is Octagonal.
- The lower portion is adorned with lotus medallions. The façade is simple until the decorative façade of the Pallavas.
- Carvings of the outer rock wall of the main cave temples show Ganesha, Jyeshtha, Vishnu, Saphthamathas, etc.
- The location of the cave temple is at all level of a hill unlike the general tendency in the pallava period to keep close to the foot of the hill.

Tripparankundram Cave Temple (A.D 773)

In the south pandya country itself, one of the most significant centers of dispersal of pandya rock-cut art have been at Triupparankundram which have been referred to in its early inscriptions as Param Kunru, or Pranasikhari in Sanskrit. The temple has four shrined temple was built by Sattan Ganapathi, another minister of Nedunjadaiya Paranthaka. Vishnu, Subramaniya, Durga, Ganapathi and Siva found in separate shrines.

Pillyarpatti Cave Temple

This temple known as karpaga vinayagar today. This temple 60 miles away from Madurai which is cave temple belonged to Mahendravarman style. It has two armed Ganesar. It has vatteluthu inscription – an archaic and early type.

Kalugumalai Vettuvan Kovil

Vettuvan kovil is a cave temple built between the 8th and 9th century located in Kalugumalai. It is a priceless unfinished Pandyan monolithic cave temple. This is an ancient Jain site that has a natural cavern with rock beds where Jain monks and nuns observed penance and was an academic centre for Jain theology for about 300 years during early Pandya period.

Sitthanavasal

Sitthanavasal is 10km from Pudukottai. This temple have more paintings belonged to Srimara Srivallaban Pandiya king in 8th century.

Structural temple

Structural temples were built on stone. They were simple in style. Each temple consist of Garbagraha, arthamandapa, and Muhamandapa. Such structural stone temples are found in Kovilpatti, Thirupattur and Madurai. The Pandya kings constructed structural stone temples at Ambasamudram, Alagar kovil. Internal structure of these temples were constructed in a planned manner.

Special Features of Structural Temples

- They have 20' to 30' high stone Vimanas with two or three talas and adorned with sculptures sala, kudu, Pancharas.
- The temples have Garbagraha, Arthamandapa, Mahamadapa. They do not have big mandapas or gopuras.
- The Gajaprista style of Vimanas – which is found in Pallava and Chola countries absent in Pandya country.

The Structural temples of Pandya are simple, containing Sanctum and arthamandapa, Muhamandapa. Some of the temples are as follows:

Temple	Place
Erichavudaiyar temple	Ambasamudharam
Kuttralanathar temple	Coutralam
Siva temple	Enadi
Rajasimhesvara temple	Kottaikasankulam
Poornathar temple	Kovilpatti
Tennalagar temple	Kovilkulam
Kudalalgar temple	Madurai
Gopalaswami temple	Mannarkovil
Tiruvaludaisavar temple	Perunkulam

Alagarkovil temple	Seevalaperi
Lakshminarayana temple	Sinnamanur
Vatapatrasayi temple	Srivilliputtur
Sawmya narayana temple	Trikostiyur
Thalainathar temple	Tiruputtur
Nambikovil temple	Triukkurungudi
Valeeswara temple	Thiruvaleeswaram
Uma maheswara temple	Vijayanam

As in Madurai the importance goes to Goddess Shenbagavalli in this temple. There are two women securities in the shrine. While the Alankara is done in accordance with form of the deity in all. Later the temples renovated by Ullamudayan belonging the 10th century.

Lakshmi Narayana Temple

Lakshmi narayana temple situated in chinnamanur. Deity was Lord Vishnu. This temple was damaged by foreign invaders.

Thalainathar temple

Thalainathar temple situated in Tripattur. The place where sage valmiki performed penance is shown behind the sanctum. There is also a shrine for lord Triunageswar. Lord Dakhsinamoorthy grace alone without his disciples. All planets are in sitting form, the temple has many such sacred features.

Second Pandyan Empire

The Second Pandya kings also promoted structural temples. The Vadapadrasavi temple at srivilliputtur, siva temple in Ambasamudram pandya rulers built big gopurams at the entrance of the temples.

Special Features of the Temple

- The pandyas did not want to tamper with the central shrine garbagirha
- They gave attention to the outlying portions of the temple as the outer gopuras, prakaras and mandapas.
- The huge temple complexes had the effect of enhancing the “Pristine holiness” of the central shrine. High walls with battlements were built for defence.
- In the pillars, the flowers element began to assume a more exquisite appearance.
- Another new feature of the development of the Dravidian style during the pandyan epoch is the large mandapam.

Meenakshi temple

Meenakshi temple is a historic hindu temple located on the southern bank of vaigai river in the temple city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Many kings and dynasties rendered endowments to this temple. Many kings constructed the temple complex including, the Pandyas, Vijayanagara kings, Nayaks of Madurai. Among them the eastern gopura of the Meenakshi

temple was constructed by Maravarman Sundhara Pandya I to commemorate his victory over the Cholas.

Nellaiappar Temple

Tirunelveli, known for Nanchil Nadu in history, attracted many Pandya's architecture. During the period of Pandya, Tirunelveli was part and parcel of their territory. Nellaippar temple is one of the oldest temples of Lord Shiva, located in Tirunelveli. The presiding deity is known as Swami Nellaippar. It is known to have been built around the 7th century also. According to architectural style, both the gopurams were built by Muthukanda Rama Pandyan.

Pillars

Nindrasir Nedumaran built Nellaippar temple. It has the musical pillars. The Somavaramandapam, the 1000-pillared hall with intricate wood work, and the Vasanthamandapam are some of the noteworthy points in this temple.

Sculptures

Pandyan sculptures are beautiful and ornamental. Some sculptures are engraved on single stone. They have got more messages and values. Pandyan period witnessed a renaissance in the art of sculptures.

Paintings

The beauty of the Pandya mural painting can be seen in the Sithnavasal cave temple constructed during the time of Srimaran and Srivallapa Pandian. The notable drawings include a pond with louts. This scene shows Samavarana, a unique, chosen and elegant audience hall where Tiruthankaras gave a sermon after they reached realization. Bulls, elephants, and other gods gathered in this audience hall to witness this grand scene. Top columns have paintings of dancing women with louts, whereas the southern pillars have the paintings of the King and queen with umbrellas.

Conclusion

Pandya rulers contributed more for the development of literature, art, and architecture. Their contribution created a unique and permanent cultural impact on Tamil society.

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