

## LESSON 11

### SOUTH INDIAN KINGDOMS – I

### PALLAVAS

#### *Learning Objectives*

*Students will acquire knowledge about*

1. *Origin of the Pallavas.*
2. *Achievements of Mahendravarman I, Narasimhavarman I and Rajasimha.*
3. *Administration of the Pallavas.*
4. *Education and Literature under the Pallavas.*
5. *Art and architecture of the Pallavas.*

After the decline of the Sangam Age in the Tamil country, the Kalabhra rule lasted for about 250 years. Thereafter, the Pallavas established their kingdom in Tondaimandalam with its capital at Kanchipuram. Their rule continued till Tondaimandalam was captured and annexed by the Imperial Cholas in the beginning of the tenth century A.D.

#### **Origin of the Pallavas**

There are different views on the origin of the Pallavas. They were equated with the Parthians, the foreigners who ruled western India. Another view was that the Pallavas were a branch of the Brahmin royal dynasty of the Vakatakas of the Deccan. The third view relates the Pallavas with the descendents of the Chola prince and a Naga princess whose native was the island of Manipallavam. But these theories on the origin of the Pallavas were not supported by adequate evidences.

Therefore, the view that the Pallavas were the natives of Tondaimandalam itself was widely accepted by scholars. They are also identical with the Pulindas mentioned in the inscriptions of Asoka. When Tondaimandalam was conquered by the Satavahanas, the Pallavas became their feudatories. After the fall of the Satavahanas in the third century A.D., they became independent. The Pallavas issued their earlier inscriptions in Prakrit and Sanskrit because of their Satavahana connections, and also patronised Brahmanism.

#### **Political History**

The early Pallava rulers from 250 A.D. to 350 A.D. issued their charters in Prakrit. Important among them were Sivaskandavarman and Vijayaskandavarman. The second line of Pallava rulers who ruled between 350 A.D. and 550 A.D. issued their charters in Sanskrit. The most important ruler of this line was Vishnugopa who was defeated by Samudragupta during his South Indian expedition. The rulers of the third line who ruled from 575 A.D. to their ultimate fall in the ninth century issued their charters both in Sanskrit and Tamil. Simhavishnu was the first ruler of this line. He destroyed the Kalabhras and firmly established the Pallava rule in Tondaimandalam. He also defeated the Cholas and extended the Pallava territory up to the river Kaveri. Other great Pallava rulers of this line were Mahendravarman I, Narasimhavarman I, and Narasimhavarman II.

#### **Mahendravarman I (600 – 630 A.D.)**

The long-drawn Pallava – Chalukya Conflict began during his period. Pulakesin II marched against the Pallavas and captured the northern part of their kingdom. Although a Pallava inscription refers to the victory of Mahendravarman I at Pullalur, he was not able to recover the lost territory.

Mahendravarman I was a follower of Jainism in the early part of his career. He was converted to Saivism by the influence of the Saiva saint, Thirunavukkarasar alias Appar. He built a Siva temple at Tiruvadi. He assumed a number of titles like Gunabhara, Satyasandha, Chettakari (builder of temples) Chitrakarapuli, Vichitrachitta and Mattavilasa.

He was a great builder of cave temples. The Mandagappattu inscription hails him as Vichitrachitta who constructed a temple for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva without the use of bricks, timber, metal and mortar. His rock-cut temples are found in a number of places like Vallam, Mahendravadi, Dalavanur, Pallavaram, Mandagappattu and Tiruchirappalli. He had also authored the Sanskrit work Mattavilasa Prahasanam. His title Chitrakarapuli reveals his talents in painting. He is also regarded as an expert in music. The music inscription at Kudumianmalai is ascribed to him.

#### **Narasimhavarman I (630-668 A.D.)**

Narasimhavarman I was also known as Mamalla, which means 'great wrestler'. He wanted to take revenge the defeat of his father at the hands of Chalukyan ruler Pulakesin II. His victory over Pulakesin II in the Battle of Manimangalam near Kanchi is mentioned in Kuram copper plates. The Pallava army under General Paranjothi pursued the retreating Chalukya army, entered Chalukya territory, captured and destroyed the capital city of Vatapi. Narasimhavarman I assumed the title 'Vatapikonda'. He regained the lost territory. Another notable achievement of Narasimhavarman I was his naval expedition to Sri Lanka. He restored the throne to his friend and Sri Lankan prince Manavarma.

During his reign, Hiuen Tsang visited the Pallava capital Kanchipuram. His description of Kanchi is vivid. He calls it a big and beautiful city, six miles in circumference. It had 100 Buddhist

monasteries in which about 10,000 Buddhist monks lived. According to his account the people of Kanchi esteemed great learning and the Ghatika at Kanchi served as a great centre of learning. Narasimhavarman I was the founder of Mamallapuram and the monolithic rathas were erected during his reign.

#### **Narasimhavarman II or Rajasimha (695 -722 A.D.)**

Narasimhavarman I was succeeded by Mahendravarman II and Parameswarvarman I and the Pallava – Chalukya conflict continued during their reign. Thereafter, Narasimhavarman II became the ruler of the Pallava kingdom. He was also known as Rajasimha. His regime was peaceful and he evinced more interest in developing the art and architecture. The Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram were built in this period. He was also a great patron of art and letters. The famous Sanskrit scholar Dandin is said to have adorned his court. He sent embassies to China and the maritime trade flourished during his reign. Rajasimha assumed titles like Sankarabhakta, Vadhyavidyadhara and Agamapriya.

He was succeeded by Parameswaravarman II and Nandivarman II. The Pallava rule lasted till the end of the ninth century A.D. The Chola king Aditya I defeated the last Pallava ruler Aparajita and seized the Kanchi region. With this, the rule of Pallava dynasty came to an end.

#### **Administration of the Pallavas**

The Pallavas had a well organized administrative system. The Pallava state was divided into *Kottams*. The *Kottam* was administered by officers appointed by the king. The king was at the centre of administration in which he was assisted by able ministers. He was the fountain of justice. He maintained a well-trained army. He provided land-grants to the temples known as *Devadhana* and

also to the Brahmans known as *Brahmadeya*. It was also the responsibility of the central government to provide irrigation facilities to the lands. A number of irrigation tanks were dug by the Pallava kings. The irrigation tanks at Mahendravadi and Mamandoor were dug during the reign of Mahendravarman I. Detailed information on the tax system could also be traced from the Pallava inscriptions. Land tax was the primary source of the government revenue. The *Brahmadeya* and *Devadhana* lands were exempted from tax. Traders and artisans such as carpenters, goldsmiths, washer-men, oil-pressers and weavers paid taxes to the government. The Pallava inscriptions throw much light on the village assemblies called *sabhas* and their committees. They maintained records of all village lands, looked after local affairs and managed temples.

### Society under the Pallavas

The Tamil society witnessed a great change during the Pallava period. The caste system became rigid. The Brahmins occupied a high place in the society. They were given land-grants by the kings and nobles. They were also given the responsibility of looking after the temples. The Pallava period also witnessed the rise of Saivism and Vaishnavism and also the decline of Buddhism and Jainism. The Saiva Nayanmars and the Vaishnava Alwars contributed to the growth of Saivism and Vaishnavism. This is known as the Bakthi Movement. They composed their hymns in the Tamil language. These hymns revealed the importance of devotion or Bakthi. The construction of temples by the Pallava kings paved the way for the spread of these two religions.

### Education and Literature

The Pallavas were great patrons of learning. Their capital Kanchi was an ancient centre of learning. The *Ghatika* at Kanchi was popular and it attracted students from all parts of India and

abroad. The founder of the Kadamba dynasty, Mayurasarman studied Vedas at Kanchi. Dinganaga, a Buddhist writer came to study at Kanchi. Dharmapala, who later became the Head of the Nalanada University, belonged to Kanchi. Bharavi, the great Sanskrit scholar lived in the time of Simhavishnu. Dandin, another Sanskrit writer adorned the court of Narasimhavarman II. Mahendravarman I composed the Sanskrit play *Mattavilasaprahasanam*. Tamil literature had also developed. The Nayanmars and Alwars composed religious hymns in Tamil. The *Devarnam* composed by Nayanmars and the *Nalayradivyaprabandam* composed by Alwars represent the religious literature of the Pallava period. Perundevanar was patronized by Nandivarman II and he translated the Mahabharata as *Bharathavenba* in Tamil. *Nandikkalambagam* was another important work but the name of the author of this work is not known. Music and dance also developed during this period.

### Pallava Art and Architecture

It was a great age of temple building. The Pallavas introduced the art of excavating temples from the rock. In fact, the Dravidian style of temple architecture began with the Pallava rule. It was a gradual evolution starting from the cave temples to monolithic *rathas* and culminated in structural temples. The development of temple architecture under the Pallavas can be seen in four stages.



Rathas at Mamallapuram

Mahendravarman I introduced the rock-cut temples. This style of Pallava temples are seen at places like Mandagappattu, Mahendravadi, Mamandur, Dalavanur, Tiruchirappalli, Vallam, Siyamangalam and Tirukalukunram.

The second stage of Pallava architecture is represented by the monolithic *rathas* and Mandapas found at Mamallapuram. Narasimhavarman I took the credit for these wonderful architectural monuments. The five *rathas*, popularly called as the *Panchapanadava rathas*, signifies five different styles of temple architecture. The mandapas contain beautiful sculptures on its walls. The most popular of these mandapas are Mahishasuramardhini Mandapa, Tirumurthi Mandapam and Varaha Madapam.



**Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram**

In the next stage, Rajasimha introduced the structural temples. These temples were built by using the soft sand rocks. The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi and the Shore temple at Mamallapuram remain the finest examples of the early structural temples of the Pallavas. The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi is the greatest

architectural master piece of the Pallava art.

The last stage of the Pallava art is also represented by structural temples built by the later Pallavas. The Vaikundaperumal temple, Muktheeswara temple and Matagenswara temples at Kanchipuram belong to this stage of architecture.



**Shore Temple at Mamallapuram**

The Pallavas had also contributed to the development of sculpture. Apart from the sculptures found in the temples, the 'Open Art Gallery' at Mamallapuram remains an important monument bearing the sculptural beauty of this period. The Descent of the Ganges or the Penance of Arjuna is called a fresco painting in stone. The minute details as well

as the theme of these sculptures such as the figures of lice-picking monkey, elephants of huge size and the figure of the 'ascetic cat' standing erect remain the proof for the talent of the sculptor.



**The Fall of Ganges**

### Fine Arts

Music, dance and painting had also developed under the patronage of the Pallavas. The Mamandur inscription contains a note on the notation of vocal music. The Kudumianmalai inscription referred to musical notes and instruments. The Alvars and Nayanmars composed their hymns in various musical notes. Dance and drama also developed during this period. The sculptures of this period depict many dancing postures. The Sittannavasal paintings belonged to this period. The commentary called *Dakshinchitra* was compiled during the reign of Mahendravarman I, who had the title Chittirakkarapuli.

### Learning Outcome

After learning this lesson the students will be able to explain

1. The different theories about the origin of the Pallavas.
2. The political history of the Pallavas and their military accomplishments
3. Administrative system under the Pallavas.
4. Their cultural contributions.
5. Architectural achievements of the Pallavas.