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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**ARCHEOLOGICAL INSCRIPTIONS OF PALLAVA DYNASTY IN KANCHIPURAM**

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**Abstract**

The Pallava Dynasty governed a significant portion of the South Indian subcontinent from the 3rd to the 9th century. Their primary domain was commonly referred to as "Thondaimandalam," stretching from the southern region of Kanchi to what is now the southern part of Andhra Pradesh. This article delves into the origins of the Pallava dynasty, exploring their noteworthy contributions in various domains, including religion, art, architecture, philosophy, coinage, and the preservation of historical monuments that uphold the cultural heritage of the region. Their architectural marvels, such as the shore temples and the remnants of Shaiva and Vaishnav temples, vividly showcase their artistic prowess and profound commitment to the principles of dharma. Throughout their rule in Tondaimandalam, the Pallavas engaged in frequent conflicts with the Tamil kingdoms of the Cholas and Pandyas in the south, as well as the Chalukyas of Badami in the north. This article highlights some of their substantial contributions to society and religion, as well as their role in advancing art and architecture, all of which continue to enrich the cultural heritage through enduring temples that stand as testaments to their existence even after 1500 years, as meticulously documented by historians over time. Given the vast extent of their empire and the duration of their reign, delving into Pallavas of Kanchi is indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of South Indian history.

**Introduction**

The Pallavas have a historical association with Kanchi and were commonly referred to as Tondamans in the annals of history. The people of this community were known as Tondaiyar, and the region they inhabited was recognized as Tondamandalam. These designations appear in South Indian literature both preceding and during the zenith of Pallava rule. The phrase "the

Pallava, who is the ruler of the Tondaiyar," as found in one of Tirumangai Alvar's songs, supports the notion that Pallava and Tondaman were interchangeable terms. However, the term Pallava gained prominence in official charters during the Pallava rule (referred to as Pallavan Tondaiyar Kon), underscoring their identity as Pallavas. Thus, it is evident that the Pallavas were, in fact, Tondamans who ruled over Tondamandalam<sup>[1-5]</sup>.

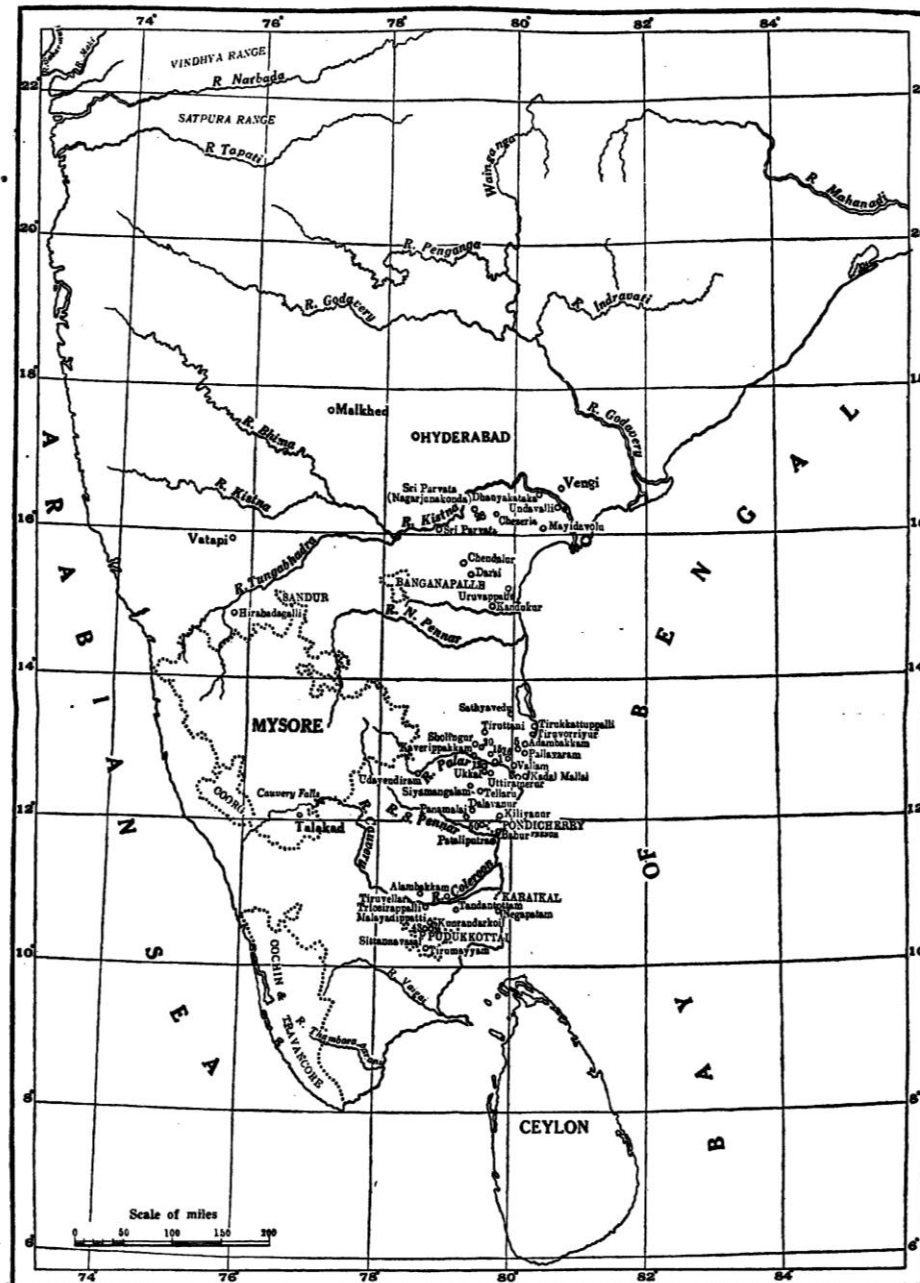


Figure.1. Deccan in the age of Pallavas

In the Tamil language, the term "Pallava" signifies both an arrow and a young creeper or a newly sprouted leaf in Sanskrit. While the precise emergence of the Pallavas in the Andhra region remains uncertain, historians suggest it likely occurred towards the conclusion of the Ikshvaku dynasty's reign. The Pallavas supplanted the Ikshvakus in the Krishna-Guntur territory. The political history of the Pallavas

can be categorized into two distinct phases: the early Pallavas and the Imperial Pallavas, distinguished by their respective time periods [6-9].

Kancheepuram served as the administrative hub for the Pandyas, whereas the Pallavas, believed to be a native tribe, established their supremacy in the region known as Tondainadu, often referred to as the "land of creepers." From the 3rd to the 9th centuries

CE, the Pallavas governed southeastern India, particularly the present-day state of Tamil Nadu. Their rule left a significant imprint on the political, social, and cultural landscape of South India. While there is speculation that their ancestors may have originated from the state of Andhra Pradesh, north of Tamil Nadu, the Pallavas' precise origins remain shrouded in mystery [10-12].

In the fourth century AD, the South witnessed the emergence of the Pallavas, who achieved their zenith of power during the seventh century AD. They held sway for a remarkable span of over 500 years. The influence of the Pallavas in the Deccan during their era is illustrated in Figure 1. They played a pivotal role in shaping the culture of Southeast Asia and were responsible for the construction of grand cities, educational establishments, temples, and statues. This article delves into the origins and the monarchs of the Pallavas.

### **Origin and History of Pallava Dynasty**

The origins of the Pallavas remain shrouded in mystery, giving rise to various historical theories. Some historians propose that they may have descended from the Parthian people, an Iranian tribe that gradually migrated to South India. Others suggest that the Pallavas were an indigenous dynasty, emerging from the South through a fusion of different tribal groups. There is another theory claiming their origin in the Tondaimandalam district near Madras, where they initially settled. A legendary account even traces their lineage to a Chola prince and a Naga princess from Manipallavam (Sri Lanka).

The earliest written records of the Pallavas are found in inscriptions, starting with Prakrit and later transitioning to Sanskrit, and eventually a combination of Sanskrit and Tamil. These inscriptions date back to the time when the local Pallava dynasty in Kanchipuram held sway (200 – 575 A.D) [13-16].

Key insights into the early history of the Pallavas are offered by the Viripara plates, discovered at Mayidavolu, belonging to Skandavarman I. They reveal that the Pallava rulers of this period held

dominion not only over Tondaimandalam or the Kanchi province but extended their rule up to the banks of the Krishna River, which was occupied by the Andhras. The Mayidavolu grant, attributed to Yuva Maharaja Sivaskandhavarma of the Bharadwaja Gotra of the Pallava line, is a vital document recording the bestowal of a village called Viripara to Brahmins in Andhrapatha, dating to the ninth year of Sivaskandhavarma's predecessor's rule [17-19].

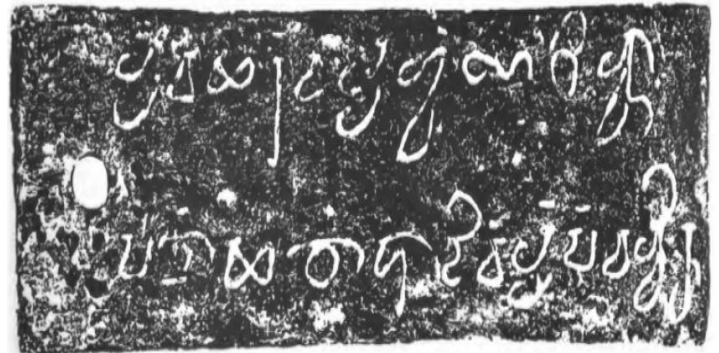
Dr. D. C. Sirkar, Government Epigraphist, presented a meticulous analysis of these inscriptions in *Epigraphia Indica* Volume XXXII Part II, establishing that Simhavarma was the father and direct ancestor of Sivaskandhavarma, given the proximity of the dates and linguistic evidence. Furthermore, the paleography and language of the current grant bear a striking resemblance to the records of the Ikshvakus, indicating that the Pallavas succeeded the Ikshvakus in the Krishna-Guntur region [16-20].

The "Hirahadagalli" grant attests that Sivaskandhavarma of Kanchi, a member of the Bharadwaja Gotra, reaffirmed and expanded a grant made to Brahmins by the great monarch Bappa in the ninth year of his rule. The British Museum plates of Queen Charudévi, presumed to be on behalf of the heir Vijaya Buddha Varman, provide further historical context. These records connect Yuva Maharajah Sivaskandhavarman, King Sivaskandhavarma of the Hirahadagalli plates, and Vijayaskandhavarma, whose descendants were Buddhavarma and Buddhayankura. The Mayidavolu and Hirahadagalli plates reveal that Sivaskandhavarma of the Prakrit charters is indeed the same individual [15-19].

While the exact succession of Pallava kings from the Prakrit charters remains uncertain, this document explores the likely order based on existing Prakrit copper-plates.



**Fig. 2.** Copper plates of Pallava period in Egmore Museum [17-19]



**Fig. 3:** Represents Imprints of Pallava King Sivaskandavarman's grant inscription on Copper Plates (Mayidavolu Plates of Sivaskandavarman [17-19])

### Rulers of Pallava Dynasty

Working more or less along these lines in the inscriptions of the pallavas and altogether omitting the rulers of the Nellore-Guntur, Sanskrit charters as likely belonging to a different line. The following genealogy has been suggested by Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sircar.



**THE PALLAVA DYNASTY(13,171)**

The father of "Yuvamaharaja" Sivaskandavarman (cir. A.D.200)  
(King of Kanchi) – **Mayidavolu Grant**

Sivaskandavarman  
(King of Kanchi)  
**Hirahadagalli Grant**

Sivaskandavarman  
(King of Kanchi)  
**Guntur**

Skandavarman  
Kumaravishnu (I)  
Buddhavarman  
Kumaravishnu (II)  
(King of Kanchi)

Vishnugopa (cir.A.D.338) (King of Kanchi – Allahabad Pillar insc  
Kumara Vishnu (cir.A.D.336)  
Skandavarman (cir.A.D.394)  
Viravarman (cir.A.D.422)  
Skandavarman (cir.A.D.450)

Skandavarman (cir.A.D.506)  
Nandivarman I (cir.A.D.534)  
(King of Kanchi)

Simhavarman (cir.A.D.506)  
Vishnugopavarman (cir.A.D.534)  
(King of Palakkada)  
Simhavarman (cir.A.D.562)

Simhavarman (cir.A.D.562)

Simhavishnu (cir.A.D.590)  
Mahendravarman I (cir.A.D.618)  
Narasimhavarman I (cir.A.D.646)  
Mahendravarman II (cir.A.D.660)  
Paramesvaravarman I (cir.A.D.674)  
Narasimhavarman II (cir.A.D.700)  
Paramesvaravarman II (cir.A.D.715)

Bhimavarman  
Buddhavarman  
Adityavarman  
Govindavarman  
Hiranyavarman  
Nandivarman (cir.A.D.742)  
Dantivarman (cir.A.D.800)  
Nandivarman III (cir.A.D.840)  
Nripatunga (cir.A.D.875)

Aparajita (End of the IX Century)

## **Early Pallavas and Imperial Pallavas**

In Andhra, the ascendancy of the Pallavas commenced towards the latter part of the Ikshvaku era. Around 300 CE, Simhavarma, a Pallava monarch, dethroned the Ikshvaku ruler Rudrapurushadatta, establishing Pallava dominion in coastal Andhra, then referred to as "Karmarashtra." This marked the emergence of the Pallavas as a formidable political force in southern India. The dynasty's founding figure is believed to be Simhavarma (280–335 CE), with Sivaskandavarman, possibly reigning at the early 4th century CE, emerging as one of their most prominent early rulers. Sivaskandavarman's domain extended from the Krishna to the South Pennar and reached as far as the Bellary region. The concluding monarch of this early Pallava phase was Nandivarman I, whose reign was marked by the Kalabhra invasion [13,14].

Simhavishnu (575–590 CE) initiated the first dynasty of this lineage and laid the foundation for the "Age of the Imperial Pallavas." He not only defeated the Kalabhras but also vanquished the rulers of the Chola, Pandya, and Chera kingdoms. His authority extended across the entire territory between the Krishna and Kaveri rivers, earning him the epithet "Avanishimha" (the lion of the earth). Legend has it that the renowned poet Bharavi visited his court. The era of Mahendrarvarman I (590–630 CE) saw a protracted Pallava-Chalukya conflict, culminating in Pulakesin II's victory over Mahendrarvarman I in the Pullalur war. In an effort to stave off further conflict, Mahendrarvarman ceded control of their Northern territories to Pulakesin II [1, 3, 4].

Narasimhavarman I (630–668 CE), also known as Mahamalla or Mamalla, was the most illustrious Pallava ruler. He continued his father's Pallava-Chalukya rivalry, seeking retribution against Pulakesin II, the Chalukyan king who had defeated his father. Narasimhavarman I prevailed in three confrontations, including a decisive battle in Manimangalam near Kanchi in 642 CE. Following Pulakesin II's demise, Narasimhavarman assumed the title of "Vatapikonda" (the conqueror of Vatapi).

One of Narasimhavarman I's remarkable feats was his expedition to Sri Lanka to reinstate the Sinhalese prince Manavarman. During his reign, Hiuen Tsang, who visited Kanchi, the Pallava capital, observed the harmonious coexistence of Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Additionally, Narasimhavarman I was renowned for constructing Mamallapuram and the Monolithic Rathas (Rock-cut Rathas). Mahendrarvarman II (668–670 CE) had a brief two-year rule before being assassinated by Vikramaditya I of the Chalukya Empire.

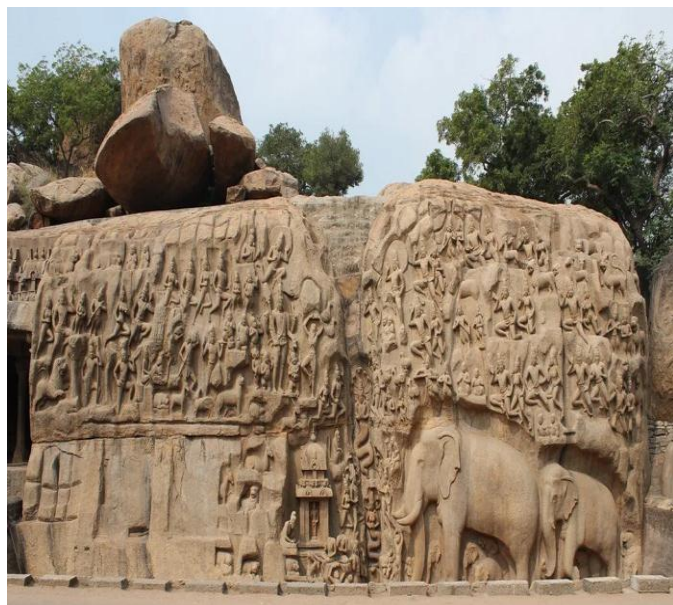
Paramesvaravarman I (670–695 CE) achieved a decisive victory over the Chalukyas and their allies, the Gangas, in a pivotal battle. Subsequently, Narasimhavarman II, known as "Rajasimha," reigned from 695 to 722 CE, presiding over a peaceful period. He was celebrated for constructing grand edifices like the Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchi and the Shore Temple in Mamallapuram. Dandin, a prominent Sanskrit scholar, graced his court. Under his rule, maritime trade flourished, and emissaries were dispatched to China. Nandivarman II (731–795), a devotee of Vishnu, was a fervent patron of education. During his reign, some ancient temples were renovated, and new ones, like the Vaikuntaperumal temple in Kanchi, were erected [13, 14, 18, 19].

## **Major Literary works of Pallava Dynasty**

### **Art and Architecture**

The period's religious revival ignited a remarkable surge in architectural innovation, with the Pallavas making a substantial impact on Indian art and architecture. In fact, the Pallavas are widely acknowledged as the pioneers of Dravidian-style Indian architecture in the southern regions. This architectural evolution encompassed the development from cave temples to monolithic Rathas and ultimately to structural temples. An exquisite illustration of this journey is found in the Pancha Pandava Rathas, also known as the Five Rathas, in Mamallapuram, which showcase five distinct architectural styles as depicted in Figure 4.

Among the most noteworthy early structural temples attributed to the Pallavas are the Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchi and the Shore Temple in Mamallapuram. The Kailasanatha Temple stands as an epitome of Pallava architecture, featuring intricately carved walls and stunning sculptures within the Mandapas. Notably, the sculpture in Mamallapuram depicting the "Descent of Ganges" or the "Penance of Arjuna" exemplifies classical art of the era. The Pallavas also played a pivotal role in fostering music, dance, and painting. During the reign of Mahendravarman I (600–630 CE), Mahabalipuram began to emerge as a hub of art and culture. Mahendravarman I, a renowned writer, poet, and orator, significantly supported the construction of many iconic landmarks within the city. His son, Narasimhavarman I (630–680 CE), along with subsequent Pallava monarchs, dutifully continued to promote this era of artistic excellence [13, 20].



**Fig.4.** Pancha Ratha (Five chariots) at Mahabalipuram are monolithic stone chariot structures

### Literature and Education

The Pallavas displayed unwavering commitment to education, with the focal point of knowledge and intellectualism being the renowned

University of Kanchi. This esteemed institution drew students not only from various corners of India but also from overseas. Mayurasarman, the dynasty's founder, himself pursued Vedic studies in Kanchi, where a flourishing period of Sanskrit literary creation transpired. Notable among the Sanskrit literary masterpieces of the era were Bharavi's "Kiratarjuniyam," Dandi's "Dasakumaracharita," and Mahendravarman I's "Mattavilasaprahasana."

Under the patronage of the Pallava kingdom, a rich tapestry of literature encompassing sacred, secular, and non-religious works flourished, with a multilingual approach that included Sanskrit, Telugu, Prakrit, and Tamil. Kanchi emerged as a pivotal center for Sanskrit learning. Mahendravarman I himself authored prominent Sanskrit compositions like "Mattavilasa Prahasana" and "Bagavatha Ajikkiyam." An excellent testament to the Pallavas' keen interest in architecture is the Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram, exemplified in Figure 5.



**Fig. 5.** The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram is one such example of much interest shown by rulers of Pallava's in arts and architecture.

The architectural monuments in Mahabalipuram, constructed during the Pallava era, stand as a vivid testament to their dedication to

Hinduism and their culture. The Pallavas also championed the development of Tamil literature. Perundevanar, with the patronage of Nandivarman II, translated the Mahabharata into Tamil. The religious literature of the time found expression in the works of the Alvars, "Nalayaradivya prabhandam," and the Nayanars, "Thevaram." These Tamil devotional saints harnessed music and dance to convey the concept of a compassionate God, incorporating these art forms into the singing of religious hymns. This practice soon became a regular feature of temple festivities. Dandin, renowned for his work "Kavyadharsha," thrived in the courts of one of the Pallava rulers, Narasimhavarman II [13-20].

### Summary and Conclusion

The significance of the prefixes Vijaya or Siva in the names Sivaskandavarman of the Prakrit charters and Vijayaskandavarman of the British Museum records remains somewhat ambiguous. Both prefixes appear to have limited relevance in the broader context. Regrettably, the absence of any indication of this connection in numerous later genealogical lists makes it challenging to ascertain whether the members mentioned in the Prakrit and Sanskrit charters were indeed related in such a manner. As previously mentioned, the exact Pallava figure responsible for the initial establishment of Pallava authority in Kanchipuram remains shrouded in uncertainty. To the best of our knowledge, Tondaman-Ilam-Tiraiyan and Bappa are the earliest names associated with the suzerainty of Kanchi, an ancient city.

This article seeks to provide historical evidence regarding the Pallava kings of Kanchi. Existing literature, copper plate inscriptions, and historical references collectively attest to Sivaskandavarman's notable military achievements and his suzerainty over certain subordinate monarchs. However, at present, it is challenging for us to definitively verify the veracity of these claims.

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