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TOURIST CENTRES IN MAHABALIPURAM



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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the Tourist centres in Mahabalipuram. Mahabalipuram is one of the most world heritage centre declared by UNESCO in the year 1984. In the 7th century Mahabalipuram was a port city of south Indian dynasty of the Pallavas in Tamilnadu. Now it is a famous world heritage tourist centre in the world. It is around 60 kms south of Chennai. The famous tourist center shore temples, shore the five Rathas, the old and New light Houses, Trimurthi caves, Varaha and Tiger caves, beach and the sculpture training centre.

KEYWORDS : Mahabalipuram, Rathas, Temple,

Pallava, Mantapa, Monuments.

INTRODUCTION

The monuments at Mahabalipuram were mostly erected during the Reign of Narasimhavarman-I. They can be classified, based on the mode of construction, as (i) Monoliths, i.e., free standing temples cut out of solid rock, most of which are locally called Rathas (Chariots); (ii) Caves, excavated in hill scarps and used as temples, some of which are called *mantapas* or Canopies; (iii) Temples, i.e., built up masonry temples; and (iv) Sculptures and Sculptured Scenes carved on the hill's edges.

These monuments bear testimony to the Pallava Architecture. The monoliths have wonderfully been created to enthrall the hearts of the architects and their admirers. It may perhaps be confusing where to start with, at Mahabalipuram. A visitor to this place may be guided to start with the group of the five monoliths in the extreme south, thence proceed towards north to see the monuments on and at the edge of the hill up to the 'balance rock' and finally towards the sea to see the Shore Temple.

THE FIVE MONOLITHS

The five monoliths, as a group, was cut out of solid rock hewn to form five free standing monolithic temples, close to, but separated from, each other. The Temples are associated without any historical evidence, with the five pandava brothers of the Mahabharata. They were excavated during

the Reign of Narasimhavarman-I and they are the earliest monuments of Pallava Kings in India. The superstructures, each of which varies from one another, illustrate the varieties of roofing system that were followed.

DHARMARAJA RATHA

This is the southern most of the five temples and it is the highest. It is a pyramid structure with a square base, the upper part consists of a series of diminishing storeys, each having a row of pavillions above a row of *Kudus* (Chaitya Windows) arranged immediately above brackets of pilasters which divide the actual portion of the temple into niches with carved images. Four corner blocks, each with two panels containing standing figures, with two pillars in between and pilasters supported on squatting lions on all but one side, which has only four pillars, are found here. Among the eight sculptured panels of the four corner blocks, one each represents Harihara, Brahma and Skanda, three show four armed figures of Siva, and another portrays Narasimhavarman whose epithets, Sri Megha and Trailokya Vardhama Principle are inscribed above the statue in Grantha characters of the time. The last image, at the back and facing east, is Ardhanarishwara, a combination of Siva and Parvathi. It is a delightful sculpture of the Pallava age.

The image in the niches in the central tier bear features which are very frequent in later iconography. Siva is represented, in the central panel, which is deeply carved and in the north, with four arms and a rogry in his upper right hand. He has the adoring figure of Ganga to his left. At the right of the central panel is found Vishnu, carrying a wheel and a conch-shell in his upper pair of arms and resting his lower left hand on Garuda, His vehicle. There is another panel showing dancing four armed Siva, the earliest representation of Nataraja. Beyond this, towards the end, is shown a four armed Siva holding a drum and rosary in His upper pair of arms, and leaning on His bull in the form known as Vrishabhandikamurthi.

In the panel to the left of the Central Panel is a four-armed Kirtamurti Siva, carrying a bow and resting one of his hands on the shoulders of Arjuna whom He presented the Pasupatha weapon as a boon. The next panel represents a four armed Siva in the company of a dancing attendant who may be Thandu or Bharata. The last panel is also a representation of Siva in the form of Dakshinamurthy.

The Central Panel on the south contains a figure of standing four armed Vishnu with chakra and conch. The second panel to the right shows Krishna charming a snake. In the corresponding panel to the left, a four-armed Siva, carrying a cobra, trident and an axe, is shown overcoming the demon Andhaka, while three other panels, represent Siva, one shows Vinodhara.

ARJUNA RATHA

This monument which belongs to the Seventh Century AD. (Period Narasimhavarma Mamalla), is a typical *dvitala Vimana* of Dravidian Style. It consists of a Sanctum and a *mutha mantapa*. These carved panels between the pilasters on the three sides of the exterior of the wall have five panels on each side. The Central Panel is flanked by either of mithurna couples (seen in North and South) or other sculptures (East) which are flanked by Dvarapalas. The Central Panel represents Siva leaning on Nandi (South), Indra on Airavada and Vishnu leaning on Garuda (North). The two *talas* over the Sanctum have applique hara of four Karanakutas and four *bhadra salas* and double nasika in the harantara section. Both the Griva and Sikhara are octagonal. Figures of Surya and Chandra are also found in the first tier. Both the Draupati and Arjuna Rathas have a common *ruapitha*.

BHIMA RATHA

This Ratha has a wagon vaulted roof carrying a row of stupis over its central ridge. It is supported length-wise by four pillars and two pilasters. The hara contains salas, Kutas encircling like a parapet on the first tier. The hara leaves a alinda like space between the high griva⁹; the latter being the upward extension of the sanctum wall. The Griva and Sikhara have five projected nasikas, on the eastern and western sides. The sala ends have *lalata nasis* prominent with miniature shrines within a horseshoe shaped arch. The Ratha might probably be dedicated to Reclining Vishnu which is evident from an unfinished excavation of it inside the Sanctum.

DRAUPATI RATHA

These Rathas, like other Temples, are associated with the heroes of the Mahabharatha without any historical basis. These were the creations of the Pallava Ruler, Narasimhavarma-I (630-688 A.D.). Though this Ratha is called, 'Draupati Ratha', this monolithic Ratha is dedicated to Durga.

It is simple but like 'Kutahara' Vimana has only four of the six normal angas of an alpa Vimana'. The 'angas' that are lacking being the 'prastara' over the 'bhetti' and 'griva'. The stupa made separately for inserting in position after completion, is to be found now on the platform in front of Vimana.

Here, the four ribbed domical roof rests directly on the wall and the corners are decorated with floral designs. The Sanctum contains four armed standing Durga, being adorned by two male worshippers kneeling at her, feet, one of them brandishing the sword to cut off his own head as an offering to the goddess. The niches on the exterior and the pilasters on either side of the main entrance are crowned with 'makaratorana'. The unfinished Durga standing on the head of Mahisha is represented in the niches.

NAKULA - SAKADEVA RATHA

The Temple, named after two of the five heroes of Mahabharata, Nakula and Sakadeva is of Seventh Century. It is apsidal on plan and resembles the shape of gajaprishta with a dvitala ashtanga vimana, with aspitaharas on both the talas. The Sikhara has longitudinal series of *stupas* on the ridge and a large gable front in nasika form constituted by front cantoning pilasters of the griva and front *torana* arch of the *sikhara*. The temple consists of a mukha matntapa with two pillars and a *cella* which is devoid of any icon. The exterior walls of the Sanctum are Plain.

VALAIYANKUTTAI RATHA

Valaiyankuttai Ratha is to the west of Mamallapuram Village near the Buckingham Canal. It is so called as it is located near a pool ('Kuttai' in Tamil) called Valaiyankuttai. It is facing east with a *mukha mantapa* in front. It is a *dvitala Vimana* with all the eight angas. It is square in size. Like the other rathas, the excavation of this Ratha was started from the top but at the adhithana level, the work was discontinued. The *harantara* of the two *talas* have usual *kuta* and *salas*. The *hara* of the lower *tala* continues over the *mukha mantapa* also. The thin mahanasis are well formed and poses floral and other ornamentation. This belongs to Paramesvaravarman-I period, i.e., the last quarter of the Seventh Century.

OLAKANNESVARA TEMPLE:

Above the Mahisamardini Cave, is located the Olakannesvara (Isvara) Temple from the Eighth Century A.D., i.e., Rajasimha Period. The name of the Temple may be Olakkannesvara (Flamed Eye Siva) but popularly known as Olakkanatha Temple. During the British Rule (18-19 Century), this Temple was

used as Light House.

It is a masonry structure facing west in the square Plane, though the super structure is lost. It is believed that it must have originally resembled a Shore Temple. It is evident from the usual rampant lion and panels representing Siva in various attitudes. The Devakoshithas show the images of Yogadakshinamurthi (in the south), Tandavamurthi (in the west) and Ravananugrahamurthi (in the north).

MUKUNDA NAYANAR TEMPLE

The Temple is dedicated to Lord Siva, faces east and it is built of reddish gneiss rock. It has a Sanctum, Mukha Mantapa, with Dvitala Vimana of Dravidian Order. The super structure has octagonal Griva and Sikhara and the stupa is missing. The structure, as a whole, is plain in nature. Absence of wall figures and other details may be due to difficulty in making carvings in such hard stones. The rear walls of Sanctum contains Somaskanda Relief. The Linga which is present in the Sanctum seems to be a later addition. The Temple is assignable to Narasimharman-II Rajasimha (700-728 A.D.)

SHORE TEMPLE

Adjoining Arjuna's Thapas is a path opposite the Krishna Mantap, which leads to the sea and very close to which almost on the slash of waves, is the Shore Temple which is an example of masonry of Rajasimha's period.

It is a temple complex consisting of three temples, - two of them dedicated to Lord Siva and the other one to Lord Vishnu. The Temple, which faces west and having Tritala Vimana, is called "Rajasimheswara". The other Temple, facing east, consists of a Chatusthala Vimana called 'Kshatriya Simheswara'. It consists of a Somaskanda Panel, while the one facing west has, in addition to the Somaskanda Panel, a dhara of fluted Linga. The third shrine, dated probably to Mamalla Period, is dedicated to Vishnu and enshrines a Reclining Vishnu figure known in the inscription as Narapatti Vishnugraham, wholly out of rock, assignable to Mamalla Period. The Department of Archaeology feels that the present Shrine was constructed during Rajasimha's Period. The Khatriasimheswara is surrounded by *Prakara* topped with kutas and salas on north, east and south and a small gopuradvara in the east. Inside the temple complex, to the south a seated lion, the chest of which has been scooped up, to form a niche inside, a figure of Mahishasuramardini is carved. The Vimanas are of typical Dravidian Order, with octagonal *griva* and *sikhaco*. The top most tala carries *bhuta nayakas* at the corners.

The Vimana at top here is somewhat narrow and elongated. The entrance to the main Shrine, which faces east, is a small gopuram with walls in continuation on either side and leads to the perambulatory passage between the Temple and the other wall. The entrance to the temple is through steps and beyond the Porch (Mukhamantapa) is the main cell which enshrines a broken fluted Siva Linga. Opposite the Gopuram, perched on a boulder, is an emblem column (dhvajastambha), an essential feature in all Temples. Behind the Siva Linga is present the Somaskanda Group, as in other Pallava Temples, on either sides of the walls of the porch. There are rampant lions at intervals dividing the carved panels of the outer walls of the temple, many of which have already been destroyed by the splash of sea water. Behind this Shrine but connected with it and provided with a small porch is a cell without superstructure in which is enshrined the idol of Seshasayi Vishnu. Adjoining this, facing west, is a similar but smaller Shrine, devoted to Lord Siva. The Somaskanda Panel is on the back wall inside. On either sides in the porch, there are Dwarapalas.

At some distance, opposite this Temple, is a Dhvajasthambam and a Bhalipeetam, around which have been stacked some loose sculptures. One of the sculptures is a striking representation of seated

Siva as Tripurantaka with Vishnu as his arrow and another of Dakshinamoorthi on the four sides of a cylindrical pillar. Here, an expensive courtyard is partly surrounded by an unfinished enclosure along which are arranged rows of Nandis. The remains of the entrance to the courtyard to the west are also visible. There are panels near the entrance to the courtyard to the west, probably depicting scenes from the history of the Pallavas, as in the Vaikunta Perumal Temple at Kanchipuram. Among the iconographic carvings, there are those of Siva, one of which representing Tripurantaka with Vishnu as his arrow.

On the outer walls are a few Chola Inscriptions in Tamil referring to Kshatriyasimha Pallavesvara Palligondaruliyadeva and Rajasimha. These Inscriptions relating to Pallavesvara and Palligondaruliyadeva refer to the image of Seshasayi Vishnu in the cell between the two shrines. The Siva Shrine, facing west, may be the Rajasimha, - Pallavesvara Temple. Therefore, Kshatriya Simha-Pallavesvara Shrine can be the one facing east only. Kshatriyasimha may be the surname of Narasimavarman-II and a damaged inscription is found consisting of six Sanskrit verses which praise the qualities, beauty, valour and piety of Narasimhavarman-II. -

In the vicinity of the Shrine facing west and near the enclosure, is a large sculpture of Durga's Lion, with the Goddess, seated on the right hind leg of the animal. On its chest, is cut a small square niche to instal an idol of Durga, at the foot of the pedestal of which the lion is seated in a headless conch ant deer.

The whole compound of the Shore Temple, which was buried under a thick deposit of sand, had been cleared and restored to a certain extent. The proximity of the sea at a hand shaking distance, is a perpetual menace to the safety of the Temple. Not only the salty winds slash at the Temple and the structure but also the fury of the wave aided by the salty winds, erodes into the Temple and acts as a corrosive sublimate. Several steps have been taken to protect the Temple from all these threats.

MAHISHASURA ROCK

To the north of Shore Temple is located the Mahishasura Rock which is a large piece of rock almost touching the sea with the Shrine of Durga cut into it. On the back wall of the Shrine, is an eight armed figure of Durga and by its side, Mahishasura is shown as a lion pouncing on him. The Shrine Door Way is flanked by lion pilasters and female door-keepers or Dvarapalas. This monument also belongs to the Seventh Eighth Century A.D.

MINIATURE SHRINE

An ancient temple, with a Miniature Shrine dedicated to Lord Siva, has recently been unearthed in the Shore Temple Complex at Mamallapuram.²⁰ There is a sculptured panel of Mahishasuramardhini behind the miniature Shrine, with inscriptions on the temple wall. It is unique because it is considered to have been built earlier than the Shore Temple.

Apsidal (i.e. like a horseshoe) in shape, the Temple looks similar in plan to the Buddhist *Chaityas* found in Ajanta and Ellora. In Mamallapuram, instead of a Stupa, which is the characteristic of the Buddhist *chaityas*, there is a Miniature Shrine, dedicated to Rishabharuda Siva. There is also an image, probably of a Varaha (boar) near the wall behind the Miniature Shrine. Sculpture, pedestal and the lower part of the Miniature Shrine are cut out of the bed rock.

In the opinion of the Superintending Archaeologist of the Archaeological Survey of India, this is the earliest structural temple, especially in Mamallapuram, and unique in India. This could be considered built earlier than the Shore Temple constructed by Rajasimha who ruled between 700-728 A.D., because when the original wall (*Prakara*) of the Shore Temple was constructed, the new unearthed Temple was in disuse and ruins. The animal sculpture of the Reclining Vishnu situated

between the two temples of Rajasimha in the Shore Temple Complex were parts of the same bed rock. The Reclining Vishnu was carved by Narasimha Varman, the grandfather of Rajasimha. The builder of the Miniature Temple, as the evidences unearthed so far indicate, is Narasimha Varman.

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