

SCULPTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PANDYAS

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Abstract

The Sculptural Art of Pandyas of the early period was actually technically admirable equal to that of the contemporary of Pallavas. But, the difference between the two was the conceptual and theme. While the Pallavas introduced the sculptural panels, depicting *puranic* lore in their cave temples, the Pandyas employed the depiction of individual sculptures of the divinities maintaining the themes giving importance to the depiction of *pancayatana* and *shannmata* concepts in their cave temples. They installed the images of the respective god heads in their cave temples unlike the Pallavas, whose early cave temples were devoid of sculptures in their sanctums. Though sculptures were not placed in the *devakosthas* of the walls of the temples of this period, the Later Pandyas consecrated the images of the main deities in almost all sanctums of their edifices. Generally in the Siva temples, sculptures depicting different aspects of Siva were installed in the upper storey of the *vimana* and the images of Dakshinamurti, Narasimha, Brahma, Indra and Subrahmanya were placed on the south, west, north and east *grivakosthas* respectively. Some of the Later Pandya temples accommodated the image of Durga in the northern niche of the *ardhamandapa*. Examples of this type are seen at Melathirumanickam, Thenkarai and Aruppukkottai. The Vishnu temples of this period accommodated different incarnations (*avatars*) of Vishnu in the portion above the *kapota* (cornice) and in the *grivakosthas*. The sanctums of these temples generally show the images of Vishnu in his standing or seated or reclining postures. In the *Astanga vimana* temples all the three postures are depicted in vertical positions of the three sanctums.

Abstract: Sculpture, Pandyas, Temples, Inscriptions.

INTRODUCTION

In the Tamil country, the sculptural tradition introduced by the Pallavas next was followed by the contemporary of Pandyas and all the subsequent dynasties like the Cholas, Vijayanagar and Nayak and so on. The Pallava sculpture throughout the period maintains its distinctive feature of tall, strong bodies with large broad waist girdle loops. In most of the Pallava figures the *yajnopavita* (the sacred thread) goes over the right arm which feature is also seen in a few Chola and Pandya sculptures. The Chola sculptures retain some of the features of the early phase such as the suppleness and slenderness of forms and well modeled curves. The Chola artists differed from the Pallava art where only a lining is shown to denote the dress. While the Chola monarchs Rajaraja I and his son and successor Rajendra Chola I have set up a number of sculptures in their temples to commemorate their victorious activities and the Pallavas set up portrait sculptures, the Pandyas never followed both the systems in their sculptural art.