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## Royal Patronage towards Fine Arts

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### Abstract

India is a country rich in art and culture and several centuries old. Many of the traditions and customs are still being followed and recognized. Tamilnadu was ruled by several kingdoms and each of them contributed towards its development. Patronage of Pallava, Chola, Maratta, Nayaka Rulers who ruled Tamilnadu across several centuries have left behind a treasure of valuable information in the form of inscriptions, manuscripts, etc and also a visual treat through their artistic skills exhibited through the sculptures and paintings in Temples. This article is an attempt to bring out the Royal patronage of Kings towards Fine arts.

**Keywords:** Contribution, Dance, Growth, Inscriptions, Music, Patronage.

### Introduction:

The rulers of Provincial Kingdoms were great patrons of Fine Arts. Fine Arts include Sculptures, Paintings, Music and Dance. The rich art and culture of Indian music and dance was never static and is ever growing. Music and Dance are also depicted in a spiritual and a religious sense wherein temples were avenues for Arts grew significantly. According to Hindu Mythology, one of the 64 art forms is sculpture. It is a branch of Visual Arts that is done on three dimensions. Mostly the sculptures seen in India depict human forms to propagate instructions and religious stories. It dates back to Indus valley civilization. Almost every kingdom in India has marked its name alongside 'Sculpture'. The kings ruling the kingdom were all artistic in nature and showed their exemplary skills through the art forms. The Great Asoka Pillar at Saranath representing the Mauryan empire, stands tall centuries later and is the official symbol of our Country<sup>1</sup>. Ajantha caves, Kajrahu built during 9<sup>th</sup> century, can be called as a golden period with respect to sculpture and almost nothing has changed in the styles till date. From 10<sup>th</sup> century, sculptural art form predominantly changed its style towards the temple architecture.

Tamilnadu, a southern state of India is a land of temples, and was ruled by famous kingdoms such as the Pallavas and Cholas. Every kingdom has a share of its own in contributing to the development of Fine arts. Tanjore, a place in south Tamilnadu was considered as the center stage for Fine Arts as every kingdom that ruled the place contributed through the literary works, the musical compositions, the inscriptions on the temple walls which stand testimony to their great patronage even today. They provide valuable information on their rich artistic skills in sculptural art, painting and a very vast knowledge on music and dance.

### Pallava Kingdom:

One of the most important Pallava rulers was Mahendra Varman I who was also known as "Chittirakarapuli". He has also authored several books on arts - music, dance, paintings and drama. He built several temples, of which Kailasanathar temple at Kanchipuram and Vaikunta Perumal Temple are very famous for its Sculptural art and Paintings. Kailasathar temple was built during 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Century with paintings depicting Hindu Mythological stories on the walls of the temple. Similarly Nandivarnam II built Vaikuntha Swamy temple and the paintings seen there date back to 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> century. It is very unfortunate that most of them have disappeared. They resemble the Ajantha style and represent one of the best example of Hindu Mural Art<sup>2</sup>

There are sufficient evidences to indicate that Pallava Monarchs were great patrons of Classical art of dancing. The Sittannaval Paintings is one of the best example. The paintings there reveal only up until the busts with hand poses. This clearly indicates the *Hashta Abhinaya* that was mentioned in *Natyasastra* was given prominence.<sup>3</sup> In addition to that, the God of Dance, Lord Siva is portrayed in many beautiful dancing modes in this temple.

The Sittannaval temple Paintings is famous for its mural paintings. The techniques used are similar to that of Ajantha Caves, one of which is called Fresco-Secco (a technique that uses pigments mixed with organic binder and/or lime dye applied on to dry plasters). It is called as "Ajantha of Tamilnadu"<sup>4</sup>. The ceiling is mostly covered by the mural painting of lotus tank which is called, "*Katikabhumi*", which is a part of the *Samavasarana* (the divine heavenly pavilion preaching hall where only fortunate people (Bhavyas) become eligible to attend). It is a belief that one has to pass through seven bhumis to attend and hear the divine discourse at Samavasarana. One such pass is to go through the lotus tank filled with all types of species which is very beautifully painted in the ceiling of this temple. The bright colours that were used to paint along with the effects of shading are pleasant to the eyes and bring out the beauty of the paintings.<sup>5</sup>



Fig1: Lotus tank on the ceiling at sittanaval



Fig2 & 3 : Examples of the Sitannaval mural painting

Pallava Kings were famous for the temples constructed during their reign . Mahendra Verma was the first to build cave temples in Tamilnadu. Finest examples of their cave temples can be seen in Mamallapuram , Tamilnadu.

Trimurthi Cave temple- a temple with three cells, one each for Siva, Vishnu and Subramanya. Mahishasuramardhini Cave Temple where the Goddess is seen punishing the demon Mahishasura. Pallava Kings are famous for their sculptures.



Fig4: Goddess punishing the demon

. From Kailasanathar temple at Kanchipuram, interesting mythical lineage of Pallavas is found.<sup>6</sup>



Another interesting Sculpture at Adi Varaha Perumal Cave Temple built during 8<sup>th</sup> century at the top of Harihara Temple has the 10 incarnations of Vishnu as Sculptures. Here Buddha is depicted as the 10<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Lord Vishnu as believed by some section of the society.<sup>7</sup>

The Cave temples at Mahabalipuram are warehouse of Pallavas Sculptural beauties. Another cave temple at Mamundur has many information about the titles inferred on the ruler. Traces of paintings in one of the caves can be seen which can be dated back to 7<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Music and Dance:**

South India has rich tradition of arts and architecture especially music and Dance. Amravathi in Guntur District in Andhra Pradesh has limestones representing various musical instruments. Similarly, several kinds of musical instruments can be seen in the temples built during the Pallava period. At Kailasanathar temple in Kanchipuram, sculptures of Gods and Goddess having flutes in different sizes and fretless veena in their hands can be seen. Also, the musical talent of Mahendravarma Pallava is very clear in the fact that he invented the Sankeerna Jathi (One of the five types of Jathi is Tala Saystem, the other four jathis being Tisram, Chatusram, Kadam and Misram)<sup>8</sup>

Kudimiyamalai inscription in Pudukottai district is a 7<sup>th</sup> Century rock cut inscription containing musical notations. The inscription contains 38 horizontal lines of musical notation. It is divided by seven sections with each section having four to seven lines of notation. The title of each section appears in a column to the left of the notation. Every section begins with a salutation on Lord Siva. The inscriptions is believed to have written by Mahendravarma pallava. It mentions about various Ragas and also the type of vina that is used. "Parivadhini" is the type of vina that was in use which is clearly mentioned in the inscription.<sup>9</sup>

Tamil inscription, "Ettirkum, Elirrkum Ivai Uriya" emphasizes on the need to practice the swaras on a 8 stringed or 7 stringed veena to gain fluency. According to C. Minakshi, in her book, has deciphered the details of the musical notations and several information regarding permutation combination is clearly understood.

There is a similar inscription close to Kudimiyamalai, Tirumayyam, also a Pallava Forte. A portion of the inscription is erased by a Pallava king and what remains is somewhat similar to the Kudimiyamalai inscription. Here too there are combination of twos, threes of musical notes. Apart from the swara combinations, there are also labels on music which provide valuable information about the existence of the Veena type, Parivadhini<sup>10</sup>

Mahendravarman II was a great admirer of Kunchita Mode of Dance and hence the art during his reign also had a significant emphasis on dance.

Pallava Period saw one of the best sculptural displays and mural paintings through the temples which showcase their artistic skills even after several centuries. Some of the earliest Musical inscriptions and the information with respect to dance were evident during their period through the cave temples that were built by them.

#### **Chola Period:**

##### **Sculpture Art:**

One of the longest ruling dynasties in world History was the Chola Kingdom. The heartland of Cholas was the fertile valley of Cauvery river and the greatest king of the dynasty, Raja Raja Chola I and his son Rajendra Chola contributed profoundly towards this art form. Temple Architecture reached great heights during the father-son rule. The two temples built by Raja Raja Chola and Rajendra Chola (the Big Temple at Tanjavur and Gangai Konada Cholapuram temple) speak volumes for their architectural skills and sculptural artistic skills. Both have been recognized as National Heritage Site by UNESCO<sup>11</sup>. Temple architecture in Tamilnadu is largely indebted to the patronage of these rulers<sup>12</sup>. The cultural background, the socio economic details can be accounted from the inscriptions, sculptures and the paintings on the walls of these temples. Each of these temples has its own speciality and stand tall by itself as a marvel of Arts.

### Paintings:

The sanctum Sanctorum of the Tanjore temple has some remarkable mural paintings which were discovered in the year 1930 by late S.K. Govindaswami<sup>13</sup>. These paintings belonged to both the Nayak rulers who ruled after Chola kings and there are also also few paintings that belonged to the Chola period. The colours of the paintings were soft and subdued, its lines are firm and straight, and constitute the most valuable information about the artists during Chola period<sup>14</sup>. Paintings depict various themes from the stories of Sundaramurthy Nayanar (one of the Nayanars) and mythological stories. In one of the panels, the artistry of the chola artist exemplified the human forms.



(Fig 5: Karanas in Tanjavur Big Temple)

The Temple has several sculptures depicting Dance Poses. The temple has 81 sculptures that show 81 karanas (dance postures) out of 108 that is believed to have demonstrated by Lord Shiva. They were found while removing weed in 1956 adding to the marvel of the sculptural beauty during chola period<sup>15</sup>. The 108 Karanas can be seen in Sculptures in the second tier of Garbha Graha at the Big Temple. The same can be seen on the Sarangapani Temple at Kumbakonam and on the East, West Gopurams of Natraja Temple, Chidambaram<sup>16</sup>.

The Sculpture art & Paintings at Tanjavur Temple reveal that the artisans lived during Raja Raja Chola reign. Besides the sculptures, the inscriptions in the temple reveal the fact that the king employed about 400 dancers and the mention the generous remuneration given to them. The dancers were called “Theli cheri Pennugal” and the inscriptions speak volume about his generosity towards the artists who are performing<sup>17</sup>. These are some of the evidence that show how much the Kings were a great lover and appreciator of art. Raja Raja Chola is also called as the “Saviour of Sacred Hymns, Tevram”, when he retrieved the palm leaves.<sup>18</sup>. Another interesting architectural marvel about the temple is that it is by itself a sculpture whose shadow never falls on the ground.

Another architectural marvel is the Gangai Konda Cholavaram which has the largest Sivalingam of about 4 metres tall. The walls of the temple depict the history of the Chola Kings describing the details of the administration and other political details. One more important and interesting fact is that the three temples -Big Temple, Gangaikonda cholavaram and Darasuram, all built by Raja Raja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola lie almost in a straight line. Darasuram lies in between the other two on either sides of 40km and 30km distance. Darasuram temple can be called as treasure trove of arts and architecture. Fine works of Art can be seen at Darasuram temple exhibiting the dance of musical scenes thus giving yet another solid evidence about the Chola Kings patronage towards Art, Music and Dance. One of the interesting facts that is evident was the focus given to the stories of Saivite Saints, illustrated as miniatures. The stories of their devotion to the Lord are beautifully carved bringing out the mythological facts<sup>19</sup>. Chola temples depicted more mythological stories from puranas and tantras.

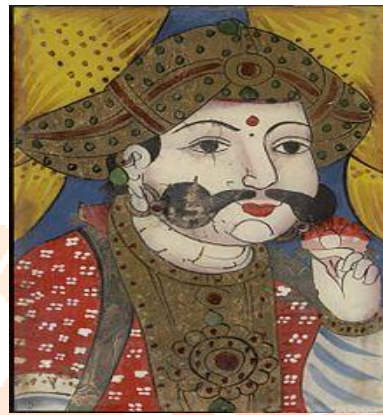
Paintings are another art form which were also very well appreciated and encouraged by rulers. Paintings showcase the emotions of the artists. Kings across India are great lovers of this art form. Taj Mahal and structural marvels can be cited as examples of their artistic skills.

Chola, Pallava and Pandya Kings were all great patrons of paintings. They convey the life of the people who lived during their period, the stories from puranas beautifully showcased through warm colours and life stories of many sages.



(Fig 6: Dancers as seen in Darasuram temple)

Tanjore paintings are still very famous and has a place of its own in the field of arts. These paintings drew inspiration from 16<sup>th</sup> century when Nayaks ruled Tanjore. However the art form that is in practice today originated during Maratta Period. The painting is done by following the Chinese reverse glass paintings with metal strips generally golden in colour and imbedded with rare and precious stones available in the kingdom. Later it was replaced with stones. Sarabhoji takes the credit of introducing this art form which is very popular today too



(Fig 7: Sarabhoji Tanjore painting)

Arts like Sculpture and Paintings gained importance and were well showcased and encouraged during Chola Period as it was done during Pallava period.

#### **Nayaka Kings:**

After the Chola dynasty began to decline, the next most evident contribution towards arts were from Nayaka kings who ruled during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Literature, Music and Dance gained prominence during their period. Centuries later, even today, the references provide very valuable information. According to Dr. S.Seetha, Tanjore became a seat for music and Dance from the time the Nayaka rulers took over. Various musical activities were encouraged in their courts. Musicians were duly encouraged, several technical aspects of music and Dance were written in the form of Manuscripts that contributed to the literature. Several Lakshna Granthas were authored which even after centuries later are still preserved and provide several references and information about Music and Dance that was in existence then and also act as basic tool for future musical aspirants.<sup>20</sup>

Achutappa Nayak the founder of Nayak Kingdom was also an art lover. He devoted an entire village, Melattur to popularize 'Bhagavatha Mela' (Dance Drama) and Venkatarama Iyer who was a very famous author of many such dramas. The tradition of performing Bhagavatha mela is still ongoing at Melattur even today.

Raghunatha Nayak, was himself a great composer, musician and musicologist. The 24 fretted vina that is in practice today was designed by him and hence also called as "Raghunatha Vina". Vijayaraghava nayak, son of Raghunatha Nayak reign saw Telugu Literature reaching its peak. Venkatamakhi was the minister in Vijayaraghava kingdom. He formulated the 72 Mela Scheme of Raga which is being used by musicians across the globe. It may be noted that he was the son of Govinda Dikshitar who was the minister in Raghunatha Nayak Coutyard.

Nayaks were great Vaishnavite devotees and their devotion reflected in the Yaksaganas (a traditional theatrical form consisting of music, dance, dialogue, costume, makeup etc), on the life of Vipranaryanar (one of the 12 alvars) of the Vaishaniam.

Several musical forms like daru, padam, Kaivaram, Jati were utilized. Variety of Ragas were aptly used for the theme thereby providing evidences about the musical knowledge of Nayaka Kings and immense involvement towards developing and preserving the Art forms.

Telugu Prabandha literature reached its pinnacle during Raghunatha and Vijayaraghava Nayak Period. This resulted in Various musical pieces, manuscripts, compositions, literature and great composers whose legacy is still carried out through their compositions.

#### **Maratta Kings:**

Due to the Political struggles after about 125 years of Nayaka rule, the dynasty came to an end and the Marattas took over. Ekoji I was the first ruler of Maratta dynasty. The Maratta kings continued encouraging Fine Arts from where the Nayakas left. Apart from Telugu, Sanskrit also started to take the center stage in literature. Some Tamil Dramas were also written during their period.<sup>21</sup>

Tukkaji had a great inclination towards Hindustani Music and wrote "*Sangita Saramrutha*" that reveals his massive musical knowledge, talent and is still being referred to whenever required.

After a brief period of stillness, Sarabhoji II reestablished the faded Art and Culture scene and his courthouse was called as place of learning. He followed his ancestors and started encouraging various branches of art forms like Music, Dance, Literature Saraswathy Mahal Library which stands tall even today in Tanjore after several centuries is a testimony to his love and patronage towards various Art forms. His Multi Dimensional Personality, his Passion for books were the main reasons to establish such a vast library. It is considered as the "*Milky Ocean of Literature*"<sup>22</sup>. The manuscripts dating back to centuries dealing with music Dance in different languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Marathi can be referred to from the library. Several granthas can also be found there. Until recently, the library was an institution preserving manuscripts, books and other sources providing valuable information, but now it has become an active center for research in various disciplines helping and guiding Scholars across the Globe with their Research.<sup>23</sup>

Sarobhiji's interest in western music can be seen through the composition that he composed for the Tanjore Palace Band and is the primary reason for popularizing Western Music in Tanjore. He is one of the main contributors in popularizing Bhagavatha MelaNatakas by developing Villages like Tepperumanallur, Nidamangalam, Uttukadu etc. The artists were well taken care of by providing land etc.

Besides, the sources through which Art Forms were developed and encouraged, several musicians, composers and musicologists adorned the courthouse of Maratta Kings.

Tanjore Quartet who systemized the Dance forms lived during their reign. The great musical trinity- Saint Thyagaraja, Sri Muthuswami Dikshithar, Syama Sastri lived during Shahjis Time. The period was called as the Golden Period of Karnatic Classical music. Their contribution towards music are mountain fold and innumerable. Tamil Trinity - Muthuthandavar, Marimutha Pillai and Arunachala Kavirayar also lived just about the same time to develop Tamil music.

The last of Maratta King Sivaji II, son of Sarabhoji continued from where his father left behind. Lavani, a Marathi folk art was popularized during his period. Ragamalika Lavani is dedicated to King Sivaji with ragas Saveri, Sri, Kannada, Punnagavarali were used.

#### **Temples:**

A lot of information regarding Music, dance, and other art forms can be got from inscriptions in temples as was seen in detail earlier in this article. There are also structures which as such provide musical references. Musical pillars can be seen in several parts of our Country. In Tamilnadu, there are pillars which when struck, produce music. They can be found in Sri Sthanumalaya Temple in Suchindram in Kanyakumari, Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple in Madurai, Airavateswarar temple at Darasuram, Adinathar Temple at Alwarthirunagari, Nellaippar temple at Tirunelveli<sup>24</sup>

#### **Conclusion:**

Art and Culture can be termed as the heart of our Country. Most of them are centuries old and have evolved with time due to the influences gained from various religious traditions, customs and other factors. The contribution of Kings towards the development and evolution of Fine arts can be seen through various references available in temples, inscriptions, Literary works even after centuries. Several researchers are still in the quest of finding more valuable information regarding the role of Kings towards the development of Finearts. It is very evident that the Fine arts that is prevalent today was given the foundation by various rulers of our Country. More researches will throw more unknown information about their patronage thereby helping us understand better the lifestyle and passion of the people centuries ago.

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