

The Pallava Dynasty has a history enveloped in debate due to the lack of reputable records on the subject. Although the timeline for when the Pallavas took power remains speculative, most scholars place the time of Pallava influence from the 4th to the 9th century C.E. Much of what is known was documented by the celebrated Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang who traveled to the capital city of the Pallavas, Kancipuram, around 642 C.E. and stayed there for some time (Tripathi 449). Xuan Zang commented on everything from the landscape, to the character of the people. The main epigraphic source of information about this people was found on approximately 30 copper-plate grants and about 200 stone inscriptions that were mostly found in temples in the Tamil and Telugu country (Minakshi 1).

The Pallavas trace their descent back to Drona (Minakshi 35). [Drona was the military leader of the Pandavas as mentioned in the *Mahabharata*]. This myth however is not widely accepted by scholars. There are differing schools of thought on the origin of the Pallavas. The theory of Parthian origin depicts the Pandavas as a northern nomad tribe that came to India from Persia; they were unable to settle in northern India so they continued south until they reached Kanchipuram. Another school of thought places the Pallavas as the Tamils of south India (Minakshi 4-5). The former explanation of origin is more widely accepted. The first Pallavas were not kings; they were new to that country. One of them married the daughter of a local king and thereby became a king himself, the first king of the Pallavas (Dubreuil 23).

The Pallavas were not a colonizing people but a ruling caste, and they maintained themselves by military power and the subjugation of the native people (Schoff 210). The Pallankovil Plates [of the 30 copper plates] explained that the Pallavas were originally

Brahmins that later adopted the profession of arms and became Brahma Ksatriyas. Drona, their mythological ancestor, also was a Brahmin who became a warrior (Minakshi 35).

The government of the Pallavas was largely one of hereditary kingship; however, there was found on the constitutional document of the Vaikunthaperumal temple, the details of an election after the death of Paramesvaravarman II (c. 731), during this time the kingdom was subject to anarchy, assumedly because the dead king had no heir (Minakshi 46-47). The copper-plates elaborately relate the idea of the divine origin of the Pallava family and the line of rulers is traced back to Brahma (Minakshi 48).

Under the rule of the Pallavas, village life was remarkably ordered. All four castes were represented in the villages. The Brahmins enjoyed a high standard of living while the other inhabitants formed the framework of various industries, some of the industries that were represented included cattle, pottery, carpentry, goldsmithing, oil pressing, and merchants. Industries were only set up after obtaining the proper sanctions from the government and taxes were paid to the king in the form of goods or money (Minakshi 160-161). The Pallavas instigated the construction of a complex water irrigation system including tanks, wells, and channels flowing throughout villages and agricultural land in an attempt to ward off the effects of famine and to facilitate agricultural production, rice being the main food source (Minakshi 155).

The Pallava Dynasty was rich in various cultural aspects including dance, art, and music. Evidence of dancing among the Pallavas has been found painted on the walls of temples and caves and depicted by sculptures. Many different poses are depicted and there were individual dances as well as group dances for both men and women. Dancing was a form of entertainment frequently employed in the king's court, as well as temples.

It was common to have dancing and wrestling matches alternate while music provided accompaniment (Minakshi 313-314). Dancing was also used as a form of worship; Siva is depicted in the dance: *tandava* (Minakshi 315). One of the principal hobbies of the princes and princesses of the Pallava Dynasty was painting. Unfortunately remnants of Pallava paintings are not commonly found. The walls of the cave temples provide a partial look into this art form; paint can be seen in traces of rich colors. The Pallavas used vegetable colour so the available colors were few, but they included red, yellow, green, and black. The Kailasanatha temple contains nearly fifty cells around the inner courtyard and each of them shows traces of painting. Several of the temples sculptures have red and green on them (Minakshi 330). Music also had a prominent place in Pallava society; songs were not only used to praise deity, but rulers as well. Pallava kings had songs called *birudas* composed, these songs sang their praises and spoke of their individual genius and skill (Minakshi 264).

Religious freedoms during the Pallava Dynasty were exceptionally observed. Denominations that were present during the dynasty included Saiva, Vaisnavas, Buddhists, and Jainas. Not only were these groups found in the kingdom, but they were all found in the capital city. Right from the beginning of Pallava rule, different religions were allowed to practise their faith. By the 7th and 8th centuries however there are a few hymns that make contemptuous references to Buddhists and Jainas (Minakshi 206).

Perhaps the most well recognized remnant of the Pallava Dynasty is their architecture. Great temples still stand as an ever present reminder of that great past. Monolithic temples hewn out of solid rock first emerged in the Tamil lands under the reign of Mahendravarman I; during his reign 20 such temples were completed, using

specialized craftsmen from the north where such temples were already found. Stone temples in the Tamil landscape had not previously been erected because of a prejudice against the stone due to its use in funerary ceremonies. Mahendravarman I, however, was practically minded and saw no reason why the stones could not be shaped and used in his building (Minakshi 350-351).

The Pallavas ruled over a vast kingdom. Kanchipuram was the capital city of the Pallava Dynasty. The kingdom extended along the Coromandel Coast up to the mouth of the Krsna, it then continued to the west in the Deccan and up to the banks of the Tungabhadra River (Dubreuil 14). This vast kingdom was not obtained by marriages alone. The Pallavas employed a vast military and were frequently at war with enemies in an attempt to increase their dominion. The main opposition to the Pallava movement were the Calukyas. It is written in one of their copper-plate records that the Pallavas constituted “their natural enemies.” The Kadambas, the Eastern Calukyas, and Rastrakutas were the other main ruling dynasties and the Pallavas were frequently in combat with each of them (Minakshi 42).

By the 9th century the Cola dynasty to the south was a strong force and the Pallavas finally succumbed to the combined attacks of the Calukyas dynasty on its northern boundary and the reviving Cola power on the south (Schoff 210).

References and Further Recommended Reading

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pallava_dynasty

http://www.indianetzone.com/3/the_pallava_dynasty.htm

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<http://www.tamilnation.org/culture/architecture/kanchipuram.htm>

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<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/439993/Pallava-dynasty>

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761588393/Pallava_Dynasty.html

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