

The Great Pallavas

To the south of the Vākāṭakas lay the realm of the Pallavas of Kāñchi, one of whose early kings, Viṣṇugopa, was captured and then liberated by Samudra Gupta about the middle of the fourth century A.D. The name Viṣṇugopa was borne by several members of the Pallava dynasty, and it is not known in what relationship the contemporary of Samudra Gupta stood to the famous Śiva-skandavarman who is mentioned in the early Prākṛit records of the family as a "righteous king of great kings" and the performer of the horse-sacrifice. Inscriptions mention the names of several later Pallava monarchs whose dominions embraced not only Kāñchi but considerable parts of the Telugu and Kanarese districts. The suzerainty of some of them was acknowledged by the early Gangas of eastern and southern Mysore and the early Kadambas who supplanted the Chutu-Śātakarnis of Vaijayantī. We learn from the *Lokavibhāga* that one of the Pallava kings who bore the name of Simhavarman ascended the throne in A.D. 436.

The history of the family becomes more definite from the time of Simhavishṇu, who must have come to the throne in the latter half of the sixth century A.D. This king is credited with having seized the country of the Cholas and vanquished all his southern neighbours, including the ruler of Ceylon. The conquest of Ceylon is also mentioned as an achievement of his grandson Narasimhavarman. Simhavishṇu was a Vaishṇava, and magnificent reliefs representing the king and two of his consorts have been discovered in the Varāha cave at Māmallapuram.

The successor of Simhavishṇu was his son, Mahendravarman I, whose reign saw the beginning of the great struggle between the Pallavas and their northern enemies the Chālukyas of Vātāpi for the mastery of Southern India. The struggle was continued for several generations. The Chālukya king, Pulakeśin II, is said to have caused the splendour of the Pallava lords to be obscured

by the dust of his army and to vanish behind the walls of Kāñchī-pura. On the other hand, Narasimhavarman I, son and successor of Mahendravarman, is said to have vanquished Pulakeśin in many battles and stormed his capital, Vātāpi. The struggle was renewed by Vikramāditya I, son of Pulakeśin II, who claims to have caused the destruction of the family of Narasimha and captured the city of Kāñchī. The Pallava records, however, inform us that the Chālukya attack was finally repulsed. Undaunted by their failures, the Chālukyas once more overran the Pallava dominions under the leadership of Vikramāditya II, great-grandson of Vikramāditya I,



(Copyright Klein and Peyerl)

RATHAS AT MĀMALLAPURAM

in the first half of the eighth century A.D. They routed King Nandivarman Pallavamalla and took the city of Kāñchī. The Pallavas were now threatened by enemies from the south as well as the north. The Pāṇḍyas advanced up to the banks of the Kāveri and engaged in deadly conflicts with the decadent empire of Kāñchī. The *coup de grâce* was given by Āditya Chola who defeated Aparā-jita Pallava and took possession of his kingdom towards the end of the ninth century A.D.

The epoch of the Pallavas of Kāñchī is memorable in the political

and cultural history of India. They built up the first great empire south of the Penner and the Tungabhadra, and carried their arms as far as Ceylon. Many of the Vaishṇava Ālvārs and the Śaiva Nāyanārs (saints) flourished during their rule. Under them Kāñchī became a great centre of Brāhmaṇical as well as Buddhist learning. Mahendravarman I, who bore the significant epithet of *Vichitrachitta*, "curious-minded", introduced the cave style of architecture and wrote the famous burlesque known as the *Mattavilāsa-prahasana*. The Pallava painting discovered in a cave shrine in the Pudukottai State has also been assigned to his reign. His son Narasimhavarman Mahāmalla gave his name to the port of Māmallapuram, and some of the famous temples cut out of rock boulders known as *Rathas* situated in that spot are ascribed to his reign. A later king, Narasimhavarman II, surnamed Rājasimha, constructed the Kailāsanatha temple at Kāñchī.

The Early Chālukyas

The Chālukyas, sworn enemies of the Pallavas of Kāñchī, rose to power in Karnāṭa or the Kanarese-speaking country in the sixth century A.D., and had their first capital at Vātāpi, modern Bādāmi in the Bijāpur district of the Bombay Presidency. Like the Chuṭu-Śātakarṇis and the Kadambas of Vaijayantī, they are represented as belonging to the Mānavya *gotra* and being Haritīputras. In later times they claimed descent from the lunar race. Certain inscriptions of a branch of the family refer their origin to Ayodhyā, and one tradition connects the dynastic name with Brahmadeva's *Chuluka* or hand hollowed out for the reception of water. Some writers believe that the Chālukyas were in reality connected with the Chāpas and the foreign Gurjara tribes of the north, but there is very little to be said in support of this conjecture. Inscriptions distinguish between Chālukyas and Gurjaras, and the characteristic nomenclature of the line is distinctly southern.

The real founder of the dynasty of Vātāpi was Pulakeśin I, who signalled his accession to power by the performance of the horse-sacrifice. His sons, Kīrtivarman I and Maṅgaleśa, extended the empire in all directions and vanquished the neighbouring rulers, including the Mauryas of the Konkan, the Kadambas of Vaijayantī and the Kalachuris of northern Mahārāshṭra and Mālwa. The Kadamba capital was finally reduced by Pulakeśin II, son of Kīrtivarman, the most famous king of the line. In the course of a long reign extending from about A.D. 609 to 642, Pulakeśin II

not only consolidated his authority in Mahārāshṭra but overran nearly the whole of the Deccan from the banks of the Nerbudda to the region beyond the Kāverī, thus reviving the memory of the glorious days of Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi. He repulsed an attack by Harsha of Kanauj and claims to have humbled the pride of Mahendravarman of Kāñchī. He annexed Pisṭapura in the Godāvarī district, the government of which was entrusted to his younger brother, Kubja Viṣṇuvardhana. Hiuen Tsang, who visited his kingdom about A.D. 641, bears testimony to the fear inspired by the king and the stern vindictive character of his people. According to some authorities, he interchanged letters and presents with the king of Persia, but the matter is not free from doubt. The last days of the king were not happy. The Pallava king, Narasimhavarman I, son and successor of Mahendravarman I, retrieved the disasters of his father's reign, inflicting crushing defeats on Pulakeśin and destroying his capital, Vātāpi.

The Chālukya power was revived by Vikramāditya I, son of Pulakeśin II, who renewed the struggle against his southern enemies. His exploits were emulated and even surpassed by his great-grandson, Vikramāditya II, who actually entered the Pallava capital. A feudatory Chālukya chieftain, belonging to a junior branch of the royal line stationed in South Gujarāt, distinguished himself in a struggle with the formidable Tājikas, who are identified with the Arabs of Sind. In or about 753, the son and successor of Vikramāditya II was overthrown by a chief named Dantidurga who laid the foundation of the next great empire of Karṇāṭa and Mahārāshṭra, that of the Rāshtrakūṭas.