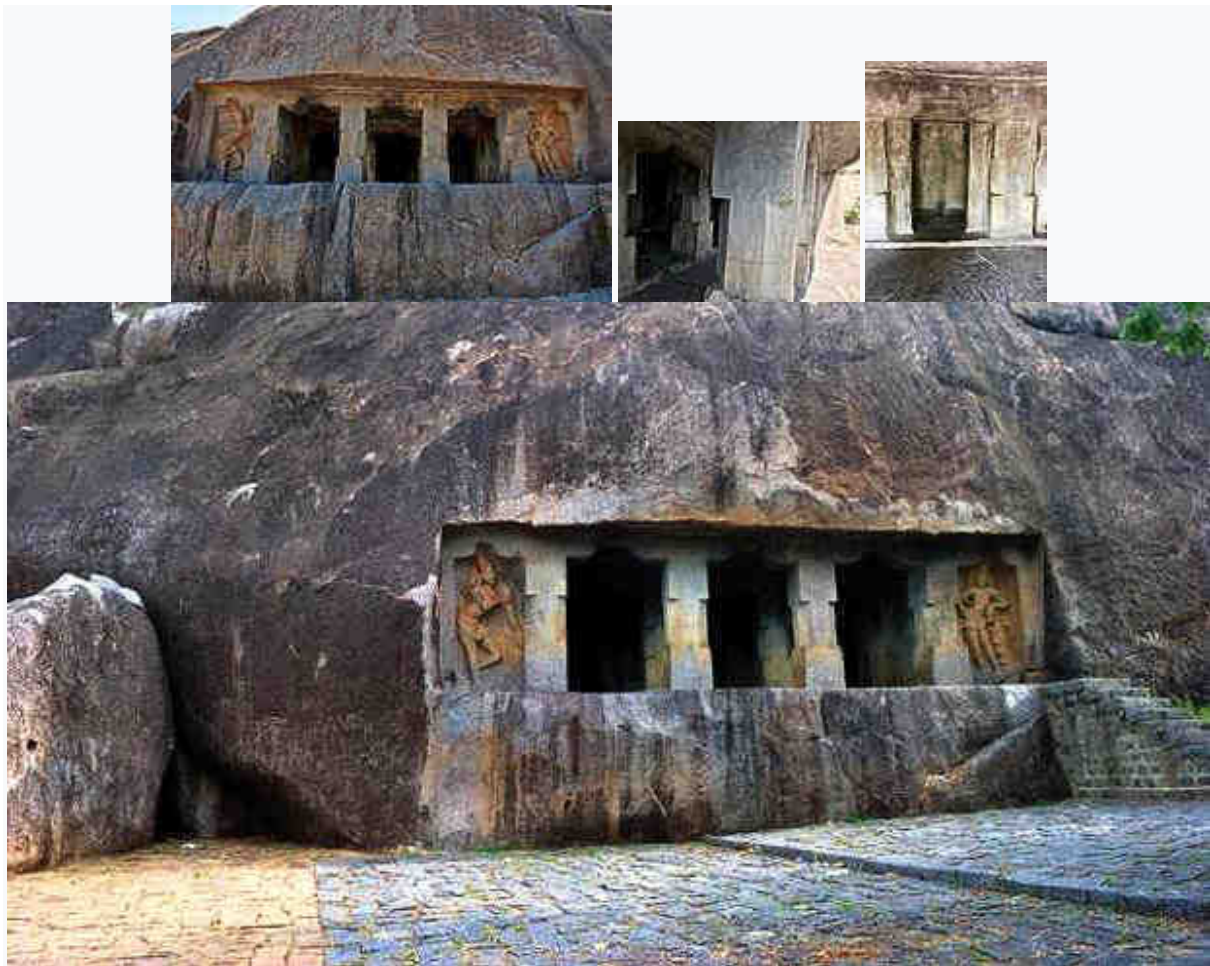


## MAHENDRAVARMAN I PALLAV

Mahendravarman was a great patron of architecture. He was the pioneer of Rock-cut Architecture amongst the Pallavas. The inscription at the rock-cut Mandagapattu Tirumurti Temple hails him as Vichitrachitta and claims that the temple was built without wood, brick, mortar or metal. The five-celled cave temple at Pallavaram was also built during his reign as was the Kokarneswarar Temple, Thirukokarnam of Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu. He made Kudimiya malai Inscription. His paintings are found in Sittanavasal Cave (Tamil Nadu).

Fine examples of his rock-cut temples can be witnessed at Mahabalipuram, (Satyagirinathar and Satyagirishwarar twin temples), Siyamangalam (the Siva temple Avanibhajana Pallaveswaram) in North Arcot district and the upper rock-cut temple at Trichy. Apart from the Siva temples, Mahendravarman also excavated a few Vishnu cave temples, the Mahendravisnugrha at Mahendravadi, and the Ranganatha Temple at Singavaram in present-day Gingee (then North Arcot district).

### Mandagapattu Tirumurti Temple :



Early 7th-century Mandagapattu temple is dedicated to Brahma-Shiva-Vishnu.

Mandagapattu Tirumurti Temple is a Hindu temple situated in the village of Mandagapattu in the Viluppuram district of Tamil Nadu, India. Hewn from rock by the Pallava ruler Mahendravarman I in honour of the trinity Brahma-Shiva-Vishnu,

the rock-cut cave temple is the oldest stone shrine discovered and dated in Tamil Nadu. The temple is notable for the earliest known rock-cut Sanskrit inscription written in Grantha script. It is attributed to the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (600–630 CE).

The inscription reads:

*EtadanishTamadrumamalOhamasudham vichitra chitEna nirma  
pitanrupENabrahmEsharaviShNulakSitAyanam*

Transliteration into Devanagari script:

अतदनिष्टकंदुं(मलो)-

हमसुधं (विचित्रचि)तेन

निम्मर्षितन्नपे(ण) ब्रह्मो –

श्वरविष्णुल(क्षि)तायनं

"The temple dedicated to Brahma, Siva and Vishnu was excavated by Vichitrachitta without using brick, timber, metal and mortar".

## MAMANDUR ROCK CUT MANDAP



**Mamandur** is a village in Tiruvanamalai district of Tamil Nadu, India. It is located on the Kanchipuram - Vandavasi road, near Dusi and about 15 km from Kanchipuram. It is known for the 7th-century rock-cut cave temple.

Inscriptions in the rock-cut temples, attribute the temples to 7th-century CE Pallava king, Mahendravarman I, a ruler who delighted in the titles of Vichitra chitta ("curious-minded") and Chitrakara puli ("tiger among artists"). He was a great patron of the arts and Mamallapuram (or Mahabalipuram) stands as a testimony to his patronage of art and architecture. He pioneered rock-cut temples in Mamallapuram, Pallavaram (near Madras), Siyamangalam and Singavaram (North Arcot district), Tiruchi and Mamandur (in Kanchipuram district).<sup>[2]</sup> Narsimha is the principal deity of Cave I,<sup>[3]</sup> while the Cave II, in the complex, is known from later inscriptions as the Saiva Rudravalisvaram Cave.<sup>[4]</sup>

The caves are situated on the banks of Palar river. A tank named *Chitramegha tataka*,<sup>[5]</sup> also known as Dusi-Mamandur tank is located behind the caves, which believed to be built Mahendravarman I.<sup>[6]</sup> The cave contain Tamil Brahmi inscriptions and cave paintings.<sup>[7]</sup>

**Cave Temple 1** "is approached by a staircase cut into the hill. The façade is made up of two pillars and two pilasters. Two pillars made up of cubes above and below with an octagonal shaft in the middle make up the façade of this cave. There are lotus medallions on the lower and top cubes. Behind these pillars there is a second row of pillars. A central shrine protrudes from the back wall. The pillars are in typical Mahendravarman style."

dedicated to Vishnu

Mamandur cave temples is the template style of Dravida temple architecture

On the northern wall of the mukha-mandapa there is an inscription probably authored by the same king.



Cave no 1

**Cave Temple 2**, situated south of the first cave, also has an ardha mandapa and mukha mandapa separated by two pillars behind the first row. There are three sanctum sanctorum in this cave temple, dedicated Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Two steps in front, with a low stone rail shaped like the back of an elephant lead into each garba griha.

According to an inscription inside the central sanctum, it is called Uruttiravalisvaram (Rudravalisvaram). Thus Shiva or Rudra would have been the deity of the central sanctum. The dvaarapalas of the central sanctum stand in tribhanga, one hand on the waist and another resting on their heavy clubs which are intertwined with serpents, wearing huge jatabhaaras on their heads, yajnopavita (sacred thread) and ornaments. The Linga in the sanctum indicates that this garba griha was dedicated to Shiva.

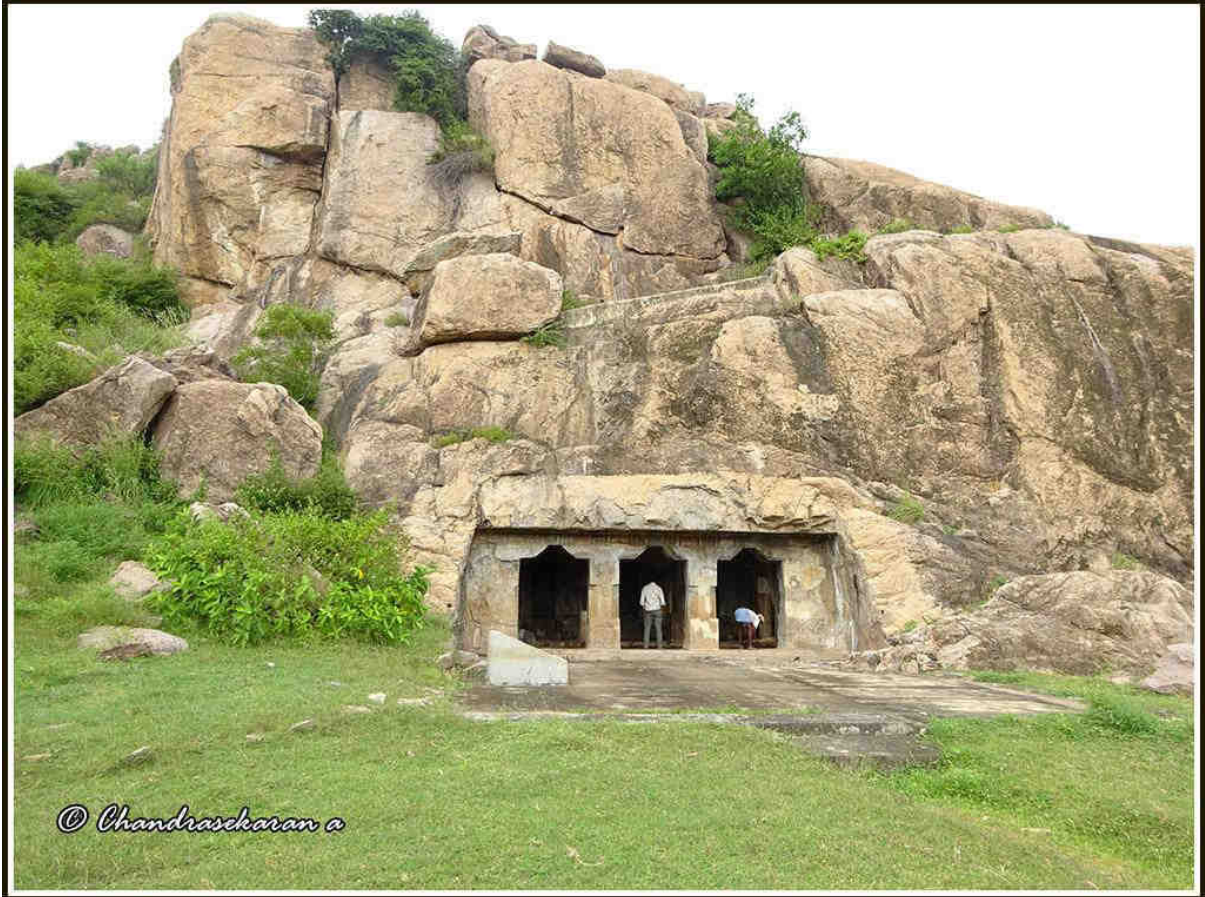
The dvaarapalas of the southern sanctum stand in tribhanga, with a hand on the waist and a lotus in the other. Wearing a yajnopavita and jatabhaara on their heads, they were obviously intended to be sages or brahmanas, and the deity within must have been Brahma.

dedicated to Vishnu, although there is no figure inside.

Traces of painting are visible inside the sanctum, suggesting that the cave temples were once painted.

There are two inscriptions of Parantaka I Chola inside this cave temple, saying that the caves were called Vruttiravaliswaram and Valiswaram The irrigation tank, Chitramegha tataka, is

assumed to have been excavated on the orders of Mahendravarman I Pallava



Cave no.2

**Cave Temple 3** – Situated south of the previous cave, this is the largest of the four caves. There are several cracks on the pillars, which may be the reason for not finishing this cave. There are five pillars and two pilasters on the façade, in typical Mahendravarman style. The corbel above the pillars is in curved profile. The southern façade has two pillars and two pilasters. Corbels are finished above the pillars, however these are not fully cut in to make the space for circumambulation. This cave has an ardha-mandapa and mukha-mandapa, the two differentiated by two rows of pillars and pilasters.

The five shrines at the back of the cave share a common platform, with staircases in front of each, consisting of three steps. The cells are all cubical and empty, with no dvarpalas or inscriptions. This shrine would have had seven cells, five on the back and two on the side.



Cave no 3

**Cave Temple 4** – This is the smallest cave on the hill, unfinished, with a façade of two pillars and two pilasters. The façade suggests a three shrine cave, but the work was stopped due to cracks in the rock and load above the roof.

#### **DALVANUR SHATRUMALLESHWARALAY CAVE TEMPLE:**

There is an inner shrine inside dalavanur cave which is very typical were never seen such type in other cave temples. The main deity with another set of dvarpalas where placed at the left side of the cave where in other cave we can see deities at the center.

Inner Shrine Dvarapalas – This set of dvarpalas are carved much finer in comparison of the previous set. These are smaller in size as compared to the previous set. Both the dvarpalas are shown with same posture, standing in tribhanga pose with one hand on their waist and another raised in adoration. Both shown wearing necklace, bracelets, yajnopavita, valayas etc. They are wearing long makuta with jata-bhara behind the head. The crown of the southern dvarpala is carved in much more details, in fact he is in total much completely carved in comparison to its counterpart.

Inscriptions of Dalavanur – There are three inscriptions, one in Sanskrit, another in Tamil copying the Sanskrit one and third is also in Tamil but added in much later compared to previous two inscriptions.

Inscription on the western pilaster near the raised hand of dvarpala – This is a Sanskrit inscription, written in Pallava Grantha script, consisting of a single Sanskrit sloka.



Kalai "N" Kovil

VISHNU CAVE TEMPLE OF MAHENDRAVADI



VISHNU CAVE TEMPLE OF MAHENDRAVADI

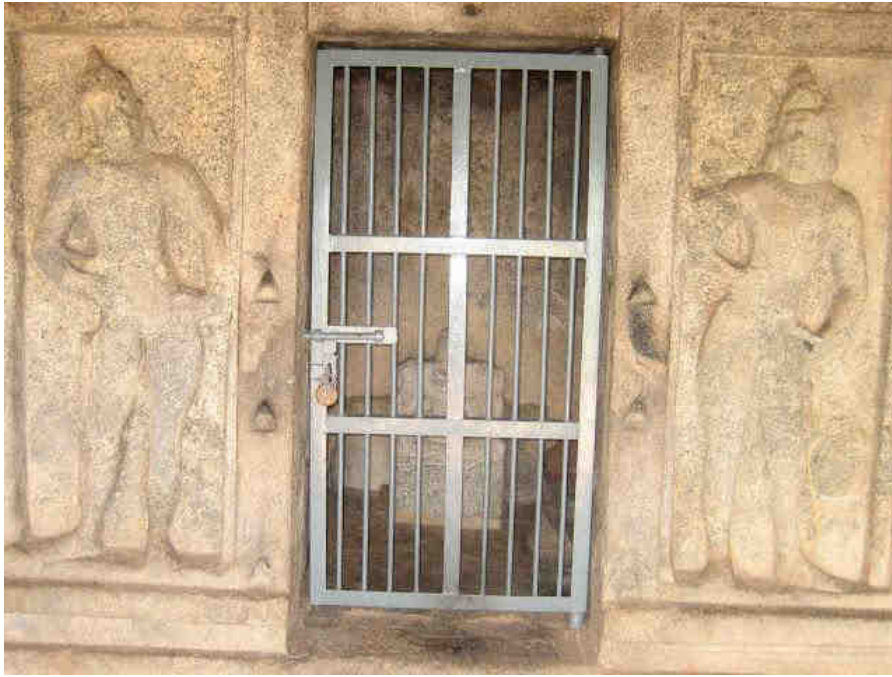


**Cave Temple** – This is a very important cave temple, constructed by *Mahendravarman I*, as this is the only cave temple which is dedicated to Vishnu. When I said constructed by *Mahendravarman*, I meant where we find inscription of his. There are many other cave temples which resembles the style used during *Mahendravarman's* time, however they do not carry inscriptions of that ruler. We may associate these caves to *Mahendra* however it will be solely on the basis of similar architectural style. Let's go to the cave temple directly. This cave is excavated on a free standing boulder which is about 11 feet long and 25 feet wide from north to south. The eastern face of this boulder is been cut and excavated into a cave. The front façade of the cave is supported on two pillars and two pilasters. Like other caves, *Mandagapattu*, *Dalavanur* etc, the pillars of this cave are also cubical on top and bottom with an octagonal intermediate portion. The upper cubical face of the pillars are carved with lotus medallion on all four sides. Lotus medallion on lower cubical face are not completely carved, in comparison to the upper cubical part. Like many other cave temples of *Mahendra*, this cave is also consisting of two rows of pillars and pilasters, hence constituting *mukha-mandapa* between the front and back row of pillars and *ardha-mandapa* between back row and the hind wall. The pillars of the back row do not have lotus medallions on their cubical parts. It seems that decoration was done only on front pillars, just same as we decorate our front portions of houses as that is the first part which is seen by anyone when they enter into house. Above the pillars, the corbel are carved in similar manner as seen in earlier discussed cave temples.



Main Cell

A shrine is carved at the back wall of the cave. This 11 feet long cell is projecting about 1.25 feet into the *ardha-mandapa*. At the entrance of the shrine are two dvarpalas, on either side of the entrance. Interestingly, these two dvarpalas seems to be standing in posture, which looks like that they are turned away from the shrine. We will discuss more about them in detail later in the article. Inside the shrine is placed an image of *Narasimha*, which seems to have been placed quite later after the excavation of the cave. On the back wall of the shrine are some remains of the color which suggests that initially the image of the god was in paint, perhaps on a stucco. There is a kind of platform carved on the back wall, protruding little forward. Perhaps this was used to place the brass or wooden image of the god, while the painting was on the back wall. The current *Narasimha* image is in stone, depicting yoga-*Narasimha* sitting in *yogasana*. The execution and style of the image is no way comparable with style during *Pallava* or any later contemporary dynasty.



Dvarapalas

**Dvarapalas of the shrine** – There are two *dvarपालas* on either side of the entrance of the main cell. Shown without clubs, supporting the inscription that this cave was dedicated to Vishnu. Both are shown in very similar profile, standing in *tribhanga* posture. Both the hands are resting on their waists. Proper right *dvarपालa* is very much worn out, however other one is much clearer. In ornaments, they are shown wearing *patra-kundala*, necklace, *mukuta* and *yajnopavita*. The posture in which they are shown standing cannot be held for a long time, as there is no support to keep such a posture. Does this the depiction of a snapshot of a movement, if yes then this might be one of the first such depiction. Though it is not much elaborated, however this seems like a snapshot of a movement.

**Inscription** – The inscription, on the southern pilaster, is inscribed in *Pallava Grantha* script in Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit text of the inscription is given below, with English text below that



मह्हिततमं सतामु [प] महेन्द्र [त] टाकमि [दम]  
स्थिरमुरु कारितं गुणभरेन विदार्य्य शिल [म] [॥]  
ज [न] नयनाभिर [॥] मगुणधाम महेन्द्रपुरे  
मह्हति महेन्द्रविष्णुगृहनाम मुरा [रि] गृ [हं] [॥]

*Mahhitatamam sataamu [pa] mahendra [ta] taakami [dam]  
Sthirmuru kaaritam gunabharen vidaaryya shila [am] [॥]  
Ja [na] nayanabhir [॥] magunadhaam mahendrapure  
Mahhati mahendravishnugrihanaam mura [ri] griha [ham] [॥]*

*Translation – Splitting the rock, Gunabhara caused to be made on  
(the bank of) the Mahendra-tataka (tank) in the great (city of)  
Mahendrapura this solid, spacious temple of Murari (Vishnu), named  
Mahendra-Vishnugriha, which is highly praised by good people, (and  
which is) an abode of beauty pleasing the eyes of men.*

### **Points to Ponder –**

1. As per *Trichy* inscription, *Mahendravarman* stated that he came

back to worship of *lingam* from some other hostile faith. This hostile faith is taken as *Jaina*, as *Appar* is seen responsible for converting *Mahendra* to *Shaiva* faith. In his poems, *Appar*, has mentioned the tortures he received from a *Jaina* king, whom he later converted into *Shaiva* faith. If this is accepted, then as a newly converted person, *Mahendra* should have dedicated his shrines to *Shiva*. Contrary to this, he dedicated first cave temple at *Mandagapattu* to *Hindu Trinity*, and this cave temple at *Mahendravadi* is dedicated to *Vishnu*. Most of his other temples are dedicated to *Shiva*. Was *Mahendra* converted after the excavation of these early cave temples? If this is correct then *Mahendra* was already a follower of *Vedic* religion and later became *Shaiva*. Can *Vedic* faith be considered as hostile faith in comparison of *Shaiva*? I am not sure whether in early seventh century, there was a distinct separation line between *Shiava* and *Vaishnava*. *K R Srinivasan* states that though *Mahendra* became a *Shaiva* however he had soft corner for *Vedic* faith, hence his cave shrines are dedicated to other gods of *Vedic* faith as well. I do not agree fully with this, even if *Mahendra* may be a considerate ruler towards all religion, but when a person constructs a new shrine, he would surely like to dedicate it to the faith which he follows.

## **TRICHURAPALLI Upper Cave Temple**

The Rock Fort temple complex in Tiruchirappalli is an important and famous monument in Tamilnadu. There are two cave temples in the fort- the upper cave temple and the lower cave temple. The upper cave temple was built by Mahendravarma Pallavan; the lower one is believed to have been built by Narasimhavarma Pallavan.

## **TRICHURAPALLI Upper Cave Temple**



The upper cave temple called as Lalitankura cave temple is located at a height of about 200 meters from the ground level. It can be reached by steep flight of steps. The Rockfort consists of three temples - a small Manicka Vinayakar temple at the foothill, the big Thayumanavar (Shiva) temple at half way to **hill** top and Uchchi Pillaiyar temple at the top of the **hill**. The upper cave temple is located near Thayumanavar temple on the way to Uchchi Pillaiyar temple. It is unfortunate that the site remains closed nowadays and you can view the temple only from outside the grilled gates.

The front facade of the south facing cave temple is supported by four pillars and two pilasters. The pillars are cubical at top and bottom whereas octagonal in the middle. The hall has an east facing shrine. The entrance of the shrine has two bas-relief images of Dwarapalaks. Both the dwarapalaks carry clubs. There is no deity inside the shrine. It is believed that the shrine would have had Shivlingam and Parvati originally.





The main attraction of the cave temple is the huge bas-relief carved on the western wall. The bas-relief depicts Lord Shiva as Gangadhara - one who is carrying the **river** Ganges.

## **SIYAMANGALAM**

**Avanibhajana Pallaveshwaram temple** also called **Stambeswarar Temple** is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva, located in the town of Seeyamangalam, Tiruvannamalai district in Tamil Nadu, India. The temple is constructed in Rock-cut architecture by the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (600-630 CE) during the 7th century. The cave temple had later additions from the Chola and Vijayanagar Empire.

One of the pillars has a sculpture of Nataraja, believed to be the earliest representation of the deity in South India. The temple has a small three-tiered *rajagopuram*, the entrance tower. The temple is declared as a heritage monument and administered by the Archaeological Survey of India as a protected monument. The other side of the hillock houses the Jain beds established in the 9th century during the reign of Ganga King Rajamalla II.

Stambeswarar temple was built during the reign of Pallava king Mahendravarman I (600-630 CE) during the 8th century. It is one of the earliest representations of Rock-cut architecture. The place is called Avanibhajana Pallaveshwaram temple as Avani is one of the titles of King Mahendravarman.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Though the image of the lions in the pillars lead to an assumption that the temple might have been possibly been initiated by Simhavishnu, the father of Mahendravarman, the view is not accepted. The inscriptions, accounted in *Epigraphia Indica*, is written in Sanskrit with Grantha-Pallava alphabet. The inscriptions indicate that it was dug out by Lalitankura, which is similar to that of cave temple in Tiruchirapalli Rock Fort indicating Mahendravarman.<sup>[3]</sup> The temple had later additions from the Chola and Vijayanagar Empire. The gopuram, the gateway tower is believed to be an addition by the Vijayanagar kings. The



other side of the hillock houses the Jain beds established in the 9th century during the reign of Ganga King Rajamalla

The temple has a three-tiered *rajagopuram* a set of scattered shrines. The shrine of Stambeswarar is housed in the circular sanctum in a rock cut cave. There is a large pillared hall and narrow pillared Ardhmandapam leading to the cave sanctum. The shrine for Nadi is located outside the pillared hall axial to the central shrine. The sanctum is guarded by two Dvarapalas, the guardian deities. The sanctum houses the image of Shiva in the form of lingam. In the pillars, lotus is carved on the upper portion, while images of lion is seen in the lower half





