

# INDIAN ART

## FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

### Talk 9

## Art of the post-Pallava period in Tamilnadu



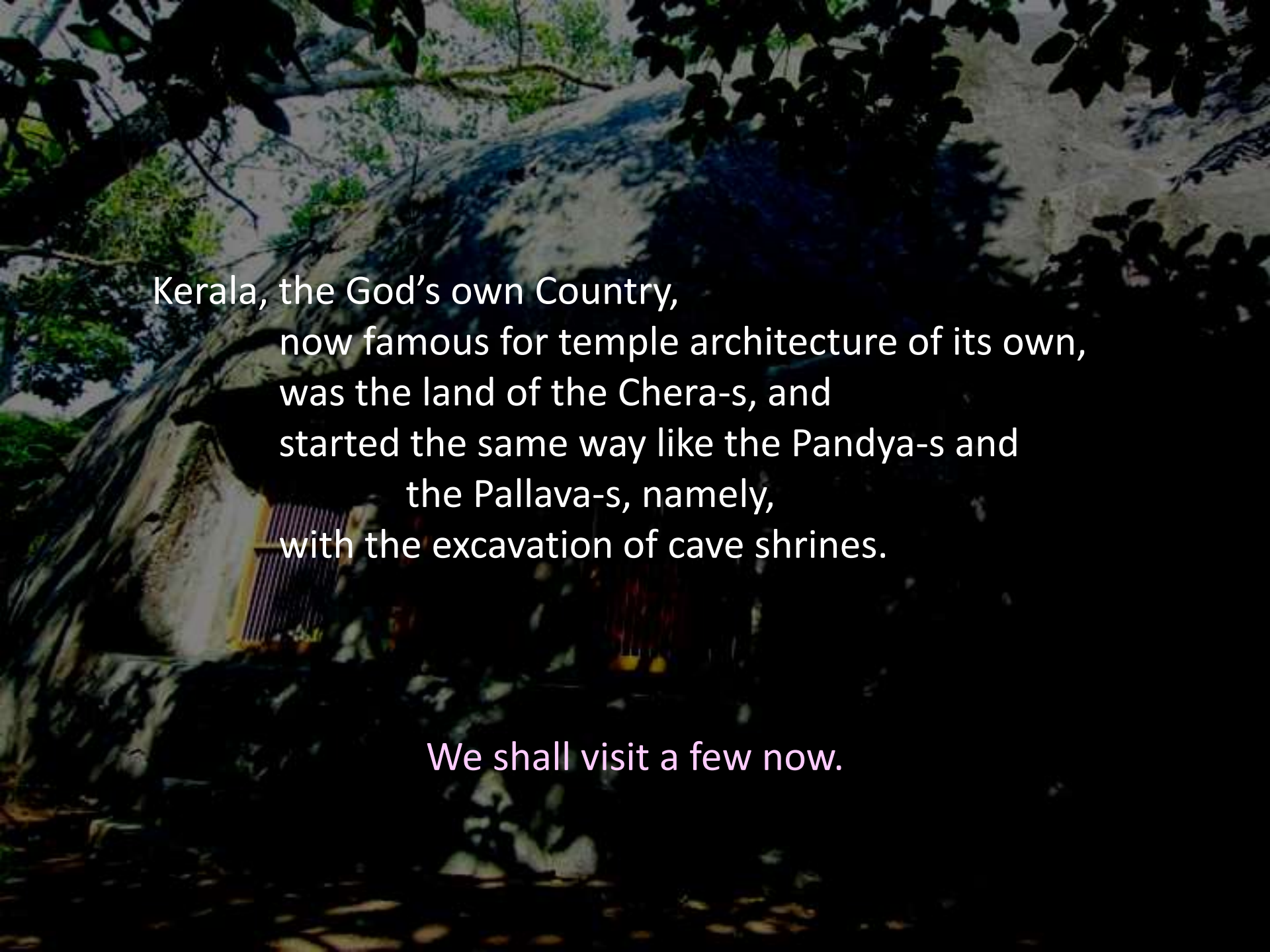
G Chandrasekaran  
S Swaminathan

The Gupta grace continued to shine in the north  
for quite a few centuries that followed.

Similarly the Pallava grace and the influence of the Chalukya-s  
can be seen in the south too.

We shall see how sculptural art flowered  
post-Chalukya – post-Pallava period in the South.

This is a period of great significance,  
when temple building activity became wide spread in the  
south,  
and particularly in Tamilnadu,  
to become almost a frenzy for centuries then on,  
to earn the sobriquet of the temple country of India!



Kerala, the God's own Country,  
now famous for temple architecture of its own,  
was the land of the Chera-s, and  
started the same way like the Pandya-s and  
the Pallava-s, namely,  
with the excavation of cave shrines.

We shall visit a few now.



At Kaviyur an early cave (8<sup>th</sup> century) built in the fashion of the Pallava-s, has sculptures of great maturity.



A simple rectangular hall,  
has a Ganesa on a side wall,  
and a *dvarapala* guarding  
the sanctum.

Sporting heavy earrings, necklace  
and waistband, with hair falling on  
his shoulders, leaning on a heavy  
club entwined by a huge cobra  
is alive and attentive.





The figure on the other side, may be a donor, is a personification of respect coupled with humility in an unusual pose of crossed hands.

On the side wall is carved a standing sage with hair piled high upon his head.



An 8<sup>th</sup> century cave shrine in Vizhinjam, carved out of a solitary boulder has some excellent sculptures.





To have Siva guarding his own shrine is unusual.



Siva, as Tripurantaka, poses brandishing his bow and arrow, with his left foot on Apasmara.

The modelling arrests attention, with the crown of hair elegantly carved as a high hairdress, with necklets, earrings, waist-cord, armlets and bracelets ornamenting his body, which reminds the rare bronze in the Tanjavur Brihadisvara Temple (now in Art Gallery).



The other side is even more interesting.

It is Nataraja in the *lalita* mode, with one hand in *abhaya mudra*, and a suggestive smile.

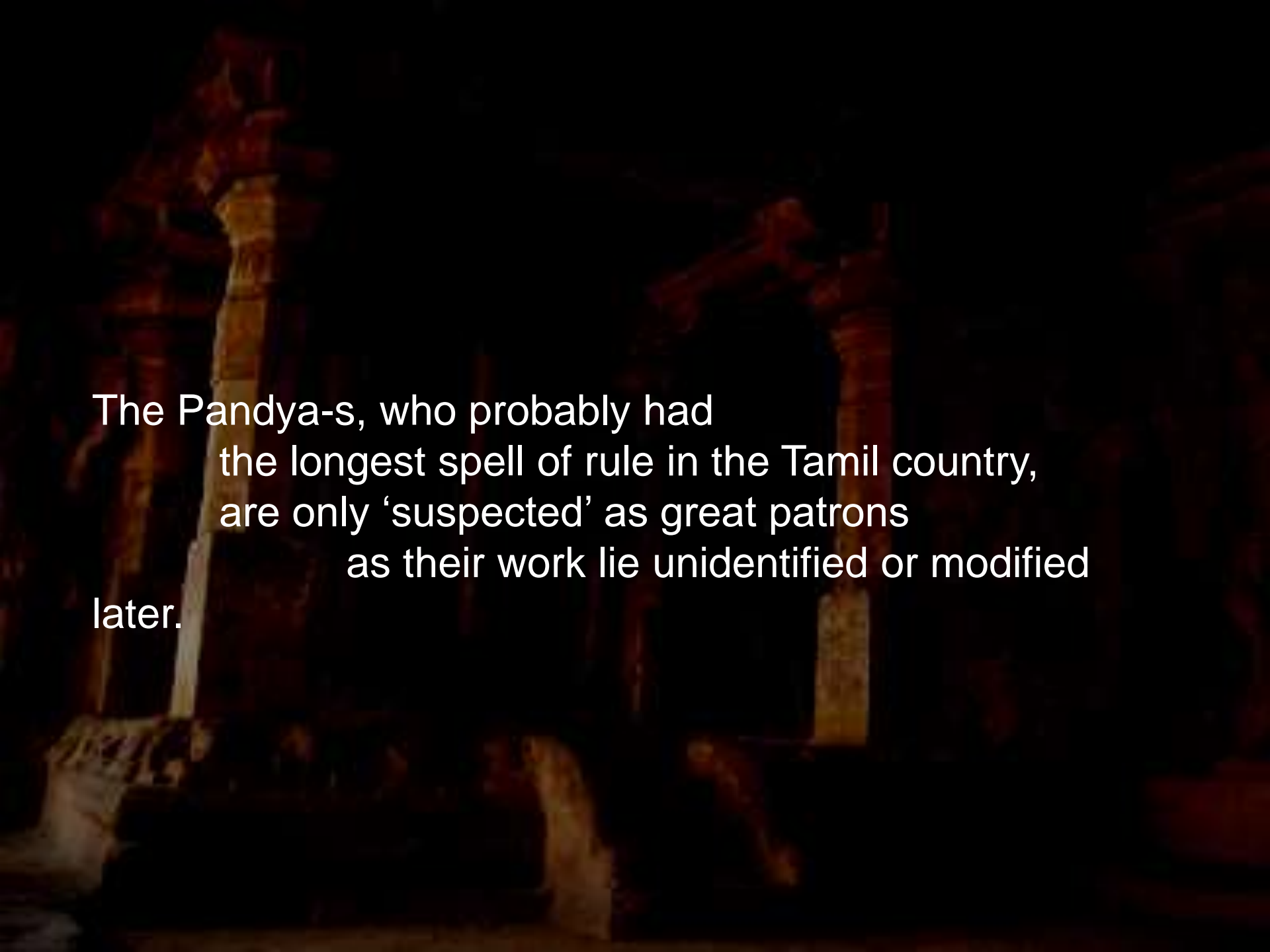
His dance is watched by Sivakamasundari, again reminding us of the Panamalai painting.

All these approach the Pallava idiom undoubtedly.

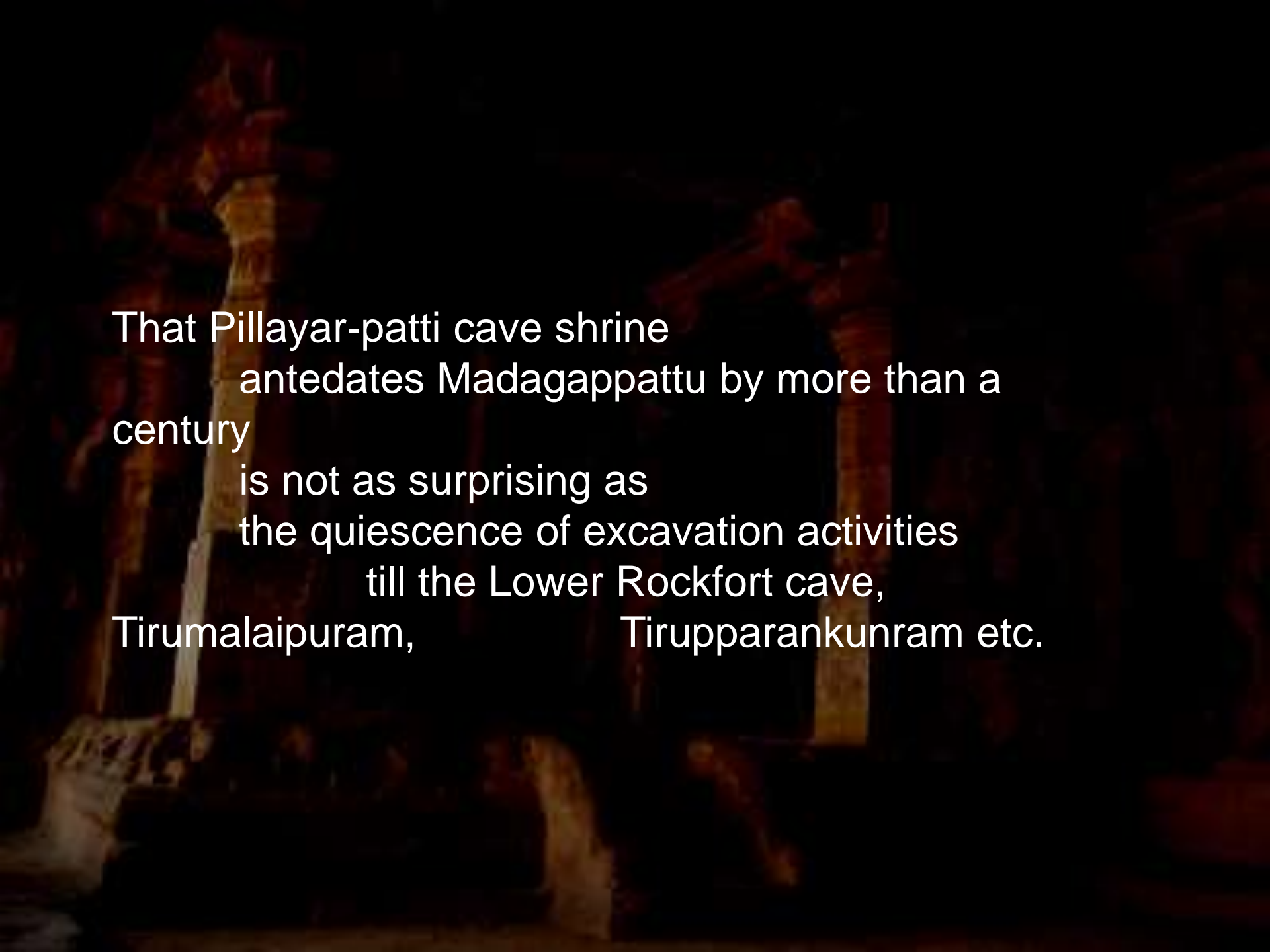


Inside, in a simple sanctum,  
is kept a 10<sup>th</sup> century  
Vina-dhara Dakshinamurti






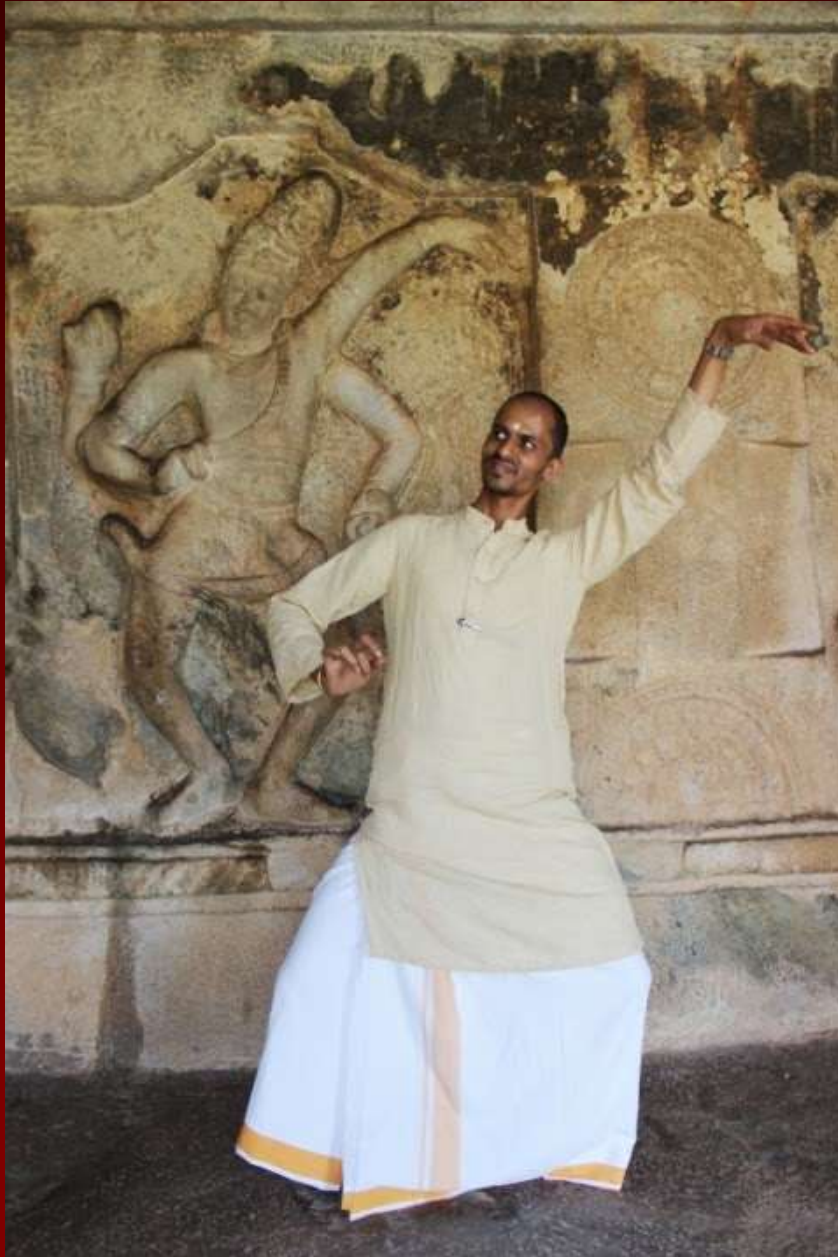
The Pandya-s, who probably had  
the longest spell of rule in the Tamil country,  
are only 'suspected' as great patrons  
as their work lie unidentified or modified  
later.



That Pillayar-patti cave shrine  
antedates Madagappattu by more than a  
century  
is not as surprising as  
the quiescence of excavation activities  
till the Lower Rockfort cave,  
Tirumalaipuram, Tirupparankunram etc.

The background image is a blurred photograph of a traditional wooden stage structure, likely used for performances. The stage is built on a raised wooden platform and has a simple, rustic design. It is situated in a rural, outdoor setting with green grass and trees in the background. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

*Adavallan* erects a stage everywhere  
to enchant all by his celestial dance.  
We shall watch a few performances



Siva dances with his head slightly tilted to the left holding a drum and a book in his hands, striking a *mriga mudra* on his front right hand. An enchanting pose indeed!



Tirumalaipuram cave temple



## Tirupparankunram cave temple

Here is a beautiful  
snap-shot,  
but badly damaged.  
His hair nicely done  
and with *kundala*  
Siva dances  
on the *Apasmara*.

Watches  
with rapt attention  
is his consort  
with *oddiyanam*,  
*yajnopavitam*,  
armlet and anklet.



Accompanying are a seated dwarf-drummer playing  
on the *urdhva* and another on the flute



The Pandya grace that is witnessed in the Vettuvankoil-Kazhugumalai complex is no way inferior to the best anywhere in the country.

It is unfortunate that this is the best kept secret! If one wants to watch the work of a sculptor-jeweller's delight, it is here, it is here, it is here!





It is, however, the rock-cut temple at Kalugumalai, closely resembling the Kailasa temple at Ellora, that should be considered a gem of Pandyan art





Under the eaves of *vimana* in the east is Siva-Parvati, blessing the entrants.

An extremely fine rendering, Siva's body covered with heavy ornaments, with axe and deer in his hands.

Uma's decorated coiffure, waist-cord, the contours of hip and busts, comfortable sitting postures proclaim the sculptor's mastery



Here is here shown  
Dakshinamurti playing drum!

His hair is arranged  
in a fine display of ringlets;  
his face wears ecstatic smile;  
he is lost in his own rhythm  
of playing on a drum  
held in position  
with a shoulder-strap.





Siva holding a snake, not wearing it?

Enchanting sculpture with beaming smile, charming face and sitting in an easy posture.



A majestic Vishnu



Brahma seated on a lotus, supported by elephants.  
Life-like recumbent bulls on the corners are exquisite.



The *gana*-s are shown in a large friezes rich in artistry of pose and in animation, their faces wreathed in smiles, beaming with enthusiasm, playing musical instruments or dancing for joy and sharing secrets in whispers



The drummer almost seems to create sound as others nod theirs heads in time to beat. The flautist is lost in his music as a drummer provides syncopation.



There are also nymphs against shallow niches between the tiers in attitudes of toiletry and coquetry, adding further colour to the shrine.



Jewellery like ornamentation

Almost at stone-throw distance  
is another sculptor's marvel,  
an unbelievable canvas of  
Jaina reliefs of grace, elegance and detail,  
rarely come across  
with the otherwise severe Jaina art,  
seen earlier in the unaffected art  
on outskirts of Bhubaneswar  
or later in Mt Abu.

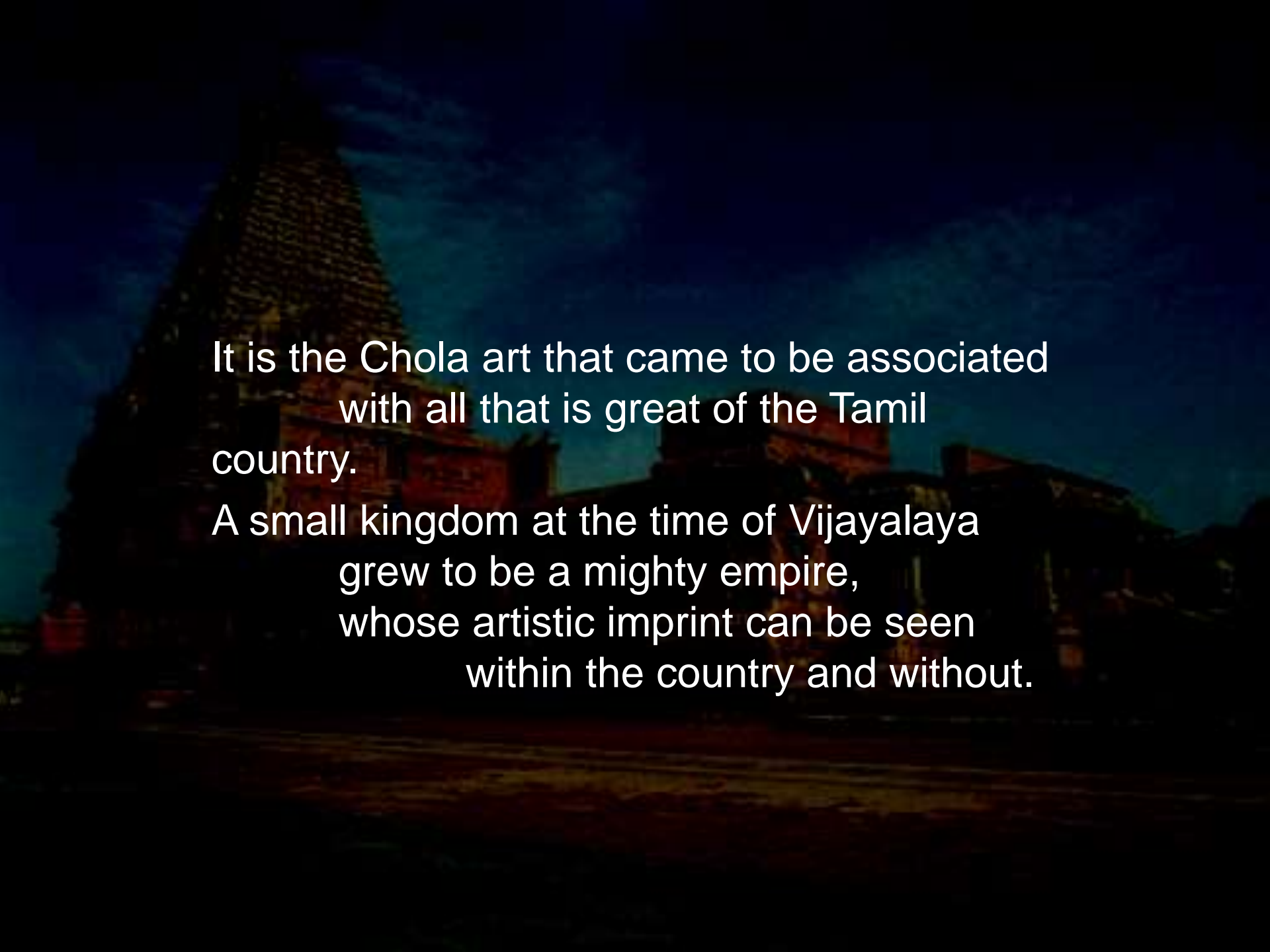


Let us pass before going to the Chola-desa.

The Vizhinjiam Tripurantaka and  
the Kaviyoor donor in the Chera-mandalam,  
the Natarajas of Tiruparankunram and  
Tirumalaipuram and  
the unexcelled Kazhugumalai figures  
in the Pandiya-nadu are  
no way inferior to the best that India produced.

But we find no predecessors and no followers.

Can these masterpieces be produced on the first attempt  
and why there are no more contributions later  
by these master sthapatis  
are the major questions that arise in our mind.



It is the Chola art that came to be associated  
with all that is great of the Tamil  
country.

A small kingdom at the time of Vijayalaya  
grew to be a mighty empire,  
whose artistic imprint can be seen  
within the country and without.



Though the political beginning was humble,  
their art in the small shrines they built was exquisite,  
truly a direct descendent of the Pallava-s.

If Kalipatti was the *pillayar-suzhi*,  
Vijayalaya-cholisvaram is dainty and well articulated





Sculpturally,  
the 'lingering Pallava grace'  
masterpieces  
in this Pallava-Chola  
transition period can be seen  
in Kodumbalur, Nagesvaran,  
Srinivasanallur, Punjai and  
Pullamangai temples.



Slim, beautifully flexioned, gracefully contoured feminine form from Nagesvaran Koil



Kalari-murti



Ardhanarisvara

Two masterpieces from Muvar Koil, Kodumbalur



The Durga of Pullamangai looks as if directly she has descended from the heavens for protecting her devotees, as an enchanted artist put it.

But the forte was  
miniature panels.

These are located insignificantly,  
as a border to the base,  
measuring no more than  
about 6in by 3in.



Pullamangai Temple



## The wedding of Sita-Rama



Rama,  
tall and majestic,  
stands before the  
fire holding Sita.  
Joyous reserve of  
the bride is palpable

On the other side are Sage Vishvamitra and King Janaka watching the proceedings with great satisfaction.

On the floor are two priests performing the rites.

Gajasamhara-hurti in action  
while terrified Parvati  
running away from the scene  
with Skanda on her lap.



Isn't it true that Adavallan can dance in any stage?

The eight-armed divine dancer has accommodated his orchestra too!







It is surprising that such remarkable narrative compositions have not been found before and it is a pity that there is none later.


What could be the reasons for their sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance?





The Brihadisvara Temples  
at Tanjavur and Gangaikonda-chola-puram  
are  
temple icons of Tamilnadu,  
built by the father-son duo  
and are marks the highpoints of  
Indian temple architecture.





Though invested with beautiful icons,  
that are small and large,  
with excellent, controlled ornamentation,  
with most ambitious narrative paintings and  
with detailed and important inscriptions  
their sculptures, though not inconsequential,  
don't match the elegance of the preceding  
phase,  
namely, of the Early Chola-s.  
Here are some samples.

Brihadisvara Temple, Tanjavur



A powerful depiction of Durga defeating Mahishasura



Brihadisvara Temple, Tanjavur

Brihadisvara Temple, Tanjavur



Nataraja  
dancing on Amasmara  
with beatific smile on his face

Brihadisvara Temple  
Gangai-konda-chola-puram

In this masterpiece ,  
Chandesha sits humbly at  
the feet of the lord,  
who decorates his head  
with flower wreath,  
with Devi watching it with  
benign countenance.



One of the trios of the world heritage sites,  
along with the two Brihadisvara Temples,  
the Airavatesvara Temple (12<sup>th</sup> century) in  
Darasuram, is unique.  
It is a storehouse of both architecture and sculpture,  
where sculpture dominate over architecture.



The layout is novel, the front mandapam built like a chariot drawn by horse-elephant, a forerunner for many later temples, like Konark.



Mandapam as ratha



The temple abounds reliefs sculptures of unbelievable variety – in size, in themes and in compositions, and playful too!





Miniature sculptures on walls, pillars and ceilings, are astounding for the details. And these are in abundance!

View of pillared hall

Dancers on the ceiling



A relief on the ceiling



A pillar

A detail





A micro-sculpture



Another  
micro-sculpture





Kannappa Nayanar chappals





Unparalleled filigree work, indeed

There are a few temples that contain narrations of the Nayanmars, but only here is found all the 63 stories in 73 miniature panels







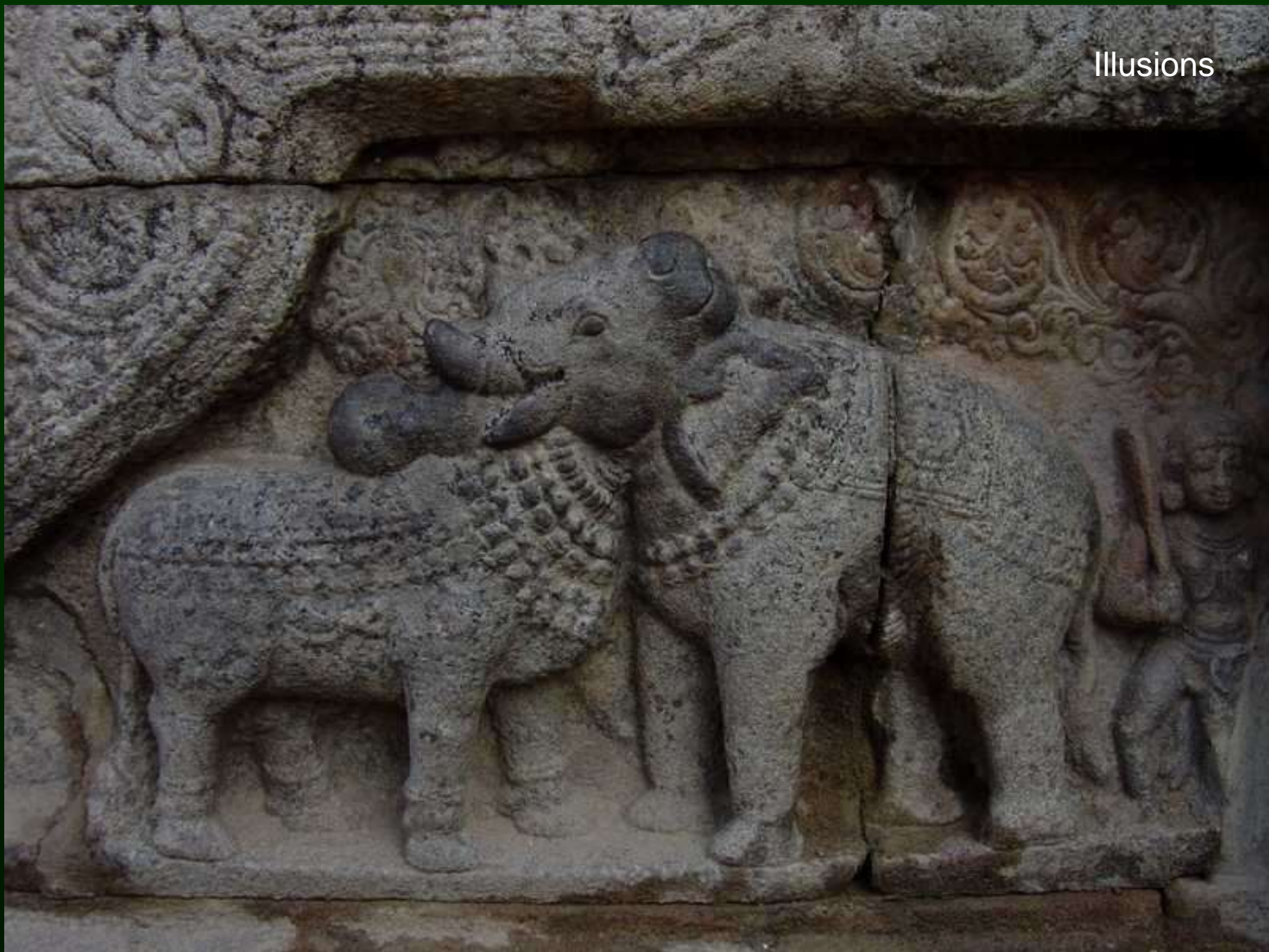




Sivacharyas/Oduvars



Street performers



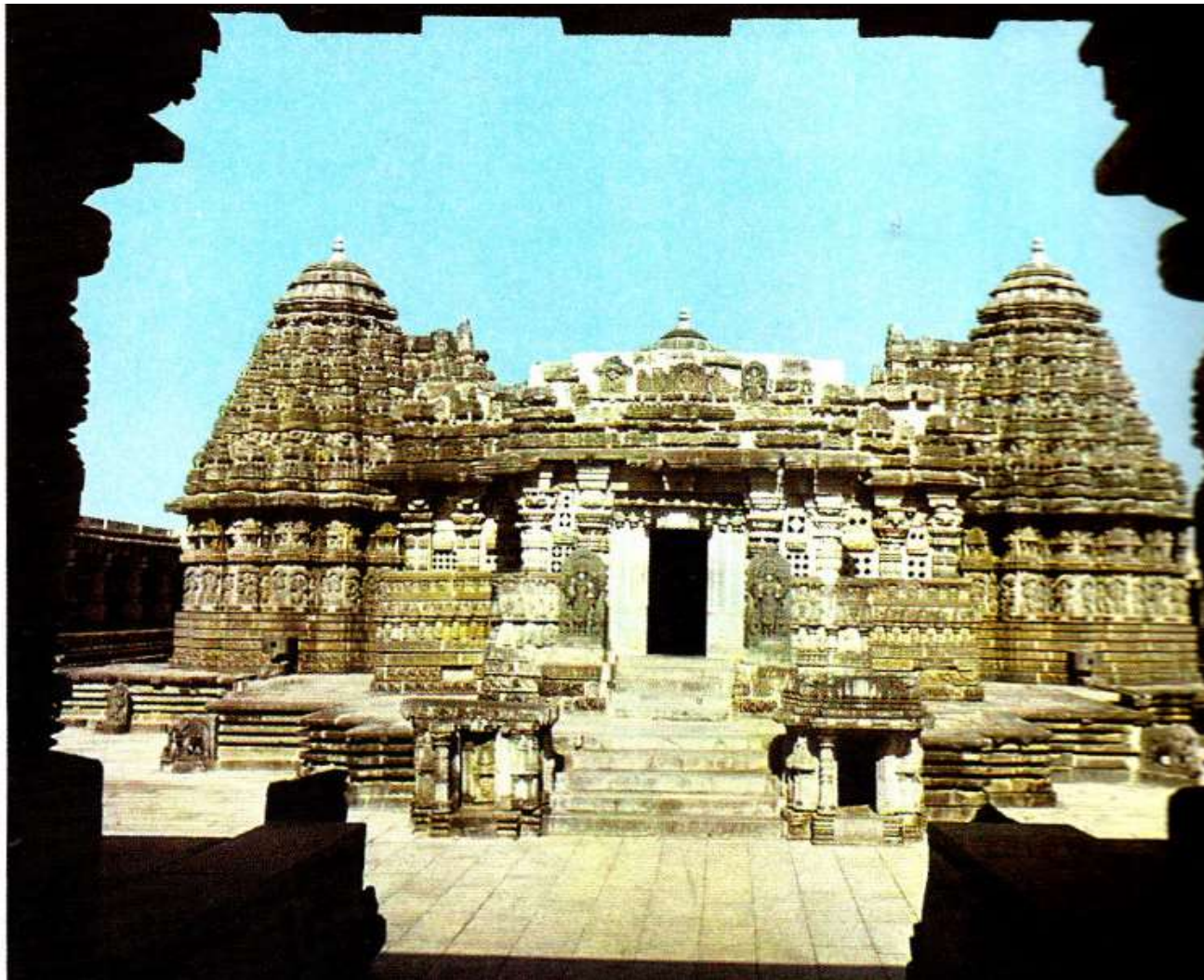








The best composition of Gaja-samhara-murti is from Darasuram now in the Art Gallery, Tanjavur



Then came the Hoysalas, ruled most part of Mysore, had a great influence in the Chola territory also. Their style was highly decorative, which the medium, namely soft stone, permitted.



The sculptural and architectural styles of the Hoysalas are radically different.

It is not a single sanctum with a mandapam in front, there are multiple shrines built around a central hall and laid out in the shape of intricately designed star.

The Hoysala art is has an ornamental elaboration  
has no parallel nor equal.

Profusion of icons, figure sculptures all over the temple,  
even on the brackets is another unique feature.



## Chennakesava Temple, Belur



Pillar-bracket figures  
are exquisite.

The intricate workmanship  
of the pierced windows and  
lattice screens is striking





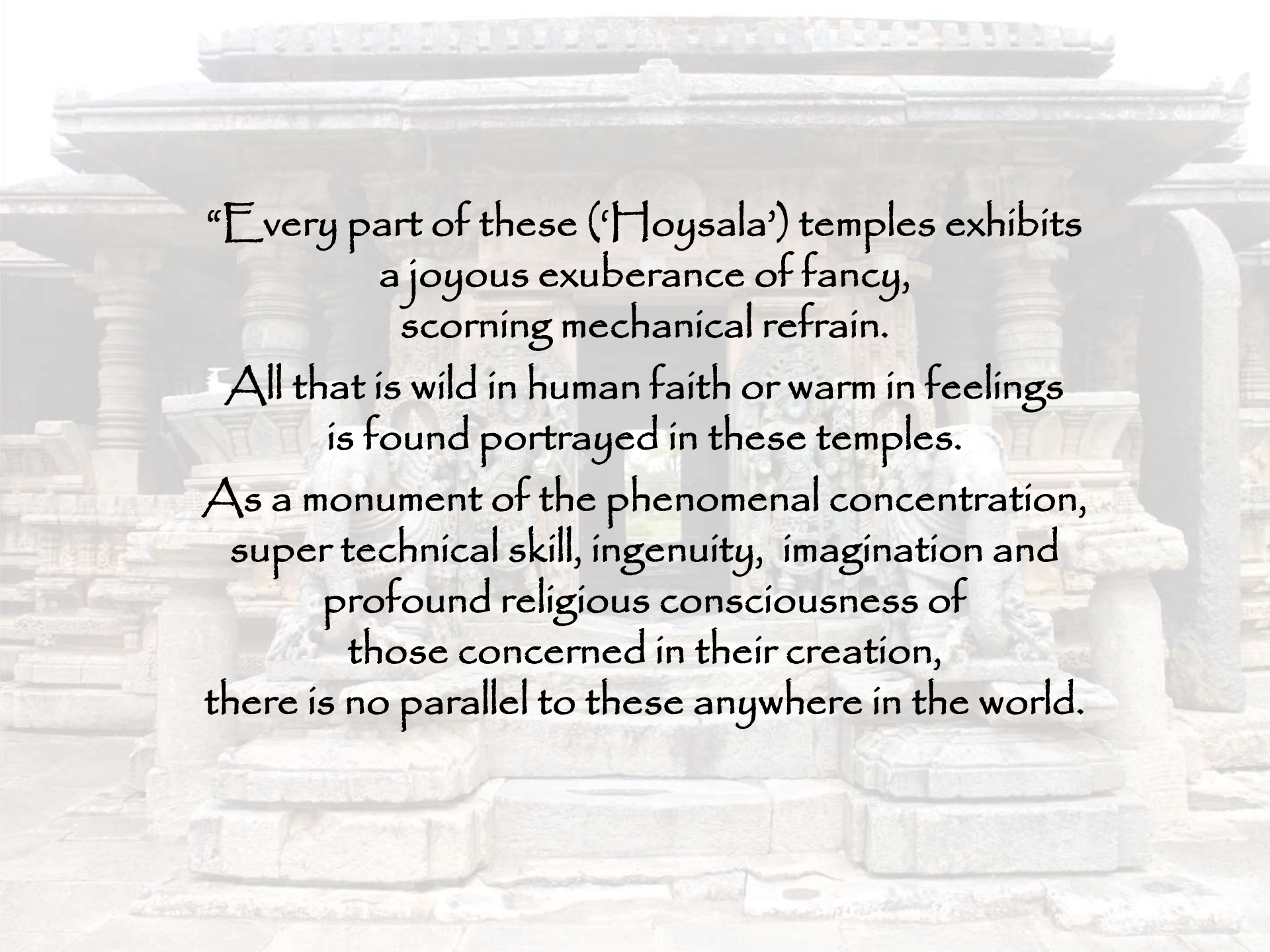
Venugopala, Belur

Saraswati, Halibed



The dancing figures, are magnificent.

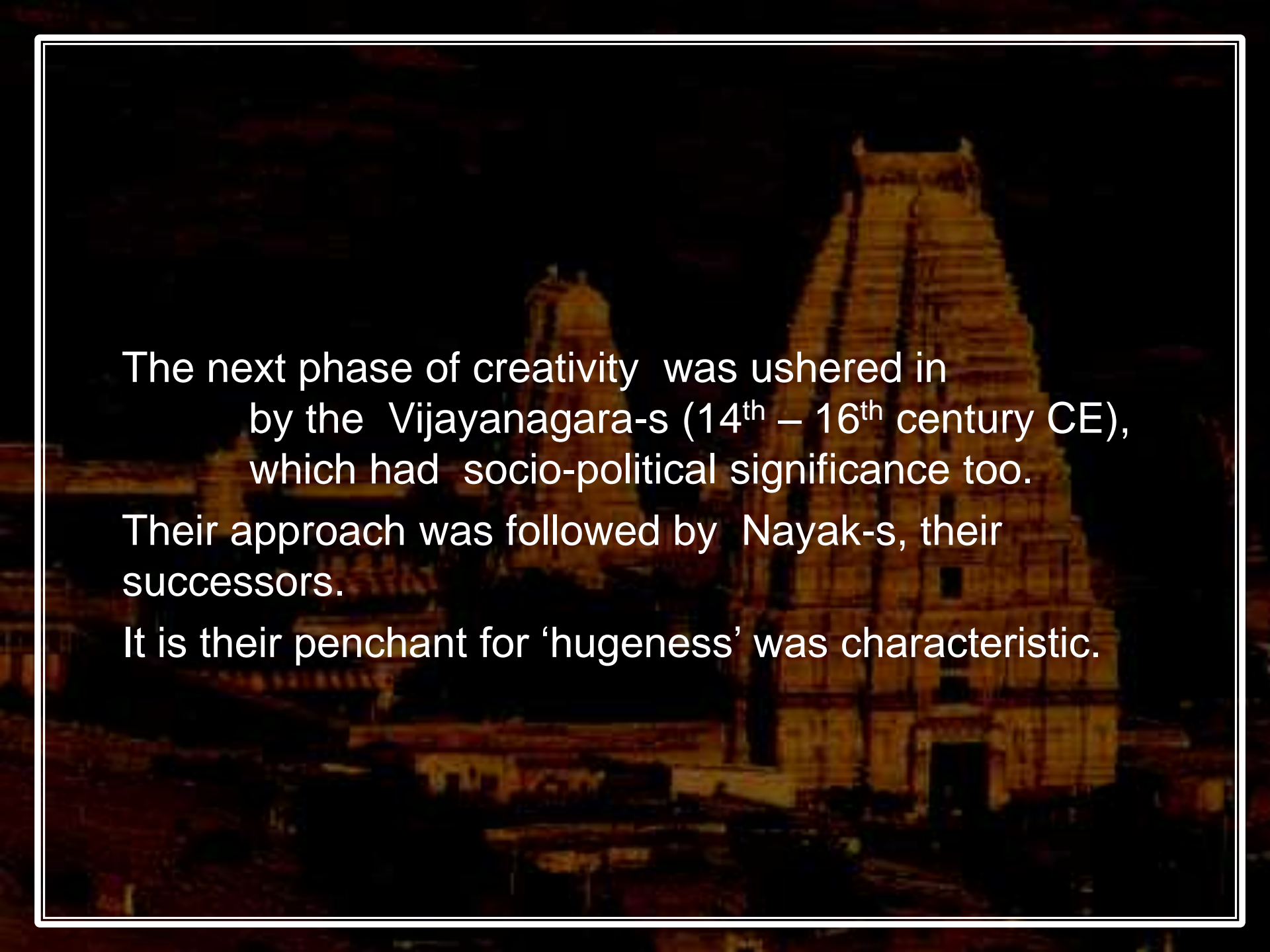




“Every part of these (‘Hoysala’) temples exhibits  
a joyous exuberance of fancy,  
scorning mechanical refrain.

All that is wild in human faith or warm in feelings  
is found portrayed in these temples.

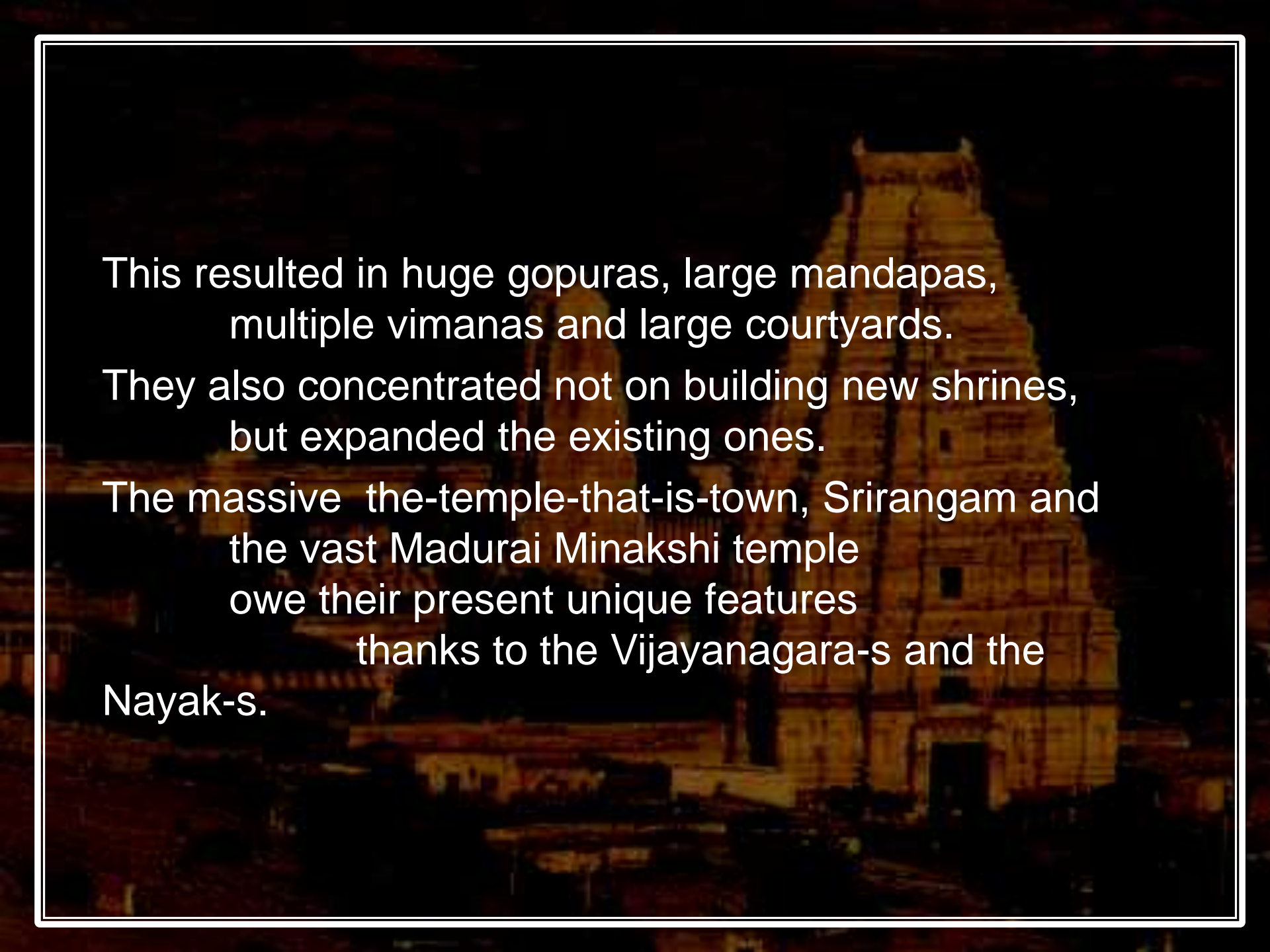
As a monument of the phenomenal concentration,  
super technical skill, ingenuity, imagination and  
profound religious consciousness of  
those concerned in their creation,  
there is no parallel to these anywhere in the world.



The next phase of creativity was ushered in  
by the Vijayanagara-s (14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century CE),  
which had socio-political significance too.

Their approach was followed by Nayak-s, their  
successors.

It is their penchant for 'hugeness' was characteristic.



This resulted in huge gopuras, large mandapas,  
multiple vimanas and large courtyards.

They also concentrated not on building new shrines,  
but expanded the existing ones.

The massive the-temple-that-is-town, Srirangam and  
the vast Madurai Minakshi temple  
owe their present unique features  
thanks to the Vijayanagara-s and the  
Nayak-s.

Virupaksha Temple, Hampi, 14<sup>th</sup> century





Garuda shrine  
Hampi, 14<sup>th</sup> century

A structure of great ingenuity that can be mistaken for a monolith for the joints of the giant granite blocks that make this chariot are smartly hidden in the carvings and other decorative features.



Madurai Minakshi Temple complex

Northern Gopura





Gopura, a close-up



This style has a special fondness for monoliths: Icons



Narasimha, Hampi (more than 20')



Monolith: Portraiture

Tirumalai Nayak,  
Madurai

## Monolith: Pillars

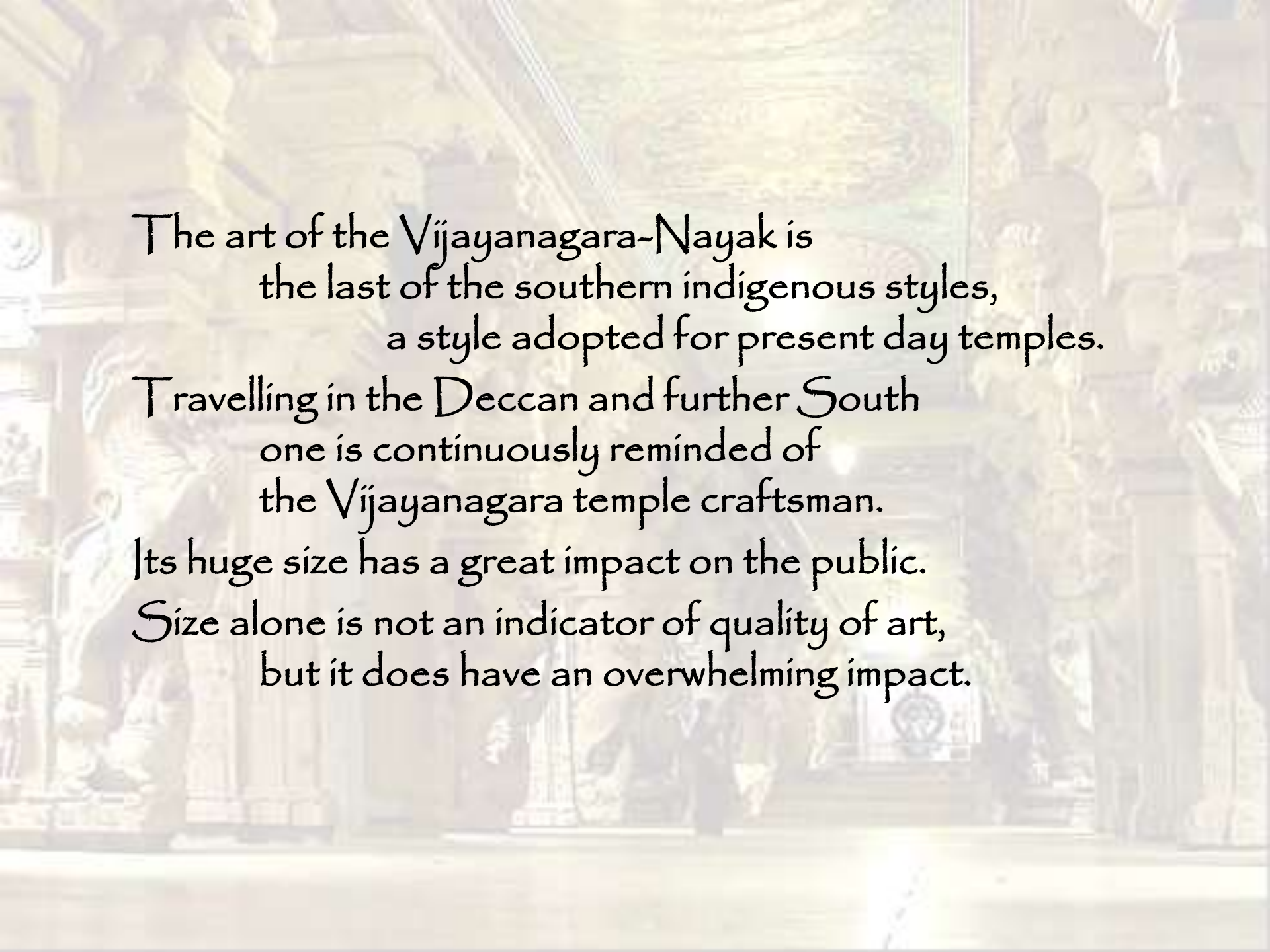


Sculptured pillars, Madurai Minakshi Temple

Pillared hall



Thousand-pillared hall, Madurai Minakshi Temple

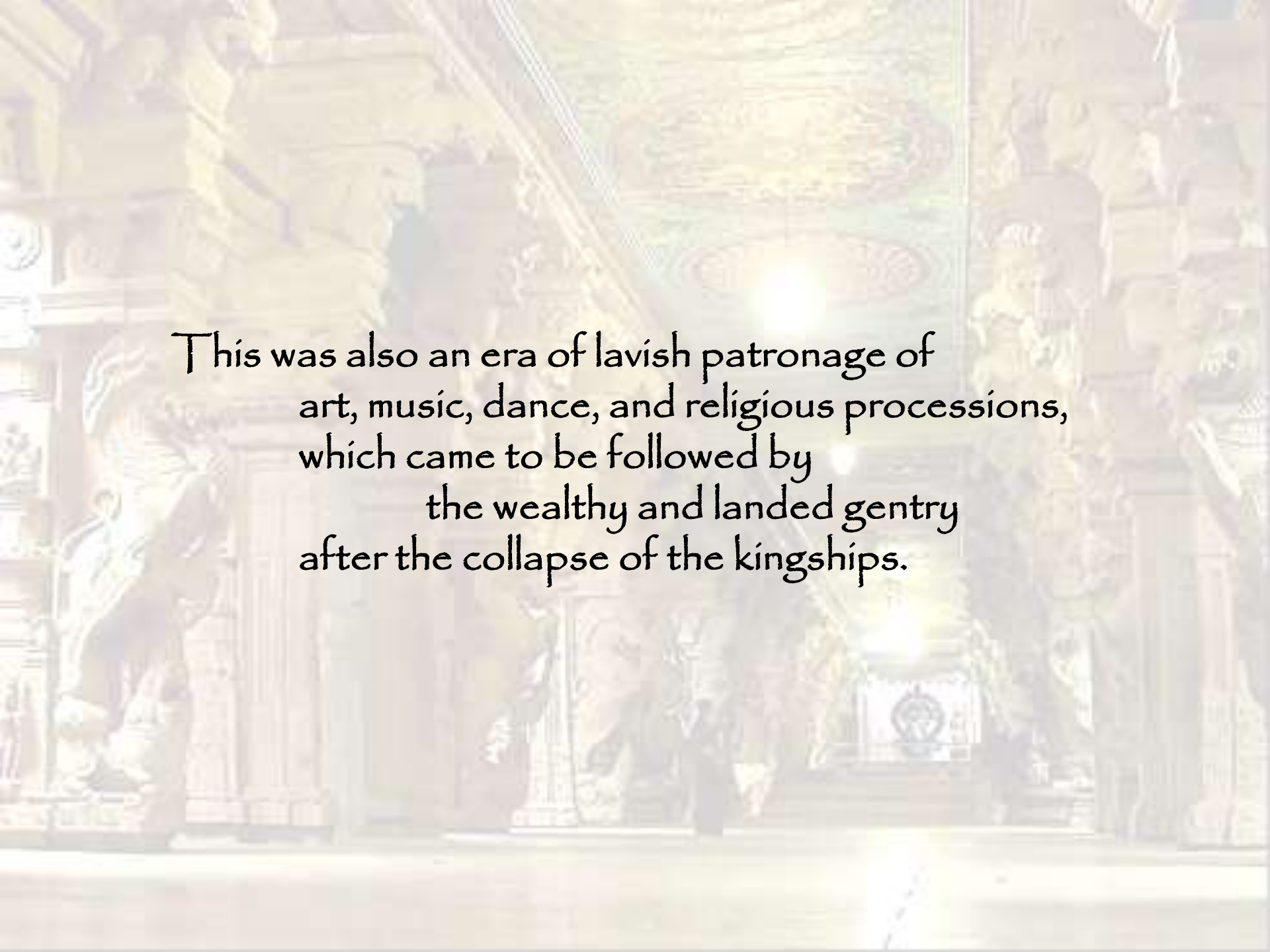


The art of the Vijayanagara-Nayak is  
the last of the southern indigenous styles,  
a style adopted for present day temples.

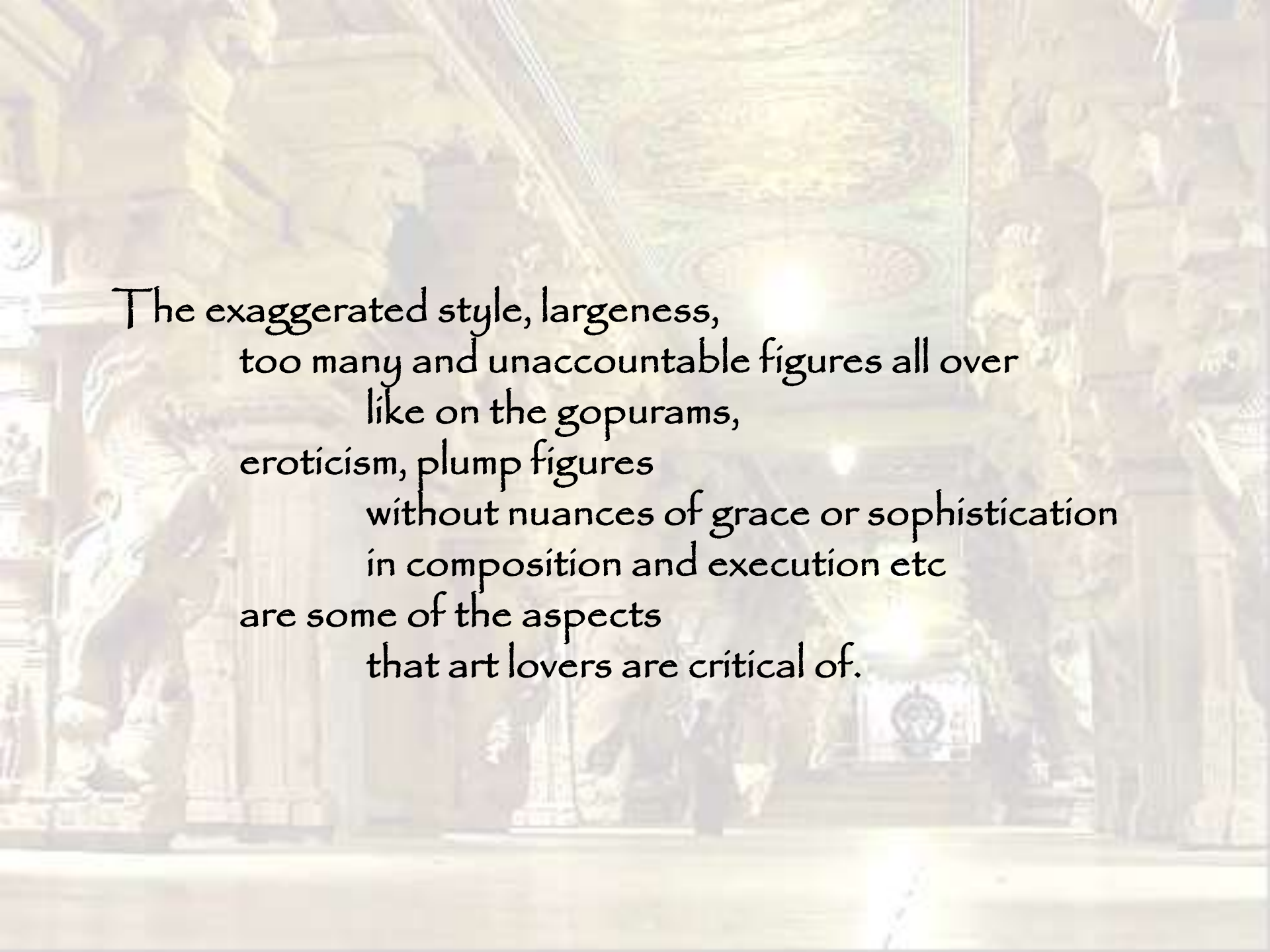
Travelling in the Deccan and further South  
one is continuously reminded of  
the Vijayanagara temple craftsman.

Its huge size has a great impact on the public.

Size alone is not an indicator of quality of art,  
but it does have an overwhelming impact.



This was also an era of lavish patronage of art, music, dance, and religious processions, which came to be followed by the wealthy and landed gentry after the collapse of the kingships.



The exaggerated style, largeness,  
too many and unaccountable figures all over  
like on the gopurams,  
eroticism, plump figures  
without nuances of grace or sophistication  
in composition and execution etc  
are some of the aspects  
that art lovers are critical of.

The background image shows the interior of an ancient temple. It features a central shrine with a dark, possibly wooden or stone, structure. The walls and ceiling are covered in intricate stone carvings and sculptures. The lighting is dim, highlighting the textures and details of the architecture. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and artistic craftsmanship.

But there are exceptions.

The sculptures in a few other temple  
where the characters , though somewhat  
plump,

have grace of their own.

The quality of workmanship makes us wonder  
whether these were wrought in hard granite!

Tirukkurungudi In Tirunelveli has one such temple









Kannan, the butter-stealer



Mahishasura-mardini in a Vaishnava temple?  
What a glorious ornamentation!



A close-up



Clever illusion



Belonging to the same period is  
a temple in Madathukoil in Pudukkottai.  
The variation in simha-lata is astounding.

















This earthly art reflects contemporary life  
which has immense historical value.

Extending the existing temples  
with lofty gopurams and innumerable mandapams  
is a great contribution.

Their contribution includes  
popular rituals and festivals on a regal scale  
for the public to participate with gusto.

*The transition from the classicism of the Early Cholas to baroque ornamentation of the Vijayanagar-Nayak-s reflects the change in the taste over the period of time and record the glorious continuum of Indian art.*

நன்றி