



A STUDY OF THE SCULPTURE OF DAKSHINAMURTHI AT SRI PANCHANADEESWARAR TEMPLE OF THIRUVAIYARU

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe about the sculpture details of Dakshinamurthi in Sri Panchanadeeswarar Temple in Thiruvaiyaru. A famous Tamil saying states that where there is no temple, people should not reside there. By this statement it is apparent that the temple plays immense role in the life of Tamilians. Temples are astonishing architectural marvels and living monuments of standing proof of our ancient past and glorious civilization. They are the vast treasure houses of our history, tradition, art, and culture. The temples are not only the places of worship but also the very focus of the entire life of a village. Sri Panchanadeeswarar temple at Thiruvaiyaru, Tamil Nadu is an ancient temple. Religion is an integral part of human life. It enables human beings to transcend from the narrow self interest to broaden world view. In Hinduism, two major religious sects are there i.e. Saivism and Vaishnavism, the worship of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu.

LOCATION

Thiruvaiyaru, a well known pilgrimage center of the day and one of the oldest towns in South India, lies at a distance about ten kilometers to the North West of Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu on the left bank of river Cauveri. Five branches of the holy river Cauveri flow close to the town situated in a fertile neighbourhood and surrounded by luxurious crops. The reputed shrine of Panchanadeeswarar in Thiruvaiyaru is considered to be the chief among the seven famous shrines called "Sapthasthalams" viz. Tiruppalanam, Thiruchchotruthurai, Thirurvedikudi, Thirukandiyur, Thiruppanturuthi, Thirunaithanam and Thiruvaiyaru.¹ This ancient and famous town of Thiruvaiyaru is considered as holy as Kasi (Benaras). This sacred place is known by a number of names viz. "Ayyaru", "Panchanadam", "Boologakailasam" and Kaverikottam. Saint Appar the sight of Kailasa due to God's Divine Grace at Thiruvaiyaru.

FORMS OF ARTS AND SCULPTURE

Arts can generally classify into two types on the basis of its characteristics the one static and the other plastic. Dance and music are plastic while the architecture is static. Time and space are also the basis in categorizing the art into different classes. By this way the art is classified into three major

divisions i.e. the art in time, the art in space and the art in space and time. Of this the sculpture comes under the static art which depends upon time and space.

Sculpture is as old as the history of mankind. Sculptures have been in almost every culture of the world.² Indian sculpture is not only valued as an object of worship but also as a work of art.³ The history of South Indian Sculpture is of great antiquity and that art is being practised even today many by craftsmen.

The forms and shapes of images have been stipulated in the early *Silpa* texts and the *Agamas*. The *Silpasastras* and *Agamas* deal with the fashioning of icons and have laid down rules for the making of icons.

No sculpture in the world is charged with a sense of poetry as Indian sculpture. Though there are references to sculpture in the literature of the Sangam and the post- Sangam age, the art of sculpture in its developed forms has come to being only in the Pallava period.⁴ *TivakaraNikandu* one of the ancient Tamil dictionaries, lists the material used for sculpting as wood, stone, metals, ivory, wax, mortar, lac, brick and (colour).⁵

The 250 year period between 600 A.D. to 850 A.D. is an important epoch in the field of sculpture in South India. The Pallavas were staunch Saivates and they got images various forms of Siva were installed in the Sri Panchanadeeswarar temple complex. The rituals and festivals observed in the temples of Tamil Nadu increased as also the number of images, to be taken out in procession. This may be the cause for the production in metal of processional deities or *utsavamurthis*.

Sculpture is one of devices by which Gods are brought nearer to the hearts of men. A figure carved on stone or a metal image is intended to be an instrument of worship designed to assist the worshipper.⁶ A *Murthi* is the concrete shape of the invisible to help achieve transcendent vision.⁷ An image is absolutely necessary for *puja* by various acts and it has to be duly consecrated.⁸

The sculptures in Sri Panchanadeeswarar temple may be said to be the best among the enormous number Chola images extent.⁹ In the profundity of facial expressions the apotheosis of serenity and dignity technical 'refinement and excellent modelling, in their sensitiveness and restraint they have few parallels in South Indian plastic art.¹⁰

Sculptures are of three groups known as *salam*, *asalam*, and *salasalam*. The *Salam* images are movable and generally made of metal. These metal images are meant for ritualistic and processional purposes. The *Asalam* images are immovable ones. They are permanently fixed in the appropriate place of the temple. The *Salasalam* images are also movable ones but are not moved from the place where they get installed.¹¹

The history of Saivism reveals that it has been one of the widely followed sects of Hinduism. The Dakshinamurti temples even as they remain paramount on the religious side, stand equally paramount in the art of their building construction. Panel sculptures of Dakshinamurti have been carved in several parts of Tamil Nadu exhibiting not only artistic excellence but also the fervour as they are intrinsically connected with several legends in the Sivapurana. Thus the famous temples of Dakshinamurti that line the length and breadth of the state stand in silent acknowledgement of centuries of history and the patronage of various kingdoms such as the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandhyas of the Tamil Nadu and the

Vijayanagar- Nayak kings. The temple of Dakshinamurti contains rare sculptures which furnish valuable and authentic information which enlightens the consecutive activities of the Kings.

Sri Panchanadeeswarar temple at Thiruvaiyaru has a number of granite sculptures and bronze icons dating back of the 10th century A.D. They expose the aesthetic sense and dexterity of the artists. This temple is famous for its priceless, the elegance and refinement of the icons of sculptures. Sri Gajasamharamurthi, Sri Bhikshatanamurti, Sri Aiyandar, Sri Alinganamurti in that temple and Sri Mohini are strikingly beautiful.

Siva worship is Universal. He has been one of the most important and popular deity in India, both in the past age and at present times. Lord Siva means all-round welfare. He is the God of God and is regarded as one of the most powerful and venerated Gods of the Hindu trial. He is primarily associated with the acts of destruction but he is the Creator and Preserver of the Universe as well.¹² Through his frantic motions, he generates the power of evolution, maintenance and dissolution of the world. The philosophical significance of the various forms and attributes of Siva are: The Five Faces represent earth, water, light, air, sky.¹³ The three eyes of Siva represent the sun, moon and fire.¹⁴

Dakshinamurti worship on Thursday plays a very prominent role in the social life of the people of Tamils. "The look of Guru brings about crore benefits" is a famous dictum. As per astrology, they started to worship Dakshinamurti to get all fortunes and *gnana*. In order to emphasize the importance of Guru, Lord Shiva himself manifested as the supreme Guru Sri Dakshinamurthi. The ultimate Guru who faces south is worshipped in all the temples.

THE SCULPTURE OF DAKSHINAMURTHI IN CHOLA PERIOD

Sri Panchanadeeswarar temple at Thiruvaiyaru is considered as one of the treasure houses of the richest specimens of art and sculptures in stone. Sri Dakshinamurti describes the remarkable features of the sculptures of this temple.

The main shrine contains images in the niches of its outer wall. The sculpture of Sri Dakshinamurthi enshrined in the *devakostha* on the southern wall of the sanctum is really a masterpiece. The *agamas* mention twenty five sportive forms of Lord Siva and one of the most important forms is that of Sri Dakshinamurthi. Sri Dakshinamurthi is known as a teacher of Yoga, music and other sciences.¹⁵ The *agamas* give the etymology Sri Dakshinamurthi. Lord Siva came to be known as Sri Dakshinamurthi because he was seated facing south when he taught the hermits Yoga and Gnana.¹⁶ This aspect of Lord Siva is always invoked by students of science and arts. Sri Adisankara among several celebrities eulogizes this aspect of Lord Siva for it is remarkable for its appearing very peaceful.¹⁷

Sri Dakshinamurthi is regarded as the teacher of *yoga vina* (*Vinadhara*), *gnana* and the expounder of the other sastras (*vyakshyana*).¹⁸ In Sri Panchanadeeswarar temple, he is represented as *Yoga* Dakshinamurthi.

The earliest representation of this image is found in Sri Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. In almost all the Siva temples, this image can be seen in the southern *devakostha* of the *sanctum sanctorum*. The best example of the bronze image of Sri Dakshinamurthi made its appearance in the Chola period

found in the Mayavaram temple. Stucco images have their place mainly in the *gopuras* of the temples. Wooden images are found mainly in the temple cars alone.

The Silparathana specifies that Sri Dakshinamurthi must have three eyes and four arms.¹⁹ In this temple, the third eye is not distinctly seen though a small projection is found in the centre of the forehead. It is perhaps intended to signify it by the four hands the front right-one shows the *Gnanamutra* (which conveys philosophical knowledge) and the back arm holds the *akshamala* (Rosary) that conveys the measure of time. The left palm is held in the *vardamudra*. The remaining hand on the left side holds the pot of fire, the deer and a kettle drum.²⁰ A *Yajnopavita* runs from the right to the left side of the body. *Udarbanda*, *Sankhapatra* and *Kundalas* adorn his body and ear respectively. He is clothed in the tiger's skin. The right leg hangs below the seat while the left one is bent at the knee and rests across on the right thigh. This seated posture adopted here is called the *Virasana*. His *jatamakuta* is held together by a serpent.

The four hermits known as Sanagar, Sanandhar, Sanandhanar and Sanakumarar collectively called 'Sanandhi Rishis' are seated in front of Sri Dakshinamurthi. *Saria*, *Kriya*, *Yoga* and *gnana* are the four ways by which one could attain self realization and they indirectly told by the presence of these four rishi images.²¹

Sivathathuva Vivegam explains that Sri Dakshinamurthi acted as a teacher for Sri Tirumal, Sri Brahma, Sri Suria, Sri Nandhideva, Muruga and Sri Indra.²² The Sage Paranjothi praises his knowledge (wisdom) saying he is the supreme teacher of the other Gods.

God is carved in relief relieved in front of the tier and the sages are carved in the background on the *Kosta*. He bears some resemblance to the Sri Dakshinamurthi image of the North Kailasa (Thiruvaiyaru) shrine, which was erected by about 1000 A.D.²³

Another image of *Dakshina murthi* occupies the southern niche of this shrine. It is a piece of very sensitive workmanship. But it is now in a mutilated state. The tree of knowledge found at back is stylized with twisting branches and a squirrel resting on the leaves in low relief, an '*achchamalai*' a hanging flower bag, a running lizard, a moving snake, a parrot eating a fruit and an owl sitting on a branch. The head of the image is surrounded by a '*halo*' (*mandala*) in two segments fringed by head – like decorative elements with a crescent and stars. The upper arms (which should have been showing '*varadamudra*' and '*chin mudra*') are broken from the elbow. The '*yajnopavita*' (sacred thread) runs across the torso in a sinuous carve while the neck and chest are adorned with three types of necklaces and *haras*. Both legs are broken but the '*Katisura*' (waist- band) is well preserved and the folds of the dhoti fall between the legs. The rock which forms the seat is adorned with frolicking and recumbent animals of which a rabbit, a deer and a calf are discernible. The demon '*Apasmara*' is recumbent and distressed by the pressure of the foot.

The image of Lord Siva represented in the form of Sri Dakshinamurthi illustrates the truth grasped by Plato and Aristotle.²⁴ Further, it shows the supreme end of man's contemplation; freedom and understanding. This image represented here is an example of the sculptor interpreting *Saivasiddhanta*.

The Kailasanatha temple of Thiruvaiyaru is the one of the middle Chola temples belonging to the period of Rajaraja I. The southern devakoshta of this temple is enshrined with Dakshinamurthi, sitting in *virasana* under the banyan tree.²⁵ The leaves and branches are very clear in their carving. A vibuthi bag

abdrudrakshamala are hanging on two branches of this tree. This Vibhuthi bag is considered as Amirthakalasangam. His curly hair is tied roundly and adorned with crescent moon. His eyesight is fixed at the tip of his nose. Deer, bull and snake are the animals under his seat. His right foot rests on the Muralahan (But part of this image is lost). This image is notable for the fineness of its sculptural beauty. This 10th century A.D. image is well developed than the 19th century A.D., figures in the decorative aspects of Dakshinamurti. The postures and hair style of the God is different from other images.

CONCLUSION

This paper reveals that significant and interesting factors of the sculpture of Dakshinamurthi in Sri Panchanadeswarar temple at Thiruvaiyaru help in the determination of the growth of civilization and culture in Tamil Nadu. Religions have had a vital part in the evolution of human civilization and culture. In comparisons with the western cultures, religions have exercised a far stronger influence in India. Every field of Indian life-economy, polity and literature is strongly influenced by religion. India is the original home of Hinduism, which constitutes the system of beliefs and rituals for the great majority of its people. It has left an everlasting impact on Indian life and culture.

In the sphere of religion, Thiruvaiyaru has made significant contributions to the theory and practice of religion and to philosophic thought in its various aspects. After the fifth century A.D. the growth of an intense emotional bhakti to Siva, is the chief characteristic of the new epoch. It is obvious that the sculpture played a crucial role in the religious history of Thiruvaiyaru, Tamil Nadu. In short, Thiruvaiyaru Sri Panchanadeswarar temple remains a beacon of artistic and cultural values especially the spiritual attainment of the Tamils of the Medieval Age.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

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