

NATARAJA STATUE IN SIVA TEMPLE AT KUTHALAM TALUK

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ABSTRACT

During the sangam age the country was ruled by the Cheras the Cholas and the Pandyas and the Tamil country Kuthalam is one of the most ancient and most celebrated temples in Tamil Nadu. It is great religious as well as historic and cultural significance. Kuthlaam is associated with Nataraja or Siva in his Anandatandava pose the cosmic dance of bliss. Chola Statue - Tamil literature - Tirumular - Tirumanthiram - Tiruvaci - Ohm - Si - va - ya - na - ma - rhythmic 23 numbers. The word kovil or temple in the Tamil saivite tradition refers to none other than the Kuthalam in around temples are Thirumanachery and Thiruvelvikudi this temple built by later chola temples.

Key Words: Pandyas, Tirumular, Kuthalam Udhvedhiswarar, Nataraja.

Introduction

Art can generally be classified in to two types on the basis of its characteristics the one static and the other plastic. Dance and music are plastic while architecture is static, time and space are also the basis in categorizing the art into different classes. Classified into three major division i.e. the art in time, the art in space and art in time and space. Of these the sculpture comes under the static art which depends upon time and space.¹

Sculpturing is one of the oldest and most widespread arts of the world. It may broadly be defined as the art of carving. Modeling welding or otherwise representing observed or imagined objects in solid materials and in three dimension. The earliest important sculptures of historical times in India are the capitals of Asoka's columns

apart from that of the Indus cities. Both schools of sculpture, the Madura and Gandhara flourished under the Kusana kings in the north. Whereas in the Deccan area, individual schools of sculpture developed.²

Location of the Temples

Kuthalam Udhvedhiswarar temple is located Mayiladuthurai Kumbakonam in western side of this temple in the present Mayiladuthurai District of Tamilnadu. Kuthalam Udhvedhiswarar temple in around temple is Thirumanchery Kalyanasundareswarar in northern side nearest of Thirukandiyur Astataveerattansthalam another temple Kuthalam to Pandhanallur route this temple Thiruvelvikudi Manavalaiswar temple.

Chola Statuary

About southern sculptures, Vincent smith is one of the opinion that excepting certain chola statuary of the eleventh century which is pre-eminently excellent. The southern figures sculpture does not often attain high quality. In quantity it is enormous, the gigantic temple and halls characteristics of the Dravidian kingdoms being commonly overloaded with sculptured ornament on every member. Mythological subjects from the *puranas* and *tantras* are the favourites and the tendency is to treat the conceptions of a luxuriant mythology with exuberant fancy. The result, too often is merely grotesque and very few of the individual images can claim to be beautiful.³

Tamil Literature

Considered this, Tamil literature and art reflect the glory of Tamilnadu. It is the land of temples of sculpture in stone and bronze of great literary works that have come down to us from the past. Though many countries of the world have had rich cultural heritage of the Tamils is unique and incomparable as far as architecture and sculpture and concerned.

In the Tamil country, even though the early literary works have plenty of reference to the sculptures of the sangam and post sangam age, the art of sculpture in a developed scale starts only with the pallava period. *Tivakara Nikan*, one of the ancient dictionaries of the Tamils, list the materials used for sculpture, such as wood, stone, metals, ivory, wax mortar, lac, soil, brick and vannam. This clearly shows the highly developed art of sculpture that was practiced Tamilnadu in those day.⁴

Sculptural art in Tamilnadu goes back to the sangam age assignable to about the first century of the Christian era. It is to be pointed that temples and temple construction were known to the Tamils long before the advent of the Pallavas. There are references to temples, palaces and mansion in Tamil literary works. In *Cilapatikaram*, the term koyil means a temple as may be gleaned from.

“Mannilum kalilum marathilum
Suvarilum kanniya devivam
Kattunar vakukka”⁵

by Manimekalai again reference to image making in different media can be gleaned from Manimekalai as but unfortunately not a single specimen of early sculptural art is available due to the fact that they were all made of perishable materials.

Nataraja

The Nataraja form of Lord Siva is known to be the first of twenty five forms of Siva. He addressed as Adalvalla, Kuthaperuman, Ambalavananan, Sabapati, Natesa, Niruthan and by ever so many other names. The Anandatandava is one of the seven dance forms of Lord Siva. The lord performs the Anandatandava at the height of his ecstasy. He in that form is known as Anandatandava Murti.⁶

Dancing male sculptures made of line found in Indus sites are considered to be the forerunners of the sculptures of Anandatandava form. The sangam literature mentions about Nataraja, however it is silent about the form of Ananda Nataraja. First of all in 5th century C.E. Tirumular sang about Ananda Nataraja in his work *Tirumandiram*⁷ the tenth book of the twelve section of the saiva canonical collection. Appar who belonged to the 7th century C.E. has also beautiful described it in his songs.

A sculptural image of Ananda Nataraja is found in the Siyamangalam cave temple pertaining to the Pallava period. This is the first specimen of Anandatandava form of Siva found in Tamilnadu from the reign of Parantaka Chola – I (907 – 955 C.E.) Nataraja was considered to be the family deity or Kudadevata of the cholas. Hence they moulded various forms of Nataraja in metal looking artistically beautiful.

In the Kuthalam in around place of Thirumanachery and Thiruvelvikudi temples an idol of Nataraja made of bronze is found. This icon is found to be in the Anandatandva dancing from. It is installed in a subordinate shrine to the right of Gnanasabha, facing south.⁸ He appears with four hands on the circular padma pedestal which rests on the *bhadrasana* made of wood. Petals of the lotus are carved with prominent tips. Surrounding Lord Nataraja the *tiruvaci* issues from the mouths of Makaras at the bottom one on either side in a perfect circle. It has been designed with thirty one flames projecting on the edge of the *tiruvaci*, each one having five tongues.

This idol represents the panchakritya of Lord Siva namely creation, destruction, concealment and protection. His upper right arm holds the drum and the left one the flame of fire in the ardha-chandra hasta. These hands symbolize the balance of creation and destruction. His lower right arm in the abhaya has represents maintenance. The left from arm in the gaja or

danda hasta is stretched across the body with its fingers pointing to the uplifted left leg perfect balance is not only shown in the forms of arms but also on the legs. His leg position is in the bhujangatrasita mode. The right leg is slightly bent and planted on the demon of apasmarapurusa symbolizing, Siva's concealment, while the left leg is raised slightly and turned towards the right leg and kept across. It indicates grace. Thus the arms, legs and Siva's torsod denotes the continuous action of creation and destruction of the universe.⁹

Apasmarapurusa under his right leg is playing with a snake held in his left hand, and his right hand in the sarpasirsha is suggestive of a serpent's hood. His head is turned to the right side and twisted to have a look of the dance of the lord.

The locks of Siva's matted hair are arranged as a feathery crown. It is decorated by peacock feathers in a single line with crescent, flowers of dhaturas, and arkas and serpent and hatisirishaka. The whirlingjatas¹⁰ streaming out on each side are absent in this figure. The ornamented jeweled band is prominent on his forehead. In the centre of the forehead below the band the third eye adds charm to the face. He is wearing in his ears two different rings, the patrakundala on the left side and the Makarakundala on the right one. His face is squarish with beautiful eyes, nose, lips and chin, splendidly depicted, in calm expression. On each shoulder is seen a stand of hair with ornate workmanship. He is wreathed by a snake like garland about his neck. Next a long chain bearing tiger's claws is seen.¹¹

A two strand yajnopavita is thrown on the left shoulder. The piece of upper cloth is flowing gracefully on the left side in between the shoulders of two arms. A cobra with uplifted hood is entwined in his front right arm. Armlets interestingly decorated by foliage designs, thin elbow bands, and triple bangles are worn on the hands. His fingers and toes are coiled by rings

except in the middle ones. A long and thin scarf tied around the waist is fluttering with its two ends in a realistic manner and is attached to the *tiruvaci*. The tiger skin attire tightly fits his body with its ends touching the right thigh. There are no anklets, on the ankles thick padasaras beautiful the legs. At the back of this figure the Siraschakra is beautifully worked in the shape of a full fully worked in the shape of full blown flower and is enclosed by a ring. From the central knob of it hangs an ornate tassel. Jatas hang loose in way fashion at the back and shoulders at the commencement of dance. The style of the figure and its workmanship suggest that this figure is datable to the 12th century C.E.¹²

The very physical appearance of Nataraja himself, represents the Pranava (Ohm). The dance of lord siva is identified with Panchaksara, the syllables si-va-ya-na-ma; which have peculiar and special significance in Lord Siva symbolic. In his feet is 'Na' in his neval is 'Ma' in his shoulders is 'Si' in his face is 'Va' and in his head is 'Ya'. The arch (Tiruvaci) represents matte, nature prakrithi which contains the splendor of Lord Siva dancing within and touching the arch with head, hand and feet. It represents the universal omnipresent spirit. Between these stands, the individual soul as 'Ya' between Si-va and Na-ma.¹³

In India particularly in Tamil nadu the Saivite figures in stone and bronze are carved in Samhkara, anugraha and thandava poses. The Tandva lakshnas were codified in Bharata's Natayasastra. The image of Nataraja the supreme uncrowned monarch of dances in the unique creation and the most precious gem of Tamil are heritage. This most illustrious, outstanding master piece of Chola art has earned individual worldwide reputation to Tamilnadu for its super balanced artistic exclusion and deep philosophical symbolism.¹⁴

The Pallavas were succeeded by the cholas. It is be lived that a great impetus took place at the hands of the accomplished, and the masterly artisans of the chola period. The early chola

art is represented by the Thiruvaiyaru, Nataraja and is characterized by clarity of workmanship.

The Nataraja in the Thanjavur big temple is one the best examples for the medieval chola artistic talent. For the first time Rajaraja – I inscription the name of the image as adavallan. During the later chola period under Vickrama Chola Nataraja was referred to as Kootanayakar.¹⁵

The Ukdavedhiswarar, Kalayasundreswarar and Manavaliswarar temples were preserved a pretty piece of four armed Lord Siva in Anandatanadava posture of all the bronzes available in this temples of the Nataraja icons are the most remarkable one a perfect representation of rhythmic dance. Its modeling details and proportion are all excellently dealt with and it therefore has a classical appearance.¹⁶

The Tiruvaci encircling God is oval in shaped to three temple icons and metal statue of Nataraja. It ends are inserted on the pita. Three pronged flames totally refer 23 in number and are attached to the edge of the Tiruvaci. Only the top most is five pronged. The smiling expression of the face is superi in nature. This is therefore, master piece of the art of the 12th century C.E.

Conclusion

Only the top most is five pronged the smiling expression of the face is superior in nature. This is therefore, masterpiece of the art of the 12th century C.E.

Endnotes

1. R. Kasirajan, *Sculptures of the Cholas*, p. 294.
2. V.N. Srinivasa Desikan, *Master Pieces of Tamil Icons*, p. 311.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
5. Epic of Manimegalai verse.
6. M.A. Manikkavelu, *Tamilnattil Nataraja Vazhipadu*, pp. 12-13.
7. H. Krishna Sastri, *South Indian Image Gods and Goddesses*, pp. 89-90.
8. A. Chidainhaiana, *Thirumandiram Tirumurai*, V. 2679, p. 324.
9. Sadasiva Chettiar (ed.) *Devarappadi Gangal Tiumurai*, 4, 5, 6, 4 : 81: 4, p. 118.
10. S.K. Balasubrahmanyam, *Solakalaippani*, p.68.
11. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Image in India Temple*, p.22.
12. K.V. Soundarajan, *Glimpses of Architecture Art and Religion*, p. 162.
13. Ananda Kumarasamy, *The Dance of Siva*, p. 87.
14. C. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art Though and Literature*, p. 157.
15. O.C. Ganguly, *South Indian Bronzes*, p. 54.
16. R. Nagasamy, *Art and Culture of Tamil Nadu*, p.37.