

STONE SCULPTURES OF SREE SOMANATHESWARAR TEMPLE IN ATTUR AT THIRUCHENDUR TALUK-A STUDY

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to high light the stone sculpture of Somanatheswarar temple in Attur. Somanatheswarar temple is situated in the centre of Attur. Attur is about 15 kms distance from Tiruchendur towards the northern direction. In sculptures is represented with a tiara on his head, as a sign of his noble birth. In his right hand, he holds a flower of tamarapusa and his left hand rests on a stick, of a special form carried by ascetics, which is called Yogatand But in the temple, he is in the anjali pose. In the sculpture of Mahesvari, the makutais well placed and its artistic treatment is an excellent one. The Kundalas of the ears are worked out with elaborate ornamentations. The shoulders and the hands are proportionate. In the temple at Attur the image is placed on the pillar in the anjali posture. The lion or the sign of leo in the Hindu zodiac represents birth and the tortoise, the termination to life.

Key words: *stone sculpture, makuta, design*

Introduction:

Somanatheswarar temple is situated in the centre of Attur. Attur is about 15 kms distance from tiruchendur towards the northern direction. The aim of this paper is to high light the stone sculpture of Somanatheswarar temple in Attur. The main shrine is an embodiment of several stone sculptures. Jvaraharadevar, 63 Nayanmars, Saptamatrikas with Virabhadra and Ganapati, Karthikeyan with two consorts, Bhairavar, Chandra, Surya, Suriadevar, Kannivinayaka, Dhakshinamurti, Adhikara-nandi in the agramandapa, dvarapalas, Kasinathar-Visalakshi, Anandasayana Perumal, Saneeswarar, Vinayaka, Subramanya, Kodimara Vinayaka and pillared Hanuman are the some of the fine stone sculptural specimen found in the main shrine.

In sculptures, Apparisi depicted with shaven head leaving only the tuft of hair behind called Kudummudi. His head and arms are decked with chaplets (rudraksha). He carried the ulavaram, with which he used to dig up herbs in the temple in which he lived. Here in the Attur temple, he stands on a patra-pitha with the hands in the anjali postures. The ulavaram is attached to the right shoulder. The shaven head and the empty ears with the closed eyes project his highly dedicated religious attitude.

Stone sculptures in study area

Here in the temple at Attur, he stands on the patrapitha. He carries cymbals made of metal discs and tied together by a cord. The hip ornament of bells adds an artistic grace to the image. The creeper designs which are present on the thighs, expose the artistic excellence of the image. The bahulamalas, armlets, wristlets and the anklets are very well worked out. The patrakundalas and the jatamakuda strengthen further the beautiful complexion of the face. The necklaces in various designs expose the tenderness of the image.

In sculptures is represented with a tiara on his head, as a sign of his noble birth. In his right hand, he holds a flower of tamarapusa and his left hand rests on a stick, of a special form carried by ascetics, which is called Yogatand But in the temple, he is in the anjali pose. The closed eyes and the empty ears remind us of his religious sacrifice which he has done for the propagation of Saivism.

In sculptures, he is represented as carrying a chaplet and a book of palm leaves. In the Attur temple, he stands on the patra-pitha. The right leg is planted and left is slightly bent forward which represents movement. The fanwise arrangement of the head with the empty lengthy ears adds divinity to the face. The right hand is in chin mudra and the left hand carries the palm leaves. The above images belong to the chola period of the 12th century A.D. The matrikas, also called Kannimars, are considered to be one of the parivaradevatas or avaranadevatas. According to Manasara the shrines for the parivaradevatas should be built at the cardinal points of the most or the first court of the temple. According to Kasyapa Silpa Sastra, the matrika row must be facing north in the first prakara).

The Saptamatrikas represent the embodied energy and prowess of seven famous gods, of their male counter-parts such as the Vishnu, Kumara, Varaha, Indra, Brahma, Mahesvara and others. The seven matrikas are Brahma, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani and Camunda. They are flanked by Ganesa on one side and Virabhadra on the other. Ganesa and Virabhadra are the protecting Gods for the Saptamatrikas. It is also said that the Saptamatrikas were the independent manifestations of Parvati. They appear to be the favourite deities of early Chalukyas and from there the cult seems to have spread to Tamil Nadu in the 5th century A.D. But the small shrines for them were constructed in the Someswar temple, after the 9th century A.D. the Nayarunars and the Alvars did not favour the growth of the cult of the Saptamatrikas in the initial stage. But anyhow, the practice of constructing the parivara shrine continued till the period of 11th and 12th centuries. By the later chola period, the matrikas disappeared from the temple.

In South India, the Saptamatrikas are represented in sitting postures but in North India they are mainly in standing postures. Moreover in the north, they carry each in one of their hands. Brahmandapurana adds Mahalakshmi as the eighth mother. Whatever may be the differences regarding the number, the accepted matrikas are seven only. Several texts mention different mythologies about the origin and importance of the matrikas. Puranas like Markandeya and Agni also tell different stories about the origin of the matrikas. The iconic features are mentioned in the Asumadbhedagama, the Suprabhedagama, the Purvakaranagama, the Vishudharmottarapurana, the Markandeya Purana, the Matsyapurana and the Rupamandana.

The three faces of Brahma are executed with an advanced artistic style. The Kundalas of the ears are well placed. The makuta is short and it is well symmetrically executed. The necklaces are worked out very intricately, the armlets and the wristlets are very simple and plain. A flat breast-band is seen and its presence beautifies the breast which is well rounded. The broad hip and the slender waist expose the feminine quality. The right upper hand holds the akshamala and the left upper hand carries the Kundikai. The right lower hand is in the abhaya pose and the left lower hand is placed over the thigh.

In the sculpture of Mahesvari, the makuta is well placed and its artistic treatment is an excellent one. The Kundalas of the ears are worked out with elaborate ornamentations. The shoulders and the hands are proportionate. The flat Yajnopavita flows in between the breasts in a fascinating manner. The upper right hand is in the abhaya pose and the left lower hand is placed on the thigh. One notable feature here is the presence of rishaba just behind the left upper shoulder. The rishaba with the prominent hump and the horns looks very beautiful. On the right upper portion is visible the dvajastamba.

The Sculpture of Kaumari here is found in spreaded hairs of the head portrayed with intricate design. Exactly above the head is seen a human head. The arched brows and the elongated eyes give an exquisite beauty to the face. The necklace falls down on the breasts and their treatment is done in a superb way and moreover it exposed the painstaking efforts bestowed by the sculptors in carving out such sophisticated artistic patterns. The right upper hand holds trisula the flag which depicts the rishaba. The right abhaya hasta and the left lower hand is placed on the thigh. In the sculpture of Vaishnavi, the treatment of the makuta of the head is an excellent depiction. Likewise, the ear kundalas also add grace to the image. The line drawings of the dress are well seen. The upper right hand holds the chakra and the left upper hand carries the chanku. The

chakra is not looked at frontly and so it is called as prayakachakra the right lower hand is in the abhaya pose and the left lower hand is placed on the thigh.

The face of the varagi image is naturally exposed without any deviation from the artistic principles and rules. The karantamakuta is well placed and its finishing is worthy of appreciation. The shoulders are broad enough and the postures of the hands are beautifully done. The armlets, wristlets and the anklets even with their plain treatment, look charming. The upper right hand carries the plough and the upper left hand holds a naga which faces towards the varaga head.

In the sculpture of Indirani, the completion of the makuta with the refined well-modelled workmanship is a striking one. The headknot has its own individuality, as regards its artistic appearance. The upper right hand carries majestically ankusa and the left upper hand holds the akshamalai. It can be said that makuta is the outstanding contribution of the artist. As regards the camunda stone sculpture in the temple, the makuta with the ear ornaments add a good as well as artistic complexion to the whole figure. The upper right hand holds the parasu and the left upper hand carries the fire. The facial features as well as the position of the legs suggest that all the figures belong to the period of the 11th century A.D.

Sree Somanatheswarar Temple

The noteworthy details of the vinayaka image are the naturalistic animal face combined in a naturalistic human body. The Karanta-makutas show refined and delicate workmanship. The ears are treated with superb artistic caliber. The udarabandhas are simple. In the representation of shoulders, one can notice naturalism and idealism. The arms are proportionately represented. The necklaces are beautifully well-modelled and its intricate workmanship reveals the artistic workmanship of the sculptor of the contemporary period. All the five images of vinayaka belonged to the Chola period of the 10th and 11th century A.D. the other four images seen inside the shrine chamber are also of the same style.

He is in the Sambhangapose which suggests spiritual equilibrium. The torso is modeled in a manner which suggests strength and power and the sewing of the lines of both sides is magnificently rendered. The shoulders and the part between them are done in such a manner as to suggest supreme prowess which is the primary quality of the theme. The arms are also done in a manner suggesting strength. The short ends of the cloth hanging between the thighs are noteworthy. The upper two hands carry the sakti and vajra. The right lower hand is in the abhaya pose and the left lower hand is in the Katvalambita pose. The Karantamakutais executed with the laudable artistic workmanship and refinement. The ears have the patrakundalas. The bahulamalas are not present. The armlets, wristlets and the anklets are treated proportionately. The vehicle peacock is seen behind. The feathers of the bird are artistically designed and it enhances the tender beauty of the bird.

The right end of the deivayanai image holds the flower and the left hand is in the Iola hasta. The manner of depicting the breasts is in the classical tradition. The figure is rendered gracefully the garment with finely worked out folds is charming. The flow of Yajopavita is delineating in a superb manner and the expression is one of serenity.

The left hand of the valli image holds the flower and the right hand is in the Iola hasta. The breast-band is well executed. The ornaments and drapery are noteworthy. Though the limbs display some stiffness in modeling, yet the treatment of the figure is exquisite. In fact, the modeling in general is beautiful and this is exemplified by the excellent treatment of the hips and the breasts. Bhairavar, can best be described as one of those terrific (ghora or ugra) forms of Siva which has no connection whatsoever with any particular puranic story narrating his exploits. He is so called by virtue of being a protector of the universe (bharana) and terrific in appearance (bhisana). He is also known as Kalabhairava (for even kala, the lord of death trembles before him), Amardaka (because he kills bad persons, marddan) and Papabhaksana (because he swallows the sins of his devotees).

Just as Vithoe is another name for Krishna, so Bhairavar or Bahiroba is another name for siva. He is also known as Ksetrapal. He has been referred to also as Bhairom. Appar refers to this aspect Bhaiava is also described as Brahmasiraschedaka in some of the puranas and agamas.

Rao has described two different peculiar forms of Bhairavar —Batuka-Bhairavar and SvaranaKarsanaBhairavar and Banejee mentions that Batuka-Bhairavar should have terrific appearance with protruding fangs. The objects found in the hands are a sword, a Khatvanga, a sula or a Kapala. He is often accompanied by a dog which is the incarnation of Kunaodaren. In the BatukaBhairava-Kalpa, he is mentioned as riding on the dog and the four hands carry a sula, a pasa, a damaru and a Kapala. Moreover he is surrounded by a host of demons.

In the image at Attur, he stands on the patrapitha. A garland of bells decorates the whole image. The garland is lowered down upto the foot. The folder sacred thread flows over the right side of the stomach of the four hands, the right upper hand holds the udukkai and the left upper hand holds the pasa. The right lower hand holds the trisula and the left lower hand carries a vessel. The left ear has the patra-kundala and the right has the makarakundala. The protruding teeth and the rounded eyes give a terrific appearance. The makuta is in the form of the jvalai design. The makutais well designed with the skull and the half-moon. A hound is seen behind him. The head of the hound faces the front and the tail of it is in a coiled form. The facial expressions and other bodily features, along with the jvalaimakuta ascribe a Chola period of the 10th and the 11th century A.D.

Surya means brave (suvirya) and is applied to Soma and Indra. The attribute later came to denote an independent Deva namely the Sun. He is the brightest among the universe, the winner of wealth, the illuminator of the world and brilliance incarnate. In short, he is prominent. Since the sun dispelled darkness and gave life and warmth, it became an object of worship. He is one of the pancadevata. In the temple art of Tamil Nadu, Surya is in most cases shown as a youth standing erect (samabhanga), two armed and holding a lotus in each hand Karantamakuta is the fitting head-gear. In the north, he is often represented with four hands and attendants are depicted near him.

The Surya representation is noticed in the mandapas of the Mamalla period, and they are mainly represented in the panels. During the period of the Cholas, separate shrine was built to keep the image. The artistic features are highly refined and proportionate. The iconical features are given in detailed manner in the texts like Amsumadbhedagama, Suprabhedagama and Silparatna. The two hands hold the lotus flowers. The halo is well depicted behind the head. The artistic features are well refined. It can be dated to the chola period of the 10th and 11th century A.D.

The Dhakshinamurti figure is noteworthy for its glamorous artistic features. The graceful ornamentation speaks of the greatness of the image. The upper two hands hold the naga and fire. The right lower hand is in chin mudra and the left lower hand holdapustak. The depiction of the branches of the tree is superb. One novelty one can notice here. Is the presence of two parrots and one squirrel on the branches of the tree? The impeccable artisticrepresentation brings out the artistic grandeur of the image. The neck ornaments are limited. The flat sacred thread with foldings flow over the right chest andis lowered down upto the right hip level. The patrapitha over which the God sits is plain. On either side of Siva, is visible the crisis who are represented as if, they are listening to the teachings of the Lord with an unperturbed mood.

He stands on the padmapitha. The upper two hands hold the parasu and deer which faces the Lord. The two lower hands are in the anjali posture. A long weapon is attached with the left shoulder. The necklaces are intricately designed and they are striking for its confined any rhythmic treatment. The left ear has the patra-kundala and the right ear has the makarakundala. The well adorned head gear enhances the facial complexion to a great level. The eyes, the cheeks, the nose and the lips are superbly exhibitedwithout any deviation from the artistic discipline.

On the outer front of the ardhmandapa one on either side of the entrance, are two beautifully carved Rajaraja style dvarapalakas, measured about 1.22 ms(four feet) in height. The right hand of the dvarapalaka image is in the danda pose and the left hand is placed on the mace of the gada. He stands on the right leg firmly and the left leg is placed on the mace. The udarabandha is flat and is pearl designed. The flexions of the body portray the artistic excellence and workmanship. The dress is upto the thigh level only. The dress is treated with the creeper and flower designs. The knot of the dress flows over the right thigh. The Kundalas

of the ears in the ears in the centre have awl representations. Themakuta is well fitted. The protruding teeth are no way adds dreadful look as the other features are executed with artistic grace and refinement.

In the case of the side dvarapalaka, the hand is raised to the head level and is in the vismayapose and the left hand is in the gajahasta pose and its wrist is well placed on the mace. The face is note in frontal but in profile. The ear ornaments are not clearly visible due to the oiling of the figure. A long garland of bells gives a combined and coherent beauty to the whole figure. To the north of the someswara shrine sanctum is the chamber housing the image of Palli-Kondar (Vishnu in the anantasayanam pose) with his head to the west. The entrance to the chamber is on its eastern wall. The divine serpent (with its five-headed hood) is protecting the head of the Vishnu image in front of this recumbent figure is an excellent metal image of Vishnu with four arms. The two upper arms carry the sankha and the chakra and what is peculiar in this sculpture (and a rare feature) is that the other two arms hold the amrita-kalasam, the pot of nectar. It can easily be assigned to the period of RajarajaI as is the case with the Anantasayanaperumal image and the shrine.

He stands on the patra-pitha. The right hand is in the abhaya pose and he left is in the Katvalambita pose. The head is ornamented with the jatamakuta. The ears are lengthy and plain. The shoulders are treated with proportionate modeling and its bahulamalas are well designed. The dress is only upto the thigh level. The dress looks very nice due to the creeper and flower designs. The bird crow, his vehicle, is present behind him. The proportionate arrangement of the feathers imparts a natural outlook to the bird.

The important position assigned to Hanuman, the devotee of Rama in the Tamil country is borne out by the inclusion of his image in the early groups of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. The separate shrine for Hanuman was constructed even in the Chola period of the 10th century A.D. He is the symbol and model of a perfect servant.

He is represented in many postures. When included in the group of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, he stands at a distance on one side or opposite to them in a humble and devotional attitude with the two hands folded together, with the tail hanging down close to his feet. In shrines, exclusively dedicated to him, he is always the heroic Hanuman who on seeing his beloved masters Rama and Lakshmana faint with fatigue on the battle field of Lanka, flew in an amazingly short time to the Himalayas, and uprooting the whole hill containing drugs, returned to revive Rama and Lakshmana and with them also the millions of dead monkeys.

The heroism, strength and devotion of Hanuman are always admired and in sculptures, he carries two hills, one on each hand. Sometimes, Hanuman may also be represented with hands showing the abhaya and varada poses. The Silparatna mentions a third posture in which Hanuman is described as a Yogin teaching philosophy to a number of pupils who surround him. In other representation, his hand is brought near the mouth, as he reverentially makes a submission to the beloved master Rama.

In north India, most of the Hanuman images carry the hill in one of the hands. An image of Hanuman which is present in South Kensington Museum has the outstretched hands which carry the lingas and not the mountains as suggested by Mr. Harvell. The image is said to have come from Ceylon and undoubtedly. One of the best pieces of bronze sculptures. It has been attributed to the 15th century A.D. Ananda coomaraswamy also refers to this image.

Conclusion

In the temple at Attur the image is placed on the pillar in the anjali posture. The kundalas in the ears the arched brows and the beautiful well carved necklaces add a fascinating beauty to the face. The Makuta on the head are well treated and executed. The artistic design of the Makuta is very superb. The broad shoulders and the chest portray is qualities of strength and valour. The wrist ornament is artistically carved. The nipple is prominent. The dress is upto the knee. The foldings of the dress depict the artistic innovation of the sculptor. The central loop which connects the two things is well exhibited. The kirtimukhais treated quite fantastically. In art, one of the most recurring themes of decoration is the design of the kirtimukha which is an arch with the face of a lion in the center and the figures of tortoise on the terminating ends. The lion or the sign of leo in the Hindu zodiac represents birth and the tortoise, the termination to life. Hence, the kirtimukha symbolizes human life this is described as Kalamakaratorana. The foot is free from any decoration. The shoulder ornaments are systematically designed the back view gives a pleasant and beautiful appearance.

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