



ICONOGRAPHIC COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LORD NAṬARĀJA AND LORD BUDDHA

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ABSTRACT

Both of the figures of a domestic-sized deity which is displayed on an altar with the sacrifices offered by them are also compatible to study in context of their statues. Lord Śiva as a dancing figure is familiar free-standing sculpture representation usually became the standard in bronze. The statues and paintings are visual statements of myths and traditions. In the remarkably standardized form, identify these gods by the objects they wear by their hair styles and other creatures that come with them. Lord Buddha is always depicted in certain physical characteristics and specified attire and specified poses. Each pose and especially the position and gesture of the Buddha's hands has a defined meaning that is familiar to Buddhists. Both God's statues represent confusion and ignorance, leading humanity away from the truth and destruction (*samhāra*) of evils like *kāma* (passion or desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (ego, pride) and *matsarya* (jealousy). Their images show the continuing cycle of life and death in this world until one attains final salvation (*mokṣa*).

KEYWORDS: Lord Naṭarāja, Lord Buddha, statues, art, temples, and iconography.

INTRODUCTION

Lord Śiva as a dancing figure first appeared in the Indian stone temple sculpture in the 5th and 6th centuries AD and it was not until the 10th century CE that the now familiar free-standing sculpture representation usually became the standard in bronze. The statues and paintings are visual statements of myths and traditions. In this remarkably standardized form, identify different gods by the objects they wear by their hair styles and other creatures that come with them.¹ The artistic basis for the creation of the divine form is

¹ <https://www.ancient.eu/article/831/shiva-nataraja---lord-of-the-dance>

unique heritage of this sub-continent. Countless temples have been raised and on their walls, ceilings, floors, *vimāna* and *mandapa*, the great works of art of the *śilpi* (sculptor) have been created.²

Buddhism was introduced in India, so it is common to see influences of ancient culture in Buddhist art. However, Tantric Buddhism has many similarities to Hinduism compared to other Buddhist sects. Only Buddha and some Bodhisattvas are used in mainstream Buddhism, which are depicted in Buddhist art. In a cultural context, the bronze figures are used in a similar way. Both of these are figures of a domestic-sized deity which is displayed on an altar with the sacrifices offered by them. Here, some of the variations of idol art of Lord Naṭarāja and Lord Buddha statues are discussed.

STATUES OF LORD NAṬARĀJA

The Tanjavur Brihadeśwara temple having illustrated *karaṇas* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s fourth chapter on the temple *gopuram* provides a sparkling example of the in-depth understanding not just of the physical human body but also of the laws of dance movement and the technical description of the *karaṇa*.³ Similarly, sculptures of dance movements adorn the Sarangapāni temple at Kumbakonam, as well as the four *gopurams* of the Naṭarāja Temple in Chidambaram; while illustrations of *cāris* and *karaṇas* are found in plenty decorating the Gangaikonda, Cōlāpuram, Madurai and Kanchipuram temples.

Naṭarāja is one of the most important, visually thrilling forms of God Śiva. The figure of Naṭarāja presenting the visual concept of Lord Śiva's dance represents the faith that human life emanates from and consists of the five prime elements like fire, water, space, wind and earth. Naṭarāja holds *Agni* (fire) in his left hand, *Gangā* (water) in his tresses, moon (*ākāśa*) on his head, *Ḍamaru* (wind) instrument in his right hand and his right foot resting on the earth.⁴

Śiva as the God of Dance is depicted as follows:

- *Prabhā Maṇḍalā* (the fiery halo), dances within a fiery arch that springs from the lotus base. The halo represents the universe.⁵ The lotus flower, indigenous to South and Southeast Asia, represents purity in the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. The flower grows from the depths of muddy water to emerge above its surface, pristinely beautiful. This pedestal is a double lotus, with petals pointing upward and downward. On this halo, the three fires symbolize the three worlds, which are heaven, earth, and the silly world.
- Śiva's feet are in dancing pose. His left leg is raised and his right leg is placed on the demon-dwarf indicating that Śiva eliminates ignorance in the world. Left foot is lifted as part of the dance of bliss, raised in elegant strength across his body. Like a member of royalty, his ankles, arms, chest, and ears are adorned with jewelry.

² Sthapati V. Ganpati, *Indian Sculpture and Iconography- Forms and measurements*, p. xii

³ <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/history-and-culture/How-karana-sculptures-in-Big-Temple-were-discovered/article16044743.ece>

⁴ Vaidyanathan Saroja, *Bharatanatyam- An In-depth Study*, p. 3

⁵ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/prabhamandala>

- Many of the hands symbolize the many powers of Śiva.
 - i. The rear right hand drum is a symbol of creation. Sound was the first of the five elements that appeared in the universe. It denotes *Nādabrahma* signifying creation (*sriṣṭi*), since life is said to have started from the *nāda* or *dhwani*. It is with this hourglass-shaped *Damaru* drum that Śiva beats a rhythm that brings the universe into creation. As both the creator and destroyer, Śiva and his drumming play an essential role in the cycle of the universe.⁶
 - ii. The back-left hand holds a flame of cosmic fire. Light symbolizes the destruction of the world and also end of the universe in its cycle of creation and destruction.
 - iii. The front right-hand rests on a gesture that tells the devotee to have no fear. It is a gesture of assurance. It is in *Abhaya mudra*.
 - iv. The front left hand refers to the raised leg which is called ‘like an elephant’s trunk’ and indicates that salvation will be achieved by Śiva’s movements. The left hand points downward to indicate sanctuary for the soul of the devotee.⁷

STATUES OF LORD BUDDHA

Lord Buddha is always depicted in certain physical characteristics and specified attire and specified poses. Each pose and especially the position and gesture of the Buddha’s hands has a defined meaning that is familiar to Buddhists. For Buddhists, the correct depiction of Buddha is not merely an artistic matter. Buddhists believe that the image of a well-rendered Buddha is a hypothesis, which is the actual spiritual incarnation of the Buddha, consisting of supernatural qualities.⁸

Dīgha Nikāya, a Pāli text from the first century BCE, gives a list of thirty-two physical features of the Buddha.⁹ Some of these are poetic or imaginary (feet like an antelope, ankle like a rounded circle), while others are more specific such as walking with the feet, heels, elongated and thin fingers and projecting toes, A tuft of hair between the eyebrows. Although it is not necessary that images of Buddha reflect all these characteristics, many of them have acquired canonical status.

Buddha’s head is covered with close, tight curls that have been arranged evenly all over, which is a *usnīsa*. At the top of the head, a crest of curls is formed in the shape of a roll. This special kind of coiffure and this style is called *Sirastrakam*.¹⁰ It is sometimes shown as a peak or spike and sometimes only as a small bump. Buddha always has a calm expression or a pale smile. The Buddha has also always been depicted with lobes with very long ears, that is one of the characteristic feature amongst the thirty-two.

⁶ Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery @ www.asia.si.edu

⁷ www.Indian art online resource.org/the smithsonian’s museums of Asian art_iconography_shiva

⁸ Chiu Angela S., *The Buddha in Lanna: Art, Lineage, Power and Place in Northern Thailand*, p.182

⁹ *Encyclopedia of Oriental Philosophy and Religion Vol. 16 Buddhism*, p. 863

¹⁰ Sthapati V. Ganpati, *Indian Sculpture and Iconography- Forms and measurements*, p. 134

The Buddha is popularly depicted in one of four postures:¹¹

- Sitting: if seated, the Buddha can be shown in one of three different positions
In heroic posture (*vīrāsana*), with legs bent over each other
In the adamantine posture (*vajrāsana*), the legs are crossed so that the soles of both feet rise up.
In the position of a person sitting on a chair (*pralambanāsana*)
- Standing: When standing, the Buddha can be shown with his feet or with one leg forward.
- Walking
- Reclining: Recurring postures may represent the Buddha resting or sleeping, but usually represents the *mahāparinibbāna*: the final state of enlightenment before the Buddha's death.

The Buddha is almost always depicted as a monastic robe of the type worn by Buddhist monks today. The robe can be worn in the covering mode (wrapped above both shoulders) or in the open mode (leaving the right shoulder and chest open).¹² The robe is sometimes shown as mysterious, transparent or billowing mysteriously, which suggests the spiritual power emanating from the Buddha.

Until the twentieth century, Buddhist art retained only five mudras for the representations of the Buddha namely *Dharmachakra mudra*, *Bhumisparśa mudra*, *Varada mudra*, *Dhyāna mudra* and *Abhaya mudra*.¹³ The significance of these mudras can be gauged from the fact that each of the five *Dhyāni* (transcendental) Buddhas was assigned one of these mudras and they were invariably depicted in visual arts with this particular mudra only. But as the studies of Buddhist iconography flourished all over the world and people started following the divine teachings of Buddha, different countries fashoined various other designs and patterns of the Buddha statues. Various mudras have been introduced by the artistes studying the literature in depth and making graceful statues of Buddha with other significant mudras other than those five.¹⁴

The various mudras associated with Buddha increased much more with time and detailed study of Buddhist iconography by the artistes and the researchers in this field. The spread of Buddhism in different countries overseas is an important reason of the flourishing of the enormous increase in new designs in Buddha's statue. Any art has glimpses of the cultural grounds where it has been developing. Same is the case of Buddha statues.

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/>

¹² Thomas Edward J., *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*, pp. 38-61

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Chandra Rajesh, *Buddha ka Chakravarti Samarajya*, p.135

CONCLUSION

As artists aspired to portray more specific events in the life of the Buddha and Naṭarāja, new secondary postures developed, such as the Buddha holding a begging character, the Buddha reciting a mango and the Buddha performing various miracles, Lord Naṭarāja smoking the pipe, Lord Naṭarāja standing applied the ash all over the body. Many of these were organized later and then spread to other parts of the artistic world. Also, Devotees visit a temple to be in the holy place of the deity. God is understood to be sculpture and hence worshipers consider sculpture to be God. In the act of worship, devotees can see God and God can see devotees. Worshipers bathe and offer perfume to God, dress the image in garb and adorn it with jewels and flowers. During festivals, the deity can be exhumed and taken in procession. *Mokṣa* and *Muktī* is a symbol of Śiva's statue is depicted stamping on the dwarf man Apasmāra Pūruṣa, who captures a cobra. Also, Lord Buddha attained enlightenment by defeating the huge army of māra, which is shown through mudras in iconography. Both God's statues represent confusion and ignorance, leading humanity away from the truth and destruction (*samhāra*) of evils like *kāma* (passion or desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (ego, pride) and *matsarya* (jealousy). Their images show the continuing cycle of life and death in this world until one attains final salvation (*mokṣa*).

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