

## SCULPTURAL ART UNDER THE NĀYAKAS

Article Particulars:

Received: 07.01.2018

Accepted: 11.01.2018

Published: 20.01.2018

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### Abstract

At the outward expression of an image, the inner meaning of the divinity could not be determined. The image of God/dess may outwardly denote, he/she is Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti or Devī, Gaṇapati or Subrahmaṇya but all ultimately denotes the Cosmic Being, Brahman or Puruṣa or Puruṣikā. This is the core thought, which we have strived to establish through architecture, iconography and religious dialogue. The major religions of the pan-Indian tradition such as Śivaism, Viṣṇuism, Śāktam, Gāṇapatya and Kaumāra found chance for a dialogue leading to unity of thought through religion, art and culture.

**Keywords:** Nāyakas, Sculptre, iconography, dialogue, rūpa/uruvam, Jyotisvarūpa, nṛtya or tāṇḍava, Āṇaimalai, Tirumōkūr, Māliuruñcōlai, etc.,

### Introduction

Dialogue in its literal sense is expressed through the sculptural media that is technically called iconography or iconology. At the outward expression of an image, the inner meaning of the divinity could not be determined. The image of God/dess may outwardly denote, he/she is Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti or Devī, Gaṇapati or Subrahmaṇya but all ultimately denotes the Cosmic Being, Brahman or Puruṣa[1] or Puruṣikā[2]. Brahman is neither male nor female and neither of these two. He is with a form *rūpa/uruvam*, and without a form *rūpa/aruvam* or of the form of Light, Jyotisvarūpa.

“The Lord is the singularly unique Principle, the solitary illumination, *jyotisvarūpa*. The master of [Tillai]-*cirrampalam*, he reforms the worlds by his symbolic recital, *nṛtya* or *tāṇḍava*. The old-*vṛddha* and the young-*bāla*. He was pleased to devour the deadly poison.

The True Principle, He is known to followers. The Liṅga in Hindu temples is without a form and with a form, *rūpārūpa*. The Lord of (Tiru)Āṇaimalai is Jyotir-Liṅga. Iconography is *śilpa* canons deals with the forms of gods and goddesses. According to the *Śrītattvanidhi*[3], Śiva is revealed through 131[4] iconographic forms, Viṣṇu 76[5] and Devī 239[6]. Ardhanārīśvara is male and female in one, Puruṣa and Prakṛti or Puruṣikā. Harihara is a form in which Hari-Viṣṇu and Hara-Śiva make up one. The Elephanta type of Trimūrti is a merger of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā[7]. The Somaskanda in Pallava art is an union of Śiva, Devī, Skanda, Viṣṇu and Brahmā[8]. The names and forms of the gods and goddesses may be in thousands, e.g. the *Lalitāsahasranāma*, *Viṣṇusahasranāma* and *Śivasahasranāma* but the Cosmic Reality is one, Brahman that is naïvely pointed out by *aṇaṅku* in Tamil. “To what is one, the poets give many a name”, i.e. Brahman as far as Hinduism is concerned. This is the core thought, which we have strived to establish through architecture, iconography and religious dialogue.

### 1. Āṇaimalai

Āṇaimalai to begin with was a center of Jain religious austerities. The rock-cut beds, devoid of any sophistication on the hill were meant for the monks to rest. Their routine work was to meditate, discuss the *piṅakas*, go out for begging food and *sallekana* “inviting or pursuing

death”[9]. In Ellora (Caves I to XIII) and Ajaṅṭā the same type of stone beds are found cut out of the living rock in small cells. These caves consist of a hall for the monks to sit together and read their scriptures. These rock-cut beds found in Aḷakarmalai and Tirupparankuṅṅam are contemporaneous with the Caṅkam Age[10].

Scholars depending on mythologies say the Jains were persecuted by the reviving Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism during the age of *bhakti*[11]. This could not be the case because the Jain inscriptions down to the 10<sup>th</sup> century are reported from the Āṇaimalai hills. The Early Pāṇḍya kings were patrons of the Jains. The Jains, Vaiṣṇavas and Kaumāras seem to have coexisted in Āṇaimalai. In due course the Buddha[12] and Jīna[13] were admitted in the Vaiṣṇava pantheon as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Therefore, the persecution of Jains or Buddhists by the Śaivas or Vaiṣṇavas could not be a reality[14]. Mounting the Jains on stakes in the TVP is a myth.

The two cave temples for Nṛsiṃha and Murukaṅṅ is another case of religious dialogue leading to amity. The patron of the Nṛsiṃha cave is identified with Maturakavi Āḷvār, which means a Vaiṣṇava was a minister under a Śaiva king.

The Jain beds are located on a detached outcrop of the main hill. The rock beds are carved on rocks with an image of Tīrthaṅkara on top of the rock. The venue is solitary away from human settlements. The Tīrthaṅkara is the first even carved image, symbolizing meditation or *yoga*.

The Murukaṅṅ cave and Nṛsiṃha temple are within walking distance. The Murukaṅṅ cave must have been busy in those time of the early Pāṇḍyas. Fred Clothey identifies the Kuṅṅu or Paraṅkuṅṅu of *Paripāṭal* and *Murukāṅṅuppaṭai* with Āṇaimalai that was a ‘weeping hill’. The rock-cut temple is of the Mahendravarmaṅṅ type with a cella and *maṅḍapa*. The cella houses the images of seated Murukaṅṅ with Vaḷḷi on his left side[15]. The entrance to the cave is provided by balustrade steps, which houses an image of a divinity holding a club in his right hand.

The outer wall accommodates some *siddha*-like[16] figures that need not be *dvārapālakas*. Murukaṅṅ temples are usually associated with *siddhas* whose literature on the impermanence of mundane life is later.

The cave temple for Nṛsiṃha is of the same model as the previous cave. It houses a rock-cut image of Yoga-Nṛsiṃha[17] in the cella. On the top of the cornice, a later stucco image of Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṃha is added. This image find Lakṣmī seated on the lap of Nṛsiṃha. Yoga-Nṛsiṃha or Ugra-Nṛsiṃha is a *ugra*-Mūrti. His ferociousness is subsided when Lakṣmī is present. This is a dialogue within Vaiṣṇavism in which an angry divinity is converted benign by the presence of the Feminine Principle. This is to suggest men aggressive many is turned peaceful by the feminine. The Mother is always a Śāntamūrti. She acquires a *ghora* form, e.g. Kālī, when provoked by demons.

The structural work added during the later times, possibly during Vijayanagara-Nāyaka or post-Nāyaka period, has provided scope for the accommodation of a number of stuccowork. These sculptures are not reported in any scholarly work[18]. Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṃha is a later medieval development. In early medieval (.e.g. Āṇaimalai[19], Ciṅka Periumāḷkōyil[20] and Nāmakkal[21]) art Nṛsiṃha appears all alone, or what is known as Kevala Nṛsiṃha[22].

The ideology behind Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṃha is pacification of masculine fury by the *śāntaḡuṅa* of the Goddess. This may be called Śrīvaiṣṇavism, Viṣṇu under the spell of Devī. Śrīvaiṣṇavism as a codified system of thought was the outcome of the later medieval commentators on the Āḷvārs’ works, e.g. the Ḽṭu of Nam Piḷḷai and Periyavāccāṅṅ Piḷḷai. It is systematically propagated during and after the time of Śrī Rāmānujācārya. For the Āḷvārs’ Tiru (equated with Śrī) is Viṣṇu.

This is a case of dialogue between Viṣṇuism and Śāktam. Puruṣa and Puruṣikā are interdependent *śaktis*. Puruṣa without Śakti is powerless and Puruṣikā devoid of Puruṣa is

meaningless. If only Puruṣa and Prakṛti unite that leads to creation, e.g. the Liṅga and Somāskanda. Some rare images of Viṣṇu-Ardhanārī have been reported[24].

## 2. Tirumōkūr

The structure and organization of the Tirumōkūr temple is a good case for dialogue within Nārāyanism[25] or Viṣṇuism[26]. The higher religion called Viṣṇuism consists of major, minor and folk cults. Māl (the Black) or Nārāṇaṇ in course of dialogue with the Āryan cults gets mixed with Viṣṇu, who was a minor divinity in the *Rgveda*. Śāktam gets integrated with the coming of Lakṣmī. Bhūdevī is rooted in an agrarian divinity connected with the soil. Later Kōtai or Āṅṅāḷ, a folk of *kuladevatā* mixes with mainstream Hinduism[27]. Garuḍa and Hanuman were tribal cults. Cakkarattālvār was a *āyudhapuruṣa*[28], cf. the worship of weapons during Āyudhapūjā.

## 3. Māliṛuñcōlai

Periyālvār in his *Tirumōji* (4.3.11) pays a glowing tribute to the Hill/"Grove of Māl", Māliṛuñcōlai, and views the Lord in Āṣṭamūrṭi form.

The Hill of hills that is the residency-grove of the Lord Black, *nāliṛu mūrṭti taṅṅai* He is the four-plus-four Āṣṭamūrṭi[29], *nāl vētak kaḷalamutai* the ambrosia of the ocean of the four-Vedas, *mēliṛuñ kaḷpakattai* the *kalpaka* (all-giving tree) of the celestial world, *vētānta*[30] *viḷupporuḷiṅ mēliṛunta viḷakkai* He is the Light that is up above the inner meaning of the Vedas (Vedānta), *viḷṭucittaṅ virittaṅavē* that Viṣṇusiddha had explicated[31].

"The Hill of hills, Māliṛuñcōlai is the residency-grove of the Lord Black. He is the four-plus-four Āṣṭamūrṭi, the *aṣṭākṣara-svarūpa*. Ambrosia of the ocean of the four-Vedas, the Lord is the *kalpaka* of the celestial world. He is the Light that is higher than the inner meaning of Vedānta[32]. Viṣṇusiddha has explicated the philosophies of Viṣṇu in this *tirumōji*."

Bhūvarāhamūrṭi is the third incarnation of Viṣṇu whose destined avocation was to rescue the Mother Earth, Bhūdevī from the demon, Hiraṇyākṣa. In iconographic illustrations, the Lord is graced with a boar-head and human body. The Lord lifts Bhūdevī by his tusks or canine teeth from the *pralaya* waters. A Pallava classical image is present in the Varāhamaṇḍapa of Māmallapuram. Besides, there is a cave temple for Ādi-Varāhamūrṭi in Kaḷal-mallai as it was known to the Ālvārs[33]. Varāhamūrṭi is the cult Mūrṭi in this cave, which tradition is living today[34], i.e. regular ritual takes place here. Nearby, another *divyadeśa*-Viṣṭantai is found where the Lord Nityakalyāṇa-mūrṭi is honoured with marriage festival on each day during *nityotsava*[35].

Garuḍa is the *vāhana* of Viṣṇu, celebrated in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*[36]. He is the Periyatiruvāṭi in medieval Tamil Vaiṣṇava tradition. The Lord mounted on Garuda is known as Garuda-vāhanamūrṭi (see note 50) or Garuḍārūḍa[37], German scholars would consider the Lord under Garuḍasthāna. The image in the present case is found all alone, standing with hands folded in *aṅjalibandha*. Garuda in Indian lore is the fast moving bird as are *mayil*-Murukaṅ and *hamsa*-Brahmā or Brahmī. Garuda and Hanuman are likely to be tribal totemic emblems, absorbed in Viṣṇuism[38]. Garuda is a *vāhana* in Vaiṣṇava temples employed for festival processions (see figure above).

## 4. Tiruvātavūr

This temple also deems an intensively examination from the sculptural point of view. We prefer to report some select specimen on random sampling basis relating to the various aspects of Hindu iconography bearing on Śiva and related divinities leading to a dialogue. The temples for Tirumaṅgainātha and Māṅṅikkavācakar are the veritable abodes of iconography. Māṅṅikkavācakar,

fourth in the order of Aṛpattumūvar commands a dignified status in Pāṇṭimaṇṭalam circle, the other three, the Mūvar belong to the Cōḷa region.

### Devakoṣṭha Images

The *devakoṣṭhas* of the Śiva temple accommodate images of Dakṣiṇāmūrti (south), Liṅgodbhavamūrti (west) and Brahmā (north). Stucco images of the same typology appear on the *vimāna*. Brahmā is unusually attended by *cāmara*-bearers. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is seated below the *āl* tree and attended by *ṛṣis*. Liṅgodbhavamūrti is attended by *haṃsa* and *varāha* to find the root and the crest.

### Stucco Images

Recently renovated stucco images appear on the *vimāna* of the temple and the sub-shrines. These include Bhairava attended by a dog, Candraśekhara, Maḥiṣamardinī-Durgā, Māṇikkavācakar, Caṇḍikeśvara, Nandi on walls and so on.

### Gaṇapati

Gaṇapati is found in various modes such as seated, *sthānaka* and *nṛtya*[39]. An image of seated Gaṇapati is found outside the temple below *aracamaram*, usually called *āṛraṅkarai-ōrattilaracamaram* Piḷḷaiyār. Interestingly, nearby the temple tank and temple car stand are found. People visiting the temple are expected to pay their first veneration to this image.

## 5. Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara of Maturai

The macro in Maturai is the Great Temple for Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara, the radiating zone of religious culture and artistic idioms in the Pāṇṭimaṇṭalam. If Kāñci is for Toṇṭaināṭu and Citamparam for Cōḷanāṭu, Maturai is the Meru of the Deep South. In fact, of the Pañcanṛtyasabhās “Dancing Halls Five”, three are present here, viz. Kūṭal, Nelvēli and Kuṛṭālam.

The sculptural wealth of the temple is beyond statistical calculation. These are in stone, stucco, and wood, bronze, ivory and so on. The images of the Aṛpattumūvar are in bronze, kept in the inner cloister of the Sundareśvara enclave. The stucco images on the five *rāyaḡopuras* have been counted and need to be recounted. Basing on a statistics provided by the temple administration, the estimated total of stucco on the five *gopuras* is 5,000± (Rajarajan 1997: 26). Each temple car provides for more than three hundred wooden images, and each pillar accommodates life-size stone sculptures or those in miniatures.

Śiva arriving as Mother Vārāhī to feed piglets and making them the ministers of the Pāṇḍya king is the theme for the TVP Episodes 45-46. When Śiva as a hunter killed a mother pig, he took pity of the piglets and came as Vārāhī to feed the cubs of the poor creature. Later they were appointed ministers of the Pāṇḍya king. This event took place during the reign of a Pāṇḍya king called Rājarāja, may be during the Cōḷa occupation of the Pāṇḍya country[40].

TVP 53 of Nampi and Patañcali’s Episode 67 deals with the mythology of Śiva feeding gazelle’s cub with tiger’s milk[41]. A mother deer, Tamil *māṇ*, was shot dead by a hunter. Śiva took pity on its cub and came as a mother to feed the cub with tiger’s milk.

### Gaṇapati

A massive figure carved on the rocky slope, the Lord is seated in *ardhapadmāsana*. The hands are two, the right holding the *laḍḍuka*. The proboscis is turned to the right that would make up *valampuri*. Though the cave temples are dated in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century the similarity between the

images of Gaṇapati in Kuṅṅrakuṭi and Piḷḷaiyārpaṭṭi (5<sup>th</sup> century) would suggest, the former should have been modeled after the latter. This would suggest the cult of Gaṇapati was fostered in the region during the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century[42]. Following Udayagiri (Central India) of the Gupta time, Gaṇapati appears in the cult orientation of the Pāṇḍya country. Pallava cave temples in and around Māmallapuram do not include Gaṇapati as in the Pāṇḍyan caves. Gaṇapati cult seems to originate in the Pāṇḍināḍu circle as far as the Drāviḍian region is concerned[43].

### Garuḍa-Viṅṅu

Two images on the subject are found in adjoining caves. Viṅṅu is *dvibhāṅga*, the body tilting at the hip and neck level. Garuḍa-*puruṣa* is standing nearby with the hands held in *aṅḷalibandha*. Viṅṅu holds the *cakra* and *śaṅkha* in *parahastas*. The *cakra* in early medieval art is normally *prayoga*. Since the image is over coated with a Nāyaka period lime pilaster, it seems the original *prayogacakra* stands distorted[44]. The Lord is fitted with a *pītāmbhara* and *kirīṅamakuta*. The other image on the same subject is devoid of the later pilaster. The *cakra* in the right hand is missing and seems to be in inviting attitude, *āvāhanamudrā*.

### Conclusion

The trend traceable in the sculptural programme of the Paraṅkuṅṅram temple is nationalism to regionalism. The cave temples provide for pan-Indian themes such as Devi of the *māhātmyam* (national mythology), the Mātṛkas, Śiva and Viṅṅu. The later medieval Nāyaka additions amply illustrate the regional mythologies such as the *Tiruvīḷaiyāḷar Purāṅam*. Though the Nāyakas came from Vijayanagara, they identified themselves with the regional culture by taking names such as Cokkanātaṅ and Mīnākṣi. They did not give up their original inheritance pointed out by names such as Nāgama Nāyaka and Maṅgammāḷ. Maṅgammāḷ is the *kuladevatā* of some *nāyakkar* communities in Tamilnadu. Besides, the major religions of the pan-Indian tradition such as Śivaism, Viṅṅuism, Śāktam, Gāṅapatya and Kaumāra found chance for a dialogue leading to unity of thought through religion, art and culture.

### Notes and References

1. *Puruṣasūkta*, v. 1.
2. *Saundaryalahari*, v. 7.
3. *Śrītattvanidhi*, Vol. I, 1-3.
4. Bhairava is a form consisting of 64 types.
5. The *avatāras* of Viṅṅu are ten, called *daśāvatāra*.
6. The *yoginis* listed in the *Śrītattvanidhi* (1. 9-15) are seven. They are sixty-four in Tantric sources.
7. H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, pl. 33.
8. K.R. Srinivasan, *Cave Temples of the Pallavas*, pl. XLVI.
9. S. Settar, *Inviting Death...* Dharwad 1986.
10. Recently, some of the Tamil-Brahmī inscriptions have been dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which means extension of the Caṅkam Age to a much earlier date than the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.
11. For example, an earlier generation of scholars believed the Sātavāhanas persecuted the Jains and Buddhists. Now, scholars say the Sātavāhanas donated a number of cave temples in the Deccan to the Buddhists.
12. See the Māmallapuram Pallava inscription including the Buddha among the *daśāvatāras*. Vide, ARE 1922, no. 663; K.R. Srinivasan, *Cave Temples of the Pallavas*, p. 173.

13. The Vidyāśānkara temple in Śringeri includes the Jina sculpture among the *daśāvatāras*.
14. D.N. Jha, "Contesting Stereotypes: The Case of Hindu Identity", In Lorenzetti & Scialpi eds. 2012:127-52.
15. This cave open some twenty years ago is closed with iron grills. See an early photo (end of 1980s) in Kalidos (2006: IV, I, pl. II.2).
16. Ibid. pls. XLV.
17. The temple is under active worship. Photography is beyond reach. However, R.K. Parthiban (2018a: fig. 2) was able to obtain a picture, which is pending publication in *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Südasiastudien*.
18. Now, the vigilance network is adamant, not giving any scope for photography. We had to depend on scholars who have already worked on the temple (Rajajaran 2006: 43-44, Plan I) and Parthiban (2018a).
19. Raju Kalidos, *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Iconography...*, Vol. I, pp. 224-25.
20. K.R. Srinivasan, *Cave Temples of the Pallavas*, pp. 110-12.
21. Vidya Dehejia, *Namakkal Caves*, Madras, 1969; V.G. Rajan, "Nṛsiṃha Cave at Nāmakkal. Its Iconographical Significance". *East and West*, 49: 1-4 (1999), 189-94.
22. Raju Kalidos, "The Malaiyaḍippaṭṭi Cave Temples, South Asian Studies, Vol. IV (1988), pls. I-II. This cave temple also accommodates Kevala-Varāhamūrti in seated aspect.
23. *Tiruvantāti* III, v. 1.
24. R.K.K. Rajajaran, "Dance of Ardhanārī: A Historiographical Retrospection". In Lorenzetti & Scialpi eds. 2012: 233-70, pl. 9.
25. The epic, *Maṇimēkalai* in the Camayakkaṇakkariṭṭamkēṭṭakātai talks of Nāraṇaṇ-kāppu, Nārāyana originating in *nīr* (see Keny 1942).
26. Following Jan Gonda (1954, 1970) Vaiṣṇavism is called Viṣṇuism by authorities in the field.
27. Santhana-Lakshmi-Parthiban, "Iconography of the Śakti Goddesses: A Case for Digitalization", *QJMS* (2014), Vol. 105: 3, pp. 72-85.
28. Jeyapriya-Rajajaran, "A Note on Vaccirakkōṭṭam", *East and West*, Vol. 54: 1-4 (2004), pp. 291-302.
29. Peryavāccāṇ Piḷḷai says, it is the *Aṣṭākṣara-rupa*, Om Na Mō Nā Rā Ya Na Ya. The Aṣṭamūrtis in this case are the personifications of *Aṣṭākṣaras*; the eight-Mūrtis identified from Vijayanagara-Nāyaka temples of *Aḷakakōyil-kalyāṇamaṇḍapa* and *Tāṭikkompu-raṅgamaṇḍapa* are Varāhamūrti, Nṛsiṃha, Trivikrama, Dāśarathi-Rāma, Venugopāla, Manmatha (or Pradhymna), Garuḍa-Nārāyaṇa, and *Garuḍa* or *Cakkarattālvār* (Rajajaran 2004: 89).
30. Vētānta/Vedānta is the "end of the Vedas".
31. Rajajaran et al. 2017: III, 1296.
32. The Lord is the end of the *Vedas*.
33. For the hymns on Kaṭal-mallai *talacayanam*, *sthalaśayana* see Jeyapriya-Rajajaran, "Sthalaśayana in the Archive of the Ālvārs", *QJMS*, Vol. 108: 2 (2018), pp. 12-28.
34. R. Champakalakshmi, *The Hindu Temple*, pl. p. 80.
35. R.K. Parthiban, "Varaha's Tusks...", *Indologica Taurinensia*.
36. P. Chandramohan, *Garuḍa in Medieval Literature and Art*, Pls.
37. Raju Kalidos, *Temple Cars of Medieval Tamiḷaham*, pl. 46.
38. Raju Kalidos, "The Wood Carvings of Tamilnadu: An Iconographical Survey". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1, pp. 98-125.
39. Seventeen forms of Subrahmaṇya are reported. See *Śrītattvanidhi* 3.102-118.

40. Ibid. pp. 35-36.
41. Ibid. pp. 42-43.
42. During the Caṅkam Age, scholars suggest no evidence of the Gaṇapati cult is detected even if Gaṇapati is considered the elder brother of Murukaṇ. Murukaṇ was the presiding God of the Kuṛiñci land. Maybe, Gaṇapati as Śiva was God of all lands.
43. Raju Kalidos, *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Iconography...*, Vol. IV, Pt. I, Annexure on 'Vātāpi Gaṇapati'.
44. R.K.K. Rajarajan, "The Iconography of the Kailāsanātha Temple Seeing Beyond the Replastered Images and Yoginīs", *Indologica Taurinensia*, XLI-XLII (2015-16), 99-148.