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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**MANUSCRIPTS ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CHOLA AND VIJAYANAGARA NAYAK
(LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD)**

Dr.R.Anuradha

*Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of History, Sri Sarada College for Women
(Autonomous), Salem – 16.
Email id: anuradha.pugal@gmail.com.*

Abstract

Stone and metal sculptures in Chola temples depict socio-religious ideas. The Nataraja sculpture is famous not only for its beauty, but also for its spiritual significance. In Vaishnava temples, there is a Vishnu idol. In sculptural representations of Alwars, a spiritual calmness is depicted. The Cholas used sculptures to decorate the walls, pillars, and roofs. The importance of sculpture is palpable in Chola works. The decorative sculptures are still in place. During the Chola period, realism dominated sculpture. Scenes from the Ramayanam Mahabharatam, Puranas, and the lives of the 63 Nayanmars are sculpted in narrative panels on temple walls. Vijayanagara period sculptures in stone and bronze represent distinctive and rich stylistic traditions. The art of the Vijayanagar-Nayaka period is multi-dimensional because all the available raw materials were exploited such as wood, stone, stucco, painting, bronze and so on. The iconographic specimens in wood and stucco are beyond the survey of a statistical analysis because each temple car accommodates not less than 300 wooden images. Several innovative themes appear in the wood carved temple cars and the stucco on gopuras. Studies on iconometric conventions and iconographic aspects have a role to play in terms of gaining more insights into the traditional modeling of such sculptural examples. This is relevant especially given that the images have had their own individual trajectories in the course of time, as for example some of the images that were damaged or broken. One of the points of interest in terms of studies in 3D modeling and digital restoration is that apart from in situ examples of stone sculptures extant in the numerous monuments at the World Heritage Site of Hampi, there are some examples of sculpture, to be found in collections such as Kamalapura museum, Hampi, and from the region of Hampi, which have missing body parts, including of the head and torso, and which include stone portrait sculptures. Hence, comparisons with intact examples in different media can give us a better sense of the totality of the artistic vision in those examples. A major aspect that this study dwells upon is thus the identification of similar themes executed in stone, bronze, stucco, and so on and for purpose of comparisons between the iconometric aspects of modeling and portrayals of themes in different sculptural media. Using the traditional

talamana canon, a bronze Lakshmi Narasimha image from Chandragiri Museum has also been studied in relation to the well-known stone Ugra Narasimha which in itself represents a reconstructed version of a damaged image.

Keywords: Chola, Vijaya Nagara , Nayaks, Sculpture, icons

Introduction

The present study examines the status of the Mother Goddesses during the later medieval period that is supposed to extend from the Cholas of the imperial period down to the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka time (c. 850 to 1700). It was during this period that the Goddess cult was crystallized in South India. Majestic temple dedicated to the goddesses and iconographic illustrations signifying the Tantric orgies were consolidated during this great saga of Indian experiment with religious tradition. These temples were particularly extensively built and the Śākta tradition adumbrated in Central India and Orissa.¹ Śakti is viewed the primordial Principle was could subordinate the masculine gods. She is seated on the *pañca*-Brahmās as *Pañca-pretāsanāsinī*-*Sadāśivī*.²

Cholas

The Cholas were a dominant political power during the Caṅkam Age that was pushed to the background with the advent of the Pallavas and Pāṇḍyas. They seem to have survived as minor potentates in the region round Paḷayārai in the Kāviri delta. With the fall of the Pallavas and Pāṇḍyas in the mid-9th century, they emerged into the picture by about 850 with the advent of Vijayālaya. They were destined to rule for the four centuries to come. Their rivals were the Cālukyas of Kalyāṇi.

The Cholas were preeminently Śaivas. Most of the temples built by them are dedicated to Śiva. Good examples are the Rājarājeśvarams at Tañcai, Kaṅkaikoṅṭa Cholapuram and Tārācuram in addition to the Kampahareśvara temple at Tiripuvanam, considered by art historians the four great masterpieces.^[3] However, under the spell of the *bhakti* movement they also built few temples for Viṣṇu. Chola art in view of its broad

chronological framework is brought under three broad heads by experts in the field, e.g. S.R. Balasubramanian. They are:⁴

- Early Chola: Vijayalaya (c. 850) to Uttama Chola (985) Middle
- Middle Chola Rajaraja I (985) to Adhirajendra (1070)
- Later Chola Kulottunga I (1070) to Rajendra III (c. 1279 CE)

Vijayālaya is said to have commenced the great saga of Chola art by building a temple for Niṣumbhasūdinī at Tañcai^[5] This is important idea from the dynastic point of view because the founder of an empire is said to have inaugurated his regime by instituting a temple for the Mother Goddess who shall be the protector for the time to come. Most of the Chola temples on the northern *devakoṣṭha* find images of Devī standing on the decapitated buffalo-head that became a stereo-typed pattern.⁶

Another important norm-setting development was that temples for Śiva came to be added with a separate shrine for Devī, called *Tirukkāmakkōṭṭam* since the time of Rājendra I.⁷ Even if the example at Kaṅkaikoṅṭa Cholapuram is hazy, a solid example is the Tārācuram temple where the two temples for Airāvateśvara and his mistress stand side by side.

From a statistical analysis of the material supplied by S.R. Balasubramanian, it has been ascertained the Cholas built totally not less than 329 temples for Śiva (266), Devī (9), Viṣṇu (48), Gaṇapati, Murukan, Sūrya and other divinities.⁸

The cult of the Goddess was gaining prominence under the Cholas as proved by the separate temples built for Devī and the increasing number of iconographical specimens.

Vijayanagara-Nāyaka

The Vijayanagara period is a turning point in the history of South India. The Islamic invaders that took Delhi and conquered the entire north by about the time of Ala-ud-din Khilji turned to the south early in the 13th century. To set right the balance the Vijayanagara Empire was founded with Vijayanagara as the metropolis in 1336. By about that time the Khiljis had conquered the entire subcontinent up to Rāmeśvaram. They destroyed the famous temple centers,¹⁰ and deprived the temples of their endowments for conducting regular *pūjās* and periodical *utsavas*. The society was groaning under the repressive regime of the vandals. Kumāra Kampana was sent to the south by Emperor Bukka-rāya in 1371. He removed the pests in Maturai and reassured the benevolent regime of the Hindu *dharma*.

Vijayanagara rulers were followed by the Nāyakas who were posted at vital centers in South India to guard the land from further molestation. Thus, four dynasties were established at the following places:¹¹

- Kelasi – Ikkeri 1499 CE
- Maturai 1929
- Tancavur 1549
- Cenci 1526-1567

Pioneering studies on history of the Nāyakas mostly concentrated on political transactions.

It is practically an unwieldy adventure to summarize the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka art to Indian heritage. A much neglected theme in research, a new impetus was given to the subject by scholars of the Tamil University teach under the inspiration of Prof. Raju Kalidos as Chairman of the Department. It is now a vigorously pursued at the international circle.

The art of the Vijayanagar-Nāyaka period is multi-dimensional because all the available raw materials were exploited such as wood, stone, stucco, painting, bronze and so on. The iconographic specimens in wood and stucco are beyond the survey of a statistical analysis because each temple car accommodates not less than 300

wooden images.^[12] R.K.K Rajarajan (2006), Rajarajan & Jeyapariya (2013), M. Ragunatha (2014) and J. Soundararajan (2015) have reported a cavalcade of stucco images from the gopuras of South India. Several innovative themes appear in the wood carved temple cars and the stucco on *gopuras* (see the back volumes of *East and West, Rome, Annali...Naples, Acta Orientalia, Oslo, Religions of South Asia, UK, and the Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, Bengaluru*). It is practically a hazardous task to report all these iconographical specimens bearing on either Devī or Śiva and Viṣṇu. Therefore, what is proposed in this part of the chapter is just to summarize the earlier findings in a tabular form. References are given following the Harvard method.^[13]

- Mīnākṣī¹⁴ (R-J 2013: pls. 6, 27, 33, 37, 77)
- Mīnākṣī-*kalyāṇam*¹⁵ (R-J 2013: pls. 16, 86, 117, 133) Pañcapretāsanāsinī-
- Sadāsivī¹⁶, called Rājarājeśvarī in *Śrītattvanidhi*, (Rajarajan 1997: fig. 2,
- Jeyapriya 2014: figs. 1-6, Rajarajan 2006: II, pl.61)
- *Aṣṭabhuja-Cāmuṇḍā* (Kalidos 1989: pl. 69), Cāmuṇḍa seated (JS 2015:fig. 94)
- Mahiṣāsūramardinī posted on buffalo-head (Kalidos 1989: pl. 64) Mahiṣamardinī endowed with three-breasts^[17] (R-J 2013: pls. 105-106)
- Niśumbhasūdinī (Ragunath 2014: pl. 153)
- Lakṣmī (JS 2015: pl. 93)
- Gaḷalakṣmī (Ragunath 2014: pls. 162-163) Sarasvati holding *vīṇā* (Ragunath 2014: pl. 12) Coronation of Taṭātakai (Rajarajan 2006: pl. 62)
- Kālī (Rajarajan 2006: pl. 68), Dancing Kālī (Kalidos 1989: pl. 65) Gaṇapati tossed in a cradle by Devī and Śiva^[18] (Rajarajan 2006: pl.69)
- Devī holding neck of Nīlakaṇṭha (Rajarajan 2006: pl. 71) and Churning the Ocean of Milk (Kalidos 1989: pl. 53)
- Āṅṭāl (Rajarajan 2006: pl. 72)
- *Sthānaka-Nṛsimhī* (Ragunath 2014: pl. 151)

- Dancing Nṛsimhī (Rajajaran 2006: pl. 192)
- Pañcamukha-Nṛsimhī (Rajajaran 2006: pl. 73) Taṭātakai-*avatāram*, born in fire (R-J 2013: pls. 73-74)
- Taṭātakai endowed with three-breasts (Rajajaran 2006: pls. 180-183, R-J2013: pls. 75-76, 96-97)
- Skanda-*mātā* (Rajajaran 2006: pl. 189)
- Sapta Mātrkās seated in a row (Ragunath 2014: pls. 147, 149)
- *Sthānaka*-Brāhmī (Kalidos 1989: pl. 63, Ragunath 2014: pl. 150)
- Vārāhī (Rajajaran 2006: pl. 193, JS 2015: figs. 96-97)
- Vārāhī feedings piglets (Kalidos 1989: pl. 51, R-J 2013: pls. 98, 121) Mohinī with big breasts (Rajajaran 2006: pls. 195-197); Mohinī's sport with Bhasmāsura and Śiva (Kalidos 1986: figs.)
- Satyabhāma with Kṛṣṇa seated on Garuḍa to slay Narakāsura (Kalidos 1989: pl. 46)
- Ardhanārīśvara (attended by *ṛṣis* Kalidos 1989: pl. 49), seated (R-J 2013: pl. 88)
- Gaṅgā descending on the matted locks of Śiva (Kalidos 1989: pl. 50) Vigneśvarī (Kalidos 1989: pl. 67)
- Devī as *yāli-vāhinī* (Ragunath 2014: pl. 148)
- Yogīśvarī (Ragunath 2014: pl. 154)
- Icchā-Śakti (Ragunath 2014: pl. 157)
- Kṛya-Śakti (Ragunath 2014: pl. 155)
- Jñāna-Śakti (Ragunath 2014: pl. 156)
- Caṇḍikeśvarī (Ragunath 2014: pl. 158)
- Navagrahas with Devīs (JS 2015: fig. 156)
- Candra with Devīs (JS 2015: fig. 17)
- A feminized Sūltān of Maturai (R-J 2013: pl. 115)

Conclusion

Few samples have been presented above to show iconography was an evolving phenomenon during the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period. Few of these forms may not command śāstraic mandate, e.g. Devī and Śiva fondling child-Gaṇapati in a cradle.

Bāla-Gaṇapati is a canonic theme. Several new forms were given shape during the Nāyaka and post-Nāyaka periods. A systematic survey of these monuments is needed.

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4. S.R. Balasubramaniyan, *Early Chola Temples* (Delhi 1971), *Middle Chola Temples* (Faridabad 1978) & *Later Chola Temples* (Madras 1979); Sitanarasimhan, *Śaivism under the Imperial Cholas as reflected in their Monuments* (Delhi 2006). For proceedings of a seminar on Rājendra Chola see J. Soundararajan ed. 2016.
5. "Durgā" according to K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas* (Madras 1984), pp. 116.
6. This tradition began under the later Pallavas as may be found in the Pallava temples at Takkōlam and Tiruttani.
7. K.R. Srinivasan *Temples of South India*, p. 148.
8. Sitanarasimhan, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 61. The actual figures may be more. This survey seems to be lacking in precision not duly consider in the images in site museums.
10. For the sad plight of the Hindu temples and institutions see the *Madhurāvijayam* of Gaṅgādevī, Canto VIII.
11. R.K.K. Rajajaran, *Art of the Vijayanagara-Nāyakas...*, pp. 202-204.
12. For a statistical analysis see Raju Kalidos, "The Wood Carvings of Tamilnadu: An Iconographical Survey". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1 (1988), pp. 98-125; *Temple Cars of Medieval Tamiḷaham* (1989), pp. 397-400.

13. In the following description the following abbreviations are adopted: R-J R.K.K. Rajarajan & Jeyapriya, JS: J. Soundararajan
14. Devī of Maturai along with Viṣālākṣī of Kāśī and Kāmākṣī of Kāñci are popular Mother Goddesses in popular Hinduism today.
15. Relates to the popular festival of Maturai in the Tamil month of *Cittirai*.
16. Devī seated on the five corpses of the masculine divinities such as Brahmā, Rudra and Viṣṇu.
17. Representation of Taṭātakai as Mahiṣamardinī.
18. A popular portrait of Vigneśvaraprasannamūrti.
