

Sri Jnana - Dakshinamurti Sculpture At Thiruvennainallur

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Introduction

Thiruvennainallur, a village located 12 miles from Villupuram on the Panruti - Thirukovilur Road. Villupuram District of Tamilnadu. There is a Siva temple dedicated to the Hindu god Siva Kripapureeswrarar temple (Plate No. 2) constructed in the Dravidian style of architecture, is belived to have been built during Cholas period. Thiruvennainallur is a tribute to the architects and artisans who created with spectacular testament. Sri Jnana – Dakshinamurti sculpture is are of the best example of the Chola period. This article deals with the art of sculpture is branch of Visual Arts.

History of Dakshinamurti

The prehistoric times, worship of god has been in existence in Tamilnadu. The god is conceived by the people of Tamilnadu as desireless; yet he reveals himself as “the atom within the atom”, being the life force of all existence; at the same time he is beyond the Universe. Worship of god must have been coeval with man’s knowledge of god. The three main forms of worship are; i) Aru uruva form of worship of the shapeless, (ii) Aruva form spirit worship and iii) Uruva valipadu image or idol worship.¹ Of these, image worship is of much later origin. Icon, Image, Idol are the three terms in English language for the objects of ritualistic worship and spiritual experience in Hinduism.²

The longing to give a form to a god or a goddess near to one's heart led to image worship and this in turn led to the moulding of many idols and carving of many statues and many forms for god and goddess. The Siva (Linga) worship existed even before the dawn of history. John Marshall and other historians hold that this form of worship is unmistakably indicated in the Indus Valley Civilization.³ P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar says in his "Stone Age in India" that (Siva)linga worship must have originated in ancient Tamilnadu as it existed here even in the Old Stone Age.⁴ To sum up, the ancient Tamils first worshipped god as an invisible being: later the linga worship must have followed suit and thereafter ever so many images and idols came to be worshipped in different temples.

The sculpture of Siva in Hindu temples of Tamil nadu is an essential feature to trace the history of our land. One of the earliest available evidences of Saivite sculpture is a reference to the 3rd century C.E. by Poryphyry to an image in a cave in the north of India, which from the description to the form of Ardhanariswara.⁵

The various forms of Siva in these sculptures are Uma-Maheswara, Ardhanarisvara, Lakulisa, Ravananugraha, Yoga-Dakshinamurti, Uma-Sahita murti, Vyakhyana-Dakshinamurti, Gangadhara Siva, Sadasiva, Lingodbhavamurti, Samharamurti, Bhairava, Mahesamurti, etc. The idea lying behind the worship of the *phallic emblem* (Sivalinga) is primitive based on fertility cult.⁶ The lingas, salagramas and yantras are symbolic representations of the divinities. The association of the pita and yoni is a later development due to tantric influence. Apart from worship of linga in totally aniconic form, in another class of sculptures, the figure of Siva appears on the (form) part of a linga shaped stone block. There are various types of Siva lingas.⁷ According to the agamas and other texts which are known as *sthirlingas* or immovable lingas, banalingas associated with the rishis and *manushalingas* have been made up human beings according to canonical injunctions. Sivalingas are further named as *Dharalinga*, *Sahasralinga*, *Mukhalinga*, etc.⁸

Sri Dakshinamurti is also represented and worshipped in the Linga form, For instance, the Mahakal Jyotirlinga, cream in color and facing south, in the ancient temple of Mahakaleshwar in Ujjain is revered as Sri Dakshinamurti. In Sri Pashupatinatha temple at Kathmandu, the south face of Sivalinga is regarded as his anugraha (grace) or Jnana aspect and worshipped as Dakshinamurti.⁹ Similarly, the Linga in the five hundred years old cave temple of Sri Gangadareswara in Bangalore is considered Dakshinamurti swarupam. In the Vaikkum Mahadeva temple in Kerala and the deity enshrined in the form of Siva linga is worshipped as Sri Dakshinamurti.¹⁰ Sri Dakshinamurti is also represented in the form of *salagrama*. The Dakshinamurti *salagrama* has the shape of a conch, but is black in color.

In all temples the idol of Sri Dakshinamurti is either carved on the wall, or placed in a niche or in a small shrine. Many temple towers to carry various versions of Sri Dakshinamurti image.¹¹ Before considering the origin and development of the Dakshinamurti cult in detail, a few general observations on the Guru concept have been found necessary. The Sanakdi Munis cleared their doubts and understood that he alone was the true Sadguru.¹² Since Dakshinamurti form of Siva is associated with Guru concept, here the discussion of the above concept in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and its effects on each other is essential.¹³

The importance of finding a guru, who can impart knowledge (vidya) is emphasised in Hinduism. Hence one should accept Dakshinamurti as a Guru as he appears so. Dakshinamurti is one of the twenty five sportive forms of Siva (*lilamurtis*) Siva's forms are classified into three aspects, that is *vega* aspect, *boga* aspect, and *yoga* aspect. Dakshinamurti form comes under the *yoga* aspect. He is regarded as the repository of all arts and wisdom.¹⁴

The origin of this form is interesting. Once upon a time, Daksha, the father-in-law of Siva, insulted Him and His consort Uma, by not inviting them to a sacrifice which he was performing. Uma went there without invitation, but being neglected,

jumped into the fire-pit and destroyed herself.¹⁵ This made Siva furious. He created Virabhadra out of his hair who destroyed Daksha. Then Siva retired to a forest and sat underneath a Banyan tree deeply engaged in meditation. After some time, Siva gave up His penance and married once again Uma, who had now incarnated herself as Parvati.¹⁶

The history of Siva Dakshinamurti worship with its long history and tradition occupies an important place in the religious life of Tamils. Dakshinamurti form of Siva has a distinction of its own from the remote past.¹⁷ Archaeological sources vouchsafe for the antiquity of the Dakshinamurti cult. Some epigraphical evidences and literary sources of this study contain valuable references relating to this form. Inscriptions of the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas throw adequate light on the Dakshinamurti cult.¹⁸

Its antiquity goes back to the days of the Indus Valley Civilization. It has its continuity through the (Vedas and Upanishads) Vedic period (Agamas). During the age of Sangam, some of the literatures speak about this form of Siva as ‘Alamar Kadavul’ and ‘Alamar Selvan’.¹⁹ After the close of the Sangam age (at the Kalabhras) there was confusion in the political history of Tamilnadu. Many of the South Indian dynasties were adversely affected. But the unproved fact is that they followed Saivism.²⁰ Overthrow of the Kalabharas, established the Pallava power. During the Pallava age the Saiva Nayanmars made the greatest contributions to the Saiva revival in the Tamil Country. In their literature they praised Lord Siva Dakshinamurti in their poems ‘Thirumurai’. From this fact, it is known that the various images of Dakshinamurti are present in several parts of Tamilnadu.²¹

The Cholas revived their rule after the Pallavas. They are ardent followers of Saivism. Hymns of ‘Thevaram’ saints reflect their intense devotion to the Dakshinamurti aspect of Siva during this period. After the sway of the imperial Cholas, the Pandyas came to power. Their literature gives a vivid picture of this form

of Siva.²² The Tamil Purana, ‘Thiruvilaiyadal Purana’, the National Purana of the Pandyas has served as a great source for this Dakshinamurti aspect of Siva. The Vijayanagar and Nayak literature are measured in small quantity regarding this form. Adi Sankarar also through his hymns glorified this form of Siva.²³

Siva, the great God is an ambivalent divinity in his role as a teacher; one of his forms has been given an exceptional importance in the sculpture of Tamil Nadu. The concept of Dakshinamurti sculpture from the Pallava period in Tamilnadu.²⁴ The popularity of Dakshinamurti cult began to spread from the 7th century A.D. onwards with the increasing production of Saivite images. A religious trend that advocates the esoteric reversal of social values is embodied by the impure Dakshinamurti.²⁵

This form of study further depicts that this image is present in the several works of painting in the temples of Tamil Nadu belonging to the different periods. This study is to some extent based on the mythological data. It can be seen from innumerable puranic literature and sthala puranas. They supply ample history pertaining to the sacred place of the Dakshinamurti form of Siva.²⁶

Dakshinamurti worship on Thursdays plays a very prominent role in the social life of the people of Tamils. “The look of Guru brings about a crore benefits” is a famous dictum. As per astrology, they started to worship Dakshinamurti to get all fortunes²⁷ and gnan. In order to emphasize the importance of Guru, Lord siva himself manifested as the supreme Guru, Sri Dakshinamurthi. The ultimate Guru who faces south is worshipped in all temples.²⁸

Jnana – Dakshinamurti (Plate No: 1)

The Jnana - Dakshinamurti has a well executed *jata makuta* ornamented with jewelled discs and bands round it’ *kundalas* in the ears; and *hara* and necklace of *rudraksha* seeds and *yajnopavita* on the chest. The forearms are adorned with a number of bracelets and the upper arm with *keyuras*. The legs are crossed one over

the other so as to bring the soles up; this is exactly the *yogic asana* called the *svastikasana*.²⁹ In the back right hand there appears to have been a *sula*, whose shaft alone now remains, the head being broken; in the back left hand is the *kapala*; the front right hand is held in the *chinmudra* pose and the front left hand also in the pose characteristic of an expounder of sciences.³⁰ This image now goes by the inexplicable name of Gaulisvara and near it and to its proper right is set up in more recent times the figure of Sankaracharya; on the base of the seat of this latter are carved the figures of his four great disciples, living beings, which he keeps under subjection under the tread of his foot. The book he holds in his hand contains all wisdom and illuminates the souls of beings. The *akshamala* which he carries in his hand is the representation of the *tatvas*.³¹ His body is composed of eternal bliss and eternal energy; the wide-spreading banyan tree casting deep shade is the symbol of *maya* (illusion) and the *vrishabha* of Siva is *dharma* (law). Dakshinamurti is teaching the *rishis* who are already deeply versed in the Vedas the *atma-vidya* (knowledge of self and soul) and resuing them from *samsara* (bondage). He is himself imperishable, without birth or death and the *kamalasana* or the lotus-seat upon which he is seated is the symbol of the sacred syllable *Om*.³²

Conclusion

The history of Saivism reveals that it has been one of the widely followed sects of Hinduism. The Dakshinamurti temples even as they remain paramount on the religious side, stand equally paramount in the art of their building construction. Panel sculptures of Dakshinamurti have been cared in several parts of Tamil Nadu exhibiting not only artistic excellence but also the fervour as they are intrinsically connected with several legends in the Sivapurana. Thus, the famous temples of Dakshinamurti that line the length and breadth of the State stand in silent acknowledgement of centuries of history and the patronage of various kingdoms such as the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas and the Vijayanagar-Nayak Kings of

Thiruvannainalur. In short, Thiruvannainallur Temple remains a beacon of artistic and culture values, especially the spiritual attainment of Tamils during medieval age these historical, architectural, sculptural and religious values here made the Temple heritage.



Plate No: 1. Jnana-Dakshinamurti



Plate No: 2. Inner Gopura

End Notes

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