

Socio – Religious And Philosophical Views On The Notable Stories Of Saiva Saints Depicted In The Miniatures Panels Of Darasuram Temple (South India)

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Abstract: *The sculpture in the Airavatesvara temple may be said to be the best among the enormous mass of extent chola images. In their depth of profundity of the facial expressions and pleasing apotheosis of serenity and dignity, in their technical refinement and excellent modelling and in their sensitiveness and restraint they have few parallels in south India plastic art.*

The sculptural art of the Airavatesvara temple compared to the great magnitude of the edifice is not prolific nor is it the product of any atelier noted for refined sensibility and freshness of ideas. Everything has now been standardized in sculpture as well as architecture. All the theme of the bas-reliefs on familiar subjects and episodes even the dance scenes do not cast any spell on the minds of the onlookers. As most of the scenes especially the narrations are restricted to the narrow strip, representing the Kantha of the Upapitha they are devoid of any natural appeal due, in no measure to the positional disadvantage. Besides the black stone images and the icons of dieties the sculptural embellishment of the temple. Includes bas-reliefs of sixty - three Nayanmars in small scales on the walls of the sanctum, decorative designs of different forms like floral and visual patterns and a large variety of architectural motifs.

The sculpture in the Airavatesvara temple are all in black stone, modeled with exquisite features and are found in the niches of the devakosthas of the vimana, ardhmandapa, mahamandapa, mugamandapa and agramandapa in the panjaras above and the cloisters all round. The images of Gods and Goddesses enshrined are those of Dakshinamurthi on the southern wall of the sanctum, Lingodbhava on the west wall and Brahma on the north wall besides Durgadevi.

The Portrait sculptures of the Airavatesvara temple are noteworthy for their exquisite beauty and grandeur. Chola art is only a continuation of the pallava art. The cholas erected huge temples with elaborate portrait sculptures. The Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram has the sculptured frieze a band of sculpture running round the outside of the adhisthana of the main shrine wall set above ground level. A very unique and excellent panel illustrating the stories of the sixty – three Saiva Nayanmars in series deserves special mention. It is full of narrative interest actually the panel contains the most important scenes from the lives of all the sixty-three Saiva saints, depicted in bas-reliefs. The frieze has 78 panels of varying length with the inscriptions only on the top of panels. Fifty inscriptions are visible at present and the rest of them have been disappear but with the help of a panel one can easily identify the stories of the Nayanmars.

I. INTRODUCTION

When we talk of temple sculpture we cannot forget that is Darasuram sculptures. The sculptural art could be used as the best term of spiritual expression and that the true sculpture was fundamentally spiritual. The Darasuram sculptures

representing a new phase in its spiritual advancement and mental evolution. And also they are intensively a higher form of emotive, spiritual and intellectual expression¹. The diverse socio-religious and philosophical elements that permeated in society made for an awakening sing of the mind of the people. The different socio-religious philosophical viewpoints that

confronted the Darasuram sculptures. Therefore this article deals about the notable stories of saiva saints depicted in the miniatures panels as the top line of the base of the vimana and the mandapa of the Darasuram temple².

II. NOTABLE SAIVA SAINTS – MINITURES PANELS

A. SAINT. APPAR

The story of saints Appar, who converted Mahendravarman Pallava and who is always represented with a spud held by his hand against his shoulder, is graphically depicted in a number of scenes. Then there is the story of Tirumular bathing with his wife of the tank beside the temple. This is followed by the story of a saint, who was fond of feeding saiva devotees and whom Siva, in the guise of a Brahmana, once tested by demanding food at mid night, which he supplied. The lable for this runs Elaiyamarangudi Marar kadai. The next Panel illustrates a lion –clad saint carrying a rod in his hand and standing before a scale, in which on one side there are two figures of a man and woman in adoration, and Siva and Parvathi on Nandhi grant them darsana. There is a scene of a king offering his sword to a young lion-clad Saiva saint carrying a staff.



Figure 1: Miniature Panel

B. KANNAPPANAYANAR

The devotion of Kannappanayanar is illustrated by representing him as plucking his eye with an arrow and offering it. Markandeya appears next with the noose of Yama surrounding not only the neck of the adoring saint but also the Linga itself³. Beyond it is the story of a woman with her hair being cut off, as a saint watches this and Siva appears with his consort on his bull high up in the sky.

This is followed by the representation of the legend of a saint playing the flute in a forest surrounded by cows and close to an elephant when siva and Parvathi on bull visit him. The next scene presents a devotee carefully preparing a garland and adoring with it Siva seated in front of a temple with a rosary in his hand.

Then comes the legend of Nanda, the great saint, who bathed in the tank and entered the fire to have access into the portals of the Chidambaram temple and Siva and Parvathi on bull grant him *darsana*. This is labelled Tirunalai-povar kadai. This is followed by the story of Tirukkuriptutondar, the saintly washerman of Kanchi, whose sincerity was tested by Siva, who is here shown as an old Brahna with a staff in his hand demanding his clothes that could not be washed by that evening owing to a storm. Scenes from the life of Chandesa are now shown. The boy-saint is bathing a *linga* under a tree with the milk of his cows: on his father angrily interrupting, Chandesa, not brooking interference, cuts off his legs with an axe. For this he is rewarded by Siva by winding a garland on his head. Chandesa is shown reverently seated at the foot of seated Siva and Parvathi, while he is adorned with the garland. The inscription here reads Saynallurpillaiyar kadai⁴.

C. ST. TIRUJNANASAMBANDA

Next is the story of the boy-saint Tirujnanasambanda, who over-came the Jainas, all shown impaled, by performing the miracle of floating a manuscript against the current of the stream. The saint is depicted as a very small boy with cymbals in his hand and as adored by a devotee from behind. Three nude Jainas, with flowers and other objects in their hands, are shown standing, probably to throw them into the stream and perform a miracle. The king is in the centre of the panel and beyond him are impaled the defeated Jainas. Another carving shows a devotee, who, failing to secure ghee for lighting lamps as directed by an aerial voice from the Siva temple at Tiruvalur (indicated by a bull at the top) is shown filling a vessel with water from a lotus-pond full of fish and birds. The clear inscription here reads *Naminandi adigal*. Then there is the story of the boy-saint Sambanda, described as *Aludaiyapillaiyar* in the inscription. The father is questioning the boy, who points to Siva and Parvati on Nandi and explains that he was fed by them with divine milk.⁵

D. KALIKKAMANAYANAR

Beyond it is the legend of the warrior Kalikkamanayanar, dying on his bed rather than getting cured of paralysis by Sundara-murti, who, in turn, attempts to commit suicide rather than return without curing him. Finally the one is brought to life and the other prevented from killing himself. The inscription here runs *eyarkon kalikkamandar*. Two priests are now presented, homa-fire between them, with a label painted Somasimaranar. A saint adoring siva with a garland is shown next with the label sakkiyanar. This is the story of a Jaina who took to Siva worship and was so lost in it that he did not know even when he used bricks instead of flowers.



Figure 2: Miniature Panel

This is followed by the legend of a great Saiva devotee, who offered his son's flesh to his guest who was no other than Siva in disguise and demanded this ghastly food. When, however, it was cooked, the guest refused to take food in the house of the childless couple but finally appeared before them and restored to life the child, whom the mother received with joy. The label here is *Siruttondar kadai*⁶. Next we have *Seraman*, the Chera king, going to kailasa on an elephant. The label for it runs *Seramanperumal Kadai*. Beyond this is a scene showing a number of scholars and a king. The inscription is in two strips, *Poyyadimaiyillada pulavar and Kurruvanar*, who were all Saiva saints.

The next is a story which is described in the inscription as *Pugalcholanar*. Here the saintly Chola king is so filled with sorrow at the sight of a head of a devotee of Siva in the midst of a number of heads piled in front of him by his victorious commander that, to expiate the sin, he took this enemy's head on his own and entered the fire when Siva and Parvathi appeared on Nandi to bless him. Beyond this is a scene from the life of a king who was fond of rewarding. Saiva saints whether they were sincere or not. He is shown in the company of six pandaram saints. The label for this reads *Narasingamunaiyaraayar*.

E. ADIPATTAN

The story narrated next is that of *Adipattan*, a fisherman, who used to offer the best fish from his daily catch to Siva at *Nagapttinam*. When one day he caught only one fish he willingly offered even that to the God, who immediately appeared before him with his consort on his bull and blessed him. The inscription reads *Adibattar-kadai*. Then is the story of a devotee, who was in the habit of feeding Saiva devotees and who cut off the hands of his wife since she hesitated to welcome and wash the feet of their old servant now turned a recluse, standing at their door as the guest. He is consequently graced by the *darsana* of Siva and Parvathi on bull. The inscription here reads *Kalikkambandar ksdai*. A saint is now shown as driving a pair of bulls for pressing oil, which is taken by him to the siva temple beyond the river. One day he failed to get the required oil, so that, to feed the lamps with his own blood, he tried to cut his head, but Siva appeared and

blessed him. The fragmentary inscription here is *Kaliyanar*⁷. The next story, as the inscription shows, is of *Sattiyadar*, a devotee of Siva, who used to cut off the tongue of those who spoke ill of Saiva devotees. A Pallava king who abandoned royal glory for serving the god is now shown four times adoring temples at different places. The inscription here reads *Aiyyadigal kadavarkonar*.

F. KANAMPULANDAR

Another a scene illustrating the story of the saint who regularly used to light lamps in temples, and once failing to obtain money by selling grass for purchasing ghee for the lamps, first lit the grass itself and later his own locks of hair. The devotee is *Kanampulandar*, as the inscription states. The next carving is of the famous author of *Tirukkovai*, who spent all his wealth in renovating temples and finally reached mount Kailasa. The inscription reads *Kariyar*. The next scene shows the conversion of the Pandyan king *Nedumaran* through his queen and minister. The inscription here reads *Nedumaranar*. Another scene shows a king cutting off the hands of his queen with a sword. It illustrates the story of a Pallava king who mutilated his queen for having inadvertently smelt a flower intended for the deity. She had already had her nose cut off by a saint named *Seruttunai* for the same offence. The inscription for this reads *Kalanchinganar*. The incident of the queen's nose being cut by *Seruttunai* is given in the adjacent panel. The inscription here reads *Seruttunaiyandar*. Beyond this is illustrated the story of the saintly priest of the temple at *Srivilliputtur*, who steadfastly worshipped Siva even in the days of a great famine. When he once dropped his water-pot on a linga on account of his extreme infirmity, the god appeared and directed him to seek and find a coin daily near the *bali-pitha*, so that he could sustain himself. The inscription here reads *Pugalttunaiyar*⁸.



Figure 3: Miniature Panel

The next is a scene of a warrior killing a child with his sword, while some women shout in fear and crouch away from him. He then adores Siva on Nandi with Parvathi. It illustrates the story of the commander of a Chola king who killed all his men, including even babies, for having consumed paddy intended for Siva during a famine when he was away in the battlefield. The inscription here reads *kolpuliyanar*.

The next scene is of saint adoring a number of other saints – an act which is as meritorious as adoring Siva himself. The

inscription reads Battaraippanivar. The following scene shows, devotees signing and sounding Cymbals in front of a siva temple. The label reads Paramanaiye paduvar, meaning that their songs of praise are only for Siva. In the same train of thought is a scene showing a saint in contemplation, seated in the vicinity of a temple whence the deity is taken out in procession to the accompaniment of music and dance outside the temple near the bali-pitha and Nandi. The next scene shows saints adoring Siva at Tiuvarur. The inscription reads Tiruvaruporandar, meaning that, everyone born in the holy spot of Tiruvarur is saintly enough to be adored.

Beyond this saint is worshipping linga; there is a bell hanging from above and below there is a conch on a tripod, reminding us of similar objects portrayed in Javanese sculpture. This, with its inscription Mukkalam tirumeni tinduvar, glorifies the greatness of those who worship Siva thrice a day.

Another panel depicts the story of the Pandya king and his queen Mangayarkarasi, who with the help of the boy-saint Sambanda, converted her husband to Saivism. The inscription reads Pandimadevi. Then there is the story of the weaver-saint Nesandar, who always gave away the products of his loom to Saiva devotees. This is indicated by the respective inscription. A beautiful sculpture beyond this shows a king adoring a temple: this is a portrait of one of the Chola monarchs who was ranked among the saints for his devotion. The inscription reads Ko Singapperumal.

G. THIRUNILAKANDAPPERUMBANANAR

The scene that comes next illustrates the story of a devotee and his wife who played musical instruments and sang near the temple of Siva at Madurai. In the hand of the saint is an early type of vina (interesting for the study of ancient musical instruments), and his wife plays of cymbals. The inscription reads *Tirunilakantapperumbananar*. Beyond this can be recognized with the help of the inscriptions Sadaianar and Isainaniyar, the father and mother of Sundara, whose story is illustrated in the succeeding panels⁹.

H. ST. SUNDARA

An old Brahmana with a manuscript and umbrella in his hand talking to a princely youth, with inscription reading *Avana-olaikattinapadi*, illustrates the incident of Siva coming disguised as a Brahmana to fetch Sundara-murti on the day of his marriage to his temple at Tiruvennainallur by presenting a document in proof of his claim over Sundara's person as also earlier over those of his father and grandfather.



Figure 4: Miniature Panel

The scene that follows shows some Saiva saints and a youth sounding cymbals in front of a temple. This illustrates the beginning of Sundara's career as a composer of hymns. The inscription reads *Udaiyanambiyai Andukondaliyapadi*. After this a princely youth, evidently Sundara, is shown leading a king beside a temple and directing him to cross a river to reach another temple of Siva beyond it. The inscription here reads *Udaiyanambikku ollenrarulinapadi*¹⁰. The next scene shows Sundara, almost princely in appearance with peacock-feather umbrella carried by one of his attendants, waylaid by dacoits and robbed of the wealth he got from the Chera king. The inscription here runs *Udaiyanambiyai Vedar valipparittavidam*. Further up is a scene showing Sundara sounding cymbals in the vicinity of a temple where a number of bags are piled before him. This illustrates how the thieves restored the wealth robbed from Sundara at the command of the god at Tirumuruganpundi. The inscription reads *Tirumuruganpundiyl perrapadi*.

Beyond this is the last scene which shows a woman receiving her child from the jaws of a crocodile in a tank adjoining a temple. The princely figure here is saint Sundara with his hands in adoration. The scene illustrates the story of how, by singing a hymn, Sundara caused a crocodile to disgorge the child it had swallowed near the temple at Avinasi. The inscription reads *Avinaisyandar mudalaivaipillai*¹¹.

III. CONCLUSION

Saivism is a very ancient sect of Hinduism with a known history of at least 3000 years. It is a historical fact that though Saivism found its adherents in the early vedic works. Many great devotees of Lord Siva who hailed from the land of Tamils, enriched Saivism with their devotional fervour and meritorious religious compositions. Therefore The above Saiva stories Represent the Socio- Religion and Philosophical significances of Darasuram temple to the modern world.

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