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## ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMME IN COLA TEMPLES DEVAKOSTHA IMAGES

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### ABSTRACT :

**S**warnakadeswara temple is one of the foremost famous temples in Tamilnadu. The lord Shiva is the supreme God in this temple. A larger religious group worships Lord Shiva in order to attain salvation. Here, the Linga is considered to be the Paramatma and the Jeevatma (devotees) try to reach the supreme one by worshipping the Paramatma. The present paper is mainly focusing on the iconography of the temple. The ancient people of Tamilnadu had known for their art and architecture. Thus the place got its name according to local mythology. The main temple is of the Middle Cola period while other annexure such as extensive mandapas, gopuras and vahanas. The present article is not concerned with the later developments of the temple but deals with the original Cola edifice. The brahmasthana that accommodates the garbhagraha, elegantly fitted with nine devakosthas, decorated with images, which programme the present article examines. The temple appears to be majestically with the Gods and Goddess. Those are as follows: Coplisvara, Agastisvara, Vaidhyanthatha, Ganapati, Siva – Nataraja, Agastya, Dakshinamurti, Lingodbhavamurti, Bhiksatana, Ardhanarisvara and Brahma.

**KEYWORDS :** Swarnakadeswara temple , foremost famous temples , art and architecture.

### INTRODUCTION:

Nelvennai with a prefix 'tiru' (auspicious) is a Middle Cola temple, held in high esteem in Tamil religious tradition. The place lies at about a distance of 9 kms to the southeast of Ulundurpet. Though dedicated to Isvara – Siva, called Vennaiappar or Swarnakadeswara temple is supposed to have been either established or worshipped by Sun god and lord Shiva, as a procession deity is in a standing form in the middle of a trident symbolizing the oneness of Shiva and Shakti and the Arthanareeswara form. Nandhi, the bull vehicle of lord Shiva is in a worshipping form spinning together its front legs, which is explained as if Nandhi is appealing to lord for the welfare of the devotees. It is said that as Lord Shiva Himself built a dam (Anai in Tamil) with paddy (Nel in Tamil) the place was named Nel Anai which later changed as Neivannai. The main section of the garbhagraha in the Vennaiappar temple accommodates nine devakosthas as it may be found in several other Cola temples. The programme in the Nelvennai is as follows: South:Ganapati, Siva – Nataraja, Agastya, Dakshinamurti, West:Lingodbhava, North:Bhiksatana, Mahisasuramardini, Brahma and Ardhanarisvara. Iconographically speaking, the images appearing on the devakosthas do not deviate from the canonical mode in any significant way that may be described in the following account. Alinganamurti, Bhiksatana and Bhairava (Adiceam 1965) at times appear in the north. All, excepting Bhiksatana, are new entrants. The outgoing members are Ardhanarisvara (Kalidos 1993, Goldberg 2001) and Brahma. Brahma is present in all, excepting Cintamaniagaram of the time of Kulottunga I. In all possibility the image fell down at some point of time because the presence of

Brahma is a common factor in the north all through the ages [8]. The dropping of Agastya could be taken for granted because the artists wanted to replace him with a canonical form of Siva.

#### COPLISVARA AT KUTTALAM:

Coplisvara is one of the famous temples in Kuttalam. The supreme God lord Shiva is blessing his devotees by facing South side with Ganapati, Agastya and Daksinamurti. The lord Ligodbhava is placed in the west side of the temple. The lord Brahma is doing his creation job in North side of the temple with Ardhhanarisvara, Mahisasuramardini and Bhiksatana. Siva – Nataraja, Ganapati, Agastya, Daksinamurti are placed South side of the temple.

#### AGASTISVARA AT ANANKUR:

Agastisvara is one of the famous temples in Anankur. Bhiksatana, Ganapati, Orthavatandava – wiva, Dakshinamurti are placed in the South side of the temple. The lord Ligodbhava is blessing his devotees in West side of the temple. Brahma, Bhiksatana, Mahisasuramardin and Ardhhanarisvara are placed North side of the temple.

#### VAIDHYANATHA AT CINTAMANIAGARAM (OF THE TIME OF KULOTTUNGA I):

Vaidhyanatha is one of the famous temples in Cintamaniagaram. Siva, Nataraja, Ganapati, Agastya, Dakshinamurti are placed in the South side of the temple. The lord Ligodbhava is blessing his devotees in West side of the temple. Alinganamurti, Mahasuranamardini and Bhairava are placed North side of the temple. From the above tabulation, it may be inferred that Uttama Cola popularized the pattern of the programme with nine devakosthas. The multiplication of devakosthas reaches the apogee in art in the three Rajarajesvarams at Tancavur, Kankaikontacolapuram and Taracuram, the last one outnumbering all other (Poonkodi 2005).

#### GANAPATI:

In Hindu mythology, Ganapati is the elder son of Siva though historically the other son, Kumara or Skanda appears earlier in literature (Main 1990). The iconographical features of the Lord have been elaborated by scholars in the field (Sastri 1914: 165f, Kalidos 2006: vol. IV, Chap. I). The image in the Nelvennai is in sthanaka mode that is rare; mostly the Lord is seated [10]. Short and stumpy, the Lord stands on a padmapitha. The hands are four of which the front rather holders eatables. The front right hand is broken. The other two hands are not legible. The ornaments are also not clear, excepting the karandamakuta and the anklets, consisting of elephant bells. Of the early images in sthanaka mode in the Tiruccirappalli lower cave may be noted. Of the later images, one in the Tatikkompu temple has been reported (11).

#### SIVA – NATARAJA:

Normally the anandatandavam mode is represented on the devakosthas [12]. The Lord's right leg is lifted gracefully in Kuncita mode and slightly bent at the knee. The left leg is planted on prostrate Apasmara and slightly bent at knee. The hands are four and posed in the usual mode. The rear arms, bent at the knee and lifted up, holds the damaru (right) and agni (left). The front right hand poses the abhaya mudra while the left is sent across the body and suspended in gaja or dala hasta. The Lord wears a jatamakuta, pantra and makarakundalas, naga keyuras, kankanas and malas. The loincloth is short, tugged to the hip. Adjoining the devakosthas few adorers with hands in anjalibandha appear.

#### AGASTYA:

Agastya has gone deep in local literary tradition as the founder of the Tamil languages (Kalidos 1976: Chap:1) who supposed to have given its first grammatical work. Akattiyam that is not extant. The next work, Tolkappiyam, is said to be his disciple, Tolkappiyar. Agastya appears in arts since the Pallava period as an image may be found in the Mahendravarman square of the Kailasanatha temple, Kancipuram (Kalidos 2006: IV, Pt. II, Pl. XXVKIII). Agastya in Cola art is a popular idiom as a devakostha figure. As many as 14 images have been

reported (Sira Narasimhan 2006:64).

Agastya is called kurumuni “short sage” who is fittingly so in the Cola images. The Nelvennai represent him seated on a bhadrapitha in sukhasana mode with the right leg pendant and left rested on the pedestal. Two – armed, he seems to hold the stencil (right) and water – jug (left) [13]. The seer is fitted with the outfit of a sage such as jatamakuta, rudraksamala and so on

#### DAKSINAMURTI:

Daksinamurti is the south facing Lord (Rao 1999: 273). Daksina means the south as well as fee, skilful, clever and so on (Kalidos 2006: Vol. II, 44). The canonical mandate of the form has been reported earlier by scholars (Rao 1914: 273-70, Sastri 1916: 89-93, Kalidos 1991: 476-93). By and large confined to the south, the earliest images are reported from the Pallava circle, e.g. the Kailasanatha temple at Kani, Pallava temples at Takkolam, Tiruttani, and Tirukkalukkunram. A rare image has been reported from the western Calukyan zone at Aihole (Rajarajan 2002: 408-10). However, the most impressive is that of the mrdanga – Daksinamurti from Vettuvankoyil at Kalukulmai (Kalidos 2006: Vol. II, Pl. CIV. 1). In Cola art Vinadhara – Daksinamurti is very famous of which a classical image is present in the Pullamankai temple, appearing on the first tala of the vimana. It was very famous with Cola bronzes of which the best could be found in the Tancavur art gallery.

The Nelvennai image finds the Lord seated in virasana mode, the right leg suspended. The front left hand holds the pustaka as the Lord is master of great teachers, a professor’s professor. The jatamakuta is nicely arranged with the locks of hair flowing on either side of the shoulder. The Lord is tucked with a number of ornaments, including the yajnopavita. The suspended leg is rested on the body of Apasmara while the student-  
sis are missing.

#### LINGODBHAVAMURTI:

Lingodbhavamurti is the Lord Siva who takes his udbhava or sambhava within the aniconic Linga and so the form is both iconic (Chandrasekhara appearing within the phallic emblem) and anionic (the Linga) (Sastri 1914: 93f, Rao 1999: 105-11).

Normally temples, since the Cola period, accommodate the image on the western devakostha if the temple faces the east. This image could be replaced by either Ardhanarisvara or Vishnu. This may naively suggest that the Linga is in ardhanari form, a union of the linga “phallus” (of Siva) and yoni or avutani “vagina” (of Devi).

The image shows a cavity within a vertically planted shanu that is the Linga. Within the cavity, the Lord appears as Cadraxeckhara who is mounted with the candra “moon” on crest. Four – armed, the Lord holds the tanka and mrga in parahastās. The front right hand is in abhaya and left in urushasta mode. The shaft part of the image on its bottom finds a zoomorphic varaha delving into the earth below to find out the foot of Siva. The upper part represents hamsa flying up above to trace the Lord’s crest. Out side the kostha two individuals stand to the right and left. Both sthanaka, the right represents caturmukha – Brahma and left Visnu who are supposed to attend on the Cosmic Lord Siva. Normally, their forearms are in anjalibandha, which is not the case in the present image.

#### BHIKSATANA:

Bhiksatana is the nude mendicant. (Rao 1999: 295-309) considers Bhiksatana and Kankalamurti of the same mould (cf. the images in the Kailasanatha temple at Kani and also Tirumananceri (supra)). The hands hold the kapala and damaru. The tiara is either jatabhara or jatamandala, fitted with the crescent. Though a mendicant, he wears the skhalabharanas with an ornamental patta on the forehead. According to the Suprabhedagama, the kapala is that of Brahma and the kankaladanda (in respect of kankalamurti) that of Visnu. It is to ward off the brahmahatti (Kalidos 1989a: 19-29) that Siva accrued that he wandered over the cosmos as a mendicant, begging alms (Suthanthiran 1992: 495-500, cf. Venkatanathan 1992:137-40). Raju Kalidos (2006: Vol. II, pp. 52-54) has nicely reconstructed the personality of the Lord, called Piccayyar (Begger), as gleaned from the Tamil bhakti hymns. The Nelvennai image conforms to the general tenor of composition. Small niches adjoining the devakostha house images of rsipatnis who fell in love with him and are supposed to have fed him during his

visit to the Darukavana.

### ARDHANARISVARA:

Ardhanarisvara is the androgen or hermaphrodite. He has the feminine on the right and is vrsabharuda. Few images with the right side breast has been reported by Raju Kalidos (1993: 69-106), later discussed by scholars like Ellen Goldberg (2001). The Nelvannai image conforms to the general mode of portrayal with the breast on the left side. Interestingly the hands are only two; maybe one more on the male half is broken.

### BRAHMA:

Brahma is caturmukha and seated. He holds the aksamala and kamandalu in parahastās, though iconographically of no significance, the images as housed on devakosthas are of considerable importance. Stylistically the temple could be dated in the Middle Cola period. The programme of fixing nine devakosthas was initiated by Uttama Cola and continued to persist until the time of the Middle and Latter Colas. Though few of the images alter their location sporadically, the basic programme continues to be the same. This offers clue to the rigidity of themes in the Saivite pantheon under the Colas.

### CONCLUSION

The eminent historian Ellen Goldberg has explained about the God Ardhanarisvara who is blessing his devotees in the form of half man and half woman in detail in the Book *The Lord who is Half Woman: Ardhanarisvara in Indian and Feminist Tradition* Albany in 2001. The book gives the accounts of the followings: the origin of the Ardhanarisvara, Shiva and Ganpat in the temple.

The people who were living around the temple lived together there as one group but the climate made them to leave that place. When the people departing from the place they always brought their art with them and spread throughout the world. The study of Iconographical Programme always tries to bring out the real talents of the people. The Kings, queens, clergy men and wealthy men denoted the materials to the temple for drawing images in the temple. These people always thought that through establishing Iconographical things in the temple they could upgrade their status in the society. Each and every image in the temple depicts the story of a particular person or group of people.

The prominent historians say that the arts in the temple are transiting the classical life of the people to the modern people. The art always carry the story like what were the customs, beliefs, Gods and Goddess, traditional things followed by the people in a particular period or group.

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