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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**KACCAPESVARA MYTH – KANCHIPURAM**  
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**Abstract**

The proliferation of sectarian sculptures in Saiva iconography in the Tamil country can be traced to the dominance of Tamil Saivism, a new stream that comes into prominence from 12th century A.D. Unlike the Smarta tradition, which gives equal importance to all the gods in the vedic pantheon, the Tamil Saivism portrayed Siva superior to the other gods. This resulted in the development of sectarian sculpture describing Vishnu, Brahma and the other gods and personalities epic and puranic origin propitiating Siva to win his grace or to atone their sin. Therefore the tendency to create a counter force for every incarnation of Visnu (fish, tortoise) became popular in Saiva myths, many of which are reflected in sculptures of Kanchipuram. The Kaccapa myth, which portray Visnu in an inferior position to Siva belongs to this category

**Keywords:** Kaccapesvara, prakara, surya, dedicated Rajathiraja, reconstruction, Vedic Pantheon, Yogi, vyakhyana, elucidate salvation, portrayal, pasupata traits, tanases, jnanasambandar, kurma, vishnu, anjans, adityas, vinnagar, chola, abiseka.

**Introduction**

The ancient city of Kanchi played a leading part in the political, religious and cultural history of South India. It was not only known as one of the most beautiful cities but also as a great intellectual and

artistic centre. Thanks to its strategic location on the northern borders of Tamilnadu giving access to the

neighbouring territories - Andhra and Karnataka it acted as a corridor for many political and cultural movements. Several dynasties had successively

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attempted to have a hold on the city with varying degrees of success. The Sathavahanas, the early (Sangam) Cholas, the Guptas (Samudra Gupta claims victory over Kanchi in his famous Allahabad Pillar inscription) the Pallavas, the Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas, the Gangas and not to speak of the later dynasties like the Telugu Cholas, Kakatiyas and the Vijayanagar had left their mark on the history of the city. Located on the banks of the Vegavati, Kanchi also enjoyed a fairly good economic status thanks to its strong agricultural base. Kaccapeswara myth is one of the Lord Siva Form in the stone sculptures during the Pallava Period. There is a temple at Kanchi dedicated to Lord Siva as Kaccapesvara. Originally it seems to have been a Pallava temple as stone slabs similar to the one used in the Pallava temples are found placed as floor slabs on the outer prakara and in the temple dedicated to Surya. The presence of the base of a Pallava pillar with sculptural details of four persons holding a jar on their shoulder shows that this may have been displaced of its original position at the time of reconstruction.

### **Inscriptional Source**

The inscriptions of Rajadhiraja II, from this temple refer to the existence of oil mills and shops selling oil on the premises of the temple. These oil mongers are certainly the followers of Saiva faith as the inscription of Rajadhiraja II shows their contribution in the form of lamps and money for the maintenance of the Temple. It is also surmised that figures of persons holding jars are oil merchants and the *rudraksa* beads round their neck show their religious leanings.

The inscriptions of the Chola kings like Rajaraja I and Rajendra I refer to the temple as Anjans andiambalam. This is the only temple in Kanchipuram where there is a shrine dedicated to Surya (Aditya) datable to the Chola period. The

inscriptions also refer to the existence of shrines dedicated to Surya, Durga, Ganapati and Siva. The presence of a shrine for Visnu (Vinnagar Emperuman) is also attested by a Pandyan inscription (13<sup>th</sup> century) which mentions the gift of land to the shrine. Similar Chola inscriptions from Sitesvara near Sarvatirtham refer to the offerings and provisions made for the worship of deities Bhoganayakar, Suryadeva Durgaiyar and Purnavitankadevar. It is probable that the assemblage of these five shrine Vishnu, Surya, Durga, Ganapati and Siva constitutes the well known Panchayatana form of worship. Later inscriptions refer this temple as *Tirukkccalai Uadiyanayanar* i.e. the temple dedicated to the god of Kacci. Kacciyappa munivar in *Kanchipuranam* while praising the temple mentions it as the union or meeting of five deities. This explicitly testifies the view that the temple once represented the *pancayatana* form of worship.

### **Form of Kaccapa**

The proliferation of sectarian sculptures in Saiva iconography in the Tamil country can be traced to the dominance of Tamil Saivism, a new stream that comes into prominence from 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Unlike the Smarta tradition, which gives equal importance to all the gods in the vedic pantheon, the Tamil Saivism portrayed Siva superior to the other gods. This resulted in the development of sectarian sculpture describing Vishnu, Brahma and the other gods and personalities epic and *puranic* origin propitiating Siva to win his grace or to atone their sin. Therefore the tendency to create a counter force for every incarnation of Visnu (fish, tortoise) became popular in Saiva myths, many of which are reflected in sculptures of Kanchipuram. The Kaccapa myth, which portray Visnu in an inferior position to Siva belongs to this category. The earliest reference to the Kaccapa myth is found in the hymns of Jnanasambandar in which he mentions the puranic account of Siva wearing the shell of *Kurma avatara*

Vishnu around his necks. Though this incident is not mentioned in connection to this temple it is taken out of context and identified with the word *Tirukkacalai* referred in the inscriptions to form a new myth of Visnu in the form of Kaccapa worshipping Siva.

### **Form of Worship**

Hence the name Kaccipesvara. According to Tamil Lexicon, the word anjan means Adityas or Surya. The joining of words anjan, sandi and *ambalam* refer to the temple dedicated to Adityas. The literal meaning of *Anjan* -sandi is the meeting or the place of two or more Adityas. It is interesting to note that there is a shrine for Surya here.

### **Sculptures of Kaccapa**

Two sculptures representing the Kaccapa myth are found in the Kaccisvara temple. The first one is a bas-relief on a large stone slab. Visnu in the form of Kaccapa is shown in the act of performing *abiseka* to Linga placed under a tree. His back right and the left hands hold *Chakra* and *Sanka*. Lakshmi is standing behind her consort Visnu in *anjali* pose. Bull (Nandi) the mount of Siva is shown seated on the left side of the Linga. The stylistic feature of the sculpture is suggestive of Vijayanagar origin. Another sculpture depicting the scene of Visnu worshipping Linga is on a pillar in the front mandapa of the temple, also of the Vijayanagar times.

### **Conclusion**

The Kaccapa myth runs on familiar lines. Vishnu as kurma became over bearing after churning the ocean of milk. This created fear and anxiety in the minds of other gods and they prayed to Siva for help. Acceding to their request, Siva over powered the *Kurma* and used its shell as his necklace. To atone for the sin of causing trouble to other gods, Visnu as Kaccapa worshipped Siva of this temple at Kacci.

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