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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRIPURANTAKA-SCULPTURAL PANALAT KANCHIPURAM

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Abstract

The Kailasanatha temple depicts one of the rarest forms of Tripurasamhara, in one of the smaller shrines on the south *prakara*, by portraying Siva standing not on his chariot, but on the ground and engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Unlike the other panels, where Siva is multi- armed, this one shows him only with tow hands. The famous bow and arrow with which Siva is said to have destroyed the three forts of the Asuras is absent and insteadhe fights with his triden. The Asuras are shown fighting from their forts. The panel beautifully illustratès the vigour in Siva's combat. The rhythm in fighting is expressed by the drawn out legs and the hand in the act of throwing the trident in the direction of the Asuras. It also reveals the anxiety writ large in the face of Brahma, Vishnu, Uma and the other celestials, who are watching the fight between Siva and the Asuras Another sculpture of this kind is not met with in the Tamil country.

Keywords: Atharvaveda, rudra, vedic period, yjurveda, mrugavaidya, silapathikaram, tripuranthaka, tripuras, elucidation, chariot, ellora, prakara, panal, asnas, sadhavahana, kakatiyas, chalukyias, rashtrakudas, vegavati, sangam, dynasty, agriculture.

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

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corridor for many political and cultural movements. Several dynasties had successively 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 Gangasansnotto speak of later dynasties like the Telugu Cholas, Kakatiyas and 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.

Tripurantaka

This association of Siva with the Tripuras is traceable to the Vedic period. The *Yajurveda* mentions the terrible bow and arrow of Siva and his actual encounter with the Tripuras. The *Atharvaveda* states that even the gods were afraid of the strong bow and the arrows of Rudra. In fact, the powerful arrows of Rudra struck prajapati for his incest and earned Rudra the name of mrgavaidya.

The Taittiriya The Taittiriya part of the *Yajurveda* elucidates the encounter between the gods and the Asuras stationed from the forts made of iron, silver and gold. The gods unable to defeat the Asuras by themselves commissioned Rudra the 'cruel god' to storm the citadels, providing him with a special arrow compounded of Agni, Soma and Vishnu. Rudra agreed to do the job on their acceptance of his status as the overlord of animals. This Vedic idea (Bhutapati) found expression in the epics, the Puranas and in the early Tamil literature Silappadikaram and the Devaram. The Silappadikaram refers to the request gods made to Rudra and the bow used in the destruction of the three Asuras. The Devaram abounds in its allusions to the Tripurantaka legend. Appar Particularly mentions the grace Siva showered on the Asuras after they lost their tamasic qualities.

Theme of Tripurantaka

The Tripurantaka theme is represented in the sculptural panels from the Kailasanatha and the Ekambaranatha at Kanchi. They are six in number four to the time of the Pallavas and the remaining two to the Vijayanagar period. The influence of the Vedic and the Puranic ideas in the making of the sculptures is amply described in two of the five panels that illustrate Siva fighting from his chariot. The *Mandapa* in front of the Ekambaranatha temple, datable to the time of the late Vijayanagar period (17th century A.D.) depicts the fight of Siva with the Tripuras in two pillar reliefs. The interesting feature of this panel is the elucidation of the idea found in the *Matsyapurana*. It mentions the special chariot and the other objects of Tripurantaka. The chariot is made with earth as its basis, the two attendants of Siva as its poles, the *mantara* the axle and the sun and the moon as the two silver and golden wheels and Brahma as its charioteer. The Panel in addition to the depiction of these deities, also portray Narada and Tumburu watching this great event.

The second panel is from the Kailasanatha and is found in one of the smaller shrines on the south *Prakara*. The interesting feature of this panel is the presence of three figures in front of the chariot (two Nagas and a human). This is probably an illustrative of the *Matsyapurenica* version, which mentions that the two Nagas, Kamvala and Asvatara are used as the tying rope of the chariot of Tripurantaka. The third figure may represent the firmament as the founder with which a chariot is provided as a defence against collision. This seems to be a unique representation found only in Kanchi. Two other panels from the Kailasanatha, one on the lateral shrine and the other in the *Bhadra niche* (on the north side of the main wall) depict Siva standing on his chariot. Similar representation of Tripurantaka is found in the

vakadaka sculpture from the Dasavatara cave at Ellora 6th century A.D.

Chariot Panel

The fifth panel is from the Ekambaranatha and is found in one of the pillars on the front *Mandapa*. The panel shows Siva standing sideways in his chariot and attacking the Asuras with his bow. C.Sivaramamurthi dates this sculpture to the Vijayanagar and Nayaka period. In the making of this sculpture the influence of the *Amsumatbetagama* is evident which lays down that Siva is to be represented as driving in a chariot with his right leg slightly raised and the left planted in the middle of the chariot.

The Kailasanatha temple depicts one of the rarest form of Tripurasamhara, in one of the smaller shrines on the south *prakara*, by portraying Siva standing not on his chariot, but on the ground and engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Unlike the other panels, where Siva is multiarmed, this one shows him only with two hands. The famous bow and arrow with which Siva is said to have destroyed the three forts of the Asuras is absent and instead he fights with his trident. The Asuras are shown fighting from their forts. The panel beautifully illustrates the vigour in Siva's combat. The rhythm in fighting is expressed by the drawn out legs and the hand in the act of throwing the trident in the direction of the Asuras. It

also reveals the anxiety writ large in the face of Brahma, Vishnu, Uma and the other celestials, who are watching the fight between Siva and the Asuras. Another sculpture of this kind is not met with in the Tamil country.

Conclusion

This association of Siva with the Tripuras is traceable to the Vedic period. The *Yajurveda* mentions the terrible bow and arrow of Siva and his actual encounter with the Tripuras. The *Atharvaveda* states that even the gods were afraid of the strong bow and the arrows of Rudra. Infact, the powerful arrow of Rudra Struck prajapati for his incest and earned Rudra the name of mrgavaidya.

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