

Vasantha Mandapa of Tirugokarnam Temple and its Sculptures

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Abstract: *Gokarnesvara cave temple at Tirugokarnam is belonged to the early Pandya period located on the highway from Pudukkottai to Tiruchirappalli. The suzerainty of the early Pandya was accepted by the local Muttraiya chief. Perumbidugu Perundevi's record which is found written on a stone slab in the Vaishnava cave at Tirumayam is witnessing this fact.¹ However, the Grandha edict from the Gokarnesvara cave says that the founder of the temple was Bhagadhacharyah.² He was not a political leader. He would have been the religious saint. During the reign of the Imperial Cholas, there would have been some additions in art and architecture of the temple. A wall in between Saptamatrika shrine and main cave has been built during reign of the Cholas. Traces of the rock prove that there was a shelter over the Saptamatrikas before the reign of the Cholas. Besides Mangalanayaki shrine is purely a Chola's contribution. This is an Amman shrine which would have been affiliated with the cave shrine. The Brhadambal shrine has been affiliated with the Pakulanesvara Shrine of the same complex. Both the Gokarnesa and Pakulanesvara shrines are dedicated to Lord Siva.*

Keywords: Vasantha Mandapa sculpture and temple construction

Gokarnesvara cave temple at Tirugokarnam is belonged to the early Pandya period located on the highway from Pudukkottai to Tiruchirappalli. The suzerainty of the early Pandya was accepted by the local Muttraiya chief. Perumbidugu Perundevi's record which is found written on a stone slab in the Vaishnava cave at Tirumayam is witnessing this fact.¹ However, the Grandha edict from the Gokarnesvara cave says that the founder of the temple was Bhagadhacharyah.² He was not a political leader. He would have been the religious saint. During the reign of the Imperial Cholas, there would have been some additions in art and architecture of the temple. A wall in between Saptamatrika shrine and main cave has been built during reign of the Cholas. Traces of the rock prove that there was a shelter over the Saptamatrikas before the reign of the Cholas. Besides Mangalanayaki shrine is purely a Chola's contribution. This is an Amman shrine which would have been affiliated with the cave shrine. The Brhadambal shrine has been affiliated with the Pakulanesvara Shrine of the same complex. Both the Gokarnesa and Pakulanesvara shrines are dedicated to Lord Siva.

Apart from the Mangalanayaki shrine, there was no further additions of sanctum sanctorum belonged to the Chola period.³ A record of Vira Pandya, found written on the backwall of the Candesa shrine indicates that the Pakulanesvara shrine would have been built by the later Pandya ruler. After words, it has been rebuilt by the Vijayanagara rulers. Further, Mahamandapa, Unjal mandapa, rearing horse pillar in the eastern area with tank, Vasantha mandapa, the long Prahara runs toward south upto the main road. Kasivisvanata temple, a small shrine behind the long prahara is built in the Vijayanagara style of architecture.⁴ The Brahambal shrine is a later addition and built by the Pallavaraya of Perungalur.⁵ A donation of the architectural elements made by a Mallittan Pallavaraya is main witness.⁶ Among the various architectural building of the temple in big premises, the present study focuses the artists features of the Vasantha mandapa which is consisted of Tandava Siva and Kali, Manmata and Rati, Aghora Virabhadra and Agni Virabhadra, Nalayini, Karna and Rama images. This is a special attempt made first time to bring out the iconographical features of the above mentioned various

images. Stone images housing permanently in the Vasantha – mandapa. Due to limited page concerned, Vasantha-mandapa has been selected for this study in the vast premises of Tirugokarnesvara temple.

The sculptural specimens of the Vasantha-mandapa of Tirugokarnesvara temple at Tirugokarnam are represented in support of huge stone pillars in the dramatic style. The texts of Hindu iconography, Indian Dramas, and epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** are compiled in the drama pattern. For the elaborate discussion each and every specimens, separate attention is needed. Therefore, the images of Tantara Siva and Kali, Aghora and Agni Virabhadra, Manmata and Rati, Nalayini, Karna , Rama and portrait are discussed one by one.

Tandava Siva and Kali

Siva is considered to be a great master of the art of dance. It is stated in Saivagama that he dances in hundred and eight modes and Bharata's **Natyasastra** too enumerates the same number gives the number to eighteen of these seven modes (sapta-tandava) are the most important.⁷

The cult of Nataraja is closely connected with Chidambaram and Tiruvalankadu. It is believed that a dancing competition between Siva and Kali took place, in which the latter was defeated. Siva adopted Tandava and this made appears to be the most fascinating subject to the artists of this period.⁸

Two sculptures of Siva in Tandava posture are found on the pillar of the Vasantha - mandapa (fig. 1.2). Both have common iconographical features. He is dancing with eight hands. The upper right hand bears the finger of the right leg which is lifted upwards. The *damaru* and *trisula* appear in the right hands. The lower right hand is in the *abhayamudra*. The upper left holds *agni*, the second hand the *pasa*, the third a *Kapala*, the lower left an indistinct weapon.

Surrounding him, Visnu stands with four hands (fig. 3). He carries *sanka* in the upper right. *Cakra* is in the upper left. The lower hands the *mrdanga* (drum).

Brahma three faced stands on the left side (fig. 4). He is four armed. The upper right holds the *kamandalu* and upper left the *aksamala*. The front arms are playing on the symbols.¹⁰

Another image of Tandava-Siva bears much iconographical features as described above. This image has flying *jatas*, having a halo around the *jatamakuta* topped by *Kirtimukha*.

Manmatha and Rati

Manmatha or Kama is identified with Pradyumna. One of the twenty-four general forms of Visnu. *Amarakosa* equates Pradyumna with Kamadeva or Manmatha, who is recognized as a son of Krishna.

Manmatha god of Love, is represented with his consort Rati. This god of Love was reduced to ashes by Siva.¹¹ Rati and Manmatha are often found among the sculptures in a temple (fig. 5). He has only two hands. His right hand is placed on the shoulder of his consort. The left hand holds a floriated sugarcane. He stands on his left leg with the right bent across and the toe touching the ground. His head is adorned with the *Kiritamakuta*. He wears trouser and long flower garland.

Rati is standing in the *dvibhanga* posture (fig. 6). She has two hands. The left hand is in the *abhayamudra* and the right in *lolahasta*. Her hair is fashioned in a with side knot, a typical hair style of the Nayaka period. She has no breast band. She wears lower garment in hip and it extended upto wrist leg. She has well-combed hair and various Jewells such as necklace, kundalas, armlets and wristlets.

Agora Virabhadra and Agni Virabhadra

Two specimens of Virabhadra are available in this temple. Siva in Virabhadra form is popular throughout South India. This form is one of the ferocious aspects of Siva. **Kurmapurana, Varahapurana and Bhagavatapurana** refer the story leading to the origin of Virabhadra, who was created by Siva to annihilate the haughty *Daksa*. Siva plucks out a lock of hair from his head and created Virabhadra.¹²

Agora Virabhadra who is standing in *dvibhanga* (fig.7), has eight arms, holding *bana* in second upper right, bow in second upper left, sword in lowered right upper and shield in lowered left upper, *tanka* in the right third, short sword in the right fourth, *pasha* in the left third, *damaru* in the left fourth. He is depicted with the third eye on the forehead. This is an indication of his anger against *Daksa*. He also wears a *jatamakuta*, necklaces, armlets, bracelets and anklets. He wears a trouser as lower garment. He wears chapel. *Muyalagan* who kept under the left feet of Lord Siva keeps a sword. A semi-circular *tiruvasi* encircles over the head of the image. A punch of bow is hanging in the right shoulder. An action is visualized by the artist in the steps of the two legs.

The second image Agni Virabhadra is too found on a pillar of the Vasantha –mandapa (fig.8). Virabhadra is standing in *Tribhanga* posture. He is having eight hands. Two front hands the kept a trident which is targeting the face of the Asura who fell down on the earth.¹³ He holds *damaru, tanga* and arrow in the three right hands from second to fourth hands. Further bow, *pasha*, and *kapala* are kept in the left

hands from second to fourth respectively. He has fire flaming *jatas*. He wears a *jatamakuta*, necklace, armlets, bracelet, bangles and anklets. He also wears a lower garment. Width of the trident in gradually reduced from top to bottom.

RAMA

The incarnation of Rama, the ideal hero of the beautiful epic **Ramayana**, has permeated the life of the Indian people and molded their character to a great extent. Rama was the eldest son of Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya.¹⁴ A stone image of Rama is represented behind the Sixth pillar of the Vasantha -mandapa of this temple (fig. 9). Rama is seated in Virasana posture on a square *Pitha* with two hands. The right hand keeps a lotus flowers. Left hand is placed on the left knee. A *tiruvasi* is encircled over the head where he wears *kritamakuta*. He wears real garland and necklaces. The *Sankha* and *Cakra* are not seen in this posture. This Rama image is beautifully carved.

Portrait

There are two portrait images erected in the Vasantha mandapa. A portrait is found in super of a huge pillar of Vasantha Mandapam (fig.10). The height of the image is 6 feet high. The statue is in *anjali* Posture. The side knot is visualized in the left side. The image is in *tribhanga* posture. He wears dhoti, belt with a small sword, different ornaments and armlets, rings, anklets, bangles and ear rings. Another image of portrait is found in the same Mandapa (fig. 11). The image is an *anjali* posture. The image the *Samapadasthanaka* posture. He wears a *Usnis* and long garment. The different ornaments such as armlets, necklace, bracelet and ring.

KARNA

Karna is originally known as Vasusena. He is one of the central characters in the Hindu epic **Mahabharata**. The epic describes him as king of Anga (present day Bhagalpur and Munger). Karna was one of the greatest warriors.¹⁵ The war between Karna and Arjuna took place in **Mahabharata** (fig. 12). Karna who attempted to use the *nagabana* against Arjuna is a scene of representation in this temple. Karna is standing in *tribhanga* posture with two hands, right hand holds *Naga-bana*, serpent arrow, left hand the bow. He wear a *Kiritamakuta*, necklaces, armlets, bracelets, ring, and anklets. He also wears a lower garment, belt and a small sword in the waist. The height of the image is 6 feet.

NALAYINI

Kavucikan and his wife Nalayini lived in Pratistanam. Kavucikan was suffering from leprosy. However Nalayini who was Virgin lady serves her husband without any hesitation. One day Kavucikan asked her wife to take her to the house of his usual prostitute. She was carrying her husband who seated on her shoulder (fig. 13).¹⁶ This is a scene of the Nalayini erected in the Vasantha -mandapa of Gokarnesvara temple at Tirugokarnam.

Kavucikan who seated on the shoulder of Nalayini is keeping a Banjo in the right hand. Banjo is a musical instrument. The right thigh and left foot of his legs are kept on her right and left shoulders respectively.¹⁷ He wears the

different ornaments and dress such as dhoti on the hip armlets, belt in waist, rings, ear rings, anklets and bangles.

She wears different ornaments and a lower garment which covers upto wrist legs. Her side-knot is clearly visible.¹⁸ Her breasts are freely hanging without band. The cross – wise hanging fleets are beautifully designated by the sculptor.

The way the temple is taken over the other cave temples in the district is more architecture. The sculptures in the temple hall are similar to the sculptures in the Vasantha Mandapa and the sculptures in the shrine of the Kudumiyamalai Shikanathar temple and the Tirumayam Sathyamurti perumal temple. All the sculptures belong to the same period.

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