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CHANDESA CULT IN TAMIL NADU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GANGAIKONDACHOLAPURAM

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Abstract:

Siva is regarded as one of the most powerful and venerated Gods of Hindu trial. The five-faced form of Siva found in the Linga Purana, is identified as Vishvarupa or the universal form of the God. The five faces are Isana, Tatpurusha, Agora, Vamadeva and Sadyajatha. From the five faces of Lord twenty-five Sivamurthas have originated. Out of these twenty-five Siva murthas, one of the most important is Chandesanugrahamurti called personification of Bakthi and devotion. It came of one of the five faces of Sadasivadeva, called as Vamadevam. In this paper an attempt is made to throw light on the origin and development of Chandesa cult in Tamil Nadu. And it also reveals the unique iconographic features of the Chandesanugrahamurthi sculpture found in Brihadeeswara temple at Gangaikondacholapuram.

KEYWORDS-

Gangaikondacholapuram , Religion , Forms of Siva , Literature , Art .

INTRODUCTION

Religion is an integral part of human life. It enables human beings to transcend from the narrow self interest to broader world view. In Hinduism, the major religious sects are there, i.e., Saivism and Vaishnavism, the worship of Lord Siva and the worship of Lord Vishnu respectively.

Siva worship is universal. He has been one of the most important and popular deity in India; both in past ages and at the present times. Lord Siva means all round welfare. He is the God of Gods and is regarded as one of the most powerful and venerated Gods of Hindu trial.¹ He is primarily associated with the acts of destruction but he is a creator and preserver of the universe as well. Though his frantic motions, he generates the power of evolution and dissolution of the world.

FORMS OF SIVA

The philosophical significance of the various forms and attributes of Siva are the five faces represent earth, water, light, air, sky. The three eyes of Siva represent the Sun, moon and fire. The danda in the hand is death itself. The three prongs of trident represent sattva, rajas and tamas qualities. The tiger skin of Siva represents the various trishnas (desire). The citron in the hand indicates the seed of the world. These seeds represent the atoms, constituting the world. The moon digit on the head of Siva is indicative of his divine power.² His mount bull is a symbolic form of divine four footed dharma. Vasuki snake associated with Siva represents anger subduing the three worlds. The colour of Mahadeva is white, which represents prakriti.

FIVE-FOLD ACTIVITIES OF SIVA

Siva is one of the most influential members of the orthodox Hindu triad. Though he is specially associated with the act of Samhara (destruction) or Pralaya (absorption) in the Hindu concept of Trinity, an exclusive worshippers of Siva thinks him no less associated with the other two acts of Srishti (creation) and Sthiti (preservation) generally attributed to Brahma and Vishnu, the other members of the triad. Siva is also endowed with the acts of anugraha or prasada (conferment of grace) and tirobhava power of concealment or disguise. These collectively make up his five-fold activities³ (panchakrityas), and his numerous manifestations according to his worshippers are connected with the performance of one or other of them for their edification and benefit. Siva is also described in the early and medieval Brahmanical texts as the origination and the best exponent of various arts and accomplishments, such as those of deep concentration (yoga) expounding (vyakhyana) the sastras (the various agamas were revelations from him), music, dancing etc.

The five faces form of Siva

He is the great Lord (Mahesvara), the greatest of the Gods (Mahadeva), the beloved husband of Uma, the great mother Goddess (Umapathi) and is the chief possessor of Maya (Mayon). Many and various are his aspects and attributes which appear to be delineated in his numerous epithets and names, which are sometimes; incorporated in different sections of the epic and puranic literature some Puranas describe Shiva with three or five faces. The five-faced form of Siva found in the Linga Purana, is identified as Vishvarupa or the universal form of the God. These five faces, which also correspond to the five syllable mantra 'Om Namasivaya'. The five faces are Isana, Tatpurusha, Agora, Vamadeva and Sadyajatha.⁴ The Agamas mention, twenty-five sportive forms (Lila murtis) of Siva most of which are usually met within South Indian temple. These twenty-five Sivamurthas have originated from the five faces of Lord Sadasiva.⁵ These twenty-five forms of God Siva are generally classified into Samharamurti (destructive) Anugrahamurthi (boon – conferring) and Nrttamurti (dancing).

Out of these twenty-five Siva murthas, one of the most important is Chandesanugrahamurti called personification of Bakthi and devotion. It came of one of the five faces of Sadasivadeva, called as Vamadevam. The North face Vamadeva (peace) is benevolent and benign face of Siva and it is directly related to Anugraha and then to water. Siva is also known as affording kindness to his devotees. These classes of images are known as Anugrahamurtis. To this group belongs Chandesanugrahamurti. The other anugrahamurtis are Dakshinamurti, Vishnuanugrahamurti, Ravananugraha-murti, Nandisanugrahamurti, Kiratamurti and Vignesvaranugrahamurti.

The Story of Chandesa

Chandesa is one of the set of sixty three canonized Saiva saints. As a cowherd, he tended the cows in his care, but spent most of his day worshipping Siva, who he built up each day as a mud linga, using the milk of the cows to perform the ritual bathing of the deity. When his father went out to reprimand him for misusing the milk, Chandesa was so absorbed in worship that he paid no heed to him. The enraged father kicked the ling, and when Chandesa instinctively flung his staff at the intruder's legs, it turned into the sacred axe of Siva, felling the father to the ground. Siva is said to have appeared to bless his devotee and promise to be a father to him.⁶ In all the temples of Lord Siva we find an image of Chandesa is found just near the water spout. Chandesa is a fervent devotee and a faithful steward of Lord Siva; He is housed in a sub shrine situated in the northern side of the first prakara in all the Siva temples.

CHANDESAIN LITERATURE

The story of Chandesa, for the first time, occurs fifteen times in the hymns of Gnanasambandar and Tirunavukkarasar of 7th century A.D. Similarly, the 8th century Saint Sundarar refers to Chandesa in five of his hymns. All these hymns contain only brief accounts connected with the story of Siva conferring grace upon Chandesa. As Chandesa is glorified by Gnanasambandar and Tirunavukkarasar, he should have certainly lived in the 6th century A.D. The absence of Chandesa – myth in the pre-sixth century Tamil works also subscribe to this date. The Tevaram-saints refer to the boy (Chandesa) by various names such as Manni (brahmachari), Chandi, Chandan, Chandanayaka, Chandisa and Chandesvara.⁷ Besides these, Sundarar adds 'Dandi' as one of his names.⁸ Periya puranam the hagiological work of the 12th century elaborates the story of Chandesa and treats him one among the sixty-three Saiva Nayanmars.⁹

CHANDESAINART

Chandesa found a place in the art of Tamil Nadu consequent to the rapid spread of bhakti ideology, popularization of Chandesa-myth by the Saiva saints, proliferation of the cult of Siva and extensive patronages of the ruling class to Saivism. The Pallava and early Pandya rock-cut and structural temples, in the sequel, came to be adorned with his sculptures since the 7th century. The earliest rock-cut sculpture, datable to the 7th century A.D., depicting the story of Chandesa is found in the Dharmaraja ratha at Mahabalipuram.¹⁰ The next one is in Anur, near Tirukalukkunram, has a 7th century low relief representing Chandesa, seated in ardha-utkutikasana posture on a low pedestal. The another one is found in the famous Kailasanatha temple of Rajasimha Pallava (700-728 A.D.). It has three panels and a sculpture in round depicting the episode of Chandesa.¹¹ Yet another 8th century Pallava sculpture of Chandesa is found in the Ramanandisvara temple at Porur near Chennai.

CHANDESA CULT IN CHOLA PERIOD

Chandesa was considered to be one of the eight parivaradevatas, probably from the latter half of 9th century, there by a small shrine for him was built at north-eastern side of the prakara wall. The early Chola temples of Aditya I (871-907 A.D.) testifying to this tradition are the Sundaresvara temple at Thirrukattalai and Agasteswara temple at Killappaluvur both in Ariyalur district. Other early Chola temples built till about the last quarter of 10th century have either small shrines or a loose sculpture at the north-eastern side of the ambulatory passage. Such examples are found at places like Allur, Sittur, Kodumbalur, Nirpalani, Nangavaram, Kamarasavalli, Uraiyur, Kilaiyur, Tiruvelvikudi, Kudimiyamalai, Govindavadi, Vayalur, Tiruvandarkoil etc., (in some temples, the figures are dislocated now). The finest of all the early Chola sculptures of Chandesa is found in the Adipurisvara temple at Tiruvorriyur in Chennai.

The cult of Chandesa gains a new lease of life from the time of the imperial Chola monarch Rajaraja I (905-1012 A.D.) who built a small temple for Chandesa closer to the pranala on the northern side of the Brihadeswara temple at Thanjavur.¹² This practice of building a small temple or a shrine for Chandesa closer to the main vimana initiated by Rajaraja I.¹³

CHANDESANUGRAHAMURTI AT GANGAIKONDACHOLAPURAM

Rajendra Chola excelled his father in not only building a small temple for Chandesa, but also embellished the Gangaikondacholapuram temple with a spectacular sculpture of Chandesanugrahamurti, unparalleled in the art history of India. On the southern side of the temple there is a long flight of steps leading to the sanctum. To the right of these steps, in large niche, we can find this sculpture. We can see three main figures in the panel, the central one is Siva with intricate jewels and his immense lock of hair done in a crown like hairdo. To his left is Parvati, with a jeweled crown. Below them is the devotee Chandesa humbly receiving the crown of garland. The sculptor has followed the principle of hierarchical scale; Siva, the central figure is the largest, next in size is Parvathi and then the slightly smaller Chandesa. On the side of the panel the story of Chandesa, receiving Siva's favour is told in tiny relief sculptures. One striking feature of this panel is that the three main figures face different directions.

Here Siva is seated in the Sukhasana or the comfortable posture on a raised pedestal (Padrapeda), as in the case of Somaskandha figures, his left leg hanging down and resting on a pedestal. Siva has four hands, the upper hands hold axe and antelope. The two lower hands, one is holding garland of flowers (indaimalai) and the other is crowning the garland on Chandesa's head.¹⁴ It is a symbol of affection and stewardship. Jatamakuta with crescent on the left side adorns his head. Makara and Patra kundalas are seen in his right and left ears respectively. A three standard Yajnopavitha is seen on the torso. Udarabandana are also present. The Goddesses Parvathi too is seated to the left of Siva on the same pedestal. Her right leg being bent at the knee and placed on the pedestal, while the left is hanging down (Udkudikasana). She has two hands. Her right hand is portrayed in Kataka posture and she keeps her left hand on her left thigh with the palms down. Karantamakuta adorns her head. She is ornamented by Savadi, Karai, Vagulamalai, Tholvalai and Sudagam. The ears bear Kudhambaiyani. Chandesa is seen seated in front and with folded arms (anjali hastham), receiving the pride of the place bestowed on him by his lord. Chandesa sculpture is also well ornamented. There are three rows of necklaces, the lower one being of Rudraksha beads. His ears are ornamented with flower like Kundalas. Keyuras, bangles are present as ornamentation on his shoulders and fore arms.¹⁵ On the side wall, is shown the story of Chandesa; Chandesa worshipping Siva as Linga; the cows standing by the side; His father watching the happenings hiding himself behind the branches of a tree; disturbing Chandesa's worship; perturbed Chandesa throwing his axe at his father and Siva bestowing grace on both.¹⁶

In the figure of Chandesa, Rajendra Chola has carved his own image. Sri C.Sivaramamurthi¹⁷ in his work, 'The Chola Temples' states that, "The most remarkable carving here, the Chandesanugrahamurthi panel, is almost a suggestion of the laurels won by Rajendra through the grace of Siva and he humbly presents himself as a devotee of Lord, who blessed Chandesa". Kings featuring themselves in a sculptural panel is not new to Indian Art history. Mahendravarman, the Pallava appears as Gangadara in a panel of rock cut cave, he commissioned half way up the rock fort in Trichy. Probably more emperors are hidden in such disguises elsewhere.

Chandesa is the embodiment of devotion and piety and the place he attained is considered the highest, a devotee of Siva is privileged with. It is called the Chandisapadam, the abode of delieverence. According to Saivasiddhantha Siva bestows this grace, in the company of Sakthi, His consort. The treatment of ornaments, the portrayed of limbs and affection with which Siva is seen taking the garland around the head of Chandesa are suggestive and truly convey the supreme message of Saiva siddantha, the image seek to depict.¹⁸ This scene is beautifully depicted as such aesthetic beauty.... Such obedience of Chandesa, benevolence radiating in the face of Siva and such motherly affection in the face of Parvathi. Thus the Chandesanugrahamurthi is one of the notable sculpture.

CHANDESA CULT IN LATER PERIOD

The Period between the 10th and 13th centuries represents the proliferation of the cult of Chandesa coinciding with the imperial Chola power in Tamil Nadu and its expansion on the adjoining territories of Kerala, Andhra and Karnataka. Every Siva temple, small or big, came to possess a shrine for Chandesa on the northern side closer to the main vimana. Beautiful stone and metal images of Chandesa were consecrated in almost all the Siva temples of their period.¹⁹

It may be said in this context that from about the 12th century onwards, every important Siva temple in Tamil Nadu possessed an additional image of Chandesa consecrated along with the other Saiva Saints (63 Nayanmars), besides the one installed in the small shrine meant for him. This is in conformity with the Periyapuram tradition making him one among the sixty three Nayanmars.²⁰ Images of Chandesa consecrated after the 14th century, are decorated with a karandamakuta or jatamakuta in addition to the jatabhara hair style. In some places, he is attributed with four arms. Such four-armed variety is reported from Mayiladuturai and Tirukachchur.

CONCLUSION

The cult of Chandesa is a regional contribution of Tamil Nadu to the growth of Saivism, art and iconography. It had its origin, development and culmination in Tamil Nadu and subsequently spread to other parts of South India. The Chandesanugraha story also served as a useful analogy to undermine the preceptors of the Buddha and Jaina sects, as they had no power granting a favour (anugraha) or even a disfavor. Thus, the superiority of Siva over Buddha and Jaina is indirectly alluded to in the Chandesanugraha story. The Chandesanugraha episode also reflects the practice of Siva-diksha ceremony connected with the Saivism.²¹ The diksha ceremony of initiating a disciple into the religious order is done by a preceptor or guru by offering special worship to Siva.

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Chandesa nugraha murti at Gangaikondacholapuram



Brihadeeswara temple at Gangaikondacholapuram



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