

IMAGES OF SIVA AT THE KAMBATTADI MANTAPA OF MADURAI TEMPLE COMPLEX

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Abstract

The famous Menakshi Sundaresvarar Temple is located in Madurai, the headquarters of Pandya dynasty in Tamilnadu. Lord Siva is worshipped as Sundaresvar. There are twenty five Siva manifestation depicted on the pillars of the Kambattadi Mantapa. Among the twenty five forms, the paper tries to trace out the significant and outstanding forms of Lord Siva. They are Tripurantaka, Nataraja, Lingodbhava, Rishabaruda, Ekabhada, Arthanarisvara, Dhakshinamurthi, Bhiksadana and Somaskanda. The present research paper unfolds the iconographical images of Siva at the Kambattadi Mantapa in Madurai Temple Complex and its origin, style and development of Mantapas.

Keywords: Menakshi Sundaresvarar Temple, Kambattadi Mantapa, Pillars and Images of Siva.

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Introduction

Mantapas are the most important architectural component of Temple art. Artha Mantapa and mughha Mantapa were accommodated in the Rock-cut-cave temples and also in the monolithic temples. The multiple Mantapas are gradually evolved when the structural temples came into practice during the Pallavas, Pandyas, Cholas and Vijayanagara Nayak periods. The multiple Mantapas innumerable attached to existing structural temples constructed by their predecessors. The Mantapas like, Hundred pillared halls, Thousand pillared halls, Kalyana Mantapa, Diyana Mantapa, Natya Mantapa, Tulabara Mantapa, Nritta Mantapa, Vasantha Mantapa, Unchal Mantapa, Kilikattu Mantapa, Horse court etc.,¹ added to the existing temples. The Kambattadi Mantapa is a significant architectural element raised around flag staff like a pillared pavilion. The pillars accommodate varieties of sculpture in the Kambattadi Mantapa of Menakshi Sundaresvar temple complex at Madurai.

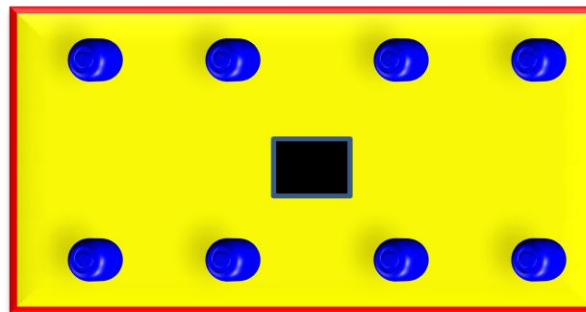
The Kambattadi Mantapa is one of the best known monuments from the Nayaka period of Tamilnadu. According to Thiruppani Vivaram, it was built in 1572-1595 A.D.², under the patronage of Krishna Virappa Nayak. Kambattadi (foot of the flag staff) Mantapa was constructed by Nattukottai Chettis in the Seventeenth century A.D.³ who was the devotees of lord Siva. The date of construction and patron are known, not from an inscription, but from a number of texts, notably a palm leaf manuscript in the possession of the temple, the Tiruvalavayutaiyar Koil Tiruppanimalai. This anthology of 106 poems gives details of the addition and renovations carried out in the temple with the names of the patron.⁴ It was built as a major addition to the Menakshi-Sundaresvar temple complex that dominates the centre of this major town and Hindu pilgrimage centre. The present research paper focused on the Kambattadi Mantapa of Menakshi Sundaresvar temple complex and its architectural, sculptural richness.

During the Nayaka period from the middle of the sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries was the most active period of temple building construction in Tamilnadu after the decline of Chola power in the thirteenth century. The architectural treatment went on peak level under Vijayanagara Nayak period in Tamilnadu. Tamil temple from the twelfth or thirteenth century onwards were often large wall complexes of structures rather than individual buildings, with multiple shrines, long corridors, towering pyramidal gateways (gopuras) and various pillared halls (Mantapas). Mantapas are constructed at large level in order to meet the increase of the

devotees. The Bhakti Movement was also motivated the temple building activities in Tamil country.

Vastasastras explain about structure of Mantapas, the methods by which Mantapas built and also describe the classification of pillars based on numbers.⁵ Generally Mantapa would be built as flatted stone ceiling supported by pillars. Mantapa means good adornment.⁶ Mayamadham is one of the vastusastra texts which indicate that Mantapas are the art and architectural practice of a particular region. Mantapa's structure would be in square shape, bow, oblong and semi circle. Generally the pillars are named in the numerical way like four, six, eight, ten, twelve, sixteen, hundred and thousand pillared Mantapas. There are many mantapa forms and pillars indicate by agama text one among them, this salient features represents in Kambattadi Mandapa. It has a sloga Poorva pavanathile Vetra Pavanathile Ettu Thungal Amaikum Murai "G+h;t gtNd g;ufhe;jNuz];jk;gh\;lf];jhgdruk;"⁷

Figure 1: Architectural Plan of the Kambattadi Mantapa



The above figure shows the architectural plan of the Kambattadi Mantapa. Its shape is oblong. In the Mantapa there are eight pillars planted around the Kodikambam or flag staff from which the name Kambattadi is derived. From the clockwise direction in the first pillar, three images of Siva are depicted such as Umasahidha, Kalyanasundara and Tripurantaka. The second pillar contains the two images of Siva like Kalasamgara and Sugasana represented. In the third pillar, the Nataraja and Kamadagana images are depicted. In the fourth pillar the images of Chandrasekara, Rishabaruda, Lingodhbava, Vinayaga and Ravana Anugramurthi are portrayed. The fifth pillar contains five sculptural images of Siva are carved. They are Ekabatha, Rishabaruda or Vrisabha, Arthanarisvara, Sankaranarayana, and Sakradhana. Sixth pillar has two sculptrures of

Salandhira Samgara, Dhakshinamurthi. The seventh pillar has two iconographical images of Gajasamgara and Sandesa Anugraha. The eighth pillar has the five manifestations of Siva images like Bhikshadana, Veerabathra, Pasubatha, Rishabanthiga and Somaskantha. A number of miniature sculptures such as Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, Saints, Ganas, Jambai girls, Horse, Nanthigesva etc., carved under the foot of the pillars.⁸

Kambattadi Mantapa (Hall of temple tree) is also known as the Kodikamba (Dhvajasthamba) Mantapa or Sundareswara Mantapa and Nandi Mantapa. This Mantapa encloses the Nandhi shrine with dhvajasthambhas, palipida, and eight magnificent pillars. The vidhana of the shrine is brightly painted with gold and variegated colors. The two proportioned golden flag staff with 32 sections like the human backbone and is surrounded by various gods, including Durga and Siddar. The iron railings are used to protect this part of the Mantapa and magnificent sculptural work of the pillars. The Mantapa accommodates twenty five sculptures of Siva's manifestation. Each and every iconography has ten feet high and is strikingly impressive on the monolithic and composite pillars. Noteworthy among the sculptures are Ekabhada, Ardhanarisvara, Dhakshinamurthi, Bhiksatana, Somaskanda, Tripurantaka, Natarajar, Rishabharuda or Rishabhavahana, and Lingodbhava. The details of these images are given below.⁹

Ekabhada

An image of Ekabhadamurthi is sculptured on the fifth pillar of the Kambattadi Mantapam. Another figure of the same image is carved in the pudu Mantapa also. There is an important difference between the two representations. The sculpture Ekabhada in the pudu Mantapa Brahma is in the right side of Siva and Vishnu is from the left. Brahma and Vishnu have not seen their legs as represented in some of the earlier sculptures but their front hands are held in anjali pose while their back hands hold their respective symbols. Brahma is represented with only one head in this sculpture. But here Brahma and Vishnu are not carved. Ekabhadamurthi shows only as Siva. He has four hands. The front right hand has abhaya pose and left is varatha pose. The back of the right hand hold malu and left hand hold dear. Since there are three continuous shrines, sculptured on the base of the pillar immediately below this figure, it may perhaps be taken as one of the different modes of representing Ekabhada Trimurthi referred by T.A. Gopinatha Rao.¹⁰

Ardhanarisvara

Ardhanarisvara is saumya (gentle) aspect of Siva in androgynous form which denotes the inseparability of Siva and Parvati, the efficient and instrumental cause of creation, according to the southern school of Saivism.¹¹ The Ardhanarisvara is carved on the fifth pillar of Kambattadi Mantapa which is facing in north. The sculpture has three hands. The image of Siva in the Kambattadi Mantapa shows with axe and abhaya pose while Parvathi's hand is hanging below. The similar image in Pudu Mantapa also shows parvathi with two hands with the front hand hanging down. The Pudhu Mantapa sculpture is not only larger but also more elaborately finished.¹²

Dhakshinamurthi

The form signifies teaches philosophy to certain rishis.¹³ In the sixth pillar of the Kambattadi Mantapa has the image of Dhakshinamurthi is depicted. Generally, the iconography of Dhakshinamurthi is faced in south. Here also carved like that. The image shows him seated under a banyan tree on Mount Kailasam engaged in yoga. His left leg is placed on his right leg which hangs and is resting on apasmara. Rishis and sages are seen worshipping him. A shrine dedicated to Dhakshinamurthi is on the south wall of the garpagriha of the Sundaesva shrine. A very old image of Viyakhyana Dhakshinamurthi is in the Kilamattur temple where Siva is seated on a rock. Siva wears a jatabhara. His front right hand has the vyakhyana mudra or cin mudra and the back right hand has kataka mudra also known as simhakarna mudra with a book resting on the palm. The back left hand holds perhaps the fire or a serpent.

Bhiksadanar

Bhiksadanar is a form of Siva represented in the eighth pillar as a mendicant in the Kambattadi Mantapa. Here, Siva becomes an ascetic in order to atone for his sin of having cut off one of Brahma's heads in anger. Forbidden to wear clothing, Siva is adorned only with ornaments including a serpent around the hip. According to legend Siva took this form to curb the pride of the rishis of Darukavana, a mythical forest. Siva and Vishnu in the form of Bhiksatanar and Mohini are believed to have respectively seduced both the risis and thereby destroyed their ego. This theme is probably a symbolic and ego centric human mind. Though his earliest delineation is found in the swarga Brahma temple wall at Alampur near Badami was

built during the reign of the Chalukya ruler Vinayaditya (c.681-96). Then Bhikshatana form became popular during the early Chola period. The earliest form is represented in Nagesvaraswami temple at Kumbakonam. The sculpture is skillfully depicted with ornaments and the jatabandham is beautifully carved. The figure measures more than six feet high. It has four arms, the back right arm holds the damaru and the front right hand rests on the head of the antelope. The back left and holds the sula which is laid across the shoulder. The front left hand has the kapalam. Bhikshatanar is dressed with only a snake coiled round him. He has bells on his left leg and applied sandals on his whole body. On Bhikshatana's left is a dwarf with a vessel to collect the alms offered by the wives of the rishis. A figure of Anusuya and other alms rishis patnis are appeared on the next pillar.¹⁴

Somaskandar

Kalidasa's work Raghuvamsa mentions the form of Somaskanda, who is described with his consort of Uma and son Skanda. North Indian sculptures do not show this form anywhere in their temples.¹⁵ The subject matter of Somaskandamurti was very popular in the Pallava art. Earliest representation of Somaskanda panel can be seen on the back wall of the sanctum sanctorum of the Dharmaraja ratha, Mahisasuramardini Mantapa and in shore temple at Mahabalipuram. Similar panel is also found on the back wall of the Siva shrine in the Pandya cave at Tirupparankundram.¹⁶ In the eighth pillar of the Kambattadi Mantapa the image of Somaskandar is found. Siva and Parvathi are seated in the sukhasana pose with a dancing figure of Skanda standing between them. Siva holds the axe and the deer. The front right hand is in the abhaya pose. The front left hand is in the simhakarna pose. Parvathi holds a flower in her right hand and her left hand rests on the pedestal. Skanda holds a flower in his each hand. The Skanda decorated with a karanda makuta.¹⁷

Tripurantaka

Tripurantaka, meaning the destroyer of three magic cities that were made of gold, silver and iron, is one of the roudra forms of Siva with a symbolic meaning. The story has been elaborately discussed in the karna parvam of Mahabharatha. According to tradition, Brahma had given boon to the three sons of Taraka and accordingly they should inhabit three cities which would move about wherever they wished. After a thousand years, the cities would become one and

indestructible, except by the Siva's arrow. The defeat of the asuras was done by Siva in his Tripurantaka form and it gets described in almost all the agamic texts. Tirular, the father of mysticism, clearly points out that 'the three cities are the impurities (malam) that shroud the soul which is essentially pure and prove to divinity. The three forts of the demons are supposed to symbolise the three malas viz anava (ego or pride), kanmam (the accumulated karma or vinai) and mayai (illusion).

Tripurantaka form of Siva sculpture takes its origin from the Pallava period in the south. In all early representations of Tripurantaka up to early Chola period, Siva is shown standing or seated in pose resembling alitha, on a chariot with a bow and arrow in the act of attacking the enemy.¹⁸ Tripurantaka sculpture is represented in the first pillar of Kambattadi Mantapa. There are a number of Tripurantaka sculptures depicted in the temple complex, like Kambattadi Mantapa, Pudu Mantapa, and Thousand Pillar Mantapa. The sculpture in the Kambattadi Mantapa shows Siva standing as charioteer. Vishnu is the arrow, Agni its barb, Yaman its feather the Vedas make the bow and Savithri its bow-string.¹⁹

Natarajar

Nataraja is the dancing form of Siva. According to Raju Kalidas, Siva performed 108 tandavas (dance).²⁰ Lord Siva, the king of dancers, is variously known as Nataraja, Adavallan and Sabhapati in his dancing aspects. This theme of Siva is a pan – Indian one emphasising the five ideas known as pancakritayam, viz. srusti (production), sthithi (maintenance), samharam (destruction), throbhavam (embodiment) and anugraha (release).²¹ In the third pillar of the Kambattadi Mantapam the figure of Siva as Natarajar is depicted. The second images of the Nataraja is represented in Velliyambala Mantapa, Nayaka Mantapa and the Thousand Pillared Mantapa.²² But the image of Nataraja in the Kambatthadi Mantapa is found with a jatamakutam. The back left hand carries agni and the front left hand is in the gajahastam pose across the body. The front right hand is in abhaya pose and the back right hand holds the damaru. The right leg is placed on apasmara, the left leg is lifted up and rests on the head of a cobra apasmara's holds in hand. The image is somewhat static owing perhaps to the limitations imposed by the narrow width of the pillar. Parvathi stands his left side.²³

Rishabharudar

Rishabha or Vrisabha, the bull, is the vehicle of Siva symbolizing the procreative power. Association of bull with Siva takes its origin from the Kushana period (c. 1st – 2nd centuries A.D.). In Tamilnadu, Siva's iconographical development with his bull vehicle starts from the Pallava period which is clearly exhibited at Mamallapuram in the Arjuna ratha. This theme was very popular with the Chola bronzes. Siva is seated, along with his consort, on the bull or nandi, he is usually called Rishabarudar and its earliest sculptural representation is found in the Anandasayi panel of Dasavatara temple at Deogarh built by the Gupta rulers. The Rishabhavahanar sculpture shows in fourth pillar of the Kambattadi Mantapa. Siva and Parvathi seated on the back of the bull. Siva holds the axe and the deer in his back hands while the front hands are in the abhaya and varada poses. Siva's right leg is hanging and the foot rests on a lotus. Parvathis's left foot rests in a similar manner on a lotus.²⁴

Lingodbhavar

Lingodbhavar is an aspect of Siva as an endless pillar of light resembling a linga and representing the axis of manifestation developing from the point limit (bindu) the centre of the universe. Purely of a South Indian visual form reflecting pan Indian puranic episode, Lingodbhava, echos the religious feud that persisted among the worshippers of the Hindu trio (Siva, Vishnu and Brahma) and the emergence of Siva cult as a superior one. According to the saivasiddhanta, this aspect is one of the twenty five lilmurthis of Siva. The Linga purana mentions proclamation of Siva's superiority among the trio. The Lingodbhava form of Siva appears in the shore temple at Mamallapuram and Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi.²⁵ This image in the Kambattadi Mantapa is on the fifth pillar carved to the right of Rishabharudar. The phallus or linga on which the murthi is carved almost a square pillar with all straight edges rounded off. The figure of Siva is carved as usual in these figures as emerging out of the linga with the feet hidden within the linga.²⁶

Thus, the Kambattadi Mantapa was constructed in the 17th century A.D by Nattukottai Chettis in the Madurai Temple Complex. This is the good record states that the Nattukottai chetties were granted endowments and well versed in the field of Mantapa Construction and depicted the Siva's manifestation such as Ekabhada, Ardhanarisvara, Dhakshinamurthi, Bhiksatana,

Somaskanda, Tripurantaka, Nataraja, Rishabharuda or Rishabhavahana, and Lingodbhava in Kambattadi Mantapa. The traditional iconographical treatment is continued during the post Nayak period in Tamil country. Even though, the images are not revealing much aesthetic principles similar to Pallavas and Cholas. It is vividly depicted and accommodated like a gallery in the Kambattadi Mantapa.

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