

Origin And Evolution Of Nataraja Cult In Chidambaram – S Study

Dr.A.RAJARAM,
Assistant Professor,
Department of History,
Thiru.Kolanjiappar Government Arts College ,
Viruddhachalam, Cuddalore (District),
Tamil Nadu.
Mobile no.07502766699

Introduction

Chidambaram is the one of seven holy cities in Tamil Nadu, situated in 11° 25' N and 29° 42' E in Cuddalore District. Chidambaram is principally renowned for its great Siva Temple. This temple covers an area of 39 acres in the heart of the town, and it is surrounded by four streets with 60 feet wide. It has Lord nataraja, one of the twenty five forms of Lord Shiva. They are namely BhikshatanaMurthi, Nataraja Murthi, Aja-EkapadaMurthi, Yoga- Sakshinamurthi, LingodhavaMurthi, KamadhanaMurthi, JalandharavataMurthi, GajasurasamharaMurthi, VirabharaMurthi, Kankala- BhairavaMurthi, KalyanasundaramMurthi, Trisha varushaMurthi, ChandrashekaharaMurthi, Uma MaheswaranMurthi, ShankaranarayanaMurthi, ArdanarishvaraMurthi, KirataMurthi, ChandeshvaranugrahaMurthi, SomskadaMurthi, GajamukhanugrahaMurthi, NilalanthaMaheswaraMurthi, SukhasanaMurthi. Among them Nataraja cult is very unique one. Moreover, this town has a great historical background, believed it had been ruled by the great kingdoms like Medieval Cholas, Later Cholas, Pallavas, Vijayanagar Empire, Maratha Empire and British. This study to focused on the origin and Evolution of the Natraja cult onthrough the ages.

Objectives

- i. To know the origin and development of Nataraja cult and the origin of Lord Shiva.

- ii. To analyse the importance of Nataraja Cult on historical perspective

Methodology

This study “Origin and Evolution of Nataraja Cult in Chidambaram District- A study “ is taken by historical method. Both primary and secondary sources were used for this study. Also Archaeological evidences, literary sources, and periodical evidences used and descriptive and analytical methodology followed.

Etymological meaning

Earlier, the Chidambaram temple place called as ThillaiKoothanKovil. It revealed that man grow forest surri under by the temple and shrine. Because Chidambaram having second largest mangalatesa in India after sunderban forest. This shine also have another name Thillai Sambalam, which means the open stage of Thillai. Further, this town chidambaram have one more definition, Chit -Ambalam means “Wisdom of Atmosphere.” This complex word come from related to Shiva Nataraja, the comic dancer and the cultural atmosphere for arts. for arts

Origin

There is lot of archaeological and literary evidences from Indus valley civilization.. For the first time during the Palkava period dancing Shiva’s sculptures were found in Tamilnadu. later Lord Nataraja cult gained greater impetus during the Chola period. The origin of lord Shiva cult has been lost in the midst of time although it is certain that Lord Shiva cult cannot be traced back by any single source.

As Nataraja (Sanskrit: Lord of Dance) represents apocalypse and creation as he dances away the illusory world of Maya transforming it into power and enlightenment. The symbolism of Shiva, Nataraja is religion, art and science merged as one. In god’s endless dance of creation,

preservation, destruction and paired graces is hidden understanding of the universe “Om NamahShivaya”. Lord Nataraja’s dance is not just a symbol. It is taking place within each of us; at automatic level, this is very moment. The *Agamas* proclaim “The birth of the world, its maintenance, its destruction, the soul’s obscuration and liberation are the five acts of his dance”. This is undoubtedly the most recognised manifestation of Lord Shiva and as Vidya Dehejia states in the exhibition catalogue, is the quintessential deity of the Tamil country of South India. Hence, Lord Nataraja is depicted within the ring of fire, the *prabha*, as both the creator and destroyer of the world, shown through the drum and the flame which can be seen in his two rear hands. His front left hand extends in a dance gesture and his front right hand is representative of the cyclical cosmic concept of time in India. Lord Nataraja can be seen standing on *Muyalagan*, the demon war who represents darkness and ignorance to be overcome. Lord Nataraja is shown with the serpent around his waist and flowing matted locks or dreadlock (called *jatamakuta*). Within which can be seen Ganga, the goddess of the Ganges, another of Shiva’s consorts. Once a celestial river, the gods granted that the river could flow on earth for the benefit of men.

Evolution

The evolution of the icons of Nataraja is an interesting history where dance and music, art and religion, philosophy and mysticism played no mean part. *Karanagama* and the *Kamikagama* give detailed measurements of the distances of the various limbs from *Imadhyasutra* of the dancing Shiva-Nataraja. A comparative and deep study of the *Saivagamas* the *Bharatanatya Sastra* and commentary of the same by Abhinavaguptacharya, the early Tamil classics, the epic *Silappatikaram*, and the hymns of the Nayanmars, besides the *Saiva Sidhanta* works, particularly *Unmaivilakkam* and the *Chidambaram mummukkovai of Kumara*

Guruparar can assist one to comprehend to some extent how the *pre-Aryan* tribal dances in cemeteries and burial grounds took shape and dominated the field of dancing and sculpture.

During the tenth century, the priests of Chidambaram began to reframe the religious identity of this long-sacred place with the intention of transforming and isolating local religious tradition into a Pan-Indic one that could draw pilgrims from distant places, award its deity extensive fame, and bring that town spiritual prestige, commercial wealth and broader regional impact. Among the transformations at *Thillai* were the the genius of new Sanskrit names for the town itself and mythic identity for the Nataraja icon that simultaneously linked him to other forms of Shiva known across India through Sanskrit texts(*puranas*) and distanced him from local, wrathful deities. The Chola kings' selection of *Thillai's* dancing god for their emblem catalyzed these revisions.

Chidambaram versions of the myths of the *Thillai* forest and the dance contest could then have neutralized these associations. The myth of the *Thillai* forest cast fire and the dance as part of Shiva's calm response to the threads of foolish sages and it identified Chidambaram's god as a later form of the widely known Bhikshatana/Nataraja against ancient Tamil goddess of the locality and credited him with exiling her from the sacred precinct.

The incorporation of *Thillai* Kali into Nataraja's story could also have strengthened Chola identification with Nataraja. As a fierce goddess of local and ancient fame, *Thillai* Kali shared several features with the goddess Nishumbhasudani, possibly the favoured deity of Vijayalaya Chola.(850-870 CE) Vijayalaya's descendants' ambitions to expand beyond the geographic confines of his small Kingdom may have encouraged them to identify with the God Nataraja-

who had domesticated and overcome a goddess much like the ones associated with his still-localised scope of kingship.

This strategy may have played a role forging strong bonds that would connect Chidambaram and the Cholas from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Whatever the causes, those bonds clearly existed by the reign of Rajaraja Chola I (985-1014 C.E), and images of Nataraja constituted one language through which Rajaraja I expressed affiliation. The Chola queen Sembiyan Mahadevi was Rajaraja's predecessor in deploying the Nataraja image as a Chola emblem.

Rajaraja Chola I manifested his devotion to Chidambaram Nataraja clearly in sculpture, painting and inscriptions at Brihadeeswarar temple in Thanjavur, which he had built between 1003 and 1010 C.E. featuring Nataraja at his royal temple in the Chola capital. Rajaraja I placed the dancing god of Chidambaram at the geographic centre of the king's political realm, declaring Chidambaram and Nataraja's importance in the world of Chola politics.

Rajaraja's declarations of devotion to Nataraja were unprecedented in their scale, but Cholas had acknowledged this deity. Gandaraditya Chola (949 -958 C.E) had composed a hymn to the dancing god of *Thillai*. His wife queen Sembiyan Mahadevi became the first Chola to invest heavily in the construction of temples, and on each of the twelve temples attributable to her patronage, Nataraja appeared for the first time as a full scale sculpted image, carved essentially in the round and housed in his own framed niche. On Sembiyan Mahadevi's temples, Nataraja's niche always faces south, recalling the peculiar southward orientation of Nataraja's Kanaga Sabha in Chidambaram. His placement is not so consistent among the earlier temples bearing small Nataraja reliefs. Further evidence of Parantaka's commitment to Chidambaram lies in his

gilding the roof of the Kanaga Sabha, donating gold from booty obtained from military campaigns late in his reign.

Parantaka's gift that shortly after Nataraja imaginary acquired a visual form, Nataraja had become the god of a Cholaking, supported by newly acquired armature of myths embodying royal ideals. The Nataraja cult then probably continued to evolve, transforming a Tamil deity of specific, local scope into a Sanskritic god of broader significance who more precisely suited an ambitious dynasty and religious community. With mutually accommodating gestures such as Parantaka's gift and Chidambaram's reinvention of its dancing god, Chidambaram and the Cholas developed a compelling reciprocity that would operate for the duration of that dynasty, as the temple town's ancient sanctity and new god enhanced the Cholas' royal legitimacy and Chidambaram benefited from the ambitious Cholas' donations and growing fame. The Cholas also stood to gain from the spread of Chidambaram's fame, as this in turn could spread the fame of Nataraja's royal protectors across the increasingly large region over which the Cholas claimed political authority.

Over the course of the tenth century, Sembian Mahadevi and perhaps Parantaka I (907-955 C.E.) preceded Rajaraja I in deploying Nataraja as a Chola emblem with increasing prominence on temples they had constructed. As Chola patronage expanded, Nataraja's image appeared in new places. Thus, the cult at Chidambaram spread visually through the Kaveri region over the tenth century, presumably as a result of Chola patronage of that cult and of temple construction. Their deployment of Nataraja continued to emphasize Chidambaram's idiosyncrasies as a place and as a cult thus keeping Nataraja embedded in his ancient home even as his extended across the Kaveri delta.

Conclusion

Thus, the Concrete ideas of *Saiva Siddhanta* were already there in the hymns of Nayanmars. Lord Shiva as the mystic dancer everybody knew, that he danced in Chidambaram was not new. The captivating smile of Lord Nataraja and the sublime serenity of the face, expressive of divine bliss, were already the theme of hymns which moved the faithful to their marrows.

Notes and References

1. Annanda K., Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, Asian Publishing House, Bombay, 1974.
2. Balasubramanyan, S.R., *Early Chola Art* (Part-1), Asian Publishing House, Bombay, 1966.
3. Dehejia, Vidya, *Art of the Imperial Cholas*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990.
4. Dhaksinamoorthy, *Sri Nataraja Thattuvam*, (Tamil), Vanathi Pathippagam, Chennai, 1996.
5. Gopinatha Rao, T.A., *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol-II, Part – II, Motilal Banarjidos Indological Publishers, Delhi, 1968.
6. John A. Loud, *The Rituals of Chidambaram*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai, n.d.
7. Joureau Dubreuil, *Iconography of Southern India*, Librarie Orientaliste Pual, Paris, 1937.
8. Kamaliah, K.C., *Vision of the Sacred Dance*, Karpakam Achakam, Madras, 1987.
9. Kamil Zvelebil, V., *Ananda-Tandava of Siva-Sadananttamurti*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai, 1998.
10. Kandaswamy, S.N., *The Concept of God in Saiva Siddhanta*, Thanjavur Tamil Sangam, Thanjavur, 1995.
11. Krishna Sastri, H., *South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2000.
12. Krishnamurti, C., *Saiva Art and Architecture in South India*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1985.

13.Manikkavelu,

M.A.,*ThamizhnattilNatarasarVazhipadu*,(Tamil)AmblavananPathippagam,Chennai, 1994.

14.Nadarajadasan,*Indhu Samaya Shivan Vazhipadu*,(Tamil),Abirami Publications,Chennai,1983.

15. Nadarajan,B., *Tillai and Nadaraja*, Mudgala Trust Publishers, Madras,1994.

16.Sivaramamurti,C.,*Nataraja inArt, Thought and Literature*, Publications Divition,Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi.1974.

17.Srinivasan,Sharada, “Dating the Nataraja Dance Icon: TechnicalInsights”,*Magazine of the Arts*, Bangalore,2001.

18.Swamy,B.G.L.*Chidambaram and Nataraja*, Geetha Book House Publishers,Mysore,1979.