
Jvaradevata and Ravana: Reference to Two Unusual Sculptural Representations in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: *The temple and its structural specificities are the embodiments of the popular culture of the civilization. Each of which signifies high degree workmanship and dedication. The structures portray the known and the unknown. It remains an eternal representation of man's conception of the supreme and hence he delineates HIM in his own very way of representation. Through the enormous literatures on the scientific erection of the temples, various breathtaking compositions come alive in stones. The obvious ones have received wider acclaim and prone to deeper study. Yet, the complexity and the divergence of myriad temple structures conceal certain structural facets which encompasses stunning and less adored pieces of worship and creativity. Two such structural and iconographic representations, that stood overlooked among the mighty columns of great temples-the Jvaradevamurti at Suchindram and the Ravana at Valvichchakottamare prone to appraisal.*

Keywords: Suchindram, Kanyakumari, Jvaradevata, Valvichchakottam, Ravana, Marthanda Varma, Epigraphy

Introduction

Being a religious institution and place of worship, the temple in India has had a hoary past. It enshrines the deity or some object of veneration and has varied growth in several parts of India. They acted as cradles of great Indian religions and their fusions over time. While retaining the common Indian plans and elevations, and the native principles and techniques of construction, showed their creedal distinctions by suitable adaptations of their forms. The craftsmen (*Sthapatis*) along with the priesthood decided upon the nature of object of veneration. They determined the forms of temples, their modifications, features of principal and sub-deities and decorations of the structure with iconic and other embellishments. The *vaastu*, *silpa*, *agama* texts and canons evolved and formed the base upon which the temple structure was realized.

Temples from the Chola times (9th -10th centuries) became the very hub of the rural and urban life in all its aspects-religious, cultural, social, economic, educational and thus

became the repository of all that was best in fabric , architecture , sculpture and other arts. Southern temples with their characteristic tiered *vimana* shrines, major and minor, their axial and peripheral *mandapa* adjuncts, which are flat roofed halls and the towering *Gopura* entrances form a distinct class by themselves as against the northern *prasada* temples with their curvilinear super structures, the crowning *amalaka* and *mandapas* with rising tiered roofs. The evolution of the hypaethral temples to the structural stone temples in South India has several intermediate phases and are complex.

The Pallavas were instrumental in the transition from rock-cut architecture to stone temples as the ones built by Mahendra Varman I, Narasimhavarman II etc. The Chola period saw a hasty intervention on the construction of a great number of new temples, renovation and grants by Raja Raja and his successors. Those constructed were typical examples of Dravidian Architecture. The Vijayanagara period almost gave a new and vigorous spurt to temple architecture by way of repairs or additions to the existing structures, and erection of new ones. In the southern territories of Vijayanagara, they developed the tradition up to the times of the Pandyas. Kerala (inclusive of erstwhile Venad, later Travancore, province of Kanyakumari) continued the traits of the Pallava –Chola-Pandya, Vijayanagara and Nayaka architecture.

The temple is the most significant architecture as it sums up and represents subtle values of Indian culture. Elaborations of the temple sculpture followed the firm establishment of image worship and the accompanying development of the ritual, which took time to crystallize. The evolution of different architectural forms in south and other parts of India was a later development (Srinivasan 2008). The paper presents a comprehensive picture of the unnoticed aspects or sculptures of certain important and once mighty south Indian temples, explaining the niceties of their architecture, the many subtle variations in style and sample of their scarce position among the usually elevated deities.

Suchindram

The ‘Spiritual Capital of Nanchinad’ (Kanyakumari district), Suchindram is afforded with mighty temple structures that have stood the test of time and has treasured rare enchanting structural and sculptural accomplishments within them. The Sthanumalayapperumal temple (T.A.S Vol IV:94), so called by virtue of its association with all the Trimurtis-Brahma Vishnu and Siva-stands majestically facing east, about a hundred yards away from the southern bank of the Paalayar along the Cape Road, 13km north of Kanyakumari (Figure 1). ‘Sthanu’ is a synonym for Siva, ‘Mal’ for Vishnu and ‘Ayan’ for Brahma. It is believed that the top, middle and base of the image in the temple represent Siva, Vishnu and Brahma respectively (Padmanabhan 1977: 123). Tradition goes that Indra was purified at this place and hence the name. ‘Suchi’ means purity. There is a strong belief that even today the *Ardhayamapuja* in the temple is performed by Indra himself. An element of syncretism (Champakalakshmi 1981:265)

is visible in the Trimurti concept of Suchindram. The earliest occurrence of the name 'Sthanumalayapperumal' in the inscriptions is found only in that of 1471 AD.

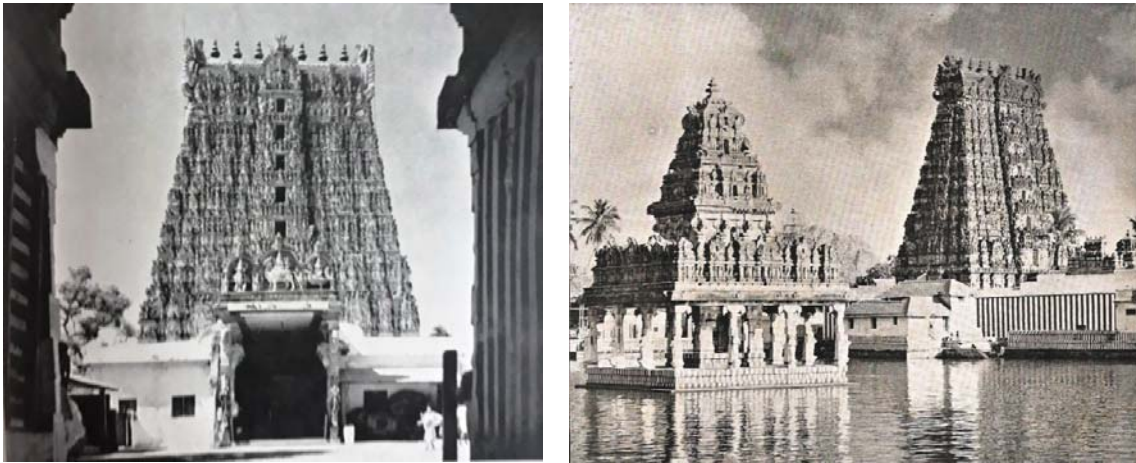


Figure 1: The Sthanumalayapperumal Temple, Suchindram

The temple was famed for the time-honoured ordeal conducted, popularly known as the 'Suchindran Pratyayam' or 'Kaimukku', which was a peculiar mode of testing the innocence of a suspected offender. (*Pratyayam* literally means confidence or trust. *Kaimukku* literally means 'dipping the hand' (Pillay 1953:299-326). The accused was to dip his hand into boiling ghee at the temple, and if his hand was left unhurt, his innocence was established. Nothing has contributed to the popular veneration of the pagoda as this fiery ordeal held under its authority. However, the ordeal was abolished in 1834 AD by Maharaja Swati Tirunal Rama Varma of Travancore (Raja 2006).

Epigraphical Records

Raja Raja Chola's epigraphs at Suchindram commences with the 10th year of his reign (Earliest discovered in Nanjinad being of 8th year at Darsanamkope). It is inferred that the while the Suchindram inscription of the 10th years describes the place merely as 'Nancinattu Tiruccivindiram', that of the 14th year speaks of it as 'Rajaraja Valanaattu Tiruccivindiram'. (T.A.S Vol.VI:1-6). Suchindram did not fail to receive the patronage of Rajaraja's son Rajendra Chola; the inscription at the base of the *garbhagriha* of Tekkedam belongs to his reign (T.A.S Vol.III:198). Jatavarman Sundaracola Pandya's name too is found in the epigraphs of Suchindram. The Suchindram records interestingly records that the village encompassing it was also described as Sundarachola-caturvedimangalam, obviously after Sundarachola (T.A.S Vol.IV: 136). Three lithic records of the next Chola sovereign Jatavarman Udaiyar Sri Chola Pandya are found in Suchindram, the last of which is dated in the 25th year of his rule. Accession of Kulothunga I in 1070 AD saw his presence in Suchindram inscriptions indicating his control over Nanjinad. It is incontrovertible that the authority of the Venad rulers was established over certain parts of Nanjinad by the first quarter of the 12th century AD. An inscription of 1126 AD (301 ME) at Suchindram, though silent

about the ruling sovereign or his regal year, furnishes for the first time among the Suchindram epigraphs the date in terms of the Kollam Era. The very circumstance suggests the suzerainty of the Venad rulers, over the locality. Also Suchindram is described in an inscription as Vira Kerala-chaturvedimangalam. It is suggestive of Vira Kerala of the 12th century. The Vattappalli Sthanikar, the titular custodian of the Suchindram temple is said to be in possession of a palm leaf record indicating the confirmation of Vira Kerala's authority over Suchindram). It is recorded that Maaravarman Sri Vallabha, the Pandyan King had made an endowment to the Suchindram temple. However the 'Sabha' described Suchindram as their own village. Koda-Kerala Varma's inscription of 1145 AD is also found in the temple. Udayamarthanda Varma(4th / 12th century AD) appears to have been actively associated with the construction of the *Ardhamandapa* of the temple. The Suchindram epigraph shows that Jatavarman Parakrama Pandya (15th century AD) instituted in the 28th year of his reign the 'Parakrama Pandya Sandhi Puja' for which he settled lands in Cengalakkuricci in Tirunelveli District.

The Chera, Chera Udaya Marthanda Varma (1383-1444AD), was actively connected with the Suchindram pagoda, and undoubtedly, he was the architect of the 'Sabha Mandapa' of the temple. The inscription which glorifies the benefaction describes him as 'Keralakshmapatindra'(the great Emperor of Kerala). Among Udayamarthada Varma's successors, Adiya Varma, Rama Varma, Marthanda Varma (all ruling as co-partners in the latter half of the 15th century)- were authors of certain embellishments of the Suchindram Pagoda. Two other rulers figuring prominently in Suchindram are Jayasimha Deva II (1495) and Sakalakala Marthanda Varma (1495). Bhutala Sri Vira Udayamarthanda (1516 AD), on the temple of Suchindram, he settled a gift of land in Talakkudi. Probably he was the architect of Udayamathanda Vinayakar near the entrance of the Suchindram temple. Vijayanagara had its sway in Nanchinad and Ramayayya Vitthala, the Vijayanagara Viceroy is to have built the Gopuram of the temple of Tiruvenkathanatha and erected the 'Dhvajasthamba' in front of the Perumal shrine at 720 ME.

Following the footsteps of the Vijayanagar generals, came the Nayaks of Madura. The regular invasion of Nanjiinad was first undertaken by Tirumala Nayak in 1634 AD (Pillai, Vol. II :192). Tirumala's advent of Suchindram had several benefactions, the palace in the South Street, the Garudalvar shrine, the endowment of a golden *angi* or mask for the image of the Tekkedam Perumal and the construction of broad streets in Suchindram are all products of his munificence. Insecurity and unrest prevailed in the 17th and 18th centuries that affected Suchindram and its neighboring villages. One of the 'Mudaliyar Manuscripts' furnishes evidence of the attack of Alagappa Mudaliy's terrible plunder of the temple in 1725 AD (Pillay 1953:13-54). The Modern era in the history of Nanjinad and of the entire Travancore state may be said to have dawned with the epoch-making reign of Marthanada Varma (1729-1758 AD). His reforming zeal found enormous scope in Suchindram itself, where he initiated the bold policy of curbing the overgrown power of the Yogakkar (Sreedhara 2016).

While Marthanada Varma was engrossed in his early military exploits in Central Travancore, Chanda Sahib was entrusted by the Nawab of Arcot to attack and plunder the southern kingdoms. The marauding army also approached Suchindram. The trustees of the temple at Suchindram, the Yogakkar, becoming alarmed at the advancing fierce horde, improvised an army manned by the tenets and servants of the pagoda led by a member of the Vattapalli Matha. The fierce struggle ensued at Ittanaad, where they fought with the enemy and naturally the ill-organized band of men from Suchindram was easily dispersed and the Vattapalli leader was killed in the combat (A gift of land was bestowed on the Vattapalli family by the king of Travancore in recognition of the valiant fight put up by the member at Ittanaad (Pillay 1953: 52. Also Interview with N.P. Sharma, Vattappali Madom, titular *Sthanikar* of the Suchindram temple). The triumphant invaders marched straight to Suchindram, meanwhile the temple authorities had taken every possible precaution in order to protect the inner shrine and the sacred images from sacrilege. However, the army destroyed several of the temple structures. The army withdrew on the negotiation and payment of money by Marthanda Varma. Marthanda Varma's glorious reign came to end in 1758 AD. His successors continued to serve the pagoda. Next to the Padmanabhaswamy temple (Trivandrum), the Suchindram pagoda has received the greatest attention at the hands of the rulers of Travancore. Soon after his accession to the throne, every sovereign avail himself of the earliest opportunity to pay his homage to Sthanumalaya of Suchindram. During Rani Gauri Lakshmi Bayi's reign (1811-1815AD), Col. Munro, Dewan –Resident as part of administrative reforms, the Suchindram temple, along with 347 others and their entire property were brought under the management of the Government. Among the reforms appeared during the reign of Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, the Regent (1924-32), the abolition of the 'Devadasi' system (Lakshmi 1995) in temples and prohibition of the animal sacrifices were effected. The last ruler of Travancore, Sree Chithra Tirunal saw the epoch-making 'Temple Entry Proclamation' (November 1936) (Selected Proclamations by the Sovereign 1937:587), which threw open temples to all Hindus, irrespective of any caste prejudices.

Temple

The stately tower that arrests our attention first is the Gopura which could be seen from a considerable distance. The height being 134 feet 6 inches and stands over a plinth area of nearly 5,400 square feet. The grace of the gopura is incredible, well-proportioned, the tower presents a gradual tapering upwards. The Suchindram Gopura forms a striking contrast with the one at the Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple in Trivandrum. Indeed, none of the temples in entire erstwhile Travancore can boast of a Gopuraso elegant and graceful as the one at Suchindram. The plinth surface of the granite Gopura base of the Suchindram Temple contains numerous panels, each of which presents the sculpture of gods, goddesses or an a Puranic/epic theme of the Hindu pantheon. The best sculptures of the Suchindram temple belong to the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries AD. The temple consists of the Natakasala (a large magnificent

pavilion, while in the past, dancing and dramatic performances were staged by Devadasis.). The prodigious doorway the *Gopuravaatal* and its shrines, *Unchal* Mandapa (a rectangular pavilion of stone, containing paintings and sculptured pillars), the Dakshinamurti shrine, the Uttupura and Madapalli (feeding halls), Southern Sribalipura, Vasanta Mandapa (highly ornamented), shrines to Nilakanta Vinayakar, Kankalanathar, Kailasattu Mahadevar, Ceravaathal Sasta, Ramaswamy, Subramoniaswamy, Jayantisvara, Kalabairavar, Aramvalattamman, Anjaneya, Devendra Vinayakar, Nandi, Konrauadinaathar, Garudalvaar, Udayamarthanda Mandapa, Rishabhamandapa, Mudu Ganapati, Sankaranarayana, Pallikondaperumal, Suchindraperumal etc. The Chempakaraman Mandapa (with 32 pillars, built in 1471), the Unchal Mandapa, Alankara Mandapa, the Gopura base and the Chitra Sabha (1410), which were erected during the above periods bear the best specimens and testimony to rich artistic merit presenting lively sculptural representations of Puranic deities and scenes (Pillay 1953:55-87). The musical pillars cut out of granite stone and the monolithic image of Anjaneya (18 feet high) and the gigantic image of Nandi (considered as biggest in India) are world renowned for their exquisite workmanship (Padmanabhan 1977: 123). These can stand a favourable comparison with the most brilliant products of other places in South India.

The part of Gopura was constructed by the Vijayanagara general Vitthala Maharaja in 1545 AD (720 ME). Further reconstruction or renovation was carried on between 1881-1888 AD. Prominent among these sculptural illustrations of the 16th century includes Siva as Lingodbhavamurti, Dakshinamurti, Gajaharamurti, Jvaradevamurti, Kankaalanathar and Urdhava Tandava as Nataraja. The forms of Vishnu as Trivikrama, Garuda Narayana Parthasarathi and Venugopala. Also are celestial deities such as Surya, Chandra and goddesses Kali. The Base-reliefs on the façade of the Cempakaraman Mandapa depicts scenes from *Puranas*, *Ithihasas* and other sacred lore.

Jvaradevamurti

Most sculptures of the deities mentioned above, are commonly found among most south Indian temples. The exception among them is Siva as Jvaradevamurti (Figure 2a, 2b). The Jvaradeva or Jvarabhagnamurti is a rare form of Samharamurti situated at the third panel to the north of the *Gopuravasal*. Very few temples contain the sculpture of this deity, the only other place prominently featuring being Bhavaani. The Siva mythology mentions the circumstances leading to the adoption of this form of Parameswara.

While Siva and Vishnu were engaged in a mock fight, on the eve of the game, in the role of Krishna encouraged and blessed by Siva, entered upon his final conflict with Vanan, the son of Mahabali. During the course of the mock fight Krishna aimed at Siva an arrow causing severe fever (Jvara). It was then that Siva, in order to overpower the fever, assumed this strange form with three heads, nine eyes, four arms and three legs. The *Agamas* and the *Ishanagurudevapaddhati* describe the deity as having three legs, two on the right side and one on the left.



2a



2b

Figures 2a and 2b: Jvaradevata at Suchindram Smeared with Pepper Paste

With regard to Suchindram the sculpture of the Jvaradeva, only four eyes are clearly seen; it is obvious that the two faces on either side are presumed to have two other eyes, while the eyes on the foreheads would bring the total to nine. Here the eye on the forehead is not at all distinct. Only three arms are definitely seen; presumably another arm is taken to be hidden from view. The murti's outer hand on the right holds a trident or *trisula*, and the inner right has a small bell. The left hand appears to hold a collection of the palm leaves. All the three legs of the *murti* rests on the pedestal. But the sculpture is devoid of halo or *prabha* around the head.

The popular belief is that Jvaradevata has the power of curing fever. Often the devotees visiting the pagoda smear pepper or chilly paste on the image believing that they would obtain relief from their malady by doing so. This practice continues till date. However, according to the Agamas, Jvaradevamurti has to be depicted as being dejected and down cast in appearance. This feature is well demonstrated in the sculpture at Suchindram; the facial expression almost suggests a weeping countenance.

Valvichchakottam

The village of Valvichchakottam in Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu; a region of the Nanjinad of erstwhile Travancore (Situated at Kattaathurai, 2km from Swamyarmadam on NH 47 at Trivandrum to Nagercoil) contains two temples, one

dedicated to Bhagavati and the other Tiruppannikodukshetram, to Siva. The deity in the temple of Bhagavati is the goddesses in her Mahishasuramardini aspect. The centuries old temple of the goddess earned name and fame from the place itself.

The origin and significance of the name of the village may be of interest. The original designation of the present incorrect form *Vaal vechaKottam / Val vechagostam/ valvichchakottam*, seems to have been *Val- Kalugichcha-kottam* or *Val-vaittakottam* 'the place where the sword was washed and kept' (Figure 3). It occurs in the latter form in an inscription dated Kollam Era 795 found in the Bhagavati temple in the same village. The *Tolkappiyam* and *Purapporul-venba-malai* describe the sword washing ceremony (*Purattinai* 68, *Padanpadalam* 35). This ceremony, an old institution among the Tamilians was celebrated by a victorious king who, returning triumphant from a battle, placed his reeking sword on the image of Durga and offered worship to both, with flowers, sandal paste, and frankincense. The sword was then taken around in a well-attended procession to the river side (*Ulijnai* 27) (T.A.S Vol. VI:169-171).



Figure 3: Valvachchakottam Temple



Figure 4: RavanaSculpture

Legend also connects the temple with Parasurama who before proceeding to the Himalayas after killing the Kshatriyas, dug a pond here, cleaned his *parasu/* axe and worshipped the goddess. The name is thus derived- 'Vaal Vacha Gostam' - literally meaning ' place where the sword was placed'. It is also said that Pandavas during their exile had hid their secret weapons here. Yet another legend is related with a Varyar (of

Ambalavasi community) sighting the deity accompanied by a *yakshi* and he subsequently built a temple with the assistance of the Venad King.

The temple also has a tryst with a decisive episode in Travancore history. It is believed that after bloodshed when Anizham Tirunal Marthanda Varma decided to surrender his kingdom to Lord Padmanabha, he washed his blood stained sword here and placed it in reverence. Moreover, he used to surrender / place his sword in front of the goddesses here and sought her blessings before he proceeded for any war. This custom was held before the decisive war of Colachel in 1741 against the Dutch, when Marthandavarma ceremoniously sought the blessings of the deity at Vaal Vecha Gostam. The deity was much revered as her blessings were sought for victory. The deity was offered the Thanka Anki (Gold ornaments) by Marthandavarma himself. It is still adorned to the deity on the 9th day of the temple's annual festival and special rituals conducted along with it. Traditionally, the Travancore kings were the patrons of the temple. Customarily, before the coronation; the heir apparent used to visit the temple and sought blessings of the deity, the tradition still persists.

Epigraphical Records

Inscriptions present in temple carvings were written in Sanskrit, Tamil, Vattezhuthu and Granta scripts. As per records, the temple was presumed to be built in three stages. The temple was erected in Kollam 410 (1234 AD) by a private individual of Melaimarudattur for the welfare of the Travancore sovereign Venattadigal (who was presumably Vira Ravi Kerala Varman of the Manalikkarai record (T.A.S Vol.III:29). The inscription on the base of the south wall of the central shrine encompasses the construction of the temple. Translated as; "May the temple which (I), Aranga-Narayanan of Melaimarudattur-kavu have constructed , protect myself, the country , king Venattadigal (The Travancore King), and those who have contributed towards the *tiruppani* (sacred temple erection) (T.A.S Vol VI Part II:171.). It appears likely that the temple was built in commemoration of some victories gained by the king, the nature of which is undetermined. Among the two other inscriptions engraved on either side of the entrance of the temple, records the fact that Trivikraman of Mullamangalam, had built the *ottakal- mandapa* (mandapa made of a single granite) in the immediate presence of the goddess built in Kollam 975 (T.A.S Vol.VI Part II:171.). , and that Damodaran of Mullamangalam died three years in Kollam 975 after having built some portions. The date of completion of the *mukha –mandapa* was in Kollam 978 (T.A.S Vol.VI Part II:172). On the other record belonging to the temple is a pillar label mentioning the name of the Variyam Kali-Sankaran.

The Temple

The principal shrine or Sreekovil (*Garbhagriha*) of the presiding deity was built in 12-13 centuries as noted earlier. It is 32ft high, made of rectangular stone. The *ottakalmandapam* (built of a single granite) is intrinsically carved. So also is the wooden ceiling with miniature representations of episodes from Ramayana. There is a special

pradakshinamandapam supported by 20 pillars .Each pillar has sculptures differing from each other and has its own significance.

Flight of twelve steps leads the visitor inside. The forecourt is expansive. *Kodimaram* (*flag pole*) welcomes the devotee. *Balikkalpura* or the *Shilpamandapam* as the name suggests is adorned with stone carvings of various sizes. Huge entrance leads to the *Kathirmandapa* and the *Namaskaara Mandapam*. Records say that *Balikkalmandapa* and *Kathirmandapa* were built in 16th century and subsequent additions were made in the 18th century. *Mukhamandapam* is crafted by Thiruvikraman Nambodiri in 1620 AD. The Temple pond, *arattupura* and *oottupura* are present within the premises.

The principal deity, Mahishasura Mardini is of more than 7 ft height 'well carved in stone; standing with four hands bearing the *sankhu* and *chakra*. HER right leg rests on the head of the demon Mahishasura. Two Ganapatis, Nagaraja and Yakshi are installed within the inner circle or the *naalambalam*. The beautiful outer *mandapa* has six huge pillars three in each row in the north and the south, bearing representations of Gods such as Nataraja and Kali. A pair of pillars at the east entrance bears the Rati and Manmatha in half relief. Other sculptures include bearded Arjuna (similar to Suchindram), dancing Kali, Rama and Lakshmana. Among those elevated/ elite deities; one mostly misses the baddie of the scene.

One hardly notices the unusually rare sculpture of the mighty Ravana (the demon king of Lanka). It is uncommon to depict Ravana with such importance and elegance (Figure 4).

Out of the eight pillars, supporting the mandapa in front of the shrine, two contains life- size representations of Nataraja and Kali. These complementary figures were popular motifs among the sculptures of the 17th and the 18th centuries. The other complementary pairs of figures facing each other in the opposite pillars are those of Lakshmana and Indrajith (son of Ravana), Arjuna and Karna. These pairs of the epic heroes were characteristic features of the said period and popular among constructions Nayaks of Madura.

Ravana

Ravana is one of the principal demons in Hindu mythology who fought against Rama, the avatar of Vishnu. In the great Indian Epic Ramayana Ravana is essayed as the king of Lanka and the overlord of Rakshasas (demons) (Mani 1975: 354). He dares to abduct Sita, wife of Rama. Ravana's arrogance sets in motion a chain of events that culminates in a great battle between Rama and Ravana. Today, Hindus still commemorate the events of the Ramayana in drama and lore, commemorating the victory of Good over Evil.

Born to sage Vishrava, and Kaikesi the Daitya princess Ravana's immense power is demonstrated by his physical features. He has ten heads and ten pairs of arms, carrying assorted weapons. His imperious militarism is well accepted even by the

Devatas. Ravana a staunch devotee of Brahma performed an intense penance for millenniums. Pleased, the Creator offered Ravana a boon. Shrewd Ravana asked for immortality which Brahma refused. Ravana then asked for absolute invulnerability and supremacy before Gods and heavenly spirits, demons, serpents, and wild beasts. Contemptuous of mortal beings, Ravana never cared it necessary a protection from human beings. This wish was granted. He also blessed Ravana great strength by way of sorcery and knowledge of divine weapons.

Meanwhile, Ravana conquered Lanka and dared to challenge Lord Shiva at his abode upon Mount Kailash. Unknowingly, Ravana attempted to uproot and move the mountain on a whim. Shiva, annoyed by Ravana's arrogance, pressed his smallest toe on Kailash, pinning Ravana firmly underneath. Once Ravana was informed of whom he had crossed, he became penitent. For several years he sang songs praising Shiva, until the Destructor released him from his bondage. Pleased with his bravery and devotion, Shiva granted Ravana further strength, awarding him the 'Chandrasah' (or "Moon-blade"), an immensely powerful sword. Ravana in turn became a lifelong devotee of Lord Shiva. It is also during this incident that Ravana officially acquired his name, which was given to him by Shiva and means "(He) of the terrifying roar," referring to the fact that the earth is said to have quaked with Ravana's cry of pain when the mountain was pinned upon him.

Ravana unleashed the full extent of his magical abilities while making full use of the boons given to him by Shiva and Brahma. After a drawn-out battle, Rama successfully decapitated Ravana's central head, but another promptly arose in its place. Rama went on to decapitate this head, only to find yet another growing in its place. This re-growth occurred because of a vessel of amrit, the nectar of immortality, which Ravana had stored in his stomach. This cycle of decapitation and regeneration continued on until twilight, when Ravana's magical powers became even more pronounced. Vibhishana informed Rama the reason. Vibhishana, whose knowledge of Ravana's proficiency with black magic and mystical weapons allowed Rama to gain a strategic advantage in the ensuing battle. Rama then invoked the 'Brahmastra', a weapon of mass destruction, and fired the great arrow into Ravana's midsection, destroying the cache of *amrit*. With the *amrit* no longer in effect, Ravana met his demise and Sita was freed.

Despite his villainous behavior, Ravana is a great character. Ravana is believed to have composed 'Shiva Tandava Stotra' (Coomaraswamy 1917). Further, his skillful leadership is often noted; although Ravana initially took Lanka by force, he was nevertheless an effective ruler, bringing times of great prosperity to the island during his rule. With this in mind, citizens of Khonpura (Madhya Pradesh) worship their Ravana idol during the Dussera festival (Santoshi 2013), an occasion wherein worshipers everywhere else burn his effigy. His successes notwithstanding, Ravana was a tragic figure who engendered his own demise with his unfettered desire and his imperious militarism. As could be expected, he continues to endure as the archetypal villain in the Hindu tradition.

The Ravana at Valvichchakottam

In congruence with his mythological descriptions, Ravana is depicted in art with up to ten heads. His ten heads earned him the names *Dashamukha* ("The ten-faced"), *Dashagriva* ("The ten-necked") and *Dashakantha* ("Ten Throats"). Ravana is also pictured with up to 20 hands, signifying his greed and never-ending want. To illustrate his military might, each and every one of his hands contains a weapon, including the trident, the conch, and the chakra (discus), among others. His skin is typically blue. As the personification of all evil, Ravana has been a popular subject of folk art and sculpture throughout India and Sri Lanka, as well as many other regions to which the Ramayana has spread.

The Ravana in the second pillar of the inner circle of the temple at Vaal Vecha Gostam too characterizes the above vigour. The facial expression symbolizes his readiness for the battle. The sculpture about 5 feet high. Ravana is depicted with 10 heads and 20 hands, each hand carrying specific weapons. The right hand carries the *Chandrasahsa/Khadga* (the powerful sword bestowed by Shiva) and is clasped with the left hand. The other hands holds *Khadga* (sword), *Gadha* (Indian Club), *Bana* (Arrow) *Chakra*, *Sankh* (Conch), *Ankusa* (Goad), *Trishula* (Trident), *Dagger*, *Naga*, etc., which are clearly evident.

The two legs rest firmly on the pedestal. Adorned with *Kirida* (Crown with the *sikhmani* on it) on the heads, great pride and valour is depicted on the face. The Moustache and protruding tooth are evident in all the 10 faces, which forms characteristic features of the *daityas*. The principal face has elongated ears with *Kundala* (earnings) that touches the shoulders (Gupta, Asthana 2007:121-136). The capturing muscular body is adorned with trinkets such as the *Upagriva* and *Hara* (necklaces), *Bahuvalaya*, *Kanakana* (bangles on the wrist), *Katisutra* (around the waist), the (*Padavalaya/Nupura* and *Paadasaras* (anklet) on the legs and the foot respectively.

Conclusion

The South Indian temple sculptures bestow a completely separate identity to the temple building idiom in India. The South Indian temple were centers of power that decided the fortunes of kings and the subjects alike. The temples represented the grandeur of once prevalent kingdoms which poured endlessly upon the temples competing each other to etch of their offerings in the form of structural embellishments and epigraphical records. The two temples and the sculptures in the present study remains unique with their unusual presence within the temples of India. The Jvaradevata of Suchindram is peculiar with its emotional weeping countenance, that is seldom seen in the iconographic representation of Siva. Meanwhile the Ravana at Valvichchakottam represents a mighty warrior with expressive ardor of bravery and inclination for a combat with all his fierceness. Such representation of Ravana in his colossal figure is hardly ever noticed. Hence, the two structural representations claim an exceptional position within the architectural, iconographic, historical and archaeological point of view of South Indian temples.

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