



Siva As Anugrahamurti – A Study of Visual Narratives from South India

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ABSTRACT

The present paper enquires about the visual narrative aspects of traditional paintings from South India. The Śiva as Anugrahamūrti aspects are analyzed through the traditional paintings which narrates the mythological stories from Śivapuranas. The 'rūpa' represents diverse range of meanings and has both aesthetic and philosophical importance in the Indian art. Rūpa means to 'shine', 'form', 'figure', and it explains about the outward appearance. Rūpa and mūrti are the synonymous words in the Indian texts, which stands for the figurative, representational image. The anthropomorphic forms of Śiva depicted as Anugrahamūrti known for their representational images and analyzed here as exclusive examples for visual narratives from South India. The murals and traditional paintings from South India which are known for similar anthropomorphic and iconographical characteristics. The Caṇḍeśvarānugrahamūrti painting from Lepakshi murals and Mysore traditional paintings chosen to visualize the narrative aspects which represents the Śiva as Anugrahamūrti.

KEYWORDS

Visual Narratives, Murals, Traditional Paintings, South India

Introduction

The stylistic evolution of the South Indian mural paintings can be studied through the ages beginning from about the 2nd century B.C. through the three phases of painting remains at Ajanta, followed by Badami and Ellora in the Deccan upto the 9th century A.D. and through the Pallava-Pandya and Chola to the Vijayanagara paintings in the Tamil country.²

The temples are the sacred place of worship of established Hindu religions, which means house of gods: performs as religious institutions, central place of communication between gods and devotees and served as a promoter of arts, which ultimately showed the way to attain union between material and the spiritual.³ The temples play a vital role in influencing the cultural elements like social, religion, educational, moral, traditional, ritualistic, political, and economical conditions, which establishes the prosperity of that particular region.

The early iconographic manuals like *Tantra – sara*, *Vishnudharmottara* and *Manasollasa* describes various aspects and forms of Śiva, all of which are anthropomorphic in character. Detailed characters like three eyes that signify sun, moon, and fire, crescent moon on crest, matted hair as crown, serpents as ornaments, tiger skin as garment, and battle – axe and deer in the hands are described in these texts.⁴ The *Saivagama* texts classify several sportive forms, each of them associated with a myth, which are represented in the Śiva temples and also in Indian paintings.⁵ It is only from the second century B. C. that images of Śiva is come to known.

The anthropomorphic images introduce themselves to the devotee by their shape, stance, and attributes. Each image coheres by means of a canon of proportions and by the composition underlying the sculpture. Although the image is anthropomorphic, it is a symbol of deity and its more - than human relevance indicated by multiplying the number of its heads and, particularly its arms.⁶ The hands communicate by their gestures and their attributes the identity of the image. The fundamental gestures of an image of deity convey freedom from fear (*abhayamudra*) and the boon of the god's grace

(*varadamudra*). The attributes held in the hands are generally weapons, such as the sword that cuts through the attachment to worldly goals and objects. However, flowers too held in the hands of a god. The image of Śiva is distinguished, in many of his different manifestations by an antelope leaping from the fingers of one of his hands.⁷

Coomaraswamy describes the Indian or Far Eastern icon, carved or painted, is neither a memory image nor an idealization, but a visual symbolism, ideal in the mathematical sense. The "anthropomorphic" icon is of the same kind as a *yantra*, that is, a geometrical representation of a deity, or a mantra, that is, an auditory representation of a deity.⁸ The anugrahamūrti aspects of Śiva as explained by Gopinath describes the various boon-bestowing aspects of Śiva as *anugrahamūrti*: for example, Śiva is called *Caṇḍeśānugrahamūrti*, because he conferred on *Caṇḍeśvara* the boon of being the steward of the household of Śiva; *Vishvanugrahamūrti*, because he restored an eye to Vishṇu, who had plucked the same for offering it to Śiva, and for which act Śiva also presented Vishṇu with the chakra or the discus; and so forth.⁹

Visual Narratives

Wall paintings played significant role in the development of Indian painting tradition. These paintings can be seen mainly in temples, palaces, schools, i.e. (chitrashalas or painted rooms, galleries) and homes. The word 'narrative' is used to highlight the narrative quality of the visual much like an adjective. Narrative is used as qualifier and is added as a prefix to refer to any visual that has a narrative aspect.¹⁰ It is traditionally accepted that a narrative has two aspects - a story or content that generally consists of a sequence of events, and the form or expression which is the means by which the story is communicated and its actions presented.¹¹ Dehejia describes about the monoscentic mode of narratives which centers around a single event in a story, one that is generally neither the first nor the last and which introduces us to a theme of action such a scene is usually an easily identifiable event from a story and it serves as a reference to the narrative. This system of representation functioned well in India, where legends were

generally familiar to the viewer.¹² The word 'painting' informs about the visual i.e. it could be a painting, illustration and a scroll.¹³ Hence the narrative paintings generate extensive scope for understanding of narrative tradition through expressive characteristics of visuals.

Chandēsānugrahāmūrti:

– Śiva nidhi, Mysore Traditional Painting, Mysore.

The Śiva Purāna, Kailāsa - samhitā and Agni Purāna contains the biography of a Śaiva saint called Chandēsvara; explained in the following phrases. Bhatt explains the story of Vicāraśarman who was, from his very childhood, noted for his wisdom and devotion. He once saw a cowherd of his village treating his cows with cruelty, and therefore took charge of the cows himself. The cows thereafter received very kind treatment and consequently yielded more milk. The abundant quantity of milk which spontaneously poured from the udders of the cows was used by the new cowherd to bathe the lingas which he used to fashion every day for worship during the time when the cows went about grazing. The villagers, who came to know about this, complained to his father of the misappropriation of their milk despite the fact that the milk he used was not drawn out, but flowed forth by itself. Thereupon, his father appeared on the scene and handled his son roughly, though he was enwrapped in meditation and worship. Enraged at this disturbance, Vicāraśarman took up a stick which lay nearby, which immediately was transformed into an axe, and cut off the leg of his father, because the latter had kicked the materials of worship with it. Śiva then made himself manifest to him and pleased with his devotion, elevated him to the rank of a saint. The god further lay down that thereafter no worship of his would fructify without obeisance being paid to this new god. Śiva is represented as Chandēsvarānugrahāmūrti in the pose of bestowing blessings on the saint.¹⁴

The Śiva as Chandēsvarānugrahāmūrti as described in the Śaiva Kāraṇāgama; the lord Śiva who shines with yellow complexion. He has four hands. In one right hand he carries chisel and in one left hand a deer. On his left stands Pārvatī. With one hand the lord shows a gesture of granting boons. The lord keeps his another hand on the head of Chandēśa who stands on the right side of the lord. The lord has three eyes and is adorned with all ornaments. He wears the moon and the river Ganga on his head. Chandēśa should be shown on the right side of the Śiva and the height of the Chandēśa should be shown equal to the length of the lord's hand. Chandēśa should be shown as full of devotion. His colour is golden and he wears ornaments suitable for a young boy. On Chandēśa's head, the lord should be shown to be doing feats.¹⁵

1.3 Chandēsvarānugrahāmūrti:

Veerabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Vijayanagara Painting. 16th century.

Shiramamurti explains about the mural painting in Veerabhadra temple in Lepakshi, Andhrapradesh, as 'the divine grace of the boon-conferring lord is clear in a painting where He is shown giving away one of his weapons to his devotee. Chandēśa receives with humility the axe that the deity kindly presents to him as insignia of his office as the steward to his household, to which he is appointed. A Gana, between the two figures, blowing a long bugle, announces the great gift to the devotees that throng to see this event. The staff that the Brahmin boy, Vicharasarma, used in his duties as a cowherd boy, turned miraculously into axe, when, unknowingly, he dealt a blow and cut off the leg of his father, who disturbed his bathing of the Śiva ling with the milk of the cows he tended.

Conclusion

The 'rūpa' as represented in the visual narratives like mural and traditional paintings narrates diverse range of connotation and has both aesthetic and philosophical importance in the Indian art. Here Rūpa is representation of Siva as Chandēsvarānugrahāmūrti, it describes about the various episodes in distinct visual narration. Rūpa and mūrti are the synonymous words in the Indian texts, which stands for the figurative, representa-

tional image. The paintings are visuals which, narrate about the arrested movements and story in which Śiva is depicted as boon bestowing aspects to his devotees.

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Shivanidhi, Mysore Traditional Painting



Veerabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Mural Painting

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