

CHAPTER III

HINDU ICONOGRAPHY

3.1 Introduction

To make a study of the techniques of iconography one needs to know about icons. The branch of knowledge that deals with the representative art in the form of pictures, drawings, figures or images or icons is called iconography.¹ The expression *icon* was evolved in the West mainly in a Christian context.² “Icon” or *ikon* means a holy painting, usually on wood, of Jesus Christ, or of a person considered holy by some Christians, especially in eastern countries. To quote J. N. Banerjea, “The same word “icon” (*ikon*, Gr. *eikon*) refers to a figure, or a representation of a divine person in painting, mosaic, sculpture, etc., which is specially meant for worship or which is in some way or other associated with the rituals connected with the worship of different divinities.”³

The Greek meaning of this expression, *eikōn*, has close parallel with the Indian terms *bera*, *vighraha*, and *arcā*, which denote sensible representations of particular deities or saints receiving the devout homage of their *bhaktas* or exclusive worshippers.⁴ An icon is what is constructed and also what is utilized. It not only delights, but serves a purpose. According to Michael Kelly, “The icon is a story in images, though it is not a story about the events of daily life, but of events that are unique, miraculous, and significant for the whole of humankind. It contains nothing contingent, transient, or insignificant: it is a generalized, laconic image.”⁵

¹ Paul Procter ed., *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), p. 700.

² S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples* (Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 1981), p. 1.

³ Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), p. 1.

⁴ S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, p. 6.

⁵ Michael Kelly, “Icon,” *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, vol 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 449.

Humans not only love to manufacture icons as representations and symbols, but feel a longing for them. It has become an urge for a human to make sculptures of the gods. This has found expression in most religions. An icon as an object of reverence satisfies not only the religious impulses of its user, but the artistic expectations also. It develops a vital quality and a protective role. Kelly explains the purposefulness of icons by saying: By pointing to the spiritual phenomena of the celestial world, which are beyond representation, the icon lifts the human mind and spirit to that world, uniting them with it and allowing them to share in the infinite delight of the spiritual creatures that surround the throne of the lord... As the object of prolonged and deep contemplation, it helps initiate spiritual concentration and leads to meditation and spiritual ascent... It is in its essence beyond time and space. In the icon, believers find an eternal spiritual cosmos, participation in which is his life's goal for a member of the orthodox community. In the icon, the unity of the heavenly and the earthly, and the communion of all creatures before the face of God, is accomplished. The icon is the symbol and embodiment of *sobornost* (companionship).⁶

From the above explanations it is clear that iconography, as it is understood, is that branch of knowledge which deals with the representative art such as portraits, figures, artistic images or symbols, and pictures. To be precise, it is the study of religious figures or drawings of objects. According to Panofsky, there are three specific levels in defining iconography and the three levels of description, analysis and interpretation mentioned below come together to form a "synthesis." He outlines the three specific levels thus: (1) The pre iconological level of description of the primary and natural subject matter, the motifs or "pure forms" that are "carriers of primary and natural meanings,"; (2) the iconographical level that recognizes the conventionality of images and their themes, demanding knowledge of their literary and textual sources and defining a "history of types"; (3) the iconological level that discloses the "intrinsic meaning" or symbolical values of a work, demanding a synthetic intuition of the work, familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind," and conditioned by "personal psychology." Iconography is a method applicable to the history of art, Iconology is the art history turned interpretive.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 454-455.

In Indian sculpture, painting, and iconography, the majority of the figures are based on the human body. This belongs to the *dr̥ ś ta* (the visible world). All natural shapes are said to be with life. Human body is the place where the outer world is transformed. It is also the scene of the transformation of the self. In this transformed shape, the self is represented in art. The transformation results from an inner process of realization. It is not visible to the physical eye; it belongs to the *adr̥ ś ta* (the unseen). The world of the inner reality differs from the outer world but cannot exist without it. Therefore, art serves as the meeting ground of the two worlds and relates to the transformation of the inner world to that of the outer.⁸

3.2 The Evolution of Images

The Indian understanding of the relationship of the background to the images was the transformation of a raw stony substance to an animate figure endowed it with the dynamism of life with features and expression in it. The early images are traced back to the second millennium BC. According to Swami Prajnanananda, the earliest known Hindu images for the purpose of worship are two *liṅ gas* (one is preserved in the Lucknow Museum and the other is enshrined at Gudimallam in Chittoor District in Andhra Pradesh).⁹

A brief historical introduction to the development of images in India, especially in South India, is provided in this division. After the decline of the Indus Valley civilization, the first historical period from which sculptural evidences are available is the Mauryan Age (3rd century BC). Asoka became the supreme ruler of vast territories, and his empire extended to the limits of the Chola kingdom in the South and practically covered the whole of India. Asoka (c. 273-236 BC) encouraged and popularized the arts and utilized them to spread the message of Buddha. The Sungas (187-75 BC) and Satavahanas succeeded the Mauryas in the North and the South respectively in about 200 BC. The Satavahanas who ruled in the Deccan and the South had a long reign of about 400 years (circa 200 BC to AD 200). The fine workmanship of the carvers reveals the high standard of efficiency of these craftsmen. The metal images found at Buddham, Amaravati, Kolhapur show the high watermark of metal work in the Satavahana period. The Ikshvakus succeeded the Satavahanas towards the end of the 2nd century AD and

⁸ Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India Through the Ages*, 3rd ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1965), pp. 14-15.

⁹ Swami Prajnanananda, *Cultural Heritage of Indian Fine Arts* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1985), p. 49.

they were great patrons of art. The metal work of their period was equally good as their stone carving.

The attitude of the artists towards their task of converting rock into the representation of an event is most obvious in the masterworks of the Pallava period.¹⁰ The Pallavas ruled Kanchi in the 4th century AD and it was during the period of Mahendravarman I (AD 600-630), the son of Simha Visnu, that importance was given to the arts. He was responsible for the introduction of rock-cut architecture in the Tamil country early in the 7th century AD. He studded his kingdom with rock-cut monuments. He is considered the pioneer of South Indian architecture and painting. He discarded perishable materials such as brick, timber, metal or mortar for constructing temples and introduced cutting images out of the hard rock.¹¹

The great monuments at Mahabalipuram are a tribute to the eternal glory of Narasimhavarman I (AD 630-668). He was the son of Mahendravarman I (AD 600-630) and is known as Māmalla. Narasimhavarman II (AD 695–722), also called Rajasimha, built the Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram, a fine example of early Pallava masonry work. Nandivarman II (AD 730-795) was responsible for the other famous shrine Vaikuntaperumal Temple at Kanchipuram. Thus the high period of the Pallava style came between AD 600 and 800.

The Chalukyas, who succeeded the Vakatakas in the Deccan, were great lovers of art. Vikramaditya I (AD 655-681), the Chalukya king, claimed the conquest of Kanchi.¹² Vikramaditya II (AD 733-34-46) invaded Kanchi in c. 740. He entered the city of Kanchi and acquired high merit by restoring much gold to the stone temple Rajasimhesvara and other images of gods. It is said that Narasimhapotavarman built the Rajasimhesvara Temple. Being struck by the beauty of the Pallava temples at Kanchi, Vikramaditya I induced some of the sculptors and architects of the Pallava realm to come to his kingdom. The Rashtrakuta King Krishna I (AD 756-773) was responsible for the famous Kailasa Temple at Ellora. Krishna III

¹⁰ Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia: Its Mythology and Transformations*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2001), p. 214.

¹¹ Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1963), p. 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

(AD 940-967), conqueror of Kanchi and Tanjavur, added a good part of the northern portion of the Chola kingdom to his territory. Twenty-five years of Rashtrakuta rule in the northern part of the Chola dominion produced sculptures showing a mingled grace of Chalukya, Rashtrakuta, and Chola elements in this area.¹³

The Eastern Chalukya King Vijayaditya II built one hundred and eight temples in his kingdom as a thanksgiving to Siva for his victories in one hundred and eight battles. The Kakatiyas of Warangal, the contemporaries of the Hoysalas, were also patrons of art and literature. The last important phase of art in South India is a mingling of late Chalukya and late Chola art under the Vijayanagara monarchs. In the time of Aditya (AD 871-907) and Parantaka (AD 907-955), there was much temple-building activity and Parantaka, who was devoted to Siva, covered the temple at Chidambaram with gold.¹⁴

In the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Rajarajan I (AD 985-1014), the magnificent temple of Śiva named after the King Rajarajesvaramudaliar was completed, and a copper *kalaśa*, thickly gilt with gold, was dedicated to adorn the finial of the *vimāna*. His intense devotion to Śiva earned him the title Sivadadasekhara and for his taste for art he received the epithet *Nityavinoda*. The inscriptions give details of the magnificent wealth of bronzes dedicated by him to the temple. The great temple of Siva erected by him as a thanksgiving to his patron deity has not only merged into Chola structures but also served to influence the artistic taste of the Chola sculptors.¹⁵

Kulottunga II (AD 1135-1150), the son of Vikramachola, did elaborate renovation in the temple at Chidambaram. Rajarajan II (AD 1146-1173), the son of Kulottunga II, was also a lover of arts. Narasimha I (AD 1238-1264) was the famous builder of the Konark temple. The motif of the wheel and horse added to the *vimāna* that occurs for the first time at Darasuram and Chidambaram in the 12th century AD is the speciality of the temple. A great builder of Chola art and architecture was Kulottunga III (AD 1178-1218). He built the Kampaharesvara

¹³ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴ Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

Temple at Tribhuvanam and also at Kanchi, Madurai, Chidambaram, Tiruvidaimarudur and Darasuram. Due to the enthusiasm of the Chola kings, Saivism swept over the whole of South India and reached beyond the seas. Thousands of temples were built, giving full rein to the architects and image-makers. This passion was paralleled by a desire to improve the images.

The Indian bronzes (in copper or more rarely in brass) of the Southern school evolved with beauty with the dancing figures of Śiva-Naṭ arāja in the South. The bronze figures of dancing Naṭ arāja with excellent quality really glorified the field of Indian art in the 11th – 12th centuries AD. The different images of the Śaiva saints were set up in the temples about AD 1014 and the images of the Vaiṣṇava saints were set up in different temples as early as the 13th century AD. In addition, innumerable forms and concepts of Siva, Pārvaṭī and other deities associated with this cult developed rapidly because the primitive *liṅga* could hardly provide adequate scope for the sculptor's skill. This was the beginning of the medieval sculpture, which lasted for nearly eight hundred years.¹⁶

A boom in bronze images marked the Chola period (AD 850-1200). In each temple, though the *liṅga* remained the central fixed image of worship, there were many movable pieces to be taken out in spectacular processions to stimulate the imagination of the people and help to spread and consolidate the dominant religion. Stone images were not suitable for this purpose and metal ones had to be cast in large numbers. These movable figures were smaller and were mounted on a base, which had either circular holes to thread the poles through, or were provided with lashing rings to secure the image to a litter to be carried in procession. In addition, there were two vertical spikes, one on each side, at the back of the plinth. These were meant to support a horseshoe shaped floral arch or aureole over the image, in place of the proper *prabhā* (a similar arch in metal) that would make the image too heavy to be easily carried.

The high period of the late Dravidian style of the Pandyas can be placed during 1100-1350 AD.¹⁷ The Pandyas followed the Cholas. Magnificent temples erected by the late Pandyas equal the late Chola *gopuras* at Chidambaram. The eastern *gopuram* at Chidambaram

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷ Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia: Its Mythology and Transformations* vol. 1: Text, p. 281.

erected by Sundara Pandya (AD 1251-1268), and the ones at Jambukesvaram and Srirangam are magnificent structures closely resembling the Chola *gopuras*. In the 14th century, the Vijayanagara empire was established. Krishnadevaraya (AD 1509-1529) was a patron of fine arts. The last phase of art in the South was during the time of the Nayaks. Tirumala Nayak (AD 1623-1650) was a renowned patron of art. The most splendid *gopura* of the South is of the time of his period. In Tanjavur and Kumbakonam, Raghunathanayaka was responsible for excellent architecture and sculpture. This was the last period of art in South India.¹⁸

The temples were built by the patronage of the kings. The temples had numerous images in them. As temples were built, images also evolved gradually. So, when the kings patronized temples, they indirectly patronized the temple arts and the artists.

3.2 Historical Perspective of Iconography

The iconographic development in India has been continuous at least for about seven thousand years. The iconic specimens found in the sites of the Indus Valley civilization,¹⁹ the proto-historic phase of Indian history and the descriptive hymns dealing with iconic conceptions in the Rig Veda provide the background for the nation-wide iconographic tradition that has held the field till date.²⁰ Choodamani, in her *Arts and Crafts of Indus Civilization*, writes, “The sculptural forms which blossomed then are considered to be the primary sources for studying the major streams of Indian art history.”²¹

The images that were found in the Indus Valley are well-defined human and animal forms, flora, fauna, and ritualistic figurines. The animal figures include those of bull, dog, horse, ram, pig, and rhinoceros. The birds and other living creatures include doves, parrot,

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁹ The term “Indus Civilization” is generally applied to all the phases of the Harappa culture. Indus Civilization limits the geographical extent of civilization to the Indus Valley, while it extends to Sarasvati and Yamuna valleys in the east, to Baluchistan in the west, to the whole of Gujarat and Godavari Valley in the south and upto Kashmir in the north covering an area of 1.5 million sq. km. The chronological order of the early Harappa is 2900-3300 BC, mature Harappa is 2900-1900 BC, and late Harappa is 1900-1500 BC.

²⁰ S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples* (Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 1981), p. 17.

²¹ Choodamani Nandagopal, *Arts and Crafts of Indus Civilization* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2006), p. 74.

duck, squirrel, snake, mongoose, and tortoise.²² Female figures were found in Harappa and Mohenjo-daro with certain characteristics such as the figures being in the standing posture with legs apart, adorned with an elaborate girdle, a loin cloth, necklaces of different types and fan-shaped head dresses. These nude female figures with well-proportioned body, slim waist, and prominent hips are respected as the Divine Mother. Thus it is clear that Shaktism, the Mother Goddess cult, flourished in the Indus Valley.²³

The bronze image of a dancing girl measuring four inches in height, found in Mohenjo-daro, is a good example of the remarkable achievement of the Indus artist in metallurgy. The pose is well defined and all the features are modeled in an artistic way. There are male figures in *yogāsana* postures. The closing narrow eyes of the male figure that is fixed on the tip of the nose and the *namaskara mudrā* (*añjali hasta*) bring out the attitude of the *yogī*.²⁴

The recorded history focuses on the north-western region of India during the 6th century BC, when the Persian influence was dominant in the region. The next date is about 327-325 BC, when the Macedonian adventurer, Alexander, swooped on the Persian Empire and dashed into this corner region of India. Hellenistic impact was in subsequent years felt in this region of India also. An aspect of this impact was the art of making images of gods and heroes.²⁵

The art form that developed in the north-western region, during the days when the Indian princes repulsed the invasions of the Greek generals, has been called Gandhara, after the name of the region. This art form is heavily Greco-Roman and so it did not flourish in India. Only when the Greek artisans and sculptors were encouraged to exhibit their artistic talent and temperament, the Gandhara art was born. The artists (sculptors, architects, and craftsmen) were commissioned to execute works on Buddhist monuments by Indian patrons. The statues were rigid and did scarcely suggest a transcendental feeling or the divine element

²² Ibid., p. 75.

²³ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 86, 88.

²⁵ S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, p. 17.

because the images were made more as works of art than as objects of worship. The relic worship and the worship of symbolic representations like the foot print, umbrella, and *bodhi* tree were in vogue from early times. That is why the Gandhara art was impersonal and short lived. It disappeared after sixty to seventy years, leaving no lineage and no impact.²⁶

The art form that emphasized the Indian idiom with idealistic symbolism that was indigenous to India was the one that developed in the city of Mathura. Mathura icons became popular all over the country and icons were prepared for commercial purposes also. The iconography that originated in Mathura (1st – 2nd century AD) continued in the fourth century and developed and attained maturity in the golden age of the Guptas (4th – 5th centuries).²⁷ The Gupta period lasted till the 7th century in the North and this period was called the classical period of Indian sculpture and fresco painting. It was about this time that bronze images really came into existence in South India, although the art of metal casting had been known for a long time and a few images had been made previously. It is to be noted that the Indian art reached its zenith in the post-Gupta period.

An essential step toward the Metal Age was the discovery that metals could be melted and cast to shape in molds. There was a close relationship between these metallurgical developments²⁸ and the growth of civilization. People needed a stronger metal than native copper. Possibly, they discovered that certain copper ores containing the tin-bearing mineral cassiterite could be treated in a charcoal fire to produce an alloy of copper and tin known as bronze. This discovery occurred between 4000 and 1400 BC. The advantage of bronze is that it is harder than copper and has a lower melting temperature and casts more readily, producing sounder castings. In a short period of time, bronze images were appreciated.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

²⁷ Nihar Ranjan Ray and Bagisvari, "Sculpture," *The Classical Age*, vol. 3 of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1997), p. 523.

²⁸ Prior to 4000 BC, native gold and copper and meteoritic iron were used occasionally without melting; during 4000–3000 BC the reduction of oxidized ores of copper and lead and the usage of bronze followed. During 3000–2000BC, roasting and smelting of sulfide ores of copper, the experimental production of sponge iron and the purification of gold and silver were in use. During 2000–1000 BC, gold purified by cementation and used in furnaces is seen. During 1000–0 BC, cast iron, cast steel, gold purified by sulfide process, mercury distilled from ores and amalgamation of gold ores are used.

After a phase of initial development, the subsequent period saw a large number of canonical works in Sanskrit in the nature of iconographic manuals called *pratimā lakṣaṇas*.³⁰ It was about the same time that temples also began to be built in a manner that was different from the *stūpa*, *caitya*, or *vihāra*. It was about the same time that the myths and the legends of gods were becoming popular. The folk deities as well as the divinities of the sophisticated classes had gained in importance and they needed shrines and complex rituals of worship.³¹

The tantric framework assumed considerable importance. There were no temples even in the earlier Indus Valley phase, although there were household icons. Now the elaborate Vedic rituals and sacrifices sprouted, as community affairs receded to the background, and the temple as a public place of worship began taking its place. During this time the Bhagavata cult also was making headway in the mainland of India. It began with the adoration of Viṣṇu and then Śiva. The innumerable folk divinities were accommodated within the general ideology of Bhagavata, which was the impulse to partake of the grace and glory of the godhead. With the spread of the cult of devotion to personal gods and goddesses, the *āgama* (sacred texts) manuals attempted a classification of deities and stylization of their iconic forms. By the 5th century AD, Indian iconography was more or less finalized and formalized.³²

The gods found in the initial stage are Sūrya, the sun god, and Indra, the king of gods. It is admitted that the ancient iconographical artifacts known of a purely Hindu deity are the coins of Kadphises II. The earliest engraved representations of god (Śiva) seem to be those on the coins of Kadphises (about A.D 80 to 90) where the figure with the trident and the bull certainly prefigure the principal personage in this religion.³³ Then arose the technical development in metal craft which reached a stage of maturity. The casting of metallic icons began to be attempted on a large scale. The class of workers known as *sthapatis* involved in

²⁹ New Knowledge Library, *Universal Reference Encyclopaedia-hoi-ira*, vol. 14 (Sydney: Bay Books Pty Ltd., 1981), p. 1318.

³⁰ S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, p. 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 23-26.

³³ A. C. Martin, *Iconography of Southern India*, p. 117.

the preparation of icons came to be well established. It is in the 6th century AD that the history of the Hindu iconography really begins.³⁴ In the 7th century, the Pallavas built temples, and the iconography of various gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Indra, Brahmā, and Kālī came into existence.

3.3 Texts on Śilpa Śāstra

The term *Śilpa* designates any kind of art, a fine or mechanical art (64 such arts are enumerated), a skill in any art and crafts in the Indian tradition. Its origin is traced to the Vedas. *Śilpa* is a pervasive term and includes within the ambit of its meaning anything creative, imitative, ideational, or skilful which in one sense or the other involves dexterity of hand or mind or both.³⁵ *Śilpa* also implies a technique, a ceremonial act, an artifact, indeed anything that either leads to or is a tangible product of some craft. On occasions, it is beyond explanation and therefore a subject of wonder, especially where it creates the cosmic elements, or even an illusion of reality without being it.³⁶ The term *śilpa* generally means “action” or “skill” in action. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (V1.27) regards *śilpa* as the *anukaraṇa* (imitation) of *deva śilpa* (divine art). It is also said that *śilpa* is supposed to be born in one who has the knowledge of it.

Śilpa signifies an extraordinary potential, a sanctifying principle, a supportive, sustaining, and strengthening force, a skill endowed with a sense of wonder for its creative essence, sometimes a propensity which is “divine” in character and which remains sanctified even in its emulation. It is also a quality. By *śilpa* the divine personages create and strengthen the cosmic forces, and by it a transmutation is brought about in different, disparate phenomena. It is the principle by which the non-manifested is rendered manifest, and the manifest derives its corporeality and colours. It manifests the basic forms of arts, for example,

³⁴ The Vaishnavite cave at Badami bears an inscription which shows that the carving it from the twelfth year of the reign of Kirtivarman I in the year 500 of the Saka era, that is, AD 578.

³⁵ Vaman Sivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998), p. 1554.

³⁶ R. N. Mishra, “Silpa,” *Kalatattvakosa*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: IGNCPA, 1992), p.193.

song, dance, music, colour and plastic arts, but is also identified by the quality of “beauty” and “effulgence” that may qualify its manifestation.³⁷

The *śāstras* that deal with the *śilpa* are the *śilpasāstras*. *Śilpasāstra* is the science of architecture. It also includes *vāstu vidya* or architecture applied to the construction of houses, fields, buildings of any kind (*setu-bandha*). The origin of this science has been attributed to Viśvakarma,³⁸ the divine architect of gods. The *śilpasāstra* deals with the rules of the construction of palaces, images, parks, houses and similar works.³⁹ This science is fully treated in works like the *Mānasara*,⁴⁰ *Brāhmiya*, and *Manusara*.⁴¹ The important texts that give information on the science of architecture and figures are *Māyamatam*, *Visvakarmeyam*, *Mānasaram*, *Kasyapam*, *Manusaram*, *Indiramatham*, *Saraswateeyam*, *Brahmeeyam*, *Śilparatna*, *Sakaladikaram*, *Ciṛ pa Ceṇṇūl*, and *Viṣ ṇudharmōtaram*. Amongst these texts, *Ciṛ pa Ceṇṇūl* is selected for the present study.

3.4 Selected Text

3.5.1 *Ciṛ pa Ceṇṇūl*

Ciṛ pa Ceṇṇūl is a treatise on sculptures written by V. Ganapati Sthapati, in 1977. It is a text in Tamil, which explains the Sanskrit technical terms of sculptures. It consists of thirty-six chapters. The first chapter deals with the measurements of the sculptures. The second chapter deals with the types of icons. The third and the fourth chapters deal with the height and

³⁷ Ibid., p. 205.

³⁸ Viśvakarma is said to have been the presiding deity of the nine artisans, namely, the carpenter (*sūtradhāra*), potter (*kumbhakara*), weaver (*kuvindaka*), goldsmith (*suvarnakara*), blacksmith (*karmakara*), brazier (*kamsyakara*), shell-ornament maker (*sañjakara*), painter (*citrakara*) and garland-maker (*mālākara*).

³⁹ R. N. Saletore, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Culture (R-U)*, vol. 4 (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1981), pp. 1348-1349.

⁴⁰ In the text called *Mānasaram* there is the mention of 32 treatises written in Sanskrit. They include *Visvakarmiyam*, *Visvasaram*, *Manavidhi*, *Mānasaram*, *Srishtham*, *Viswabodham*, *Visalakaham*, *Prabodham*, *Vrttam*, *Māyamatam*, *Twastatantram*, *Kalyupam*, *Chitram*, *Sadhakasara*, *Aindiramatham*, *Sauram*, *Visvam*, *Nalam*, *Manakalpam*, *Behusrutam*, *Manabodham*, *Visalakaham*, *Adisaram*, *Viswakasyapam*, *Vastubhodham*, *Mahātantram*, *Vastuvidyapati*, *Manusaram*, *Chaityam*, *Avaryam*, *Bhanumatam*, and *Lokagnam*.

⁴¹ In the text called *Manusaram*, mention has been made of 28 texts. Eighteen out of these, which do not find a place in the earlier list, are *Isanam*, *Chitrakasyapam*, *Prayogamanjari*, *Gautamam*, *Vaishistam*, *Manokalpam*, *Bhargavam*, *Markandam*, *Gopalam*, *Baudhamatham*, *Peruhitam*, *Naradiyam*, *Narayaniam*, *Kasyapam*, *Kulalam*, *Chitrayamalam*, *Chitrabahulyam*, and *Desikam*. Out of these eighteen texts, only a few deal comprehensively with both architecture and sculpture. Cf. V. Ganapati Sthapati, *Indian Sculpture and Iconography: Forms and Measurements*, pp. xiv-xv.

measurements of the gods and Vaiṣṇava deities. The fifth chapter is about the *utsava* or the festival deities. The sixth chapter deals with the *āyādi gaṇita* (calculation of beneficial measures).

The seventh and eighth chapters deal in detail with the hand gestures and *bhaṅgas* (the flexions of the body) of the icons respectively. The eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth chapters give information on the head-dresses, the ornaments, and the costumes. The fourteenth chapter is on the art of making designs of trees, plants, creepers, and leaves using the imagination of the artist. The fifteenth and sixteenth chapters give information on the symbols used for weapons, animals, and birds. The seventeenth chapter is on the aesthetic aspect of art. The eighteenth chapter gives details of the explanation of the *āgama* theories. The nineteenth and twentieth chapters deal with the form of the *liṅga* and bronze images. The twenty-first chapter deals with the icons made out of wood, sand, and cloth. The twenty-second and twenty-third chapters deal with the different *māna* (scale) and *tālamāna* (rhythmic measure) respectively.

The twenty-fourth chapter gives information on the different types of *tāla* (measure), the *uttama daśatāla* (higher ten-part measure) and the icons of Viṣṇu, Murukāṅ, and Buddha. The twenty-fifth chapter gives information on the *madhyama daśatāla* (medium ten-part measure), *penmānam* (female image scale), *ānmānam* (male image scale), *penmānam* of Vaisnavism, and icons of Rāma, Sītā and Hanuman. The twenty-sixth chapter deals with the *adhama daśatāla* (smaller ten-part measure), *ānmānam* and *penmānam*. The twenty-seventh chapter deals with the *navārdha tāla* (nine-and-half-part measure).

The twenty-eighth chapter deals with the *uttama navatāla* (higher nine-part measure) in general, *ānmānam* of *vaiṅavam*, the icons of Garuḍa, *madhyama navatāla* (medium nine-part measure), *adhama navatāla* (smaller nine-part measure) and *penmānam*. The twenty-ninth chapter deals with the icons of the devotees. The thirtieth chapter gives information on the *uttama aṣṭatāla* (higher eight-part measure), icons of *ālvars*, *madhyama aṣṭatāla* (medium eight-part measure) for *penmānam* and *adhama aṣṭatāla* (smaller eight-part measure) for *penmānam*. The thirty-first chapter is about the *uttama sabdatāla* (higher seven-part measure) and *madhyama sabdatāla* (medium seven-part measure). The thirty-second

chapter is about the *uttama sattāla* (higher six-part measure), *madhyama śaṭ tāla* (medium six-part measure) and *adhama śaṭ tāla* (smaller six-part measure) in detail.

The thirty–third chapter deals with the *uttama pañcatāla* (higher five-part measure) for the icon of *Vināyaka*, *Kṛ ś ṇa* and also for other icons in general. This chapter also deals with the *madhyama pañcatāla* (medium five-part measure) and *adhama pañcatāla* (smaller five-part measure). The thirty–fourth chapter gives information about the icons of *yakṣa* (attendants of the *deva*) and *vidyādara* (poets who extol the virtues and greatness of the *deva*). The thirty–fifth chapter gives details of the *uttama catuṣ tāla* (higher four-part measure), *tritāla* (three dimensions), *dvitāla* (two dimensions) and *ekatāla* (one dimension). The last chapter, the thirty–sixth, gives details about the opening of the eye of the images. This chapter also includes a bibliography and a glossary.

From the above study one learns that the *Ciṛ pa Ceṇ ṇ ūl* provides a detailed study of sculpture and iconography. This text has remained one of the oldest and authoritative texts in the fields of sculpture and iconography. It has been translated into English and published in the year 2002 under the title *Indian Sculpture and Iconography: Forms and Measurements*. The researcher has used the English version of the *Ciṛ pa Ceṇ ṇ ūl* for the study, which is the direct translation of the primary text *Ciṛ pa Ceṇ ṇ ūl*.

3.5 Some Basic Aspects in Iconography

Iconography has several integral elements in it. They include the classification of images, textual principles of making images, mode of casting, materials employed in making images, the accessories, and the characters of gods and goddesses. They are discussed in the forthcoming paragraphs.

3.5.1 Classification of Images

Since prehistoric times worship of gods and goddesses exists in Tamilnadu. Worship of god must have been coeval with people’s knowledge of gods. The ways of worshipping gods have differed from age to age in Tamilnadu. They suggest the different aspects of the Supreme Being. The three main forms of worship are *uruvam vaḷ ipādu* (image worship), *aruvam vaḷ ipādu* (spirit worship) and *aruvuruva vaḷ ipādu* (worship of formless form). Of these,

image worship is of much later origin than the other two. The history of image worship has been traced by many historians in Tamilnadu. The people had a custom of worshipping stones in honour of the valiant heroes who sacrificed their lives in the battlefield.⁴²

It is said that without images one cannot imagine, one cannot remember, and one cannot think. The word *sandrśe* means objects visible to the eye, that is, images proper. Thus, each god has an existence in two forms: one is the concrete and finite form and the other is the abstract and infinite form. "The Supreme Spirit has two states of form: the [one, the] Nature of the World (*prakṛ ti*) and [the other,] its transformation as appearance (*vikṛ ti*). *Prakṛ ti* is His invisible form. *Vikṛ ti* is the aspect (*akara*) in which He pervades the Universe. Worship and meditation can be performed in relation to His aspect (*sakara*) only." (*Viṣ ṇudharmōttara*, 111. ch. 46. 2-3).⁴³

Ganapati Sthapati believes that God is one; He is the beginning, the end and the intermediate substance. He is not without qualities (*nirguṇa*), nor is He *nirakara* or formless. He has a form and is contained within reality, and all reality contained within Him.⁴⁴ Therefore, there are numerous forms of the deity and they are classified according to the form, quality, and the material used in making images.

Lord Kṛ ṣ ṇa says in Bhagavat Gita that the Supreme God is one. All the other gods are aspects of him. When any devotee worships any one of the various forms of the Lord with faith, he is bestowed with what he yearns for, because the path he takes from any side leads to the Supreme God. Thus the multiplicity of the forms of images arises from various causes, all ultimately referable to the diversity of the need of individuals and groups.⁴⁵ There are numerous forms of images. The images are classified into Hindu Puranic images, Buddhist Puranic images, Hindu Tantric images, Buddhist Tantric images, and so on. These images are classified into various types. In general, the images are of three types, namely 'bodily',

⁴² A. M. Paramasivanandam, *Ancient Temples of Tamilnadu* (Madras: Tamil Kalai Publishing House, 1981), pp. 9-10.

⁴³ Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* vol. 2 (Calcutta: University Press, 1946), p. 298.

⁴⁴ Cf. V. Ganapati Sthapati, *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. 19. (Henceforth *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*).

⁴⁵ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, pp. 160-161.

‘tactile’ and ‘visual’ images. The imagination is largely made up of images deriving from and corresponding mostly to sensations. One may seem very ‘real’, another ‘fantastic’, another ‘distorted’, and another ‘abstract’. One may emphasise visual quality, another tactile, another bodily, and another seems to draw impartially on all kinds of sensory experiences.

The Hindu Puranic images are the main focus of this thesis. Hinduism has different sects such as Śaivism (the followers of Śiva), Vaiṣṇavism (the followers of Viṣṇu), Kumāryam (the followers of Mūrukaṇ), Gaṇapathyam (the followers of Gaṇapati), Śaktism (the followers of goddess) and Sūryam (the followers of Sun God). Each sect has numerous images in various forms. *Mūrti* is the deity of the temple. The deities differ according to the religious faith of the people. Each sect has a philosophy and religion of its own. The main deity of the Vaishnavites is Lord Viṣṇu. As a philosophy, it bases itself upon the Upanishads, and as a religion it reaches its roots into the *Tantra*. Its religious ritual, in general, is of *Āgamic* or Tantric in character. The history of Vaishnavism in northern India is traceable in its main lines at least from the 5th century BC and the history of Vaisnavism in South India is said to have gained popularity since the 13th century AD.⁴⁶ The following section studies the classification of the Hindu images.

The ancient *śilpis* have classified the revelation of the Primary Energy into three states. They are *avyakta/niṣkala* (amorphic/non-manifest), *vyaktāvyakta/śakala–niṣkala* (morpho-amorphic/partially manifest) and *vyakta/śakala* (morphic/fully manifest in anthropomorphic). The Sanskrit word *avyakta* or *niṣkala* is called *aravam* in Tamil. It is the abstract state of formlessness, where the different parts of the body and other physical attributes are undefined and represented in an amorphous state. This state is said to be all-pervasive and luminous in nature. The *liṅga* comes under this category.⁴⁷ In *vyaktāvyakta* or *śakala–niṣkala*, the parts of the body and other physical features are partly defined and partly suspended in an amorphous state. The physical features of the human body are not fully represented. This state is called *aruvuravam* in Tamil and the *mukhaliṅga* is described as an example of this kind of image. *Vyakta* or *śakala* or *uravam* (in Tamil) is the form where the body is well defined and is

⁴⁶ S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Early History of Vaishnavism in South India* (Madras: The Oxford University Press, 1920), pp. 3, 4.

⁴⁷ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. 3.

represented in a perceivable, tangible manner. The images of Candraśekara, Murukaṅ and Viṣṇu come under this state of form.⁴⁸

The Hindu images are divided into three classes – *chala* (movable), *achala* (immovable), and *chalāchala* (movable-immovable). The moveable images are easily portable and are made of *loha* (metal). The images that come under this category are the *kautukaberas*, meant for *arcana* (dedication); the *utsavaberas* are meant for festive occasions in processions; the *baliberas* are meant for the purpose of offering sacrifice to the *parivāras*; and *snāpanaberas* are used for holy bathing.⁴⁹ In short, the *bhoga mūrti* or *utsava vigraha* that are carried in processions are the best examples for *cala*. The immovable images cannot be moved from the particular place where they are installed. They are made up of *mṛ nmaya* (terracotta) or *sārkara* (laterite), and *sauyaja* (stucco). The *dhruva* or *yoga bera* or *mūla vigraha* that are permanently established in a shrine come under this category. The movable and immovable images are made of stone, wood, *dhātu* (mineral, possibly jade) and gem.⁵⁰

There is another classification of images into three kinds – *chitra* (depiction of a painting –two dimensional), *chitrārdha/ardha-chitra* (high relief sculpture) and *chitrabhāsa* (relief sculpture). *Chitra* denotes images in the full round representation with all their limbs completely worked out. It is also known *sarvāṅga-dṛ śyakaraṅam* (having all its parts visible). *Chitrārdha* is an image in which half the body is not seen. It is to be done with mineral colours. It is known *bhittiyādaulagna-bhāvenāpy-ardhaṅ* (when half of its being is attached to a wall or the surface). *Chitrabhāsa* refers to images painted on walls and cloth, and such other objects. It is referred to as a *vilekhanaṅ* (painting) and *lekhyam nānā-varṅ ānvitaṅ* (painted with the use of many colors).⁵¹ The images are again classified into *vyakta* or manifest form, *vyaktāvyakta* or manifest and non-manifest form, and *avyakta* or non-manifest form.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹ T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* vol. 1 part 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Indology Publishers, 1968), p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, pp. 142, 211.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.143.

⁵² T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, p. 18.

There is another classification of images based on their terrific (*raudra* or *ugra*) and pacific (*śānta* or *saumya*) nature.⁵³

Images are classified into five forms, namely *parama*, *vyūha*, *vibhāva*, *antaryāmi* and *arcā*. *Parama* means the ultimate or the highest. *Vyūha* stands for formation or line of arrangement. It denotes the state in which the supreme power gathers its qualities together. This is the state where the creation of the universe begins. *Antaryāmi* is the name given to the inner image held in intense worship within the beings of devotees. The ability to confirm and act from a self-contained energy is known as *antaryāmitva*. *Arcā* stands for images that are worshipped, which have been fashioned according to the specifications and methodology of the sculptural tradition.⁵⁴ In short, *parama*, *vyūha* and *vibhāva* stand for the subtle states in which the *paramātman* exists everywhere and eternally. *Antaryāmi* is the essentially subtle state of existence of the Divine within our consciousness and within the beings of all substances. It is only through the *arcā* state that He becomes perceptible and manifest in a form which can be identified and worshipped by all.

3.5.2 Textual Principles of Making Images

Strict and most elaborate rules were laid down for the measurements of the various parts of the body and their relative proportions and the different postures. In course of time, representations of gods and goddesses were made. An impression of their power and personality was created by the *sthapatis* (the metal workers or the sculptors). The measurements of proportion in images studied in this division are based on the details in T. A. Gopinath Rao's *Elements of Hindu Iconography*.

In the Indian value of measurement of length there are two different kinds of units, namely, the absolute and the relative. Of these, the first is based on the length of certain natural objects, while the second is obtained from the length of a particular part or limb of the person whose measurement is under consideration. They have been specified by R. N. Mishra, in his

⁵³ Ibid., p. 19

⁵⁴ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, pp. 19-22.

text in volume 1 of *Kalātattvakōśa*. The following table gives the relation between the various quantities used in the absolute system:

- 8 *Paramāṅgus* (atomic size) make 1 *Rathārēṅu* (speck of dust) or *Trasarēṅu* (mobile speck)
- 8 *Rathārēnus* make 1 *Romāgra* (tip of a coarse hair) or *Valāgra* (tip of a thin hair)
- 8 *Romāgras* make 1 *Liksa* (egg of a louse)
- 8 *Liksas* make 1 *Yuka* (length of a louse)
- 8 *Yukas* make 1 *Yava* (the size of a barley grain)
- 8 *Yavas* make 1 *Uttama mānāṅgula* (superior inch measure)
- 7 *Yavas* make 1 *Madhyama mānāṅgula* (middling inch measure)
- 6 *Yavas* make 1 *Adhama mānāṅgula* (inferior inch measure)⁵⁵

T. A. Gopinath Rao also suggests other larger units of length, such as:

- 24 *aṅgulas* or *mānāṅgulas* (inch measure) make 1 *Kiṣku* (cubit)
- 25 *mānāṅgulas* make 1 *Prajapathya*
- 26 *mānāṅgulas* make 1 *dhanur graha* (bowl length)
- 27 *mānāṅgulas* make 1 *dhanur muṣṭi* (bowl length)
- 4 *Dhanur muṣṭis* make 1 *daṇḍa* (churning stick).⁵⁶

The different *aṅgulas* are as follows:

Mātrāṅgula – The length of the middle digit of the middle finger of either the sculptor or the architect, or of the devotee is *mātrāṅgula*.

Deha-labdhāṅgula – This is obtained by dividing the whole length of the body of an image into 124,120 or 116 equal parts. Each of this division is called a *deha-labdhāṅgula* or shortly *dehāṅgula*. The relative measure is used in the construction of temples or in the making of

⁵⁵ S. K. Ramachandra, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, p. 372.

images. Different names are given to certain lengths representable by two or more *dehāṅgulas* up to twenty–seven.⁵⁷

The measurements described in Sanskrit authorities are altogether of six kinds: *māna*⁵⁸ (the proper height of the icon), *pramāna*⁵⁹ (the breadth), *unmāna*⁶⁰ (thickness), *parimāna*⁶¹ (the circumference), *upamāna*⁶² (the space between the limbs) and *lambamāna*⁶³ (surface of the image).⁶⁴ Besides the smaller units known as *dehāṅgula* there are other larger relative units of length, which are called *prādeśa*, *tāla*, *vitasti* and *gokarṇa*. The distance between the tips of the thumb and the forefinger, when they are stretched out to the utmost, is called a *prādeśa* (the distance between the tips of the thumb and the middle finger). The distance between the tips of the stretched out thumb and ring finger is *vitasti*. The distance between the stretched out thumb and little finger is *gokarṇa*.

The unit of measurement chosen for stating the proportions of the images of the various gods, goddesses and other beings belonging to the Hindu pantheon is called the *tāla*. For measuring lengths along plumb-lines an instrument called the *Lamba-phalaka* is employed. The different *tāla* measurements prescribed for the various images are given below:

1. The *Uttama-daśatāla* (124 *dehāṅgulas*) is prescribed for the images of the principal deities Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

⁵⁷ S. K. Ramachandra, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, pp. 28, 30

⁵⁸ The synonyms for the linear measurement *māna* are *ayama*, *ayata*, *dīrgha*.

⁵⁹ The synonyms for the linear measurement *pramāna* are *visṭāra*, *tara*, *striti*, *visriti*, *visritam*, *vyasa*, *visarita*, *vipula*, *tata*, *vishkambha* and *visala*.

⁶⁰ The synonyms for the linear measurement *unmāna* are *bahala*, *ghana*, *miti*, *utchraya*, *tunga*, *unnata*, *udaya*, *utsedha*, *uchcha*, *nishkrama*, *nishkriti*, *nirgama* and *udgama*.

⁶¹ The synonyms for the linear measurement *parimāna* are *marga*, *pravesa*, *parinaha*, *naha*, *vriti*, *avrita* and *nata*.

⁶² The synonyms for the linear measurement *upamāna* are *nivra*, *vivara* and *antara*.

⁶³ The synonyms for the linear measurement *lambamāna* are *sutra*, *lambana* and *unmita*.

⁶⁴ S. K. Ramachandra, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, p. 27.

2. The *Madhyama-daśatāla* (of 120 *dehāñgulas*) for those of Srīdevī, Bhūmidevī, Umā, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Sapta-mātrikas, Uṣa and Jyeṣṭha.
3. The *Adhama-daśatāla* (of 116 *dehāñgulas*) for Indra and the other Lokapālas, for Candra and Sūrya, for the twelve Ādityas, the eleven Rudras, the eight Vasus, the two Aśvinī-devatas, for Bhrigu and Mārkaṇḍeya, for Garuḍa, Seśa, Durgā, Guha or Subrahmaṇya, for the seven Ṛṣis, for Guru, Ārya, Candeśa and Kṣetrapālakas.
4. The *Navārtha tāla* for Kubera, for the *navagrahas* (nine planetary divinities) and certain other celestial objects.
5. The *Uttama navatāla* for *Yakṣas* (sylvan deities), *Uraga* (dragon), *Siddhas* (sages), *Gandharvas* (celestial musicians), *Vidyesa* (learned) and for the *Aṣṭamūrtis* of Śiva (the various forms of Śiva).
6. *Sa-tryāñgula-navatāla* for such persons as is equal to the gods in power, wisdom, and sanctity.
7. *Navatāla* for *Rākṣasas* (demons), *Asuras*, *Yakṣas* (Sylvan deities), *Apsaras* (celestial women), *Aṣṭamūrtis* and *Marudgaṇas*.
8. *Aṣṭatāla* for men.
9. *Saptatāla* for *Vētālas* (dragons)
10. *Ṣaṭtāla* for *Pretas* (dead bodies)
11. *Pañcatāla* for *Kubjas* or deformed persons and for Vighneśvara
12. *Catuṣtāla* for *Vāmanas* or dwarfs and children
13. *Tritāla* for *Bhūtas* (goblins)
14. *Dvitāla* for *Kushmandas*
15. *Ekatāla* for *Kabhandhas*

The measurements for making images are dealt with in brief in the above division.

3.5.3 The Mode of Casting Images

In the Rig Veda there is reference to the hollow casting of images. But the people in the Rig Vedic period did not have so many images of gods. Nor were they made for the purpose of worship. In the later texts there is very little instruction on the casting of metal figures, or on making icons of wood, clay and stone. It is only after the Christian era that one finds proper instructions for working in metal. The art of making images has survived over the centuries in

Tamilnadu with relatively little change either in the norms of making the image or in the technique of casting.⁶⁵ The present day use of metals is the culmination of a long path of development extending over approximately 6,000 years. The first metals known to humans were gold, silver, and copper which occurred in the native or metallic state. Such native metals became known and were appreciated for making ornaments and images during the latter part of the Stone Age.⁶⁶

The mode of casting metal images is termed *madhuchchhishtavidhāna* or the lost-wax method and is known as *cire perdue* in French. The name suggests pouring the molten metal into the hollow of the mould. There are two ways of casting metal images, the hollow method and the solid method – *suṣira* and *ghana* respectively. Though the smaller images for household worship were usually cast in the solid fashion,⁶⁷ the large ones were sometimes cast according to the hollow method.⁶⁸ The *madhuchchhishtavidhāna* method is described in the *śilpaśāstras*. The casting of metals began about 3500 BC and there was an interval of about 2,000 years between the making of crudely wrought metal articles and the earliest castings.⁶⁹

During the Bronze Age the Egyptians introduced the lost-wax process, a method known today as the investment method of casting. In this method, an exact model or pattern of the article to be cast is made in wax, and then covered with a claylike material to form the mold. The composite is heated to harden the mold and to melt the wax, which drains off, leaving an exact negative impression, which is then filled with molten metal and allowed to

⁶⁵ Metallic objects are divided according to their mode of production into two types: cast and wrought. Cast materials are brought to final form by permitting molten metal to fill and solidify in molds of desired shape. Wrought materials generally begin their career by solidifying in a metal mold of simple shape and being brought to desired form by working, either cold or at elevated temperature, using practices such as rolling, pressing, forging, stamping, drawing and extrusion. Casting is a process practiced by foundries all over the world as a basic method for the production of shapes, using in one form or another almost all of the metals known to human. Important processes among these are plastic mold, composite mold, investment, permanent mold, and die casting.

⁶⁶ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, vol 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1768), p. 1061.

⁶⁷ C. Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, vol 2, p. 1061.

solidify. One of the earliest examples known of the lost-wax art is the statue of the Pharaoh Pepi I and his son, dating from about 2600 BC.⁷⁰

In India, images are moulded in two ways as mentioned earlier. A few references are given for image casting in the forthcoming paragraphs. There is a chapter on the method of casting images in the *Mānasāra* and it is described in the following lines: It instructs that after coating the wax figure with clay, the artisan should first dry it and then heat the earthen mass to allow the wax to run out; it should now be filled with the desired metal and the cast image finished by breaking the burnt earthen mould and cleaning it with water. (Manasara 8, 20.23)

A short clear description of bronze casting is available in the *Viṣṇusamhita*: A complete wax image prepared and coated with clay may be cast as a solid one in gold or other metals properly tested and melted in the requisite temperature by experts. (*Viṣṇusamhita*, verse 14)

Shankara, in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (I. i, 12), gives the explanation for the mode of casting images in the words *mushanishiktadrutatamradipratimavat*, that is, like images wrought of copper and other molten metal poured from a crucible into the mould. This is particularly interesting as Shankara was a contemporary of the later Pallavas when some of the finest bronzes of the Pallava period were being fashioned.

According to Ramatirtha, *musha* is an earthen hollow mould of a figure; just as copper is melted by fire and poured into a mould takes that very shape, so does the mind take the shape of the object comprehended.⁷¹ It is still a living art. It is practiced by *sthapatis* or metal workers who have kept alive this ancient art, both by preserving the texts relating to the mode of preparation and the contemplative hymns or *dhyānaślokas* that describe the forms of individual icons.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 1061.

⁷¹ C. Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes*, p. 15.

The process of making an image, as described in the 12th century work *Abhilāshitārthachintāmaṇi* is as follows:

The image should be prepared of wax, according to the *navatāla* measurement. It is light yellow in color and beautiful to behold, with proper disposition of limbs, including arms and weapons according to the iconographic texts. At this stage the *sthapati* must be able to visualize the image in metal and to distribute its weight carefully. After the image has been approved, the process can proceed. Long tubes, each with a flared mouth resembling the *kaśa* flower, should be added to the back, at the shoulder, at the nape, or on the crown.

The figure has then to be coated lightly with clay, well prepared by adding to it charred husk, tiny bits of cotton and salt, all finely ground on a stone. The coating has to be repeated three times, each after an interval of two days, and dried in the shade. The final coating is the most liberal one. The mouth and the channel of the tube, wherever fixed, should be left free when the coating is applied. The weight and quantity of brass, copper, silver or gold for preparing the image is determined by the weight of the wax in the mould; brass and copper are to be eight times the weight of wax, silver twelve and gold sixteen times. The casting of the image is usually done on a day that is auspicious for the *sthapati*, the donor, and the deity whose image is being made. Great care must be taken since, despite all the work involved, only one image can be made from each mold. To start, a roaring fire is lit in a pit and the wax image, now completely coated with several layers of clay, is placed therein.

The chosen metal should be encased in clay to form a crucible of the shape of a large coconut, and then dried and heated in the fire. The mould is then heated to allow the wax in it to melt and run out. The crucible is then heated again. The heat for melting copper, silver and gold is reached in progressive order – mild embers, flaming embers, and blazing embers to five times the normal heat. A hole is made with an iron rod in the crucible, which is to be lifted up from the fire with the help of iron tongs. The molten metal is poured into the mouths left open on the mould, after cleaning them with a burning wick so that the metal will run in a hot stream to completely fill up the entire space within, and reach up to the mouths of the tubes.

The fire is then extinguished and the mould is allowed to cool down. Then the burnt earth composing the mould is carefully broken to reveal the image as originally prepared in wax. The *sthapati* now spends a great deal of time removing extra bronze from the channel areas, polishing the image and working out the details of decoration. Finally the *sthapati* incises the pupil of the eye. Once this is done the image is believed to have ‘life’; only then may the finished sculpture be consecrated with appropriate ceremonies for worship in the temple and for service as *utsavamūrti*, a processional image. This in brief is the description of the mode of casting images, and in practice also it is nearly the same even now.

In the early period, metal images were very carefully fashioned with all the details present in the wax model itself and these were naturally imprinted in metal, and there was little finishing work after the casting. But, in later times, up to the present day, the image as cast was usually a rough one. The final touches were added elaborately, which involved so much of chiseling work that the result was almost a carved-out image rather than a cast one.⁷²

3.6.4 Iconometry

“Iconometry” means the measurements of the icons. Iconometry is the use of relative units and in the field of image making it is the most interesting part. The measurements used for making images are the basis for perfection. Proportions of images are ruled by complex iconometrical canons. The accuracy in measurement is the criterion of perfection. The *sthatis* have always produced their images according to prescribed measurements. In the making of the images, the *sthapati* follows two types of iconometry, the *tālamāna* and the *aṅgulamāna*. The word *tāla* refers to the length of the palm, which is considered to be equivalent in sculptures, as in human beings, to the length of face from forehead to chin. Generally, images are made according to the *navatāla* measurement. That is, the length of the image is nine times the length of its palm or face. The nine-face length is distributed thus: face, one *tāla*; throat to navel, two; navel to the tip of the knee, three; lower knee to ankle, two, and the remaining one *tāla* is divided among the height of foot, knee and top knot. Dwarfish figures may be made according to the *caturasratāla*, or four-*tāla* formula, four times the length of the image’s face.⁷³

⁷² Ibid., pp.16-17.

⁷³ Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes*, p. 18.

Aṅgula can be measured in three ways: *mānāṅgula*, one-twelfth of a *tāla*; *mātrāṅgula*, the length of the middle digit of the middle finger of the right hand of a man; *dehalabdāṅgula*, the length of the middle digit of the middle finger of the right hand of the donor or the *sthapati*. Between the two schemes, *tālamāna* iconometry is more popular probably because the differences that exist as to the size of the basic unit in the *aṅgulamāna* iconometry are inhibitive factors in that scheme.

Ideally the chest of a man should be broad and flat as the face of a charging bull; the female torso should be slender and long like the face of a horse. The male hand should be strong and tapering like the trunk of an elephant; that of woman, smooth and round like a bamboo stem. The mature trunk of a teak tree is usually the model for a man's thigh, while for a woman the model is the firm, pale-green inner core of a banana tree. The *gloriosa superba* lily with its long petals was often the sculptor's favourite guide for fashioning female fingers.⁷⁴

Different attributes, weapons, and postures that are special for each deity must be present in the image for it to be worthy of worship. Such details are described in the various *śilpaśāstras*, treatises on sculptures, generally considered to have been compiled between the 8th and the 12th centuries AD. The popular *śilpaśāstras* such as the *Mānasara*, *Mānasolasa*, *Abhilāshitārthachintāmaṇi*, *Visvakarmiyam*, *Māyāmatam*, *Amsumadbhedagama*, *Pratimālakṣaṇam*, *Cirpa Ceṇṇūl*, *Śilparatna*, *Rūpādhyānalakṣaṇam*, and *Śakalādikara* provide rules for both the iconography and for the iconometry of the images. Though these *śilpaśāstras* do not agree in all details, they do agree on the significant attributes of the more popular deities. Sculptors may show a special preference for one or another of the *śilpaśāstras*.

3.6.5 Materials Used in Fashioning Images

The materials listed in the *Āgamas* for the making of images are wood, stone, precious gems, metals, terracotta, laterite, earth, and a combination of two or three or more of the materials specified above. The precious stones mentioned in the *Āgamas* for the purpose of making images are *sphaṭika* (crystal), *padmarāga*, *vajra* (diamonds), *vaidurya* (cat's eye), *vidruma*

⁷⁴ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, pp. 288-289.

(coral), *pusya*, and *ratna* (ruby). *Sphaṭṭika* is of two kinds, the *sūryakānta* and the *candrakānta*. *Kaṭṭ uśarkarā* (brick) and *danta* (ivory) are also used for making images.⁷⁵ Icons are made from the mixture of *pañca lōha* (five metals), namely, copper, gold, silver, brass and white lead. Bronze (*kamsya*) and brass (*arakuta* or *paittala*) are used for portable icons. Iron (*ayasa*), lead (*sisaka*) and tin (*trapu*) are used for making images of wicked and terrific aspects.⁷⁶ The materials recommended in the *śilpaśāstra* for the fashioning of images are unburnt clay, burnt clay as in brick or terracotta, *sudhā* (a special kind of mortar/plaster), composite earth, wood, stone, metal, ivory, *dhātu* (mineral), pigment, and precious stones. Wood is considered superior to earth, stone as better than wood, metal better than stone, and precious stone is the most preferred of all. In case of *loha* (metal) icons, gold is accorded the first place, second comes silver, then copper. Ivory is not used for idols meant for worship. It is only used for decorative purposes.⁷⁷

The earliest icons were made of clay or wood and sometimes of brick and mortar. As the early images were made of perishable materials like clay or wood, it was very easy for invaders to destroy the figures. Almost all *dhruvaberas*, that is, the images built permanently in a temple were constructed of stone and clay mixed with limestone and fortified with chips of stone, husks and cotton fibers, varying according to different formulae. In some cases, the large figures were carved in wood, brick, and mortar. Metal is rarely employed in the making of *dhruvaberas*. Metal, especially bronze, is almost always used for casting *utsava*, *snāpana*, and *bali* images. The relative grading has been set out in the texts and they explain the divine power of the substances used just as the fruit of a tree depends upon the soil it is planted in.⁷⁸

3.6.6 Qualities of a *Śilpi/Sthapati*

The qualities needed for a *śilpi*⁷⁹ (sculptor) or *sthapati* (metal worker) discussed here in brief are from the personal interviews of a few *sthapatis* and also from textual references. In the

⁷⁵ Rao, *Element of Hindu Iconography* vol 1 part I, pp. 48-49.

⁷⁶ S. K. Ramachandra, *The Icons and Images in Indian Temples*, p. 42.

⁷⁷ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. 6

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

ancient days the temples were loaded with numerous gifts from princes and peasants and the demand for images was great. The demand had its supply and was kept alive with unstinted patronage by a school of sculpture and bronze workers who are commonly known as *sthapatis*.⁸⁰ They existed long before the Chola ascendancy, but their highest contribution to their field was between the 10th and the 13th centuries.

When a material image is to be produced for purposes of worship in a temple or elsewhere, a technical procedure is undertaken by a professional craftsman, who is called by various names such as *śilpin* (craftsman), *yogin* (yogi), *sādhaka* (adept) or *rūpakara/pratimākāra* (imager).⁸¹ The sculptors associated themselves in villages solely populated by them. In the villages of Tanjore District, Svāmimalai and Kumbhakonam, there existed and still exists a group of families who have been practicing the art of image making in bronze and stone as hereditary profession from generations past. In the ancient days, the *śilpa parampara* (the sculptural tradition) was closely linked to the architectural field and the two together was called *vāstu parampara*. The designers and the artists of the classical tradition of sculpture were known as Viśvakarmas.

Viśvakarma craftsmen and artists have been the designers of towns, temples, residences, villages, palaces; makers of sculptural works in metal, wood, earth-mortar and stone; jewellers, vessel makers, blacksmiths; and makers of implements of war.⁸² The work of the Viśvakarma community was outstanding and their creativity contributed to the identity of the culture today. The works of the Viśvakarma community show a remarkable similarity in the whole of India.

The builders or the craftsmen – *sthapatis* and the *śilpins* – who belonged to the same guilds of artisans, had common principles and set methods of design and construction; and they worked in collaboration with the priests who knew the rituals, the nature of the objects of

⁷⁹ *Śilpi* is an artist who is trained in the traditional system of fine arts and applied arts and has thorough knowledge of the *śāstras*, the myths and legends. He intuitively understands the secrets of the natural phenomena.

⁸⁰ O. C. Gangoly, *South Indian Bronzes* (Calcutta: Indian Society of Oriental Art, 1915), p. 26.

⁸¹ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 166.

⁸² Introduction to *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. xi.

reverence, and the modes of their worship. They together determined the forms of the temples with such modifications as suited the respective cases, as also the fixing of the principal deities and the decorations of the structure with iconic and other sculptural embellishments. All that was known and necessary in the creation of the temple and the conduct of worship therein was codified.⁸³

The *śilpi* tradition was hereditary. During the day, the actual work technique was taught and in the evenings the theoretical knowledge was imparted through the *śilpa* texts. The father's workshop became the working ground for the son. The *śilpi* should acquire expertise in *svānubhāva* (based on experience) which can be cultivated only through exposure to the lyrical aspects of literature, poetry, composition, and other fine arts as much as through a deep experience of life.

The *śilpi* is a vibrant and passionate person who responds to the essential nature of things and this ability helps him in self-expression. Thereby the artists' characteristic is transformed into the created object. Hardly noticeable truths are understood and integrated into the *atman* (soul) of the artist. He understands the great truths of the Divine One and his experiences of the reality can be seen to reflect the manifestations of the primary substance. The *śilpi* understands the philosophical and metaphysical content of the Divine Being properly. Such a craftsman goes through the whole process of self-purification and worship, mental visualization and identification of consciousness with the form evoked and then only transforms the form into stone or metal.⁸⁴

He should be very clear about the setting out of *pāda vinyāsa* (modular divisions) of the images since the allocations of the positions are different for *ekabera/dhruvārcā* and *bāhubera/druvabera* images. The proportions in making each idol follow very strict rules that are secretly and precisely guarded by the *sthapatis*. The image that serves as an icon must be

⁸³ K. R. Srinivasan, *Temples of South India* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972), p. 2.

⁸⁴ Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 166.

artistically perfect and realistic; it must have a profound appeal to the onlooker or the devotee and it must be meaningful to the devotee.⁸⁵

Ganapati Sthapati speaks of an artist thus:

The *śilpi* should have highly developed moral and spiritual values, should be compassionate, should be without envy or anger, without worries, always content, not ambitious, with the senses under control, adhering to truth, with a highly developed sense of responsibility, without serious ailments, and with a harmonious physical body that reflects the balance in his inner being.⁸⁶

The practicing *śilpi* should have a thorough knowledge of the *pañcarātra āgama śāstra* (the doctrine of the five elements) and the various forms of images set out in it before creating the images of divine beings. A *śilpi* must have knowledge of the fine arts of the land, namely, literature, music, dance, painting and sculpture. The reason for a *śilpi* to know the fine arts is that it elevates and sublimates the human spirit through *dharma* (right action), *artha* (material and spiritual benefits), *kāma* (attachment in the worldly life) and *mokṣa* (release from the bondage of birth).

The *śilpi* must be exposed to the *navarasa* (the nine major experiential qualities) through an appreciation of *nāṭya* (dance) and *saṅgīt* (music). The *śilpi* should have immense skills in mathematics because all the calculations for making an image are based on the digital measurements. He must be a painter as well because only if he can draw he can give his drawings a form. With the guidelines for field application from the *śilpa* texts, the *śilpis* with their experience and responses to art create excellent sculptures and structures/monuments.

Kramrisch, in her book, *The Art of India*, speaks about the craftsman:

The craftsman, his patron, and the public for whom he makes the work of art are magically one, and this relationship is further supported by the fact that the craftsman is a link in the unbroken chain of Tradition. Through his work he confirms the continued presence of the masters who once originated and now represent the various schools by which the doctrine is transmitted.... This phase of consciousness is called *Mahat* (The Great), wherein there is no differentiation between subject and object. The

⁸⁵ S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Icons and Images in Indian temples*, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Introduction to *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. xiii.

subject-object content, functioning as the active agent, is the intellect (*buddhi*). Its lucidity is neither strained by energy (*rajas*) nor dulled by inertia (*tāmas*). When these begin to assert themselves, and only then, the 'I' sense (*ahamkāra*) makes its appearance and thenceforth the outside world.⁸⁷

One of the greatest *śilpis* who left behind his theories and guidelines was Mayan, who has been mentioned in the *purāṇas* (legends) and *kāvya*s (poetry). Mayan is called the father of the sculptural tradition.⁸⁸ The image maker's craft continued to be practiced after the traditional art had exhausted its resources. Even today images are being made to serve the formalities of cult.⁸⁹ In the last two decades, innumerable artists from Madras and Kumbakonam have branched out on their own creative instincts and some of them have made it to the national and even to the international art scene. Talented *sthapatis* (sculptors) have also been produced by the Tamilnadu Institute of Architecture and Sculpture at Mamallapuram.

3.6.7 The Attributes Held in the Hands of the Deities

The technical terms of the attributes relate to the objects which the images of Hindu gods and goddesses are shown as bearing in their hands, such as weapons, musical instruments, animals, and birds. The attributes also relate to the various attitudes in which the hands of images are shown and the postures which the bodies of the images are made to assume. The attributes include the costume, ornaments and head gear in which they are represented. In this division, the researcher has dealt with the objects held in the hands of the gods and goddesses.

The sculptural tradition has taken on the responsibility of expressing some of the most profound ideals and experiences of man through simple, easily understandable symbols, which have a direct bearing on everyday life. Words by themselves cannot fully communicate profound philosophical truths. Even though art, particularly the three-dimensional form, is capable of translating the subtleties of the philosophical principles by way of the posture, flexions, ornamentations and facial expressions of the image, there are some aspects which can

⁸⁷ Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India Through the Ages*, 3rd ed., p. 14.

⁸⁸ Introduction to *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. xiv.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

only be communicated through the employment of specific symbols which are attributed meanings. The artist has had to take recourse to symbols, which have clearly understood social meanings. The *śilpa* tradition has made use of many symbols like implements of war; musical instruments, work tools, flowers, plants, trees, fruits, animals and birds, and some articles of daily use. Artists have also brought into use several kinds of imaginative symbols. On the whole, there are about 120 symbols and accessories, which are explanatory tools in sculptural compositions.⁹⁰

The *śilpa* texts have classified the various accessories under the broad heading of *āyudha* or *karuvi* (implement), including even flowers, animals, and musical instruments. The following list of accessories comprises various items and articles, which may have one or more meanings, to be understood according to the context. Some of these symbols have been mentioned in the *śilpa* and *Āgama* texts, some others in the philosophical works. Some of the implements of war mentioned are – *śakti* (ornamental blade), *śula* (trident), *śaṅkh* (conch), *cakra* (discus), *vajra* (two-headed *śūla*), *daṇḍa* (staff), *udaivāl* (sword), *kathi* or *surikai* (knife), *kēḍaya* (shield), *vil* (bow), *ambu* (arrow), *maḷu* (axe), *gadā* (mace), *sammaṭṭi* (spade), *īṭṭi* (javelin), *vēl* (spear).⁹¹



Śaṅkh – *Śaṅkh* is the ordinary conch, which is almost always found in one of the hands of the images of Viṣṇu. The conch is either plain, held in the hand with all the five fingers by its open end, or an ornamented one, having its head or spiral-top covered with a decorative metal cap, surmounted by the head of a mythical lion, and having a cloth tied round it so that portions of it may hang on either side. In a few instances, attached to the lower end of the *śaṅkh*, there is a thick-jeweled ribbon, which is made to serve as a handle. Sometimes this ornamental variety of *śaṅkh* is shown with *jvālā* or flames of fire on the top and the sides.⁹²

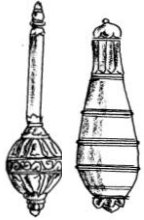
Cakra – Cakra is shown in sculptures in two different forms. In the first variety, it is shaped like the wheel of a cart, with spokes, nave and all, and is studded with precious gems. But in the other form, a highly ornamental one, the spokes are made to resemble the petals of a lotus

⁹⁰ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. 178.

⁹¹ Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes*, p. 40.

⁹² Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* vol 1 part 1, p. 4.

so that the internal parts appear like a full blown lotus. The *cakra* also has ornamentations on the top and the sides, and a jeweled ribbon, running around it. It is in some cases held in the hand by means of this ribbon, and in other cases, between the first two fingers. It is a weapon resembling modern quoits and must have been used as a missile to be thrown against the enemy to cut him through and kill him.⁹³



Gadā – *Gadā* is the ordinary Indian club. It is held in the hand with all the five fingers. In some cases, however, one of the hands of the image is placed upon the top of the *gadā* which rests on the floor. It has a tapering top and a stout bottom. It is a weapon meant to strike the enemy at close quarters and does not therefore leave the hand of its owner.⁹⁴



Khaḍga – *Khaḍga* is a sword, long or short, and is used along with a *khetaka* or shield made of wood or hide. The *khaḍga* is either single-edged or double-edged and has a handle.⁹⁵



Khetaka – *Khetaka* is either circular or quadrangular and has a handle at the back, by which it is held. Sometimes there are curious emblems and devices depicted on the face of the *khetaka*.⁹⁶



Musala – *Musala* is the name of the Indian wooden pestle, which is an ordinary cylindrical rod of hard wood. It can be used as an offensive weapon.⁹⁷



Dhanus – *Dhanus* is the bow. It has three different shapes. The first is like an arc of arc of a circle, with the ends joined by a string or thong taking the place of the chord. In the second variety, it has three bends, the top and bottom bends being smaller and

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

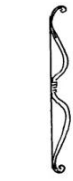
⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 5

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

turned in a direction opposite to that of the middle bend which is the larger one. The third variety has five bends.⁹⁸

Bāṇa – *Bāna* or the arrow is so represented as to appear to be made of wood, and is tipped with a metallic point, its tail end having a few feathers stuck in it. The arrows are put into a quiver slung on the back. An arrow is extracted from it for use with the aid of the forefinger and the middle finger.⁹⁹



Paraśu – *Paraśu* is the battle-axe. The *parasu* of the archaic type consists of a steel blade, which is fitted on a turned, light, wooden handle. The handle is sometimes fixed in a ring, which is attached to the blade of the axe. Sometimes, however, the blade is fixed in a hole bored in the handle. The later forms consist of a heavy club, closely resembling the *gadā*, into which the head of the *parasu* is fitted.¹⁰⁰



Kaṭvāṅga – *Kaṭvāṅga* is a curious sort of club, made up of the bone of the forearm or the leg, to the end of which a human skull is attached.¹⁰¹



Ṭaṅka – The small chisel used by the stonemason is called the *ṭaṅka*.¹⁰²



Agni – This is represented in two varieties, according to whether it is used as a weapon of war or employed for the purpose of making offerings.¹⁰³



Śūla – *Śūla* is the trident, which is the favourite weapon of Śiva. It is represented in many forms. The essential feature of all these is the triple metal pike ending in sharp points and mounted upon a long wooden handle.¹⁰⁴



⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 6

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰³ Ibid.



Aṅkuśa – *Aṅkuśa* or the elephant goad is a weapon consisting of a sharp metal hook attached to a wooden handle.¹⁰⁵



Pāśa – It is a noose of ropes employed in binding the enemy's hands and legs. It is represented in sculptures as consisting of two or even three ropes made into a single or a double loop.¹⁰⁶



Vajra – *Vajra* is the thunderbolt. It is made up of two similar limbs, each having three claws resembling the claws of birds and both its parts are connected together by the handle in the middle.¹⁰⁷



Kathi – *Kathi* is a short knife. It is also called as *surikai*.

Śakti – *Śakti* is the name applied to the spear. It consists of a metallic piece, either quadrangular or elliptical in shape, with a socket into which a long wooden handle is fixed.¹⁰⁸

Some of the work tools held in the hands of deities are as follows:

Kalappai (hoe), *ulakkai* (wooden pestle), *koṭṭ āppuli* (wooden hammer), *karaṇḍi* (ladle), *danta* (tusk), *kartari* (scissors), *eḷ uttāṇi* (pen to write on palm leaf), *tāla* (cymbals), *uḷ avarappadai* (trowel), *aṅkuśa*, *paraśu* (axe), *kuṇḍali* (pickaxe), *arivāḷ* (sickle), *saattai* (whip), *yoga daṇḍa* (yogic staff), *muḷ akōl* (measuring rod), and *uḷ i* (chisel).

The musical instruments held in the hands of deities are – *yāḷ* (stringed instrument), *vīṇā* (stringed instrument), *kuḷ al* (fluet), *murasu* (drum), *mattāḷ a* (drum), *pañcamukhavādyā* (drum), *uḍukku* (kettledrum), *ekkāḷ a* (trumpet), *mṛ daṅga* (drum), *tampura* (stringed

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

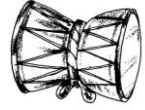
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

instrument). The commonly seen musical instruments that are held in the hands of images are explained hereunder.

Ḍamaru – The *ḍamaru* is an instrument generally found in the hands of the images of Śiva and of his manifestations such as Bhairava. *Ḍamaru* is a small drum with a hollow body open at both ends. Over each of the open ends of this hollow body is stretched a membrane which is held in position firmly by means of a string passing to and fro over the length of the body of the drum. By pressing these strings, the tension of the membranes may be altered at will so as to produce different notes by striking thereon, or by rubbing one of the membranes with a resined stick. Sometimes there is a string attached to the middle of the body of the drum; and to the end of this string is attached a bead. By holding the drum in the middle and shaking it suitably, this string with the bead may be made to strike against the membranes alternately and produce the required sound.¹⁰⁹



Ghaṇṭā – *Ghaṇṭā* or the bell is another musical instrument, which is generally found in the hands of Vīrabhadra and Kālī.¹¹⁰

Vīṇā – It consists of a long hollow semi-cylindrical body with a number of keys on its sides. From each of these keys proceeds a string or wire, which is stretched over the long body of the instrument and tied at the lower end. At this lower end is a square sounding box, and to the upper end a hollow gourd is attached to serve as a resonator. It is played with the left hand by passing the fingers lightly over the strings and pressing them down a little in required positions. The right hand plucks the various strings periodically to suit the requirements of the musician.¹¹¹

Murali or ***vēnu*** – *Murali* or *vēnu* is a flute made, as its name indicates, from a thin and hollow bamboo. In a piece of bamboo, suitably chosen, holes are bored in proper places. By blowing in the hole which is near the closed end and stopping one or more of the other holes with the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

fingers as required, music of a very high standard of perfection is often elicited from this simple instrument.¹¹²

The animals and birds found as vehicles for the deities or held as attributes or weapons in the hands of the deities are – *ṛ ṣ abhāntika* (bull), *siṅṅha* (lion), *kudirai* (horse), *mān* (deer), *ādu* (goat), *dhenu* (cow), *varāha* (boar), *mūṣ ika* (rat), *nāy* (dog), *makara* (fish), *macca* (fish), *āmai* (tortoise), *annam* (swan), *mayil* (peacock), *sēval* (cock), *ki! i* (parrot), *garuḍa* (brahmini kite), *kāka* (crow), *pāmbu* (snake), *aṭ ṭ ai* (leech), *muyalaga* (dwarf form), *vēdā! am* (genie), and *kāmadhenu* (celestial cow).

The representations of certain animals and birds are generally found in the hands of images. They are *harina* (deer–head); *mṛ ga* (deer); *kūrma* (tortoise); *kukkuṭ a* (cock); *matsya* (fish); *pakṣ i* (bird); *vainayaki* (elephant head); beetles (insect) and *rām* (goat). The flowers held in the hands of the deities are *sentāmarai* (red lotus), *nīlotpala* (blue lotus), *alli* (water lilly), *veṅtāmarai* (white lotus), *erukkam* (white root), *karpaka kodi* (creeper), *senga! u nīr* (reddish lily). Flowers, such as the *padma*, (lotus), and the *nīlotpala*, (the blue lily) are to be generally seen in the hands of the images of goddesses especially in the hands of goddesses Lakṣ mī and Bhūmīdevī.¹¹³

The fruits found in connection with the deities or held in the hands of the deities are – *māmpa! am* (mango), *palā* (jackfruit), *vā! ai* (banana), *mādu! ai* (pomegranate), *koyyā* (guava), *annāsi* (pineapple), and *vilāmpa! am* (wood apple). The trees found in the temples as *sthala vṛ kṣ a* (the tree of the temple) are *arasu* (peepul), *āla* (banyan), and *karpaka* (celestial tree).

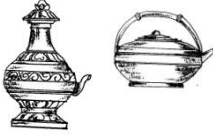
The colours commonly found on the deities are white, red, black, blue, yellow, and green. The other miscellaneous articles found as attributes in the hands of the deities are *maṅi* (bell), *kaṅṅāḍi* (mirror), *agni* (flame), *kalasa* (pot), *kamaṅ ḍalu* (holy jug), *keṅ ḍi* (holy jug), *akṣ amālā* (prayer beads), *tulasi mālā* (rosary), *sphaṭ ika mālā* (rosary of crystals), *ēdu* (palm leaf manuscript), *koḍi* (flag), *kapāla* (skull), *kaṭ vāṅ ga* (implement), *kuḍai* (umbrella),

¹¹² Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

vīraḱaḱal (ankle bell), *sāmara* (fan), *silambu* (anklet), *talaikkol* (variety of staff), *sengol* (sceptre), *tīvaṭṭ il* (fire pot), *karumbuvil* (sugarcane bow), *malarkaṅai* (flower arm), *modaka* (rice sweet), *kokkiragu* (stork feather), *gaṅgā* (doll), *śiraśu* (head), *nelkadir* (paddy stalk), *kumbha* (pot), *malai* (mountain), *nūl* (thread), *pāśa* (rope weapon), *liṅga* (symbol of Śiva), *āvuḱaiyār* (pedestal), *śrīvatsa* (mole on the chest of Viṣṇu), *kaustubha* (stone), *balipīṭha* (sacrificial seat), *dhvajasthambha* (flat staff), *tiruvāsi* (arch), *mukha* (face), *kaikal* (arms), and *kaṅkaḱal* (eyes).

Certain utensils and other objects that are commonly found in the hands of the images are:



Kamaṅḱalu – This is an ordinary vessel to hold water and is of different shapes. It has in some cases a spout.¹¹⁴



Sruk-Sruva – *Sruk* and *sruva* are two different kinds of spoons, used to take out ghee from the ghee-pot and pour it out over the sacred fire in the sacrifices. The former of these has a hemispherical bowl, while the latter is shaped very much like a modern spoon. A *sruk* of large proportion is generally carried by the Goddess Aṅṅapūrṅa.¹¹⁵



Darpaṅḱa – *Darpaṅḱa* means a mirror. In ancient times, highly polished metal plates of various designs were utilized to serve as mirrors. The *darpaṅḱa* is either circular or oval in form, and is mounted on a well-wrought handle.¹¹⁶



Kapāla – *Kapāla* denotes the human skull. Śiva uses it as a receptacle for food and drink. Later on the word came to mean the cut-half of an earthen pot, and then a basin or a bowl. In sculpture the *kapala* occurs as a common spherical or oval bowl.¹¹⁷



¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

Pustaka – *Pustaka* means a book. It is made up either of palm leaves or of paper. In older sculptures it is always a palm leaf book that is represented as being held in the hand by Brahmā and other deities.¹¹⁸



Akṣamaḷā – *Akṣamaḷā* is the rosary of beads. The beads are either *rudrākṣa* or *kamalākṣa* in variety, and the rosary is found on the hands of Brahmā, Sarasvatī and Śiva, though rarely in association with other deities.¹¹⁹

Ajya pātra – *Ajya pātra* denotes the blessed vessel that never remains empty. Goddess Anṇa apūraṇi uses it to feed the hungry people who approach her.

The accessories should be made of the same material with which the main image has been fashioned. Each of these accessories denotes the attributes of the images while in certain circumstances they denote particular divinity or character by themselves. The following articles signify the attributes of Lord Śiva:

<i>Śūla</i>	-	<i>Triguṇa</i> or his three states
<i>Paraśu</i>		<i>Satya</i> (Truth)
<i>Kaṭkam</i>	-	<i>Perannmai</i> (Stoic endurance)
<i>Vajra</i>	-	<i>Muḷumai</i> (Wholeness)
<i>Abhaya</i>	-	<i>Peraruludaimai</i> (Benevolence)
<i>Nāga</i>	-	State of desirelessness
<i>Pāśa</i>	-	Transitory nature
<i>Aṅkuśa</i>	-	Colourlessness
<i>Maṇi</i>	-	Tangible form of sound
<i>Agni</i>	-	Containment. ¹²⁰

3.6.8 The Characters of the Deities

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, pp.178-181.

There are three modes in classifying the deities. Depending on the classical *guṇa* that they signify or embody, they are classified into *sāttvika* image, *rājasa* image and *tāmasa* image. They are explained hereunder.

The *sāttvika* image is represented in a yogic stance. The expression of the deity is very calm, tranquil, bright, ethereal, pure, wise, and luminous. The *mudrās* in the hands are held in such a way that they dispel fear and offer benediction to the worshipper. The images of Dakṣ iṅ āmūrti, Gaṇ eśa, Candraśekhara, Lakṣ mī, Sarasvatī, Rājarājeśvarī and Śrīnivāsa are typical examples of the *sāttvika* form.¹²¹ The *rājasa* image is represented either in standing posture or mounted on a vehicle. The deity is depicted energetic, active, heroic, emotional, and mobile. It is adorned with various ornaments. The hands are held in the posture of removing fear and granting prayers. Subrahmaṇ ya, Śiva as Bhikṣ āṭ ana, HariHara, Ardhanārīśvara, Rāma and Sītā, Rājagopāla and Śrīnivāsa belong to this *rājasa* form.¹²² The *tāmasa* image is represented with many arms and various implements of war in the arms either standing or riding on a vehicle. The deity is perceived as destroying the evil forces. It has a fearsome expression on its face and its posture reflects great pleasure in the acts of destruction. The images of Mahiṣ āsuramardinī, Viṣ ṇ u as Narasiṃha, Kṛ ṣ ṇ a as Kāliya Dahana, Vīrabhadra, Skanda riding on the peacock are good examples of this form.¹²³

The *āgama* texts state that the standing posture of the deity represents *rājas bhāva*, the seated posture *tāmasa bhāva* and the reclining posture, *sattva bhāva*. There are also various other postures for the deities in various states of emotions, namely, the *yoga* posture, *bhōga* posture, *vīra* posture and *abhisārika* posture.

3.7 Pratimā Lakṣaṇa (The Body Postures of the Icons)

The body postures mean the *āṅgikābhinaya*, which has been dealt with in detail in the previous chapter. The texts followed for this division are also specified. The researcher has classified this section, “the body postures,” into three divisions: (1) *kai amaiti* or *hastas* (hand

¹²¹ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, p. 6

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

gestures), (2) *āsanas* (the basic stances) and (3) *bhañgas* (the inflexions of the body). The *kai amaiti* or hand gestures are divided into *toḷ irkai* and *eḷ irkai*. The *asānas* are classified into *sthānakas* (the standing poses), *āsanas* (the sitting poses), and *śayanas* (the reclining poses). The *bhañgas* are the flexions in the body.

3.7.1 *Hastas* – Position of the Fingers

The technical term used in the texts to denote the finger poses is *mudrā* and *hasta*. The term *hasta* is generally used in cases where the whole of the arm along with the hand is shown in a particular pose (*daṇḍa hasta*, hand like a stick; *gaja hasta*, hand like the trunk of an elephant; *kaṭṭi hasta*, hands on the hip; and so on). The term *mudrā* usually denotes the peculiar posture in which the palm with the fingers is shown (*jñāna mudrā* – fingers in *hamsāsya mudrā*, denoting wisdom; *ciṇṇ mudrā* or *vyākhyāna mudrā* – fingers in *hamsāsya hasta*, denoting teaching/advising; *yoga* or *dhyāna mudrā* – fingers in *hamsāsya mudrā*, denoting meditation; and so on). *Hastas* and *mudrās* thus usually indicate some action, which the god or his attendant is shown to be engaged in. The action consists of the expression of an idea by means of a particular gesture.¹²⁴

In iconographic terminology, the word *kai amaiti* is also used for the hand poses. There are mainly five poses: stretching the fingers, folding, counting the fingers, spreading or separating, and joining. There are thirty-two *kai amaitikal* in iconography. The *kai amaitikal* is also known as *hasta mudrā* in Sanskrit and *ciṭṭ pa kai* in Tamil. In India, many of the hand poses were long and stereotyped. Coomaraswamy observes: “Such motions must have been elaborated and codified at a very early date; and later on we find that the art of silent communication by means of signs, which is in effect a ‘deaf and dumb language’, and just like the American Indian hand-language, was regularly regarded as one of the ‘sixty-four arts’ which every educated person should have knowledge of.”¹²⁵

On the whole, there are thirty-two *mudrās*/hand gestures and they are divided into two major groups – *toḷ irkai* and *eḷ irkai*. *Toḷ irkai* comprises functional and expressive gestures, which communicate a specific meaning. *Eḷ irkai*, also called *nāṭṭ yakaram*, is a graceful

¹²⁴ J. N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 268-269.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

posture of the hand, with no specific meaning but which adds balance and elegance to the total form.¹²⁶ Gestures with one hand are:

1. *Abhaya* (fear not)
2. *Varada* (benevolence)
3. *Kaṭ aka* (crab-hold)
4. *Siṁha Karṇa* (lion's ear)
5. *Vyākhyāna* (essence, exposition of truth)
6. *Sūcī* (point)
7. *Tarjanī* (underline, warn)
8. *Kartarīmukha* (scissors-like)
9. *Alapadma* (blossomed lotus, happiness)
10. *Vismaya* (surprise)
11. *Pallava* (tendril)
12. *Nidrā* (supportive, sleepy, meditative)
13. *Ardhacandra* (half moon)
14. *Ardhapatāka* (dvaita philosophy)
15. *Triśūla* (triad)
16. *Muṣṭi* (weapon-hold, fist)
17. *Śikhara* (bow-hold, crest)
18. *Bhūsparśa* (touching the earth)
19. *Kaṭ i*, held at hip, regal
20. *Uru*, held at thigh (dignified)
21. *Āliṅgana* (tender grasp)
22. *Dhanur* (bow-hold)
23. *Ḍamaru* (holding drum)
24. *Tāḍana* (punishing)

Gestures with both hands are:

25. *Añjali* (devotion)

¹²⁶ V. Ganapati Sthapati, *Cirpa Cernūl* (Chennai: Tolil Nutpak Kalai Kalvi Nilaiyam, 1978), pp. 32-33.

26. *Dhyāna* (meditation)
27. *Puṣpa Puṭā* (worship with flowers)
28. *Dharmacakra* (Buddha)

Elilkai brings out the beauty of the hand. They are:

1. *Gaja* (elephant trunk)
2. *Daṇḍa* (rod, dangling)
3. *Doḷā* or *Lamba* (dangling)
4. *Prasārita* (spreading out and stretching)

The method of making the hand gestures is described below.

Abhaya Hasta



In this position, the four fingers from index to little finger are held vertically above the plane of the hand while the thumb is bent close to the index finger.



Varada Hasta

When the *abhaya hasta* is held upside down with the palm facing outward, it is known as *varada hasta*.¹²⁷



Kaṭaka Hasta

When the thumb is brought forward slightly and curved towards the palm, the middle and ring fingers joined and brought forward, slightly, the little and index fingers bent only at their top joints, the form is called *kaṭaka hasta* (since it closely resembles the hold of a *kaṭaka* or crab). The tip of the middle finger should be a little in front of the ring finger.



Sirīḥa Karṇa Hasta

This *hasta* is very similar to the *kaṭaka hasta*, except that the middle finger is curved further inward into the palm, followed by the ring finger. The other fingers stay in the same position as in the *kaṭaka hasta*.

Vyākhyāna Mudrā



¹²⁷ *Varanamurti, South Indian Bronzes*, p. 20.

The thumb is held perpendicular to the palm and the index finger is bent forward to touch the tip of the thumb. The remaining three fingers are held close together vertically above the palm. It is known variously as *vyakhyana*, *vitarka* or *ciṅ mudrā*. Rao remarks about it that it is the “*mudrā* adopted when an explanation or exposition is being given; hence it is also called *vyākhyāna mudrā* and *sandarśana mudrā*.”¹²⁸

Sūcī Hasta



When the forefinger is held vertically upward from the palm, and the remaining fingers are held in *kaṭṭaka hasta*, the form is known as *sūcī hasta*.

Tarjanī Hasta



It is a variation of the *sūcī hasta*. Several other goddesses are very often described as *tarjanī-pāśa hasta*, that is, “with a hand holding a *tarjanī-pāśa*.” It is not meant hereby that the deity holds a noose (*pāśa*) in one hand while another is shown in the *tarjanī* pose, but the epithet really means that the noose, which is meant for chastisement, is placed in the same hand, which is shown in the threatening pose.¹²⁹

Kartarīmukha Hasta



This *mudrā* is formed with the thumb and ring finger together and curved inward into the palm, the little finger either held erect or bent slightly, the middle and index fingers held vertically upward with the middle finger leaning forward a little and the forefinger held back from it to indicate the open scissors' effect.

Alapadma Hasta



When all the fingers of the hand are spread out and separated from each other with the palm facing upward, and the effect is like an open flower, it is known as *alapadma hasta*.

Vismaya Hasta



When the *alapadma hasta* is held vertically upward with the palm facing inwards and the back of hand facing outward, it is known as *vismaya hasta*. Just like *alapadma*, the fingers are held separated to express an open blossom.¹³⁰

Pallava Hasta



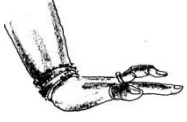
vents of Hindu Iconography, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 15

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

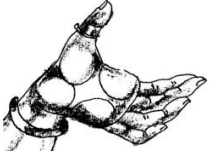
In this gesture, the hand, with all the five fingers joined together, is extended gracefully downward from the wrist with the palm facing towards the ground.

Nidrā Hasta



When the hand is placed on the ground as support in a seated posture, or when an image is in a reclining posture and the hand is again rested on the ground, the gesture is called *nidrā hasta*.

Ardhacandra Hasta



Ardhacandra hasta describes a half moon. In this form, the four fingers are held together, vertical to the palm, with the thumb held rigidly away from them. To give a clear effect of a half moon, this gesture should be held at an angle and not flat.

Ardhapatāka Hasta



The *ardhapatāka* form shows the forefingers and middle finger held vertically upward from the palm with all the other fingers curved inward into the palm.

Triśūla Hasta



Triśūla hasta is formed with the palm held vertically upward, the little finger, thumb touching each other, and bent towards the palm and the other three fingers extended upward, separate from each other. This stands for the three-pronged instrument known as the *triśūla*.

Muṣṭi Hasta



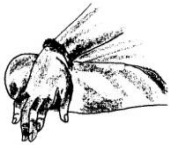
Muṣṭi is formed with all the fingers firmly held, close to the palm and the thumb placed over the middle finger, the whole forming a fist.

Śikhara Hasta



In this posture, the four fingers are held bent into the palm while the thumb is held vertically upward away from them.

Bhūsparśa Hasta



When the *pallava hasta* is held close to the ground, with the fingers touching it, it is called *bhūsparśa hasta*.

Kañṭhi Hasta



Held at the level of the hip of the image, this *mudrā* has the thumb raised into the hip and the other fingers spread away from the thumb and held together in line

with the palm. The little and the forefinger are away from the hip and arched gracefully while the middle and ring fingers rest on the hip.



Urū Hasta

This form is similar to the above *hasta*; the hand is placed on the thigh.



Āliṅgana Hasta

The arm is shown either around the waist or around the shoulder. The middle and ring fingers are passed firmly down, while the forefinger and little finger are raised gracefully away. The thumb is held up vertically away from the rest of the palm.



Dhanur Hasta

The middle and ring fingers are placed over the bow, with the palm turned inward. The forefinger and little fingers are raised gracefully above. The thumb is bent forward until its tip rests on the bow.



Damaru Hasta

This gesture represents the holding of a small drum known as *damaru*. The fingers are spread fully and then curved inward towards the palm as if holding the drum. The middle and ring finger rests lightly on one side of the drum and the thumb on the other side. The forefinger and the little finger are raised up and curved gently away from the hand.



Tāḍana Hasta

The hand is raised up vertically with the palm facing outward, and all the fingers from the forefinger to the little finger are held together, the thumb held apart and little behind them.

Gestures with Both Hands



Añjali Hasta

When both the hands in *abhaya hasta* are held close together at the level of the chest, it is known as *añjali hasta*.¹³¹

¹³¹ Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, p. 16.



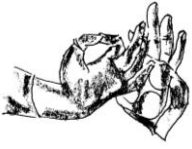
Dhyāna Hasta

In seated images, the *dhyāna hasta* is formed with the left hand opened fully and placed on the lap, over which a similarly opened right hand is placed. Both the hands face upward and the fingers are held in *abhaya hasta*.



Puṣpa Puṭā Hasta

When the two palms are held gracefully together in *varadha hasta*, facing upward, and tips the tips of the fingers are slanted slightly inward, it is known as *puṣpa puṭā hasta*.



Dharmacakra Hasta

The *Dharmacakra Hasta* is formed in the following manner: The right hand is placed close to the chest and turned outward in an *abhaya hasta*, with the fingers curved gracefully and thumb forward. The left hand, turned inward, is brought close to the right hand with the fingers in supplication. The two hands are held close together with the thumb of the right hand and the middle finger of the left hand almost touching.

Eḷ irkai



Gaja Hasta

When the hand is stretched straight out, and the palm slopes downward from the wrist, with the fingers bent gracefully like tendrils on a creeper, this regal *mudrā* reminiscent of an elephant's trunk, is called *gaja hasta*. The palm in this drawing seems to be in the *vainayaki mudrā*; in the well-known *Naṭ arāja* images of Śiva, this *mudrā* is clearly recognizable. This pose is usually met with in images of gods or goddesses shown in the dancing attitude. Śiva Naṭ arāja dancing vigorously on the back of Muyalaka or the *apasmara puruṣa*, Nṛ tya-Gaṇapati, Kṛ ṣ ṇa *Kāliya damana*, dancing Cāmuṇḍa and such other images has one of their hands in this pose.



Daṇḍa Hasta

When the *gaja hasta* is held in front of the body, it is known as *daṇḍa hasta*.



Doḷā Hasta

This gesture has the appearance of a broken and hanging branch of a tree. The hand is held in a sharp downward slope from the shoulder. It is also known as *lola kara* or *lamba kara*. The fingers are held in a *pallava hasta*.

Prasārita Hasta



When the arm is held horizontal from the shoulder with the hand in *pallava hasta*, the *mudrā* is known as *prasārita hasta*.

Images are recognized by these *hastas* and other peculiar iconographic characteristics associated with individual concepts and deities.

3.7.2 Āsanas (Body Postures)

The divine postures of the deities are called *āsanas*. There is also another meaning, that is, the originating pose. Ganapati Sthapati in his text *Citr pa Ceṅṅūl* describes the five *āsanas* as *sthānaka* – the standing pose, *āsana* – the sitting pose, *śayana* – the reclining pose, *sthānāsana* – the pose dependent on the *sthānaka-amaiti*, and *śayanāsana* – the pose dependent on the reclining pose. *Sthānaka* is the standing vertical pose with two divisions found in iconography and is studied in relation to Bharatanatyam in chapter four. The pose with one leg hanging and the other leg folded on the seat (*pīṭ a sthāna*) of the icon is called *āsana*. The lying pose of the deity with legs and hands stretched on the seat (*pīṭ a sthāna*) is called *śayana*.

3.7.2.1 Sthānakas (The Standing Poses)

The *sthānaka* or the vertical stance is of two types. They are the *samapāda sthānaka* (erect posture) and the *kayotsarga sthānaka*.



Samapāda sthānaka

In the *samapāda sthānaka*, the head and body are held erect with legs and arms close together. There is no flexion in the body. The gaze is direct. Candraśekara and Viṣ ṅ u are good examples of this posture. *Samapāda sthānaka* is of two types, namely *vaitastika sthānaka* and *ardha vaitastika sthānaka*.

Kayotsarga sthānaka



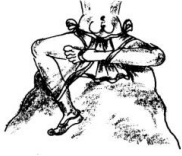
In *kayotsarga* posture, the feet are placed together with the body erect and the arms hanging close to the body. The Gomateśvar image in the Jain tradition is a

good example for this stance. The Hindu deities are not often found in this stance.

3.7.2.2 *Āsanas* (The Sitting Poses)

The word “*āsana*” generally means the sitting pose. The various sitting poses of the deities are described in detail as hereunder.

Sukhāsana



The body is held erect without shift or curve to any side, with one leg folded flat and the other hanging in a very reposeful manner; the hands are held together in equilibrium. This is called *sukhāsana*. This posture is usually favoured for Śiva and Viṣṇu images which are consecrated separately (without supporting figures) and are called Sukhāsana Viṣṇu or Sukhāsana Śiva.

Padmāsana



An image sitting cross-legged, with the feet facing upwards and resting on the thighs, and the body held erect, is said to be in *padmāsana* or *kamalāsana*. This posture is also known as *paryañkāsana* or *vajrāsana* in the Buddhist tradition.



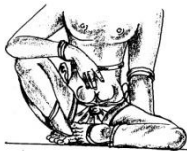
When one leg is folded, with the other foot resting on its thigh, it is called *ardha padmāsana*.

Laṅgītāsana



Seated with feet on the pedestal, with one leg held vertically and the other folded flat, the image is in *laṅgītāsana*. This posture can be observed in the seated Vināyaka image.

Mahārāja Līlāsana



In the above posture, with the right leg held vertically and the left folded flat, if the right elbow is placed on the right knee with the hand gracefully bent down or held close to the chest, and the left hand supported on the ground, with the body arched in a relaxed manner, it is called *maharājā līlāsana*. Buddha and Śiṃhanātha images are usually fashioned in this posture.

Vīrāsana

When one leg is hung down and placed on the ground with the other leg bent, with the foot resting on its thigh, and the body is held erect in an aggressive manner, the whole figure

denoted a regal bearing. This is called *vīrāsana* or heroic pose. Vyākhyāna Dakṣ ināmūrti is a suitable example of the posture.



Utkutikāsana

The posture is known as *utkutikāsana* when one leg is supported vertically on the pedestal and the other is hung down. Ayyanār images are good examples.

Yogāsana



This posture signifies the disciplining of the five senses. One of the hands is held in *jñāna mudrā* close to the chest, with palm facing either inward or outward. The other hand is placed on the thigh with palm upward and fingers held together and extended. The head is held erect with eyes gazing at the tip of the nose. These are the special characteristics and qualities of *yogāsana*. Yoga Narasiṃha is found in this posture.



Svastikāsana

Svastikāsana is also called *yogāsana* in the seated posture. Whether the image is standing or seated with legs crossed, it is called *swastikasana*.



Garuḍāsana

The right leg is folded inward with its knee supported on the ground; the left leg is bent and stretched away from the body with the foot resting on the ground.

This posture is called *garuḍāsana*. Garuḍa, the vehicle of Śiva is found in this posture.

The *āsanas* also serve as the pedestals. The word *āsanā* can also mean a seat or even a pedestal; in the latter sense, the word *pīṭha* is frequently used. Thus, *padmapīṭha* would indicate the lotus seat on which the deities are often seated. A few such *āsana* are described below.

Kūrmāsana

Kūrmāsana in one context may mean that it is the tortoise, which serves as the seat (of a particular god or goddess of the river goddess Yamuna who is *kūrmāsana*), while in another it would indicate that type of sitting pose in which ‘the legs are crossed so as to make the heels come under the gluteals.

Kukkuṭāsana

The *kukkutāsana* as a sitting posture is a variety of *padmāsana*, where the whole weight of the body rests on two arms placed on the ground on both sides, the body thus hanging in the air.

Bhadrāsana

In the *bhadrāsana*, the heels of the legs, which cross each other, are placed under the testes and the hands hold the two big toes of the feet.

Siṁhāsana

In the *siṁhāsana* the legs are crossed as in the *kurmāsana*; the palms of the hands, with the fingers kept stretched out, rest supinely upon the thigh, while the mouth is kept open and the eyes are fixed upon the tip of the nose.

T. A. G. Rao refers to five different kinds of such *āsanas* as mentioned in the *Suprabhedāgama*. They are *anantāsana*, *siṁhāsana*, *yogāsana*, *padmāsana* and *vimalāsana*. *Anantāsana* is a triangular seat, *siṁhāsana* rectangular, *vimalāsana* hexagonal, *yogāsana* octagonal, and *padmāsana* circular.¹³² *Anantāsana* should be used as the seat for the image when it has to witness amusements, *siṁhāsana* when it has to be bathed, and *yogāsana* during invocation, *padmāsana* during the conduct of worship, and *vimalāsana* when offerings are made.¹³³

Rao describes four types of *āsanas* or *pīṭhas*, viz., *bhadrāpīṭha* (*bhadrāsana*), *kūrmāsana*, *pretāsana* and *siṁhāsana*. The height of the first is divided into 16 parts, of which one forms the thickness of the *upana* or the basal layer; four, of the *jagati* or the next higher layer; three, of the *kumuda*; one, of the *pattika*; three, of the *kantha*; one, of the second *pattika*; two, of the broader *mahāpattika*; and one, of the *ghṛtavari*, the topmost layer. The *bhadrāsana* of an image does not seem to have been such an elaborate *āsana* or *pītā*. The *kūrmāsana* is to be made of wood and is to be of oval shape. It should be four *aṅgulas* high and twelve *aṅgulas* broad. *Pretāsana* is a yogic *āsana*, in which the whole body lies rigid and motionless like a corpse. *Siṁhāsana* is a four legged seat usually rectangular in shape; its legs are carved in the shape of four lions.¹³⁴

¹³² J. N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, p. 273.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 273-274.

According to the Tamil work *Saivasamayeneri*, *kūrmāsana* is to be made of wood and is to be of oval shape; it should be four *aṅgulas* high and twelve *aṅgulas* broad, and the face and feet of a tortoise should be shown on it. *Pretāsana* is really a yogic *āsana*, in which the whole body lies rigid and motionless like a corpse. *Sirīhāsana* is a four-legged seat usually rectangular in shape; its legs are carved in the shape of four lions, thereby laying special stress on its name.

3.7.2.3 *Sthānāsana* (Variations on the Standing Posture)

Sthāna means positions. *Sthānāsana* consists of some variations on the standing posture. They are:



Vaiśākha Sthānaka

When one leg is firmly supported on the ground and the other is stretched straight ahead to a distance of $2^{1/2}$ *cāṅg*, and the body is held in a graceful posture, it is called *vaiśākha sthānaka*.



Vaiṣṇava Sthānaka

This posture is similar to the *Vaiśākha Sthānaka*. One leg is firmly supported on the ground while the other is placed a little distance away, bent slightly, and the body is held in a graceful manner. Since one leg is held on the ground with the other elegantly bent, it is also called *sthita kuṅcita*.



Svastikāsana

One leg is held firmly supported on the ground, while the other is crossed over in front and rested on its toes. This posture is called *svastikāsana*.



Ālidāsana

The standing figure has the bent left leg placed in front with the right leg stretched out behind. The legs are held one behind the other and the arms represent the stretched string of a bow. This posture is called *ālidāsana* or *āliḍa*.

The left hand holds a bow in a *śikhara mudrā*, and the right hand is in *kataka mudra*, with the string and arrow pulled back.

Pratyāliḍāsana

The stance when the body springs forward the moment an arrow has been discharged from the bow is called *pratyāliḍa kōlam*. In this *āsana*, the arms and legs of *āliḍa* have to be interchanged. When the bow is stretched fully back with the arrow held in the hand, the body

is taut and tense. With the arrow, activated by this tension, having been freed by the archer, he is thrown forward with the recoil. The postural adjustment that the archer passes through to come back to equilibrium is called *pratyāliḍāsana*.



Urdhvajānu

One leg is firmly supported on the ground and the other is raised, bent at the knees and supported on a pedestal, or on a higher plane, or on another image. The image of Tripura Samhāra Śiva Mūrti with one leg resting on the ground and the other resting on the top of His chariot and the image or Durgā with one leg resting on the ground and the other placed on the head of Mahiṣ āsura, are good examples of this posture.



Ekapada Sthānaka

In this posture, one leg is firmly supported on the ground, with the other bent and rested near the knee of the first leg. This posture can be seen in meditative Arjuna images. Another variation found in *ekapada sthānaka* is one leg supported on the ground and the other is bent fully and placed on the genitals of the image with the feet facing upward. Such a posture can be seen in images of KāmākṢ i, in meditation.

3.7.2.4 Śayana (The Reclining Poses)

Śayanāsana shows the body and head resting on the pedestal, with arms and legs stretched out. *Śayana* or recumbent images of Hindu divinities are very rare. The following two are found mentioned.

Samaśayana

When the image is shown flat on the back, with the body and head reclined fully, the arms and legs stretched out straight, and the eyes closed, it is in *samaśayana*. This posture is suitable for Abhicārika Śayana Viṣ ṇ u Mūrti.

Ardhaśayana

The body, reclining on the couch, is arched slightly with the right arm either placed on the pillow or stretched up to the *makuṭ a* or head. The left arm is bent slightly and placed on the left thigh, the right leg is stretched out straight the left leg is bent a little and the head is shifted about three viral to the right of the central line of the body. The left leg is placed in *kuṇcita* form, right leg stretched. This reclining posture is called *ardhaśayana* or *ardhārdha śayanam*.

This posture can be seen in images of Bhōgaśayana Viṣṇu Mūrti and Yogaśayana Viṣṇu Mūrti.

3.7.2.4 *Bhaṅgas* (Flexions of the Body)

The poses and the inclinations of the figures are the peculiar characteristics of the South Indian images. The easy pose and the exquisite balance of some of these images are so very remarkable in their aesthetic quality and are based on certain rules as to the bent and disposition of the trunk and legs laid down in the sculptor's handbooks. The bend in the body of an icon is called *bhaṅga* (flexions or attitudes). They are three, namely *abhaṅga* (that form of standing pose in which the plumbline or the centre line from the crown of the head to a point midway between the heels passes slightly to the right of the navel), *samabhaṅga* (the equipoise body where the right and the left of the figure are disposed symmetrically, the *sutra* or plumbline passing through the navel from the crown of the head to a point midway between the heels), and *atibhaṅga* (the form of the *tribhaṅga* curve being considerably enhanced).¹³⁵

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter may be concluded by saying that *Cirpa Cennūl* and *Śilparatna* instruct the sculptors and the architect to follow the rules and formulations laid down for making images. This chapter has discussed the evolution of images, the classification of images, the mode of casting images, the attributes in the hands of images, the costumes, ornaments and headgear of images, and the characters of the gods and the goddesses. This chapter has also explained the techniques of the *āṅgikābhinaya* and the details of the *hastas*, *āsanas* and also the *bhaṅgas*. Both the creation and the contemplation of an image are devotional acts. The techniques involved in iconography will help to study closely the bodily postures of the icons of the deities.

¹³⁵ *Indian Sculpture and Iconography*, pp. 47 - 56.