

Paraśiva, Śiva-Pārvatī and Ardhanārīśvara Images A Philosophical Approach

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As the devotional theism of the Bhakti school gained momentum a new pathway was thrown open for the realization of the formless ultimate. The Nirguṇa became Saguṇa, the nirākāra assumed vibrant the metaphysical became transformed into the physical. The iconic expression of the metaphysical ultimate not only took diverse form but forms which were pregnant with beautiful suggestivity. These fantasies in sculptural stone came to personify in concrete form the dogmas and tenets of the various schools of philosophy, struggling to give expression to the ultimate that pervades the universe. What the words could express through endless discourses appeared in visual stone in compact suggestion.

It is interesting to know as to how the ancient artist under the guidance of philosopher tried to give form to the formless. The visual expression of which can be witnessed at Ellora as it is a fine blend of all major cults of formulative and resurgent Brahmanical Hinduism like Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, etc. It comprises the spectrum of iconographic creations commencing with Buddhist, through Brahmanical and ending with that of Jaina faith.

Among the Brahmanical caves on the site the Kailāsa epitomizes the highest ideal of bhakti which is the main cause for the creation of religious imagery. There are many images of gods and goddesses which require to be read in an esoteric way to understand the image in its full significance, in its spiritual tattva. It is, thus, thought here to study some of them which can lay bare the religious springs of iconographic manifestation and thereby help us to know the relevant philosophy behind them. It is well known that in the Indian context iconography is one of the sources of expressing philosophy and religious predilection of the society.

In the north gallery of Kailāsa is a panel containing images of Śiva and Pārvatī. They are shown holding a liṅga emblem, Śiva supporting it with his left hand and Pārvatī with the right (Fig.1). Śiva here is depicted seated in the vāmalalitāsana while Pārvatī in ardhaparyāṅkāśana. Those who have described this

image have neither tried to bring forth its philosophical significance nor could decipher it properly. The Kashmir Śaivism, I think, can help us in identifying it properly.

The object they together have held stands for Paraśiva, which is the supreme principle of this ism. It creates Śiva and Śakti (Pārvatī). And they, in turn, are the creators of the universe. It is presumed that man has tailored images after himself, i.e. yathā dehe tathā deve. If it is so, then naturally the society expects these deities to follow the customs in vogue in the society. Hence Śiva and Pārvatī are expected to get married before the creation of the universe. The artist did not lag behind. He prepared the Kalyāṇasundara images of the divine couple. This is the primordial couple considered as the parents of the universe. Kalidas expresses this idea.¹

Śrī Jñeśvara supports this in following words : “for knowing their spiritual stance this is to offer homage to the parents, the premier Śakti and Śiva, of the universe, who poses their non-duality.”² Manu tells the same thing but little bit in different words, like “The almighty creates Puruṣa and Prakṛti from his body and then the Prakṛti gives birth to Virāja i.e the entire universe.”³

Since Parabrahma is indivisible, the reference here to almighty should be taken as to Paraśiva in the context of Śaivism.

As said above the artist in India prepared images based on the marriage of

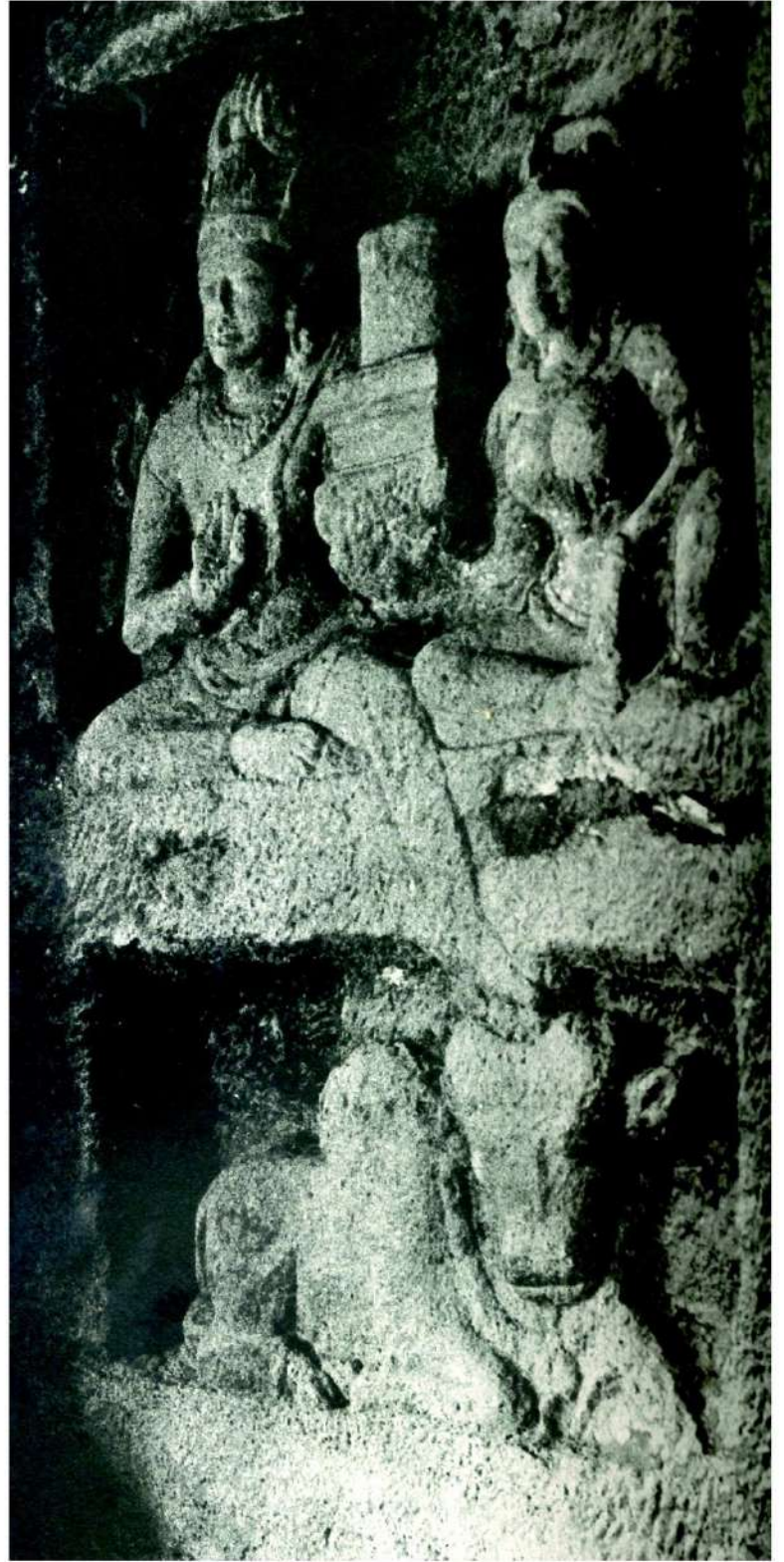


Fig. 1 : Śiva-Pārvatī, Kailāśa temple, Ellora

Śiva and Pārvatī. One such is seen in the same gallery of Kailāsa. Both the bride and the bridegroom representing themes as a divine couple stand with hand in hand of each other (known as pāṇigrahaṇa rite) (Fig.2). In fact this posture indicates Śiva seeking a helping hand of Śakti in the mission that is undertaken. Beneath, on the ground is seen Brahmā seated as a priest. Kalidas describes this lovely scene in a very apt way.⁴

This type of images depicting Kalyāṇasundara mūrtis are to be met with through out the length and breadth of the country; but the eternal couple though



Fig. 3 : Ardhanārīśvara
Kailāsa temple, Ellora



seemingly dual in form basically is non- dual however, it is utterly difficult to understand their oneness

by separating them; as one, can not separate lamp and its light or sugar and its sweetness. Somānanda⁵ and Gorakhanath⁶ of the Nātha Sampradāya have expressed similar views, they both do things together because Śiva is inactive without Devī and she is incomplete without him.

Fig. 2 : Kalyāṇasundara, Kailāsa temple, Ellora

Jñāneśvara also observes “No one from among them can create even a single blade of grass.”⁷

And thus to suggest their eternal togetherness the ancient Indian artist devised an image of a syncretistic form known as Ardhanārīśvara (Fig.3). The Ardhanārīśvara image combines the physical form of a man and woman. The image symbolizes a

syncretistic representation of Śiva and his Śakti. On the basis of Nilamata Purāṇa and Rājatarāṅgiṇī it can be shown that devotion to Ardhanārīśvara is witnessed from pre-Maurya period.⁸ However, Somānanda and Abhinavagupta have provided philosophical base to it by establishing Āgamokta Śaivism.⁹

The Seśvarata of the Sāṅkhyas sent vibrant currents of creativity into the artistic outpourings of the early centuries CE, the Ardhanārīśvara being one of its manifestations. The two eternal existents, Puruṣa and the Prakṛti found an unparalleled form, an imposing and aesthetic blend, whose visual impact transports the devotee into the realm of intuitive experience of the primeval forces of creation.¹⁰

References:

1. Jagataḥ pitarau vande Pārvati-parameśvarau
Raghuvamśa, I.1.
2. Advaitamātmanastam darśayantau mithastarām
tau vande jagatāmādaḥ tayostatvābhi pattaye
Jñāneśvara
3. Dvidhākṛtātmanodeham ardhena puruṣo bhavat
Ardhena nārī tasyāma sa virājamasrjāt prabhuḥ
Manusmṛti, 1.32
4. Tasyāḥ karam śailagurūpanitam jagrāhatāmraṅgulimaṣṭamūrṭiḥ
Kumārasambhava, 7.76
- In the god's hand the priest (collin's Elephenta caves.)
5. Śivasaktastathābhāvān icchayā katṛmihite
Śakti-śaktimātorbhedaḥ Śaive jātu na varṇyate
Śiva dṛṣṭi, 3.2
6. Śivopi śaktirahitaḥ kartum śakto na kiñcana.
Siddha-siddhāntā saṅgraha, 4-26
7. Jñāneśvara, Anubhavāmṛta (Amṛtānubhava), 8-12
8. G.V. Tagare, Śaiva Darśana, 1987, 80
9. Kantichandra Pande, Abhinavagupta- A Historical and Philosophical Study, 82-90.
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