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Concept and Images of Sadasiva in Ancient India

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Abstract:

Sadasiva is one of the famous form of Siva with five heads and ten hands. This body of Siva is self created. The five heads are also known as 'Mahadeva', 'Bhairava', 'Nandivaktra', 'Umavaktra' and 'Sadasiva' or 'Isana'. The ten hands of Siva represents ten directions holding various attributes. Several texts give details about Sadasiva. The artists also depicted several Sadasiva images which generally belong to tenth-twelveth century A.D. These images have local differences too. These images represent the philosophy and popularity of Sadasiva worship. In this paper an attempt has been made to show the popularity of Sadasiva form of Siva with the help of images found in different parts of Ancient india.

Keywords: Sadasiva, attributes, images, iconography

1. Introduction

One of the oldest and most widely spread cult in India is that of Siva. It consisted once of several sects, of which only a few have survived to the present day. Some of them had the sanction of the Vedas while others were classed as outside the Vedas or as opposed to them; again, some of them had milder forms of worship, while others practiced horrible and shocking rites. The ideas about life, action and liberation differed from sect to sect.

2. Discussion

Sadasiva is one of the famous form of Siva with five heads and ten hands. The Supreme Siva has these bodily features for benefit of devotees who cannot worship him in His true incorporeal form. Isana as His head, Tatpurusha as His mouth, Aghora as His heart, Vamadeva as His secret parts and Sadyojata as His feet. This body of Siva is self created, and the cause of five functions of Supreme are Grace, Obscuration, Destruction, Preservation and Creation.

Several texts like Vishnudharmottara Purana, Siva Purana, Aparajitaprihcha, Rupamanda and several other work give details about the Sadasiva. According to the Visnudharmottara Purana Sadyojata which faces west is of pearl like colour of the full moon and represents earth (Prithvi), Vamadeva faces north has red colour and represents water (Jala), Aghora which faces south is darkblue and represents fire (Agni) Tatpurusha faces east has golden yellow colour and represents air (Vayu) and Isana facing upwards has crystal white colour and represents sky (Akasa).¹

सद्योजातं मही प्रोक्ता वामदेवं तथा जलम् ।

तेजस्त्वघोरं विख्यातं वायुस्तत्पुरुषमतम् ॥

ईशानं च तथाकाशमूर्ध्वस्यं पञ्चमं मुखम् ।

विभागे नाथ वक्ष्यामि शम्भोर्वदनपञ्चकम् ॥

These heads are also individually known as 'Mahadeva' (eastern) 'Bhairava' (Southern) 'Nandivaktra' (Western) 'Umavaktra' (Northern) and 'Sadasiva' or 'Isana' the fifth face on the top.²

महादेवमुखं भूमिस्तेजः स्याद्भैरवं मुखम् ।

नन्दिवक्त्रं तथा वायुरौमेयं चाप उच्यते ।

सदाशिवारण्यं विज्ञेयमाकाशं यदुनन्दनम् ॥

The ten arms of the god representing ten directions hold various attributes.

The Aparajitprichcha mentions that Sadyojata should wear a jata mukuta and have abhaya and varada poses. Vamadeva should wear a red dress, red garland and red ushnisha and carry a sword and a shield in his hands. Aghora should have a terrific look and should wear a cobras on his head. His colour is blue. Tatpurusha wears a yellow garment and a yellow sacred thread. Isana is of white complexion and carries a trisula and a kapala in his hands.³

The Rupamandana describes Isana (Sadasiva) as having white complexion and holding trisula and kapala, but it also says that he is beyond the comprehension even of the Yogies.

'पञ्चमं च तथेशानं योगिनामप्यगोचरम् ।'⁴

Uttarakamikagama defines that Sadasiva should be white in complexion. He should have five faces with brown hair arranged in the form of Jatamukuta. On his ten arms, the right ones should carry sakti, sula, khatvanga and the remaining two should be placed in abhaya and prasada postures. The left hands should hold bhujanga aksamala, damaru, nilotpala and matulinga.⁵

The earliest representation of such a form of Siva is found in the famous Sivalinga from Bhita (Allahabad district) of 2nd century B.C. now preserved in State Museum (Lucknow)⁶. The sculpture has five faces and bears a two line inscription.

खजदुतिपुतनं (f) लंगो पतिथापिती ।

वासेटिषुतेन नागसिरिना पियतं देवता ॥

The five faces of the god carved on the linga suggest the five fold aspects of of Siva composing the Sadasiva form. The five faces representing Tatpurusha, Aghora, Vamadeva, Sadyojata and Isana are collectively known as Panchabrahm as and they are regarded to the emanations from the Niskala Siva.⁷ The Saivites regards these heads symbolising the soul, material world, buddhi, ahemkara and the mind.⁸

Most of the Sadasiva images generally belongs to 10th - 12th century A.D. Such images have five faces and ten arms. One of the earliest Sadasiva image datable 10th century A.D. is known from Kaveripakkam in North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. The arms of deity are damaged and in the surviving right hands he hold damaru, sword, and one was probably held in abhaya pose while the left hands had an axe.⁹

At Khajuraho the unusual form of Sadasiva is represented by two images - one in the north-eastern corner of the eastern wall of mahamandapa of the celebrated Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Fig.1) and the other one exhibited in the Archaeological Museum Khajuraho (Fig. 2).



Figure 1: Sadasiva, east wall, mahamndapa (interior), Kandariya Mahadeva temple, Khajuraho

Figure 2: Sadasiva, Archaeological Museum (No.1098), Khajuraho, ci 10th century A.D

The two images are almost identical and depict six faces, three each in two tiers. The lower set has one main head facing front and two subsidiary ones facing side ways. The three faces in the upper tier are smaller in size but are represented in a similar fashion. A linga surmounts the upper tier of the faces. The most curious feature of these images, however, are four legs, two of which are placed in padmasana while the other two are hanging down.¹⁰ The artist of Khajuraho knew the iconography of four-legged Sadasiva probably not represented elsewhere in Indian art.

A unique image of Sadasiva from eastern U.P. is preserved in the State Museum Lucknow. It has three visible faces which is seated in bhadrāsana pose on a high seat wearing wooden sandals in his feet. His one right hand is damaged while the others carry a sword, vyakhyanamudra with a rosary held between the thumb and index finger, a lotus and a manuscript. The other hands hold a pasa and a kamandala.¹¹

The marble Sadasiva image from Gujarat shows that the right hand of Sadasiva is in varada mudra and in others he holds a trident, a kettle drum, a cobra, a citron and other attributes.

The fine image of Sadasiva at Elephanta caves have three faces. In this the central face (Tatpurusha) is calm and detached, the right facing head (Umadeva) is a peaceful and feminine and his left facing head (Aghora - Bhairav) is fierce and masculine. The three faces taken together express the contradictory nature of the Divine which gathers up and transcends all opposites¹²

Worship of Sadasiva is very popular during the Pala and Sena periods in Bengal. Several copper plate grants of Sena kings bears the figure of their deity on their seals. The identify of such figures in seals is revealed by its names as 'Sadasivamudra' in the Idilpur copper plate of Kesavasena etc.¹³

The Pala and Sen kings of Bengal have depicted several images of Sadasiva in their temples. A number of image of Sadasiva fashioned both in stone and metal found in different parts of Bengal preserved in several museums. In a bronze figure the deity is seated crosslegged on a double lotus pedestal with his vahana. He has four visible heads facing the four directions and ten arms. In his hands he holds a bow, a bajra, a suta, a cobra, an arrow, varada mudra, a citron fruit etc.

Some of the images of the Pala workmanship are displayed in the V.R.S. Museum Rajshahi. In these images deity shows crosslegged seated on lotus seat carrying various weapons in his ten hands.¹⁴

Another fine image of Sadasiva is preserved in the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta which has two hands which are held near the chest in vyakhyana mudra. His left hand carry a sanalakamala, s damaru, a sarpa. His faces have the third eye mark.

In the Indian Museum, Calcutta the Sadasiva images holds the same attributes as mentioned above, but the bull Nandi is depicted in the extreme left corner of the inscribed pedestal.¹⁵

3. Conclusion

Thus, it is clear that the images of Sadasiva in ancient period are supposed to illustrate in an esoteric manner the whole philosophy of the Suddha-Saiva School of Saivism.

4. References

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