

Co-relation between Karana sculptures of Prambanan and Thanjavur



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Abstract

Temples of South India are filled with dance sculptures in and around the complex. But it is fascinating to see similar sculptures portraying the dance elements of Karanas given in the text of Natyasastra of Bharatamuni in the South-Indian and South-East –Asian temples. This paper attempts a comparative study of Karanas in Prambanan temple and Thanjavur temple.

Keywords- Prambanan, Thanjavur, Karana, Architecture, Sculpture.

Karanas have been spoken off and described as poses by many scholars. 'Indian Archeology- A review' has given a note on Thanjavur Karana series in 1953-54. Karanas were explained as movements for the first time in the Journal of Assam Research Society by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam in 1964. They have been defined as cadences of movements culminating in a pose by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan in her book 'Classical Indian dance in literature and the arts' in 1968. 'The frozen moments of movements' was the title of an article on Karanas by Dr. Padma in Illustrated Weekly of India in March 1969. These Karanas have been reconstructed based on textual and sculptural sources and has been proved that they are dance movements, by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam a dancer cum research scholar in her research thesis on Karanas in Indian Dance and Sculpture- (1978). Practical reconstruction of 108 Karanas by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam is done by connecting the literary sources of Natyasastra, Abhinavabharati and the sculptural sources from Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Chidambaram temples.

Coming to the articles on Prambanan Karanas, Kempers in his book 'Ancient Indonesian Art' (1959) says, "There are 62 panels with dancing figures on the outside of the railing demonstrating a dance which corresponds with the Tandava of Shiva as described in the Natyasastra, a manual on the art of dancing".

The Javanese scholar Edi Sedyawati has worked on dance in the context of an assessment of the Indo-Indonesian relationship of ancient times. She has identified these Prambanan dance sculptures as sub-units of karanas such as caris- leg movements, sthanas- postures and hastas- hand movements.

Roy E.Jordaan who has edited the Dutch essays on Prambanan temple says,

"As a final check, the interpretation of the dance scenes may be of relevance. Indubitably what is depicted here is the Tandava dance of Siva. The "laws" of this dance are recorded in the great book on Indian dramaturgy written by Bharata, the Natyasastra. The fourth chapter of this work, which is entitled Tandavalakshana, contains a detailed description of the Tandava. The elements of this dance comprise what are known as karana, coordinations of certain postures of the body (the so-called anga) and of the limbs and other parts of the body (the so-called upanga), which one might refer to as dance poses or dance





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figures. There are 108 karana, each of with its own name. These 108 dance poses, a few of which are claimed to be Siva's favourite poses, are depicted on the inner walls of the gateways of the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram.”

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, in her article on Prambanan karana sculptures- The Dance Sculptures of Lara-Djonggrang (Prambanan)- A Comparative Study, opines ‘the karana-s are cadences of movement, deriving their name either from the chari-s, bhaumi or akashiki, hasta-s, or suggest the chief characteristic of a circular movement through the use of the word rechita or vivartita. The depiction of the karana-s in sculpture thus can at best be an identification of the chief characteristic and not the whole movement: often either the initial or intermediary or final position is captured. The three groups of the dancing figures illustrate a remarkable affinity in the principles of movement.’

Dr. Alessandra Iyer, an Italian Archeologist who came to India in 1994 for her post-doctoral research on ‘Natyasastra in Indonesia’ wrote a book Prambanan: Sculpture and dance in ancient Java- A study in dance iconography which was published in 1997 which referred to research undertaken in the late 1980s and the early to mid- 1990s, focused on the dance reliefs of the Prambanan temple complex in Central Java. She had also compared the newly constructed karana panels at Uttara Chidambaram Temple Satara by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam in which each Karana was depicted with two figures namely Shiva and Parvati. She as Alessandra Lopez y Royo (Alessandra Iyer) later published an article, ‘A new introduction to Prambanan: sculpture and dance in ancient Java. A study in dance iconography, published in 2005.

Definition of Karana as in Natyasastra

Bharata in the chapter four - Tandava lakshanam of Natyasastra talks about the definition, execution and purpose of Karanas. He defines karana as ‘hasta pada samaayogah nrttasya karanam bhavet’ meaning karana is the combined movement of hands and feet in dance. Abhinavagupta in his commentary for Natyasastra says karana is kriya-action. It is the action of dance. i.e. the action of moving the limbs beautifully.

Prambanan Karana Sculptures

Lara-Djonggrang temple located in Prambanan was built in 9th century. This is located in Central Java in South-East Asian countries. There are three major temples known as Candi Brahma, Candi Siva and Candi Visnu along with 3 small temples. In the balustrade outside the Candi Siva temple 62 reliefs are seen in between 70 apsara panels. In these 53 have been identified as Karana sculptures by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam when she was guiding Dr. Alessandra Iyer, an Italian archeologist in the year 1994. She has published her study in her book on Prambanan.

Prambanan karana sculptures are seen as triple figures which represent the animation. The main central figure represents the dance movement with the side figures which also play instruments along with dancing.

The result of the study given by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam is:

1. Natyasastra has been a common text for dance both in India and Indonesia.
2. The reconstruction of Karanas done by her has been stunningly authentic.
3. Prambanan karana sculptures match with most of Satara karana sculptures.



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Thanjavur Brihadeeswara temple karanas

Thanjavur Brihadeeswara temple was built during 11th century by the king Rajaraja Chola. It has 81 karanas out of 108 karanas sculpted as given by Bharata in his Natyasastra. They are seen in a closed circumambulatory passage in the first tier of the temple vimanam. These karana frescoes are seen in horizontal order from 1 to 81 around the passage and rest of the slabs are vacant. This passage was discovered by Sri K.R.Srinivasan who was the Superintendent of the Archeological department in the year 1954 and the identifying these sculptures as karanas were done by Dr. T.N.Ramachandran who was the Joint director General of Archeological department of India. Padma Subrahmanyam had started assisting her mentor, archeologist T. N. Ramachandran in the study of the Karana sculptures of Thanjavur, during her PG studies when she developed interest in these Karana sculptures. Her view of the secondary 2 hands of Shiva in Thanjavur karana sculpture as depicting the animation of the movement was accepted by Sri. T.N. Ramachandran.

Karanas are seen in the Gopuram of a Vishnu temple known as Sarangapani temple in Kumbakonam. The names are seen in the inscriptions under these karana panels. Some of them are missing and some do not have the names. Chidambaram Karana panels engraved in all the four gopurams of Nataraja temple are in vertical order and the eastern and western Gopuras have sloka inscriptions in grantha script from Natyasastra. Though there are many dance sculptures found in North Indian caves such as Ajanta, & Elora, Pattadakal, Aihole and Virupaksha temples of Karnataka, they have not been proved as karanas as there are no inscriptions mentioning their names as in Sarangapani or the verses seen as in Chidambaram temple.

Co-relation between karana sculptures in Prambanan and Thanjavur.

- **Nikuttakam- (K-9)** Mandala sthanam is seen in Prambanan with the weight of the body on left, left hand on the thigh and right hand raised up with slightly tilted head. This is almost similar to Thanjavur sculpture which is with mandala sthana, the body weight in center and both hands near the shoulders. These hands match the sloka of Natyasastra which says “nikuttitau yadha hastau sva bahu shirasontare” (N.S. Ch 4. V-71) which means the hands should be struck near one’s shoulder and head.
- **Unmattam- (K-14)** Mandala sthanam with right leg lifted as Anchita pada is seen in this Prambanan temple center figure which matches the sloka as in Natyasastra which says, “anchitena tu paadena recitau tu karau yadaa” (N.S. Ch 4. V-76) where the hands are moving up as rechita. Thanjavur represents the opposite side of the karana where body is slightly bent back but the leg is not still lifted. So this position must be before the Prambanan position. Here the primary hands show the beginning of lifting and the secondary hands show the raising of hands as rechita nrta hasta.
- **Katisamam- (K-19)** Prambanan center figure is seen in mandala sthana left leg slightly raised, right hand on the waist, left hand not clear but Thanjavur figure is in mandala sthana with right heel raised, right hand near navel and left hand is on the waist. Both the sculptures match the sloka in Natyasastra which says, “svastika apasrtaha paadah karau nabhi kati sthitau paarsvamudhvaahitam chaiva karanam tat katisamam” (N.S. Ch 4. V-81) feet should be released from a cross, hands in navel and waist, body slightly raised on one side is known as Katisamam.
- **Akshiptarecitam- (K-20)** All the three figures are very clear in Prambanan. The center one has



the left hand slightly damaged and right hand near the head. This is similar to Thanjavur sculpture which is just started raising the right leg. The body position is very similar in both the figures. The sculptures matches the sloka, "hasto hrdi bhavet vaamah savyascha aakshipta rechitaha" (N.S. Ch 4. V-82) meaning left hand is near the chest and right hand moves away.

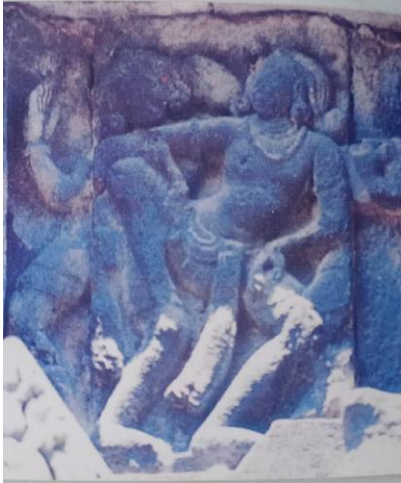


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- **Urdvajanu- (K-19)** The center sculpture is very clear in Prambanan right leg lifted as Urdvajanu and right hand above the right knee the body slightly slanting on the left side. This is almost similar to Thanjavur sculpture which also represents Urdvajanu, "kunchitam padam ukshipya janu hastam samam nyaset" (N.S. Ch 4. V-87) which means lift the kunchita pada and knee and hands are to be in same level.

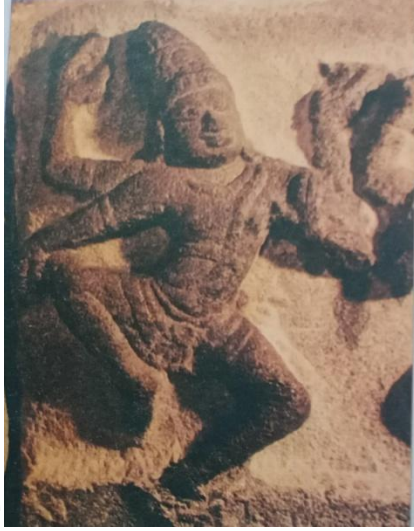


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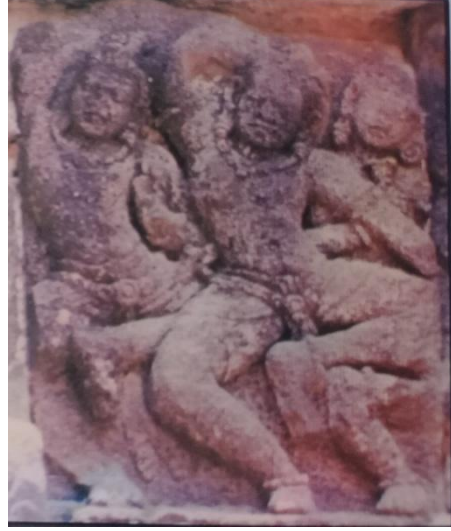


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- **Dandapaksham- (K-34)** Prambanan sculpture is very clear and it is directly opposite to Thanjavur figure. Bharata says, 'urdvajaanum vidhaayaatha tasyopari lathaam nyaset' (N.S. Ch 4. V-96) which means raise the knees and place the latha hand on top of that- which is seen in these sculptures.

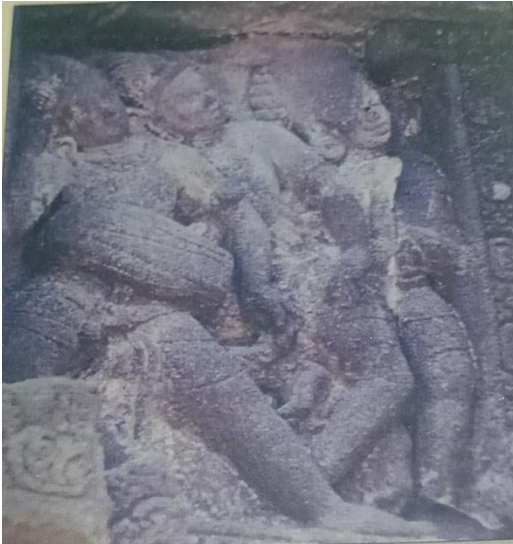


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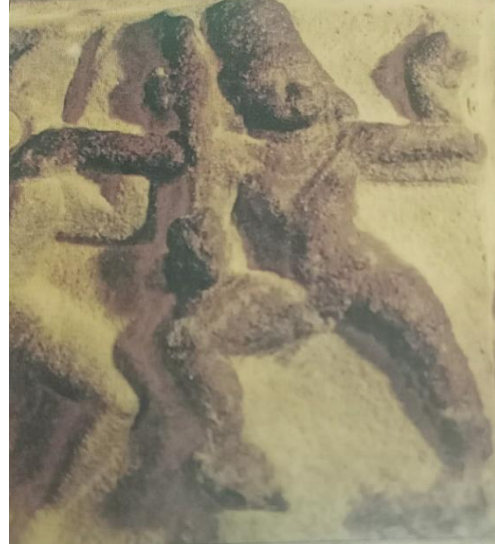


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- **Nupuram- (K-36)** Prambanan sculpture is directly opposite to Thanjavur but the hands are stretched as rechita in Thanjavur but the hands are as rechita and latha in Prambanan which matches the verse of Natyasastra, 'trikam suvalitam krtva latha rechitakau karau' (N.S. Ch 4. V-98).
- **Vyamsitam- (K-48)** Prambanan sculpture is very clear and the left figure is very similar to Thanjavur. Body is slanting on the right side and the three figures show a perfect animation of transition from alidha to pratyalidha.



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- **Uromandalam- (K-54)** Prambanan sculpture represents the movement which has the left leg crossed which will follow Thanjavur sculpture movement. In both the sculptures the hands are almost in the same position which is near the uras- chest.
- **Vikshiptam- (K-58)** Prambanan sculpture has svastika pada it is directly opposite side to Thanjavur sculpture which is in mandala sthana. The hands are stretched out in the center figure of Prambanan and Thanjavur figure.



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Conclusion

Many scholars opine that Prambanan temple sculptures are based on Natyasastra. Dr.Padma Subrahmanyam who has done a thorough research on the sculptures of Prambanan has proved that they are Karanas mentioned in fourth chapter of Natyasastra, as many of her reconstruction of these karanas which she has engraved in the temple of Satara in Maharashtra perfectly match these Prambanan sculptures. Through this research a comparison is done with the Prambanan Karana sculptures and the Thanjavur Karana sculptures. Though nearly ten karanas are brought into account here there are many other karana sculptures which are very similar to each other. Scholar Hermann says that “examples of the Hindu cultural influence found today throughout the Southeast Asia owe much to the legacy of the Chola dynasty. For example, the great temple complex at Prambanan in Indonesia exhibits a number of similarities with the South Indian architecture”. Many scholars opine that the Chola school of art also spread to Southeast Asia and influenced the architecture and art of Southeast Asia.

Thus we can conclude that:-

- The artisans and the sculptors of India must have taken this art to South-East Asia.
- Chola Architectural beauty has been known throughout South East Asia.

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