



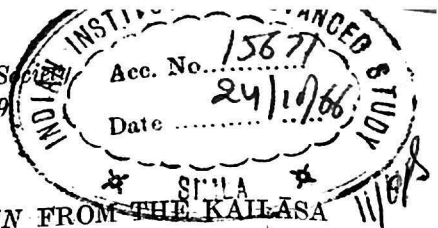
Library

IAS, Shimla

TMP 294.5513 Gu 959 T



00015671



TWO SCULPTURES OF ŚIVA AS LINGIN FROM THE KAILĀSA
TEMPLE AT ELLORA

By R. SEN GUPTA

While approaching towards the Kailāsa temple at Ellora a visitor's eyes, after wandering along the sculptured screen walls flanking the *gopuram*, are naturally attracted to and fixed on the interesting panel of Umā-Maheśvara (Fig. 1) carved on the western face of the *śāla-śikhara*. The panel is so arranged in the semicircular opening of the *śāla* that Śiva with Pārvatī sitting on his lap at the centre is surrounded by dwarfs in different attitudes on brackets supporting the curvilinear roof, and below, in front, is the couchant Nandī. Of particular interest in the panel is the *liṅga* which is apparently being carried by Śiva on the right shoulder and touched by his back right hand. And of the three other hands of Śiva the proper right hand is placed on his right foot on the ground, the proper left hand touches the head of Pārvatī while the back left hand carries a lotus. Pārvatī sitting on the left lap of Śiva keeps her right hand on his right foot and her left hand is touching the left *karna-kunḍala*.

Another sculpture of Śiva (Fig. 2) of the same nature has recently been noticed by the writer. This is a small image carved at the top of the *deva-koṣṭha*, on the outer face of the northern wall of the *garbhagriha* of Kailāsa. It is to some extent mutilated but enough of it remains to show clearly the *liṅga* on the left shoulder of Śiva, touched by him with his back left hand. His proper left hand is on the ground and the right hands are broken.

The Aihole panel of Umā-Maheśvara, now housed in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, also depicts Śiva with the *liṅga* on his shoulder. This aspect of the sculpture was noticed for the first time by Śrī Chakravarti,¹ Curator of the Archaeological Section of the Museum. In this panel, however, the *liṅga* is on the left shoulder of Śiva and he touches it with the back left hand.

Dr. Moti Chandra has kindly drawn the attention of the writer to a fragment of a sculpture (Fig. 3) in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, which, unlike the panels described above, depicts the *liṅga* placed on a *padmapīṭha*, being carried on the head by a male whose broken hands on the sides of the *padmapīṭha* are still extant. Provenance of this sculpture is not known and it is said to have been identified by the late K. P. Jayaswal as the representation of a 'Bhāraśiva King'² who, according to the epigraphical records,³ used to carry a *liṅga* as a load on the shoulder. The nature of the sculptures from Aihole and Ellora, however, precludes such an identification.

¹ S. N. Chakravarti—P.W. Museum: *A Guide to the Antiquities of the Historic Period*, p. 21, pl. xa. Though the panel was published by H. Cousens in his *The Chalukyan Architecture* (pl. XVII) he did not notice the *liṅga* on Śiva's shoulder.

² Also see *A Comprehensive History of India*, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri Ed., Vol. 2, p. 258 f.n.

³ *Aṁśabhāra sanniveśita Śiva liṅgodvahana*, etc. (J. F. Fleet—*Gupta Inscriptions*, pp. 236, 245).

The suggestion that readily appears to one's mind is that this type of sculptures might have some connection with a branch of Śaivism, which is known as Vīraśaivism, the followers of which carry the *liṅga*. It is generally held that Vīraśaivism came into existence only in the twelfth century A.D. with Basava, minister of the king Vijjala or Vijjana (A.D. 1157–1167) of Kalyāṇa, who is credited with originating it. On the strength of available evidence the question of any likely connection between Vīraśaivism and these sculptures will be discussed in this paper.

While discussing about Vīraśaivism R. G. Bhandarkar¹ has observed that the creed is older than the date that is generally attributed to it. He has further shown that Ārādhyas, who were of Brahmanic descent, formed a distinct sect of that name and was affiliated to Vīraśaivism. According to an account in *Śaṅkaravijaya* by Anantānandagiri² an Ārādhyas sect came into conflict with Śaṅkarācārya. On the strength of this account the sect may be considered to have come into existence about the time of Śaṅkarācārya, i.e. before the ninth century A.D. Therefore, it appears that Basava in the twelfth century A.D. acted as a reformer of the older doctrine which came to be known as the Vīraśaiva or Liṅgāyat sect, while a portion of the followers of the older doctrine clung to the orthodox faith, in which is to be traced the Ārādhyas sect of the present day. Based on the epigraphical records Fleet,³ however, opined that the Vīraśaiva sect must have received encouragement and support, among others, of the 500 Svāmins of Aihole who were adherents of the Vīra-Banañju doctrine. To what extent this sect helped in the formation of the Vīraśaiva system is yet to be decided. It may be mentioned here that the panel in the Prince of Wales Museum, already referred to above, also comes from Aihole which is significant:

Besides the Ārādhyas or Vīraśaivas, still earlier, the Bhāraśivas used to carry the *liṅga* on their shoulders as mentioned in the epigraphical records of the Vākāṭakas, whose maternal ancestors were the Bhāraśivas. But at that time (fifth century A.D.) which particular branch of Śaivism, and under what name, professed such a practice cannot be ascertained. The apparent similarity between the Bhāraśivas and Vīraśaivas in carrying the *liṅga*, the former on the shoulder, probably as seen in the sculptures under discussion, and the latter suspended from the shoulder tied to the thread or to a piece of cloth, is all that is evidenced.

Worshipping or revering the *liṅga* by carrying it on the person was therefore not exclusive to the Vīraśaivas or Liṅgāyats alone. Śrī M. N. Deshpande⁴ feels that such an idea might have as well been influenced by the Buddhists who used to carry relics, symbols and effigies of the *Dhyānī* Buddhas. One is, however, reminded of the meaningful couplet:

Kīto bhramarayogena bhramaro bhavati dhruvam |
*Mānavaḥ Śivayogena Śivo bhavati kevalam ||*⁵

which in a way explains the concept so far as it relates to a Śaiva worshipper carrying the *liṅga* regarded as the symbol of the Supreme Being.

¹ *Collected Works of Śrī R. G. Bhandarkar*, Vol. IV, p. 190.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 199 f.n.

³ J. F. Fleet—*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. V, p. 244.

⁴ Communicated to the writer in a personal discussion.

⁵ 'Just as the larva which associates with the bee, itself in the end becomes a bee, so the man who realizes unity with Śiva through Śiva-yoga himself becomes one with Śiva' (Alain Danielou—*Yoga*, pp. 96, 160).

And truly, all emerging out of Him at the journey's end is to re-unite with Him. It is with such a background that Śiva also came to be depicted in his anthropomorphic form as giving prominence to his symbolic form, so that the idea of carrying or revering the *līṅga* is upheld. Other instances wherein the *līṅga* is thus glorified are the Guddimallam *līṅga* and the *Līṅgodbhavamūrti*. In the latter, in particular, is discernible the echo of the earlier conceptions in such passages from the Vedas as quoted by Rao,¹ 'where Skambha, generating, brought Purāṇapurusha into existence' and 'Skambha in the beginning shed forth that gold (*hiranya*, out of which Hiranyagarbha arose) in the midst of the world', etc. Skambha seems to have been identified later by the Śaivas with the *līṅga* and it appears that 'one of the functions of Skambha was to beget Hiranyagarbha or Purāṇapurusha, the god of reproduction'. (One of the functions of Śiva is also reproduction). In the same vein the *Līṅga-purāṇa*² too states that 'Pradhāna (nature) is called the *Līṅga* and Parameśvara is called the *Līṅgin* (the sustainer of the *Līṅga*)'. Parameśvara is one of the epithets of Śiva. Śiva's role as the *Līṅgin* in the material universe is therefore to be regarded as exemplary for the common people to emulate, the same way he is portrayed as Mahāyogī, 'teaching men by his own example the power to be acquired by mortification of the body, suppression of the passions and abstract contemplation, as leading to the loftiest spiritual knowledge and ultimately to union with the Great Spirit of the universe' which is visualized as Skambha or the *Līṅga*. The same idea appears to have worked in depicting Viṣṇu³ with six arms carrying a *līṅga* in the proper left hand with the right hand kept above it, as if worshipping in the Līṅgāyat way, while the other four hands carry as usual *śaṅkha*, *chakra*, *gadā* and *padma* respectively. The sculpture is to be found in the Siddheśvara temple at Haveri.

The image of Viṭhobā in the famous temple of Pandharpur is said to carry a *līṅga* on the head. This has been mentioned by the celebrated Maharashtrian saint Jñānadeva in his *Abhaṅgas*, as also indicated by his elder brother Nivṛtṭinātha, Tukārām and later by Rāmadāsa. Professor Ranade quoting the relevant portion says, 'This is as much as to say that Śiva who was the greatest devotee of Viṣṇu was himself held aloft on his head by Viṣṇu in the form of Viṭhala.'⁴ Although the nature of the object on Viṭhobā's head is disputed,⁵ it is significant that several Maharashtrian saints have mentioned or indicated the object to be a *līṅga*. Among other deities Devī is often sculptured as carrying the *līṅga* in one of her hands. In the subsidiary excavation, known as Lankeśvara attached to the Kailāsa temple at Ellora, can be seen such a representation. According to the *Chandīmāhātmya* Mahālakṣmī is required to carry the *līṅga*:

Mātulīṅgaṁ gadāṁ kṣeṭaṁ pānapātraṁcha bibhratī |
*Nāgaṁ līṅgaṁcha yonīṁcha bibhratī nṛipa mūrdhani ||*⁶

The loose sculpture in the Siddheśvara temple at Haveri answers to such a description and is seen to carry the *līṅga* on the *yonipatṭa* with a snake

¹ T. A. G. Rao—*Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 56-59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³ Cousens—*Chalukyan Architecture*, Pl. LXXXI.

⁴ R. D. Ranade—*Mysticism in Maharashtra*, p. 41.

⁵ See G. H. Khare's *Śrī Viṭthal āṇi Pāndharpur* (in Marathi), pp. 16-25, M. M. P. V. Kane's *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. IV, pp. 718-19, etc.

⁶ Swami Jagadisvarananda—*Śrī Śrī Chandī* (in Bengali), p. 367.

spreading its hood over the *liṅga*. The medieval sculpture of Devī from Pālikherā Well II, now in the Mathura Museum (No. 882), however, is seen supporting a *liṅga* with the extra pair of hands on the head.¹

Mention must be made here of a relevant sculptural panel (Fig. 4) in which Śiva and Pārvatī both hold the *liṅga*. The panel is in the north side of the *prākāra*² of the Kailāsa. In this panel sitting side by side with Pārvatī Śiva carries the *liṅga* in the left hand and his right hand is in *abhaya* while Pārvatī touches it with her right hand. According to the Virāṣaivas in the *dikṣā* the *gurū* hands over the *liṅga* to the initiated with his left hand and they claim their preceptor to have received the *liṅga* from a person no less than Śiva himself. Further, the recipient of the *liṅga* has to be very careful as its loss is thought to be equivalent to spiritual death. In this connection the allusions made in the *paurāṇic* story of Rāvaṇa's reception of the *liṅga* and its loss may be considered *vis-à-vis* the precepts mentioned above. The account states that pleased with the devotion of Rāvaṇa, Śiva was obliged to give him the *liṅga* with the proviso that he will always carry it and will never put it on the ground. Rāvaṇa's prowess had already proved to be a matter of concern to the gods and with the favour shown to him by Śiva, they were all alarmed and decided to dispossess him of the *liṅga* which would otherwise make him invincible. However, Rāvaṇa after receiving the *liṅga* proceeded towards his home. After going some distance he felt the necessity of easing himself but the *liṅga* was to be borne by somebody. In the nick of time Viṣṇu appeared there in the guise of a brahmin who was requested to hold the *liṅga* which was agreed upon. When Rāvaṇa was busy in the fields, Viṣṇu putting the *liṅga* down on the ground himself vanished. Rāvaṇa returned only to see the *liṅga* implanted on the ground which would not budge and was doomed. The *liṅga* enshrined in the famous temple of Vaidyanāth or Baijnāth (in Bihar), known as Mahādeo Rāvaṇeśvara, is claimed by the people there to be the elusive *liṅga* and the story³ mentioned above is related in details. There are yet other places in the South associated with this account. Mahābalipuram is said to have been named after the mighty *liṅga* which defeated the potency of Rāvaṇa. The *liṅga* known as Mahābaleśvara enshrined in the famous temple of that name at Gokarna is also claimed to be the holy *liṅga*. The story narrated in relation to the *liṅga*, although the same as above in essence, is little different. It says:⁴ To fulfil the desire of his mother, to worship 100,000,000 *liṅgas* Rāvaṇa was wandering in search of the *liṅgas* whereupon he was told that worship of the *ātma-liṅga* with a *bilvapatra* every day bestows upon the worshipper the benefit of worshipping 100,000,000 *liṅgas*. Rāvaṇa by propitiation obtained the *ātma-liṅga*, which was worn round the neck of Śiva, on the condition that he would always carry it and not put it on the ground. On his way home, in the evening he wanted to say his prayers but was confronted with the problem of safe custody of the *liṅga*. At the opportune moment Gaṇeśa appeared on the scene in the guise of a cowherd and on Rāvaṇa's request agreed to carry it provided he would take it back from the cowherd on his calling Rāvaṇa up to three times. Rāvaṇa hastened towards the river but the cunning

¹ V. S. Agrawala—*A Cat. of the Brahmanical Images in the Mathura Art*, p. 53.

² Although the *prākāra* forms a part of the original conception of the Kailāsa temple, the style and execution of the sculptures point them to a later date than the eighth century A.D.

³ J. D. Begler—*A.S.I. Rep.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 143-45.

⁴ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol. XV, Part II, p. 290 f.n.

cowherd called after him three times so fast that Rāvaṇa could not even turn his back. Gaṇeśa then placing the *līṅga* on the ground vanished, wherein it was implanted. Rāvaṇa returning to the spot tried with all his might to dislodge the *līṅga* in vain and exclaimed that the *līṅga* was very powerful whereupon it attained the name Mahābaleśvara. A sculptured panel in the south side of *prākāra* of the Kailāsa shows Rāvaṇa trying with all his might, with the cheeks swollen and eyes bulging due to holding of breath, to enable him to apply full force, to dislodge the *līṅga* that is planted on the ground.

Anyway, from the above-mentioned versions of the account it emerges that the *līṅga* was intended to be carried by Rāvaṇa on his person, most probably an ancient custom practised by a section of the Śaivas and alluded to in the episode, which is further corroborated by the Vākāṭaka inscriptions referring to the Bhāraśivas carrying the *līṅga* on their shoulders and the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan sculpture. Throughout the centuries the custom was kept alive, as portrayed in the sculptured panels from Aihole and Ellora and probably by the earlier Ārādhyā sect which is mentioned in the *Śaṅkaraviṇaya* to be finally popularized by Basava among the followers of the Līṅgāyat system.

The purport of the panel with Śiva and Pārvatī holding the *līṅga* perhaps is to be explained in the light of the above discussions as handing over the *līṅga* to the initiated to be carried on the person. In that case it is to be connected with the panel on the *Śāla-Śikhara* of the *gopuram*. But at this stage it is still immature to say whether the depiction of the panel at such a prominent place, as on the *gopuram*, has an implication or it was just a matter of course that among so many other themes this particular theme of Śiva as *Līṅgin* also happened to be depicted there. Further researches can only throw light on it.



FIG. 1. Śiva as *Lingīn* with Pārvatī from Kailāsa temple, Ellora.



FIG. 2. Śiva as *Lingīn* from Kailāsa temple, Ellora.



FIG. 3. So-called 'Bhāraśiva King' carrying the *liṅga*.



FIG. 4. Śiva and Pārvatī with the *liṅga* from Kailāsa, Ellora.

