

20.0 Iconographic Depictions of Ēiva at Kailāœa Temple: Manifestation of Religion in Rock-Cut Architecture

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Abstract

One of the most brilliant architectural marvels of not only India but world, Ellora Caves stand testimony to the rich heritage of India. The Kailāœa Temple along with its wonderful sculptures represent the pinnacle of rock-cut architecture and is the heritage of India's history and culture. Sculptures of the Kailāœa temple depict various aspects of and scene from Indian Epic-Paurāḍika mythology and other related legends. This work focuses on the depictions of Ēiva on the sculptures or panels of this temple. An attempt has been made to study these iconographic depictions under two broad categories- one being the depictions of various forms of Ēiva while the other being the depictions of narratives related to Ēiva. The focus has been laid on the way in which these legends have been depicted in the iconography leading to a wonderful manifestation of religion in rocks.

Keywords- Ēiva, Kailāœanātha, Kailāœa Temple, Iconography, Iconographic Depictions, Rock-Cut Architecture, Forms of Ēiva.

Introduction

India has a rich heritage of rock-cut architecture and the Ellora Caves are one of the most marvellous examples in this regard. The caves, located in Sambhajinagar district in Maharashtra, India, are a multi-religious rock-cut cave complex with inscriptions dating back to Sixth Century C.E. thus spanning over a history going back to around 1,500 years¹.

These consist of twelve Buddhist (cave 1-12), seventeen Hindu (Cave 13-29) and five Jain (Cave 30-34) caves which were commissioned and constructed under the rule of various dynasties such as the Vakāpakas, the Kalachuris, the Chālukyas, the Rāshṭrakūpas, the Yādavas, etc.². Ellora Caves were declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.

Kailāœa temple

It is the largest rock-cut Hindu temple at Ellora Caves. It is considered as one of the most marvellous temples in the whole world. It has been described as the 'climax of the rock-cut phase of Indian Architecture'³. Most of the excavation of the temple is attributed to the Rāshṭrakūpa ruler Kāishḍa I⁴. The temple architecture shows traces of Pallava and Chālukya architecture⁵.

Iconographic Depictions of Ēiva at Kailāœa/Kailāœanātha Temple

Kailāœa temple, also known as Cave no. 16, has vivid iconographic depictions of Ēiva⁶. As suggested by name, it is dedicated to Ēiva, although there are ample depictions of Viṣṇu and Ēakti or Devī as well⁷. But since most of the depictions are of Ēiva, it will be not wrong to assert that as in mythologies, Ēiva is the 'Kailāœapati', i.e., the master or owner of Kailāœa, at Ellora as well. His depictions though numerous, can be categorized under the

following two categories, taking into account the ultimate notion of depiction they do convey:

I. Depictions of Various Forms of *Āiva*.

II. Depictions of Narratives Related to *Āiva*.

These two categories include among them most of the iconographic depictions of *Āiva* at Kailāśa Temple. These two, thus consist of numerous depictions, but few among them need special mention and have been described below as such.

I. Depictions of Various Forms of *Āiva*

I.1. *Kevala Āiva*⁸

This depiction is to be found in the Northern Gallery. *Āiva* has been showed as four-armed and standing. One of his right hands is in the '*abhaya mudrā*' holding a rosary while his other right hand is in the '*varada mudrā*'. One of his left hands is in '*vyākhyāna mudrā*'. He wears a '*jaṭāmukūṭa*' and other ornaments. A snake seems to be wrapped around his neck and his *Nandī* bull can be seen below his right hand. This shows his aspect of calm and composed greatness.

I.2. *Umā-Maheśvara Āiva*⁹

This one, located in the same gallery, as former one, depicts *Umā* and *Maheśvara* in '*ālīṅgana*' pose. *Maheśvara*, seated in '*vāma-lalitāsana*', has snake in one of his right hands while his other right hand rests on his knee. His one left hand rests on seat while other one on *Umā*'s headdress. He wears a '*jaṭāmukūṭa*'; *Umā*, seated on his left, has entwined her lord with her right hand. She wears an elaborate headdress while she is adorned with ornaments like necklaces, earrings, bangles, etc. *Nandī* is seated below.

I.3. *Umāsahitamūrti Āiva*¹⁰

Located in the Eastern Gallery, it shows *Āiva* as four-armed. One right hand is in '*abhaya mudrā*' while his one left hand holds a cobra snake while other one rests on his waist. On his right is a pot-bellied figure and below him is an elephant. A '*Vidyādhara*' flies above his head. On his left is seated *Pārvatī* in '*vāma-lalitāsana*'.

I.4. *Harihara*¹¹

Located in the Eastern Gallery, the depiction shows the right side as '*Hara*' and the left side as '*Hari*'. *Hara* or *Āiva* holds a '*triśūla*' while *Hari* or *Vishṇu* holds a '*chakra*', thus both deities carrying their respective '*āyudhas*'. On *Hari*'s left is his mount, *Garuḍa* while on *Hara*'s right is his mount, *Nandī*. *Harihara* is ornamented elaborately.

I.5. *Dancer Āiva*¹² or *Nāttamūrti Āiva*

Āiva has been depicted as dancing very profoundly. This dance pose seems very similar to the '*Tāḍava Nāṭya*' of *Āiva*. He is four-armed and in one of his right hands he holds a '*ḍamaru*' as he does while doing '*Tāḍava Nāṭya*'. Fingers of one hand seem to be closed while his left hand is in '*gaja-hasta*' pose. His left leg is bent, as happens in dance, from knee

on which the right leg, in fact, rests. One of his hands holds a '*triæûla*' as well. His all body has been depicted as in flow of dance.

I.6. *Bhairava Æiva*¹³

Some of the images or depictions of the Eastern Gallery are described as various forms of *Æiva*. They have been described variously as depictions of *Kâla Bhairava*, *Kapâla Bhairava*, *Naugoginî Bhairava*, *Siddhi Yoginî Bhairava*, *Bhûpâla Bhairava*, *Bapuka Bhairava*. They are generally four-armed and depicted as holding a trident or '*triæûla*'. *Pârvatî* is shown as a comparatively small figure on his left.

I.7. *Ardhanârîævara*¹⁴

Æiva has been depicted as *Ardhanârîævara* as half-male and half-female. His right half represents male with the left half represents female. It is an androgynous personification of *Æiva* based upon a mythological story¹⁵. He is depicted as four-armed and holding a trident in his one right hand and a mirror in his other left hand. The right side has been depicted as manly by giving it a tough appearance while left side has been depicted as smooth with prominence to curves to give that required feminine effect. *Nandi* has been depicted on the lower right.

II. Depictions of Narratives Related to *Æiva*

II.1. *Kalyânasundaramûrti Æiva*¹⁶

Located in the Eastern Gallery, this depiction shows beautifully the scene of marriage of *Æiva* and *Pârvatî*. Both the figures are in standing position. The iconographic depiction on the stone clearly presents the picture of a charming, shy and composed bride in form of *Pârvatî*. *Æiva* is four-armed and has been depicted as gracefully looking towards his shy bride. He holds a lotus in one of his left hands while his other left hand is in on shoulder of *Pârvatî*. His one right hand holds the hand of his bride while the other right hand holds something else. Below them both, *Brahmâ*, officiating as the priest in ceremony, has been depicted as four-armed and three-headed. The charming depiction of expressions on rock is the centre of attraction.

II.2. *Andhakâsuravadhamûrti Æiva*¹⁷

Slaying of the demon *Andhaka* has been depicted in this image located in the Eastern Gallery. *Æiva* has been depicted in this image as standing with his right leg straight and the left leg folded and kept on the head of a demon. In his one left hand, he holds a '*kapâla*' and in the other left hand, a '*ðamaru*'. His one right and one left hand hold a trident or '*triæûla*'. This trident has penetrated the body of *Andhakâsura* and his fierce slaying has been clearly depicted. On *Æiva*'s right, an elephant head, probably representing *Gajâsura*, has been depicted as well. Based upon this, his other two hands may be holding a '*gajacharma*' (elephant's skin). *Pârvatî* has been depicted as seated on a stool while *Kâlî*, near *Æiva*'s left foot, has been depicted with a bowl to collect the drops of demon's blood.

II.3. *Tripurântaka Æiva*¹⁸

Located in Eastern Gallery, this depicts the scene from the episode of destruction of *Tripura* at the hands of *Æiva*. *Æiva* has been depicted with three eyes (his third eye being on his

forehead). He stands on a chariot driven by horses and *Brahmâ* acts as the charioteer. *Āiva* has been depicted as six-armed and carrying various weapons like a bow and '*khaṇvâḡga*' in left hands and '*triæûla*' (trident) and '*paræu*' in his right hands. His other two hands are shown busy in the act of discharging arrows from the bow. The scene of war and depiction of *Āiva* as the warrior has been well executed.

II.4. *Liógodbhavamûrti Āiva*¹⁹

It is also located in the Eastern Gallery. It is the depiction of a legend which implies the ultimate supremacy of *Āiva* over *Brahmâ* and *Vishòu*. *Āiva* has been depicted in sculpture in the '*Agni Stambha*' or '*Lióga*'. His one hand is in '*abhaya mudrâ*' implying him giving protection to *Brahmâ* and *Vishòu*. *Āiva* has been depicted as wearing ornaments. Two figures of *Vishòu* and *Brahmâ* each have been depicted on the right and left respectively, all of them in '*namaskâra*' pose. One figure of *Vishòu* is shown as trying to find bottom of the '*Agni Stambha*' while other stands on earth. One figure of *Brahmâ*, at the same time, has been depicted as finding the top of '*Agni Stambha*' while the other stands on ground. Figures of both (*Brahmâ* and *Vishòu*) are shown as slightly bending their heads, as a sign of reverence to *Āiva*, with folded hands.

II.5. *Gaógâdharamûrti Āiva*²⁰

This panel on the left side of the portico of the *Mahâmaòḡapa* depicts the scene/ episode of the descent of the *Gaógâ* or Ganges. *Bhagîratha* is shown practicing penance standing on his right leg only on the top of left corner. *Āiva* is receiving the celestial river on his matted locks. He wears '*mukupa*', garlands, armlets and other ornaments. *Pârvatî* is seen standing on his left with her legs crossed. *Gaógâ*/ Ganges descends gracefully from *Āiva*'s '*japâ*' on some boulder like object representing the ashes of *Sagaraputras* whereas some do identify them with the seven crowned figures below.

II.6. *Gajâsuravadhamûrti Āiva*²¹

This sculpture on the western wall below the *Nandi-Maòḡapa* represents the scene of '*Gajâsuravadha*' or slaying of *Gajâsura*. *Āiva* has been represented as ten-armed in this fierce form. Two of his hands hold the elephant's skin or '*gaja-charma*'. Other hands hold a '*ḡamaru*', a '*triæûla*', a '*kapâla*', an elephant tusk. Serpents surround his head. The '*Saptamâtrikas*' and a dancing *Bhâiôgi* have been shown below. *Āiva* has been shown as adorned with ornaments like necklaces, earrings, etc. *Gajâsura*, represented by elephant or '*gaja*', is shown on right side of *Āiva*.

II.7. *Mahâyogî Āiva*²²

The scene refers to the narrative of '*Āiva Purâḡa*' according to which when *Āiva* goes in deep meditation, it causes consternation to the world. It has been depicted on the eastern wall below the *Nandi-Maòḡapa*. *Āiva* has been depicted to be in deep-meditation while some other ascetics are trying to meditate as well. At the same time, two musicians play their instruments loudly. *Āiva*, undisturbed from anything, meditate in the '*padmâsana*' and is eight-armed. He wears a very elaborate headdress or crown. He is holding lotus, '*akshamâlâ*', serpent in his hands. The '*Ashpa-dikpâlas*' or the guardians of the eight quarters/ directions are seen above him. On his left, various deities have been depicted as comparatively small figures seated on their mounts like *Indra* on *Airâvata*, *Yama* on ram,

Kuvera/ Kubera on man and *Niruti* on goat. While a similar representation on his left with *Varuḍa* on *Makara*, *Vāyu* on stag, *Agni* on goat and *Iṣāna* on bull have been depicted as well. The calm and composed depiction of the '*Mahāyogi*' is worthy to be noted.

II.8. *Rāvaḍānugraha*²³

This sculpture represents a famous story of the shaking of *Kailāṣa* by *Rāvaḍa* in an attempt of uplifting it and is located on the south face of the lower-storey of *Gudhamaḍḍapa*. In the panel, the multi-armed *Rāvaḍa* is seated on his knees and trying to lift up the mountain. In the depiction, *Ēiva*, *Pārvatī* and their attendants are shown. *Ēiva* is four-armed and is holding a '*paraṣu*' in his one hand while other is on the shoulder of *Pārvatī* as if reassuring her, for she has been depicted as being scared and in fear. One attendant has been depicted as almost running or fleeing away. Two '*dvārapālas*' or door-keepers are depicted as seated and holding trident (*triśūla*) and mace (*gadā*). Monkey and '*gaḍas*' of *Ēiva* have been depicted on various levels of Mt. *Kailāṣa* and being engaged in various activities. Some of them carry weapons and few play instruments as well.

II.9. *Ēiva* Protecting *Mārkaḍḍeya* from *Yama*²⁴

Ēiva is shown to be emerging out from *liḡga* to protect his devotee *Mārkaḍḍeya* against *Yama* in this sculpture of Northern Gallery. *Ēiva* seems to be majestic by placing his foot on the waist of *Yama*. *Yama*, fearful of *Ēiva*, clearly seems submitting himself to *Ēiva* by bending on his knees and folding his hands as a sign of begging for pardon. *Ēiva* is four-armed and wearing necklaces, earrings, anklets, '*jaḍāmukūḍa*'. *Mārkaḍḍeya* is sitting near '*liḡga*' while joining his hands in reverence to his saviour/ protector.

II.10. *Umā-Maheṣvara* Playing '*Chausara*'²⁵

On another panel of Northern Gallery, *Ēiva*, i.e., *Maheṣvara* is playing '*chausara*' with *Umā*. *Maheṣvara* is four-armed and with one of his hands seems holding the hand of *Umā*, as if to stop her from throwing dice. *Umā*'s hair-bun has been beautifully represented. Both of them sit in the '*ardhaparyāḍkāsana*'. *Ēiva* wears an elaborate '*jaḍāmukūḍa*'. *Umā* wears necklaces, bangles, etc. *Nandi* and '*gaḍas*' are below the throne as if watching the game of dice between *Umā* and *Maheṣvara*.

II.11. *Rāvaḍa* Offering his Heads in Sacrifice to *Ēiva*²⁶

This is the depiction on a panel of the Northern Gallery. This is related to a legend showing *Rāvaḍa* as the greatest devotee of *Ēiva*. *Rāvaḍa* is about to put sword on his head as if to cut his tenth head, as he had done with the other nine heads of him. His nine heads can be seen around a large sized '*liḡga*' on its three sides. '*Liḡga*' has been depicted to be placed on a '*yonī*'. *Rāvaḍa* has been depicted as in a state of total dedication to his sacrifice. A fire can be seen in front of him while a water pitcher is to be seen on his behind.

Manifestation of Religion in Rock-Cut Architecture

As is clear from these iconographic depictions, religion and its legends were not only represented or depicted in the most brilliant manner, but they in fact came to life. Religion in general and *Ēiva* in particular were not merely depicted on these rock sculptures but manifested in them as well.

Not only various forms of *Āiva* and narratives related to him were shown but got animated on these rocks. Every form and legend are not only beautifully depicted but is full of life and expression as well, credit for which is due to the perfect application of iconographic details as mentioned in the texts related to these myths and iconography.

Āiva, as the *Kailāṣanātha*, the master of *Kailāṣa* (*Kailāṣa* Temple in this context), has manifested in the most vibrant manners in every corner of *Kailāṣa* Temple. Hence, it will not be wrong to assert that *Kailāṣa* Temple is not only the pinnacle of Indian Rock-Cut Architecture but the manifestation of religious beliefs or religion on rocks as well.

Endnotes

- ¹ Burgess, James (1949), *A Guide to Elura Cave Temples* (hereafter *GECT*), pp. 1-2; Fergusson, James, Burgess, James (1880), *The Cave Temples of India* (hereafter *CTI*), pp. 431-2; Gupte, R.S., Mahajan, B.D. (1962), *Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad Caves* (hereafter *AEAC*), pp. 132-52.
- ² *Ibid.*; *GECT*, pp. 1-2; *CTI*, pp. 431-2.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 448-62; Burgess, James (1883), *Report on the Elura Cave Temples and The Brahmanical and Jaina Caves in Western India* (hereafter *RECT*), pp. 26-36; *AEAC*, pp. 187-210.
- ⁴ Cf. Owen, Lisa (2012), *Carving Devotion in the Jain Caves at Ellora*, pp. 135-6.
- ⁵ Cf. Dhavalikar, M.K. (1982), "Kailasa- The Stylistic Development and Chronology", *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, Vol. 41, pp. 38-40.
- ⁶ *CTI*, pp. 448-62; *RECT*, pp. 26-36; *AEAC*, pp. 187-210.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*; *RECT*, pp. 26-36; *CTI*, pp. 448-62.
- ⁸ *AEAC*, p. 195.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 196; Gopinath Rao, T.A. (1916), *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II- Part I (hereafter *EHI*), pp. 132-41.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*; *AEAC*, p. 198; *RECT*, p. 30.
- ¹¹ *AEAC*, p. 198.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 199.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*; *RECT*, p. 30; *EHI*, pp. 174-82.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 321-32; *RECT*, p. 30; *AEAC*, pp. 116-7, 199-200.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8, 197; *EHI*, pp. 337-52.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-4; *AEAC*, pp. 117-8, 197; *RECT*, p. 31.
- ¹⁸ *AEAC*, pp. 118-9, 197; *EHI*, pp. 164-71.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-11; *AEAC*, p. 198; *RECT*, p. 30; *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. IX, p. 91; H.H. Wilson's Works, Vol. II, p. 211.
- ²⁰ *AEAC*, p. 204; *EHI*, pp. 313-21.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-56; *AEAC*, p. 207.
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8.
- ²³ *EHI*, pp. 217-20.
- ²⁴ *AEAC*, pp. 196-7.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194-5