

Nataraja (?). A little further up is Rajaraja with his guru Karuvur Devar.

Chamber No. 10: Rajaraja I and Karuvur Devar

In this chamber, on the inner jamb facing north is a fine representation of Rajaraja I and his *guru* Karuvur Devar. We have already noted yet another panel where they are shown in the forest scene in the fifth chamber.

Chamber No. 11: Tripurantakar

On the southern surface of the inner wall facing north in chamber no. 11 is perhaps the most graphic and dynamic of all the paintings so far unveiled to us by the hand of man. Nothing delighted the master artists of the Dravidian Court so much as the concept of Siva as Tripurantakar; and the Chola painter drew upon it and gave it a new dimension. The entire canvas here is covered by the enormous figure of Tripurantakar riding a chariot driven by Brahma and accompanied by Karttikeya on his mount the peacock, Ganesa on his mouse and Kali on her lion, with Nandi in front of the chariot. Tripurantakar is shown standing in a fighting (*alidha*) posture on a *pitham* in a two-tiered chariot, the two wheels of which are represented as Surya and Chandra, and his eight arms are shown carrying the traditional weapons, the bow and the shield among them; one arm is swung across the body to the opposite side; one hand is shown in the posture of taking an arrow from the quiver; there is another quiver on the base of the chariot as a standby.

The anger in the eyes and the smile on the lips are brought out very subtly and effectively; Siva is shown not as aiming the arrow at the enemy but in the act of pulling out an arrow from the quiver; the consternation among the *asura ganas*, who are accompanied by their female companions, shown clinging to them, is patent, and one of the frustrated among them is shown lifting a boulder to throw at Siva; hatred and fear are both brought out in the facial expression of this *asura*; *Asura-guru* Sukracharya is shown in a posture of surrender and despair at the right hand corner of the panel; lower down in the panel is

shown an *asura* carrying Siva (in the form of a *linga*) (?). This painting is a masterpiece and perhaps the greatest among those which have come down to us and have so far been exposed to view in this temple; in its rhythm, composition and concept of form and dimension, it has no equal in any contemporary painting (or could one add sculpture too?). There is a confluence of emotions and sentiments depicted in this panel, majesty and valour etched in the face and form of Tripurantakar, piteousness and utter despair in the faces and postures of the female demons; wonder in those of the many gods and demi-gods, at the feat of the Lord; and finally a portrayal of the unusual and the grotesque in the shape and form of the *ganas*. It is no wonder, Rajaraja I or his court painter chose this theme; was not the story of Tripurantakar the theme of Rajaraja's life itself, of a great warrior, a great benefactor, a king among kings?

On the opposite wall of the same chamber, we have scenes showing Ravana shaking and trying to lift the Kailasa mountain; the ten-headed *rakshasa* is shown in a fine shade of green and the attempt to lift the mountain is portrayed effectively by a neck bent low and a face showing strain. Parvati is frightened and clings to Siva from whose arms the snake has slid and fallen to lie coiled on the ground. Lower in the same panel are shown the *devas* and the *ganas*, some in fright and others in postures of trying to dissipate the efforts of Ravana. The panel has not yet been fully exposed and will turn out to be one of the best paintings of the Tanjavur group.

Chamber No. 13

There are patches of Chola painting peeping out of the exposed patches where the Nayak layer has peeled off; but the theme cannot be clarified unless the superimposed Nayak painting is removed.

The roof over the ground floor vestibule also has paintings which require to be exposed; whatever is visible now relates to a later period. Owing to years of neglect, rain water had seeped through the crevices in the *srivimana* stones and so the topmost foot or two of the panels have been virtually washed out and are

thus lost irretrievably. The *sikhara* is now being cleaned and the gaps are being plugged and it is to be hoped that whatever of the paintings are left will suffer no further damage. These are perhaps the best set of paintings of the Chola period, in fact, of South India of the Chola and Pandya periods, and should therefore be preserved jealously. One wishes, judging by the exquisite quality of the paintings, that some at least of the secular buildings like the palaces at Tanjavur, Gangaikonda-cholapuram and Palaiyaru could have come down to us, if for nothing else, at least to give us an idea of the mature skill and versatility of the Chola painters.* (Colour Plates 1-10)

A Unique Monument

The Rajarajesvaram is unique in many respects. It has a well-conceived unitary plan and its execution is perfect. Its plinth—*upapitham* and *adhishthanam*—is high and strong and has fine mouldings which give dignity and grandeur to the whole edifice. Stones of excellent texture have been brought from a long distance, and were properly dressed and raised by an artificial inclined plane to the required height. It is a rare feat, considering the limited technology of the age. With great engineering skill, the downward thrust of the heavy stone superstructure has been well distributed. The Linga is huge and it is housed in a double-storeyed *garbhagriha* supporting the upper part of the *srivimana*. All the members of the structure are well proportioned and there is harmony in their assemblage. The steep upward sweep of the *srivimana*, resembling Meru, with the needle-like *stupi* at the top seems to point to the devotee the path to the lap of the Lord of the Universe.®

*In a very informative article written in 1937, S. Paramesvaran, the then Chemist of the Government Museum at Madras, has dealt with the technical aspects of these paintings, the plaster used for the base, the pigments, the binding medium, the method of execution and other interesting details. (See *Technical Studies*, Harvard: V 4 (1937), pp. 222-239.)

®In the Author's Preface to the book '*The Story of Indian Art*', S. K. Bhattacharya (Atma Ram & Sons) observes:

"Indians were never an architectonic people: The Buddhist Chaitiyas, Jain and Hindu Temples are all replete with the sculptural quality of the builders. They never aspired towards the