

Gangadhara: One of the Most Diversified Style in Shiva Statue

Le Zhang

School of Art, Northwest University, Shannxi, 710127, China

Abstract. This paper discusses the statue of Gangadhara and its background. First, interprets the myth on Gangadhara, then analyzes the statue focusing on the following three main points: The selection and performance of the story, the settings on creating and representing Shiva, and the debates on the two main goddesses in the myth. Through those investigating, atypical and diversified factors on the Shiva statue were found and it help us to understand the statue of India more flexible.

Keywords: Shiva; Gangadhara; statue.

1. Introduction

In Chinese, Shiva translated into “shīpÓ”. In here, “pÓ” means female, so, lots of Chinese think Shiva is a female god. Actually, “Shiva” means “Auspicious, blissful, gracious and peaceful”[1] in Sanskrit, and he is one of the three major Hindu gods. The stlye of Shiva statue is complicated and diversified. On the face of it, Shiva is acting as countless priesthood which correspondent to abundant of myth. More deeperly, this is based on complicacy of India’s Cast, religion, social and cultural, Also based on the complexity of Hindu itself, like Nehru pointed out: being a religion, the Hindu is vague, unformed, omnifarious, so everyone can understand it from his own point of view[2]. As one style of the varied statue on Shiva, Gangadhara is not wildly known, but the differentiation in settings and variation in details are very diversified and interesting.

2. Three Myths on Gangadhara

Descent of Ganga is one of the most famous myth on Shiva. Because it was passed down mouth to mouth, the stories have different versions. Among them, the widely spread were three versions which have similar contents with little difference.

2.1 The Water of Reproduction

In the first version, the Ganges consider as the seminal fluid of Shiva. When all the gods were troubled by the devil Uttaraka, a prophesy said that the son of Shiva and Parvati could destroy this devil. Then Shiva was in penance, even though Parvati tried every means to attract Shiva’s attention, Shiva still immersed in penance. So, Parvati decide to follow the Shiva to practice penance. Finally Shiva noticed her, fell in love and married with her. After that Shiva makes love with Parvati, just one time was a hundred years long without intermission or rest. The other gods got afraid of it, they were worrying the seminal fluid of Shiva which was the Ganges may overflowed and destroy the earth. On the beg of the other gods, Shiva let the water flow through his locks, then reach the land. When the Ganges fell down from the heaven, the Skanda was born. After Skanda grown up, he finally destroyed the devil Uttaraka. Hegel once pointed out that those India’s inconceivable myth throw all the chaste and shame to the wind. However, Indian thought this story was very gracious, they revere the Shiva’s power whole heartily, praise him constantly, till everyone knows this story [3].

2.2 The Water of Salvation

In the second version, the Ganges was a pure water. In this myth the king of Solar race, Bhagiratha practiced a thousand year penances to pray the gods in the heaven to approve the Ganges down to the earth, so that the Solar race could clean the soul of their ancestries’ s. Finally, his pray was approved, Shiva uses his locks as the tool to slow down the current, make the water flow down through his entanglement hair to the land [4].

2.3 The Water of Life

In the third version, the Ganges means a beautiful goddess who represents the continuity of life. After a great drought, the entire creature on the land faces the danger of annihilation. The sages in Himalaya please the Ganges in the heaven incarnate into a goddess, flow to the land to rescue them. However, the rushing river may destroy the drought land. To prevent this, Shiva who living in the holy mountain Kailash, uses his locks to accept the rushing river, change it flow to the land gently. In this version of myth, the Parvati stand on the left side of Shiva with the eyes looking up. Some scholar thought, in those expressions Parvati is envy the goddess who flow in Shiva's hair[5].

3. The Analysis of the Gangadhara Statue : Settings and Characters

Gangadhara usually represented as Shiva was receiving the Ganges River on his locks, but its expression is diversified. In the sculpture of early Gupta era, Goddess Ganga represented as personification, such as the sculpture "Ganga Mounted on a Makara", which was made at the 5th century Gupta period and collected at the national museum of New Delhi nowadays. The Goddess Ganga in this sculpture hold up a jar with one of her hand, the lower part of the body portrayed as two legs, not the mermaid that common in the later period. Although the Shiva did not appeared in this sculpture, the Goddess Ganga showed up honourable and devout expression, seemed like to move toward to the great God Shiva. Nevertheless, as some scholar indicated that the craftsman who carved the sculpture with one unified draft was unthinkable. Those "similar" or "slightly different" myths, plus it made by different craftsman, expressed in a variety of ways [6].

3.1 Settings Dominant Form: Atypical Form of Gangadhara

The second version of myth was found at the big Monuments "Descent of Ganga" in Mahabalipuram, and it was consider as the most outstanding statue of Pallava era. Pallava Dynasty (about A.D. 580-879) was the biggest Hindu kingdom in the middle age of southen India. In the middle Age, the Art of Hindu kingdoms' at southern part of India were still preserving the Dravidian cultural system. They developed and inherited the tradition of Indian domestic sprites which were advocating life, pursuing dynamic change in artistic style, named as Indian Baroco style[7]. This big monument was created about 7 centuries, 9 meter's high, 27 meters long, also named as "Arjuna's Penance". The monument contained by more than a hundred deities, persons, and animal figures, to express the splendid scene of the Ganges river flow from the heaven to the land. The monument takes advantage of the gap in natural granite skillfully, formed a reservoir on the top of it. Whenever hold a big ceremony, the water poured down to represent the effect of the Gages River was falling. In this big monument, the statue of Shiva was appeared and stand by the Arjuna, presenting as four arms holding his symbolic trident in one of the arms, the size of the statue is almost double as the other statues around him, showing his dignify. However, this statue isn't the form of Gangadhara, it is just a normal Shiva statue as standing posture. Like the similar, in the monument of representing the theme on the falling dawn of the Ganges River, Shiva described as "atypical form of Gangadhara". In the typical form of Gangadhara, Shiva and the Ganges River or the Goddess of Ganga who symbol the Ganges River, should be linked directly.

3.2 Main Actor Dominant Form: Focus on the Shiva

The 16th cave in Ellora has an embossment that represents the myth of Gangadhara. This embossment and the Monument at Mahabalipuram based on the same myth, but their distinctly different feature was that in this embossment the big scale spectacle was not uesed as performing object, only stress the Shiva as the main "actor". In the upper right corner, Bhagiratha stand as yoga posture and practice penance. As high as this statue, the Goddess Ganga doing Gen gesture in the middle, and her lower part of the body was already changed into the flow, landing to the earth. A very big size of Shiva stands at the golden mean of the whole monument, place him at the absolute center of the whole embossment. The left side of Shiva was Parvati who stand as tribhanga, slightly looking up to the Shiva with immense reverence. The face of Shiva already blurred, the four arms

also air-slaked, but it doesn't affect to feel his graceful act. The hairline of Shiva naturally fell down to form a curve naturally, integrated with the Ganges River perfectly, revealed a sense of body mass without lose the beauty. If the statue in the southern part of India reflects graceful movement, the Ellora in the middle India represent the Deccan region's sense of power.

3.3 Who is the Main Actress?- Jealous or Generous Wife

Some scholar analyzes that in the statue of Gangadhara, Shiva usually portrayed as erected form, because the beautiful Goddess Ganga was attractive, so Parvati was jealous about her[8]. However, the large scale of denudation made it hard to recognize Shiva's genitals. Then, in such settings, between the Goddess Ganga and Parvati, who is the main actress?

In the Cave of Elephanta, Shiva as Gangadhara holds the Goddess Ganga with his locks. Some scholar thought in this monument Parvati was angry, because she anticipated that the Goddess Ganga may be the rival to her. But in front of the embossment I did not feel the jealous from the wife. Even though the main actress in this myth was the Goddess Ganga, the size of Parvati was the second biggest figure in the picture, got the second visual focus. In this myth, the main actress was the Goddess Ganga, but in the monument she was just as symbol to emphasize Shiva's superhuman strength. After all, Shiva was willing to sitting with his wife as the form of Ardhanarishvara. Beside this, in this form of monument, Shiva was absolute main actor, his grace standing posture, tidy crown and complete decoration emit relaxation, happiness and dignity. One of his four arms picks up his hair slightly to accept the coming Goddess Ganga, also accept the worship from deities around him.

4. Summary

Gangadhara is not only an important Hindu myth, but also the most well-known myth on Shiva, even more we could found the Goddess Ganga appeared as symbolized form of "mermaid" on Shiva's locks. The different version of myth and the casual and inclusive character of Indian's, which affect the expression of statue diversified and complex: The Ganges was represented as the form of "water"; The Ganges was represented as the form of half people and half water; The Ganges was represented as the personate form of Goddess. In the personate form of Goddess Ganga, also found the human shape Goddess or "half man half fish" form [8]. From those different and diversified forms of Gangadhara, we Could receive the freedom and beauty of non-stylization, also this is the charming of Indian art.

References

- [1]. Yong Wang, Transplantation and variation. Renmin University of China,2010, P.47.
- [2]. Weiguang Ma, Exploration of Indian gods. The world knowledge press,2014,P.73-76.
- [3]. Haijun Shi, Witness of eros: Eroticism in Indian culture. Chongqing Press,2008,P.21-86.
- [4]. Roy· C· Craven, A concise history of Indian art. Renmin University of China,2004, P.124-144.
- [5]. Eckard Schleberger, The world of Indian gods—Hindu image manual. Zhong Xi press, 2016, P. 62-81.
- [6]. G· T· Garratt, The legacy of India. Shanghai Renmin press,2005, P.91-93.
- [7]. Yong Wang, India Art. Renmin University of China,2004, P.253.
- [8]. Calambur Sivaramamurti, The Art of India. Harry N. Abrams,1977, P.79.