

# AGORAMOORTHY CULT IN TAMILNADU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SWETHARANYESWARAR TEMPLE AT THIRUVENKADU

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## Abstract:

Hinduism is an undeniable religion in India. There are numerous Gods in Hinduism and the most significant of them is Lord Siva. Siva is the most powerful and glorious deity of Hinduism. Siva has taken many incarnations and he is the God of protection and God of destruction. The five-faced form of Siva found in the Linga Purana, is identified as Vishvarupa or the universal form of the God. The five faces are Isana, Tatpurusha, Agora, Vamadeva and Sadyajatka. From the five faces of Lord twenty-five Sivamurthas have originated. Out of these twenty-five Sivamurthas, one of the important is Agoramoorthy. Agoramoorthy appeared from Agora's face. Agoramoorthy is the figure who appeared to destroy the demons and evil. In this paper an attempt is made to bring out the uniqueness of Agoramoorthy sculpture and the special features of the sculpture found in the Swetharanyeswarar Temple at Thiruvankadu.

**Keywords:** Agoramoorthy, Sivamurthas, Vyomakesa, Jatamudi, Pralaya, Samhara

Religion is an integral part of human life. It enables human beings to transcend from the narrow self interest to broader world view. In Hinduism, the major religious sects are there, i.e, Saivism and Vaishnavism, the worship of Lord Siva and the worship of Lord Vishnu respectively. Siva worship is universal. He has been one of the most important and popular deity in India; both in past ages and at the present times. Lord Siva means all round welfare.

He is the God of Gods and is regarded as one of the most powerful and venerated Gods of Hindu religion.<sup>1</sup> He is primarily associated with the acts of destruction but he is a creator and preserver of the universe as well. Idolatry is an important part of Hinduism. Each deity has a different image structure, form, ornament, costume, and vehicle and worship methods. Let's see the lord Siva and Agoramoorthy God.

The philosophical significance of the various forms and attributes of Siva is that the five faces represent earth, water, light, air and sky. The Ganga is also said to represent the flow of knowledge and devotion to God. The crescent moon stands for time. The one having ash as his ornament. Ash symbolizes death or detachment from the world and lust. Lord Siva have a three eyes .The three eyes of Siva represent the sun (right eye), the moon (left eye) and the fire, the three sources of light, life and heat. *Jatamudi* (hair) is the whole sky including the powerful wind blowing in it, forms his hair. Thus, he is called *Vyomakesa* (one who has the sky or space as his hair). The snake curled three times around the neck of Lord Siva depicts the past, present and future time. The rudraksha mala worn by him symbolizes his firm approach with regards to the following of cosmic laws towards the maintenance of law and order in the universe.<sup>2</sup> Danda in hand is death itself. The three ends of the trident represent the Sattva, Rajas and Tamas qualities. The citron in hand represents the seed of the world. These seeds represent the atoms that make up the world. He wears a tiger

skin; Desire is compared to a tiger. As one beyond birth and death, Siva has been is considered as timeless youth.

Lord Siva is the destroyer; the third deity of the Hinduism is responsible for the dissolution of the universe. Literally, all that begins must come to an end. All that is born must die. Siva is one of the most influential members of the orthodox Hindu triad. Though, He is specially associated with the act of *Samhara* (destruction) or *Pralaya* (absorption) in the Hindu concept of Trinity. Three great cosmic actions are all performed by God Siva. In addition to creation, preservation and destruction, Siva performs two more actions which relate specifically to the soul. His fourth activity, the so-called darkness, he hides himself from us, forgets our past and future lives and karmas. By His fifth act or power, Lord Siva frees us from the illusion of being separated from Him. "The birth of the world, its maintenance, its destruction, the soul's obscuration and liberation are the five acts of His dance."<sup>3</sup>

Lord Siva clearly depicts these five actions. Creation, or emanation (*srishti*), is represented by His upper right hand holding the drum upon which He beats *Paranada*, the Primal Sound, from which issue forth the rhythms and cycles of creation. Preservation (*sthiti*) is represented by His lower right hand, held in the gesture of blessing, *abhaya mudra*, indicating "fear not." Destruction (*samhara*), dissolution or absorption, is symbolized by the fire in His upper left hand, held in *ardha-chandra mudra*, "half-moon gesture." Obscuring grace (*tirodhana*), the power which hides the truth from souls, thereby permitting experience, growth and eventual fulfilment of destiny, is represented by His right foot upon the prostrate person, *apasmrapurusha*, who symbolizes the principle of ignorance, or *anava*. Revealing grace (*anugraha*), in which grants knowledge and severs the soul's bonds, symbolized by Siva's raised left foot, and by His lower left hand, held in *gajahasta* or "elephant trunk" *mudra*, inviting approach.

The five-faced form of Siva found in the Linga Purana, is identified as Vishvarupa or the universal form of the God. The five faces (from left to right) are *Ishana*, *Tatpurusha*, *Aghora*, *Vamadeva* and *Sadyojata*.<sup>4</sup> They radiate, in order, revelation of grace, sublimation of the five senses, omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. Four faces are said to have revealed the Vedas; the fifth (Ishana) revealed the Agamas. These five faces, which also correspond to the five syllable mantras "Om Namasivaya". 1. *Sadyojata* ("quickly birthing"), the controlling Lord of Brahma, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of creation. His direction is west, He is related to the sphere of earth (*prithivi mandala*) and His *Panchakshara Mantra* syllable is "Na". 2. *Vamadeva* ("lovely, pleasing"), the controlling Lord of Vishnu, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of preservation. His direction is north, He is related to the sphere of water (*jala mandala*), and His *Panchakshara Mantra* syllable is "Ma". 3. *Aghora* ("terrifying"), the controlling Lord of *Rudra*, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of dissolution. His direction is south, He is related to the sphere of fire (*agni mandala*), and His *Panchakshara Mantra* syllable is "Si". 4. *Tatpurusha* ("supreme soul"), the controlling Lord of *Maheshvara*, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of obscuration. His direction is east, He is related to the sphere of air (*vayu mandala*), and His *Panchakshara Mantra* syllable is "Va." 5. *Ishana* ("ruler"), the controlling Lord of *Sadasiva*, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of revelation. His direction is upward, He is related to the sphere of ether (*akasha mandala*), and His *Panchakshara Mantra* syllable is "Ya." The Agamas mention, twenty-five forms of Siva most of which are usually met within south Indian temple.<sup>5</sup> These twenty-five forms of God Siva are generally classified in to *Samharamurti* (destructive), *Anugrahamurthi* (boon-conferring) and *Nrttamurti* (dancing). Out of these twenty-five Siva murthas, one of the most important is Agoramoorthy form. Agoramoorthy is the southern face of the *Panchaprama Moorthys* of Lord Siva. Agora Murthy is the 43rd of the 64 deities of Lord Siva. In the twenty-eight agamas, in the *Uttara Karana agama*, he is said to be the *agorashtra murti*. The *Agora Veerapathira* who originated from the forehead eye by Lord Siva to destroy the Thachchanya Yaga is different. This Agoramoorthy is different. The unique Agorasivan Moorthy sculpture is placed in Thiruvankadu temple. Such an Agora idol cannot be found in any other Siva temple in India. This image can see in this temple only.

Agoramoorthy, the second chief deity of this temple it is set to be ferocious form of Siva. There is a great legend that describes the Agoramoorthy's form and purpose. Demon *Maruthvasura* performed severe penance and prayed to Lord *Brahma* for long years of life. Lord *Brahma* appeared before him and asked his favour. Brahma gave the boon that the demon asked for. With the power of that boon, the demon tormented many Gods and people. The Devas pray to the Lord to save them from the demon. The Lord went to Thiruvankadu and said to be in disguise. Meanwhile, the demon stood in the middle of the ocean and penance

Siva. He received the *trident (Tirisūlam)* from Lord Siva as a gift. Then the demon came to know that the Gods were in Thiruvankadu in a different form and tormented them. With the trident (*Tirisūlam*) day by day *Maruthvasura* tortured the devas, saints, and the people in the village. The Devas immediately went to Pragaspati (Guru) and they prayed to get freedom from the evil. *Pragaspati* (Guru) call Nandi Deva and sent to him away with advice to the demon. But the demon refused to accept this and attacked Nandi. There was a ferocious fight between Demon and *Nandhi* and the Demon injured the *Nandhi's* body with his trident (*Tirisūlam*) in nine places the demon cut off left side Nandi's horns and ears. Injured, Nandi came to appeal to *Swedaranyeswarar* in Thiruvankadu.

Then immediately nandi went to lord *Siva* and appealed. Lord *Siva* was angry. That time Agoramoorthy appeared from the *Ishanya* (north east) face of one of his five faces. As soon as he saw this agora image, the demon surrendered to lord *Siva* and worshipped to him. At the feet of the surrendered demon Agoramoorthy, and the wounded nandi can still be seen in the swetharanyeswarar swami *nirth mantabam* today and the scars of the injury can still be seen on Nandi's body. That demans also asked Agoramoorthy to remove Navagraha Dosham, Pitru Dosham and Yamabayam from the devotees who worship him.<sup>6</sup> In brief the worship of Agoramoorthy will turn one's obstacles and struggles to a state of serenity. This is how the idol Agoramoorthy, a manifestation of Siva's anger holds importance at Thiruvankadu. For the idol of Agoramoorthy especially on Sunday nights are considered important and special.

*Koram* 'means terrible. That is what '*Agoram*' means 'beautiful'. Thiruvankadu Swetharanyeswarar Temple is the place where Lord *Siva* bestows blessings on this agora face. In the western part of this great temple, Agora *Siva* is keeping his grace as a sanctum facing south. This Agoramoorthy God is mentioned in the songs of *Thirunavukkarasar* in the 7th century A.D., Sung by the *Thirunavukkarasar*.<sup>7</sup> All that is said in the revision, which begins with the Appar Swami singing about the *thiruthandagam*, "*thundu Sudar Meni*", can be found in the portrait of Agoramoorthy.

Worship practices of Agora Murthy in ancient times were one of the most important. Kings worshipped the Agora idol to destroy enemies in order to win the war. Among the rites and ceremonies that are pre- scribed for kings for attaining success against their enemies is the adoration of Agromoorthy. The description of the rites that have to be performed is given in the Lingapurana.

The following is the description of the Agora who is required to be meditated upon. The figure of Agora should have eight arms; in the hands are to be seen the *sula, damaru, pasa, kabala, danda, dhanus, bana and khadga*; the neck of Agora should be blue and his complexion black. He should be naked, or be clad in the skin of the elephant and the lion and be adorned with ornaments composed of snakes and scorpions, and be covered with the ashes of the dead bodies of human beings. His face should be terrific in appearance and should have side tusks. A snake should bind his hair and he should be surrounded by demons and goblins.<sup>8</sup>

Another description, according to which the Agoramoorthy is generally sculptured and set up in temples, is found in the *Kara agama*. In this work he is known as the Agoramoorthy and it is stated therein that the image of this aspect of *Siva* is set up for gaining victory, for destroying such great sins as brahmahatya or brahmanicide and for granting riches.<sup>9</sup> Aghorastramurti should have three eyes, eight arms and be of terrific look, with The colour of this aspect of *Siva* is He is to be draped in red clothes, adorned with garlands of red flowers, ornaments set with rubies, a garland of skulls, and another composed of short daggers (*khadgamala*) and a third of scorpions. His hair should be flaming and his forehead marked with ashes in the shape of the in his two hands he should carry side tusks, dark crescent moon. a trisula horizontally as though about to charge with it, and the other hands should hold a *vetala, khadga, damaru, kabala* and *khadga (ghanta)*.

Agoramoorthy sculpture is the very unique sculpture. This sculpture 6 feet tall statue of Agoramoorthy is made of a single black stone. Thus the black and tall statue of Agoramoorthy can be seen only in this temple. He is the owner of black colour body (*Kariya Thirumeni*).<sup>10</sup> The Agoramoorthy neck is blue in colour. He is in the walking position with the left leg forward and the right toe and the next toe. He has an eight-hands and seven- armed martyr. In his hands he carries the weapons of *dalam*, knife, *udukkai*, skull, shield, bell and trident. He holds the one trident horizontally with both hands. Dressed in red colour, He looks majestic with Fangs. There is also a bronze sculpture of Agoramoorthy in this temple.

In Karthikai month, *Abhishekam* and *Puja* will be held for Sri Agoramoorthy every Sunday. On the third Sunday, the *Maha Rudrabhishekam* and *Vibudhi* decoration will be held. In the month of Masi there will be a ten days festival. It is called *Indra Vizha*. Fifth day festival is for Sri Agoramoorthy Awakening,

and that night *Maruthivasura* deman *Samharam* , and next *Rishabha* Vehicle Show will be held. In the month Panguni *Latcharchana* to Agoramoorthy will be held on *Suklapaksa Prathamai*.<sup>11</sup>

The Concluding part reveals the fact that the cult of Agoramoorthy is a regional contribution of Tamil Nadu to the growth of Saivism, art and iconography. Worship of Agoramoorthy was popular the Ancient time and today also. If one worships in the presence of Agoramoorthy, the doshas like Pitras will be removed. The blessings of the ancestors may be perfectly available. Enemies will be weakened. The protests will all go away, the people believed. So worship of Agoramoorthy in Thiruvankadu temple is noteworthy and famous among the devotees of Tamilnadu.

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**Fig:1** 6 feet single black stone Agromoorthy sculpture, Thiruvankadu.