

A SCULPTURE OF ARDHĀNARĪSVARA FROM POLONNARUVA

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I

Monuments of the adherents of the Hindu faith are fairly numerous in Polonnaruva and the outlying districts, the seat of the Cola administration in the 11th century A.D. A considerable number of sculptures of Hindu deities and saints and temples devoted to their worship as well as inscriptions in Tamil characters are available in and around this region.

The icon which is being illustrated in this article is of an unusual type. Now headless, it is placed on a pedestal about one foot in height. It is to be found inside a cave in Kandēgamakanda, Egoḍapattuva, Polonnaruva District. The height of the icon from the seat on which it is placed is also about twelve inches. It is inside a room adjoining that of a recumbent Buddha. Brick and mortar had been the media of its execution, The right arm is not *in situ* but the left is shown as resting on the left knee. The attitude of this seated image is known as *mahārājallā* (also called *lallāsana* or *sukhāsana*.) The part of the body above the waist corresponds to that of a female, both breasts being prominently shown. Below the waist is the form of a male with genitals clearly displayed. The left leg is bent at the knee and placed under the right which hangs down from the seat. There appears to have been a halo round the head which is now *not in situ*. Both the right arm and the head must have disappeared at a time when the Hindu faith was subject to persecution (probably after the expulsion of the Colas in or around 1070 A. D.). Considering the attitude *lallāsana* and the pedestal on which it is kept, the sculpture has to be regarded without doubt as a representation of a deity of great importance in the Hindu pantheon. Half man, half woman is Ardhānārīśvara, an aspect of Siva, the supreme deity of the Saivites.

II

The human body, vertically divided into male and female forms is called Ardhānārīśvara. In such a representation, the left part of the body is female while the right part is that of a male. In the present instance, the halving has been executed horizontalwise, above the waist being female and below, male. To the best of our knowledge such a representation has not been met with elsewhere and the standard works on Hindu Iconography illustrate only the vertically halved specimens of Ardhānārīśvara.