



Goddess and Buffalo Demon, Shiva temple, Chidambaram , Tamil Nadu. Photograph by Kalpana Desai, 2004.

WHO IS DEPICTED HERE?

As in the previous slide, the Goddess Durga appears in an episode involving her defeat of the buffalo demon. The Goddess image appears in a niche on one side of the main structure of the great Shiva Nataraja (Dancing Shiva) a temple in Chidambaram, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. This celebrated temple complex was created during the Chola dynasty and completed in the 1200s. The god Shiva is the main deity worshiped at this temple, while images of other important and related duties are found in principle locations around the temple structure, as well as in sculptural freezes and other decorative motifs.

In this image, the multi-armed Goddess is portrayed with her enemy the buffalo demon in a subject commonly depicted in sculptural relief. The sensual looking and serene Goddess is framed by a cascade of multiple arms, each once holding a separate weapon or attribute.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THIS IMAGE?

Elsewhere in narrative sculpture and painting, this story is often depicted through an image of graphic violence. In the previous slide, the beheading and conquest of the buffalo demon is subtly alluded to by the fact that the Goddess stands upon his head. This rendering at the great Shiva temple expresses a sense of harmony, and a victory that is satisfying to both parties in the drama. The buffalo demon Mahisa is portrayed here in an unusually anthropomorphic and sensuous form, his curvaceous thigh and garment echoing those of the Goddess herself. His charmingly realistic face, including bovine eyes and drooping ear, speak to the persistent talent of Indians artists in rendering lifelike animal forms. The buffalo has so acquiesced to his defeat that also equates with his own spiritual liberation, that he is licking the foot of the Goddess which rests upon the shoulder.

The Goddess image is adorned with a gorgeously radiant silk sari, and also decorated with strands of flowers. The sari was probably draped by temple priests, although various image adornments may be left as well by passing worshipers. This region of south India is celebrated for its consummate perfection of silk saris, and thus the adornment seen here expresses a regional artistic strength.