

# Rāvaṇa Offers Heads to Śiva: Another Aspect of Rāvaṇānugraha-Mūrtis in Indian Art

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Rāvaṇa is a prominent negative personality of Rāmāyaṇa. In the text, he is described as a demon. Rāmāyaṇa is a prominent text of the Vaiṣṇava sect. However, many of the descriptions associated with Śiva are also found in this text. One of these descriptions refers to Rāvaṇa and Śiva. This description is discussed in more detail. According to this description, many images were made in Indian art. These images are often called ‘Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrti.’ However, no iconographic texts provide any details on the construction of these images. For this reason, the Rāvaṇānugraha sculptures in Indian art are mainly based on the description of Rāmāyaṇa. In addition to Rāmāyaṇa, there are stories related to Rāvaṇa and Śiva of Śiva Purāṇa. In this text, Rāvaṇa is shown as a great devotee of Śiva, not a demon. Rāvaṇa, as a devotee, is expressed through Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrtis in Indian art. However, these images are completely different from those made based on Rāmāyaṇa. The study provided a detailed description of the image of Rāvaṇānugraha depicting Rāvaṇa as a religious figure. Sculptures were built based on Śiva Purāṇa, in which mainly Rāvaṇa depicts doing great penance for Śiva. This paper discusses the importance of this aspect of Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrti, where Rāvaṇa is described as a devotee of Śiva.

### 1.1 Stories Behind the Rāvaṇānugraha-Mūrtis

The descriptions of the two kinds of Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrtis engraved in Indian art come from Rāmāyaṇa and Śiva Purāṇa. The details of Rāmāyaṇa (Shastri 1992) are as follows: Rāvaṇa conquered Kubera and then went to the large tree forest known as Śaravaṇa. Near the forest is a mountain; when Rāvaṇa began climbing this mountain, he observed that the Puṣpaka aircraft had not been moved. Then Naṇḍīśvara came to Rāvaṇa. He told Rāvaṇa that Śiva and his wife Pārvaṭī were playing on this mount. It has stopped the movements of all beings such as Devatā, Gaṇḍharva, Nāga, Rākṣasa, Suparṇa, and Yakṣas. When he heard these words, Rāvaṇa was angry and came down from Puṣpaka and said, “Who is this Śiva?” He said this and came to the centre of the mountain. At that place, he saw Naṇḍī standing as another Śiva with a śula in his hand. Rāvaṇa decided to destroy the hill that had stopped his travel. Consequently, he came near the mountain, grabbed it in his hands and shook it violently, so that the mountain vibrated. As a result, the entire gaṇa of Śiva was lifted up, and Pārvaṭī clung to the neck of her Śiva. Then, Śiva, as if he was playing, pressed down the mountain with his toes and crushed Rāvaṇa’s arms, which looked like the pillars of the hill. Rāvaṇa found himself in a desperate situation, cried and the people of the three worlds trembled. Rāvaṇa then celebrated Śiva with the hymns of Sāmaveda. Thus, a thousand years passed

for the devil, and weep and praise him with the pain of his hands. Then the man on the mountain, the Śiva, was satisfied. Śiva liberated Rāvaṇa's arms from this crisis and said that the living beings of the three worlds cried out in fear of being suppressed by the mountain. Therefore, from now on, you will be known as "Rāvaṇa". Śiva gave him a brilliant weapon Caṅdrahāsa at the request of Rāvaṇa.

Rāvaṇa is described in the story as a demon. The representation of this form of Rāvaṇa is found in its full form, especially in the art of northern India. However, a new aspect of these images appeared during the Cālukya period in southern India. The representation of Rāvaṇa as a devoted man makes this image special. This aspect of the sculpture of *Rāvaṇānugraha* is based on the narration of Śiva Purāṇa. Its description (Shastri, 1970) is as follows: Rāvaṇa has dug a deep ditch on the south side of Himāvata. Then he sparked a fire. Rāvaṇa installed the image of Śiva and prayed. He did three types of penance. He stood for five fires in the summer; he was lying on the bare soil in the rain; he was in the water in the winter and continued to suffer. However, this time Śiva was not delighted. Subsequently, the Rāvaṇa began to worship the Śiva by cutting off their heads. In the appropriate execution of the cult, he cut off his head one by one. Thus, when he had cut off nine heads, a head remained, and a happy Śiva appeared in front of him. Śiva has re-established the severed head without causing pain. Rāvaṇa said to Śiva, who was satisfied. I am going to take your idol to Laṅkā. Make my desire fruitful. He replied to Rāvaṇa, letting my *liṅga* be brought to your house. But, where this *liṅga* is placed on the ground, it will become stable. Saying this, Śiva returned to his home. After that, Rāvaṇa began to go toward his house. However, as he was walking, he started to get the urge to urinate. Rāvaṇa was unable to control his urge. When Rāvaṇa came upon a cowherd, he asked him to hold the *liṅga*. The cowherd became alarmed after about an hour when Rāvaṇa failed to show up. The *liṅga* was too heavy for him to lift for much longer, so he set it down. The *liṅga* was made permanent established and given the name "Vaidyanātheśvara".

Rāvaṇa got back to his home without a *liṅga*. He enlightened his better half regarding the shelter acquired from Śiva. He was satisfied to express this on hearing everything; Indra and different divine beings become staggeringly despondent. Subsequently bothered, Indra and different divine beings welcomed Nārada and said to discover a few means to beat this wretchedness. Nārada shared with the divine beings, surrender your distress. I will design out and go. By the pardoning of Śiva, I will do

the undertaking of the divine beings. In this way saying, Nārada went to Rāvaṇa's habitation. In the wake of getting the conventional gladly received, he talked with extraordinary delight. Nārada told Rāvaṇa, to kindly portray the subtleties of how you fulfill Śiva. In this way, asked by him, Rāvaṇa gave the subtleties of the entire occurrence exhaustively. In the wake of paying attention to the entire story, Nārada told Rāvaṇa, I will let you know what is beneficial to you. All that will emerge to be productive just when Kailāsa is lifted. It is certainly so. Rāvaṇa thought of it as beneficial when in this way prompted. Putting stock in the meeting by the Nārada, he went to Kailāsa. Arriving there, he lifted the mountain. Śiva thinks this work of Rāvaṇa difficult. He is loathsome for being egotistical about his solidarity. Eventually, the difficulties of the Indra, and different divine beings survived.

## 2 RĀVAṆĀNUGRAHA SCULPTURES BASED ON ŚIVA PURĀṆA

There are some Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrtis in Indian art, which are based on the Śiva Purāṇa tale. The famous tale of Rāmāyaṇa may be the cause of this. How the image is created may be another important factor. because no iconographical book has a description of the formation of Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrti. The Mahakuteshvara temple in Mahakuta, Karnataka, India, contains the oldest representation of the Śiva Purāṇa narrative.

Here the story is engraved in four sections on the southern *adhiṣṭhāna* of the temple (Kalidos, 2006). However, the tale does not present these parts in any particular order. The following are the descriptions of these sections: In the first panel (Fig. 1a), Rāvaṇa is doing penance to Śiva. Rāvaṇa has a garland in his hand. Rāvaṇa raises his right leg, which is resting on his left thigh. On the Kailāsa mountain, Śiva and Pārvaṭī are sitting. Rāvaṇa and his attendant are attempting to appease Śiva with musical instruments in the second panel (Fig. 1b). Although Rāvaṇa's left hand is broken, due to that it is hard to identify the instrument. The attendant's flute, though, is apparent. The four-armed god Śiva is holding Pārvaṭī in the *tribhaṅga* position. Her left hand is resting on the female attendant's head, while her right hand is grasping Śiva's *liṅga*. A ten-armed Rāvaṇa is seated on the ground in the *ardhaprayaṅkāsana* position in the third panel (Fig. 1c). Rāvaṇa is seen beheading people with a sword in his upper hand. While a

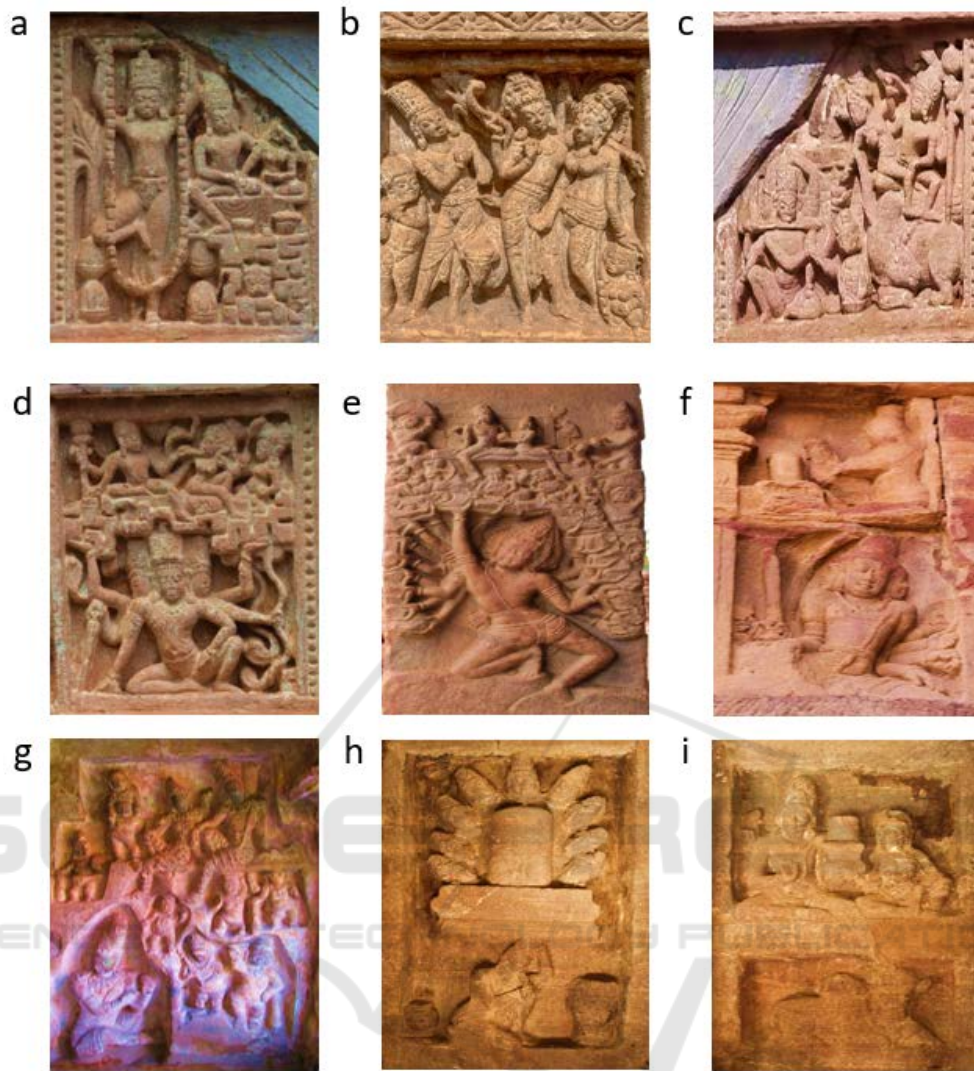


Figure 1: (a), (b), (c)&(d) Mahakuteshvara Temple, Mahakut (c) Mahakuteshvara Temple, Mahakut (d) Mahakuteshvara (e) & (f)Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal (g) Mukteshvar Temple, Kanchipuram (h) & (i) Kailasa Temple, Ellora

sacrifice ladle is most likely in the bottom right hand. Rāvaṇa is clutching his severed head in his upper left hand while holding a skull cup in the other. Sitting atop a Kailāsa mountain with a huge Naṅdī figure etched below them, Śiva and Pārvaṭī are shown. Rāvaṇa is most likely receiving Śiva's *ātma-liṅga* from Pārvaṭī. In the last panel (Fig. 1d), four-handed Śiva is sitting on Kailāsa Mountain in *sukhāsana* posture. Pārvaṭī is also sitting in the *utkūṭikāsana* posture to the left of Śiva. Rāvaṇa is shown with three heads and six hands. Two of them are lifting the mountain, while others hold bow and arrow, and the lower right hand is placed on the ground, and the lower left hand rests on the thigh. The *gadarbha* face is built above the main face of Rāvaṇa. This is the first example of this type found in South India.

The Virupaksha temple in Pattadakal, Karnataka, India, has two distinctive and incredibly exquisite engravings of *Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrti*. The first image is engraved on the pillar of the Virupaksha temple (Fig. 1e). Two parts of the tale can be seen in this sculpture. In the first part, Rāvaṇa can be seen acquiring the *liṅga* as a boon from Śiva and Pārvaṭī. Śiva and Pārvaṭī are sitting on the couch in the *lalitāsana* posture. Both are holding the *liṅga* in their hands. Rāvaṇa is sitting in the *svastikāsana* posture on the left of Śiva and Pārvaṭī. He is shown taking the *liṅga* with his hands. In the second part, Rāvaṇa is shown lifting Mount Kailāsa, influenced by Nārada's words. Rāvaṇa with five heads and twenty hands is extremely massive. The second image (Fig. 1f) is carved into the northern wall of the Virupaksha



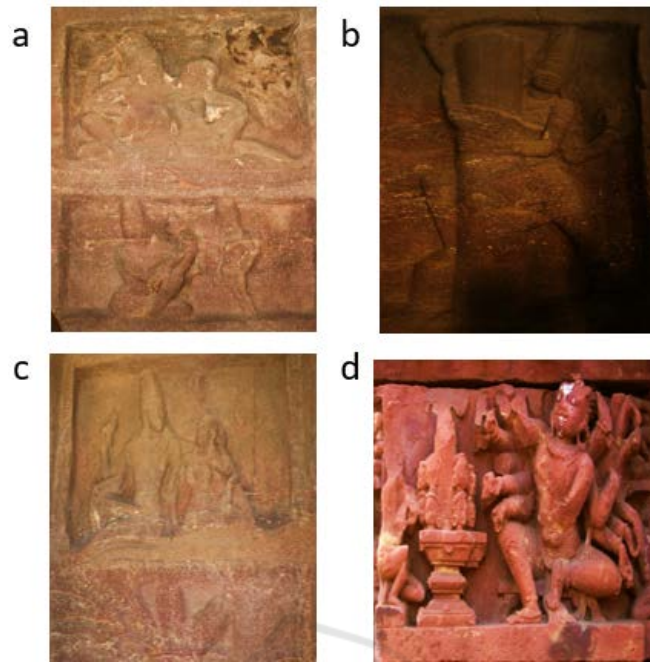


Figure 2: (a), (b), Kailasa Temple Ellora (c) Kailasa Temple, Ellora (d) Ratanpur Fort, Chattisgarh.

temple, which represents Rāvaṇa receiving a boon from Śiva. This image is divided into two parts. In the upper part, Rāvaṇa is offering his head to the *liṅga*. In the lower part, Rāvaṇa receives a boon from Śiva, reflected by his giant body. Rāvaṇa with three heads and eight hands is adorned with *jaṭājūṭa*, *kuṇḍala*, *ekāvalī*, *valaya*, *yajñopavīta*, *udarbaṇḍha*, and other ornaments. He holds three swords in his three right hands, while a shield is held in his left hand. Another image is of the Pallava art centre Mukteshvara temple (Fig. 1g), Kanchipuram (Donaldson, 2007). Śiva and Pārvaṭī are sitting on the mountain in *utkūṭikāsana* posture. Śiva carries the *liṅga* on his left shoulder. That is the speciality of this image. However, this image shows that part of the story when Śiva was delighted with Rāvaṇa's penance and appeared. Rāvaṇa's single head and the *liṅga* placed on Śiva's left shoulder show that no boon has been given to Rāvaṇa yet.

The story of Rāvaṇānugraha is depicted through various sculptures in the corridor of the Kailasha temple, Ellora (Kalidos, 2006). In the first panel (Fig. 1h), Rāvaṇa is seated below a giant *liṅga* and engaged in cutting off his tenth head with a sword. The nine other heads already cut off by him are placed in a semi-oval form around the *liṅga*. In the second panel (Fig. 1i), Śiva is seated on a pedestal along Pārvaṭī, both holding a *liṅga* in their hands. Nāṇḍī is depicted sitting down. In the next panel (Fig. 2a), Śiva and Pārvaṭī are shown seated at the top of the panel.

Rāvaṇa is sitting on the ground holding the *liṅga* at the bottom. While the cowherd is shown standing before Rāvaṇa. The fourth panel (Fig. 2b) is very interesting. The four-armed Rāvaṇa is standing in *pratyālidha* posture, holding a sword in his upper right hand, while a shield in his upper left hand and trying to lift the *liṅga* with both his main hands. This image is probably the only example in Indian art. In the last panel (Fig. 2c), Rāvaṇa is shown lifting Kailāsa mountain. Although the depiction of Rāvaṇa is incomplete.

In Chattisgarh's Ratanpur Fort, there is a stunning representation of Rāvaṇa (Fig. 2d) (Tiwari, 1991). In this image, he's perched atop a tiny platform. In front of Rāvaṇa, a *liṅga* with a *yonipīṭha* is installed. He has given the *liṅga* his eight heads. He has the ninth head in his hand. On the other side of the *liṅga*, a companion is likewise seated in the *añjali* position. M. P. Tiwari named this image "Sirodāna-mūrti".

### 3 CONCLUSION

Compared to the narrative in Rāmāyaṇa, where Rāvaṇa is depicted in many forms depending on the story, Rāvaṇa is depicted as a devotee in Indian art. For the first time, Rāvaṇa was shown in South India as a Śiva devotee. This creative voyage continued till it arrived in Central India. The depictions of

*Rāvaṇānugraha* as a lover of Indian art have seen further alteration. The salient characteristics of this representation of *Rāvaṇānugraha-mūrti* in Indian art are as follows: **i.** *Rāvaṇa* is symbolized by bowing down to *Śiva*, accepting a *liṅga* from *Śiva*, or praising *Śiva*. **ii.** *Śiva* and *Pārvaṭī* are seen seated on a high pedestal, with either *Śiva* holding the *liṅga* or *Pārvaṭī* presenting it to *Rāvaṇa*.

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