

## **Reflections on the Saivite Philosophy of the 12th century Tamilnadu Through its Temple Art & Literature**

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**Abstract:** The inscriptions and literature pertaining to a region, speak the language of politics and political correctness through their genealogy. Rarely the subtleties of religious philosophy as espoused in the region get reflected in such sources as much as it does in art, though occasionally, literature gives that rare glimpse. To study the cultural phenomena, concepts, and notions of a particular period, an integrated study of art and literature become necessary. The art of a particular period brings forth certain nuances which otherwise would have been impossible to discern only through literary sources. The later Cholas of Tamilnadu espoused Saivism in preference to other faiths. To them, the concept of Saivism was all encompassing and it subsumed Vaishnavism within it. This thought was reflected in the Kulothunga Cholan Ula, the literature of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The temples of Kambaharēshwara of Tirubuvanam which is closer to Chola capital and the temple of Ramalingeshwara of Avani in Karnataka which was an outlying province of the Chola Empire were two such distinct examples. In Tirubuvanam the Lord Sarabēswara, who is lion headed but with a human upper torso, his lower body like a horse, has wings, four arms and six legs and who subdues the lion-faced Lord Narasimha after the latter slayed the demon Hiranyakasibu, was built during this period. Though the story of Sarabēswara is part of Siva Puran, the popularization of this myth during this period requires some study. In Karnataka in the village of Avani the temple of Ramalingeswara was built in the same period on the orders of the same king, Lord Ram and his brothers have been represented in anionic form of Lord Siva. The temple has many sculptures which juxtapose Saiva saints and Saiva divinities alongside various avatars of lord Vishnu. The themes of the sculptures in the pillars, especially in the Ramalingeshwara temple, have a mix of both Siva and Vishnu puranas. It undoubtedly brings forth an interesting mix of both Saiva and Vaishnava legends within the same temple walls and pillars. A study of the temples, their art and the Saivite philosophy bring out the underlying tensions prevalent in the period and reveals how the Chola rulers through art and philosophy were trying to steer the course of people's preference towards their rule.