

Ardhanarishvara Sculptures from Chalukyas of Badami

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Introduction

The rise of Imperial Western Chalukyas into the power in the middle of the 6th century CE inaugurates a new epoch in the political and cultural history of Karnataka in particular and South India in general, with their capital cities at Vatapi, i.e. Badami; Ayya-Holalu-Halli, i.e. Aihole and Pattadakal, i.e. Red Town. The advent of the Chalukyas ascertained a fine phase and culmination of cave and structural architecture inspired the development and culmination of Indian sculptures, which attained its zenith in the 8th century CE.

The Imperial Western Chalukyas rising in the 6th century CE with their capital at Vatapi are now known as Chalukyas of Badami, the modern name of their ancient capital Vatapi. They held sway over the Deccan over a period of two centuries with firm footing in Karnataka. Before coming to the power, they were the feudatories under the Kadambas of Banavasi. Pulakeshin I of the Chalukyan dynasty defeated Kadamba Krishnavarma II and founded his own kingdom.

The Chalukyas ruled over the Deccan for more than two centuries with their territory roughly extending from Kanchi in Tamilnadu to the bank of river Narmada in Madhya Pradesh and from Orissa in the East to the West coast. The territorial expansion and military exploits of the dynasty started with Pulakeshin I and constructed a strong fortress at Vatapi in CE 543-544,¹ which was surrounded by hills on the three sides.

The Chalukyan rulers were not only great warriors and conquerors but also liberal patrons of religion, art and architecture. They excavated caves and erected

temples at Aihole, Badami, Mahakuta and Pattadakal. Under the royal patronage, these places became great centers of experimentation in caves and temple building. In the art of temple building, the Chalukyan temples evolved the prototype of Southern *vimana* style at Badami and other places, popularly known as 'Chalukyan Style'. In the first stage massiveness and expressiveness in sculptures are outstanding, while in the second stage, graceful plasticism is more conspicuous.

The term 'Chalukyan Sculpture' is delimit since the period spanned is so long and partly as a result of Chalukyan political expansion and the description of what exist at these places of Aihole, Badami, Mahakuta and Pattadakal in the District of Bagalkot (formerly in Bijapur) of Karnataka. The Chalukyan caves and the temples embellished variety of sculptures and reliefs, which are highly developed plastic art of South India.

Sites and its Environs

The modern villages of Badami, Mahakuta, Pattadakal and Aihole are situated in the District of Bagalkot of Karnataka State. These sites are situated on and near the bank of the river Malaprabha, which flows towards north-eastern direction and joins the river Krishna, which is one of the major rivers in Karnataka. The valley covers about twenty kilometers long and 5 kilometers wide area and is partly blocked off by large rocky outcrops, beneath which the villages of Aihole and Badami are fortified by the Chalukyans in order to guard the approaches. The Chalukyan artists exploited the picturesque settings and the richly grained red sandstone, cutting the cave temples leading into the womb like interior of the mountain and erecting the structural temples.

Aihole

Aihole (Lat. 16° - 50' East & Long. 75° - 57' North) is a small village situated in the *taluk* of Hunugunda, district Bagalkot, known as Aryapura, dominated by a steep hill to the southeast provided with fortification. The site is noted for several stone dolmens erected by Megalithic culture people and the Meguti temple, the only dated temple erected in CE 634² by Pulakeshin's court-poet Ravikirti. This

temple is a landmark in the history of Karnataka architecture in general and Jaina architecture in particular. In Aihole alone we can find more than seventy temples and it has rightly been called as 'The Cradle of Indian Temple Architecture' as it represents the best Chalukyan architecture. Some of the important temples are - Huchchimalli, Meguti, Chikki, Lad Khan, Durga, Gaudara Gudi, Konti Gudi, Huchchappayya, Huchchappayya *matha*, Mallikarjuna, Galaganatha, Ravalapadi Cave, Buddhist and Jaina caves, etc.

These caves and temples represent varieties of sculptures of Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, Jaina, Buddhist and composite sculptures such as Shiva-Parvati, Gangadhara, Nandi-*vahana*, Gajasamhara, Nataraja, Vishnu, Varaha, Narasimha, Trivikrama, Ananta, Vishnu on Garuda, Saptamatrikas, Mahishamardini, Ganesha, Karttikeya, Brahma, Harihara, Ardhanarishvara, etc.

Badami

Badami, the capital of Chalukyas established by Pulakeshin I in the middle of the 6th century CE, is a *taluk* headquarters in the district of Bagalkot, identified with ancient *Vatapipura* in the inscriptions³ and in the chronicles of Ptolemy, a Greek traveller. It was under the control of the Kadambas of Banavasi before coming to the power of Chalukyas. Pulakeshin I constructed a strong fortress at Badami in CE 543-44,⁴ which was surrounded by hillocks on three sides with an artificial tank. Four excavations in the sand rock cliffs beneath the south fort constitute one of the most important series of Rock Cut Caves in the Deccan. The lowest one, Cave No.I, is dedicated to Shiva; the Caves No.II & III are dedicated to Vishnu and Cave No.IV is dedicated to Jaina. In between Caves No.II and III, a roughly excavated chamber has a figure of Buddha. Besides caves, Badami is famous for structural temples, namely, Lower Shivalaya, Upper Shivalaya, Malagitti Shivalaya, Bhutanatha group of temples and Lakulisha temple. The caves and temples are dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Jaina, etc. with varieties of sculptures.

After the fall of Chalukyas, Badami was ruled by the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Kalachuris, the Yadavas, the Vijayanagara, the Adilshahis, the Marathas, the Odayaras and finally by the Britishers.

Mahakuta

Mahakuta is situated in the shelter of a grave, deep within the curves of a small hill in the Badami *taluk* of Bagalkot district. The temple building activities gained momentum during Vikramaditya II. The erection of temples of *rekha nagara* style began around the tank in the Mahakuteshvara complex, which consists of a number of temples and small shrines surrounded by a high enclosure wall entered through a gateway on the east. In the middle of the enclosure is a masonry tank fed by a natural spring of fresh water.

Mahakuta was a sacred site of great importance for the Chalukyan rulers and famous for temples of Mahakuteshvara, Sangameshvara and Bananti. These temples depict variety of sculptures of Shiva, Vishnu, etc.

Pattadakal

Pattadakal is a small village situated on the left bank of river Malaprabha in the Hunugunda *taluk* of Bagalkot district, which was a royal commemorative site during the Chalukyan period. The temples at Pattadakal are highly developed and represent the climax of Chalukyan architecture. The temples also provide one of the most striking illustrations in India of the co-existence of different styles and art traditions. The Virupaksha and Mallikarjuna temples are the largest and most richly decorated temples of Chalukyas, unparalleled anywhere in India before the middle of 8th century CE. Some of the other important temples at Pattadakal are Kadasiddheshvara, Galaganatha, Sangameshvara and Kashivishvanatha, which depicts beautiful sculptures of Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, etc.

The Chalukyan caves and temples at Aihole, Badami, Mahakuta and Pattadakal offer interesting details for the study of the development of architectural and iconographic history of Karnataka in particular and South India in general. The Chalukyan sculptors produced interesting variety of sculptures and relief's. The sculptures from Aihole and Badami are the earliest and the sculptures from Pattadakal represent the refined stage of Chalukyas.

Ardhanarishvara Sculptures

Among the composite sculptures created by the Chalukyas of Badami, the Ardhanarishvara ones are very important. The Ardhanarishvara form of Shiva is perhaps an outcome of the conception of the Shakta doctrine that only when combined with Shakti, Shiva is capable of discharging the divine functions. The Puranas narrate many interesting episodes regarding the emergence of this composite form of Shiva. In *Skandapurana*,⁵ it is stated that when Brahma asked Rudra-Shiva to divide himself, the latter divided himself into the male and female forms. The *Matsyapurana*,⁶ *Shivapurana*,⁷ *Lingapurana*,⁸ gives a detailed story of this form of Shiva.

There is a popular story connected with the origin of this form of Shiva, "on a certain occasion when Shiva and Parvati were seated on the top of the Kailasa mountain, the *devas* and *rishis* went there to pay their homage to them. All of them, except *rishi* Bhringi, went round both Shiva and Parvati in their circumambulations and also bowed to both. Whereas *rishi* Bhringi, a fervent devotee of Shiva, ignored goddess Parvati who was a part of Shiva. Parvati became angry and cursed him to become emaciated day after day and he was unable to support himself. Shiva gave him a third leg so as to enable him to attain equilibrium. *Rishi* Bhringi became pleased and danced vigorously with his three legs and praised Shiva for his grace. Parvati became angrier and started performing penance. Shiva, pleased with his consort, granted her wish of being united with his own body. Shiva assumed hermaphrodite form of *Ardhanari* to test the faith of *rishi* Bhringi and to create difficulty for him in circumambulating or bowing to Shiva alone. But undaunted by this impediment, Bhringi assumed the form of a *bhringa* (bee), pierced a hole through the composite body of Shiva and circumambulated Siva alone to the great wonder and admiration of even Parvati, who became reconciled to his vow and bestowed her grace upon the pious *rishi* Bhringi for his steadfastness to his vow."⁹

Iconographic texts, like *Shilparatna* and the *agamic* texts, namely, *Amsumadbhedagama*, *Kamikagama* and *Suprabhedagama* furnish us with elaborate information regarding the formation of the image of Ardhanarishvara.¹⁰ The artistic conception of a purely philosophical idea and as the name indicates, the

form of this image should be half man and half woman. The right half is male, that is, Shiva and the left half is female, that is, Parvati. The male-half should have a *jata-mukuta* on the head, which should be adorned with *chandra*. In the right ear there should be *makara-kundala* or *sarpa-kundala* or ordinary *kundala* and the right half of the forehead should have half of the third-eye on it. The Ardhanarishvara may have two, three, four or sometimes more arms. If there are four arms, one of the right hands should be held in the *abhaya-mudra* and the other should hold the *parashu*, or one hand may be in the *varada-mudra* and the other carry a *shool* or *tanka* and the other arms may be bent or rested upon the head of his *vahana* Nandi. If there are only two arms, the right one should be held in *varada-mudra* or may be *kapala* held in it. The whole composition of the right side should be that of a man. On the right side, the garment should cover the body below the loins upto the knee and material of the garment should be the tiger's skin or silk and there should be *naga-yajnopavita* on the right half of the chest. The right leg should be either straight or sometimes bent and resting upon a *padma-peetha*.

On the left part of Ardhanarishvara, Parvati should be depicted wearing a *karanda-mukuta* or a fine knot of hair well combined. On the forehead of this half, a half-*tilaka* mark, contiguous with the half eye of Shiva should be shown. The left eye should be painted with collyrium. In the left ear, there should be a *kundala*. If the sculpture of Ardhanarishvara has four arms, one of the two left ones is to be bent and rested upon the head of the Nandi of Shiva and the other kept in *kataka* pose, holding a *nilotpala* in it. This hand may keep either a *padma* or a *darpana* or a parrot. The left side should have the bosom of a women with a round well developed breast. This half should be smeared with saffron, draped in multi-coloured silken female cloth covering the body down to the ankles. There should be an anklet on the left ankle. The left leg might be somewhat bent or stand erect upon the *padma-peetha*. The colour of the left half may either be parrot green or dark and should be of pacific appearance.

Gopinatha Rao¹¹ illustrated the sculptures of Ardhanarishvara from rock-cut temple at Badami, Karnataka, Dharmaraja Ratha at Mahabalipuram,

Nagshvaraswami temple at Kumbakonam, Kailasantha temple at Ellora and Bronze figures from Egmore Museum, Madras.

Few sculptures of Ardhanarishvara *murti* are described below:

Ardhanarishvara (Fig.1) depicted on the inner wall of Ravalaphadi Cave, Aihole is standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half of Shiva has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, armlet, wristlet and *dhoti* or tiger skin tied to waist-girdle and the right hand holds *trishool*. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, *hara*, armlet, wristlet, anklet and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. The left hand holds mirror and the left chest is depicted with well developed breast indicating the feminine aspect. This beautifully depicted sculpture is one of the earliest sculpture of Early Chalukyas of Badami.

The right half of the four-armed Ardhanarishvara (Fig.2) sculpture depicted in the inner wall, Cave No.I at Badami has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-kundala*, *naga*



Fig.1 : Ardhanarishvara, inner wall, Ravalaphadi Cave, Aihole



Fig.2 : Ardhanarishvara, inner wall, Cave I, Badami

armlet, wristlet and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The lower right hand resting on the back of Nandi holds *vina* end and the upper right hand holds *parashu*. The left half is Parvati, wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, armlet, wristlet, anklet and *sari* tied to

jewelled waist-girdle. The lower left hand holds upper part of *vina* and the upper left hand holds *padma*. The left half of the chest is depicted with well-developed breast indicating feminine aspect of Parvati. To the left side a lady is depicted standing in *tribhanga* posture with her right hand held in *lola* pose and left hand holds something. She wears *kirita-mukuta* and other ornaments on her body. To the right side is depicted *rishi* Bhringi standing with hands held in *anjali-mudra*. Nandi is shown standing behind the deity with bell ornaments decorated on its body. Flying *Gandharva* couples are depicted on the top. This beautiful sculpture is also one of the earliest sculptures of Early Chalukyas of Badami.

The four-armed Ardhanarishvara (Fig.3) on a pillar bracket, Cave No.III at Badami is depicted standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal.



Fig.3 : Ardhanarishvara, pillar bracket, Cave III, Badami



Fig.4 : Ardhanarishvara, pillar, Durga Temple, Aihole

The right half of Shiva has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *channavira*, *naga-mala*, *naga-armlet*, *wristlet* and *dhoti* tied to *waist-girdle*. The lower right hand holds *fruit* and is kept on the head of a man who is standing with hands held in *anjali-mudra* and the upper right hand holds *parashu*, which is tied with *single-hooded naga*. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundalas*, *armlets*, *wristlets*, *anklet* and *sari* tied to *jewelled waist-girdle*. The lower left hand is held in *katihasta* and the upper left hand holds a *round mirror*. The deity is provided with *siraschakra* at the back of the head. The left chest of the deity is depicted with *well-developed round breast*

indicating *feminine aspect of Parvati*. To the lower left, a *dwarf Gana* is shown with his right hand raised towards Parvati and left hand hanging down. The man shown on lower right must be *Bhringi* standing with hands held in *anjali-mudra*.

A beautiful sculpture of Ardhanarishvara (Fig.4) with four-arms is carved on a pillar in Durga Temple, Aihole. Standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal,

the right half of Shiva has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet*, wristlet and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The lower right hand is placed on the raised right knee and the upper right hand holds *parashu*. The left half of Parvati wears *kiritamukuta*, *kundala*, *hara*, armlet, anklets and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. The lower left hand rests on the head of a female figure and the upper left hand is placed on the well developed left breast. The lady standing in lower left side has her right hand raised up in praise of Parvati and a dwarf *Gana* standing on the lower right side has his left hand raised up in praise of Shiva.

Ardhanarishvara (Fig.5) depicted in a niche (*devakoshtha*), MTC, Mahakuta is standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half of Shiva wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet*, wristlets, single-hooded *naga-mala*, a single-hood *naga* tied between the two thighs and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. A long *trishool* is held in right hand. The left half of Parvati



Fig.5 : Ardhanarishvara in a niche, MTC, Mahakuta

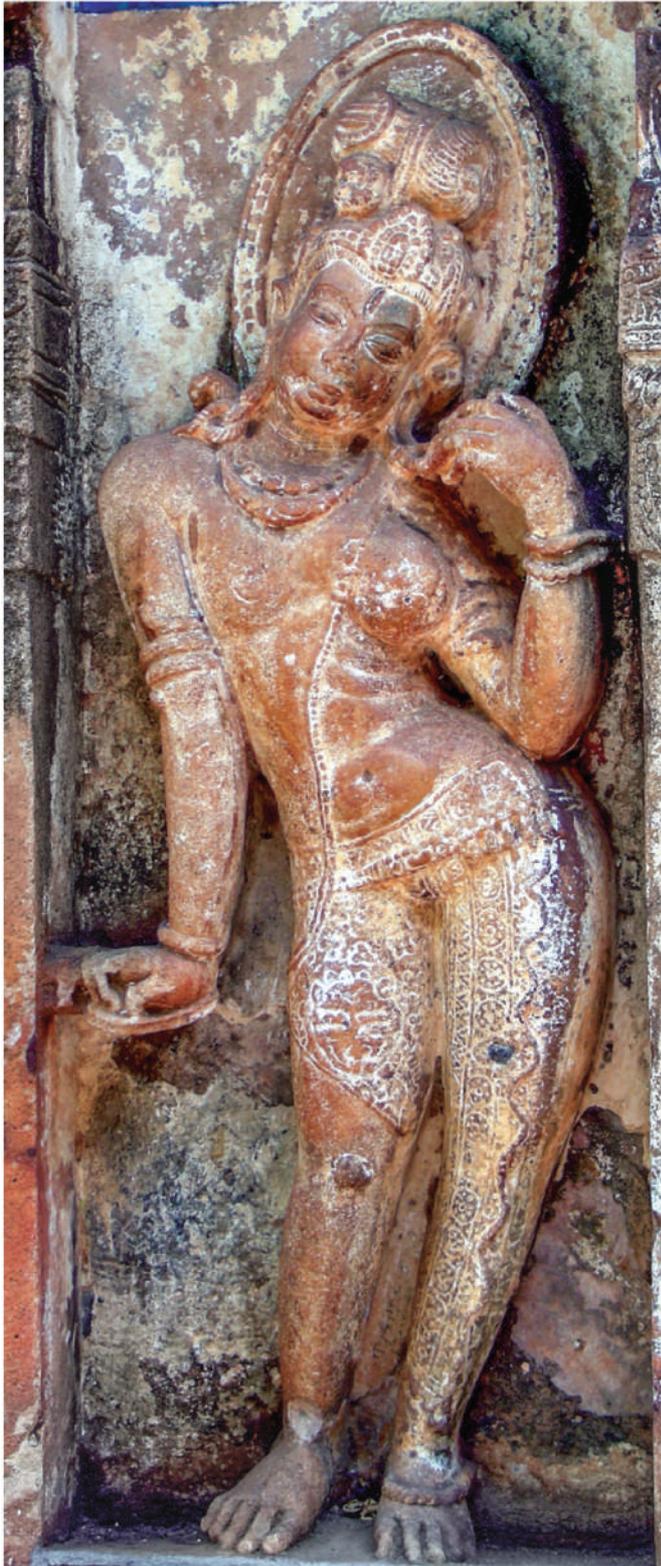


Fig.6 : Ardhanarishvara, in a niche, MTC, Mahakuta

wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, *hara*, armlet, wristlet, anklet and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. The left hand holds *padma* and left chest has a well-developed round breast indicating feminine aspect of Parvati.

Ardhanarishvara sculpture (Fig.6) in another niche (*devakostha*) in MTC, Mahakuta can be seen standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half of Shiva has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet*, wristlet, and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The right hand hangs down and held in *lola* pose. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, armlet, wristlet, anklet and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. She has a well-developed round breast on the left chest indicating her feminine aspect. The deity is provided with *prabhamandala* at the back of the head.

A four-armed Ardhanarishvara (Fig.7) sculpture in yet another *devakostha* of MTC, Mahakuta stands in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half of Shiva has *trinetra*,

wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet*, wristlet, and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The lower right hand is placed on the head of a standing *Gana* and the upper right hand holds a *parashu*. The *Gana* has his right hand held in *lola* pose and left hand little raised to praise Shiva. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, armlet, wristlet, anklet and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. She has a well-developed round breast on the left chest. Her lower left hand hangs down in *lola* pose holding tassels and the upper hand holds a mirror.

Another *devakostha* in MTC, Mahakuta contains a two-armed Ardhanarishvara (Fig.8) standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half is carved with the usual traits of Shiva - *trinetra*, *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*,



Fig.7 : Ardhanarishvara, in a niche, MTC, Mahakuta



Fig.8 : Ardhanarishvara, in a niche, MTC, Mahakuta

yajnopavita, *naga*-armlet, wristlet and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle with the hand hanging downwards and holding a single-hooded *naga*. The left half of Parvati is carved with *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, armlet, wristlet and *sari* tied to waist-girdle with a round well-developed breast. This sculpture is much weather worn-out.

A n o t h e r Ardhanarishvara (Fig.9) figure carved in a *devakostha* at MTC, Mahakuta is seen standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half has *trinetra*, *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga*-armlet, wristlet and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The right hand hanging downwards is

placed on the head of *Gana*. The left half of Parvati is carved with *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, armlet, wristlet, *sari* tied to waist-girdle and a round well-developed breast. The left hand is raised up and rests on the shoulder. This sculpture is crudely finished.

A f o u r - a r m e d Ardhanarishvara (Fig.10) figure depicted in an outer *devakostha*, GTC, Pattadakal stands in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half of Shiva has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet*, wristlet and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The lower right hand is in *vyakhyana-mudra* and the upper right hand holds a single-hooded *naga*. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, *hara*, armlet, wristlet and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. The lower left hand is carved in *katihasta* posture and the upper left hand holds a round mirror. The left chest depicts a well-developed round breast. A *Gana* standing on the right side has his left hand



Fig.9 : Ardhanarishvara, in a niche, MTC, Mahakuta



Fig.10 : Ardhanarishvara, outer niche, Virupaksha Temple



Fig.11 : Ardhanarishvara, *devakoshta*, GTC, Pattadakal

raised to praise Shiva and his right hand rests on his right thigh. The sculpture is beautifully depicted.

Ardhanarishvara (Fig.11) depicted in a *devakoshta*, GTC, Pattadakal stands in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The right half of Shiva has *trinetra*, wears *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet* and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. The lower right hand is carved in *katihasta* pose and the upper right hand holds a *trishool*. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, *hara*, *armlet*, *wristlet* and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. The lower left hand hangs down in *lola* pose and the upper left hand holds a round mirror. The left chest depicts a round breast. The legs of the deity are partly chipped off.

Ardhanarishvara (Fig.12) sculpture placed in a *devakoshta*, GTC, Pattadakal is seen standing in *tribhanga* posture on a pedestal. The



Fig.12 : Ardhanarishvara, *devakoshtha*, GTC, Pattadakal

right leg is bent at the knee and crossed and placed behind the left leg, which is planted firmly on the pedestal. The right half is carved with the usual features, viz. *trinetra*, *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet* and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. Shiva's right hand is placed on the head of Nandi, which is standing behind him. The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta*, *kundala*, *hara*, armlet, wristlet and *sari* tied to jewelled waist-girdle. Her left hand is bent at the elbow and holds a *padma* and the left chest depicts a well-developed round breast. To the right side is depicted a *Gana* seated with hands held in *anjali-mudra*.

A two-armed Ardhanarishvara (Fig.13) exhibited in the Archaeological Museum, Aihole stands in *tribhanga* posture. The right half is Shiva, having *trinetra*, *jata-mukuta*, *naga-kundala*, *hara*, *yajnopavita*, *naga-armlet*, wristlet and *dhoti* tied to waist-girdle. His right hand is held in *lola* pose.



Fig.13 : Ardhanarishvara, Archaeological Museum, Aihole

The left half of Parvati wears *kirita-mukuta* and other usual ornaments on the body. Her left hand is raised and placed on the left shoulder. The left chest depicts a round breast indicating her feminine aspect. The deity is provided with *prabhamandala* at the back of the head and legs are partly broken at the knee. The sculpture is beautifully depicted.

References & Notes

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