

Chapter 2

Brahmanical Divinities in Siam: From Early to Modern Era

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Abstract The relation between India and her neighbouring Southeast Asian countries dates back to prehistoric times. By the fourth–fifth century, there was a clear Indian influence in sociopolitics and culture of different kingdoms of Southeast Asia. India has got a healthy interaction with Siam (present Thailand) since pre-Common Era. The present paper focuses on brahmanical divinities of Siam since the early times. We notice the Indian *trimurti*, i.e. *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, in Siam since the early era. Comparing to other two, we find a large number of *Vishnu* images in different regions of Siam. Apart from the three, we noticed the images of *Krisna*, *Surya*, *Skanda*, *Ganesha*, *Uma* and *Mahisasuramardini* in Siam.

Keywords *Suvarnabhumi* • *Suvarnadvipa* • *Brahma* • *Vishnu* • *Shivalinga* • *Krisna Govardhana* • *Surya* • *Ganesha*

Introduction

The region of Southeast Asia has been called by many names since the pre-Christian era. Sanskrit records referred to it as *Suvarnabhumi* (Pali *Suvarnabhumi*, the Land of Gold) or *Suvarnadvipa* (the Golden Island or Peninsula) (Wheatley 1961, p. 179). According to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, it was *Chryse* (golden) Island, ‘lying not only to the east of the Ganges, but also to the southward of the Chinese Empire’ (Scroff 1912, p. 260). Ptolemy mentioned these regions as *Aurea Cheronesus* (Scroff 1912, p. 259). In modern time, Western scholars and nationalist Indian scholars mentioned these regions as Farther India or Greater India. During the Second World War, we got the name Southeast Asia. Modern Southeast Asia consisted of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore.

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Early Indian Arrival in Ancient Siam: A Caste Profile

The relation between India and her neighbouring Southeast Asian countries dates back to prehistoric times. The earliest literary reference, which can be considered as a source of information for Southeast Asia, occurs in the Ramayana (fourth *canto*) (Scroff 1912, p. 177). The first definite reference to this region occurs in the *Arthasastra* with reference to *Kaleyaka* or a kind of incense that came from *Suvarnabhumi* (Ray 1994, p. 87). The other brahmanic, Buddhist and Jaina literature also referred different regions of Southeast Asia. We find the mention of Southeast Asia in different *Katha* literature also (Sarkar 1985, p. 23). The archaeological evidences substantiated that the connectivity between India and Southeast Asia started from pre-Christian period.

The catalyst of this interaction is no doubt the mercantile community. The fertile soil and mineral wealth of Southeast Asia attracted them. The *Jataka* stories and the *Katha* literature has referred to many stories of sea borne trade of India with the countries of Southeast Asia and sea men of India, who were going beyond the sea to earn more wealth. The archaeological provenance also substantiated the mercantile connection between India and Southeast Asia. Gradually, the mercantile community was accompanied by *brahman* and Buddhist missionaries and *kshatriya* fortune hunters. From this incessant migration of Indian people, it is clear that by the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era, there was a clear Indian influence in every field of maritime as well as continental Southeast Asian society. Pioneer scholar like George Coedes commented that the superior cultural endowments of the immigrants were cognate to the local peoples and therefore readily accepted by them and assured the newcomers of a welcome (Wales 1951, pp. 19, 20).

The issue of Indian influence in Southeast Asian culture attracted the scholars from the second half of the nineteenth century. Renowned anthropologist William Graham Sumner has said that the culture is transmitted and shared also (Marcus 1999 vol. 8, pp. 315–318). We notice this transmission of culture between India and her neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Unlike other Southeast Asian countries, India developed healthy relation with Siam (present Thailand) since pre-Christian era. The present paper focuses on the brahmanical divinities of Siam since the early times to the modern era. The introduction of brahmanical cultural pattern was a gradual process.

First, so we must look into the subject how brahmanical influence took place in the society of ancient Southeast Asian countries as well as the Siamese society. Prof. N.A.K. Sastri opined that the colonies of resident Indian merchants, intermarrying locally, became the basic transmitters of Indian culture. Indian liaison was also enhanced by the presence of adventurous *kshatriyas* who married into local ruling families and subsequently procured the *brahman* priests to authenticate their political authority (Sastri 2003, p. 18). The introduction of the brahmanical culture was a continuing process. It began with the arrival of a few merchants who later became more numerous and were accompanied by *brahmans*. Such contacts, beginning at an unknown but relatively remote period, were first substantiated

archaeologically in the second to third century A.D. In my opinion, the foundation of ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms, the transformation of a simple commercial settlement into an organized political state came about in two different ways. Either an Indian imposed himself as chief over the indigenous population that was more or less strongly imbibed with Indian elements, or a native chief adopted the civilization of the foreigners, strengthening his power becoming 'Indianized'. In this regard, George Coedes put forward with his hypothesis that the *brahmins* were welcomed by the native chiefs to authenticate their power and veneer (Coedes 1968, pp. 14–35). A Chinese text of the fifth century A.D., states that at Touen Siun, a dependency of Funan believed to have been situated at the Malay Peninsula, there were 'five hundred families of merchants from India and more than a thousand Brahmins from India. The local people practice the doctrine of the brahmins and give them daughters in marriage' (Wales 1951, p. 21). According to tradition, since the fifth–sixth century the first group of brahman priests went to Siam and they became the first settlers in Siam. Though Buddhism played an important role in early Siamese culture, brahmanism had a vital influence upon the monarchical system. The main agents of transmission of brahmanical culture to Southeast Asia were *brahman* priests, sages and other literary persons. These persons '... were believed to have at his disposal the divine omnipotence to maintain the world order and to control the destiny of mankind' (Cressey 1963, p. 258). Coedes in *The Empire of the South Seas* wrote that 'The Hindus seem to have been the first to feel the attraction of the transgangetic countries. Their expansion towards the east began a little before the commencement of the Christian era, and carried Indian religions and usage of Sanskrit up to the coast of Annam as well as to Bali and Borneo; in origin it was a commercial expansion' (Coedes 1943, p. 147).

The initial supposition was thus that cultural interchange occurred only in one direction, with Indian *brahmins*, coming to Southeast Asia and bringing the people of the area into a wider universe of common symbols and attachments. These *brahmins*, with their ability to read and write, brought Indian religious texts which they applied to give the developing states an Indian framework for their statecraft (Hall 1976, p. 3). When we turn to Siam proper, as distinct from the peninsula, we have to recall a fact which is very interesting. In *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*, Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray states that 'In Siam, which is professedly Buddhist, finds of brahmanical deities in considerable numbers testify to the existence of a large brahmanical population' and 'brahmanism preceded Buddhism in that country' (Ray 1932, pp. 4, 5).

Perhaps it was true that Buddhism was the trader's religion and brahmanism and, on the other hand, could be transmitted only by high-caste immigrants, *Kshatriyas* or *brahmins*. Brahmanism authenticated the royal authority through the system of divine kingship and achieved the priestly intervention. Apart from the indispensable services of brahman advisers at coronations, they assisted the rulers in the development of administration. Buddhism, by contrast, could contribute little to political authority. Brahmanism was unable to attract the degree of popular acceptance so widely, whereas the Buddhism was able to attract the common people.

Early Royal Patronage of Brahmanism

Dvaravati civilization is known as first historical civilization. Between seventh to eleventh century C.E., the area which is now central and western Thailand was occupied by the Mons and the strong hand of Funan was removed. The Mons developed the Dvaravati civilization. Although Dvaravati kings patronized Buddhist temples and no doubt followed the Buddha's teaching, it is believed that they have taken up brahmanical religions' customs and state conceptions (Saraya 1999, pp. 208–213). *Brahmans* have played a great role in the court especially in the brahmanical rites, such as *Rajasuya* or the royal consecration. They also introduced the Indian concept of state and kingship to the Dvaravati monarchy (Hopking 1971, pp. 92–101). Through the magical power of the *Rajasuya*, or royal consecration, the king was imbued with divine power. Objects with ritual purposes carved on stone tablets depicting a series of royal insignia were discovered from Nakhon Pathom and Dong Khon, Chainat Province. The Khmer rulers traced their origins to the marriage of a Naga princess and a visiting *brahman* priest. Sanctioned by brahmanical ritual, Khmer chieftains adopted the name of Indian gods that were linked to the suffix *Isvara*, a Khmer word meaning 'ruler' (Gosling 2004, p. 36). In contrast to Dvaravati's brief royal inscriptions inscribed on medals that referred only to unnamed 'lord[s] of Dvaravati', Khmer inscriptions recorded not only the name of the ruler and his forebears, but linked him to the gods as well (Gosling 2004, p. 36).

'As the evidence is obscure, it is not possible to evaluate the influences of Hindu traditions on the life of the Mons. The Khmer period gives more definite evidence of Hindu tradition in ancient Siam' (Briggs 1951, pp. 230–249). Between 1283 and 1287 C.E. Ramakhamhaeng of Sukhothai conquered the Mons of the Menam valley and substituted Thai rule for Khmer over an area which included much of the upper Mekong region as well. The majority of his subjects were Mons and Khmers. There is no doubt that from the Khmer and Mon influence, the Sukhothai people worshipped brahmanical deities and sculpted such images, though the kings mainly patronized Buddhism. It is worth mentioning that from this era, Theravada Buddhism (Hinayana) became the 'national' religion of Siam, but the role played by the *brahmans* to support the monarchy is most important. The coronation ceremony of the king was performed by *brahman* priests and the rituals were also brahmanical.

During the Ayutthaya era, contact with brahmanical beliefs and practices was further increased. This is evident from the inscription of King Boromaraja I dated 1361 C.E. that it was essential on the part of the king to have knowledge of the Vedas and astronomy (Desai 1980, p. 23). During this time, brahmanical influence was so much intensified that gradually different places of Siam came to be famous after Sanskrit names. In this circle of popular beliefs and superstitions, an important position has been assigned to the brahmanical elements. As a result of Thai–Khmer conquest, many Khmer officials and the *brahmans* of Cambodia migrated and brought brahmanical faith with them (Desai 1980, p. 13). The chief among the

brahmanical gods in Siam were Phra Phrom (Brahma), Phra Isuan (Shiva), Phra Narai (Narayana or Vishnu), Phra In (Indra) and Phra Barun (Varuna). The celestial denizens from ancient Indian mythology are also present in their religious belief. Among these, Naga and Garuda take important place. The people of Siam associated Naga with the rainfall and describe it by the traditional epithet ‘The Guardian of the Aquatic World’ (Desai 1980, p. 26).

After five decades ruling of Ayutthaya, in 1782 Chao Phya Chakri founded the present ruling house the Chakri dynasty. The Chakri kings have always called themselves as Rama after the great hero-king of the Indian mythology Ramayana. We can understand easily the influence of Ramayana (in Thai the Ramakien) upon the Siamese ruling family and common people, as Indian mythology suggested Rama is one of the incarnations of Vishnu and Vishnu is the most important brahmanical divinity in Siam. Present days also ‘sacred water’ was collected from all the religious places from every district of Thailand for final presentation to the king by the chief *brahman* Priest at Wat Suthat of Thailand (Gupta 1999, p. 114).

Brahmanical Deities: Tradition to Modernity

In Indian brahmanical tradition, there are three Supreme Gods each of whom personifies one major aspect of the cosmic cycle: they are Brahma, the creator; Vishnu or Narayana, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer. We find a large number of Vishnu images in different regions of Siam. It is observed that since the Sukhothai era we find the local habitants came to regard their kings as embodiment of Vishnu (or Rama, an incarnation or *avatara* of Vishnu). The names of the Siamese kings substantiate this fact. Apart from Vishnu, Shiva in both anthropomorphic and phallus status, Brahma, Surya, Skanda, Ganesha, Uma and Mahisasuramardini are found. Anthropomorphic images of Shiva are very rare. Usually, he was worshipped in his phallus form, with some reaching monumental size. We also notice images of celestial denizens such as Yaksha, Kinnari, Naga, Garuda and animal like bull (Nandi). Boisselier mentioned different school of sculptures in Siam since early historical period: they are early Hinduized images; the Dvaravati school; the Srivijaya school; the Lopburi school; the Sukhothai school; the school of Lan Na or Chieng Sen; the Ayutthaya school and the school of Thonburi and Bangkok.¹

The Vishnu image of Chaiya or Jaiya in Peninsular Siam is the earliest brahmanical sculpture in Siam as well as Southeast Asia. It is a four-armed Vishnu in *samapadasthanaka* posture, featuring an arrangement of his requisite attributes that is distinctive to pre-Gupta models (O’Connor 1972, p. 29). The posterior left hand is missing, the anterior left hand holds a conch shell (*sankha*) on the hip, the posterior right hand holds a heavy club (*gada*) and the anterior right hand appears to

¹Art historians like Boisselier (1975), Krairiksh (1977) and Gosling (2004) mentioned the Thai sculptures in these different sections.

be in *abhayamudra*. As the statue represents Vishnu, the attribute in the missing hand must have been either the lotus (*padma*), the round symbol of the earth (*bhu*) or the discus (*cakra*). The figure wears a tall mitre. We find this type of mitre in later Khmer brahmanical statues. Piriya Krairiksh suggests Vasudeva-Krishna or Vishnu image from Chaiya dated to the early fourth century C.E. (Krairiksh 2012, pp. 100, 101). A number of Vishnu images are found in early Siam, majority from the southern and eastern parts of the country. Archaeology also establishes the presence of Vishnu and Shiva worship in southern and eastern parts of early Siam.

It is noticed that a number of stone images of Vishnu, datable from the fifth to the seventh century, have been reported from the major Dvaravati sites such as Pong Tuk, U Thong, Lopburi, Sri Thep and Sri Mahasot. Four-armed stone Vishnu found from Pong Tuk District, Kanchanaburi Province; U Thong, Suphun Buri Province, Prachinburi Province and Lopburi Province.

The school of Si Thep achieved a kind of synthesis of the sculptural styles of Dvaravati, Srivijaya and Lopburi (Boisselier 1975, p. 104). The sculptures found there are essentially brahmanic. On both stylistic and technical grounds, it does not appear earlier than the eighth or ninth century. The brahmanic workshop in Si Thep has been very active and they have left a great quantity of images inspired both by Saivism and Vishnuism. Apart from stone Vishnu we notice Krishna Govardhana (Fig. 2.1) and Surya image.

The Bang Wang Phai inscription confirms the cultural influence of India and Chen la in Si Thep and corresponds with other objects of worship found in the area, for example, a *Shivalinga*, the figure of a female deity, a figure of a door-guard (*dvārapāla*) and a depiction of the sun which resembles ancient Khmer sculpture. Other stone sculptures have also been found, mostly in form of icons of brahmanical divinities. A prominent figure of Narai (Narayana or Vishnu), for example, is depicted wearing an octagonal headdress. A bas-relief on a gold plate depicts Narai standing in the *tribhanga* or contrapposto posture (Dhida 1999, p. 132). Just south of Si Thep, at Phra Ngam cave relief dating from sometime between the sixth and eighth centuries shows a *pralambapadasana* image of the Buddha in *vitarka mudra*. It is accompanied by a four-armed Vishnu, Shiva and a *ṛsi* or *brahman* priest (Brown 1996, pp. 30, 31). The cult of Shiva at Si Thep is attested to almost solely by *linga*. In addition to a badly damaged statue, possibly a Ganesha image, several images of Surya are worth mentioning. Represented by bust figures, these Suryas all wear a polygonal mitre. One of the images of Si Thep is Surya (Fig. 2.2) with beard which is a unique sculpture.

The brahmanic statuary of Srivijaya school attracted the connoisseurs and historians. In his *Le domaine archeologique du Siam*, published in 1909, Lajonquiere wrote of the famous Vishnu of Takua Pa, 'Of all the statues that I have recorded in this group [the group he designated as *groupe hindoe non Combodgien*], this is certainly the one that how the greatest purity in its form and greatest art in its modeling' (Boisselier 1975, p. 97). The Vishnu from Takua Pa (Fig. 2.3) is a very impressive statue, well over six feet in height. The generally accepted date for it is the sixth century C.E. (Dupont 1942, pp. 229, 230). Dupont stated that the Takua Pa image could be directly attached to the Pallava style of southern India, and

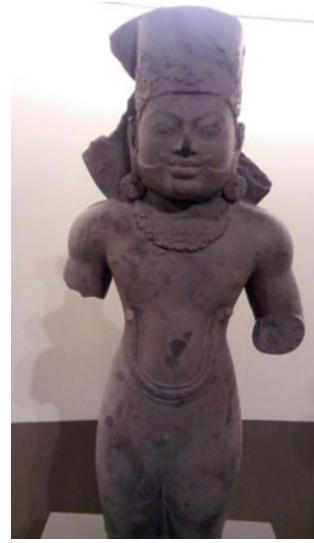
Fig. 2.1 Krisna Govardhana (stone), sixth–eighth century. Si Thep, Petchabun district (now at Bangkok National Museum)



suggested that its presence on the isthmian tract was due to the accidents of trade rather than to the development of any artistic tradition that could be identified as distinctive to Peninsular Siam (O'Connor 1972, p. 29). Peninsular sculptors created an image of Vishnu at Takua Pa in the seventh or eighth century which is regarded as one of the greatest achievements of stone sculptures to be found on the mainland of Southeast Asia (O'Connor 1972, p. 55). Takua Pa Vishnu appears to be purely of Indian origin. It may be that the Manigramam, a Tamil merchant guild, was forced to build its own brahmanical shrine, and bring its statue from India or have them made by an Indian sculptor at Takua Pa (O'Connor 1972, p. 58).

The Vishnu images from Dong Si Mahapot (Fig. 2.4) in Prachinburi District have similarities with Vishnu from Wieng Sra, southern Thailand.

Fig. 2.2 Surya (stone), sixth–eighth century. Si Thep, Petchabun District (now at Bangkok National Museum)



In Peninsular Thailand we notice Vishnu images mostly belong to the school of Srivijayan art. Two from Wieng Sra, one from Sating Pra, one from Petchaburi (Fig. 2.5), one from Si chon and one from Surat Thani Province are worth mentioning. Petchaburi Vishnu preserves in its attire something of the tradition of the archaic Vishnu from Chaiya (Boisselier 1975, p. 104).

Two small Vishnu sculptures found at Wieng Sra are related to the Chola tradition. A triad of stone images—a standing Vishnu and two kneeling figures, the Sage Markandeya and the Goddess Bhudevi—has been found on the banks of Takua Pa river. A standing Ganesha from Dong Si Mahapot, central Thailand of eighth century can be found in the National Museum Bangkok.

Within the precinct of Wat Mahadhatu at Nagara Sri Dharmaraja (Nakhon Si Thammarat), there is a most interesting museum. Among the objects on display in it, there is a stone sculpture that bears a very close resemblance in style and iconography to the Chaiya Vishnu (Fig. 2.6). The image has small round faces with button-like eyes; both are four-armed figures with the posterior arms missing. In the remaining, left hand of each has a conch shell against the hip. The remaining right hand of the second figure, which has the palm up and the fingers extended at hip level, must have held either the lotus or a symbol of the earth (O'Connor 1972, p. 25).

Other brahmanic sculptures like *Shivalinga* have some relation to the art of the Srivijaya period. Shiva its regarded Shiva as the Supreme God and made images representing Lord Shiva in the figure of *Shivalinga*, symbolizing the male genital organ as fertility. We find *Shivalinga* (Fig. 2.7) in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province in southern Thailand. Piriya Krairiksh states that Shiva as a god is actually never represented anthropomorphically before the seventh century. We notice a fine Shiva



Fig. 2.3 Vishnu (stone), seventh century. Takua Pa District (now at Bangkok National Museum)

in the Indonesian style from Sating Pra. In Wieng Sra, we found a Vatuka Bhairaba (Shiva in one of his terrible aspects), a terrifying nude four-armed figure leaning on a dog which is supposed to be his mount.

A large Skanda sitting on his mount peacock is now in the Ayutthaya Museum. According to Lajonquiere, this sculpture originated in the Peninsular Thailand. There is no doubt that this is the finest Skanda image from Southeast Asia (Boisselier 1975). This remarkable statue wears the same long garment as the Peninsular Vishnus. The presence of this Skanda suggests that there may have developed a genuine brahmanic style not limited to the depiction of Vishnu alone.

One sculpture of a Surya can be found at Chaiya. The image is very clumsy and ill proportioned, but it has a smiling face. It dates presumably tenth or eleventh century. Among the brahmanical deities, the statuettes of Kubera (also known as Vaisravna), a fat young god with a purse in his hand, seated on a throne in front of

Fig. 2.4 Vishnu (stone), sixth–eighth century. Si Mahapot, Prachinburi District (now at Bangkok National Museum)



which are placed seven bags containing the traditional seven treasures, seem to have been especially popular. He was famous as the god of wealth and was often associated with Sri, the goddess of Prosperity and Fortune. Kubera and Sri were honoured both by Buddhist and brahmanists. Many terracotta figurines bear on one side a scene showing the anointment of Sri and on the other image of Kubera (Boisselier 1975).

We should mention three more images from the region of Dong Si Mahapot. A very large Ganesha, exceptional for its size, is under consideration. Unfortunately, the image is shattered into many pieces. Together with a small statue in the seated *lalitasana* position, now in the Sonkhla Museum, it is one of the very few representations of Ganesha that can be assigned definitely to this period. We

Fig. 2.5 Vishnu (stone), sixth–eighth century. Wat Tho, Petchaburi District (now at Bangkok National Museum)



notice a large Mahisasuramardini, standing on the head of a buffalo demon. The bust of an unidentified female figure with a round face presumably belongs to the same series.

Brahmanical sculptures in Peninsular Siam from the ninth to the eleventh century are dominated by South Indian styles. The few images available for study are so close in style to known Indian examples of late Pallava and early Chola art that they seem to have made by South Indian artist, either on the Peninsular or in India. This is an unexpected phenomenon, since the brahmanical sculptors of the Peninsula had slowly developed both a technical mastery of their medium and a stylistic vocabulary which reflected local and regional, not Indian, preoccupations (O'Connor 1972, p. 52).

Fig. 2.6 Vishnu (stone), fifth–sixth century. Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat (now at NST National Museum)



Khmer gods provided new identities with Hindu names and characteristics. By the late sixth century, the Khmer in the Lower Mekong were producing fine brahmanical images similar to those that were being made on the Peninsula. Images of Vishnu, like their peninsular prototypes, were monumental, powerful and hieratic and were adorned with same tall mitred headdress. Vishnu was sometimes combined with Shiva to form composite images known as Harihara (Gosling 2004, p. 36). Harihara is the god that combined the two main brahmanic gods, Shiva and Vishnu, into a single image by including the distinctive symbolic features: the four-armed aspect, conch shell and disc symbolizing Vishnu, and the third eye on the forehead and the snake as the brahmanical sacred thread or *yajnopavita*

Fig. 2.7 Shivalinga (stone), eighth–ninth century. Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat (now at NST National Museum)



representing Shiva. We notice fine sculptures of Harihara (Fig. 2.8) in Khmer, Srivijaya as well as in Sukhothai school of art.

It was Shiva more than any other Indian gods who blended most intimately with the Khmer's ancient customs and beliefs. In India, Shiva was thought to control the cosmological universe from his abode on the lofty mountain Kailasa, and mountains for the Khmers were already sacred. In Mueang Phaniat Chantaburi, Prasat Khao Noi, Prasat Muang Phai had the trace of the Cambodian culture. Late seventh century, Khmer image of Vishnu was in the Dong Si Mahapot tradition. The exceptionally wide shoulders and the pronounced musculature of the torso result in an architectonic quality typical of Cambodian images (Gosling 2004, p. 37). Prasat Khao Noi also had Vishnu images. There is a superb sculpture of Indra mounted on



Fig. 2.8 Harihara (bronze), eighth–ninth century. Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat (now at NST National Museum)

Airabata (Fig. 2.9) in the Prachinburi National Museum. This sculpture is a fine example of Khmer school of art.

The sculpture of reclining Vishnu is another unique example of Khmer art. Khmer-influenced sculptures in Siam can be divided into three periods: seventh to ninth century, tenth to early thirteenth century and thirteenth–fourteenth century C.E. Sandstone and bronze both were used to produce statues and images in Khmer culture. Among the most important images belonging to the first period is a headless stone image of a female divinity; probably Shiva’s consort Uma, found at Aranya Prathet in Prachinburi Province. Examples are found from all the subsequent periods of Khmer and Khmer-influenced art in Siam until the thirteenth century, and they confirm closely in style and iconography to contemporary lintels from Cambodia. Their subject matter is both brahmanical and Buddhist. The official art of Khmer period, with its brahmanical Gods and creatures of brahmanical



Fig. 2.9 Lintel depicting Indra mounted on Airabata. Khmer school of Art, Prachinburi National Museum

mythology reflects the modes of the Khmer capital. Bronze figures of Viswakarman, the craftsman of Gods, presided over the work of architects and sculptors. His hands hold indistinct objects, presumably instruments of crafts. The illustration of brahmanical lesser gods such as Garuda (part bird and part human, a mythical creature), Ananta (five-headed snake on which Vishnu lies on the ocean of eternity), the Makara (mythical sea monster combining features of a crocodile and a dolphin), the Kala (the round demon face) and the Hamsa (goose) were noticed in Khmer sculpture.

Two bronze Vishnu sculptures of Lopburi period (thirteenth–fourteenth century A.D.) are kept in National Museum in Bangkok. One bronze Vishnu held a *cakra* (disc) in upper right hand, a lotus in lower right hand, a *sankha* or conch shell in lower left hand, and object in upper left hand is lost. Another Lopburi style Vishnu mounted on Garuda holds the usual attributes. Lopburi also possess some Khmer monuments. The two well-known temples are Wat Mahathat and P’ra Prang Sam Yot (the temples of the three stupas). The second temple appears brahmanical. The three towers seem to depict the brahmanical trinity (*trimurti*) of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

In Sukhodaya era, the Buddhist kings had subjects of brahmanical faith; in particular, they had brahmin advisors, who needed temples and images. A mid-fourteenth-century inscription refers to the installation of images of Shiva and Vishnu in the Brahmin temple. The two images were made of bronze. Sukhothai king Luthai commissioned religious images to sanctify his monastery. *Mondop* or image houses appear to have been introduced during Luthai’s reign and in the Mango Grove Monastery compound. He built two large cubicle edifices, one for the Buddha image and one for two images of brahmanical gods Shiva and

Vishnu. Two statues now kept in Bangkok National Museum are generally identified as those having once been enshrined *Devalayamahakshetra*, Luthai's brahmanical shrine (Gosling 2004, p. 37). A bronze statue of Shiva and his consort Uma, now preserved in National Museum Bangkok, is among the finest example of Sukhodaya art of a non-Buddhist nature. We found a tower of the Sukhodaya era where an image of Indra is found along with six deities, praying to a Buddha image. Despite the presence of a Buddha image, the temple has been regarded as brahmanical in its architectural design (Gosling 2004, p. 38). The Sukhothai Vishnu and Shiva figures are magnificent. They are nearly two metres tall, dressed in royal attire, with tiered crowns, elaborate necklaces and three banded bracelets. The figures are truly artistic. The faces of the images are oval, broad, rounded shoulders and narrow waists rendered in smoothly curved lines. Another headless brahmanic deity discovered from San Ta Pa Deng dated twelfth century, preserved in the National Museum, Bangkok (Boisselier 1975, p. 127).

Coedes and Griswold proposed that the statuary of the early Ayutthaya era should be designated as belonging to the U thong style in honour of Ramadhipati I, the founder of Ayutthaya who before his coronation was known as the Prince of U thong (Griswold 1960, pp. 161, 162). Ayutthayan sculptors had not created many brahmanical sculptures. Some of the brahmanical sculptures were strikingly stylized and surprisingly realistic; but all of them were full of verve and vitality (Boisselier 1975, p. 171). Beginning in the eighteenth century, an influence from South India also felt in the art of Ayutthaya, though it may have been transmitted by way of the peninsula together with Cambodia. Among the sculptures, the most outstanding is a huge Shiva of 2.8 metres tall now preserved in the Bangkok National Museum. His costume is intricately wrought in multiple pleats covered by a long leaf-like ornament and with a *naga* crossing his chest diagonally. He has the third eye. He wears a mitre and a crown on the forehead. He wears jewellery in upper and lower arms along with a thick necklace, earring and ornaments in both feet. Surprisingly, the image has beard. Though executed locally from Indian models, which were rather freely interpreted, these images obviously exerted no influence outside the brahmanic milieu. The most interesting of them are the dancing figures of Shiva and those of Sri. The finest Sri, now in the Bangkok National Museum, a large statue in Indian dress, is a work of genuine artistry; it stands out distinctly the rest of Ayutthayan sculptures (Boisselier 1975, p. 178). Lesser deities such as Yaksha and Kinnari and animal figures both in real and myth are found in Siam. A bull (Nandi) figure of Ayutthaya period is preserved in the National Museum, Bangkok.

In Rattanakosin or Bangkok era, the sculptors put plenty of effort in sculpting brahmanical images. King Rama V undertook the creation of several bronze brahmanical deities. The iconography was inspired by the *Tamradevarupa*, a brahmanical iconological treatise written during the reign of King Rama III as a guide for artists. Of the many decorative sculptures, the most outstanding are the 152 marble bas-reliefs of scenes from the Ramakien created during the reign of Rama III to decorate the base of Wat Chatpun. Each panel represents a different episode from the Ramakien, the version of Ramayana. It has been suggested that these Ramakien panels have been done during the later Ayutthayan era, but

following the view of Prince Damrong, it seems safe to regard them as one of the prime masterpieces of the reign of Rama III (Boisselier 1975, pp. 189, 190). We found Rama murals in Wat Phra Keo, Chapel Royal of Emerald Buddha in Bangkok also. We find images of Brahma and Vishnu in Wat Bovoranibies Vihara. These were also the evidences of the peaceful correlation of brahmanism and Buddhism. In Ayutthaya and early Chakri times Triyambvay Tripavay ceremony was performed at Devasthan Bosth Brahmana, the brahmanic temple erected by King Phra Buddhayosfachulalof. There were three separate temple buildings, one for Shiva, one for Ganesha and one for Vishnu. The brahmanic images further illustrate the scope of Rama III's patronage and the importance of his initiative in the field of art. While the brahmanic art of the later Ayutthaya period was divided between two general tendencies, one Khmerizing and more or less a continuation of the Lopburi school, the other inspired by the iconography of South India, the Bangkok school created an original and unique brahmanic art (Boisselier 1975, p. 188).

In the twenty-first century also, we notice Hindu² temples predominated in Buddhist Thailand. Nowadays also all over the Thailand, we find modern sculptures of Phra Phrom (Lord Brahma), Phra Narai (Vishnu) and Phra Pikanesvara (Lord Ganesha). These deities are worshipped with high reverence. At present, there are four Hindu temples in Bangkok. Sri Maha Mariamman Temple is the oldest among the Hindu temples in Bangkok (Gupta 1999, p. 98). It is said that in 1870 A.D., the Tamil community of Bangkok, who started migrating to Siam or Thailand, purchased a plot of land for building the temple with the help and assistance of the local people. The present site of the temple is on Silom Road. The migration of Tamilians paved the way for the rapid spread of the ancient Dravidian culture and civilization in Siam. The influence of Hindu culture, customs and tradition found their way into the fabric of the social life of the people of the Siam. It is said that the ancient and the most holy brahmanic Vedic book of Siam was written in the ancient Tamil script and this is still available in the Siamese Brahmin temple in Bangkok. In 1872, King Chulalongkorn came to India and on his return he gifted a set of glass lamps to the temple as a token of friendship between India and Siam. The shrine of Goddess Mariamman became a place of worship for all including the Siamese. In 1911, the temple was renovated. Gradually, the idols of Hindu gods and goddesses were brought from India and installed with due solemnity and reverence in the temple. Images included Lord Ganesha, Lord Subramaniam and Lord Krisna. In 1953, a huge image of Lord Buddha was consecrated in the temple premises with a view to making it a place of worship for the Hindus and Buddhists alike.

Hindu Dharma Sabha Mandir is commonly called Vishnu Temple (Gupta 1999, p. 99). It is located about 10 km from Phaurat market. Earlier, all the Hindus used to visit this temple, but after the construction of the Dev Samaj Mandir, the Punjabi Hindus have stopped regularly visiting this temple. The main idol in this temple is

²Here, the term 'Hindu' is used in a broad cultural sense meaning the civilization that developed towards the east of the Indus or Sindhu rivers.

Lord Krisna. There are also idols of other goddesses. Hindus of this country are used to celebrate the Holi festival in this temple.

Dev Samaj Mandir is the third Hindu temple built by Indians currently living in Bangkok. In this temple, the idols and images of all the Hindu gods can be seen. In 1981, Pandit Sri Keshar Das Sastri published a book entitled *Dev Mandir Darshan* in which he explained the significance of all the gods placed in this temple. This temple is known as the Radha Krisna Temple as the idols of Radha and Krisna are the main attractions. Sri Krisna is regarded as the Supreme God of Truth, omnipresent and Supreme Lord whose power is Radha. There are six more idols in the temple. They are idols of Buddha, Saraswati (Goddess of Supreme Knowledge), Hanuman (power of devotion and strength), Ganesha, Shivalingam and the Surya. As one climbs the right-hand staircase towards the second floor, one finds an engraved picture in marble on the wall. The title of the picture is *Mahabharata ka YudhSthal*. The pictures show the Kauravas on the left-hand side and the Pandavas on the right. Between the two is the chariot with Lord Krisna holding charge of the chariot and Arjuna standing behind him dressed as a warrior. Hindu festivals such as Shivaratri and Navaratri are celebrated in this temple.

Ram Nayan Mandir is a small temple as compared to the other three temples. The temple is located in the Petchaburi area of Thonburi, about 2 km from Phaurat. The temple is named after the person who was responsible for its construction. Its main deity is God Shiva in *linga* form.

On 26 February 1984, the India Thai Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok presented an idol of Lord Vishnu to the Governor of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration who received the idol on behalf of the Prime Minister of Thailand. The image has been installed in an open space in the park in the front of the Dev Samaj Temple and the place is very near the Giant Swing and the Thai Hindu Temple. It was presented in the commemoration of Rattanakosin Bicentennial year, celebrated in 1982. There is a fine sculpture of Vishnu mounted on Garuda (Fig. 2.10) in front of the Hotel Intercontinental, remind us the influence of Khmer art in Thailand.

The Erawan Shrine is a Hindu shrine in Bangkok, where a statue of Phra Phrom, the Siamese representation of Hindu god Brahma, has been consecrated. The shrine is located by the Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel, Bangkok. The hotel's construction was delayed by a series of mishaps, including cost overruns, injuries to labourers and loss of a shipload of Italian marble intended for the building. An astrologer advised building the shrine to counter the negative influences. The Brahma statue was designed and built by the Department of Fine Arts and enshrined on 9 November 1956. The hotel's construction, thereafter, proceeded without further incident.

Last, we discuss about Wat Arun or Temple of Dawn. It is a Buddhist temple in the Yai District of Bangkok, in Thonburi on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. The temple derives its name from the Hindu God Aruna. This temple has existed since the Ayutthaya times. Though a Buddhist temple, the central prang is topped with a seven-pronged trident, referred to by many sources as the Trident of Shiva. Over the second terrace are four statues of the Hindu God Indra riding on



Fig. 2.10 Vishnu mounted on Garuda in front of Hotel Intercontinental, Bangkok

Erawan. The central prang symbolizes Mount Meru of the Hindu cosmology. The satellite prang are devoted to the Wind God Phra Phai. The demons at the entranceway are from the Ramakien.

Conclusion

There is a debate regarding the characterization of Southeast Asian culture, whether the culture is totally dominated by Indian influence or it has an indigenous influence only. The nationalist historians of India and also a section of Western scholars put

stress on Indianization theory. For this, Southeast Asia was referred to as 'Farther India' or 'Greater India'. Coedes (1968) proposed two periods of Indianization, a time span of five centuries (roughly middle of first century to the middle of sixth century). It was thought that pre-Indianized Siam was a barren land that provided not a single local resistance to the seeds of change that foreign immigrants planted on Southeast Asian soils as they arrived continuously from their native lands (Gosling 2004, p. 15). However, despite borrowing, Southeast Asians rarely became carbon copies of their mentors. They took ideas they wanted from outsiders, adapted them to their own indigenous values and institutions and creating the process of a synthesis.

Scholars like H.G. Quatrich Wales put stress on 'local genius'. By the term 'local', he simply meant pre-Indian (Wales 1951, p. 17). Later Mabbett (1997), Casparis (1983) and other scholars have questioned the entire notion of 'Indianization'. Brown questioned how Indian art and culture so thoroughly influenced those of Southeast Asia. He suggested that the Indian civilization lay on the top of the indigenous Southeast Asian cultures like a thin flaking crust, a mere scratch on which would reveal the real culture; it was a healthy counterbalance to the idea of 'further India', but in no way explains the depth, to which Indian culture was formative to the cultures of Southeast Asia (Brown 1999, p. 5). Here one question may arise, whether the early brahmanical sculptures are a copy of Indian images in the sense of duplication or the sculptures made by a local artisan in a distinct Southeast Asian style? According to Brown, 'We can almost completely rule out that there were Indian artists, at least of any number, working in Southeast Asia, simply because we do not have Indian sculpture; Indian artists, whether in India or Southeast Asia, would produce identical sculptures. Nor do we have imported Indian sculpture of any quality found in Thailand ... It is still a mystery as to how Indian artistic styles and iconographies are so thoroughly reflected in art from Thailand without models and without copies' (Brown 1999, pp. 4, 5).

However, archaeological, linguistic and art historical research has begun to discover ancient cultures of Siam that existed prior to the introduction of Indian cultural concepts. According to Gosling, '... local people rather than foreign visitors who determined the course of Thailand's artistic history. While the change often arrived from distant lands, their selection, cultivation and cross-fertilization were products of local endeavors' (Gosling 2004, p. 15). But the vital role that Indian culture has played in the formation of Southeast Asian as well as Siamese art and culture deserves major attention to the historians. We cannot neglect the role of India in pre-modern Southeast Asian society and culture. Observation of Mitchell is worth mentioning here. The kingdoms that came to be established were outwardly Indian in their culture and religion but surprisingly the Hinduism that was fostered in these civilizations was a mixture of indigenous elements and imported Indian features (Mitchell 1977, p. 18).

At the beginning of this paper I referred to the comment of renowned anthropologist Prof. Sumner, that culture is transmitted and shared also. Here, it is proved that Indian culture was transmitted to Siam as well as to the rest of Southeast Asia. We can conclude that certain kind of 'localization of Indian culture' can be

observed in Southeast Asian art and culture. In the field of sculptures of brahmanical images, we notice this shared culture also. In the present paper, in our discussion about brahmanical deities from the very beginning of the Siamese civilization to the present days, we found that in spite of being a Buddhist country, brahmanism (now Hinduism) was very important in Siamese sociopolitical scenario. The concepts of brahmanism and Buddhism both came from India. However, in Siam, people are not all Hindus or Buddhists; there was an element of animist faith in many people. In the beginning of the Common Era, the indigenous people believed in the existence of spiritual beings. Gradually, *brahman* priests and later Buddhist missionaries influenced the indigenous people. I would like to mention Coedes's (1968) observation here again. He said that the introduction of Indian cultural process was a gradual process and the local people readily accepted the 'superior cultural endowments of the immigrants' and 'assured the newcomers of a welcome'. Brahmanism attracted the monarchy and Buddhism attracted the masses. Though, since the Dvaravati era, the monarchy and the majority of people became predominantly Buddhist, brahmanical (modern, Hindu) faith had acquired an important place.

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