

## Sculptures of Neelkanth Mahadev temple: An aesthetic view

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### Abstract

The Neelkanth Mahadev Temple is one of the known religious centres and it lays great emphasis on the sculptural art. The temple is situated in Tehla village that comes under the buffer zone of the Sariska National Park, Alwar, Rajasthan. This temple is grand specimen of Indian temple architecture and sculpture. Numerous sculptural images are very similar to the Khajuraho temples. The main sources of attraction are the unique combination of “Dharma” and “Karma”, the religion and sex. It stills a great enigma of Neelkanth Mahadev Temple. The study focuses upon the characteristics of the stone images and traces the myth behind the temple. The analysis of stone images is according to the subject matter.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic, Neelkanth Mahadev temple, dharma, karma, myth, sculpture.

### 1. Introduction

#### Section -1

Neelkanth Mahadev Temple remains neglected for a long time and only recently the Archaeological Department has begun to take care of it and chance visitors have referred to the magnificent monuments and the artistic beauty of the temples. The history was silent that by whom and when the temple was built. But it was estimated that the temple was built by the Badgujars (Bargujars) king, “King Manthandev Bargujar” and it is also mentioned on the rock edict, now inside Sariska Tiger Reserve confirmed by Col. James Todin in his classical, “Annab and Antiquities of Rajasthan”, 18<sup>th</sup> century British historian.

The temple is destroyed by the Muslim ruler Aurangzeb. Though the temple is well known as a great sacred-centre, but the temple also plays an important role in the sculptural art and now the temple is in ruin.

The nature of the art and sculptural compositions of this temple reflect their characteristic styles of different periods. The Neelkanth Mahadev Temple essentially follows the Nagar style of architecture of the North India. A good number of sculptures are also fixed on the temple walls. Besides, some of the sculptures are lying scattered within the temple campus. But due to religious prohibition, the sculptures of interior walls are not given permission to study. (Figure 1)



Fig 1: Neelkanth Mahadev Temple

#### Section- 2

Number of legends is associated with every temple but Neelkanth mahadev temple is still in isolation with no well-known mythological story. Neelkanth mahadev temple essentially follows Nagar style and it is built upon a combination of symbolic geometric figures (Yantras or Mandalas) with the purpose of making it a summary of the universe and a prodigious centre of energy. (Figure 2)

It is noteworthy that the sanctum of the temple is a cube-shaped room without decoration. Only a qualified priest may enter this magical place to worship the *linga* with flowers, water, lights incense and offerings symbolizing the five elements. A narrow passage runs around the sanctuary, to be walked along clockwise, so that the temple monument is on one’s right, except in Tantric rites of black magic. The door of the sanctuary is richly embellished with the numerous erotic sculptures and its quadrangular shape frames the image of the deity, which appears to the faithful gathered in the vestibule or Mandapa, illuminated by oil lamps swung by the priests. (Figure 3)

The threshold is little high, and no foot must rest on it: it has to be jumped over and arabesques contain various deities recalling the tree of life. The walls of Neelkanth Mahadev Temple are richly embellished with the numerous relief sculptures where varieties of subject matter are depicted such as religious, secular, flora and fauna and geometrical design.

The more important gods are closer to the centre of the temple than the image that surround them and are located precisely at the points corresponding to the energies they represent on the temple plan’s magical design. Besides the temple deities representing the eight direction of the space there are also images of the ‘apsaras’ and ‘surasundaris’ (the dancers of heaven), secondary gods (the go-between of the celestial and terrestrial worlds); and the ‘mithuna’ (erotic couplings), symbolizing voluptuousness, the image of celestial bliss, and the final goal of spiritual realization.(Figure 4)

The gods move freely through space and time free from the restraints of weight and distance. They fly, albeit having no wings. The ‘ganas’ and ‘vidhyadharas’ are represented flying through the air. Gods shown standing usually appear in a state

of repose, giving the body a triple curve (*tribhanga*), to which a symbolic meaning is attached.

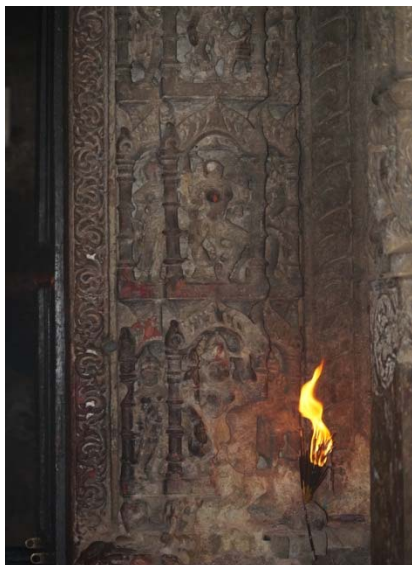
The triple orientation recalls the three tendencies or basic qualities of all things, the '*gunas*':

*Sattva* (the ascending tendency, purity, light, the color white);  
*Tamas* (the descending tendency, degradation, darkening, the colour black);

In the Neelkanth Mahadev Temple, an image of Shiva and Parvati, which performs a terrific aspect, is inscribed on the outer wall of the sanctum. The image is given in which Shiva and Gauri are standing and Nandi is sitting behind Shiva. Both Shiva and Parvati are richly adorned with jewels. Shiva wears *jatamukuta*, *kundals*, torque and lower garment tied to waist girdle with jewelled loops and tassels, long mala and anklets. Parvati wears *kiritamukuta*, *kundalas*, torque with pendent, wristlets, lower garment tied to waist, girdle with jewelled loops and anklets. This image is carved in realistic manner with the accuracy of physical details. These images can be regarded to be the best product of sculptural art of Rajasthan. The figures are amalgamated with different characteristic features like full of charm, elegant posture, spiritual expression, simplicity, etc. besides Shiva and Parvati figures, there are also enshrined some other divine images like Ganesha.



**Fig 2:** Geometric pattern on the interior pillar



**Fig 3:** The door of sanctuary



**Fig 4:** Interior wall with principal deities.

### Section-3

Thus, it can be concluded that the temple art is the reflection of broad aspects such as myths, mythology, beliefs, cults and customs which are clearly as well as aesthetically reflected through the sculptural motifs found in the symbolic representations. Amalgamations of different myths as well as the sculptural parts enhanced the grandeur of the whole architectural part of the Neelkanth Mahadeva temple. Though, the Neelkanth Mahadeva temple is influenced by other parts of India but the regional variation is properly represented in some of the elements. The sculptural compositions are nicely arranged in the Neelkanth Mahadeva temple to create the most sophisticated ideals of aesthetic effect.

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