

Śaivism in Tālā and the Devarānī Doorway

Natasja Bosma MA, Groningen, The Netherlands

Tālā is a village in the north of the ancient region Dakṣiṇa Kosala, in the modern Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Despite the fact that it is a very small village, the place is well-known for the earliest monuments of Dakṣiṇa Kosala. In Tālā, one can visit the ruins of two temples that are dedicated to Śiva: the Jitḥānī and the Devarānī. Since these ruins are the earliest Śaiva remains in the region, that makes Tālā an important place in the search for an answer to the questions how, when and why Śaivism spread to Dakṣiṇa Kosala at some point in history.



Ruin of the Devarānī



Seven floral śākhās



Left doorjamb



Right doorjamb

The lintel of the Devarānī's doorway is divided in an upper and lower part by an intricate pattern of leaves and flowers. The upper part shows the *abhiṣekha* of Lakṣmī, but the lower part has been subject to many discussions. It makes sense that the four-armed man in the centre is Śiva, since the iconography of all the panels of the doorway are Śaivite in nature.



When giving a closer look to the object next to Śiva's head, one can identify the head of an elephant. The head dangles above Śiva's left shoulder, disappears behind his head, to become visible again at the right side of his head. The woman on his left is Pārvatī, looking in awe at her husband. The male attendant could be Vīrabhadra, making a *varadā* gesture because he gave the elephant-hide to Śiva.

To be short: the central figure might be Śiva holding the skin of the elephant-demon he killed above his head as a sign of victory.