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Three copies
of
Mural Paintings
from
Padmanabhapuram Palace, Travancore,
South India,
presented by the Government of
His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore.

1. NATARAJAN.

A copy in full size and colour, true to the original, of a mural depicting Shiva as Nataraja (natya-dance, raja, king).

2. GANESHA.

A line copy, in the size of the original, of a mural depicting a ceremony connected with Ganesha.

3. HARI-HARA.

A line copy, in the size of the original, of a mural representing the conjunction of Vishnu and Shiva as the two aspects of one deity, called Hari-Hara.

Notes on the murals by Dr. J. H. Cousins, Head of the
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For a number of centuries prior to the middle of the eighteenth, Padmanabhapuram Palace, twenty miles north of the southern extremity of the continent of Asia, was the seat of Government of the State of Travancore by the Maharaja and his appointed officers. In the middle of the eighteenth century a powerful ruler, Maharaja Marthanda Varma, brought a number of small principalities under his rulership, and extended the state to its present boundaries. In order to centralise Government, he made Trivandrum his capital, and Padmana-

bhapuram fell on two centuries of decay, neglect and vandalism. Happily, owing to the bedroom of the Maharaja, at the top of a four storeyed pagoda-like tower, having maintained a reputation for sanctity, a gallery of paintings covering every foot of the four walls of the room, (33 feet long, 16 feet broad, 9 feet high) was preserved practically intact, and, owing to subdued light, with little if any loss of colour. As the Palace was vacated in 1750, the paintings were executed sometime prior to that date; but the destruction of records, and lack of historical alertness in the intervening centuries, makes it impossible to fix a date for their beginnings. Recent developments in the collecting and studying of ancient documents may solve the problem later on. Meantime the murals may be dated no later than a few years before 1750, and some students consider them to belong to the early sixteenth century. In any event, their contents and technique indicate a long traditional development; and there is a certain amount of justification for linking them up with the Ajanta era that terminated in the eighth or ninth century. As examples of the art of a people to whom art and religion were one, they have a special study-value. Their technical and aesthetic features have their own interest. In this connection it has to be remembered that these copies of murals that were painted on plastered walls in home-made pigments have been copied on paper in modern water-colours. The coloured copies therefore only presents the appearance of the mural, not its technical process; and the line-copies only indicate their composition and rhythmic linear quality.

1. In Hindu theology Shiva is one of the three fundamental powers of the Universe - Brahma being creative activity, Vishnu being form and feeling, Shiva being cognition. Usually Shiva is called "the destroyer," but this is only applicable in the sense that any advance supersedes previous stages, and thus may be said to destroy them. In this aspect as Nataraja, he performs the dance traditionally said to be in destructive anger over the loss of his consort, Parvati, but in

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reality dramatising the rhythmic activity that brings forward the latent powers of life, and in this sense destroys the obstacles to life typified in the demoniac figure on which Nataraja dances, which may be interpreted as matter that constitutes the substantial basis of life, or as material limitation which has to be overcome by life. In the mural there are a number of weapons and adornments in multiple hands which symbolise phases and aspects of the mental side of consciousness in action. Celestial, demoniacal and human entities witness the cosmic dance. The bull is the vahana (means of transport) of Shiva, symbolising the substance of life by which the spiritual element is conveyed into manifestation.

2. Ganesha, son of Shiva and Parvati, is popularly associated with good fortune. His elephant head and the story of his creation make him an embodiment of substance. The upper part of the mural shows devotees bringing offerings. Food is being cooked, on the right side of the mural, by a figure taken to be a woman, and wearing the sacred thread now confined to men. Ganesha wears the adornments of his father. The bottom part of the mural depicts musicians playing oboes, drums, cymbals, around a three-fold lamp (in brass). The corkstrew border around the figures is a linear way of indicating the thick ornamental lines that can be seen in their colours in the "Nataraja" mural. It will be observed that the deity is not represented as an image, but as himself, among human devotees, not in the celestial region, but on earth. It will also be observed that, while, Ganesha belongs to the Shaivite (Shiva) side of Hindu theology, the worshippers bear the caste-marks of the Vaishnavite (Vishnu) side on their foreheads and other parts of their bodies.
3. The unity of devotion expressed in the followers of Vishnu worshipping the son of Shiva in the Ganesha mural

is given its complete iconographical expression in the Hari-Hara mural. Here, in a single figure, are Vishnu (right side of the mural, with the conch) and Shiva (left side of the mural, with the moon in one of his hands). In the Hindu philosophical concept, consciousness functions through the mental mode, personalised in Shiva, and the emotional mood, personalised in Vishnu. But, while these aspects of the universal life may be devotionally separated, according to the predominance of intellect or emotion in the human worshipper, the separation is nominal, not absolute. Neither can exist without the other. A similar unity behind the nominal separation of the masculine and feminine aspects of the one life is seen in another mural representing the figure known as Ardhanareswara (which means, half goddess, half god), or Shiva and Parvati as one.
