

Conflated Iconographies?

The Depictions of Bhṛṅgin in South India and his Association with Jvara

Anna A. ŚLAČZKA

Abstract

Around the 10th century CE, a new way of representing Bhṛṅgin — the emaciated follower of Śiva — emerged in South India, marking the beginning of a divergence between his southern and northern iconographic form. While in the North he continued to be depicted as a two-legged skeletal figure, in the South his form evolved to include a third leg and multiple arms. This article analyses the development of Bhṛṅgin's distinctive iconography in South India, with particular emphasis on Tamil Nadu, and investigates its possible origins through both textual sources and largely unpublished visual material. It then revisits the current interpretation of several three-legged figures currently identified as Bhṛṅgin and proposes the hypothesis that, in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Bhṛṅgin's iconography may have become conflated at some point in time with that of Jvara — the three-legged god of fever and a fellow member of the Śaiva pantheon. For comparative purposes, the article also offers an overview of Jvara's iconography.

Keywords: Bhṛṅgin; Śaiva pantheon; Śaiva iconography; Tamil Nadu; Naṭarāja; Jvara; three-legged figures.