

Fig. 14 Śaiva ascetics or Pāśupatas with dancers are depicted in a hermitage setting on the north-east corner pavilion of Angkor Wat.
(Swati Chemburkar)



Khmer inscriptions mention the words *vāca*, *kinmara* and *gandharva*, indicating reciters performing divine services – a class of performing artists and singers in the temples.⁷⁸ Based on these records, Saveros Pou argues for the *gandharvas* of ancient Cambodia being living creatures unlike the mythical persons of Indian literature, who performed at temples.⁷⁹ Does it mean a category of Pāśupatas who performed the singing as per *Gandharvaśāstra*? Are the depictions of ascetics, playing musical instruments and performing dance on the Mý Són pedestal characteristics of Pāśupata?

Sometimes, these ascetics or *ṛṣis* are depicted in the company of women/dancers as seen at Phnom Rung, Angkor Wat, Bayon temple. The depictions of ascetics in the company of women/

dancers are intriguing. What is he doing with women? Is he an owner or a teacher of these women/dancers? (Fig. 14)

A 10th century Bhadrāśrama inscription K. 450 from Yaśovarman's reign mentions, musicians, singers, and instrument players assigned to the hermitage and a chief of worship for Śiva was accompanied by the actors,⁸⁰ presumably following ritual offering of dance and music. If we compare the Śaiva K. 279 Prei Prāsāt, Vaiṣṇava K. 701 Prāsāt Komnap, and Buddhist āśrama K. 290 Tep Pranam inscriptions, the company of women, even if she is the legitimate wife is strictly prohibited for Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist hermits of the āśramas. No such prohibitions apply to Śaiva hermits. We can then logically assume that the depictions of the ascetics in the company of women are all Śiva ascetics.

In the early 13th century, Jayavarman VII's Buddhist Bayon temple displays several Śaiva ascetic figures in the inner galleried enclosure. The exact nature of their ritual practices during the king's reign are not recorded in the epigraphic corpus, but the records mention over 3,000 dancers performing in the temples throughout his kingdom.⁸¹ There is evidence to suggest that the dance was a temple offering. The offering of music to the dancing Śiva is seen on the 8th century tympanum from the Cham Mý Són C1 temple and kept at the site museum. It depicts several musical instruments that are observed by Lorenzen as emblems of the Kāpālīka cult that emerged within the Pāśupata. (Fig. 15). The offering of dancers and musicians to Śrisanbhadreśvara along with the necessary articles for the worship is mentioned in the Mý Són pillar inscription of Harivarman II.⁸²

Fig. 15 Dancing Śiva tympanum found in Mý Són C1.
(Photo: Trần Kỳ Phương)

