Goddess Saraswati without veena

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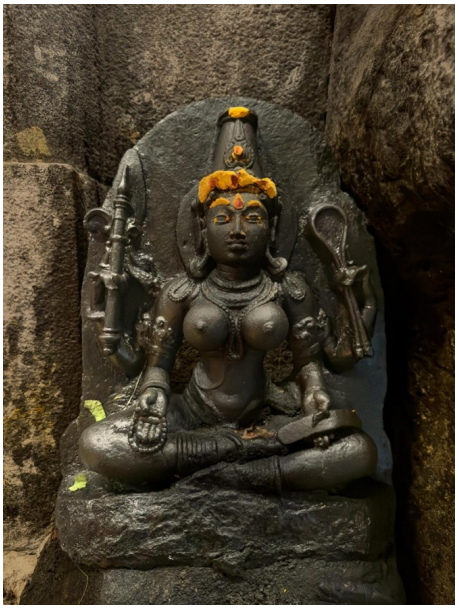
Why in News?

The veena, today regarded as inseparable from Saraswati's identity, appears to have emerged as her dominant symbol only in the later period.

The Pala Dynasty Saraswati

- **Location -** Goddess Saraswati is notably observed without the veena (Musical instrument) at the Arthamandapam of the ***Brihadiswara Temple, Ariyalur district, Tamil Nadu.***
- **Origin -** Brought to Tamil Nadu by Rajendra Chola I as a war trophy following his famous military campaign to the Ganges (North India/Pala Empire).
- **Unique Iconography -** Seated in padmasana with 4 arms holding the suvadi (manuscript) in one hand and the *akka mala* (rudraksha rosary) in another.
- The remaining 2 hands hold an *ankusha* (goad) and a *pasha* (noose).



- She wears a crown, *kundalams* in her ears and ornaments on her neck,

chest, shoulders, arms and legs.
- She is entirely different from the Saraswati images sculpted in Tamil Nadu and represents the north Indian style.

The Chola Gnanasaraswati

- **Location -** Carved on the outer walls near the steps leading to the Arthamandapam of Brihadiswara Temple.
- It is indigenous Chola craftsmanship.
- **Unique Iconography -** She is seated on a lotus with her hair arranged in an elaborate jata makuta.
- She is richly adorned with necklaces, shoulder ornaments, bangles and makara kundalams.
- Instead of a veena, she holds a suvadi in one hand and an akka mala in another, underscoring her identity as the embodiment of learning and spiritual wisdom.
- Of the remaining two hands, one carries a kundigai (kamandalu), while the other is shown in tarjani mudra—a rare and striking gesture in Saraswati iconography.

Veena-less Temples in Tamil Nadu

- Koothanur (Maha Saraswathi Temple).
- Darasuram (Airavatesvara Temple).
- Thanjavur (Brihadisvara Temple & Palace Complex).
- Kanchipuram (Kailasanathar Temple).
- Tiruvalanchuzhi (Sadaiva Muktheeswarar Temple).

Reference

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