

---

**DEVOTION IN SOUTH INDIA: CHOLA BRONZES**

---

**Mrs. Senthamarai**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History, Sri Meenakshi Govt. Arts college for women, Madurai*

**Abstract**

This paper explores the Chola Bronzes. Archaeological, iconographic and literary evidence are discussed, shows that Nataraja Bronze, depicting Shiva's Ananthathandava. Major concepts of the Hindu worship are addressed along with the iconography artists used to express these ideas. The resource focuses on the names of the famous Bronzes found in Chola period and contribution of Chola Kings and Queens. The research deals with the materials used for making Bronze sculptures.

**Key Words:** Nataraja, Shiva, Sculptures, Temple, Iconography

**Introduction**

During the Chola period, Tamilnadu became the centre for crafting magnificent bronze sculptures of deities. Among the existing specimens in the various museums of the world. The temples of south India may be seen many fine figures of Siva in various forms. Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi, Siva, Somaskanda, Ganapathi and many more. The Arts of this period began to make use of these new themes introduced some significant detail to an image of a deity which was not found in such images of early periods. Owing to the increased religious activities and the building of a large number of temples, the production of metal images also increased in leaps and bounds. While they made innumerable bronzes, the Sthapathis of the period naturally became great adepts in the technique of this art, which is clearly exemplified by the bronzes.

**The Art of Making Bronzes**

The art of making bronzes reached its zenith during the Chola era between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. These are unique art creations which have attracted connoisseurs from all over the world. The bronzes are two types namely hollow and solid. Most of the bronzes made in solid. The bronzes are made using the Lost Wax process. It is known in artistic terms as "Cire Perdue". Beeswax mixed with dammer is softened and used to create the desired image using a wooden chisel. Once complete the wax model is hardened in cold water before being encased in three layers of finely ground clay. The mould is fired melting the wax which drains out

through specially positioned spouts, molten bronze an alloy of copper and tin is then poured in and fills the empty mould. Once the bronze has been allowed to cool down the mould is broken open and any finishing touches are made to the piece. Since the clay mould is destroyed in order to remove the solid bronze Sculpture, each piece is unique. The bronzes were placed in the temples where they received ritual worship which included bathing, dressing and decoration with jewels.

### **Nataraja 'Lord of Dance'**

The forms of Chola bronzes are devoid of intricate ornaments and designs. They are very expressive. There is grace, elegance, beauty. The most famous cache of Chola bronze Sculpture is Nataraja. Shiva as Lord of the dance (Shiva Nataraja) is particularly associated with the reign of the Chola rulers of South India. This is undoubtedly the most recognizable manifestation of Shiva. Shiva is depicted within the ring of fire, the Prabha is both the creator and destroyer of the world. Shown throw the drum and the flame which can be seen in his two rear hands. His front and left extends in a dance gesture and his front right hand is in the abhaya position which indicates protection. This forms part of a dance representative of the cyclical cosmic concept of time in India. Shiva is shown with a serpent around his waist.

One of the earliest examples of the later Chola period is the Somaskanda of height 50 cm from Nidur Thanjavur District. This bronze is apparently beautifully treated. But such minor details as the makutas of both Shiva and Uma, the elaborate necklaces, the angularities of the torso of Uma. Siva is seated on a padmasana in the erect sukhasana posture. Kalyanasundarana from Tiruvottiyur. This bronzes are superior to those of the former. This is mainly due to the fact that it comes from heart of the Chola kingdom. Their modeling is fine and their postures are beautiful and balanced. The bronze representing Chandrasekhara for Okkur. It is a small figure measuring 38 cm high including the prabha. In spite of its small size, this bronze shows details which are characteristic of bronzes of Chola period.

The Nataraja image in the Nageswara temple, for instance which has never been photographed is one of the largest and finest images known. Another Kalikathandava from Thiruvarangulam in Pudukkottai, two other images belonging to the Madras museum and got from Thiruvalangadu and Velanganni. Metal of the Bhiksatnamurthi and the closely allied form of Kankalamurti reproduced above from Darasuram.

### **Shiva Arthanarishvara**

Iconographically attention is drawn in the right of the figure, depicting the male aspecting is endowed with broad and strong arms, two hands, and proportionate measurements suited to male members. The left wide view ; depicting

the Devi, the Goddess aspect, is endowed with one hand and tender fingers, proportionately smaller measurements, single hand with bangles, emphasize the feminine aspect. The left side face is some what shorter than the right side.

### **Vaishnava Bronzes**

Four Vaishnava Bronzes from Sermadevi temple, Tirunelveli district. Here are two figures of Vishnu and Rukmani. The larger image is simpler and bolder and may be of the time of Rajendra I. It is 3 feet and 2 inches high the largest South Indian bronze of Vishnu known. The figure of Rukmani is also remarkable for its simplicity. A group of Rama Lakshmana and Sita from Thirukkadaiyur with Hanuman in an attitude of worship is obviously one of the finest products of the best of Chola bronze casting.

### **Sembiyan Madevi**

The greatest patrons of tenth century Chola art was a woman, Queen Sembiyan Madevi who was the daughter-in-law of king Parantaka and wife of Gandaraditya and Grand Mother of the Great King Rajaraja I. Sembiyan Madevi built numerous stone temples commissioned bronze sculptures made endowments of land and money for temple maintenance. A majestic bronze of the Goddess Parvati consort of Shiva whose dignified stance and withdrawn expression evoke awe and respect was produced by the bronze workshop of Queen Sembiyan Madevi. Konerirajapuram and Thiruvengadu have the largest and perhaps the finest collection of early Chola bronzes most of them dating back to the Sembiyan Age. Other icons cast are Thirupuravijayam, Rishabhavahana devar and Ganapathi, Kalyana Sundarar. The concept of a consort of the main deity of the temple becomes more popular in the form of a Devi image in metal close to the entrance Garpagraha known as Bhogeswari. This image was set up in many temples during Sembiyan Madevi's days and represents a high watermark in metal casting. Some of the Bhogeswari bronzes are found in temples of Kuttalam, Viridachalam and other places. She renovated the Shiva temple at Thiruvalangadu. There are three images in the temple, one of Urdhva Tandava Siva, second dancing Kali and third Karaikkal Ammaiyyar.

### **Kundavai**

Kundavai was the only daughter of Sundara Chola. Her younger brother was known as Rajaraja I. Kundavai set up four metal images in the Tanjore temple which included the images of Umaparameswari, the consort of Dhakshinameru Vitankar. The lithic inscriptions in the Brihadisvara temple provide a list of 66 beautiful bronzes of Rajaraja Chola and his sister Kundavai gifted to the temple.

**Rajaraja I**

Rajaraja I mentions a large number of metal images set up in the great temple of Thanjavur by himself, his sister, his queens, his commanders and other officers. Over fifty bronzes are listed. It is unfortunately that most of them have disappeared through the centuries except four images. The magnificent Nataraja and its consort that are still under worship, a Thirupuravijaya called Thanjai Alagar and another small Nataraja also under worship. There are some other Bronzes mentioned in the temple inscriptions which are unique images, not found in any other temple so far. Such idols are Mahameruvitanakar, Lingapuranadevar, Ayudha purushas. A similar group of great significance was from Thiruvenkadu that had yielded 30 bronzes, most of them belonging to Rajaraja I. The famous Arthanarisvara, Bhikshathana Vrshavahana, Chandikesvara, Kannappan, Kalyanasundara and Kshetrapala bronzes were made in the time of Rajaraja I.

**Rajendra I**

Rajendra Chola I had built the great temple Gangaikondacholapuram. There are few bronzes remarkable beauty preserved in the temple. They were probably gifted for worship when the temple was erected. Of the classical bronzes in the collection. Somaskanda, Subramanya, Durga, Bhogasakti, Adhikaranandi and probably Vrshbhantika are to be assigned to the period of Rajendra I. Bhogasakti bronze has two armed standing image of Parvati of arresting beauty is now placed near sanctum. Durga bronze has four armed standing figure in erect (Samabhanga) pose, holds discus and conch in the upper arms and boon bestowing and hand on thigh poses in the lower arms. The Goddess is shown wearing a breast-band; buffalo head is not represented below the feet. Adhikaranandi is four armed figure in abhaya pose, standing on a lotus pedestal. The upper pair of arms hold axe and antelope; the lower arms in anjali pose hold a garland of flower in between. This image is particularly a good specimen representing the theme. Somaskanda is Quite fitting with the great Linga in the sanctum and the mahaprasada of the temple, the group of Somaskanda in the temple is fairly big in size and exhibits all the classical qualities of the Chola age. The group consists of Siva seated majestically on a pedestal with four arms. A two armed Devi is shown by the side. The original skanda image is missing. The figures of Siva and Devi closely resemble the sculptures on the lower niches of main vimana and was probably the principal Somaskanda image of the temple. The group of Somaskanda in the Gangaikondacholapuram temple should have been the main professional deity of the temple.

**Conclusion**

The Chola bronzes are products of the Tamil creative genius during the period that the great Chola dynasty. The history of metal art in South India is great antiquity and this is a living art today. South Indian Chola bronzes represent technical perfection, they also reveal a sophisticated relationship between spiritual and the sensual. The Chola bronzes in relation to the Hindu tradition of bhakthi, which emphasizes intense and intimate worship of a personal god. The ruling Chola elites, most of whom were devotees of Shiva, drew upon this popular piety in their patronage of temple bronzes, partly to legitimize their dynastic power and social prestige. During festivals, however deities were paraded inside and outside the temple complex for the public to see. In rituals that continue to this day the deities appear as living beings, elaborately dressed in silks, jewels, crowns and flower garlands. The dressing ritual is known as alamkhara, which serves to embellish the deity with grace, beauty. This interplay of image and processional rites was an important aspect of faith in Chola society, as well as in the lives of Hindus today.

**References**

1. Balambal . - Studies in Chola History, Kalinga Publications, New Delhi, 1998.
2. Balasubramanyam S.R - Middle Chola Temples, Oriental Press, Bombay, 1966
3. Nagaswamy. R - South Indian Bronzes, New Delhi.
4. Nilakanda Sastri. K.A - A History of South India, University of Madras, 1955
5. Srinivasan P. - Bronzes of South India, Bulletin of the Madras Museum, Vol III, India Press, Madras, 1963.
6. Venkataraman .B - Temple art under the Chola Queens, Thomson Press (India) Faridabad, Haryana, 1976.