

INDIAN ART

FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Talk 10

The bronze images



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Man has been always inquisitive and inquiring.
Starting with ritualistic practices,
man, among other things, has been making images,
which came to acquire
greater and greater sophistication,
in other words, more and more artistic.



He has tried his hands on
all kinds of material he could find:
stone, clay, wood, stucco, ivory, metal etc.

Each of these had limitations.

Then, only a few stayed longer,
like stone and metal.

We shall consider art in metal,
which is an absorbing story.



The history of metal casting for images starts with the Indus civilisation, and the 'Dancing girl' is the earliest masterpiece. We had to wait till the Gupta times for more masterpieces.

The gold coins of Gupta period are a landmark in Indian metal work.

And these are the best India ever had noteworthy for the utmost delicacy of their treatment and the fine moulding of the details of the figures and the intricate and artistic legends.





The lion-slayer type presents
with the utmost animation and spirit
the might of the prince
who could fight the fierce king of the beasts



Samudragupta is seated on a couch and is playing the lyre. This presents a visual commentary to an inscription that describes him as putting to shame by his proficiency in music, even the divine musicians Tumburu and Narada.



A serene Tirthakara recovered from Akota belongs to the Gupta period and testifies to the height metal casting has reached at that time

Gurjara Pratihara; 8th c. CE

This contemplative Vishnu, with Narasimha and Varaha heads on either side, is a fine bronze from Kashmir, with well-modelled torso in the Gandharan style which has inspired the subsequent traditions.





The lion and elephant motif cast in a very large size, as a support for a seat is an important example of the early Nalanda school.



The Pala metalworker has created some of the most charming bronzes of India.

From Nalanda come a host of lovely bronzes of both Buddhist and Hindu inspiration.



Sultanganj Buddhas, Bihar; Pala 8th c. CE



Avalokitesvara,
an exquisite bronze
from Sirpur, Central India.

An inscription in Nagari
on the pedestal gives
the name of the sculptor
as Dronaditya

Sirpur (Madhya Pradesh). Chedi, ninth century CE

This is one among
the finest metalwork figures,
typical of the period.

Gomatesvara, Rashtrakuta, 9th century CE





An extremely important bronze not only for its simple and effective workmanship, but also because it is inscribed in the reign of the ruler, Mahipala-deva.

Vishnu, flanked by Sri and Sarasvati
Gurjara Pratihara, 10th century CE

Lost Wax Technique

Bronzes are mostly created using the lost wax technique.



The process includes kneading beeswax and kungilium (camphor) with a little oil.

This forms a malleable substance from which the figure is sculpted by the master artisan complete with minute details.

This is the wax model.





The figure is then coated with several layers of clay and left to completely dry out in the shade.



Then the wax is melted leaving only
a shell of hard crusted clay.

A metal alloy of bronze is then melted and poured
until the necessary thickness is achieved.





When the metal has filled all crevices and has hardened and cooled, the clay mould is broken, and the rough statue is revealed.

It is then cleaned, smoothed and polished.



The lost wax method means that each bronze icon is unique and the mould is created fresh every time.



Pallava-s, the art-pioneers in the Tamil country, made metal images for processions and these were fashioned with the utmost elegance, with all the details worked out in the wax itself.





This only representation of Natesa in this pose in metal. In spite of its face being worn out, it can be seen that the modelling of the figure and the treatment of the ornaments and garments have unmistakably the Pallava grace.

Natesa in the *urdhvajanu* pose
Kuram, Pallava, 9th century, CE.

This is a beautiful little bronze of the transitional period from Pallava to Chola, with a peculiar trait, that of Siva carrying the trisula in one of his hands.



The Somaskanda, Tiruvalangadu, 10th century CE

Now we are seeing a masterpiece



Nataraja, Tiruvarangulam, 900-1000 CE



*The cosmic dance of Lord Siva
in his Nataraja form
symbolising five actions
known as panchakṛtya-s:
creation, protection, destruction
and removal of ignorance
is artistically celebrated,
particularly, in the Chola time*



*A fine example
of early Chola art,
this Nataraja is
the outstanding bronze
and ranks among
the finest Chola bronzes.*



Three-eyed and four-armed Nataraja in chatura-tandava pose, dancing with the right foot placed on the prostrate demon Apasmara and the left leg resting on the toes.

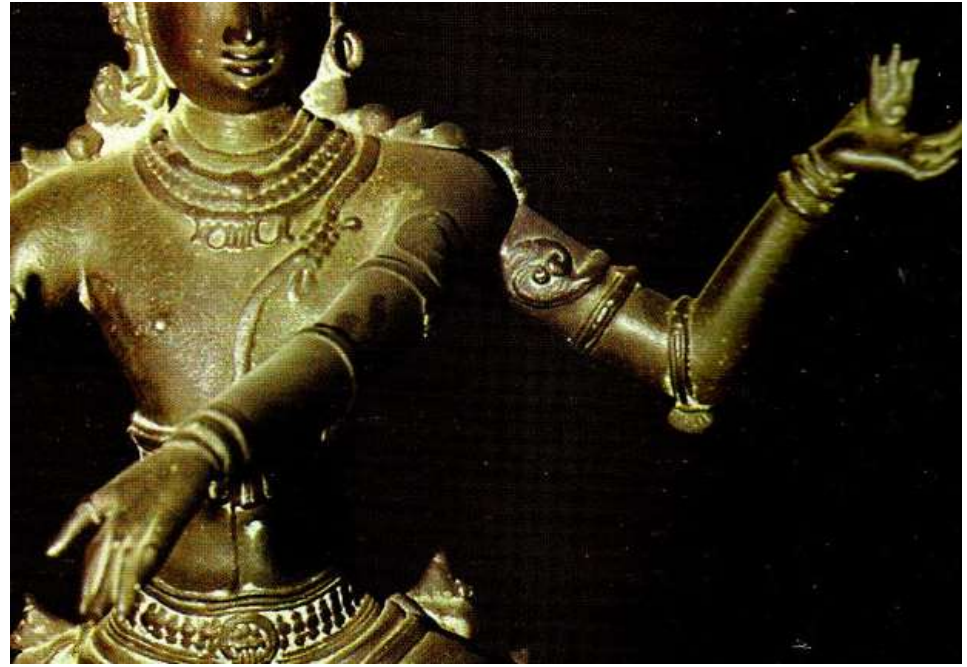




*The arms are bifurcate
at the shoulders.*

*The rear right hand holds
the damaru.*

*The front right in abhaya-mudra
with a serpent coiled
Around the forearm.*



The rear left carries the flame and the front left arm is across the body in the dancing gesture gaja-hasta.



The hair dressed as jata-makuta bearing a crescent- moon .

Thirteen braided locks are hanging at the back of the head.

A siras-chakra (damaged) behind the head.



A thin sash round the waist, narrowed in front, has a projecting loop on either side.



The costume consists of short drawers, worn with an elaborate girdle with a floral clasp in front.



*Other details include
a tiara with fillet, ear-rings,
a chain of flowers on shoulders,
yajnopavita, a necklace,
udara-bandha, spiral armlets,
armlet with tassel at the elbow,
three bracelets,
wrist rings on fingers and toes
and anklets.*

But all these aren't distracting!



The prostrate demon holds a cobra in the left hand, while the right hand is in suchi-mudra.





The image is on a double lotus oval-shaped pedestal, mounted on a rectangular block. There is a ring at each of the four corners of the base.





There is an upright on either side to hold the prabha, which is missing.





Tcan we imagine making of this six-footer

*Kalyanasundara,
an exquisite group
illustrating
Vishnu and Lakshmi
performing
the marriage of
Siva and Parvati,*



Kalyanasundareshwara, Tiruvelirkudi, 1000 CE



Vrishabhantika with Devi, Tiruvenkadu, Early Chola. A.D. 1011



This is one of the most effective Chola bronzes yet discovered. For sheer grace and beauty to form, there is rarely another to match it. The locks arranged as jatabhara fashion are not easily distinguished from the snake that is wound up in them, but their treatment is very skillful.

*Confidence shown by a benign smile,
Murugan is armed appropriately
for the war with Sura-padman,
perhaps, symbolises Rajendra Chola
celebrating his conquest of Java
in Ganga-konda-cholapuram.*



What a sight!

*Karanda makuta,
a headband, makara kundala,
three pearl necklaces, yajnopavita,
heavy arm-bands, udara-bandha
and veshti held by lion-buckle.*



*His top-right hand holds
Sakthi Padai, given by his mother,
while the other top hand holds
a cock, his standard.*

*His lower right hand, now broken,
must have held Vajra and
the other one a shield.*

*His pose is dynamic,
in spite of being in sama-bhaga*





Ardhanarisvara of Tiruvengadu

Fusion of Siva, the godhead, and Parvati, the divine energy, where the contra-distinction is brought out to the minutest detail from tip to toe.



*Siva's manliness - strong shoulders
and two arms, broad eye, firm
waist and muscular thigh*



... contrasts sharply with Parvati's feminine beauty – supple shoulder, slender arm, broad hip and a shapely leg. The differentiation in the jewellery and dress too is stark at the points of fusion.

*The contrast is seen on the back too -
Siva's rock-like shoulder blade against Parvati's soft.*









Tinnan, as he was known before he was canonised, sports a fierce moustache and a beard, has just gouged out his right eyes. His upper row of teeth can also be seen.





Neesumbasudani, 11th century CE



Krishna with Rukmini and Satyabhama, Tiruvarur, 11th century CE



Nataraja, Kulasekara-nallur, 12th century CE



*Manikkavachakar,
with Tiruvachakam
in his hand
with a Tamil inscription
12th century CE*



Murugan and Valli, Velankanni, 12th century CE

Parvati, 13th century CE





Bharata, Tiruchirapalli,
Vijayanagara, 15th century CE

Bharata carrying the padukas of Rama on his head is a rare metal sculpture illustrates Bharata as the ideal brother returning home without Rama but with only his sandals, to rule the empire in their name.

Bharata dressed as a gentle hermit like his elder brother, living so in the forest, is full of pathos, and the sculpture is a masterpiece.

Tirunala Nayak and his queen
(part of metal cover for a huge
doorway to the temple sanctum),
Near Madurai, 17th century CE



But the Chola bronze has become an attractive 'drawing room decoration' and are 'manufactured under order', and are available under various finishes like 'antique', 'dusty', 'gold', 'patina', 'bronze' and 'black'.



Swamimalai;Rs 30 000



Original Chola

To conclude, we may look at
the Nataraja icon
which some consider as
'the best metal ever sculpted
by humankind'!



NATARAJA OF TIRUVALANGADU
Raja Raja Chola 985-1014 CE).



Siva is performing
“Ananda tandava”.



It will remind anyone
Appar's description
in his celebrated poem
*'kunitta-puruvamum
kovvai-sevwayum . . .*
(arched eyebrows,
lips as red as a *kovvai* fruit,
a beatific smile and
a raised golden foot . . .)



His four hands are shown playing *damaru*, in *abhaya-hasta*, *gaja-hasta*, and holding a flame of nine tongues symbolising the continuum of energy.



He wears a jewelled necklace,
a beaded one and
a rosary of rudraksha.
A makara kundala and
a patra kundala adorn his ears



His right foot is
planted firmly on Apasmara
and the left foot is
poised lightly in the air.



The *jata* (the flying hair) and the aureole (tiruvasi) with a series of flames are missing.



C Sivaramamurthi says:
“The pose of this figure,
its rhythmic movement,
the flexion of the body and the
limbs, the perfect smile,
the physical proportions and the
flowing contours are blended
into a pose so amazing that it is
no wonder Rodin, the world
famous sculptor, considered
this to be the most perfect
representation of rhythmic
movement in the world.”



Aguste Rodin's outburst after seeing this image (1913)

“Looking upon the whole of Shiva, in the full flower of life, the flow of living, the air, the sun, the sense of being is a rushing torrent. .

The human body attained divinity in that age, not because we were closer to our origins, for our forms have remained the same, but because we believed in freeing ourselves completely from the constraints of now, and we spun away into the heavens.



“It is a pleasure sorely missed...
... Shiva is but a slender crescent.
What endowment; what pride of body!
Today it is perpetual beauty in bronze.
The imperceptible movement of the light.
One can sense the immobile muscles,
bathed in luminescence,
ready to erupt into action if the light should shift...”

THANKS