

**SCULPTURES OF THE CHOLAS A STUDY****T.SELVI**

Associate Professor of History

Rani Anna Government College for Women

Tirunelveli – 8

**(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 627 012)****DOI: 10.48047/ecb/2023.12.si10.00336**

The aim of this paper is to describe the growth of sculptures during the chola period from 850 to 1270 A.D. Art can generally be classified into two types on the basis of its characteristics, the one static and the other plastic. Dance and music are plastic while architecture is static. Time and space are also the basis in categorizing the art into different classes. By this way the art is classified into three major divisions, i.e., the art in time, the art in space and the art in time and space. Of these the sculpture comes under the static art which depends upon time and space.

Sculpturing is one of the oldest and most widespread arts of the world. It may broadly be defined as the art of carving, modelling, welding or otherwise representing observed or imagined objects in solid materials and in three dimensions. There are two general types, the statuary in which figures are shown in the round, and relief in which figures project from a ground.<sup>1</sup> These two types may otherwise be defined as bas-relief and high-relief. In the high-relief, all sides of the sculpture can be observed, whereas in the former, the front and the side posture alone can be seen.<sup>1</sup>

To the Indian sculptor, the purpose of a statue is to serve an aid to meditation and its position, its expression, its gestures and even its costume have a very precise meaning. The principal gestures are known as mudra in Buddhist and as hasta in Brahmanic works. They include the gesture of meditation, the gesture of charity, the gesture of absence of fear, the gesture of preaching, the gesture of argument and the gesture of adoration or salvation.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest important sculptures of historical times in India are the capitals of Asoka's columns apart from that of the Indus cities. Both schools of sculpture, the Madura and the Gandhara flourished under the Kusana Kings in the North, whereas in the Deccan area, individual schools of sculpture developed.

About Southern sculptures, Vincent Smith, is of the opinion that excepting certain chola statuary of the eleventh century which is pre-eminently excellent, the southern figure sculpture does not often attain high quality. In quantity it is enormous, the gigantic temples and halls characteristic of the Dravidian Kingdoms being commonly overloaded with sculptured ornament on every member. Mythological subjects from the puranas and Tantras are the favourites and the tendency is to treat the conceptions of a luxuriant mythology with exuberant fancy. The result, too often is merely grotesque and very few of the individual images can claim to be beautiful.<sup>3</sup>

In the Tamil country, even though the early literary works have plenty of references to the sculptures of the Sangam and post-sangam age, the art of sculpture in a developed scale starts only with the Pallava period. 'Tivakara Nikantu', one of the ancient dictionaries of the Tamils, lists the materials used for sculpture, such as wood, stone, metals, ivory, wax, mortar, lac, soil, brick and vannam. This clearly shows the highly developed art of sculpture that was practised in Tamilnadu in those days.

The sculpture of the Cholas is only a continuation of the Pallavas and the early Pandyas, but they developed certain distinct stylistic characteristics. It covers a period of four centuries from 850 A.D. to 1270 A.D. In connection with the various stages of development in the art of sculpture, this period is further divided into three, the early (850 A.D. to 985 A.D.) the middle (985 A.D. to 1070 A.D. and the late (1070 A.D. to 1270 A.D.).<sup>4</sup>

Douglas Barrett, has further classified the early Chola sculpture into three phases, the first phase known as Aditya phase 850 A.D. to 940 A.D., the second phase 940 A.D. to 970, and the third phase called Sembian Madevi phase 970 A.D. to 1014 A.D. He starts that the sculptural development in the early Chola period is clear and fundamental. The unique achievement of the first phase, which surely includes some of the most imaginative carving in hard stone which carries the achievements of three generations of artists in the History of sculpture. Its strength, dignity and power but less of its intimate grace and tenderness survived in the sturdier more earthbound figures of the second phase. Stone sculpture in the third phase is strangely unequal even in the temples built by Sembian Madevi. At its best it remains a noble form of expression.<sup>5</sup>

During the Chola period, 'there was no temple without sculpture. Mostly stone and bronze sculptures are identified. Very few gold and silver sculptures are found during Rajaraja I and Rajendra I periods. The civil art of the Cholas in palaces and houses have more are less disappeared.

Under the Pallavas, stone sculptures made great advances. They are in a naturalistic pose and unconventional attitudes. The human faces are elongated and have a broad nose, full lips, and double chin. The body show massive archaic form without much anatomical shape. The drapery is over-simplified and rarely indicates the details of the folds. The group sculpture many of which were hewn out of the original rock, displace excellent natural movement and monumental quality.<sup>6</sup> The shore temple of Mamallapuram, the Kailasanatha and the Vaikuntaperumal Temples at Kanchipuram mark the *zenith* of Pallava art.

G. Jouveau Dubreuil observes, the Chola sculptors were in no way inferior to Pallava sculptors in stone. Their achieve the men in big bronzes were unsurpassed for their beauty and found the technical skill in the sheer manipulation of large masses of metals.<sup>7</sup> 'Humanism and the freedom from pose are the two most significant features that elevate Chola sculptures to the status of great art says' Dr. T. V. Mahalingam.<sup>8</sup> He also clearly differentiates the Cholas sculpture from that of the Pallavas.

The Pallava sculptures are abstract and schematic and that there is not much of difference between Pallava representations of God and portraits But in Chola art, one can encounter an attractive conception of life and beauty and to spirit of humanism pervading all through: the Gods remain Gods and the portraits remain portraits. Also a portrait of an individual is not merged in a type and each image has an individuality of its own. Pallava images, particularly the rock-cut carvings are stiff and heavy and even disproportionate at times; but the Chola images are in a pleasing freedom of pose Chola sculptures are endowed with naturalistic and a somewhat elaborate treatment of decorative details These details in Pallava images are suggested by soft lines, which not infrequently, merge in the modelling, but in that of the Cholas the details are in bold and emphatic lines in the carvings of the period under review.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these, he points out the differences in the iconographical features of the sculpture like Katisutra, Yajnopavita, Skanta mala etc., from Pallava to the Chola images.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the style of the Chola sculptures, Chintamonkar expresses that the Chola figures show much more natural Soundness of the human body than the Pallava sculptures and though the attitudes are formal and the gestures are conventional they express dignity and vitality. The Chola faces are smooth and round shaped, decorations are simple The necklaces are in broad designs and are arranged in circular pattern round the neck. They rarely hang

down between the breasts or are bent into ornate patterns. The figures usually wear a bangle immediately above the elbow, a part of which sometimes projects from the other side of the arm. The girdles round the waist of the figures are in most cases very realistically shaped with a gargon-like head in the front for the buckle and with long festoons hanging down. In the later Chola style the figures assumed more conventional attitudes, standing or started in stiff attention. The nose became more pronounced and the tors was modelled to show robustness and power.<sup>11</sup>

NilakandaSastri, classifies the sculpture to the cholas into three major categories as portrait, Icon and decorative. The decorative sculpture includes the imaginative and natural figures. There are many quasi-portraits of various chola rulers and their queens, the Saivaite and Vaishnavaites saints and the donors are also identified. There is also another class of sculpture, human figures holding a lamp mostly female figures which are known as Dipa-Lakshmis or beauty-lamp.<sup>12</sup>

### Portraits

Carvings of individual persons in a realistic manner come under portrait sculpture. This type of art predominated in western art as against the Indian art. In the southern region, the pallavas developed this art and the cholas continued it to certain extent. The earliest historical sculptured portrait to survive in Tamil Nadu is on the walls of the Adivarahaperumal temple at Mamallapuram. The portraits found here are considered to be of Simhavarman and his wife and of Mahendravarman with his consort, belonging to the pallava period.

The earliest definitely dated portrait of the chola period that of Tirukkarrali Piccan who is said to have built the stone temple of Tiruvavaduturai (A.D.932) This relief is on the as south wall of the central shrine of that temple. By its side, in the another panel stands a portrait of Ilaiya Tirunavukkaraiyan, the devotee of the lord of the temple These figures, though adorned, give evidence to the realistic reproduction of facial traits practised by the artist of the tenth century.<sup>13</sup>

The statues of two women and a man on the walls of Koranganatha temple at Srinivasanallur are all sadly mutilated. Several other figures of men and women in the Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam are all very well preserved. It is significant to note that the life-size statues are all the hall-marks of the chola period.<sup>14</sup> Both Srinivasanallur and Kumbakonam portraits are dated a century before the accession of Rajaraja I.

About Kumbakonam sculpture, Ajit Ghose says that here for the first time the chola artist stands in sharp contrast with his pallava predecessors and the latter's severely abstract, ideal and schematic vision. There is no difference in outward bearing between a pallava king and a God, between a Goddess and a queen. But a new and attractive conception of life and beauty had dawned on these chola sculptors. These chola ladies are picturesque and realistic human figures, full of feminine grace and the joy of life. This intensely human quality may be said to distinguish every one of the statues in the niches of the shrine. This art so unconventional is thus refreshingly original in conception and spirit. This humanism is the chola's principal contribution to the south Indian art.<sup>15</sup> In their free and easy poses, in the divergence of their features and forms which impart a pronounced individuality to each figure, in the excellence of their modeling and in the discerning treatment of facial expression particularly of the eyes and mouth, these sculptures have no parallel in any other phase of south Indian art, not even in the chola period. The treatment of dress, coiffures of women and ornaments of both men and women reveal much of life in gone high society and these were perhaps representation of royal honors or members of the royal family, observes K.A.Nilakanda Sastri.<sup>16</sup>

Five portrait sculptures are found in the niches of the Acalesvara shrine of the Thiyagaraja temple at Tiruvarur. There are somewhat inferior to those found in Nagesvara

temple at Kumbakonam and Koranganatha temple at Srinivasanallur, due to the lack of individuality and expression and it seems that installing portraits had become more a practice than a method to portray individuals. In these portraits, the individuals merged into a type.<sup>17</sup>

The image of Kulotunga III at Kanchipuram Ekambarasvara temple, is an excellent model for portrait sculpture of the later chola period. His another image made of mortar installed in the same temple was now ruined. In the temple of Umamahesvara at Konerirajapuram, built by Sempian Madevi during the period of Uttamachola Maduranthakan, the statues of Kandarathittar and Sembian Madevi are installed in the posture of worshipping the Linga of the temple. In the southern wall of the garbhagriha of the temple the image of the stapati Alattfir sattan Kunapattanis carved in stone with his name also.

Some bronze images are also identified as portraits of the chola period. The Tanjore Bragatesvaratemple inscription makes a mention about the images of Rajaraja I and his consort Ulagamadevi made up of bronze by Athittasuryan an officer of the temple. The first definitely dated south Indian bronze image is the portrait of Cholamadevi, the queen of Rajaraja-I which is, in the Kalahasti temple. The inscription on its pedestal refers to the age and identify of the statue. It also states about the sculptor Nicipattalagan who cast the statue under the order of Rajendracholadeva. This portrait is an excellent and fine specimen of the art of the time. In the Freer Art Gallery Washington, a beautiful bronze, woman statue is preserved and it is interpreted as Parvati or Lakshmi or Sembian Madavi. If it is Sembian Madevi, it is one of the best examples of the portrait sculpture of the early chola period. Its pleasing proportion and workmanship, certainly make it, an early chola broad sculptured portrait.

The metal statuette of Kulottunga-III which was a gift Udaiyanambi to the temple Kalattidaiyar at Kalahasti dated 1180 A. D. wears many ornaments and the face the expressive of youthful energy and eagerness.<sup>18</sup>

The stone statue in a niche on the north wall of the Koranganatha Temple at Srinivasanallur is supposed to be that of Athicantesai. The metallic statue at Tirunamanallur is believed to be that of Narasinga Munaiyadaraiyar, a Saivite devotee; and another one from Kodikkarai is said to represent Ejobamaharsi, a Saiva Acharya. All these statues are more icons of the types of royal patron and spiritual leader than portraits proper. In the same manner, the statues of Sandesvarar, Appar and Sambanthar erected around the Prahara of the temple of Tiruvalanturai Madevar at Kilaipaluvur [dated 907-955 A. D., Paranthaga-I], Tirumangai Alvar of the eleventh century A. D. at Perunto Mam, and Sambanthar of the twelfth century A.D. at Pudukkottai Museum, can also be considered more as icons than as portraits. The figures of the sixty-three Nayanmars installed in the Arthamantapa of the Tiruvalanturai Madevar Temple at Kilaipaluvur are the very best examples of the quasi-portraits of the chola period.

**Icons :** Icons form part of the sculpture of the chola period. Even though the Vaishnava icons enshrined in the Temples, the thematic representation of Lord Siva (murtam) predominated in both stone and metal sculptures, because the Cholas were ardent Saivites.

The iconography deals with twenty-five thematic representation of Lord Siva, and the sculptors of the period concentrated in these murtams. The Somaskanta is the popular theme of Pallava sculpture and painting, whereas the Nataraja predominates the chola sculpture. The Takshinamurti and the Arthanari are also more popular forms of this period. When imparted with these forms, the Umasakitar, the Bhitchatanar, Kalasamharar, the KalyanaSundarar, the Gangalamurti, the Biravar, the Kalarimurti the Tripurantakar, the Pasupatarti, the Chandrasekarar, the Gajasamhramurti, the Sivanadanamurti and the Sangaranarayanar forms all found in any of the Chola temples but of less popularity.

The Yali frieze, the Devakoshita, the Bhutagana. the kutu of the first tier, and the salai, the kotungai. the Yali Frieze the greeva and the shikara of the second tier are a few of the

temples of the chola period that have the icons. In addition to these the sculptured columns are found in the outer walls the floors, the pillars, the entrances and the mandapas of the temples.

The main shrine of the Chola temple stands the east, the other three directions of the garbhagriha walls are engraved with niches having Thrimurti, the concept which was practised by the pallavas the south devakoshta with the Varahamurti. In course of time, the Lingodbhava and Durga replace Varaha and Brahma, on behalf of the devotional spirit of the Saivas, whom they believed that Siva is the only supreme God.

The image of a female deity Nisumpasutani found in Nisumpasiitani Temple at Tanjore, and the Dvarapala in the Arthamandapa of the VijayalayaCholesvaram Temple at Narttamalai are the specimen of the fantastic art of modelling the icons during the period of Vijayalaya. The main shrine 'Subramanya' has been identified in Karjanna Subramaaya Temple; the statues Takshina'murti, Subramanya and Brahma enshrined in the south of the main shrine of 'Avani Kantarppa Esvara graham' at Kelaiyur, are a few examples expressing the technical skill in carving the icons of the Athitta period. In the same manner, the icons of Ganapathi, Lingodbhava, Brahu and Durga traced at Pullamangai Brahmapuresvarar Temple show the talent in modelling the sculpture during paranthaka period.

The Siva Temple at Tiruvallesvaram has early Chola icons' before Rajaraja-I. In the niches of the pancharas of its vimana, there is Nataraja statue in the centre, of the southern side, with Vrushabharudra and gangadhara on its left, and Virabhadra and his Devi on the right. In the western side, the Lingodbhava with Vishnu and Brahma on either side and in the centre Kalaharamurti and Kiratamurti on its left, and Yoga Dakshinamurti and Umasakitar on the right. The Northern side, the Gajarimurti is in the Centre, the Candesanukraha and Sukhasanamurti on the right and Somaskanda on the left. Besides, an Ardhanari having three arms, a group of Somaskanda standing with Nandi and a Gana.

During middle Chola period, ie., the glorious era of Rajaraja-I and Rajendra-II, the Brahatesvara Temple at Tanjore and the Gangaikonda Cholesvaram Temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram have numerous icons to their credit.

The walls of the first tier of the garbha griha of Brahatesvara are adorned with a set of life-size sculptures of variety of forms of Lord Siva. Six sculptures of each wall except the eastern one, which include a pair of Dvarapalas. The icons on the walls of the second tier of the garbha griha, of the southern and northern sides of the mahamandapa and of the griva; the eighty-one karanas of Bharatanatya (other karnas incomplete) represented in the Srivimana all high relief sculptures the eighteen Dvarapalas in total, the Nandi, the Tikpalakas which include the Isana deva, Nirutti, kubera and Varuna all engraved in the temple depict the forceful execution of sculptures.

Likewise, the two tiers of the walls of the garbhagriha of GangaikondaCholesvaram Temple have numerous statues, numbering as many as fifty. Of them, the Chandesanugrahamurti Nataraja and Sarasvati are the supers specimens.

#### END NOTES :

- <sup>1</sup> Encyclopaedia Britanica, vol. 20 'sculpture'.
- <sup>2</sup> M. M. Deneck, Indian Art, Haru Iyn, London, 1950,PP. 14-15.
- <sup>3</sup> A. Vincent Smith, A History of fine art in India and Ceylon, Bombay,p. 119.
- <sup>4</sup> S. R. Balasubramaniam, 'Cholar kalaip pani, Madras, 1966, P.50.
- <sup>5</sup> Douglas Barrett, 'Early Cola Bronzes', Bombay, 1965, p. 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Chintamoni kar, Indian Metal sculpture, London, 1952, p. 26.
- <sup>7</sup> K. A. Nilakanda Sastri, The Cholas, Madras, 1965, p. 694.

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- 8 Dr. T. V. Mahalingam, 'Studies in South Indian Archaeology, Epigraphy Architecture  
and Sculpture, Madras, 1978, p. 133.
- 9 Ibid. p. 133.
- 10 Op.cit., pp. 133-35.
- 11 Chintamoni kar, Indian Metal sculpture, p 27.
- 12 K.A. Nilakanda sastri, The Colas, op.cit., p. 24
- 13 Chintamoni kar, Indian Metal sculpture, op.cit., p. 27
- 14 K.A. Nilakanda sastri, op.cit., p. 726
- 15 Ibid. p.725.
- 16 Ajit ghose, Ostasiatische zeitschrity, p. 165, 1933.
- 17 K. A. Nilakanda sastri, the Colas, op.cit., p. 725.
- 18 S. Ponnusamy, Sri Thiagaraja Temple at Tiruvarur, Madras, 1920, p. 91.