

## CHAPTER VII

### EARLY CHOLA BRONZES - A FORMAL ANALYSIS

#### INTRODUCTION

Metal casting in South India needs no introduction. Objects of arts have been discovered from Adiccanallūr, Arikamēdu and other megalithic burial sites. Metal sculpture in pure metals and alloys date back to antiquity. We are also now aware of certain fallacies regarding the antiquity of these casts(1). The ebb and tide of supply and demand perhaps caused a historical uncertainty. These conjectures have been revised. It is certainly evident today that metal casting was a continuing tradition. The historical emphasis with the rise of the Pallavas was given to the construction of monolithic and structural stone temples. The still undiscovered metal sculptures perhaps never entered the picture. The Pallavas themselves must have been preoccupied by a much more gigantic task of controlling and turning to his will something as unwieldy as stone. If their adversaries could do it, so could they ! And thus D. Barret made a claim that the best classical tradition barely lasted for a century and half. Gravelly and Ramachandran declared (a couple of decades earlier) that no Hindu metals were known that could be proved to be from the Pallava period. So with time and concrete visual evidence they changed their views. O.C. Ganguly of course did pioneer work as early as 1916 A.D. while Stella Kramrisch,

A.K. Coomaraswamy, and C. Sivaramamurti took up the cause for the South Indian Bronzes.

Art connoisseurs and scholars in the last tw decades have brought to light Pallava, Chōla and other bronzes. Chronology, iconography and technique became a major preoccupation for bronze lovers. Today, the authority is R. Nagaswamy who has brought out the 'Master Pieces of Early South Indian Bronzes' which is a mine of treasure and insight.

In the words of Robert Frost -

"read it a hundred times, it will for ever keep its freshness as a metal keeps its fragrance".

#### VII.1 MEDIUM AND MATERIAL

Man had discovered metal in its natural state. The Neolithic age used metals like gold, copper and silver. It was his sudden recognition of the 'potential of metal' and its treatment which transformed it and contributed to one of the more creative fulfilments and urges.

Hammer wrought, smelting and alloying succeeded each other. Smelting and alloying created bronze which was more harder than stone. Being an exhaustible resource

its use was limited, its value dear, its potential more tempting and most of all the finished product non perishable and easily movable. Thus its diffusion has been widespread, and its forms infinite.

When we try to understand the technical repertory of the craftsman or sculptor we must not forget two realities. These are his visual experience and his human intuition. Stones and wood called for rounded or curved finish, clay saw the spherical, palpable and mouldable. Smelting proved the malleability and ductility of metals. They can be metaphorically called the sculptor's 'liquid gold'. And once the molten liquid was hardened to form, a further threading and incising perfected his form. The 'visual and manual' together created a new conception of form over a period of time. It was the beginning of an artistic revolution. The quality or character of metal is supple and strong, it could be finished to minute details and forms, and is very tactile. It provokes the sensual urge in us to touch and caress. The important thing to be remembered is that more important than the visual experience, the medium here guides the sculptor to be first and foremost a manual worker where technique comes first.

Material played a very fundamental role. The genesis of sculpture is essentially determined by its material. The tactile values of the medium establish the emotional stance and basic accent. Furthermore, it is not delimited, and the one who uses the medium must be aware of the correct degree of its exploitation. This comes by the 'visual and manual' experience. His aesthetics is thus bound. However, it is not the sculptor alone who creates an emotional empathy; but it is also through the thorough knowledge of the medium and the intrinsic property contained in it. These are universal traits, but the degree of stress, manipulation and finish determine its individual or peculiar trait.

The properties of metal, ductility, malleability and tensility allowed access to the sculptor, but did not give him the advantage of control so easily, he strived and perhaps suffered the agonies of wanting to possess and create. Sometimes he succeeded and sometimes not. We take those examples where there was harmony between the sculptor his medium and the observer.

## VII.2 TEXTS AND TECHNIQUES

Bronzes was technically called Pañcalōha, which literally means an amalgam of five irons - copper, gold, silver,

brass and white lead. The main ingredient however was iron. The technique of casting was referred to as 'madhuchiśta vidhānam' in its first stage. This is the 'cire perdue' or 'lost wax' technique.

A brief summary of technique is that an actual size model is made in wax and wrapped in soft clay. This is held in position by metal wires. There is a small hole at the base of the clay, this is to facilitate the flow of wax once it is heated. The lost wax naturally leaves a hollow of its shape in the clay. It is inside this that the amalgam (liquid) is poured. On cooling the metal sets and the clay is removed. The figure is chased and chiselled. South Indian tradition forbade hollow casting. Reference to such casting appears in the Mānasāra but dates back to earlier sources like the Atharva Vēda. If this is the practical side of technique the intellectual was made aware of 'dhyāna lakshana.' made up of dhyāna or contemplative verse for iconography; the lakshana or recipe showing the pattern for the image its pose and other details, and the iconometry for respective images. These may not be followed verbatim, but they became an essential part of the metal caster's rituals. Super human, human, male, female, lesser creatures all find some iconometric

proportions. However, much was left to the sculptor's intuition. Knowledge regarding the plumb lines, 'pralamba phalaka', The Brahmasūtra, Rudra-sūtra, Parsa sūtra, Kaksha-sūtra and Bāhu-sūtra are carefully studied. There is an additional Lamba-sūtra or Naṭa-sutra and Hikka/Vadra/Kaṭi sūtra. He is also aware of the māna, pramāṇa, unāna, parimāṇa and upamāṇa. The three poses are equally mastered. They are the pose and balance. In place of the tribhanga, we have vaṅgabhanga, samabhanga and atibhanga which is a little like the tribhanga. These are the bodily curves, and flexions. Apart from this the different hand poses or finger play is an important South Indian trait, which is a "highly formalised and cultivated gesture language" - conveying an attitude, values of movement and moods. Examples of such poses are lōla or lamba hasta; nidrita hasta, kaṭi hasta, dhanurdhāri hasta, aliṅgana hasta. Poses based on mudrā are kaṭaka hasta, siṃhakarnahasta very similar to the former, kartari, patāka, tripatāka - carrying an object or being inviting or throwing down; sūci or mukha hasta ardhaçandra, jñāna, varada and abhaya hasta .

One is also drawn to the ornaments which are found uniformly over South India and over the centuries. These are also seen in stone and are naturally the kind of

prevalent ornaments. Some characteristic examples are kaṭibhandha, which has the vyāla or siṃha clasp called aruṇōnmālai; the festoon which hang are called urumālai, and those hanging from the ear ornaments across shoulders 'bāhumalai'. There is a jewel band for the chest called 'ratna kōdārabandhanam and the anklet'. The crown ornaments are kirīṭa, kārāṇḍamakūṭa, jatāmakūṭa and jātabandha. Vaiṣṇava icons take kirīṭa, while kārāṇḍa is prescribed for female and jatāmakūṭa for forms of Śiva and jātabandha for Caṇḍikēśvara. Contextual sources for the iconography of these icons are specially mentioned in the Sakalādhikāram and are found consistently in the bronzes with scant or no change.

The Āgamas encouraged and recommended these icon worship as nityapūja, nityōtsava and mahōtsava. This is all the more feasible because the mūla bēra being acala, these utsava bēra were made cala and fulfilled the rituals and religious urges.

The Chōḷa, specially their queen's bore gifts, and gifting of metal icons was a noble gesture. It was during the Sembiyan Phase that this reached its zenith and moved into the Rājarāja I Phase.

Having a fairly clear background the problem that confronts us is that the art of the Chōḷa was a Pallava extension as stated by Nagaswamy(2); Pallava art merged into the Chōḷa style in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D.(3). Chōḷa sculptures have their forerunners in the Mām allā puram ratha (4).

A fairly detailed study of stone sculpture showed the mixed origin, an intermingling of various styles which go back to a common heritage. Can the same be applied to bronze? This is yet to be seen. Perhaps the following pages may partially answer some of the questions regarding the emergence of its style.

We are no longer in a blind alley. Getting as far back as the dancing girl of Mohenjodāro is no longer relevant. Geographic and chronological proximity help us trace and study immediate links.

### VII.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHŌḶA BRONZES

"Whence and whither to bronzes?"

The Early Chōḷa Phase begins around the mid ninth century A.D. and extends upto the early years of Rājarāja I; tentatively before the Imperial Middle Phase sets in.



The high quality, which is a Chōḷa virtue raises questions for the curious art historian. Like the petite woman who stands with the slightest of contraposto, in lōla and kaṭaka or siṃhakarnaka hasta, is an enigma-both a question, and secret. And so each tried to conquer the Chōḷa; total victory was like catching rainbows. Some colours were caught and passed through the prismatic studies of scholars. However, they are not total.

D. Barret in his study on Early Chōḷa Bronzes does not attempt to relate to the many manifestations of the Pallava style. He only shows that within the history of the Chōḷa art an Early Chōḷa period has a point and meaning.

Nilakantha Sastri, following J. Dubreuil says, that this period represents an intermediary style between the Later Pallava monuments and the Rājarājēśvara in Tañjāvūr in the 11th century A.D. which 'reached and passed a meridian'! He divided it into two phases, from Vijayālaya to Āditya I, which he calls the transition from the Pallava to Chōḷa style; and the other, the phase including the reign of Parāntaka I to the accession of Rājarāja I in 985 as "a more pronounced Chōḷa phase".

D. Barret is against any misleading word which implicates. He contended that Early Chōla is an original movement; dispenses with the Pallava-Chōla transition and calls it The Āditya I or Phase I. As we saw in the earlier sections the IInd or transition Phase and the following Sembayan Phase posited with no water tight compartments.

At this juncture it is redundant to go into iconographic details of these icons. Chronology will be only supportive but visual nuances and variations of the formal qualities will guide in the development of style.

A random selection of Pallava bronzes are shown here as representatives of that style.

One of the earlier examples is the Viṣṇu from Thiruneippēr Vānmikinātha temple, dated 750 A.D. (fig.258). An archaic image, the chief Pallava characteristics of ornament seen there are the yajñōpavita over the right arm which is a Western Cālukyan influence on Pallava; the haritis-aundrika or median loop hanging in semi circle from the waist. The drapery is heavy and coarse reaching well below the knees, while the katisūtra is looped at the sides in fan like folds hanging stiffly upto the knees. The leonine clasp arunōnmālai and the festoon-

urumālai are prominent; the makūṭa is kirīṭa and cut into square blocks. The cakṛa and śaṅkha are held between the tips of the finger. The back shows a moderately worked sīrsa cakṛa with a pendent. This is a partial iconographic detail, but on looking at the formal qualities, the first impression it gives is that of being archaic. The medium is not yet explored. There is a certain rigidity of form while the gestures are tentative and unsure. The shoulders are broad which is a Pallava norm, just as the limbs show the tubular quality. The relative proportions between the shoulder blades, narrowed waist and hips start with strength and diminish into timidity. The face however is a redeeming feature. It is here that the manual attempt at technique is somewhat set aside to mould the sensitive and emotive. The result is naive quality. A notable feature is that careful details do not exist, and the medium has not come to life in the sculptor's hand. This is the initial or tentative stage, in the first throes of creating. It is in the nature of stone which caused a rubric and archaic form, not yet yielding to the sculptor's desire. The metal in its earlier attempts rebels and obscures its own potential. This is not a unique feature, and is universally applicable where a sculptor grapples with his unyielding medium as does Pallava at this point of time.

Almost a century later we once again encounter the now seasoned and tired Pallavas. Their output in stone froze, while the more intimate art of bronzes cast a spell over them. From baroque proportions in stone this was a refreshing change. 'Petite and charming', the Kalyāṇasundara from Vaḍakkalathūr and the Sukhāsana Śiva of the Umāśahita group from Kilaiyūr (figs.259,260) stand as masterpieces of the Pallava style. The Kilaiyūr Śiva dated 875 A.D. is considered to be the Early Chōḷa example showing Pallava features. The feature that is common with the earlier discussed Viṣṇu is the variation in facial similarity. The face is a more perfected ovoid, and the features sligher but carefully worked out. The torso is broad but once again cast with more surety as in the Vaḍakkalathūr Kalayāṇasundara. What is giving it the Chōḷa characteristic is its 'inner radiation and peace' justifying its name. The Vaḍakkalathūr Kalyāṇasundara perfected the technique. The flow of curve, masses, tones and rhythm make it an advanced and perfected art. The Pārvati is slight, innocent and tender, her hands placed in Siva's is the subtly rendered pānigrahaṇa pose. Form has been thoroughly understood here. The tactile values are more prominent in the rear(5). The facial expression is solemn and perhaps becomes the occasion. The drapery is near

transparent unlike the earlier Viṣṇu and the Sukhāsana Śiva. Tranquil and in non-moving attitudes we saw the above examples, and now towards a dynamism is the Nallūr Naṭarāja (fig.261) specially in the urdhva-vajānu pose. Being multi-armed it is rare; eight hands and the five hooded serpent encircling a hand is one of vigour. An elaborate, typically Pallava jātamukuta similar to our previous examples is seen. The jāta at the back with the śīrsa cakra are also typical Pallava features. The arch of flames symbolises the energies bursting out of the Naṭarāja, as the apasmāra is crushed by the mere heel of the lord. There is a latent dynamism which bursts forth in the dance. Each limb, shows the quality of the sculptor to transform his medium. The space and image are in consonance with each other. The space around is activated and energised. The tensile strength of the medium becomes the living flesh of the Lord.

All these bronzes show some feature or the other, common to all of them. It is also known that three to four generations of sthāpati lived within a close radius of each other.

A detailed survey of both the dated and undated bronzes assigned to the Early Chōla period are known. Some

of these have been incorporated in this essay, they show predilection and variations which either contribute as prototypes for the development of the style, or exist as types that do not necessarily do so, yet they remain within its formal bounds. For the sake of convenience the forms are seen as female-male dieties and devotees and saints. The Śivakāmi of the Naṭaraja from Vadakkalathūr (fig.262) is a variation of the Parvati of the Kalyāṇasundara from the same place. There is only a variation in her makuṭa deifying her. The external features like the ornaments and drapery are very similar. The channavīra kiṅkiṇi, kēyura and bangles are common features. The kuṇḍala of the Kalyāṇsundara Pārvati is patraḥkuṇḍala, and her coiffure is a traditional hairdo in the S curve. Śivakāmi wears a kārāṇḍa makuṭa. What strikes us most are her shut eyes, rapt in the concentration of her lord. Her hand gesture is such that it suggests her total concentration on the music and dance, as if a spell has been cast on her. The naivette is no longer there. Here is a mature and seasoned woman well versed in the ways of the world. Not shy, timid and adoring in the child like manner of Pārvati; she is an experienced adult. The lōla hasta shows her poise and confidence. She is relatively more rounded, and her slight bodily curve moves towards

the tribhanga. The pedestal she stands on is the padma-pīṭha, unlike the Pallava pīṭha. The sculptor recognised the potential of his medium, of causing curves and gentle rhythms. There is a distinct Chōḷa 'inner radiance'.

The group of bronzes from Tandantōṭṭam (figs.263,264) showing Umā, Dēvasēṇa and Umā from Śkanda, as a contrast show totally different features. Their drapery differs, there are elaborate kaṭibandha with urumālai in loops girdling the waist upto the thighs. The channavīra falls only from the left shoulder and passes through the cleavage towards the right hip. The Umā of the Sōmaskanda wears a different channavīra similar to the Pallava examples. The female form gained much confidence and regal bearing. The seriousness that is a quality of the Chōḷa is seen in all the three. There is no hovering smile, the faces have a determined look, and a 'looking inwards' feeling. The kāranda makūṭa adds to their stature. The body flexions have been established, the tendency to accentuate and stress without flaunting is the key to their feminine grace. There is something more inviting than suggestion. The Naṅga-varam Bhōgēśvari (fig.265) was the first inscriptional evidence of an independent gift given to the consort

of the chief deity of the Sundarēśvarar temple. Standing in the prominent tribhanga with the right side in the lōla and left in kataka hasta, this is a particularly contrasting example from what we have seen thus far. The finish and details are sadly lacking. The padmapītha rests on a square pitha with rings to insert rods for taking the icon out. This is again a Pallava feature. If the Bhōgēśvari belongs to the Muttaraiyar temple, but made during Parāntaka I reign, it is certainly not the best. The drapery also recalls Pallava drapery, while the channavīra is absent and a upavita goes from the left to the right side. Two other examples which show mixed features are the kali from Kilaiyūr and Tiruveṅgāḍu (figs. 226, 227). Seated in the ardhaparyāṅka upon rectangular pītha they are royal and of proud bearing. Fully articulated anatomy which have exaggerated curves, these bronzes show the 'ananku'. They represent both quietitude and anger. On one hand she blesses, in the abhaya mudra and the other holds the cup, while the trident and goad are in the upper hands. They have flaming hair, the Kālī from Thiruveṅgāḍu has such flaming hair as a crown, protruding teeth, raised eyebrows and closed eyes; and a flared nose suggesting fierceness. Her upavita is made of munda or skulls, while the breast band or kucabandha is a



serpent. The Kilaiyūr Kālī is benign. She also has a serpent twined round her breasts and wears a pearl upavita. The form is much more rounder, like the Parāntaka I fullness of his later period. The face is broad and the features suggesting meditation. The fluid lines and curves have all been arrested into firm, steady and tangible forms. This feeling for form was realised by burnishing and polishing of the bronze. If the deities possess the physical and spiritual qualities and radiance; the two examples from Kilaiyūr and Paruthiyūr, Paravai and Sīta respectively show the semi-divine idealised feminine being (fig.268,269). One is the courtesan and the other the noble queen. Both carry their identities. One is earthly and the other divine, but to the sculptor they are idealisations of the real. The Kilaiyūr Paravai, Sundara's beloved, with kaṭi hasta stands in a confident tribhanga. Her face recalls very slightly the other Kilaiyūr images showing Pallava traits. The accomplishment is there to be seen. Her stance in its own way recalls the Kumbakōṇam figures of the apsara. At once dignified, at once accessible, at once somewhat detached she is a mystery. Her rounded, just ample form calls for caress. The Paruthiyūr Sīta, more human than divine is the queen in tribhanga and kaṭaka hasta, while the other is in lōla hasta. Wearing a channavīra

she too recalls the Kumbanakōṇam forms with a variation however. The elegance of Paravai and the placidity of Sīta show the Chōḷa predilection for capturing the essence and infusing it in their forms. Both figures stand on the padmapīṭha. They are moving towards transcendence and sublimity.

A few male divinities show the development of a style in their casting. One thing was certain that unlike all other civilisations, equal emphasis was given to both the male and female aspects in the making of art. One without the other was like a song without a tune. Bhakti revelled not only in lyrics but also a visual religious landscape where gods and goddesses were the dramatic personae.

The Viṣṇu from Paruthiyūr (fig.270) standing in samabhanga recalls the Brahma from the Pullamaṅgai Brahmapurīśvara youthful, he shows the abhaya mudra and holds his other hand in the kaṭi hasta. Broad shoulders, tapering torso, this Early Chōḷa bronze however recalls the loosened Pallava drapery and Chōḷa features. The gentle stresses and translucent drapery bring out the form. It is in this sculpture like the Pullmaṅgai Brahma, that this Viṣṇu has realised absolute transcendence. The climax

in transubstantiation is clear. Slender but with the rounded shoulders there is a total harmony of every limb and ornament. It is as if he has come down from the infinite to lead the way towards bliss. As if in poetic justice we see the opposite in the Tiruppālanam Viṣṇu (fig.271). It can only be said that not all sculptures contribute towards style or search for excellence. The conscious effort is obvious and the reason for this could be anything from slack, unimaginative, lesser or a learner's hand. The cakra is frontal facing which is more common, while the Paruthiyūr Viṣṇu holds it edge front.

If the Paruthiyūr Viṣṇu causes a tremor of the sublime, the Bhikṣātana from Tirunāmanallūr (fig.272) gives us a glimpse of the transcendental. In a perfectly balanced form, this nude god in the garb of the begger mendicant wanders among the fickle ṛṣipatini and arrogant ṛṣi. The fluidity of line and inner life or 'mana' is a subtle suggestion. The limb and languorous forms suggest a spiritual detachment and the dissolution of the ahaṁkāra. Such expression is essentially a Chōla attitude. However, such detachment was not conducive to the Rāma and Lakṣṇa group (fig.273,274). They are divine and thus closer to the Paruthiyūr Viṣṇu in style except

for the drapery. The details are more lucid and sharper in these two figures. They wear short ardhouka. The representation and suggestion are perfectly affected by the sculptor. The left hand is in the dhanurdhāri hasta. It is interesting to note their jewellery befitting the cakravartin image. Grace, charm and the cakravarti or mahā puruṣa lakṣṇa make it a conception of royalty, responsibility, poise and perfection. Caught in the moment, their stance is a subtle body language poised for action. Such bliss finds no parallel. To a lesser degree these traits are seen in the two Tripurāntaka; the Tripurāntaka from Cidambaram (fig.275) is more robust and shows the broad and rounded features of the Parāntaka I type. The Tripurāntaka from Śekal (fig.276) is a contrast. Standing in the dvibhaṅga this is a lesser Chōḷa piece. The benign grace of the former comes from a slight smile, open eyes and a relaxed form, while the latter is in rapt concentration thus tense. Two opposing aspects are shown. Three saints deified are Sundarar from Kilaiyūr and the Caṇḍikesvara from Thiruthuraipūṇḍi and Nāgapattinam (figs.277 to 279). Sundara stands as a perfectly realised soul. Youthful, handsome and lost in the world of Bhakti. The lover aspect is projected here. Spontaneity is the key to this image. His being is imbued with the

mādhurya Bhakti and thus he is mellifluous like his songs and lyrics. The aesthetic attitude and temper that is essentially Chōla is seen in this example along with his consort Paravai. The property of metal, the molten liquid shaped itself to the sculptor's poem. This icon is both movement and stance that is timeless. Timelessness is one of the facts of the Early Chōla which is suggested in their form. From mādhurya to the pasu and pati relationship; is one of the master and slave. This is realised in the forms of the Candikēśvara. Like the Sekal and C idambaram Tripurāntaka, these are similar variations following broadly the variations of the Parāntaka I or the general Āditya I Phase.

Changes began to be observed in the casting of bronzes. First and foremost, under the Sembiyan munificence the production went up. The golden age of metal casting had dawned. "The style is characterised by clarity of workmanship, particularly in the modelling, and excels in rendering the bhanga of the body, particularly the tribhanga. The accurate and detailed delineation of ornamental detail is another distinguishing feature. The face also presumes a rendering noticed in the other schools"(6).

The Konērīrājapuram bronzes of Tripurasundari, Pārvati and Śivakāmi (fig.280 to 282) all three with consorts show the height attained by bronzes. It is here that realism and idealisation synthesise. Divine yet human, the female forms achieve total perfection. The play of sunlight and lamp light heighten the tactile sensation. They are at once desirable as well as divine. They are an expression of all that is alive, throbbing with life and fervor. Their body in sensuous, full curves is the sculptor's quest for form. The technical manipulation reaches a feverish pitch while the sensuous is elevated. The emotive is an understatement in these bronzes. The body thrown in the tribhanga, the eternal woman places her weight ever so gently. There is a subtle modelling where shapes and forms emerge like wisps of silk. The shoulder, length of hands, limbs in general and torso, specially the langourous curve and then the flare of hips are all fluid. There is a similarity in the facial features. Petite, tender and some what coy. She is the enchantress.

A variation of these same features shows us the 'ideal female form' that was formalised. Taking off from the Konērīrājapuram bronzes, types were created. The prototype saw too a prolific development. These examples

are the Śivakāmi from the Naṭarāja group at Sembiyaṇ Mahādēvi (fig.283); the Sīta of the Rāma, Sīta, Laks'mana from Kappalūr (fig.284); the Pārvati of Kalyāṇasundara from Tiruvelivikuḍi (fig.285), the Bhōgēsvari of Vṛddhācalam (fig.286) and to an inferior degree Śivakāmi from Tirumiyaccūr (fig.287). It is the slight variation in mudra, drapery, stance and in minor details that these bronzes vary. They however suggest the uniformity of the Sembiyaṇ style more or less.

There are also a few examples showing certain lesser or archaic trends through the period. The Kalyāṇa Sundara and Pradōsha-mūrti (fig.288,289) from Tirumañjēri recall the Kōṇāḍu ethnic trait. The Śiva in both cases recall the stone sculptures from the Āditya I and late Parāntaka I Phases. Further guesses cannot be hazarded. The formal quality puts them very much in the ambit of the Sembiyaṇ Phase. Recalling once again the Pallava aesthetic of form we come to the Sōmaskanda group from Paṭṭiśvaram (fig.290). Small and unique it recalls the Vaḍakkalathūr Kalyana-sundara in domestic harmony and grace. The Śiva is closer to the Chōḷa idiom, but it is the beatific quality - between the tangible and the intangible that leaves us replete.

The Bhōgēśvari from Kuttālam (fig.291) bespeaks the same family of sculptors who worked variously under the patroness Sembiyaṇ closely at Konērirājapuram. The vocabulary is same, while the rendering goes closer to naturalism very tentatively. The example that strikes us most as parallel to their stone rendering are the Tripurāntaka and Tripurasuṇdari from Kilappaluvūr (fig.292). They are Sembiyaṇ in the realisation of their form and reflect the stone sculptures from Tiru-Ālandurai Mahādēvar temple from the same place. The facial features and upper torso follow some of the Āditya I archaism also seen in stone. The joy of sculpting bronzes, the finesse and detail, the metallic quality and yet the ethereal sensitivity reach their pinnacle in the three bronzes from Aliyūr, Tiruvēlvikuḍi and Nallūr (figs.293 to 296). They are the Śivakāmi, Tani Amman and paramount of all the living and breathing Umā. She is the ultimate in the female form and yields to the Umā of the Vṛśā-vāhana from Tiruvēngāḍu of the Rājarāja I Phase (fig.297).

To counterbalance the petite and passive feminine form, innocence and restraint the gods are cast in larger frames and higher pithas. Forms of Śiva as Natarāja and Tripurāntaka from Konērirājapuram and Sembiyaṇ Mahādēvi (figs.280,282,283) show the virile, broad chested adult



in imposing stances. Confident and knowledgeable He is in control. Such are the features that become recurrent in the Kalyāṇasundara of Tiruvēlikuḍi (fig.285), Rāma Lakṣmaṇa from Kappalūr (fig.284) etc. These features are further embellished by the divine knowledge and grace. The power and masculine grace are seen in the subtle stance and body language, in the Vṛśāvāhana from Nallūr, Gidambaram and Tiruthuraipūṇḍi (figs.298 to 300). They become one of unsurpassable style in the Thiruvēṅgāḍu Vṛśāvāhana (fig.297). Despite the high quality of bronze casting we are confronted with some examples which cry out transition. This is noticable in the Viṣṇu from Tiruneippēr (figs.301,302). The only salvation perhaps lay in disproving the date purely on the basis of its archaic style or passing it over saying 'one swallow doesn't make a summer'.

An amazing silence thus far. Where are the Nataraja? It is only befitting that they do not get clubbed with the other bronzes, firstly, because they are movement and dynamism and secondly they stand as the Chōla - prized and preserved.

The Nallūr Natarāja (fig.261) is one of the earliest examples with food raised above, in the catura pose. This

has been discussed in the earlier pages. However, K.V. Soundara Rajan says that the guild mannerisms differed specially in the use of eight hands. It was also not properly ascribable to the ananda tandava milieu. There are two fully articulated ānandaḥ Tāṇḍava Naṭarāja at Tiruvēdikudī and Puṇṇai (figs.303,304) and both show the developed Sembiyaṇ examples in their fully rounded forms and facial qualities. One foot placed firmly on the apasmāra, the other is lifted gracefully pointing outwards. The gaja hasta is held out in grace, while the other hands hold the ayudha with equal poise. These are examples of movement and spatial understanding. The images henceforth do not occupy the allotted space, but cause an apparent or illusory space that gains in meaning and existence by their dynamic vigour. The face still broad and ovoid moves towards realisation. The smooth limbs of the Punjai Naṭarāja, the texture, the enhancing curves and the firm but fluid lines show a master hand at work. The spatial relationship of form have been apprehended and transferred into a visual one, with the subtlety that only a Chōḷa can show. The texture and colour, the gradation of tones on its surface and the linear qualities of its contours show a perfect understanding of form. The flying jātā extend to the prabhāvali in Tiruvēdikudī. Jātā

as occupying space also enters into relation with it, by extending into it, and enfolding it. The flames of the prabhāvali if not controlled and shaped within bounds would engulf all of the space and this universe metaphorically.

This control over form by the sculptor, the visibility and tangibility of masses is made to relate with the more elusive space. Occupied space and voids are both expressed in a way that they cause tensions and give rise to movement. Shaping of the masses in different directions and in contrasting and complimentary position show a realised spatial relationship in the Sembiyan Mahādēvi and Konērīrājapuram Nāṭarāja (figs.283,305). This is sharpened in the Tirunaraiyūr bronze to a greater extent (fig.306). Without enclosing all the space, the component parts from the prabhāvali to the volume and configuration of the different parts shows only the physical space that is displaced by the form. The other space is the extended one which is expressed by the voids. The curvatures of the convex and concave are intuitive. The Sembiyan Mahādēvi Nāṭarāja in the use of the prabhāvali shows closely packed flames, like a woven garland encircling the god with a studded and outspread jatā. The energies of the ānanda tāṇḍava, the cosmic dance

is controlled in the fires of the prabhāvali, perchance it may cause such brilliance and take us to that summit of bliss which goes beyond creation, and dissolves the universe. The examples from Tirumiyaccūr, Vṛddhācalam, Vēdāranyam present such an annihilation by being more contained (fig.287,307,308).

Clarity, articulation and controlled proportions are born of great jnana and 'transcendental religion'. The different parts of the body merge in a way that makes them single volumes. This volumetric obsession is seen in the two unique examples from Śivagāṅga and Tiruvālaṅgulam. Both of them stand minus the prabhāvali (figs.309,310). Each articulated part has an internal proportion as well as one that related to other parts. This is harmonised and we see a single volume of fluid lines. This causes unlimited movement and spatial relationships. Even a slip of the drapery enhances these qualities. The Nataraja do not just show us their excellent skill in stance, movement and facial expression. As forms themselves they have an internal logic and organisation. This is classically realised here by the controlled transition from one part to the other suggesting a 'structural rightness'. The curves of the convex and concave merge and end at 'joints of the limbs and stop at the nipple

in the male and merge with the breast in the female form. The Tiruvālaṅgūlam Naṭarāja is in the catura tāṇḍava pose. The inner skeletal substructure is shown in the fixed and rigid geometry of the form. The muscle form, the softer and fluid parts balance this. The subtle pressures applied in the wax stage brings to play and rest the character of the whole form and its symmetry. The heel and toe of the feet balance the body, yet every other part makes an adjustment in relation to it. This is because 'catura tāṇḍava' is essentially the foot work, and the foot carried the entire weight. If a thorough balance is not achieved the sculpture falls into irregular symmetry and lack of balance. The textural blend softens, smoothenes or enhances the transition from one part to another and the very slight change in the plane. This leads us to qualitative expressions of the form from its quantitative output.

Kenneth Clark pays a tribute to the Indian sculptor, he writes, "Sculptures which are variations on a similar compositional theme can teach us a great deal about the art of sculpture. To compare half a dozen 'Indian Bronzes' which are identical in pose and to see how even within the severe limitations of iconography and iconometry it is possible for one sculptor to achieve

such different visual effects from another, or to compare two entirely different variations on the same theme..... (and makes one more keenly aware of the subtlety of the range of formal and expressive qualities that are at the sculptors disposal"(7). The two Natarāja from Kunniyūr and Aliyūr (figs.311,312) dated 950 A.D. and 1000 A.D., taken from a span of fifty years difference prove this. Exquisite detail and workmanship show balance and dignity. Reflective happiness, the luminosity from within characterise both these bronzes. The Nāḍanta Śiva from Kunniyūr shows the three dimensional schemata resolved by the configuration of an elaborate and anatomical form. This schemata shows the surface complexity and flux. The musculature was so sculpted that from naturalism idealisation began. "The nature of the sculptural schemata employed by a society is intimately bound up with the whole of its outlook with its fundamental attitudes and beliefs"(8). The Chōla show this analogy for naturalism and idealisation. Literature and religion were the scaffolds upon which these two characteristics developed. The Natarāja from Aliyūr also shows the perfecting of the form born of the intellectual and artistic climate. Interplay of the formal elements like volume, line, texture and planes are punctuated further by their drapery and ornament.

The Naṭarāja are a total harmony between the conception of the work, material, technique and creativity. The quality of ultimate fulfilment of all the above is realised in the light rhythmic step of the Naṭarāja, where the figure overcomes the weight and property of metal. Hovering and balancing in space, swift and gracefully it lifts us alongwith it into a state bliss.

Such a summit of bliss 'ānaṇḍa eḷḷai' as Sundara calls it, gives us humility and grace. These are best seen in the bronzes of the saint devotees. The Appar, Sambandar and Caṇḍīśvara (figs.313 to 315) are attributed to the Āditya I Parāntaka I Phase. Each of these bronzes are so cast that they represent very human traits. There is naturalism and emotive quality that suit the lesser being. The texture, form and heights of these figures are according to śāstra, lesser than the gods. The features are personalised to show individuals, while their supplicating attitude of reverence are styled variously. They carry their respective ayudha which identify them. Portrait sculpture of the canonised saints began to appear more frequently. The Tirumanjēri Caṇḍīśvara and Maṇṇikavācakar (figs.316,317) and the Kuṭṭālam Maṇṇikavāc akar, Apar and Sundarar are naturalistic forms (figs.318 to 320). The tactile quality are not emphasised and naturally

so because the theme did not call forth such. Very human, it is by the agony and ecstasy of religious fervour that they experience bliss, but still rooted to the earth as the sculpture intentionally casts them. Purposeful, their plastic intention is fully realised.

This formal analysis shows us the vocabulary used in the Early Chōla Bronzes. The pan Indian culture by and large show the urge for transubstantiation; however the method used and the variations in attitude, emphasis and stress give style, its identity. The iconographic and iconometric compendium are again the common heritage banks. The existence of the Pallava tradition shows its influence iconographically and plastically in the very Early Chōla Bronzes. Vestiges of it are also seen as late as the last quarter of the tenth century A.D. This did not mean a direct transition from the Pallava to Chōla. What gives the Chōla its very specific qualities of the formal and aesthetic are essentially its cultural attitude and plastic intention. Figures of human form are in a process of constant transubstantiation, which is more or less reached in the last years of Parāntaka I, and realised in the Sembiyan Phase. Interplay between the formal elements and very specially the humanising and spiritualising at one and the same



time give it a unique identity. The vocabulary is a specific one to that phase. The sublime and ethereal are achieved by the religious fervour and technical mastery not seen before or after. The overtones of an advanced and awakened culture is reflected in their works. At once it humanises and at once it elevates.

Whence and whither to Bronzes? and their answer, always -

'Within, within the Chōla !'

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