

Investigating Treasure Trove Chola Bronzes of Thiruvarur – A Study

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Abstract

This research paper probes the bronze images of Chola dynasty which ruled over Thiruvarur or Aaroor served as one of the five traditional capital towns. This town holds the symbol of rich culture of Chola's hegemony. The Dravidan style of iconography reached its perfection under Cholas. The Metallurgy Art of India reached a pinnacle on of Chola bronzes. The Greenish patina bronze images of Aiyandar riding an elephant, Subramaniya with his consort, Thirugnanasambandar and Lord Ganesha which was created during the medieval period especially in the Thiruvarur had a highest regard of superiority in art for many centuries. These Bronze images were created using "Lost Wax Technique" which specifies that only one specimen of that particular image can be made by the sculptor, so the image is original and it cannot be remade as it is. The craftsmanship of the bronze images of Chola period attained maximum glory. These bronzes were found as treasure troves in Tiruvarur. The Scholar who was a former Curator of this Museum attempt to bring limelight of Iconic excellence of the beauty of these bronze images and the Conservation method adopted to preserve them for future generation.

Keywords: Aiyandar on Elephant, Benzotriosole, Bronzes, Ganesha, Greenish Patina, Lost Wax Technique, Panchaloka, Subramaniya, Thirugnanasambandar, Thiruvarur, Treasure Troves, Valli

1. Introduction

Thiruvarur or Aaroor holds the symbol of rich cultural town of Chola hegemony. This town served as one of the five traditional capitals of the Chola Empire. The historic name of the town Aaroor (Arur) finds mention in the 7th century Saiva canonical Tamilwork, Tevaram. The Dravidian style of Iconography reached its perfection under Cholas. The Metallurgy Art of India reached a pinnacle on of Chola bronzes. The images which were created during the medieval period especially in the Thiruvarur had a highest regard of superiority in art for many centuries. The Government Museum, Thiruvarur has finest collections of Chola Bronzes which draws special attention of many visitors. The bronzes displayed in the Thiruvarur Museum were found as Treasure Troves

in and around Thiruvarur. The Scholar who was a former Curator of this Museum attempt to bring limelight of Iconic excellence of the beauty of these bronze images and the Conservation method adopted to preserve them for future generation.

2. Literature Review

The craftsmanship of the bronze images of Tamil people attained maximum glory during the period of Chola dynasty. The book titled "A Guide to Archaeological Galleries - An Introduction to South Indian Temple and Architecture and Sculptures" by F. H. Gravely and C. Sivaramamurti (first edition) published in 1939 mainly focused on Temple Architecture and Sculptures of India and throw limited light on Bronze images of Tamil Nadu.

“Guide to Bronze Gallery” by Srinivasadesikan in the year 1992 published by Government Museum, Chennai describes only the Bronze gallery of Madras Museum which were collected across Tamil Nadu before the year 1992. The book “Bronzes of South India” by P. R. Srinivasan published in 1963 and republished in 1994 reflects the bronzes collected from various parts of South India and the study of Cholas bronze images in Tiruvarur was also limited. So there is a need to bring limelight the bronze images which were found as Treasure troves in Tiruvarur. These bronzes were collected after the establishment of Tiruvarur District Government Museum in 1998 and the documentation of these bronze images became necessary.

3. Methodology and Sources

The Methodology adopted in this paper is historical and illustrations of bronze images are descriptive. The materials mainly collected from the field visits and bronze images are kept in Government Museum, Tiruvarur. The Scholar who earlier worked as the Curator of the above said Museum personally inspected these Bronze images.

3.1 Bronzes

Bronze, a mixture of Copper and tin, was a metal used for casting sculptures during medieval ages. “Bronze” is a terminology used for sculptures casted on metal. As the man advance in the religious practices and belief, he made attempt that the deities have to be visualized as King and this concept was emerged around 10th and 11th centuries¹. The sanctum image in the temple was usually made on stone. So it cannot be moved as it was too heavy to carry outside. For the purpose, to partake in temple carnival, processions and day to day ceremony, big metal images were made to carry away. The bronze images made during the period of Cholas stood as a symbol of great antiquity and rich cultural heritage of South India. Very skillful craftsmanship technical methods were followed to make tiny and large bronze images.

3.2 Lost wax Technique

Chola period Bronzes were created using “Lost Wax Techniques”. It is known in artistic term as “Cire Perdue”². The metal alloy of bronze is melted and poured into the mould. This particular bronze alloy is known as “Pancha Lokam” (Copper (50%), Silver 16%, Brass (10%), Lead

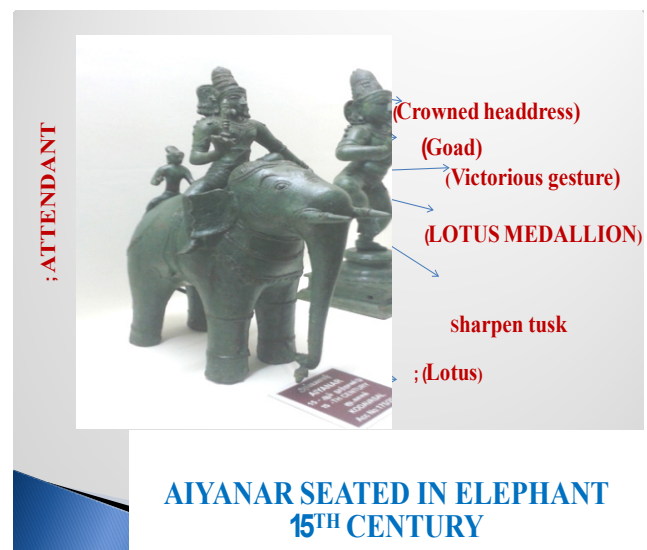
(16%) and Gold (8%)). When the metal has filled all crevices and has settled and hardened and cooled then the mould is broken off. The bronze figure is thus obtained. It is then cleaned, finer details are added and blemishes are removed, smoothed and polished well. So, there will be only one specimen of that particular work done by that sculptor and it cannot be moulded or copied. Since it is the only specimen available at all times, it is unique and expensive. During the Chola period many bronzes were made with intensive craftsmanship at the maximum glory.

3.3 Treasure Troves

Treasure Trove literally means “treasure that has been found”. According to Indian Treasure Trove Act, 1878, buried objects when exposed from the ground belong to Government. These objects when exposed accidentally they are brought to the knowledge of the Collector of the district. The Collector informs the head of the department of museums and if he requires the object, the treasure-trove objects are sent to the museum for examination³. The following Treasure Trove Chola Bronzes have been collected and kept it for display which evident the Iconography excellence of Tamils.

3.3.1 Aiyandar on Elephant

Aiyandar is a deity worshiped as one of the guardian folk deities of Tamil Nadu. According to Hindu belief, Aiyandar also refer as Shasta is the son of Shiva and Mohini, the female avatar of Vishnu. The village temples of Ayyanar



are usually flanked by gigantic and colourful status of him and his companions riding horses or elephants.

The Bronze image of Aiyandar riding an elephant was found as Treasure Trove in Kodavasal Taluk of Thiruvarur District in the year 2012⁴. Aiyandar riding an elephant with two tusks is extremely rare of high quality of metal casting. Holding a lotus flower in its trunk, the elephant is well decorated with lotus medallions on the top of its head (Kirti-mukha glory face of victory). A garland of skulls is seen on the back of the elephant. A small figure of an attendant who holds a goad is seen behind Aiyandar. Aiyandar wears the three Saivaite symbols in his hair, which is spread out; a snake on the left, a skull in the centre and a crescent moon on the right. He keeps his left hand on the left thigh. He is seated in Veerasana. He wears necklaces, Skandamala, udarabandha, lower garment and rings on the fingers.

3.3.2 Subrahmanya with Consorts

Lord Subrahmanya with consort Valli and Deivanai collected as Treasure Trove objects from Thiruthurai poondi in Thiruvarur district in the year 2010⁵. Lord Subrahmanya with Valli and Deivanai stand on three separate Padma (Lotus) pedestal. Subrahmanya wears a Krita makuda, Makara kundala (ear ring in shape of crocodile) in his ears, necklace, haara, udarabandha (Silk or Gold thread worn on the stomach). He holds the Sakthi ayudha the weapon given by his mother Parvati (which is broken and missing) in his upper right hand and Vajra ayudha (which is bent) in his upper left hand. The lower



left and right hands are in the pose of holding a bow and arrow respectively.

Valli (Devi) wears a Karanda makuda (Crown in form of Cone resemble as a neck of a peacock) on her head, patra kundalas (Ear ring in shape of palmyrah leaf) in her ears, Channavira (an ornament consisting of 3 chains), necklaces and valayas. The right hand is in kataka mudra (hand in pose of holding a stalk of a flower) and the left hand is in lola hasta (hand hanging down loose). The girdle is elaborately carved.



Deivanai wears a Karanda makuda on her head, patra kundalas in her ears, necklaces and valayas. The right hand is in lola hasta and the left hand is in kataka mudra. The girdle is elaborately carved.

3.3.3 Tirugnanasambandar

Tirugnanasambandar was a young Saiva poet of Tamil Nadu who lived around the 7th Century C.E; He is regarded as one of the most prominent of sixty three Nayanmars of Tamil Saiva bhakti saints. His hymns to Shiva were later collected to form the first three volumes of Tirumurai., the religious canon of Tamil Saiva Siddhanta.

Tirugnanasambandar figurine was collected as Treasure Trove in Thiruthuraipoondi in the year 2010⁶. He dances on a padma peetah over bhadra peetah. He wears Kesa bandha adorned with jewels. A sirachakra is seen at the back of the hair-do. The right hand index finger which is raised and points at something is taken to mean that it is pointing to Parvati in the sky who fed the



saint with milk. The child saint points this out when the father scolds him for drinking milk from the strangers at the temple tank at Sirkali, Nagapattinam district. The left hand poses in Gaja hasta mudra.

3.3.4 Ganesha

The Fifteenth Century Bronze Image of Ganesha was collected from Kodavasal Talk of Thiruvarur District in



the year 2012⁷. Ganesha stands on a circular padma peeda over a square bhadra peetah. He holds the goad in the right hand and the noose in the left hand. In the lower right hand he has the broken tusk with which he wrote the Mahabharata. He carries a sweet rice ball (modaka) in his lower left hand. The trunk is touching the modaka, as if he is going to take it to the mouth for eating.

4. Conclusion

The Chola Period is considered as a remarkable age for its sculpture in Bronzes. These Bronzes are praised for the figures of sensuous depiction and for detailed treatment used in their clothing and jewelry. The treasure trove bronzes of Thiruvarur would endure throughout the ages to tell story of Tamil iconographic excellence for years. The careful treatment of treasure trove bronzes using chemicals is very much needed to restore the bronze images for generations to come.

5. References

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