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Little Books on Asiatic Art Vol: I

Southern Indian Bronzes

(FIRST SERIES.)*

By

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Editor "RUPAM."

23 Illustrations & 10 Diagrams.

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The great school of Southern Indian Bronzes has furnished a very interesting chapter to the history of Indian Art. It is the bronze images of Natarāja, the 'Dancing Lord,' of this school, which made the name and fame of Indian Art in Europe and America, and helped to draw the admiring gaze of western connoisseurs to the peculiar quality and aesthetic significance of the plastic art of India. To quote Professor William Rothenstein: "No Chinese artist has reached greater perfection of poise and form than the Natarāja bronzes or the ecstatic figures of Sundara-murti Svāmi achieve." According to the famous sculptor Auguste Rodin, the Indian Natarāja "can well contest for superiority in gracefulness with the gesture of the Venus de Medici's which defends its charms by the arms, while Śiva does the same by an ingenious gesture."

Though partaking of the general characteristics of Indian religious sculpture, the bronzes of Southern India, from about the ninth or tenth century, developed very peculiar features, which clearly distinguish them from other Indian Bronzes, in the north as well as in the south. The art of founding images in bronzes appear to have an

earlier history in South India itself. Buddhist images in bronzes have been discovered in Buddhavani in the Kistna district, which appear to belong to the Gupta period (5th or 6th century A.D.), while numerous Buddhist images of fine quality, ranging in date from the fifth to the twelfth century have been recovered from various sites in Ceylon, chiefly from Anuradhapura, where the remains of a Mahāyāna monastery of the about the ninth century have been traced. The Southern Indian bronzes, which developed into a distinctive "school," had their root in a fairly old tradition, and bronze founding must have been a perfected craft, having many centuries of practice. The earlier Buddhist school of Southern India and Ceylon was more nearly related to the Gupta and Pāla bronzes of Northern India.

By the ninth century, the wave of Śaivaism swept over the whole of Southern India and gave a new direction to the old art of bronze founding and gave birth to a school of unique distinction and quality. The artistic activity of the Pallavas (7th—9th century) had already laid the foundation for a great school of Śaivaite sculpture, which found its expression in the magnificient stones of Mahāvālipuram (the Seven Pagodas, near Madras). And it appears to have been left to the kings of the famous Chola dynasty (9th to 13th century) to inspire and develop a great school of bronze sculpture as a parallel and a compliment to the

contemporary school of stone sculpture. Though innumerable examples of Hindu mediaeval bronzes have been found in many temples of Southern India, very few can be dated with any degree of certainty. But even on the basis of style it is impossible to associate any of the metal images with any of the monuments of the Pallavas. Nor is there any evidence in literary or lithic records, hitherto discovered, which could connect the art of the Pallavas, with any bronze or metal images. The growth of a school of metal sculptures, until the discovery of fresh evidence, has to be associated with the Cholá kings. Though Hindu religious texts (collected by Hemādri) recommend metal images in preference to stone ones (**śailajád lohajam shreśtham**), the fashion of setting up metal images does not appear to have gained currency during the ascendancy of the Pallava princes, though many of them are described as "constantly clever in the sport of the fine arts" and have left valuable records of their artistic taste, in stone monuments. In a legendary account of the conquest of Kānchipuram (Conjeeveram), the Pallava capital, by Adondai Chola, amongst the trophies of the battle acquired by the latter, a reference is made to a bronze gate of the Pural fort, which would seem to suggest that there may have been artists in metal in the capital of the Pallavas.

The records of the early Cholas, (100—907 A.D.)

do not, however, furnish any tangible evidence of the art of bronze-casting practised during their reigns and it is not, until we come to the reign of the great Rājarāja I (985-1018) and the records of his famous Śiva temple at Tanjore, now known as the Brihadîswara, (Rājarājeswara) that we come across references to metal images. The practice of setting up metal images of deities and saints must have had an earlier origin. It must be taken to date from the time when the system of 'moving images' (**chalam**) was first inaugurated. The lingam—the fixed emblem of Śiva in the main shrine of the temple could hardly satisfy the religious hunger of all worshippers, many of whom could not have access into the sanctum, the "holy of the holies." The system of 'moving images' known as 'utsava murtis' or 'bhoga murtis,' as distinguished from the 'druva bera,' the fixed image (**achalam**) inside the shrine was introduced. These moving images were carried in procession on festive days, with pomp and ceremonies, and helped to stimulate the religious ardours of all and sundry. The main deity, to which the temple was dedicated, came to be associated with a number of secondary images, in the shape of 'utsava' or 'bhoga murtis' generally representing one or other aspects of the main diety. These 'utsava murtis' (ceremonial images) were cast in metals, generally, in copper or bronze, rarely, in gold and silver, and offered ample

scope for the display of the skill of the metal founders. Already under the Pallavas, Śaivaism had developed a richly crowded pantheon,—Śiva being conceived under sixteen wonderful forms*—each form having distinctive iconographic features. During the Chola period, each of these forms were translated into fine types of stone as well as metal images, the stone images being placed on the niches round the facades of the temples, the metal ones being placed in minor shrines or corridors. Another interesting use grew up of these metal images. Every one could not afford to build new temples or to instal or endow images of the deities, but they could offer a metal image as a devout gift to an existing shrine. The sacred texts prescribe many forms of **deva-dánams** ('gifts to the gods'), of which the most popular in Southern India, during the Chola supremacy was the 'gift of images' (**murtidánam**). Sometimes these images were given in groups, *e.g.*, **tri-murtidánam, chatur murtidánam.** The practice of presenting donative images of deities must have been very common before the reign of Rājarāja I, who has also left inscriptions recording the gift of several copper images.† It is this prince who is said to have set

* The Kāraṇāgama mentions 25 'sportive incarnations' (līlā-murtis) of Śiva.

† "Hail! Prosperity! (The following) copper images (**tiru-méṇi**) which the lord Śrī Rājarāja deva had set up

the first example of setting up the images of the Śaiva saints in the Brihadiswara temple at Tanjore, which is attested by an inscription. Indeed, the walls of this temple are profusely loaded with numerous donative inscriptions recording gifts made by himself, his queen, his ministers and military commandars as also by king Rājendra Chola, his successor. The inscriptions of this temple give us an interesting glimpse of the intense religious passion of the Chola princes, for which it is impossible to find any parallel in any other part of India. Every battle that they won, or every piece of land that they added to their kingdom was followed by magnificent gifts to the temples. The builder of the Brihadiswara temple endowed villages after villages from the revenues of which the various services and festivals in the temple were appointed to be conducted. Of the many titles assumed by Rājarāja none was more appropriate or more truly expressive of his religious ambition and sincre piety than the epithet **Śiva-pāda śekhara** ("he whose crown is the feet of Śiva"). His gifts are very typical of the religious donations of the

in the 29th year of his reign in the temple of the lord Śrī Rājarājeśwara were measured by the cubit measure, (preserved) in the temple of the lord, and engraved on stone: one Chandesvara-Prasāda deva, Umāparamesvarī, Mahādeva, Chandesvara." No. 29. South Indian Inscriptions by E. Hultzch, Vol. II, part II, 1892, p. 136-37.

South Indian princes, in later periods, and remind one of Henry VIII whose gifts of images, pictures, jewels, relics, plates and stuffs, etc., to the Church of Westminister Abbey have become proverbial. Many of the Tamil princes enthusiastically patronized the Śaivaite devotional works, *e.g.*, the Devārām, Tiruvāsagam, Tirumurai, etc., by providing for their recitations in the temples on stated occasions called "**adhyayana utsavas**" or festivals of recitations and many of their inscriptions record gifts of lands for endowing these sacred recitations. Reference must be made here to the great Śaiva saints of Southern India, who by their devotion and mystic religious life popularised the faith in Śaivaism and helped to recover the Tamil countries from the influence of the then prevailing cults of Buddhism and Jainism. Many of the reigning princes, of the earlier Pallava, Chola and Pandyan dynasties were adherents of Buddhism and Jainism. Before the advent of Śankarācharya, the popular Tamil saints by their devotional songs enlisted popular support and gradually won converts to the old Śaiva faith. They went about the country singing hymns composed with reference to each shrine and temple visited by them. Indeed modern Śaivaism in Southern India may be said to be the creation of these Śaiva saints and is intimately bound up with their memories, glories, and deeds of piety, their miracles and their hymns. Only those temples that have been sung by

them in their sacred hymns, ⟨ **pedal petta sthalam** as the phrase goes ⟩, are now held sacred. Shortly after their death they were canonized and their images began to be set up in all the important Śaivaite temples and divine honours were paid to them and special feasts and festivals were founded to honour their memory. These Śaiva Ācharyas or Adiyars in attempting to popularize in the shape of their divine songs the philosophic teachings of the Śaiva Āgama Siddhānta emphasized personal devotion and service ⟨ **bhakti** ⟩ in preference to rituals and formulas and have lent a catholicity to the Śaiva form of worship which invited within its fold all classes of persons without any distinction of caste and creeds. These teachings and hymns bore their fruits during the following centuries from the 9th to the 13th, when the wave of Śaiva fervour and fanaticism practically swept over the whole of Southern India and part of Ceylon, and of Java, the strength and māgnitude of which could only be compared with the out-burst of Buddhism under Ashoka and of Vaishnavism under Chaitanya. Of these preachers and hymnists of Śaiva faith the name of four stand out in resplendent glory. First comes Mānikka Vācagar ⟨ 'whose words are pre-scious rubies' ⟩ whose teachings are embodied in the famous collection of hymns known as **Tiru-vácagam.** He was the prime minister of the King of Madura and lived about the 400 A.D. Next comes **Tiru-jnána-**

Sambandha ('related by wisdom to the divinity'), the famous 'boy saint' associated with his older contemporary St. Appar ('Father'). They lived about the seventh century and their hymns are collected in the great book of Tamil hymns, the **Devárám**. The fourth of the great Tamil psalmists, is Sundara murti Svāmi who lived about the 8th century. Born and brought up as a Bramhin, his consecration happened on the eve of his marriage. His marriage procession was stopped by Śiva as an aged Bramhin who claimed the boy as a family slave, producing a bond which stopped the marriage. He was then led into a Śiva temple where Śiva himself appeared and claimed him as his devotee of old, and at his bidding Sundara burst into a hymn, and this moment of illumination is generally represented in his canonized portraits (Plate XIX). He was more of a human character than his other predecessors, not disdaining to accept payment for his songs, hence the saying attributed to Śiva: "My Appar sang of me, Sambandhar sang of himself, but Sundara sang for gold."

From the point view of the sculptor's art, of special importance were the gifts of metal images and lamps to the temples for which the examples set by the royal princes were followed extensively by the courtiers, the prosperous merchants, also by the people at large, high and low, who vied with each other in bestowing these sacred gifts. The

spirit of these votive offerings is very well suggested in the famous lines of Lucian: "Thine own fair form's sweet image take, Than this no choicer offering can I make." Amongst votive offerings in ancient Greece similar gifts of images are also recorded. The statues of Artemis generally offered at child birth were more common than other images. As nearest equivalent in Christian Church may be cited the Catholic custom of making relic-holders, in in the shape of busts and statues. But these gifts to images in Southern India have put to shade practices in other countries, in their scale, lavishness and magnificence. It is very interesting to read the accounts of these gifts in the numerous inscriptions discovered in the various temples of the cathedral cities of the South. Reference has already been made to Rājarāja's record of setting up of the image of a Śaiva saint in the Brihadiswar temple, Tanjore. An inscription of the reign of King Kulot-tunga I (1069-1119 A.D.) records the dedication of an image of Natarāja in the temple of Neyvanai by one Nanurruvan Malaiyam, who made a grant of land for offerings. A record of the reign of Rājarāja Deva III refers to the setting up of an image of Mānikka Vāsagar in the third **prákára** (gallery) of the temple of Tiruvilimilai. Though the majority of these dona-tive images were Śaivaite, Vaishnava images were, by no means, rare. The mother of Rājendra Chola

(A.D. 1012) is credited with the gift of a Vaishnava saint—Algiyamanavala.* One Tippara Pallai of Conjeeveram has left a record of a gift of Lakshmi-narasimha murti at Nara-simhapura. That many of these images were 'utsava murtis,' to be taken out on festivals, is proved by an inscription which refers to an image of Pralhāda-Purandara *'which was to be carried out in processions.'* Unfortunately the Vaishanava metal images, hitherto discovered, are not of outstanding æsthetic merits as compared with the Śaivaite bronzes and the school is chiefly illustrated by Śaivaite images of fine quality, though the gifts came from both the Śaiva and the Vaishnava devotees.

It is apparent, however, that when princes and peasants, Śaivas and Vaishṇavas combined to load the temples with numerous gifts, the demand for images should be great. The demand had its supply, and had brought into existence and kept alive, with unstinted patronage, an organized guild of skilled sculptors and bronze founders, commonly known as **sthapatis**. These sculptors generally associated themselves in villages solely populated by them. During earlier times many such villages existed, one of which has survived to this day. In the village of Swami-malai, on the Cauvery, three miles from Kumbakonam, there still exists a group of families who have been practising

* Madras Govt. Epigraphist Progress Report for 1908-09, page 95.

the art of image-making in bronze and in stone as a hereditary profession for generations past. In fact this little group of artists now form the only remnant of the old school who have kept the traditions of the craft alive with remarkable vitality and devotion. The **sthapatis** of old were adept in all kinds of medium, wood ⟨ **dáru** ⟩, brick ⟨ **ishta** ⟩, stone ⟨ **śilá** ⟩, metal ⟨ **loham** ⟩, etc., but some of them specialized in metal crafts and were guided by traditional practices, and principles, both as regards the technical process, and the designs of the types and patterns, laid down in craftsman's handbook known as the **Śilpa-śástras,** originally written in sanskrit and made accessible to less learned craftsmen by means of Tamil glossaries and interpretations.

In these handbooks, sometimes attributed to hoary antiquity and ascribed to legendary Riśis as authors, are given, in the first instance, **dhyánas** of the principal deities, in the form of short verses, indicating the priestly conceptions to be interpreted by the image-maker. In the second place, are given the **lakshaṇas,** or patterns, or pictures and types by which the god indicated in the **dhyána** should be translated in a plastic form. For each icon elaborate canons are prescribed indicating the measurements, the stances, and the poses and attitudes of the limbs. Different canons of measurements are prescribed for different class of images. Thus important images, *e.g.*, Śiva, Naṭarāja,

Fig 2A Diagram of image of Vishnu in Uttamadastala.

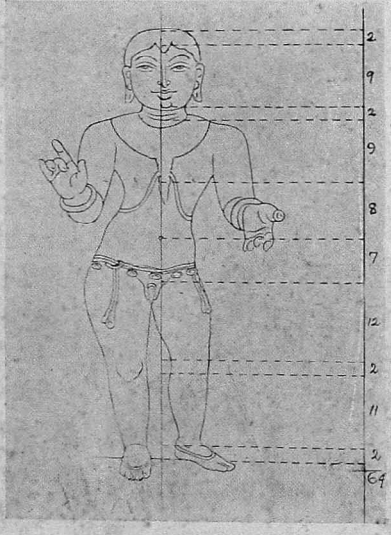

Fig 1 Diagram of image of Krishna in Panchatala.

Viśṇu, are asigned to the **daśa tála,** or the ten-head measure. The size of the head being taken as the unit ⟨**tála**⟩, the length of the image is to be ten times the head. For images of goddesses, as a general rule, '**asta tála**' or the 'eight head' measure is prescribed ⟨**asta tálá-bhabet Devî**⟩. For diminutive figures, such as that of boys, Ganeśa and **ganas** ⟨demons⟩, the fifth measure is prescribed ⟨"**pancha tálá smritá válá**"⟩. The relative proportions of the different parts of the limbs are skilfully worked into short mnemonic verses, easily committed to memory by young students from their infancy. Thus the relative measurements of the figure of Kriśṇa illustrated in the diagram opposite ⟨Fig. 1⟩ is given in a short verse quoted in the foot-note.* For different images, corresponding to the spiritual sentiment or **rasa** connotated by each particular conception, are prescribed appropriate stances, sways or poses, known as **ábhanga** ⟨slightly bent⟩, **samabhanga** ⟨equally bent, *i.e.*, in equilibrium⟩, **ati-bhanga** ⟨greatly bent⟩ and **tribhanga** ⟨thrice bent⟩. The 'sways' are indicated by deviations from the central plumbline ⟨**bramha sutra**⟩, illustrated in the accompanying diagrams ⟨Fig. 2, 3, 4⟩. The '**ábhanga**' pose is

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* "**Kara** ⟨2⟩ **nava** ⟨9⟩ **nayana** ⟨2⟩ **nandayih** ⟨9⟩ **nága** ⟨8⟩ **pátála** ⟨7⟩ **bhánu** ⟨12⟩ **Rudra** ⟨11⟩ **Kara** ⟨2⟩ **hridaya mánam pancha tálancha Kriśṇam.**"

generally illustrated in figures standing with the weight placed on one leg (Plates V & XV) and is peculiarly adopted to interpret meditative figures or figures in repose. The **samabhanga** pose is generally used to interpret **sáttvic** images, standing or sitting in a gracious mood ready to listen to the prayer of devotees (Plate VI & XXI), the plastic equivalent to a spiritual equilibrium. The **atibhanga** poses come into operation in interpreting images, conceived in violent or dramatic action, such as Dancing Natarājas (Plates II, III & IV), Kriśṇa-tāṇdava or Kāliya Damana (Plate XI), Śiva as Kālasamhāra (Plate I). The peculiar gestures suggested by these **bhangas** or flexions of the body form a special characteristic of South Indian sculpture and remind one of the beautiful 'sways' of the figures of some of the Gothic Madonnas. The graciousness of the pose of some of the figures illustrated here (Plates V, IX, XIV & XIX) lends a vitality to the plastic conceptions and a peculiar artistic flavour to this school of Sculpture. There is nothing perhaps in Indian sculpture, excepting a few examples of Nepalese Buddhist figures, which could approach the South Indian bronze figures in the easy grace of their peculiar gestures.

The poses of the arms and fingures constitute another artistic peculiarity of the Southern images which distinguish them from those of the North. In the movements of the

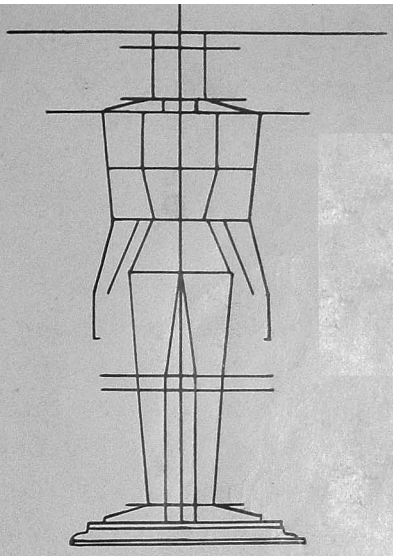


Fig 2 Diagram of Samabhanga pose.

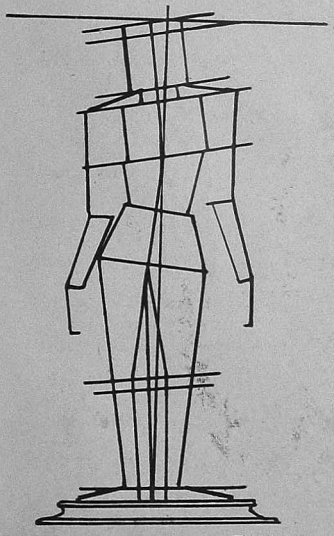


Fig 3 Atibhanga or Tribhanga.

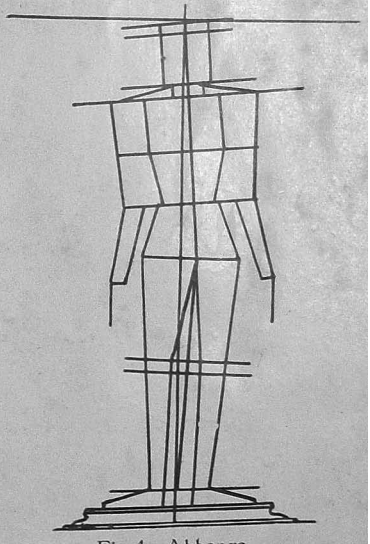
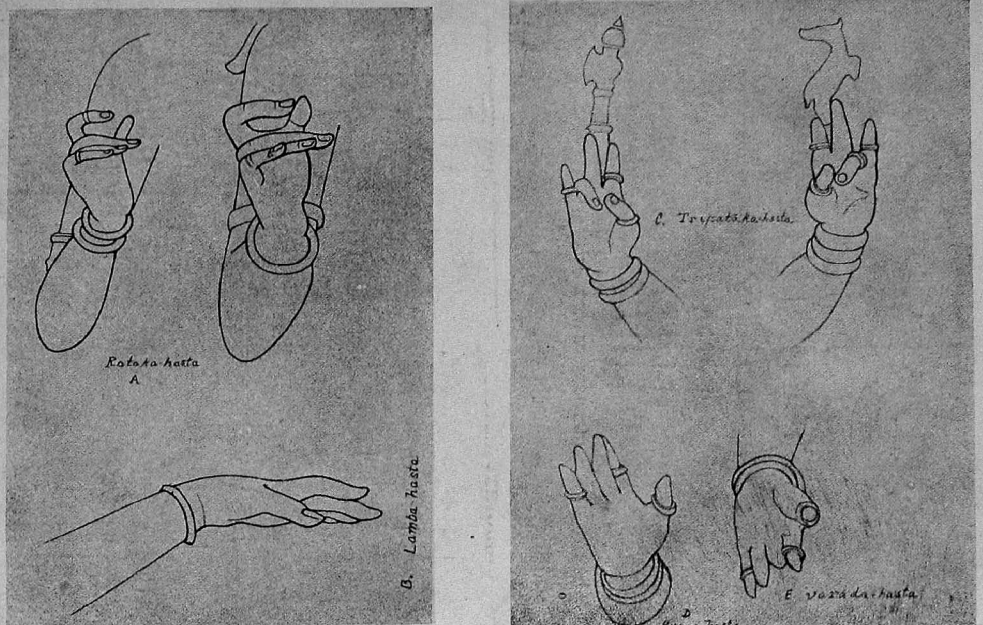


Fig 4 Abhanga.

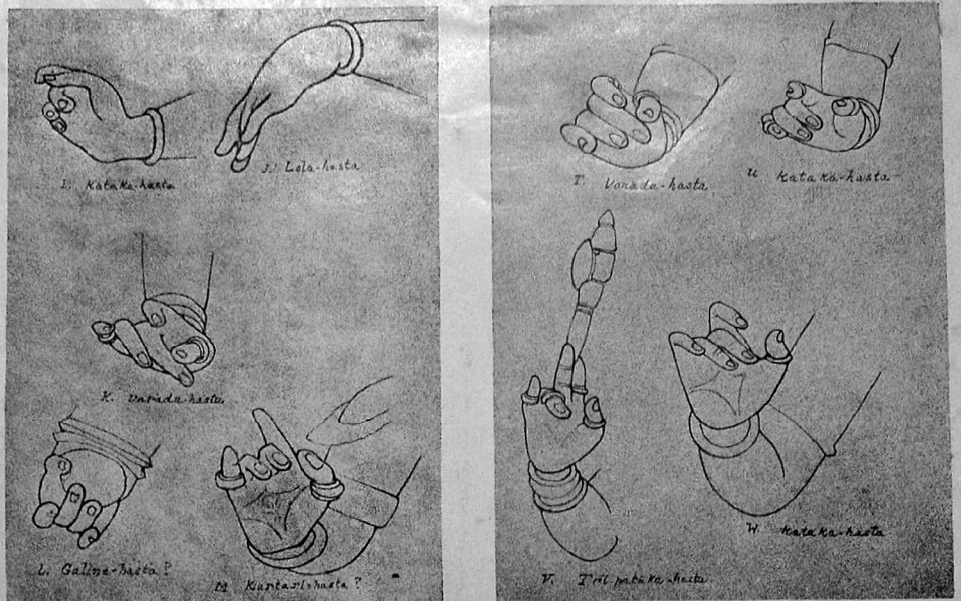


Diagrams illustrating *mudra*s or 'finger poses'.

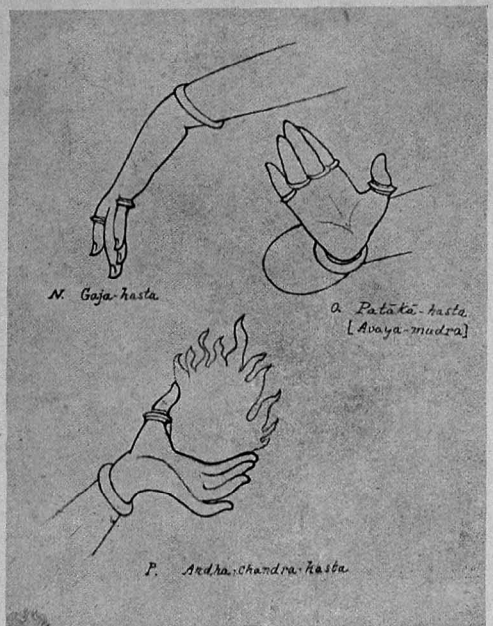
arms and figures the Indian artists has devised a "highly formalized and cultivated gesture language" which has been the means of interpreting the feelings and the motives of the mind and has been very skilfully utilized by the Southern **sthapatis,** as effectively as the gestures of the body **〈bhangas〉,** in conveying by values of movements, ecstatic raptures and spiritual moods. They have been devised as exquisite artifices for suggesting, as it were, *a refinement of external action* corresponding to *a refinement of feeling.* Some of these gestures, apart from their significance and symbolism, are wonderfully articulate with a grace and a tenderness which is truly spiritual and non-human. These movements of the hands and 'finger plays' **〈mudrás〉** have been characteristically called by Śukrāchārya as **'divya-kriyá'** or devine actions, being distinguished in their conventions from the movement and gesture of the ordinary human being. Of these 'actions' of the hands and 'finger plays' there are some typical poses common to all the schools of Indian sculpture, borrowed from the language of dance-gestures laid down in the **nátya-śástra** of Bharata, while some appear to have been devised by Southern Indian sculptors. We can only illustrate here, a few of these significant mudrās and enumerate some of the leading motifs. The **kataka hasta** 〈Diagram A〉 is the gesture of communication 〈Plate VIII〉. The **lola hasta,** also called **lamba hasta,**

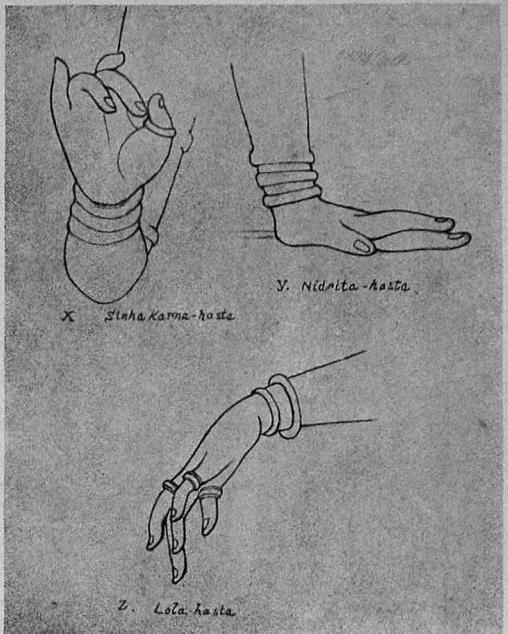
(Diagram B) or **gaja hasta,** is the 'hand hanging down The '**gaja hasta**' (N) (akin to the drooping proboscis of the elephant) is a significant gesture in images of Natarāja, the '**lamba hasta**' is well illustrated in the image of Kodanda Rāma (Plates XII & XIII). The **tripatáká** or "three fingered" pose (Diagram C) is generally used in hands carrying weapons (**áyudhas**), *e.g.,* the **tanka** (axe), the deer (**krishṇa mriga**), etc., the emblems of many images of Śiva (Plate V and Plate VII.) The well known **varada** and **abhaya hasta,** the gracious 'gesture of gifts,' and of 'assurance,' slightly differ in their forms in the southern images (Diagram D. E). The **nidrita hasta,** the 'sleeping hands,' the gesture of inaction, is illustrated in the pose of the left hand of Pārvatī (Plate VIII). In the images of Natarāja, the hand carrying the drum is called the '**damaru hasta,**' and the one carrying the fire, the '**ardha chandra hasta,**' (P) spread out in the form of a crescent. The images of saints and devotees are generally depicted in '**anjali hasta**' the joint palm of devotion (Plate XV and XVI).

The southern bronzes, as also the stone sculptures, are further distinguished by characteristic ornaments and coiffeurs. The matted locks of Śiva are tied up in a graceful pyramtd which forms the coronet of the deity (**jatá mukuta**) on which are placed, the skull, the snake and the crescent, for Śiva is 'Chandra-śekhara.' In the whirling dance of Natarāia these locks spread out in a



Diagrams illustrating *mudras* or 'finger poses.'





Diagrams illustrating *mudras* or 'finger poses'.

conventional halo, very artistically disposed, on which is sometimes placed the effigy of Gangā—as a nāgini. On the back of the head is placed a large circular lotus ornament. The ears, generally in Śaivaite images, carry different forms of ear-rings, the **makara kundala** on the right and the **patra kundala** ⟨ **todu** ⟩ on the left, 'indicating the presence of the śakti as an essential part of the diety himself'—suggestive of the dual aspect of the divinity, useless without the other—Śiva and Śakti, more clearly expressed in the conception of **Ardhanârîswara**. For the necklaces—we have the **hára** on the breast, and the '**upagrîva**' near the neck. On the upper arms are placed armlets ⟨ **keyura** ⟩ and on the lower arms, **valaya.** The image of Śiva has a special armlet of snake called the 'nāgābharaṇa.' The shoulders carry a characteristic decoration of festoons known as **váhu-málai,** those hanging down the thighs being **uru-málai**. The sacred thread ⟨ yagnopavîta ⟩ runs across the breast, which is bisected by the **udara vanda** or the **ratna-kodara-vanda** ⟨ waist-belt ⟩ rarely met with in Northern Indian images. A very characteristic item of decoration is the **kativanda,** which keeps the dress in place—which is frequently given the **kîrtimukha** as a clasp. On the legs are given ringlets over the ankles, below them, figure **nupura** ⟨ anklets with bells ⟩. The images of Vishṇu, and the goddesses ⟨ Devîs ⟩ have a special form of coronet, tapering and cylindrical,

known as **karanda mukuta** (Plates VIII, X & XII).

The canons and prescriptions given in the **śilpaśástras** were intended to secure a fixation of the types of the donative images, and their accessories, and to forbid experiments in new patterns. When a cycle of practices in image-making evolved a masterpiece—a perfect plastic interpretation of a theological conception, *e.g.*, the figure of Natarāja (which went through numerous evolutions before it achieved the perfect type in Chola bronzes), there was a natural tendency to perpetuate and hand down a perfected masterpiece, through the means of artistic canons and rules, so as to prevent degeneration of the plastic conception in the hands of less gifted artists. The images, once interpreted in a perfected form, were systematized in set formulas and types, and repeated for many centuries, and were not permitted to be deviated from at the caprice of individual fancies. Similarly, in Catholic Christian Art, "the artistic representation of sacred objects was a science governed by fixed laws which could not be broken at the dictates of individual imagination."*

A few words may be useful to indicate the methods and processes employed by the southern **sthapatis** in casting bronzes. Bronze is technically known in the **śilpaśástras** as **pancha louha** (lit., 'five metals'), the

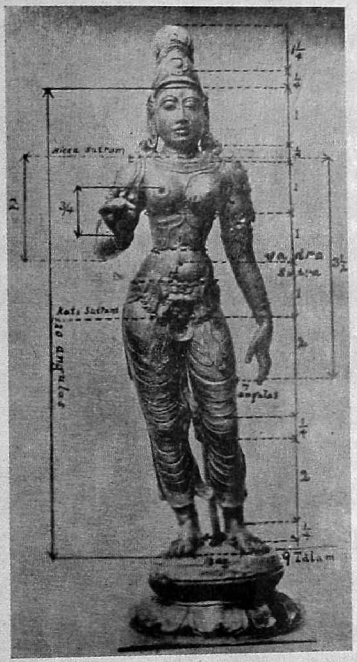
*E. Mâle, *Religious art of the thirteenth century in France 1913, page 1.*

amalgam being composed of five ingredients,—copper, silver, gold, brass, and white lead. The copper forms the chief ingredient, and in modern practice, gold, silver and brass are generally dispensed with, so that, strictly speaking, many of the southern metal images are not 'bronzes' but copper figures. In most of the modern images the amalgam is made in the following proportion : Ten parts of copper, half part brass and one-fourth part of white lead. This formula, no doubt derived from practices current in the earlier Buddhist periods, is very akin to that given in an old Siamese manuscript, for the making of bronze figures or '**samrit**' as they are called in Siam, where the art must have been carried from India.

The process employed in casting bronze images in southern India is most well known as the **cire perdu** or the 'lost wax' process. A text of the **śilpaśāstras** asserts that 'metal images are made from wax' (**"lohajam sakalam yattu madhucchistena nirmitam"**). The first stage in the casting is the preparation of the wax model (madhucchista-vidānam). The image is first modelled in wax in actual size which is wrapped in a thick coating of soft clay kept in position by wires. The wax model is then melted away by the application of heat, which leaves a 'hollow' in which the amalgam is poured in. After the metal has set and cooled, the mud wrapper is removed and the figure is then chased and chiselled, and

all the fine finish is then worked at, which sometimes takes days and months according to the skill and technical capacity of the artist. A model, in wax, of a Devî, made by Guruswâmî, a **sthapati** from Swami malai, for the author, in 1914, is illustrated, here, on the page opposite. It is obvious that unlike the copper gilt images of the Tibeto-Nepal school, the Southern Indian **pancha louha** sculptures are all cast in solid metals. This is also the case with most of the metal images found in Ceylon. Some of the Southern Indian texts of the **śilpaśástras** actually forbid the casting of hollow images.

As has been indicated above, the Southern school of bronzes invariably take for their themes, iconographic conceptions of the different forms of Śiva. As may be gathered from some of the illustrations, the Śaivaite pantheon offer many interesting scopes for static, as well as dynamic, plastic conceptions. The sixteen principal forms of Śiva well illustrated in metal images, may be usefully enumerated: Natarāja, Kālasamhāra, Umā-mahesvara ⟨Umā-sahita⟩, Somāskanda, Gajasamhāra, Gangādhara, Chandraśekhara, Dakshināmurti, Bhikshānateśa, Kalyānasundara, Ardhanārîswara, Vriśavavāhana, Lingodbhava, and Tripurāntaka. The **śakti**, the female energy Śiva, is illustrated in various iconographic forms, which are sometimes difficult to distinguish, owing to identity of poses and gestures. They are known under the well-known



A wax model of a Devi
By Guruswamy Sthapaty.

names of Umā, Gouri, Pārvati, and as Bhoga śakti, and Ādhāraśakti, and in a very characteristic name of Śiva-kāma-sundari (" Śiva's darling "). The terrific aspect of the devi—is the Pidāri, the southern Indian Kāli. Of the other members of Śiva's family represented in bronze, are Gaṇeśa, Skanda, or Subramaṇya (Kārtikeya) and Āyyanār. The devotees of Śiva, including the saints mentioned above (p. 8-9) are frequently represented and sometimes with their wives. Surya, the Sun-god—with the navagrahas, the nine planets, are frequently represented in bronzes of miniature size. Of the icons of the Vaishṇavite pantheon, Viṣṇu (Perumal), Varadarāja, and Mahāvishṇu have been frequently illustrated. But the more popular forms met with in bronze figures, are the various forms of Kriṣṇa, Kāliya mardana, and Navanita-nritya. Rāma and his family group, and single figures of Kodanda Rāma are met with. Hanumāṇa is frequently represented and has survived in a fine masterpiece. The Vaishṇava saints or ālwars are frequently represented in miniatures of no particular æsthetic interest. Of ritual accessories, lamps in the peculiar forms known as Dīpa Laksmis (' Beauty-Lamps ') are frequently represented being very popular as sacred gifts to the temples and have afforded excellent opportunity to contribute fine pieces of sculpture of unique æsthetic values.

Examples of Southern Indian bronzes have survived in

numerous specimens and almost in a bewildering variety which still await systematic study. They are rather difficult to date. The only dated example is a Natarāja from Belur, but the reading of the date is uncertain, either 910 or 1511. The only chronological data available is with regard to the group of images recovered from the Śiva Divāle at Polonnāruva in Ceylon, at one time a Śaivaite colony. These images cannot be dated later than the 13th century. The group of images in a corridor of the Brihadiswar temple contains some fine specimens, and some of them, ⟨ one here illustrated, Plate I ⟩, may perhaps be taken to belong to the time of Rājarāja I. The largest example of Natarāja, occurs in a minor shrine in the quadrangle of the same temple, apparently a **bhoga murti** of the main deity ⟨ Plate III ⟩. It may be contemporaneous with the founding of the temple. Though the beauty of the image fully justifies an early date, there is no data, excepting the style, to corroborate the suppositon. The group from Polonnāruva now in the Colombo Museum, though containig many superb examples are not of equal merit. Many of them might have come from India and are admirable examples of the school at its best. Good specimens are attached to many minor shrines of the many temples of the South, *e.g.*, at Chidambaram, Trichinopoly, Madura and Tinnevelly. A recent find, displaying local features, has come from an old temple in Travancore

(“Rupam” No. 30). The principal centres. appear to have been in the Districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly, North and South Arcot District, Salem, and Ramnad. The largest collection of bronzes of this school is that of the Madras Museum. Important examples have been acquired recently by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. While in many private collections are various specimens of distinctive quality, some of which are reproduced here.

In the absorbing serenity of expression, in the rhythmic sways and the dynamic symmetry of the poses, above all in the moving and generalised forms of an original yet artistic anatomy, the bronzes of this school translate the abstruse conceptions of Bramhinic philosophy, into which the artists have skilfully mingled their own meditations, their prayers, and all the hopes of their lives. To know them and to appreciate them is to receive an initiation into a new world of plastic dreams not revealed in any of the masterpieces of Greek, or Renaissance bronzes.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES.

FRONTISPIECE *(on cover)*. **Bhiksátana-Mūrti** of Śiva ⟨Tamil Pichchadevar⟩, conceived as a 'mendicant going about a begging.' This image is represented as a nude standing figure, three-eyed, and four-armed, the upper right hand carrying a drum, the lower right hand, probably, a **lamva hasta,** the lower left hand carries a skull cup, the begging bowl, the upper left hand in **kataka** pose is meant to hold the **khatvánga,** or **kankáladanda,** ⟨the bone of a dead body⟩ resting horizontally on the shoulder. In this form Śiva performed an act of penance for the sin of **Bramhahatyá,** incurred when he cut off one of the five heads of Bramhā for his presumptuous claim to be the ultimate creator of the universe ⟨**Kūrma Puráṇa**⟩. The pair of sandals is very necessary for a 'begger' who must go about a good deal and is prescribed by the iconographer ⟨**páduká sakta pádam**⟩.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Date about 1800?

I. **Kálasamhára or Kála-Kála Mūrti of Śiva,** conceived as the destroyer of Time or Death, symbolised as a small effigy of a demon whom the Lord kills, by a pressure of the right toe. The right upper-arm carries the axe, and the other arm, the deer, or the trident ⟨missing⟩. The lower right arm is in **Suchi mudrá,** a

gesture of surprise, the lower left arm in **álingana** pose, embracing the śakti. The flexion is rather **ábhanga** than **atibhanga.**

Brihadîswara Temple Collection, Tanjore. Date 10=12th century.

II. **Natarája, or the nritya=mûrti of Śiva,** con=ceived as the cosmic dancer, the embodiment of the Eternal Energy in Five Activities ⟨pancha=kriyā, viz., Sristhi ⟨Production⟩, Sthiti ⟨maintenance⟩, Samhāra ⟨Destruc=tion, Tirobhāva ⟨embodiment⟩ and Anugraha ⟨Release⟩. The Lord dances on the body of the Apasmāra purusa ⟨Muyalaka⟩ who represents ignorance or original sin, the destruction of which brings true wisdom. The upper right arm carries the drum, sound being the primary symbol of creative energy. On the **ardhchandra hasta** is fire, the symbol of destruction. The lower right hand indicates 'fear not' **⟨abhaya⟩.** The lower left hand in **gaja hasta pose** points to the lifted foot as the refuge or salvation of individual soul. The oval **pravá mandala** ⟨ring of fire⟩ at the back is also known as the tiruvāsi—symbolising the the dance of Nature ⟨prakriti⟩ reflecting the Dance of Wisdom ⟨jnāna⟩ or according to some, representing the mystic "om." The pose is in the **atibhanga** flexion.

Madras Museum Collection. Date 12th century?

III. **Natarája.**—Very much related to the last example in style and treatment. A peculiar feature com=

mon to the two figures is the fluttering 'angavistāram' (scarf) tied round the waist which does not occur in later specimens. A variation is provided by the introduction of two **makara** heads from which issue the shafts of the tiruvāsi. The modelling of the body and the expression of the face is very delicate and sensitive. There is an inscription on the pedestal which records the date of repair to the image.

Brihadîswara Temple, Tanjore. Date 12th century?

IV. **Natarája.**—Though superficially attractive and carefully chased and minntely ornamented, it lacks the easy grace of the last two examples. An innovation is introduced in the spreading out of the locks in radiating lines, and in the form of the tiruvāsi, which is a complete circle, carrying the flames in a closely set row.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Date about 1800?

V. **Chandra Śekhara.**—'He who carries the crescent on his crown.' It is a four armed conception, with the usual attribute of axe and deer on the upper arm. The lower right arm, in 'abhaya mudrā,' the lower left arm, suggests the embracing of the śakti (**śakti-málingya-váme**). According to some, the two lower arms indicate the handling of a vînā, hence the form is identified as Vînādhara Dakshināmūrti. The pose is evidently **ábhanga.**

Madras Museum Collection. Date 16-18th century?

VI. **Dakśiṇá mūrti,** the image of the gracious pose, *i.e.,* in an attitude of bestowing gift. Axe in the right hand, left hand, in the **varada** pose. Seated in **lalitásana** ⟨easy posture⟩, one leg hanging down. The ear rings are both equal, **patra kundala** ⟨todu⟩ which may suggest that the Lord is not here accompanied by his śakti. The matted locks are dishevelled ⟨**galita jatá**⟩. The pegs on the two sides are the sockets for the **prabhá mandala** ⟨the halo⟩ at the back, missing in the image. The rings at the four corners of the pedestals are for driving poles to carry the image in procession.

Madras Museum Collection. Date 16th century?

VII. **Umásahita mūrti,** a conception of Śiva seated 'with Umā,' at ease ⟨**lalitásana**⟩, in affectionate conversational relation. Umā is apparently talking to her Lord, her right hand raised in the **kataka mudrá**—the gesture of enquiry. Her left hand rests by her side in the **nidrita** pose. Her right knee is raised a little ⟨**daksiṇam-jánu-kincid-uddhrita**⟩. Her Lord bears the coronet of matted locks while she carries the **karanda mukuta.** Characterized by a lot of charm and grace, the style is somewhat stiff and conventional.

National Museum, Copenhagen. Date 16th century?

VIII. **Umá,** detail from last group.

IX. **Daksiṇá mūrti** of the Devî, the goddess, seated in an attitude of Grace ⟨**dakshiṇá**⟩, without her Lord,

though she carries his emblems. The lower hands in **abhaya** and **varada mudrá**. It is a parallel conception to the 'Dakṣiṇā mūrti' of Śiva (Plate VI). The subject matter is treated with considerable depth and restraint.

Madras Museum Collection. 12-14th century?

X. **Ādhára Śakti.**—According to the Tantras, she is the presiding genius of the triangular space in the mid-most portion of the human body (mūlādhara), 'when awakened it is she who gives birth to the world of mantra.' Iconographically she is conceived as a four handed deity, carrying the **páśa** (noose), **ankuṣa** (goad) and display-ing the **vara** and **abhaya mudrá**, seated in the **sukhásana** (easy) pose in the centre of the lotus seat. Somewhat florid in treatment, it is an attractive little figure. The **tiruváci** at the back, has undergone conventional elabora-tion, with a 'kîrtimukha' (glory face) at the top, which lends quite a grandeur to the figure, otherwise of no special merit.

Tagore Collection, Calcutta. 18-19th century?

XI. **Káliya-Damana, or Káliya-Mardana,** Kriṣṇa quelling the serpent Kāliya. It is the Vaishnavaite parallel in bronze to the Śaivaite Natarāja. It is said that Kriṣṇa danced the **tándava** on the neck of the dragon (**Káliya-phaṇa-kantha-sthale tándavam**). The figure, though finely modelled, is somewhat encumbered by the emphatic lines of the ornaments.

Treasure Trove Image, from Kattu Edayer, South Arcot District. 18-19th century.

XII. **Kodanda Ráma,** (*i.e.,* 'Rāma with the bow'). The bow is not actually represented but suggested by the raised left arm (dhanurdhāri hasta), the right arm in the **lamvita hasta** pose. The figure is in **ábhanga** flexion. The style is somewhat stiff and formal, though the treatment is suave and graceful. A peculiar feature is 'chhannavira'—a sort of coat of arm which encircles the trunk. On the breast is the 'kaustuva ratna,'—the special jewel of Vishnu. Another feature common in images of Vishnu is the long garland reaching below the knees. The image is believed to have been brought from Southern India by Maharāṇā Kumbha (1433-1468) when he returned from a pilgrimage to the South and it occupied a place of honour in the royal temple of worship of the Seesodias. Fully described and discussed in "Rūpam" No. 8.

Collection of Messrs. Luzac & Co., London, (formerly in the collection of the late Thakurji Shri Jesraj Singh Seesodia). 15th century?

XIII. **Kodanda Ráma.**—Another view.

XIV. **A Śaiva Devotee,** unidentified. Probably Vyāghrapāda or Tirujnāna-sambandha. The general treatment is very delicate and restrained. The rapt expression of the face is particularly fine, and the general poise of the

figure, in **ábhanga** flexion, is in exquisite equilibrium. Fully described and discussed in "Rūpam" No. 7, July 1921, pages 1-3.

Collection of Mr. C. W. E. Cotton, I.C.S., C.I.E., Madras. 14th century?

XV. **A Śaiva Devotee.** Another view.

XVI. **Āppár Swámî** (?) One of the famous śaivaite saint and hymnologist, said to have lived about the 8th century. To testify his devotion to Śiva he went about weeding the courtyard of temples and is represented here in vaddhānjali (joint palms). He is usually represented with his weeding impliment resting on his right arm. He wears his **rudrákshas,** and is clad in the meagre **koupîna** of the ascetic. It is a simple unassuming portrait rendered without any flourish. The identification is doubtful.

Madras Museum Collection. 13th century?

XVII. **Tiru-Jnána-Sambandha.** He was the younger contemporary and associate of St. Appār. Called to the worship of Śiva, when a child, he came to be known as the 'boy-saint.' He used to go about singing hymns to the accompaniment of a pair of gold cymbals. The treatment of the figure is very soft and delicate and the expression of the face extremely tender and sincere. The treatment of the pedestal is identical with that of the last plate.

Colombo Museum Collection. 13th century?

XVIII. **Tiru-Jnána-Sambandha.** Another view.

XIX. **Sundara Mūrti Swámî.** A very delicate and serene presentation of the one of the four great Tamil Śaivaite hymn writers. The portrait presents the young man in his bridal dress at the moment of illumination when he realised, whose bond bound him as a slave. The rapt expression of the face is rendered with great power and restraint. As the visible incarnation of **bhakti** ⟨ passionate adoration ⟩, the figure has a wonderful quality of breathlessness and is a distinguished masterpiece contributed by the Southern artist to the great gallery of classic Indian sculpture.

Colombo Museum Collection. 11-12th century?

XX. **Sundara Mūrti Swámî.** The nervous gesture of the figure in the moment of the illumination is more accurately realised in these two views of the image.

XXI. **Sūrya.** A remarkably fine and sensitive presentation of the image of the Sun God, posed in the **samabhanga** flexion, carrying red lotuses on either hands, bearing the **karanda mukuta,** with the red halo ⟨ **rakta mandala** ⟩ at the back. The drapery and the ornaments are very delicately treated and emphasize the fine modelling and equipoise of the figure.

Colombo Museum Collection. 12th century?

XXII. **Dîpa Lakṣmî.** These 'beauty lamps' or auspicious lamps of piety have been frequently requisitioned

by the faithful devotees as very appropriate gifts to their favourite divinity. By frequent practice, a very interesting pattern was evolved for these donative lamps, very typically represented in this example. The bird parching on the right arm is a very peculiar feature.

Collection of Sir John Woodroffe, Oxford. 19th century?

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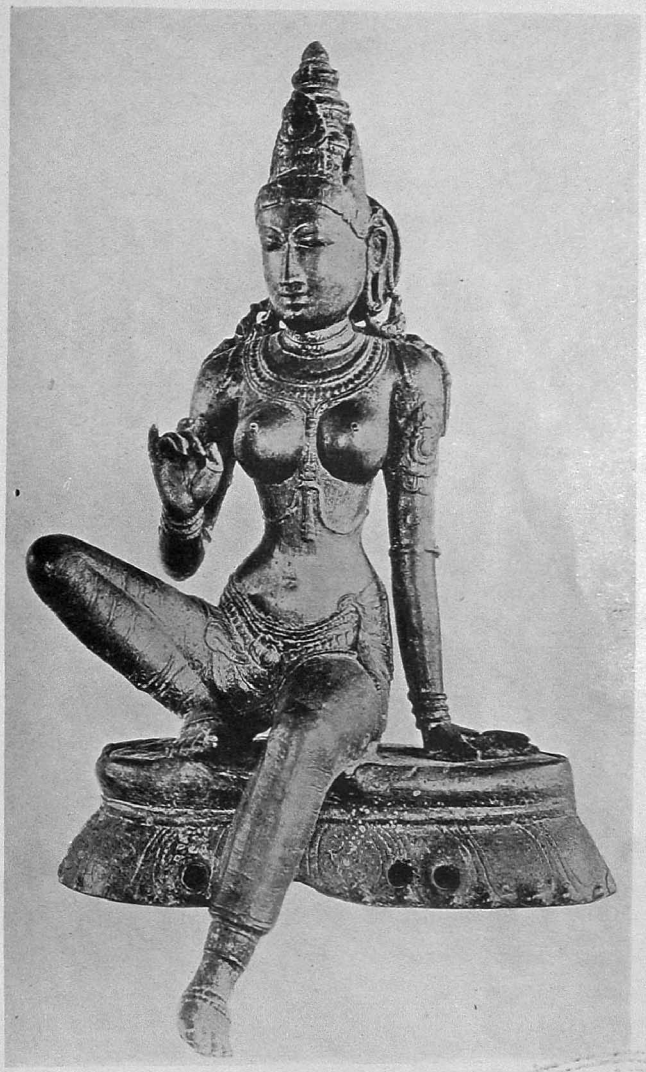
V. Chandr-śekhara mûrti of Siva.

VI. Dakṣiṇâ-mûrti of Śiva.

VII. Umâ-sahita-mûrti.



VIII. Umâ (Pârvatî),
detail from last plate.

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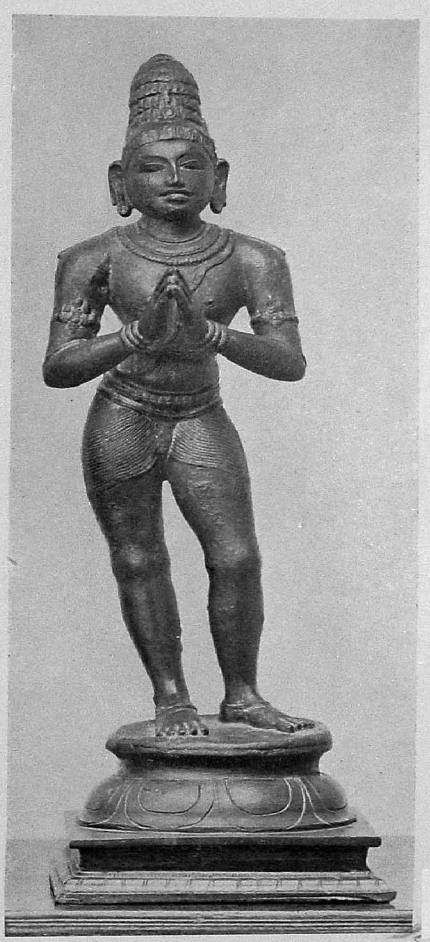
XI. Kālīya-damana (Krsna).

XII. Kodanda-Râma.

XIII. Kodanda-Rāma,
another view.

XIV. A Śaiva Devotee,
unidentified.



XV. A Śaiva Devotee,
another view.

XVI. Âppâr-Swâmî ?

XVII. Tiru-jnâna-samvandha Swâmi.

XVIII. Tiru-jnâna-samvandha Swâmi,
another view.

XIX. Sundara-mûrti Swâmi.

XX. Sundara-mûrti Swâmi,
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