

**DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TAMIL NADU**

**LOCAL VISUAL CULTURE SERIES
VOLUME 1 - 2022**

STONES OF SUBSTANCE.

**EDITOR
FRANCIS P. BARCLAY**



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WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

This book is a compilation of fieldwork-based essays assigned to I M. A. Mass Communication students as a part of the course on Local Visual Culture guided by Dr. Francis P. Barclay. Espying the current efforts of the Central University of Tamil Nadu in exploring novel avenues to expand and enhance the scope of knowledge and learning experience, the Department of Media and Communication introduced (in 2021) this standout course of substance to document precious local cultures that are facing the threat of obsolescence. This course made it convenient for the students to conduct intimate inquiries into local cultures—gathering information from relevant sources, rediscovering art and culture through contemporary and enthusiastic perspectives, and showcasing student cultural and artistic talents. Ours is an ethnically and religiously diverse country, replete with regional cultures. Our indigenous wisdom of oral literature and visual culture is rich, and the onus is on us to help it survive in new-fashioned forms. This small book is an exhibit of those aspirations. In this volume of the Local Visual Culture Series, we explore the sculptural wonders of the temples in and around Thiruvavur, Tamil Nadu, India.

Editor
Dr. Francis P. Barclay

This book and the Local Visual Culture course are a part of the Local Community, Communication and Culture Linkages (LCCCL) initiative of the Department of Media and Communication, CUTN

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A Dynastic Wonder



Arulmigu Thyagaraja Swamy Temple, Thiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, India

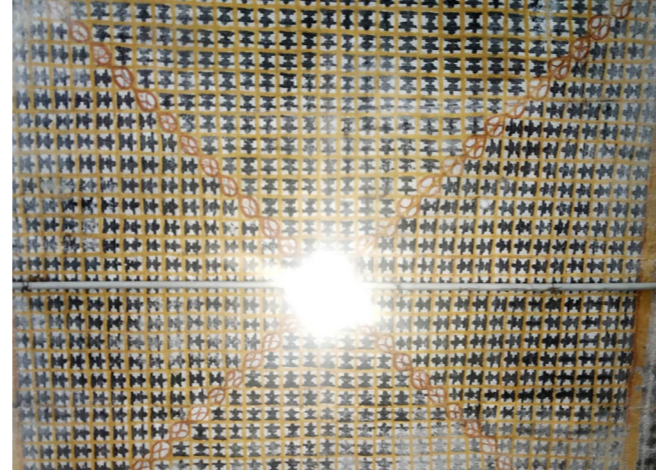
By Shruthi K, Shanmugadurai K & Harisankar KV

SPECIALITIES

Temple with the most number of shrines

Has the largest pond

Marvellously huge temple chariot, perhaps the biggest in the world or at least in Asia



Thiruvarur, a historically-significant town for thousands of years, is one of the five ancient capital cities of the mighty Chola kings. It has always been a cultural, religious, and political epicentre, ruled by the Cholas, Nayaks, Vijayanagar Empire, and Marathas for centuries. This good-old town is known for its temples, history, and historic architecture. One of the oldest temples of Tamil Nadu, the Thyagaraja Swamy temple, is situated in Thiruvarur. This temple is a rare ancient shrine in India where we can witness the culmination of different sculpture and stone art styles from multiple centuries. The Chola kings constructed a temple that covered 33 acres and included several small shrines. Innumerable sculptures and paintings

(Left) Stone sculpture of Purusha murgam—One of the biggest devotees of Lord Shiva. As the name suggests he was half animal and half man **Shruthi K**
 (Above) 1008 Shivalingas **Shanmugadurai K**
 (Right) Shiva acharyas Thirugnanasambanthar, Thirunavukarasar, Sundaramoorthi, Manikavasakar **Shanmugadurai K**





from the Chola, Pandya, Pallava, Maratha and Nayaka periods make it possible to study the development of form, line, image, and theme in traditional art.

Vanmikanathar, an incarnation of Lord Shiva, is the main deity worshipped in this temple. The Lord is in the form of a precious stone, Maragatha (Emerald), placed in a silver casket. One unique feature of the idol is that only the face can be

seen because the rest is covered in cloth, flowers, and jewelry. Beautiful carvings adorn the temple pillars and walls. An idol of Buddha is also found in the locale of the temple.

The standing Nandi that faces the presiding deity, which is rarely found in any other temple, is another unique feature of Thyagaraja temple. The temple covers a colossal area with 9 Rajagopurams and more than 100 shrines, hold-

(Left) Lord Surya **Harisankar KV**
 (Above) Airavata, a white elephant
 (with either three or sometimes
 thirty-three heads) who carries
 lord Indra **Harisankar KV**
 (Right) Dhakshinamoorthy—an aspect
 of the Hindu god Shiva as a teacher of all
 types of knowledge
Shanmugadurai K





ing the maximum number of shrines in India.

At the entrance, just below the Rajagopuram, is a series of reliefs from the Krishna Leela, which essentially depicts Lord Krishna's childhood pranks. Each sculpture in this series reminds us of Lord Sri Krishna and the stories we have heard about him as a child. One is pranking mother Yashoda by stealing butter from pots and getting caught every time by the mother or other ladies. There is also a sculpture of Sri Krishna playing the flute. Karanas, or dance poses, are on the other side. There are sculptures of 64 karanas (dance postures) and abhinayas (expressions) of Bharatanatyam on the gopurams and mandapams.

Some of the stone sculptures are not minutely carved. There are half-carved hands and unfinished faces. Still, the man, woman, and animal combinations and their postures are easily identifiable. This temple is said to date back to the sixth Century. Construction of the stone structure started during the Chola era, around the ninth Century, and continued till the reign of Chembiyanmadevi. The temple's inscriptions stand witness to this.

Another feature is the sculptural representation of a

stone chariot and Manuneethi Chozhan, the righteous King. A large granite sculpture of a wailing cow with its calf and the King pulling a chariot can be found on the temple's northeast side. While admiring the magnificence of those sculptures, the history of the Chola kings comes to mind. The stone walls and sculptures of the Thyagarajaswamy temple, which is an excellent example of the Chola king's Shiva devotion over many centuries, also show the history of their imperium. The sculptures that feature dance poses and exhibit happy moods seem to engage in perpetual enjoyment. Much like the Chola sculptures in other temples, some sculptures tell a story and provide clear hints, while the others leave the viewer's imagination both exciting and unsatisfied at the same time. Carvings and sculptures in temples always showcase the skill and originality of sculptors and artists of those periods and also portray the nation's long history and magnificent culture. These also provide ample proof of the foresight and vision displayed by kings and rulers in their desire to leave behind a legacy that modern India could be proud of. ■



(Left) Lord Murugan (Karthikeya) seated on a peacock **Shanmugadurai K**
(Right) Carving of Nataraja **Shruthi K**



Celebration of Love



Sri Vanchinadha Swamy Temple, Srivanchiyam, Tamil Nadu, India

By Kaviya R, Anaina C & Jinu Thomas

SPECIALITIES

The only temple to host Lord Yama in its shrines



Lord Vanchinadar, another divine form of Lord Shiva, is housed in the Sri Vanchinadha Swamy Temple, and the central deity is Shivalinga. The temple is also hailed as the only temple that hosts Lord Yama in its shrines.

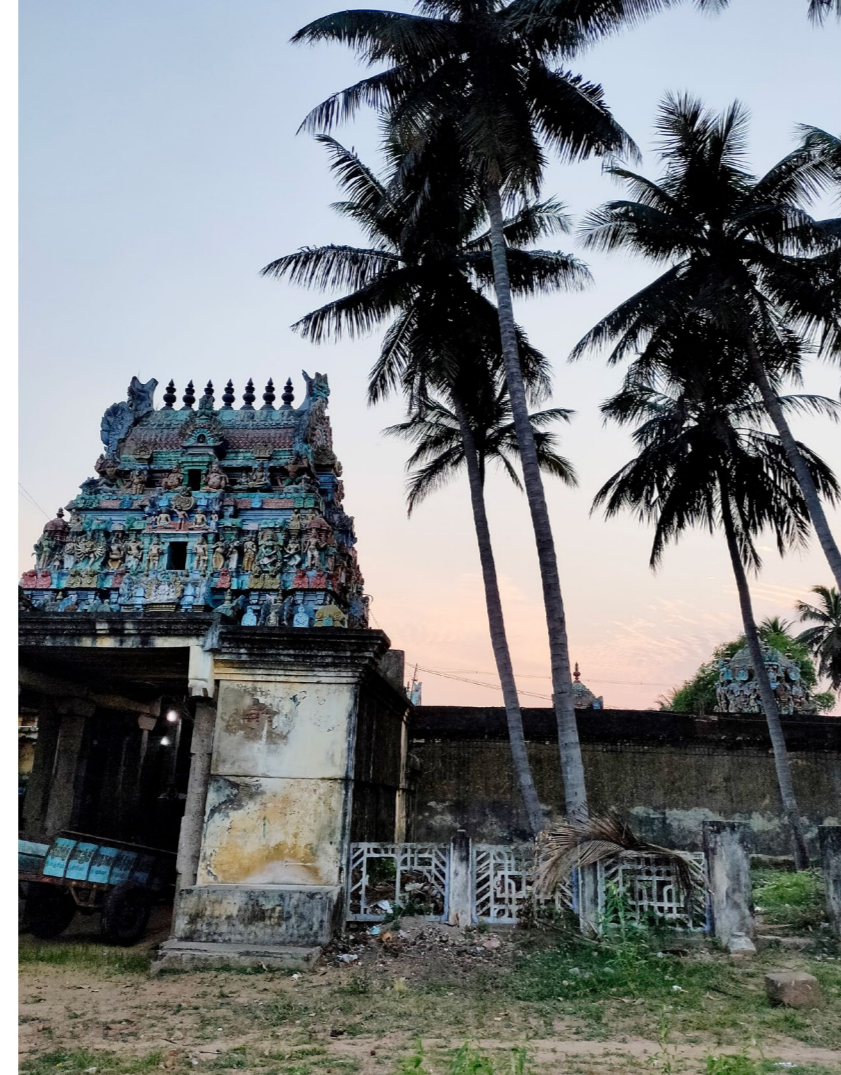
Apart from the sculptures of Shivalinga, his consort Parvati is depicted as Mangalambigai Amman. Lord Yama, Chitragnpta, Goddess Lakshmi, Maha Vishnu and a giant sandalwood tree, which is reminiscent of the rich flora that once existed here, enrich Sri Vanchiyam. It is also the house of distinguished gopurams. Whilst the serene and blessing avatar of Shiva is spellbinding, the gopurams are vibrant.

Sri Vanchiyam is over a thousand years old, but the grandeur of the colours parcelled onto the tall standing gopuram suggests the chances of renovation. It is impossible to ignore the peacock shades that welcome the devotees, and even there is a peacock-like structure crowning the 108 feet of the eastern gopuram. Spanning over two acres, the temple has two gateways, with the eastern and western gopurams. There are also three other similar structures inside Sri Vanchiyam.

Unlike every other imperial Chola structure that brims with sculptures in its gopurams, Sri Vanchiyam has a collection of pillars. Except for the final three stories, a gopuram is a group of uniform pillars that varies in descending sizes as we move up each story. Architects have sought to develop a pattern of designs using pillars. There are five openings in the middle of the gopuram, including the tall gateway. It is also notable that the deities carved into the top stories assume a protective posture, and all of them are male.

The sculptures have their chest puffed up with throbbing biceps, and all are half naked. The artistry behind the gopurams seems heavily stereotyped, where the guardian

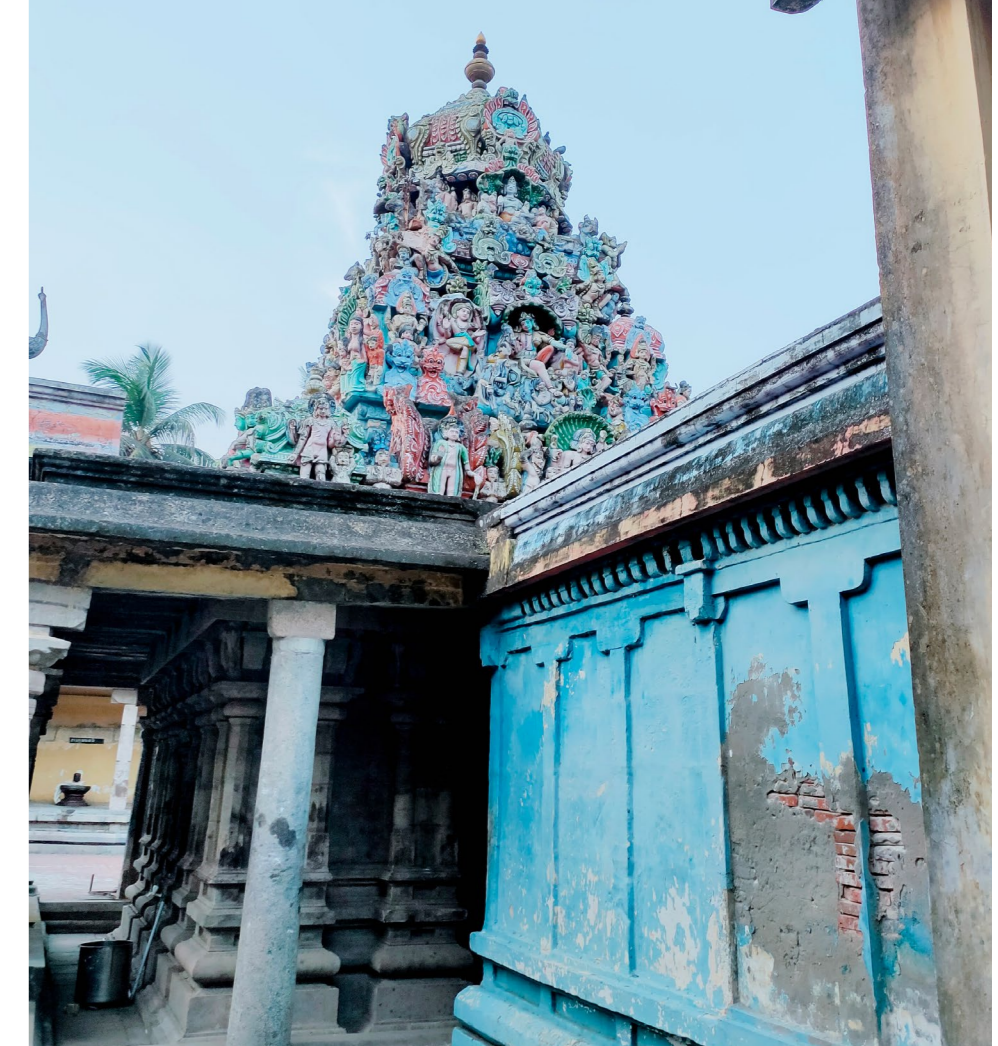
(Left) Front gate way of Sri Vaanchinaadha Swami Temple. . Kaviya R.



(Left) The sculptures have their chest puffed up with throbbing biceps and all of them are half naked. The artistry behind the gopurams seem heavily stereotyped where guardian and top-tier positions are reserved for men **Jinu Thomas**
(Above) In this gopuram, the father-son relationship of Shiva and Karthikeya is shown. Karthikeya is shown as Shiva's guru and lecturing him **Anaina C**



(Left) Peacock shades that welcome the devotees. There is even a peacock-like structure crowning the 108-foot eastern gopuram **Kaviya Ravi**
(Below) A gopuram dedicated to the women hurling towards Manmada with all their sexual might and flexibility **Anaina C**





and top-tier positions are reserved for men. Women are also subjugated to the back quarters of the temple and are represented as objects for pleasure for Manmadan. While another gopuram is dedicated to Hindu mythology's gods and goddesses, another one celebrates the Nayanmars of Shaivism.

The structures are incredibly polished and have withstood over a thousand years of hurdles. Such an achievement would be impossible without timely renovations. Nonetheless, the Sri Vanchiyam temple is a celebration of literature, lust and birth. A gopuram is dedicated to the women hurling towards Manmada with all their sexual might and flexibility. One of its sculptures exhibits the stages of pregnancy chiselled. To avoid the jinxing of the artisans' talents, it is said that a few sculptures were deliberately roughened up but still could not cover up the mastery.

Women's nudity is celebrated, and the beauty of their heavy bosoms is carved with perfection. One could notice women figures with utmost flexibility: in one sculpture, a woman's leg is held up above her head, and in another, she squats in a perfect aramandala (dance posture), throwing light onto the culture of those times. Despite the prejudiced depictions of sexes, women tend to occupy more space in the gopurams. Although secluded from the mainstream professions of warriorship and literature, they are celebrated for their body, beauty and virility.

There is an exciting take on the father-son relationship of Shiva and Karthikeya. It is constructed as if Muruga, aka Karthikeya, is Shiva's guru lecturing him on a particular topic, and Mahadeva is the most attentive student. It breaks the notion that teachers are always elderly. Those figures glorify the idea that knowledge should be welcomed from everyone despite age. The gopurams in Sri Vanchiyam temple serve more purposes than mere gateways, and they are the repositories of a millennium-old art and history. ■

(Left) Women's nudity is celebrated, and the beauty of their heavy bosoms is carved with perfection **Kaviya Ravi**



The Murals of Magic



By Aditya R, Esakki Rajan & Guguloth Kishore

Brihadeeswarar Temple, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India

SPECIALITIES

It is one of the largest Hindu temples

An exemplary example of a fully-realised Tamil architecture

It is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the 'Great Living Chola Temples'



A temple is not only a place of worship and festivity, but it also plays a significant part in the community's social and cultural life. Temples have long been used as learning sites. The exceptional Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur was built by Chola emperor Raja Raja Chola I in 1010 AD. The grand temple, dubbed "The Big Temple", is an archaeological splendour. The walls have exquisite sculptures and art related to Hindu mythology. Another highlight is the Vimana or the 'temple tower', which holds the stature of the tallest temple tower in the world at 216 ft. This temple is built with granite; we can see the Chola murals, arts, paintings, and sculptures on the wall. .

The writing on the north wall of the perimeter lists the people who worked for and were sponsored by the temple. Their names and roles are all listed on the inscription. Priests, lamplighters, washermen, tailors, jewellers, potters, carpenters, sacred parasol bearers, dance gurus, dancing girls, musicians, performing artists, accountants, and others are among the 600 names on the list. All these enormous Thanjavur temple murals portray three distinct artistic movements, the Chola, Nayaka, and Maratha, which is the most astonishing factor. The longest known were the Maratha Paintings and the Nayak Paintings. A set of paintings is visible to everyone in the corridors that follow the temple's wall. The temple has another set of Chola paintings that have been discovered on the walls in the secret pathways that connect the temple and Raja Raja Chola's palace. The murals in the Brihadeeswara temple exhibit Thanjavur's living legacy.

The paintings of the Brihadeeswarar temple are renowned for their vibrant colours and elaborate ornamentation. Gods from Indian mythology, the epics or religious literature are typically shown in the paintings. Some murals

(Left) A 216-foot vimana or the temple tower of Brihadeeswarar **Aditya R**
(Right) A vimana or tower of the temple **EsakkiRajan**





represent scenes from the Thiruvilayadal and the Markandeya Puranas. These paintings mainly portray Krishna, Vishnu, Lakshmi and Lord Shiva, sometimes surrounded by different figures or objects like temple arches, animals and trees.

The Chola murals are outstanding examples of the Chola artists' mastery of the line. They parade the profiles of divine and human figures and their expressions by combining flowing lines and suitable colouring, a unique quality of Chola murals. In contrast to the tranquillity of sculptural and metal pictures, even the Gods are illustrated with lively and vibrant expressions. The Chola painters have created the murals with an incredible imagination. All the characters and symbols are alive and communicate with the viewer.

The females are clad in unadorned saris with some ornaments. The paintings represent the beautifully adorned hairstyles of the kings and the queens, the gorgeous flower arrangements, a variety of ornaments, clothing embroidered with numerous patterns, and even an illustration of perfectly trimmed nails. The Chola murals provide the best graphic evidence for the hairstyles and clothing of ancient India.

Raja Raja Chola worships Sundareshvara (Shiva)

Shiva Manasa Pooja is an exquisite stotram through which devotees can worship God Shiva inside themselves. That is why this devotional hymn was called Manasa pooja, which means worship through manas or mind. The Chola king offers worship to the Shiva Lingam, located beneath the Jambu Vriksha. From a young age, emperor Raja Raja Chola showed tremendous devotion to Lord Shiva. This mural is positioned in the courtyard of the west colonnade. He devotedly worships the Lord, who made the powerful Tripuras burn like straw. He was a devoted patron and worshiper of the Three-

(Left) An old mural in the ceiling of Nandi mandapa
Guguloth Kishore
(Right) Mural of Lord Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma
Guguloth Kishore





Eyed Lord (karuvur thevar). Shiva Pada Shekara was hence a befitting name for Raja Raja Cholan, which meant one who adorns the foot of Lord Shiva on the head.

Vitchavati prays to Lord Shiva

In this mural of the Thiruvilayadal puranam, a devotee by the name of Vitchavati prays to Lord Shiva for the blessing of bearing Goddess Parvathi as her child. He gives her the blessing to give birth to Goddess Meenakshi as her child.

Parvathi feeding Thirugnana Sambandar

The mural is widely misunderstood as showing Yashodha feeding Krishna. But Sambandar, the famous Nayanar, is shown being fed by Goddess Parvathi. Near Thanjavur, at Sirkazhi, there is a temple devoted to this legend. It is Sambandar who revived Shaivism in Tamil Nadu.

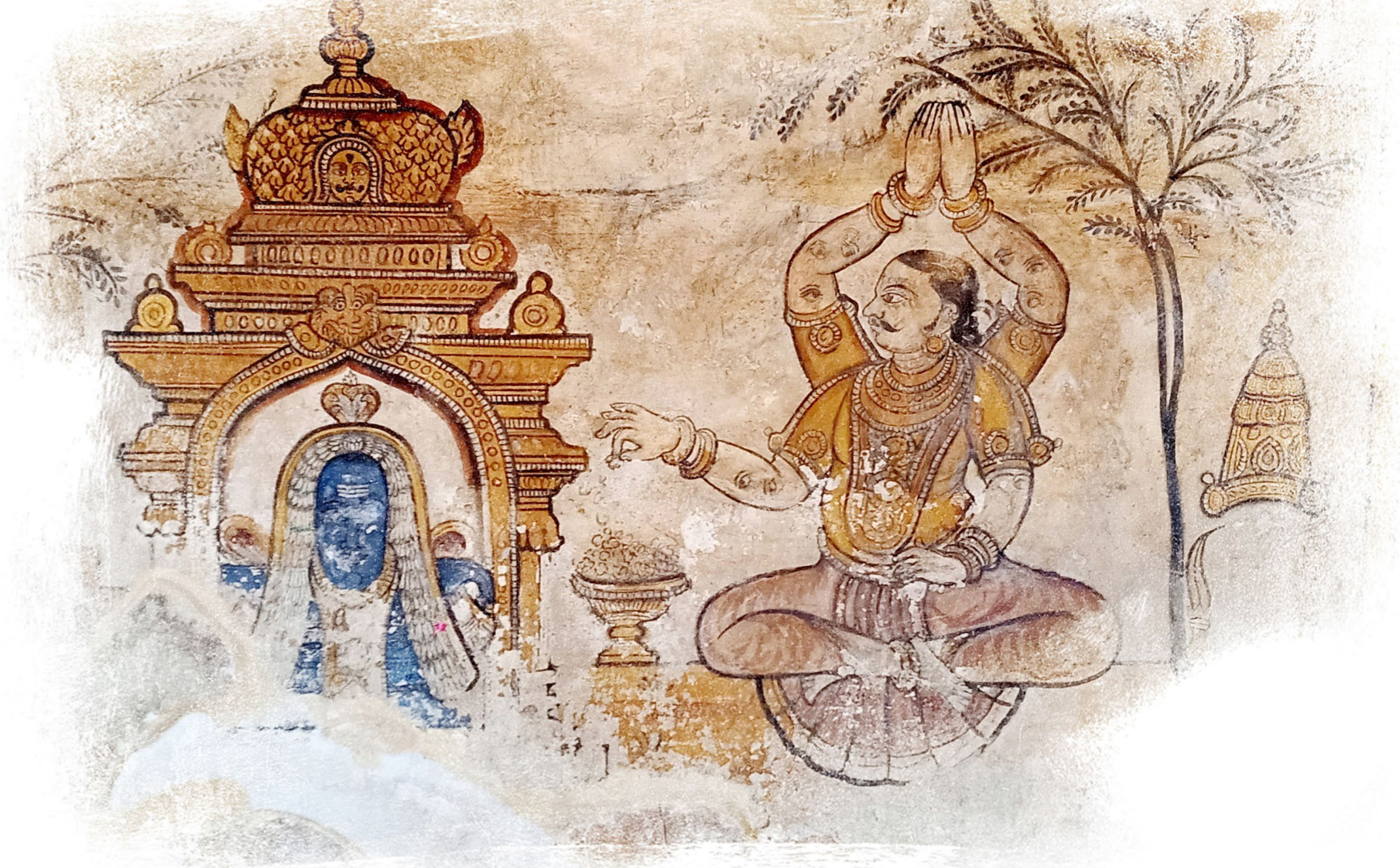
Goddess Saraswati playing the veena

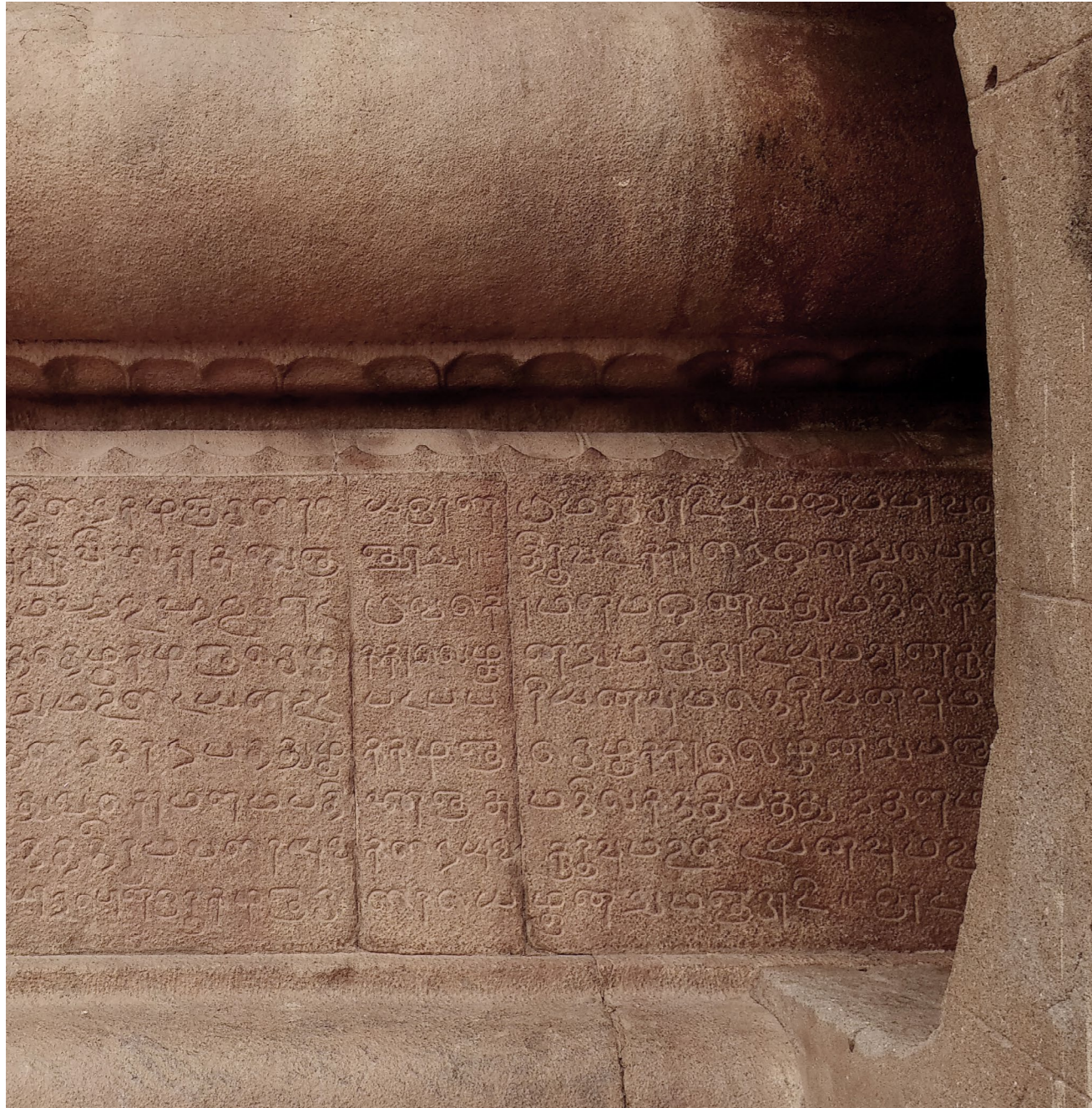
The beautiful mural depicts Goddess Saraswati playing the veena. Her Sage Narada, playing his Mahathi instrument, is to her left. Tumburu, a Gandharva and the best vocalist of all, is pictured on the right.

Mural of Kala Samhara Moorthy

Here, Yamadharmaraja sees Lord Shiva as Kala Samhara Moorthy, also known as Kalantaka, dancing vigorously. This aspect of Lord Shiva shows him as the supreme being who has defeated both time and death. He takes on this appearance in order to protect Markandeya, his great bhaktha, from Lord Yama. These murals reveal the supernatural powers of gods. We realise how the people gave importance to the cult at that time. The artisans tried to depict the exact visuali-

(Left) Dravidian-style gopuram or gateway of the temple **EsakkiRajan**
(Right) Raja Raja Chola worshipping Lord Shiva **Guguloth Kishore**





(Left) Tamil inscriptions on the stone walls
Aditya R
(Right) Carvings on the wall
Aditya R

sation of gods mentioned in Hindu puranas by their colour, number of hands, heads, postures, etc. The refined proportions in drawings reveal the artistic brilliance of their painters. Mural paintings are crafted using natural colours and have a standard mud colour canvas. Examining each of the mural paintings appearing in Brihadeeswarar temple shows the usage of different colour ink to depict different characters in puranas. The artists had the idea to present deities in blue to highlight them. Most of the mural paintings portraying the stories from Hindu Folklore are well executed. ■





The Dance of Divinity



By Arya J, Nikhila MS & Muhammed Roshan K

Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, India

SPECIALITIES

From the tenth Century, it is one of the oldest surviving active temple complexes in South India

Its architecture exemplifies the connection between arts and spirituality, creative activity and the divine



Chidambaram Nataraja Temple is the foremost of all temples and has influenced worship, architecture, sculpture and performance art for over two millennia. The present temple was built in the 10th Century when Chidambaram was the capital of the Chola dynasty, making it one of the oldest surviving active temple complexes in South India. After its 10th-century consecration by the Cholas, who considered Nataraja as their family deity, the temple was damaged, repaired, renovated and expanded.

The trajectory of the dancing Shiva is traced: from the processional worship of metal icons outside the sanctum to the cultic elevation of the Nataraja bronze into the sanctum at Chidambaram. The development of Chidambaram was upheld by numerous southern administrations like Cholas, Pallavas, Nayakas, Pandyas, and Vijayanagara Kings, in the ancient and pre-medieval periods. The temple is still maintained mainly from the 12th and 13th centuries, with later additions added in a similar style.

The sculpture is not only an artwork of creativity but also the best sustainable way to narrate history and cultures to future generations. Temples built in Tamil Nadu during the Chola period [second and third centuries] were given importance to sculptural architecture to illustrate the mythical stories and artistic works done by Indians to illuminate the upcoming generations. Chidambaram temple is such a shrine which is still in the grandeur of its sculptural brilliance.

Decorated walls of gopurams

Taking a stroll through the Chidambaram temple corridors, we can see the walls that portray karanas which are noted in Natya Shastra. About 108 such karana or dance units are named and characterised in the Natya Shastra, the oldest text on the performing expressions formed by Bharata Muni. This

(Left) Durga in the Shivakama Sundari shrine, in her Mahishasuramardini form killing the buffalo demon below her foot **Richard Mortel**



text is dated to a time close to quite a while back, inside an edge of 500 years and has been the most powerful in characterising and moulding Indian performing expressions. The eastern gopuram shows carvings of similar dance poses. In Chidambaram, the passages through all four gopurams have been decorated with a complete representation of all 108 karanas, one above the other and are heavily remarkable. The east, south and west gopurams have been dated to the 12th and 13th centuries, the north gopuram somewhat later. We are sure of this because the panels are accompanied by the relevant verse from the Natya Shastra in the east and west gopuram. Here a female dancer accompanied by two musicians perform the movements. The series is mainly identical in all four gopurams.

The panels are positioned in a horizontal band around it outside of the gopuram. Here many of the panels are captioned with inscriptions written in Grantha script. Again, this is the main reason, surely, the reliefs are intended as representations of Bharata's karanas. The gopurams depict the importance of Natya Sastra in the 2nd Century. It reveals that the people of that time valued their cultural artworks. Each perfect karana carving illustrates the artistic brilliance of sculptors. They carved the dance poses in all their contours and painted the expression the dancers had given to each pose. The effort has been to identify the sculptured Karanas of the Chidambaram temple with the verses of the fourth chapter of the Natyashastra, and to point out the discrepancies between the inscriptions and the sculptural representation.

Sculptures of Shiva Nataraja, dancing in his ring of flame, are maybe the best-known objects of Indic art. Nataraja differs from other images of dancing Shiva in this posture with his left leg extended across at hip level, known as Bhujangatrasita karana, a unique dual form of worship.

The culmination of divinity in the innermost sanctum: of a three-foot-high metal icon of Nataraja alongside an empty curtained space representing him as akasa or ether is unreal. Nataraja was worshipped at Chidambaram by the Pallavas with underlying philosophical concepts of cosmic cycles of



creation and destruction.
Krishna Deva Raya, was the Vijayanagara King who improved this temple at the beginning of the 16th Century A.D. The Nritta Sabha, which houses the image of the Oordhva Thandava Murthi boasts 56 pillars of exquisite art, each 6 ft. high (1.50m). The carvings in these pillars are a veritable wonder to behold. This sabha mandapa is fashioned as a chariot with excellent carvings of wheels and horses. ■



Fabulous Fusions



By Shaharban T, Alka Elizabeth Babu & Albin Benny

Shri Airavateswara Temple, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu, India

SPECIALITIES
A UNESCO World
Heritage Site



Three kilometres from the heart of Kumbakonam lies one of the greatest repositories of Chola architecture, one among the Great Living Chola Temples, The Airavateswara Temple, popularly known as Darasuram Temple. Rajaraja II built it in the year 1167, and the deity was initially named Rajarajeshwarar.

The legend has it that the Airavata – The majestic white elephant of Lord Indra was cursed by Sage Durvasa, causing it to lose its pure white colour. Being humiliated and devastated by the incident, Airavata prayed to Lord Shiva in the very spot of Darasuram and, as a result, regained its colour. Then the deity came to be hailed as 'Airavateswarar' referring to Lord Shiva. Over the years, the Darasuram Temple has withstood many obstacles, from Muslim invaders to the careless locals who did not think to preserve this historical marvel. Some deeds have seriously affected the temple, including the massive destruction of the Eastern gopuram and locking the "singing- steps" in agra-mandapam near the Bali-pitham. The Archeological Survey of India has meticulously renovated this UNESCO Heritage Site.

Considering the scorching heat, the best time to visit this marvellous creation is in the morning or late afternoon when there is enough light to witness this paradise of artistry. The changing hues of the sky resonating with this astonishing Dravidian Architecture have the might to leave those in its presence in a trance. Unlike the other Great Chola Temples, the Airavateswara temple is not so splendid with grandeur, but the intricate architecture has industriously overcome that weakness. Each nook and corner of this centuries-old temple is adorned with complex designs of Chola architecture on granite. Fusions in the Uncommon Idols of Darasuram Fusion is an art of blending. The enigmatic collection of giant sculptures in Shri Airavatheswara temple, Kumbakonam, is an abundant mine of such indigenous beauties which adorn

(Left) A performing gypsy **Albin Benny**
(Right) Female warriors **Alka Elizabeth Babu**





the glory of the Dravidian architecture of the Chola period. Shri Airavatheswara temple, also known as Darasuram temple, stands out with its resplendent fusion of art and culture.

Ardhanarisurya

Ardhanarisurya, which is embedded into the niche of the 80 feet tall vimana, is a rare sculpture that reminds the trinity concept of gods in myths. Here the deities Siva, Parvathy, and Lord Surya form the Holy Three, which is said to be the only sculpture of that kind in the world discovered until now. The sculpture of Ardhanarisurya is often misunderstood as Ardhanareeswara sculpture. The sculpture is built almost 4 feet in height and is made of rough stones. The sculptor has chiselled even the minute differences in the facial features of Lord Siva and Parvathy, and Lord Soorya is placed behind their head as an aura. The hermaphrodite form of Ardhanarisurya sculpture, which shares equal space for men and women, propagates gender equality and also shows

the acceptance of gender beyond binaries in that era. The upper body of the statue is naked for both Siva and Parvathy, which also states both genders were treated equally in those times, and the nudity of women's bodies was not a taboo or a meagre instrument for sex in those times. Even though they are half naked, both are portrayed as rich in ornaments. And this implies in those times, dresses and ornaments are not used to hide the body but to decorate the body equally for men and women. There is a poonal thread for Lord Shiva reflecting the caste system in the Chola period.

Rishaba Kunjaram

One of the other exciting sculptures is that of Rishaba Kunjaram, a blend of bull and elephant. Their faces are synced with distinguishable heads but a single eye. The share of animal depiction in the artistry of the 11th Century shows the impenetrable relationship between animals and men in those times. The animals are also wonderfully ornated, showing they were domestically kept and well taken care of and ornaments were not only meant for human beings. A break in

the stone can be seen towards the middle portion of the elephant, which implies that the sculpture is not made in a single stone, but its art is made in a fusion of rocks and animals.

Dhanwanthari Maharshi

One of the other notable sculptures in the Darasuram temple is Dhanwanthari Maharshi. He is Lord Vishnu's avatar, the deity of Ayurveda. He comes as a group with his disciples and is placed in a position upper to his students. They are placed below his feet level. This reflects the gurukul system of those times. And the disciples appear to be wearing Sufi-type caps, which is intriguing. This can be doubted as a religious fusion of the Hindu Vedha concept and Sufism. The Dhanwanthari sculpture also wears Poonal thread, which again sheds light on the prevalent caste system at those times. He sits and places his hands in a yoga mudra which shows the importance of Yoga in Ayurveda. The sculptures are accurate with their measurements on either side, even though they are not polished ones. And the medical developments in those times can also be concluded from this sculpture.

Statue of Siva, Parvathy, and Ganga

One of the outstanding contributions of Chola artisans to Darasuram is a marvellous statue of Siva, Parvathi and Ganga blended in one. There is syncing of two emotions in this statue, romance and protection. He is cajoling Parvathy with his hands, and on the other side, he is protecting Ganga in his 'other hand'. Ganga, the sister of Parvathy is depicted in the form of a river flowing from his hand in this statue instead of keeping her in his hair. The lasya bhava of Parvathy is majestically chiselled in the statue where she is placed little in front of Siva. The ornaments, the attire, and the posture of the Parvathy in the idol enthral its viewers. She is mesmerised by the

(Left) A pillar with Bharatnatyam postures **Albin Benny**
(Right) The Nandi mandapa at Darasuram temple **Shaharban T**



touch of her loved one. It seems like Siva is cajoling a dejected Parvati. Shiva is portrayed in a curved figure in this sculpture, similar to a female body as same as in the Ardhanarisurya sculpture. Female attributes are blended

into male anatomy. The common feature of these sculptures reflects the social and cultural life of those times. And all these sculptures are placed in rectangular areas, while most of the mini sculptures are placed in circular womb-like structures. With the rarest of the sculptures and most intriguing fusions among these sculptures, the Airavateswara temple remains one of the biggest repositories of Chola architecture.

Intricacy and Precision: Microcarvings in Darasuram Temple Female warriors

Almost a millennium-old creation, Shri Airavateswara Temple is one of the most significant caches of Chola architecture. The breathtaking intricacies in this historical marvel leave those in its presence spellbound. The lavishness of the grandeur of this Great Chola temple could be of the question, but the artisans have put their souls into itching a repository of micro-carvings, second to none, in Darasuram.

Apart from the giant god figures, ornamented pillars and boulders and exquisite goddesses, the detailing that's done in the tiniest of the carvings echoes the mastery of its architects. The sculptures in the Airavateswara Temple cater to the idea of Nithyavinodam or perpetual amazement, the smiles and joy in the face of the sculptures is intact even today. Other than that, the idols of the gods are engaged in activities of happiness and peace such as romance, dancing, singing, playing an instrument or meditating.

Performances

The miniature sculptures seen in Darasuram are less than two feet in length but vivid in their expressions. The lips pursing into a happy smile for Shivganas to the trance mood in the face of Shiva during Shivatandava are conscientiously carved. The entrance is splendid with the steps of Bharatanatyam



itched into its pillars in miniature form, once inside, the pillars and bas-reliefs of the temple are also brimming with micro-carvings.

Shivganas

The extraordinary miniature sculptures are less than an inch in height, but their artistry and detailing should be commendable. There are sculptures of Shiva and Parvati sitting together, Lord Ganesh playing the veena, Lord Ganesha dancing, Lord Kaala Bairava, Maa Kali. All of these sculptures are embedded in intricate embroidery-like designs. Most of them appear to be naked, or the attire is not easily comprehensible due to the carving size. Although, more attention has been given to the facial expressions of the statues adhering to the theme of Nithyavinodham. The statues have a rough finish in contrast to many of the giant basaltic figures in the temple. The figures' postures are distinguishable, and most are devoid of ornaments.

Pregnant woman

Owing to the temple's general theme, several other miniature carvings are scattered almost into the whole of the creation. While some of them remain an extensive narration of Mahabharatha, Periyapuram and Skandapuram, others can be singled out to be unique. Some sculptures highlight the flexibility of the artists of that time, like women performing gymnastics or Bharatanatyam. There is also a piece of work which could be categorised as a performing gipsy. Every one of these artworks has a rough finish, and unlike the very minute god statues, the attire and ornaments of these statues are visible and elaborate. It's ironic how the gods are tinier than ordinary people in this work style.

Shri Airavateswara Temple also has several life-style-themed sculptures in its storehouse. There is a unique depiction of a yogi meditating in its cave. The yogi is seated in the yoga posture of Pathamasana, has long hair tied into a bun and a long beard, and seems naked, resembling the Aghoras. Darasuram temple has a strange collection of lives of laypeo-

ple; the most notable among them are two midwives helping a pregnant woman with her delivery. The sculpture is less than two inches in height but is done with precision. It sheds light on the delivery method of those times: standing delivery. Two midwives support the pregnant lady on their shoulders while supporting the womb as well. The woman undergoing delivery seems to be in agony and exhausted. The midwives are half naked, and the pregnant woman is fully naked.

There are also sculptures of women warriors with swords and shields but not on the war field, the expressions depict they are practising it with ease. The sculpture shows that the women of that time had knowledge about weapons and the ways of using weapons. They are clad in warrior dresses, too, with their hair tied up on the head for the easiness of fighting. The sculpture gives hints at the gender-equal social scenario of that time. These sculptures of five women are made of equal height. The philosophy of perpetual amazement can be seen even in these warrior sculptures.

The sculptures, in large, depict the pattern of equality among sexes. While in togetherness, no statue is shown bigger than the other, and lots of space is dedicated to the women artists, warriors, and even commoners of that time.

The impeccable craftsmanship of the Darasuram temple cannot be limited to a few words. It is undoubtedly one of the unparalleled contributions from the Chola dynasty to art and history and reverberates the truth of the existence of art and culture till the end of time. ■

(Left) The dwajastambha at the entrance of the temple **Albin Benny**
(Right) The "singing steps" leading to Balipeetham at the Darasuram temple **Alka Elizabeth Babu**





Feminine Exuberance

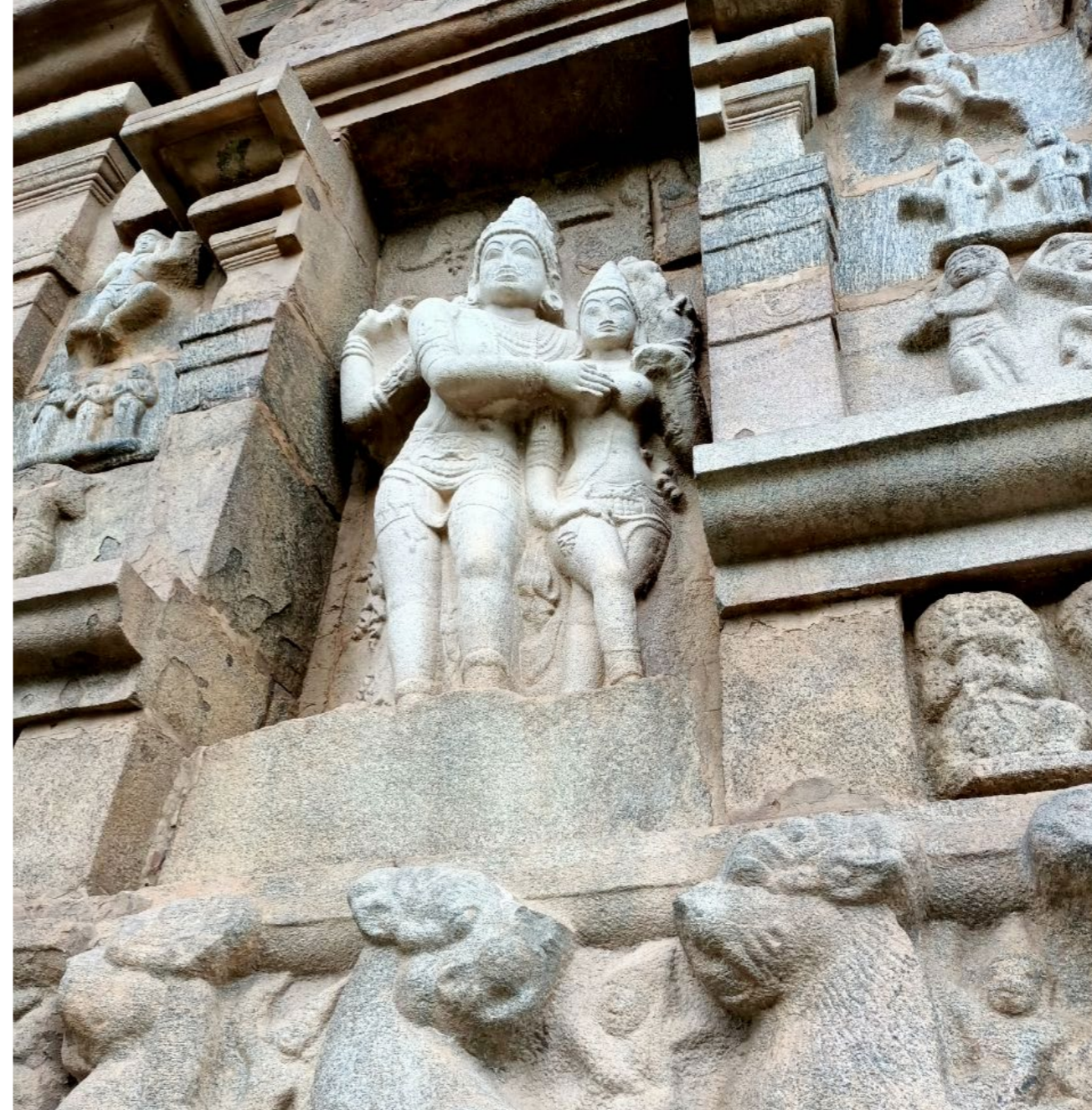


Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Jayankondam, Ariyalur district, Tamil Nadu, India

By Ajith K, Anamika T & Remya V

SPECIALITIES

A UNESCO World
Heritage Site



When discussing Gangaikonda Cholapuram, people often wonder whether it is more feminine because those structures are less masculine. However, this is not the only reason because when we look at those sculptures, we can see many of them are based on female gods and semi-female gods like Ardhanareeshwara, and there are also more sculptures of female dancers, which illustrates the similarities between the female hierarchy in the Makar art.

Compared to modern architecture, Gangaikonda Cholapuram is more inclined toward the feminine side of depiction. More sculptures were all around Gangaikonda Cholapuram, which show female dancing actors leading to the statement that Gangaikonda Cholapuram is more feminine. Beautiful rock art, sculptures, and architecture, not only the legacy of Cholas, go beyond that. They've built many stunning temples and set their mark in more than a few regions. One of those temples is the Gangaikonda Chola Puram temple, the feminine version of The Tanjore temple. Though this temple claims to be the replica of the Thanjavur temple built by Raja 1, it has uniqueness. Even when Pandyas destroyed every trace of the Chola dynasty in the early thirteenth Century, this temple still stood for centuries.

After Pandyas, the remains of the great city were broken down by the locals brick by brick within five miles. And for decades, the local villagers have been digging the bricks and are selling by cartloads. One bullock cart of Gangaikonda Chola Puram bricks is sold for four annas. This is the speciality of Brihadeeshwara temple it stood in all the circumstances, first the Pandya then the locals. Though the temple survived, it didn't escape the damage. And the damage was not because of the wars it was because of the greed of the local contractors. When the Dantikat dam was built, they pulled down the stones of enclosure walls of the gopurams and the mandapas and carried away the stones.

Talking about the architecture of this epic temple, the

(Left) Lord Siva and Parvathi Remya V



artists have set their standards. Chola's architecture is fascinated and appreciated by the whole world; few of the carvings in this temple are proof of the mesmerising art of the Chola dynasty. There are many breathtaking sculptures like Nataraja, Hariharan (half Shiva, half Vishnu), and Ardhanarishwara (half Shiva, half Parvathi). These sculptures are very intricate and detailed in their execution.

The Sociality of Man and Animals: An Artistic Reading of the Sculptures of Gangaikonda Cholapuram

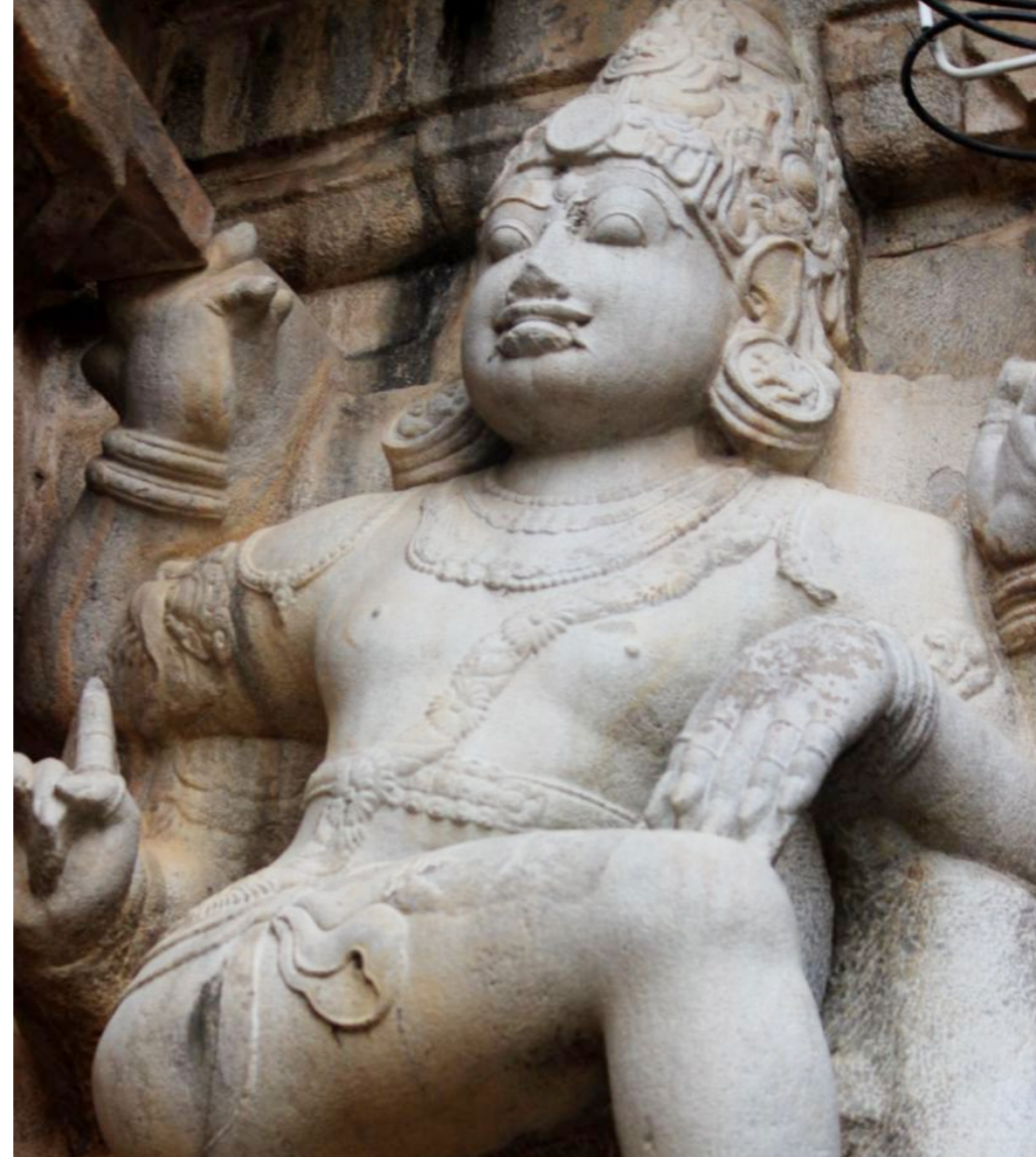
Since the beginning of mythology, animals have played a significant role in the stories. Horses, eagles, and elephants are given much importance while the horse represents speed, the lion represents bravery, and the elephant represents strength. Every Shiva temple must have a cow sculpture because Nandi was his devoted follower. In such a way, there is an animal associated with each god. It is a peacock for Lord Muruga, a cow, a snake for Shiva, and a rat for Ganapathi.

The "Prakriti" manifestation is more in line with this type of depiction, where animals are valued equally.

In addition to having goshalas, or cow sanctuaries, all the major temples also incorporated animals into their design. The fact that some temples' worship would be incomplete without the animals speaks volumes about the significance of animals in Hindu temples. Hindu philosophy emphasises the significant role that animals play in temple worship and links worship of Uma or Shakti, Lord Shiva's consort, to the very manifestation of nature, or "Prakriti." The spiritual tenets of Hinduism exalt the interdependence of worship, gods, humans, and animals. ■

(Far left) Nandi Remya V
(Left) Lord Bikshadanamoorthi Anamika T





(Above) Entrance of the temple Ajith K
(Right) Dwarapalakas of the temple Ajith K

