

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATARAJA CULT IN TAMIL NADU - A STUDY

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Abstract: Hinduism is one of the oldest major religions in the world. It consists of three principal gods called Brahma. The creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. Hinduism are two major sect, one is a Saivism and Vaishnavism. Saivism regards Shiva as the ultimate deity, Vaishnavism regard Vishnu or his avatars such as Rama and Krishna as supreme gods. The Lord Nataraja form of Lord Shiva is known to be the first of twenty five ones of Lord Shiva. Lord Nataraja is unique concept among the noblest symbolism of the supreme power the most common image shown his four arms and flaming of neck. According to the *Shiva Purana*, Lord Shiva is said to have five faces, corresponding to his five tasks, (panchakriya) creation, destruction, grace, dissolution and blessing. To know the origin and development of Nataraja cult in north Indian context and south Indian context. There is lot of archaeological evidences from Indus valley civilization. Lord Shiva is essentially found in two forms, an iconic that is symbolized without aiming at resemblance, and uniconic in which the god is represented. There is no Shiva temple in South India without a Lord Nataraja bronze in worship and a critical study of the bronzes is a stupendous task. For the first time during the Pallava period dancing Shiva's (Lord Nataraja) sculptures were found in Tamil Nadu, later Lord Nataraja cult gained greater impetus during the Chola period. Lord Nataraja is worshipped in all the three forms, namely, arupa - which is called Chidambara rahasyam, aruparupa - Shiva Lingam and rupa - Nataraja.

Key Words: Lord, Shiva, Nataraja, Pasupati, Sculpture, Cult, Saivism, Dance, B.C.E., C.E., Chidambaram.

I. Introduction

Religious study occupy a prominent place in the culture of history of India. Typically it focuses on an ultimate (or) obsolete thought of some one who believes as god. Hinduism is one of the oldest major religion in the world. It consists of three principle gods called Brahma. The creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. Though these are several sects within Hinduism, Saivism and Vaishnavism are the two major divisions of Hinduism. Saivism regards Shiva as the ultimate deity. Vaishnavism regard Vishnu or his avatars such as Rama and Krishna as supreme gods.

The Lord Nataraja form of Lord Shiva is known to be the first of twenty five ones of Lord Shiva. i.e., Nataraja, Chandrasekhara, Umamahesha, Rishabhharuta, Kalyanasundara, Bhikshatana, Kamari, Kalari, Tripurani, Jalantarari, Mantankari, Virabhadra, Hariyatha, Ardhanariswara, Kirata, Kankala, Sandesanugraha, Nilakantha, Chakkaraprata, Gajamukhanugraha, Somaskanda, Ekapala, Sukhasana, Dakshinamurti and Lingotbhava. Hence, it is derived from the *Agamas* that Lord Shiva manifests himself in the form of Nataraja. He is addressed as *Adavallan*, (Best dance performer) *Kuttaperuman*, *Ambalavanan*, *Sabhpathi*, *Natesar*, *Niruthan*. Lord Nataraja is unique concept among the noblest symbolism of the supreme power the most common image shown his four arms and flaming of neck. The left upper hand caring a fire, right upper hand hold on damaru, left lower hand is hajagashta and right lower hand abhaya mudra posture.

According to the *Shiva Purana*, Lord Shiva is said to have five faces, corresponding to his five tasks, (panchakriya) creation, destruction, grace, dissolution and blessing. His five faces are associated with the creation of the sacred syllable *om*. Lord Shiva is said to live on Mount Kailash, a mountain in the Himalayas. His vehicle is Nandi (the bull) and his weapon, the *trisula*. Lord Shiva's consort is Parvathi, who is also believed to be a part of Lord Shiva. Their sons are Ganesha and Karthikeya. Lord Shiva is believed to have a large number of attendants called *Shivaganas*. These mythological beings have human bodies with animal heads. Shiva's son Ganesha is the leader of the *Shivaganas*. Lord Shiva is shown with a serpent around his waist and flowing matted locks or dreadlock (called *jatamakuta*). Within which can be seen Ganga, the goddess of the Ganges, another of Shiva's consorts. Once a celestial river, the gods granted that the river could flow on earth for the benefit of men.

Lord Nataraja is one of the twenty five forms of Lord Shiva. To know the origin and development of Nataraja cult, the author rely on the origin of Lord Shiva. There is lot of archaeological evidences from Indus valley civilization. For the first time during the Pallava period dancing Shiva's sculptures were found in Tamil Nadu, later Lord Nataraja cult gained greater impetus during the Chola period. Lord Shiva is essentially found in two forms, an iconic that is symbolized without aiming at resemblance, and uniconic in which the god is represented. In respect to an iconic form, Lord Shiva is represented as Linga, essentially a phallic pillar, which in *Saivaites* temples is the central object of worship.

II. Methodology

This study attempts to bringout the philosophy of life especially Saivism in all human endeavours with philosophical perceptions. The period under the study of the numerous metal images of Lord Nataraja was found in the Tamil country since Sangam age. "The Nataraja type is one of the great creations of Indian art". This research article is also done mainly based on development of Lord Nataraja cult in Tamil Nadu. The methodology adopted in this work is partly descriptive and partly analytic and interpretative. In this article, Tamil words are also italicised.

III. Development of Nataraja Cult in the North Indian Context

Lord Shiva has been one of the most important and popular deities in India, both in the past ages and in present times. His antiquity goes back to the Indus valley period. The earliest figure resembling the deity occurs on a seal from Mohenjo-daro, which shows a three-faced male deity with horns, seated on a stool, with his heels pressed closely together. He is surrounded by a tiger, an elephant, a rhinoceros, a buffalo and two deer. Besides seals, several Linga shaped object and ringstones discovered from Mohenjo-daro and Harappa are regarded as representations

of the *phallic* and *yonis*. The existence of Linga like objects and the representation of a deity resembling Pasupati-Shiva on the seals, lead us to presume that the God Rudra-Shiva of later days, had his moorings in the religious beliefs of Harappan people, and his personality further developed in later times.

Rudra is mentioned in the *Rigveda*, where he occupies a subordinate position. His personality possesses two divergent traits, one destructive and the other benevolent. In destructive form, he is associated with storm, rain and lightening, and his main weapons are a bow and arrows, with which he kills the animate beings. In the *Yajurveda*, the Rudra has acquired a higher status, and is prayed to keep away his dreadful arrows. His names are *Kivi* and *Daurvratya*. He is also prayed to supply good medicines to the animate beings. His Pasupati form is well established. He is also associated with the welfare of the children. In the *Atharvaveda*, Rudra is called as Nila Sikkhandin. He is also described as attacking the animate beings with the lightening. His chariot is black and awful and is drawn by the red horses. His poisoned arrows are represented as spreading diseases, destroying by his medicines. In the epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) Rudra-Shiva is shown as a benevolent and meritorious god. He is the saviour of the mankind and bestower of gifts. He is all merciful, and the highest god. It is remarkable that *Nandi* is mentioned in the *Ramayana* for the first time. In the *Mahabharata*, Shiva is the creator, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. In the development of Rudra-Shiva, the non-Aryan and Aryan elements are completely fused by the *Puranic* age. He becomes one of the great Brahmanical Trinity, and a powerful sect develops round him. His personality is so charming that he combines him a large variety of characteristics, and thus becomes the most colourful deity of the Brahmanical pantheon. The figures of Rudra-Shiva are symbolic representation of Linga on an uninscribed cast coin, Taxila coins and Ujjayini coins are 3rd or 2nd century B.C.E. The representation of the humped-bull on the punchmark and Indo-Greek coins may be a theriomorphic representation of Shiva in c. 3rd, 2nd century B.C.E.

The most important figures of the deity are found on the Kushana coins, showing single or multifaced Shiva with two or more arms, holding attributes of varying nature, such as trident, damaru, water-vessel and noose, etc., and also represents a deer standing before the deity, indicating his Pasupati aspect. It is rather strange that though various form of Shiva appear on the coins from very early time, and he is frequently mentioned in early literature yet he is rarely referred to inscriptions prior to the Gupta age. Subsequently numerous epigraphic reference to Shiva provide a store-house of material for the study of different Saiva sects and the development of his iconography. By the end of the Gupta period, the Saiva pantheon was fully developed. The Allahabad pillar-edict refers to Pasupati in connection with the descent of Ganga. The gift of a cave at Udayagiri by a Shiva devotee also indicates the popularity of the god in the Gupta period.

Sangaloi copper-plate inscription of Harivarman, Lord Shiva is praised as the Supreme God along with Brahma and Vishnu indicating the liberal attitude of the age. Lord Shiva is represented in the sculpture are may be made of clay, wood, stone, iron, copper, bronze, silver, gold or gems. The earliest Kushana images represent the deity in various forms, such as, Uma-Mahesvara and Ardhanarisvara. In the Gupta sculptures, crescent is also added to his forehead and his ferocious form also gains artist's attention. The hair style shows pleasing variations. The post-Gupta age heralds a new era in the fashioning of Shiva images. A large number of new forms such as yoga-Dakshinamurti, Vinadharamurti, Lingodbhavamurti, Samharamurti, and Bhairava, etc. are sculptured for the first time. The other gods associated with the deity include Ganesha, Karthikeya, Brahma, Vishnu, Indra, Yama, Navagrahas, Nandi and his ganas etc. Nataraja image is found from the Gupta period onward. It is artistically carved with exquisite beauty and sublime tenderness with fine rhythm of limbs in a lively fashion, transforming the physical form into the cosmic upheaval. A medieval sculpture from Ballesvara temple, Champawat represents Nataraja. Though the concept of the dance of Shiva is very old, the representation of Shiva's dance multiply only in the medieval period.

IV. Development of Nataraja Cult in the South Indian Context

The Vakatakas who were contemporaries of the Guptas in the south, have not been a whit behind the later in their portrayal of the dancing form of Shiva. The sculpture of Shiva, in the earlier Vakataka caves at Ellora, and there is another equally interesting dancing form in the Elephanta cave. The theme of Nataraja has been a great favourite with the sculptor here. Bhanja king, from Orissa, Maharaja Sattubhanja, is in an early script and mentions its creator as a king who was versatile and liberal. Connected by matrimony with the Vakatakas were the Vishnukundins. Virkramendra, the Vishnukundin king, who was the maternal grandfather of the Pallava king Mahendravarman I, has a figure of dancing Shiva on the top triple-celled cave, at Mugalrajapuram near Bezvada. Among the early Western Chalukyan representations of Shiva's dance, the one from Badami cave is very effective but another which is less known but equally important, is from the Rawalpadi cave at Aihole, with features unusually long, and slightly more primitive than the Badami one. A special feature of this sculpture is that Shiva here dances amidst *matrikas* and his *jatamakuta*, like the *makuta* and the limbs of the other figures flanking him, is very elongated. Eastern Chalukya art the Nataraja image, in a niche to the back of the temple in the field, is a striking one, representing the deity dancing in the chatura pose. Though this dance pose is common with similar figures from the north, it, however, comes closer to the Southern tradition. These two are probably the only representations of dancing Shiva of the Eastern Chalukya school. The Nolambas continued the tradition of the early Western Chalukyas, but with a special charm of their own in this style of work, and have created some fine examples of dancing Shiva at Hemavati, their capital, where their temples abound. This is typical ninth century work. The Rashtrakuta king, Krishnaraja I, carved out of the living rock a magnificent temple, which is a great wonder of Indian architecture. There are excellent carvings representing the sports of Shiva here. Shiva dancing, as the central figure of a long lintel, exquisitely carved, recovered from Hampi as a typical Later Chalukya piece.

In the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, Lord Shiva is shown dancing eight-armed, with his right leg lifted up almost to produce *urdhvajanu*. There is another multi armed Nataraja form of Shiva, in this temple with twelve hands. Kakatiyas are one of the feudatories of the Chalukyas. They became independent and continued ruling in their own right. One of the finest sculptures of the Kakatiya school is from Warangal and shows carving on the lintel of a doorway of a Shiva temple. There are representations of Nataraja in the earliest temples at Bhubanesvar Originally under the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Gujarat continued their traditions under the Chalukyas.

The dance tradition of Malabar is very famous for its tandava element, as this vigorous mode is more prominent in Kathakali. This early representation of Shiva as the dancer is indeed most interesting and is the precursor of the very much later Nataraja form in sculpture. In accordance with South India traditions, Shiva as a dancer is here shown with Devi as Sivakamasundari beside him.

V. Development of Nataraja Cult in the Tamil Nadu

There is no Shiva temple in South India without a Lord Nataraja bronze in worship and a critical study of the bronzes is a stupendous task. There are two aspects of study one the evolution and the growth of the cult of Shiva - Nataraja as contained in the works referred to and the other as to how the ideas were translated into works of art in the forms of the icons of Lord Nataraja. Not all the bronzes may be outstanding works of art but most of these satisfy the requirements and lapses in conforming to the symbolic representations are few and far between. But a sizeable number of such images are marvellous pieces of art, silent exponents of a glorious past. It should be remembered that Lord Nataraja

bronze is an epitome in plaster, eloquent of the *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophy. The Lord Nataraja icon is surcharged with ideas, thoughts moulded into metal, a perfect symphony of dance and song, religion and art, literature and philosophy, mingling one into the other as in an orchestra, that can speak volume of a degree of perfection attained and maintained in the past but not surpassed in later times.

VI. Sangam Age

The Tamil Literary conversion classified geographical regions as Kurinji (hills), Mullai (forest), Marudam (plains), Neidal (Coast) and Palai (desert) and fixed their deities, no mention is made of Shiva while the other deities such as Muruga, Vishnu, Indra, Varuna and Kotravai are mentioned. This was obviously because Lord Shiva was held supreme and considered as the deity for all the regions.

Tirumular freely uses the appellation Shivan meaning, "He who is reddish and Shiva meaning the auspicious". The word Nataraja has not come into vogue as yet, but Tirumular uses profusely instead the word *Kuttan* (Dancer). When the lines of the vision of the sacred dance are read, an image of Lord Nataraja appears before the mind's eye, as representing the Lord who dances in the cosmos. But archaeology fails miserably and does not keep company with ancient Tamil works. But for the availability of Tamil works, these would have been a greater void in understanding these icons of perennial and everlasting value. However, the Lord Nataraja icons with a considerable volume of literature, is a link with the past, reminding one, the place of dance in pre-Aryans society.

The tribal dance in honour of the pre-Aryan hill god in cemeteries and burial grounds lies buried in antiquity. But in *Kalittokai*, a *Sangam* work, there is a description of two of the dances of Lord Shiva *Pandarankam* and *Kodukotti*. Hero of many a battle, smearing ashes over his body, the Lord Shiva dances *Pandarankam*, while his spouse of tender shoulders as those of bamboo, and hair humming with bees maintains the beats for him. With his drum sending various musical notes and the Lord Shiva's spouse gives the concluding beats. In *Silappadhikaram* a vivid description of the performance of the *Kodukotti* dance in the presence of the King Chera Cenkuttuvan and his queen by a professional dancer and his wife playing role of the Lord Shiva and Goddess Uma is given. *Pandarankam* also finds a place in the epic *Silappadhikaram*. Several centuries must have passed by between the time of the tribal dances in honour of the pre-Aryan hill god and the time when *Kalittokai* and *Silappadhikaram* were written. But by then, dance as such made a significant march from cemeteries to a King's court, reflecting the development of civilization, art and literature. Something concrete came to be spelt out two of the dances attributed to Lord Shiva. It has to be noted that from a hoary past in the field of dancing, the corner had been turned round and one was face to face with a highly developed musical and dance repertoire. The account was furnished by *Silappadhikaram* with great historical and artistic value.

The *Silappadhikaram* mentions a number of dancer associated with Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, Goddess Durga, Lord Muruga and Lord Krishna but their identification is not yet established without attempting the larger question of the origin of the Lord Nataraja cult and its beginnings, it may be stated that there was a phase of the widespread Hindu revival in the six century C.E.

Four centuries later in the sixth century C.E., Karaikkal Ammaiyar sings about Shiva's dance in the burial-cum-cremation ground of Thiruvallangadu. The Lord Shiva dressed as maniac dances to the accompaniment of the musical notes and instruments. In addition to compositions sung vocally, drums such as *tudi* and *parai* are sounded and produced shrill notes. The eight directions reverberate with echoes at the sounding of *mulavu*, another kind of drum. Musical instruments of leather stringed instruments, and metallic instruments are sounding galore, while the Lord Shiva dances. It is to the credit of Karaikkal Ammaiyar that the theme of Shiva as the dancer got an embellishment in her scintillating songs of rich poetic content and galloping style and music played a dominant role in the dance of Lord Shiva who became the Lord Nataraja par excellence of music and dance. The era of devotional poetry in Tamil can be taken to have been ushered in by Karaikkal Ammaiyar. She sees the Lord Shiva as the father, the very embodiment of beauty whose dance spits fire. The foot of the Lord Shiva, raised as high as the ear, pierces and ransacks the universe. The Lord Shiva dancing in the cosmos, the mystic dance, soars over the heavens, with his feet going down below the seven worlds.

In the early Chera cave temples, which closely resemble the Pallava and the Pandyan ones, the sculptural form, and poise is very close to the early type in the rest of South India. In a cave at Viliyam near Trivandrum, there are carved figures on either side of the entrance. This is typical work of the eighth century from the Chera territory and resembles closely Pallava carvings in and around Villuppuram and Thiruvallur districts. The particular form of Tripurantaka, resting his leg on a dwarf, is as much as to suggest the association of Apasmara, trampled under foot by Shiva in his dancing attitude at Chidambaram, where the heretic Rishis created Apasmarapurusha, whom Shiva crushed under his foot.

The earliest stone Nataraja sculpture is found in the seventh century Pallava cave temple at Siyamangalam. Nagasamy identified a Pallava stone Nataraja in the Tirukkadaimudi Mahadeva temple, Tiruchinampundi. There is a dancing Lord Shiva image in the second *tala* of the Dharmaraja Ratha at Mamallapuram. The Pallava period, Lord Shiva's Tandava sculptures are found in panels in the temples at Tirukkandiyur and Srinivasanallur.

The Chola kings were patrons and connoisseurs of art and thought during the reign of the earlier king Vijayalaya and Aditya Chola-I, perfection was not attained in the Ananda Tandavam pose of Lord Nataraja. The earliest properly three dimensional stone Natarajas are found in temples built by the great Chola patroness, queen Sembiyan Mahadevi, such as the Kailasanathaswamy temple 940 C.E., at the place named after her. Lord Nataraja from Nallur in Thanjavur district had come very close to the perfect pieces of rhythms, poise and majesty later attained during the reign of Parantaka Chola-I (907-955 C.E.) and his great grandson, Rajaraja Chola-I (985-1014 C.E.). Parantaka Chola-I celebrated his victory over the Pandya King by covering the Golden Sabha in Chidambaram his family deity Lord Nataraja with tiles of gold. The temple of Vishvamangaleswaram at Tiruayur of the days of Aditya Chola-I has on a pillar of a sculpture of the Ananda Tandava form of Lord Nataraja. The Gomukteswarar temple at Tiruvaduturai of the time of Parantaka Chola-I has the sculpture of Lord Nataraja in his Ananda Tandava form in the centre of the *makara torana* on the devakoshta of Dakshinamurti. At Pullamangai, there is a base panel of dancing Lord Shiva.

In the cave temple at Tirumalaipuram which is among the earliest of its kind in the Pandyan era, the main wall has three niches, in one of which is shown Nataraja dancing in the chatura pose. At Tirupparankunram, in the vicinity of Madurai, is another Pandyan cave, where, in two panels, flanked by pilasters, there is a fine carving of Shiva dancing in one panel, while in the other there is the orchestra to keep time, and Parvati, Nandi, Sivaganas and other Devas watch the dance. Shiva is shown dancing on the back of the dwarf Apasmara, who groans under his weight. In yet another cave at Sevilipatti, there is a very simple representation of Shiva almost as simple as the figure at Tirumalaipuram, showing the peculiar arrangement of the hair as *jatabhara*. *Jatabhara*, as we usually know, is for Dakshinamurti, and this almost suggests that Shiva as Nataraja is like Vinadakshinamurti, Natyadakshinamurti expounding the art of dance. In the cave temple at Kunakudi, in Sivagangai district, there is another interesting early Pandyan sculpture of Shiva's dance. Somewhat later in date, but a rare one, representing the *lalita* mode of dance from the Pandyan country is the Nataraja with an elaborate *prabhavali* from the Kodumudi temple in the Coimbatore district.

Shiva from the Tiruvalisvara temple at Tirunelveli district is Nataraja of the normal type, except for the *jatabhara* and it is in pure early Chola tradition. One of the earliest Pandyan paintings from Sittannavasal, which is to be dated in the ninth century C.E. is a 200 magnificent representation of Shiva's dance mode standardized in the type of Chidambaram and Thanjavur. As important as the Thiruvallangadu Nataraja

himself is the magnificent Nataraja from Poruppumentupatti in Pandyan territory. Nataraja has his right leg raised, an unusual feature associated with the Rajata Sabha or Velli Sabha (silver hall), at Madurai. This belongs to the early Chola period, about 1000 C.E. and is in the best tradition of Chola work, though with the right foot raised and without prabha. This is more to respect the Pandyan tradition in their territory.

Vijayanagara art is mostly in the Tamil tradition. The sculpture in the Sivakesava temple at Pushpagiri represents a very early phase of Vijayanagara art. There is here a carving, which, though representing the Urdhava Tandava of Shiva. Perur, near Coimbatore, has a very important sculpture in a well embellished mandapa, where, on each pillar, there is a beautiful sculpture in the best Vijayanagara tradition. One of them represents Shiva with his right foot raised in the lalatatilaka mode.

The Nayaks, originally vassal kings under the Vijayanagara emperors, slowly asserted themselves with the weakening of the empire. Tirumalai Nayak of Madurai, Sevappa Nayak of Thanjavur, Chinna Bomma Nayak of Vellore, and others, are noted for their great contributions in fostering every branch of fine arts, architecture, sculpture, music, dance and literature. To this period belong several sculptures of Nataraja, illustrating the late phase of art portraying the theme. The finest representation of Nataraja, in the Ananda Tandava pose, but with the leg transposed in accordance with the tradition of Nataraja in the Silver hall of Madurai Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple.

VII. Genesis of the Nataraja Cult at Chidambaram

During the tenth century, the priests of Chidambaram began to reframe the religious identity of this long-sacred place with the intention of transforming an isolated local religious tradition into a pan-Indic one that could draw pilgrims from distant places, award its deity more extensive fame, and bring the town spiritual prestige, commercial wealth, and broader regional impact. Similar transformations, or "Sanskritization," occurred at temples across Medieval India. Among the transformations at *Thillai* were the genesis of new Sanskrit names for the town itself and a mythic identity for the Nataraja icon that simultaneously linked him to other forms of Shiva known across India through Sanskrit texts (*puranas*) and distanced him from local, wrathful deities. This literary transformation of *Thillai's* deity may have mirrored a comparable shift in the reception of the temple's bronze icon as well. That icon's wild dance and fire may have suggested the marginality and violence of older Tamil deities. This strategy may have played a role in forging the strong bonds that would connect Chidambaram and the Cholas from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Whatever the causes, those bonds clearly existed by the reign of Rajaraja Chola I (985-1014 C.E.), and images of Nataraja constituted one language through which Rajaraja I expressed that affiliation. The Chola queen Sembiyan Mahadevi was Rajaraja's predecessor in deploying the Nataraja image as a Chola emblem. Rajaraja Chola I manifested his devotion to Chidambaram Nataraja clearly in sculpture, painting, and inscriptions at Brihadeeswarar temple in Thanjavur, which he had built between 1003 and 1010 C.E.) Featuring Nataraja at his royal temple in the Chola capital, Rajaraja I placed the dancing god of Chidambaram at the geographic center of the king's political realm, declaring Chidambaram's and Nataraja's importance in the world of Chola politics.

Rajaraja's declarations of devotion to Nataraja were unprecedented in their scale, but earlier Cholas had acknowledged this deity. Gandaraditya Chola (949-58 C.E.) had composed a hymn to the dancing god of *Thillai*. His wife the queen Sembiyan Mahadevi became the First Chola to invest heavily in the construction of temples, Nataraja appeared for the first time as a full-scale sculpted image, carved essentially in the round and housed in his own framed niche. On Sembiyan Mahadevi's temples, Nataraja's niche always faces south, recalling the peculiar southward orientation of Nataraja's Kanaka Sabha in Chidambaram. His placement is not so consistent among the earlier temples bearing small Nataraja reliefs. Further evidence of Parantaka's commitment to Chidambaram lies in his gilding the roof of the Kanaka Sabha, donating gold from booty obtained from military campaigns late in his reign. Parantaka's gift implies that shortly after Nataraja imagery acquired a visual form, Nataraja had become the god of a Chola king, supported by a newly acquired armature of myths embodying royal ideals. The Nataraja cult then probably continued to evolve, transforming a Tamil deity of specific, local scope into a Sanskrit god of broader significance who more precisely suited an ambitious dynasty and religious community. With mutually accommodating gestures such as Parantaka's gifts and Chidambaram's reinvention of its dancing god, Chidambaram and the Cholas developed a compelling reciprocity that would operate for the duration of that dynasty, as the temple town's ancient sanctity and new god enhanced the Cholas' royal legitimacy and Chidambaram benefited from the ambitious Cholas' donations and growing fame. The Cholas also stood to gain from the spread of Chidambaram's fame, as this in turn could spread the fame of Nataraja's royal protectors across the increasingly large region over which the Cholas claimed political authority.

Over the course of the tenth century, Sembiyan Mahadevi and perhaps Parantaka I preceded Rajaraja Chola I in deploying Nataraja as a Chola emblem with increasing prominence on temples they had constructed. As Chola patronage expanded, Nataraja's image appeared in new places. Thus, the cult at Chidambaram spread visually through the Kaveri region over the course of the tenth century, presumably as a result of Chola patronage of that cult and of temple construction. The period during which the imperial Cholas ruled (850-1200 C.E.) witnessed a bubbling religious fervour which was utilized by them in building massive temple of art. They were instrumental in getting cast a spate of Lord Nataraja bronzes as objects of worship. This period has been very rightly called "The Golden Age of Tamil Culture".

The evolution of the icons of Nataraja is an interesting history where dance and music, art and religion, philosophy and mysticism played no mean part. *Karanagama* and the *Kamikagama* give detailed measurements of the distances of the various limbs from *Imadhyasutra* of the dancing Shiva-Nataraja. A comparative and deep study of the *Saivagamas*, the *Bharatanatyasastra* and commentary of the same by Abhinavaguptacharya, the early Tamil classics, the epic *Silappatikaram*, and the hymns of the Nayanmars, besides the *Saiva Siddhanta* works, particularly *Unmai Vilakkam* and last but not the least the *Chidambaram Mummanikkovai* of Kumara Guruparar who lived in the 17th century C.E. can assist one to comprehend to some extent how the *pre-Aryan* tribal dances in cemeteries and burial grounds took shape and dominate the field of dancing and sculpture.

For a proper and systematic study, the theme of Lord Nataraja, it should be profitable to limit it within specified periods. They may be clubbed together in a chunk from 600 to 1400 C.E. Taking the different views of scholars, the Agastian Age of Tamil literature, i.e., the *Sangam* Age can be put down three centuries before and after Christ. In Tamil country, the saint Nayanmars and Alvars, poured out their hearts in hymns in praise of the gods they worshipped. The Nayanmars were worshippers of Lord Shiva and their hymns were compiled by Nambiyandar Nambi in the 11th century C.E.⁷⁵ The compilation are by the name of the Twelve *Tirumurais*. Four of the saint poets deserve special mention. They are Thirugnanasambandar, Appar (Tirunavukkarasar), Sundarar and Manikkavasakar, whose poems are considered divinely inspired.

VIII. Conclusion

The study was elaborated the origin and development of Lord Nataraja cult in North Indian, South Indian context especially in Tamil Nadu. During the sangam age Lord Shiva was held supreme and was the deity for all regions. The image of Lord Nataraja was developed

through the ages of the Cheras, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Pallavas, the Vijayanagar and Nayaks period. Lord Nataraja came to function as emblem of the Chola dynasty. The bronze sculpture of Lord Nataraja in the Nataraja temple of Chidambaram remain under worship at the temples centre as the most sacred of Lord Nataraja's representations. The most important *Sabha* for Nataraja is the *Kanaka Sabha* or golden hall at Chidambaram. The Nataraja dances here in the *Ananda Tandava* or the dance of bliss form and he is called *Kanaka Sabhapati* or the Lord of the Golden Hall. This temple has been sung in a lot of *Tevaram* and *Tiruvacakam*. Here Lord Shiva is worshipped in all the three forms, namely, *arupa* - which is called *Chidambara Rahasyam*, *Aruparupa* - Shiva Lingam and *rupa* - Nataraja.

Recent times Lord Nataraja sculptures are smuggled from India to various foreign countries for the sake of arts. This should be prevent and protect the Nataraja sculptures by the effects of the government. According to Hindu Philosophy the function of the world will stop to exist if the dance of the Lord Nataraja would cease. Chidambaram is centre of cosmos were Lord Nataraja is performs cosmic dance all through and he is moving world. Not only it Hindu puranas and its also proof by CERN scientist. Lord Nataraja temple at Chidambaram and its shrines are responsible for the promotion of Nataraja cult through the ages. In Tamil Nadu, Nataraja sculpture were famous the chola period, gradually became world famous.

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