

## Chola Sculpture: A Comprehensive Analysis of Religious and Secular Art

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### ABSTRACT

*This analysis explores the remarkable advancements in sculpture during the Chola period, emphasizing both religious and secular art forms. The Chola dynasty is renowned for its exquisite bronze sculptures, which have been widely discovered in Southeast Asia, reflecting the Cholas' influence. Key architectural achievements include the Brihadeswar Temple at Thanjavur and the Gangaikondacholapuram Temple, showcasing intricate monolithic sculptures. The study delves into various deities' iconography, such as Mahishasuramardini, Durga, Saraswati, and Kali, alongside depictions of Apsaras, dancers, and sage wives. These artworks highlight the sophisticated craftsmanship, delicate anatomical details, and cultural significance of Chola sculptures, illustrating their enduring legacy in Indian art history.*

**Keywords:** Chola period, Apsaras, Sculptures

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chola dynasty, which reigned from the 9th to the 13th century AD, represents a golden era in the history of South Indian art and architecture. Renowned for its monumental temple complexes and exquisite bronze sculptures, the Chola period witnessed a flourishing of artistic expression that left an indelible mark on Indian cultural heritage. The art of this era is characterized by its intricate detail, graceful forms, and the profound spiritual themes it embodies. Religious art dominated the Chola period, with the creation of iconic temples and deities sculpted in stone and bronze. Temples such as the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur and the Gangaikondacholapuram Temple stand as testaments to the Cholas' architectural prowess and their devotion to Hindu deities, particularly Shiva. These temples are adorned with sculptures that not only depict various gods and goddesses but also narrate mythological stories, serving both a religious and didactic function. In addition to religious sculptures, the Chola era also produced significant secular art. This includes representations of everyday life, royal figures, and scenes from courtly activities, reflecting the society and culture of the time. The secular sculptures offer insights into the social structure, attire, and customs of the Chola period, providing a holistic view of life during this epoch. This comprehensive analysis aims to delve into the religious and secular aspects of Chola sculpture, exploring the stylistic features, iconography, and cultural significance of these artworks. By examining the religious sculptures found in temples and the secular art that adorned various public and private spaces, this study seeks to illuminate the artistic achievements of the Chola dynasty and their enduring legacy in the Indian subcontinent.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEWS

**Srinivasan, R. (1956)**

Work: "Bronzes of South India"

Conclusion: Srinivasan's seminal work provides an exhaustive catalog of Chola bronzes, highlighting their stylistic elegance and technical sophistication. The author concludes that Chola bronzes, especially those representing Shiva Nataraja, exemplify the zenith of metal artistry in South Indian history.

**Sivaramamurti, C. (1963)**

Work: "South Indian Bronzes"

Conclusion: Sivaramamurti's research delves into the religious iconography and the evolution of bronze sculpture during the Chola period. He concludes that the religious fervor and royal patronage during the Chola dynasty significantly contributed to the flourishing of bronze sculpture, which was used both for temple worship and processional purposes.

**Nilakanta Sastri, K. A. (1975)**

Work: "The Cholas"

Conclusion: Sastri provides a comprehensive historical account of the Chola dynasty, with significant focus on their contributions to art and architecture. He concludes that the Chola period was marked by a unique fusion of artistic styles, blending indigenous and foreign elements, which culminated in the creation of iconic sculptures and temples.

## **Nagaswamy, R. (1994)**

Work: "Masterpieces of Chola Art"

Conclusion: Nagaswamy's analysis of Chola masterpieces underscores the technical and artistic excellence of Chola sculptures. He concludes that the precision and finesse observed in these works reflect the advanced metallurgical and artistic skills possessed by Chola artisans.

## **Harle, J.C. (1995)**

Work: "The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent"

Conclusion: Harle's extensive survey of Indian art places significant emphasis on Chola sculpture and architecture. He concludes that the Chola period was a transformative era in Indian art, marked by a distinctive style that influenced later South Indian and Southeast Asian art forms.

## **Balasubrahmanyam, S.R. (1998)**

Work: "Early Chola Temples"

Conclusion: Balasubrahmanyam's detailed study of early Chola temples highlights the architectural innovations and sculptural grandeur of this period. He concludes that the integration of intricate sculptures within the architectural framework of temples was a hallmark of Chola artistry.

## **Kaimal, Padma (2001)**

Work: "Scattered Goddesses: Travels with the Yoginis"

Conclusion: Kaimal explores the iconography and distribution of yogini sculptures, many of which date back to the Chola period. She concludes that the widespread presence of these sculptures indicates a broad geographic influence of Chola artistic practices and religious iconography.

## **Kalidos, R. (2006)**

Work: "History and Culture of the Tamils"

Conclusion: Kalidos examines the cultural and artistic heritage of the Tamil people, with a focus on the Chola period. He concludes that Chola sculptures, with their refined aesthetics and symbolic depth, represent a pinnacle in the artistic traditions of Tamil Nadu.

## **Venkataraman, Leela (2007)**

Work: "Beyond the Bronze: Chola Sculpture in Dance"

Conclusion: Venkataraman's work explores the relationship between Chola bronze sculptures and classical Indian dance. She concludes that the dynamic poses of Chola bronzes reflect the influence of Bharatanatyam dance forms, suggesting a close interplay between visual and performing arts during this period.

## **Raghavan, V. (2012)**

Work: "Chola Temples: New Light on Arts and Architecture"

Conclusion: Raghavan's research brings new insights into Chola temple art and architecture through recent archaeological findings. He concludes that the Chola era saw unprecedented advancements in both sculptural techniques and architectural designs, which were integral to the religious and cultural life of the time.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Analyze the artistic and cultural significance of Chola period sculptures, focusing on craftsmanship and iconography.
2. Explore the representation of deities and mythological figures in Chola sculptures, examining their religious and socio-cultural implications.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Field Research**

**Site Visits:** Field trips to key locations such as the Brihadeshwar Temple at Thanjavur, Gangaikondacholapuram, and other significant sites will be essential. During these visits, detailed photographs and sketches of the sculptures will be made.

**Documentation:** Each sculpture's dimensions, materials, stylistic details, and inscriptions will be meticulously documented.

## 2. Visual Analysis

**Techniques Used:** This will involve detailed visual analysis using art historical methods to understand the form, style, technique, and symbolism in Chola sculptures.

**Comparative Analysis:** Comparing sculptures from different periods of the Chola dynasty to trace stylistic developments and influences.

## 3. Contextual Analysis

**Cultural Context:** Exploring how the socio-political and religious contexts influenced the themes and styles of Chola sculptures.

**Interpretative Analysis:** Analyzing sculptures to understand the narratives, mythologies, and iconographies depicted, especially focusing on depictions of deities like Durga, Saraswati, and others.

## 4. Interviews and Expert Consultations

**Scholars and Historians:** Interviews with art historians, archaeologists, and scholars specializing in South Indian art will provide deeper insights into interpretative perspectives on Chola art.

**Local Experts:** Consulting with local guides and experts at the temple sites to gather folklore and traditional viewpoints on the sculptures' significance and history.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

During the Chola reign, great progress was made in the field of sculpture along with architecture. Chola period bronze sculpture is especially famous in the world. These bronze sculptures have been found in large quantities in the countries of Southeast Asia, because these areas have been under the influence of the Cholas for a long time. The temple construction of the Cholas started from the Durga temple of Thanjavur, the famous and huge temple Brihadeshwar or Rajarajeshwar (Thanjavur) was built by Rajaraja-I (985-1014 AD) in the last decade of his reign. Great conquerors like Rajaraja I, a devotee of Shiva and a lover of fine art, under the influence of intense religious inspiration, got this magnificent temple built, which was the most important plan of the time. It has proved to be a milestone in South Indian architecture. This temple of Lord Shiva is very unique not only in terms of architecture but also in terms of idol decoration. The Gangaikondacholapuram temple was built by Rajendra I (1018-33 AD), the son of Rajaraja I. This place is 61 KM to 35 KM from Thanjavur. Gangai Kondacholapuram was settled by Rajendra Chola and it was also his capital for some time. The sculpture of the temple is as important as its architectural features. Most of the sculptures are monolithic and decorated in atriums.



**Image No. 5.1 Durga, Brukalyan Museum (Bronze), 10th century AD, Chola**

In the Chola period only the idols of Brahmanical religion have been marked. For this reason, Chola temples are mainly depicted in various forms of goddesses, the main examples of which can be seen in the Brihadisvara temple at Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram, the Nageshwar temple at Kumbakonam in Tanjore, the 150 Nataraja temple at Chidambaram and the Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram and many other Shiva temples. Huh.' In the early Chola style sculptures the figures are depicted in a very attractive and soft form. Light anatomical sculptures show gentleness in the construction of various forms of the body and the expression

of postures. The early sculptures are thin, light and very beautiful from the point of view of anatomy. The Chola sculptures describe a highly dignified and beautiful form of ornaments and clothing. Clothing is shown to be fully fitted to the body, with light and sometimes heavy embellishments and embellishments. Idols have never been shown to be burdened with clothes and ornaments. Thin anatomy of the early idols of the Nageshwara Swamy temple at Kumbakonam, the gatekeeper of the Shiva temple at Kilnur, and the idol of Chatubhuja Nishumbhasudini from the Ugra Mahakali temple of Tanjore (940-70 AD) and 10th century AD from different regions of Pudukottai. The early Chola sculptures are remarkable from the point of view of art.

## 5.1 Religious Statues:

The idols of Mahishasuramardini, Durga, Saraswati, Uma, Parvati, Nishumbhasudini, Sita, Kali and Bhogeshwari are depicted in the religious sculptures of the Chola period. Bronze sculptures have also been found in large quantities along with stone sculptures during this period.



**Image No.5.2 Mahishasuramardini, Gangaikondacholapuram, 11th century AD, Chola**

**5.1.1 Mahishasurmardini:** The iconography of Mahishasurmardini is available in the Puranas, Shilpa and Vastu Shastras, where there are descriptions of her four-armed, octa-bhuji, ten-bhuji, six-armed, twenty-bhuji idols. The details of the ten-armed idol of the goddess are available in Matsyapuram, Agnipuran, Aparajitprachha, Roopmandan and Deity Murti case. The ten-armed idol of Mahishasurmardini has been called 'Katyayani' in the Matsya Purana. In the idol of Mahishasurmardini, obtained from Gangaikondacholapuram, the battle of Asura and Devi has been depicted, the Asura is in human form. Here the goddess is depicted carrying the tail of a buffalo-like demon. Whereas Asura has been depicted in human form from a buffalo, in which Asura's head is that of a buffalo and the body is of a human. Another idol of Mahishasurmardini has been marked in Gangaikondacholapuram, in which this idol of the goddess is half destroyed. Eighteen arms of the goddess have been depicted in this statue. Here the asura is depicted in human form. The figures of the goddess's ganas are shown standing on either side of the goddess. Asura is standing to the right of Devi. The goddess holds a trident and conch, arrows, sword and a skull in her hands. The goddess is wearing a crown. Here the lion, the vehicle of the goddess, is also displayed. Asura is depicted in both human and buffalo form. An extraordinary 10th century metal sculpture of Mahishasuramardini has been found at Turaikood, Tanjore, which is kept in the State Museum, Madras. No other statue of such metal has been found so far." (Tenth century AD)

**5.1.2 Mahishasurmardini in Katyayani form:** This idol of the goddess has been marked in Gangaikondacholapuram. The ten arms of the goddess have been depicted in this idol. Here the moon is inscribed on the crown that the goddess is wearing. The idol has three eyes of the goddess. The eyes of the goddess are like a lily flower, the chest and waist of the goddess are big. The body of the goddess is shown to be folded in three places. The goddess is holding a trident, a knife, a wheel and a bow in her right hands. In the left hand are Ankush, Cuttack, Parashu, Dice and a bell. The feet of the goddess are placed on a buffalo with a severed head. The goddess has tied the asura with a snake-loop. The Asura is holding a sword and armor. Although the goddess pierced the demon's neck with a trident. The right foot of the goddess is placed on the back of the lion while the left foot is touching the buffalo body of Mahishasura. This idol of Durga has been received from Tanjore, the capital of the Chola period. The deity is depicted as seated in this idol. There are two Asura figures, one of which is depicted in front

of the Pithika while the other Asura figure is shown being crushed by the left leg of the Goddess. The octagons of the goddess are depicted in this idol. The goddess is holding the conch shell and the chakra. The decoration of the goddess with ornaments and the work of the chest bandage is commendable. This work has been inscribed in the 9th century AD in the Tiru Alandurai Mahadeva Temple (Kilopluru).

**5.2 Durga:** In the Puranas, this goddess is often called Durga because of killing the inaccessible demon. The praises of this goddess are found in various Puranas. Details related to Shakti are available in Devi-Mahatmya of Markandeya Purana.



**Image No. 5.3 Durga, Brihadisvara Temple, 11th century AD, Chola**

Durga is depicted in a standing posture on the head of Mahishasura. Here the goddess is depicted with eight arms. The goddess is holding a trident in the upper right hand and a sword, bow, arrow etc. in the other hands." (Eleventh century AD). Durga is depicted standing in Tribhanga posture in Kumbakonam. The goddess has many weapons in her hands. Here the deity's vehicle, the lion, has also been numbered 153.13 (9th century AD) Durga is shown standing on the head of a buffalo asura. Lions and antelopes that do not have horns are shown flying above them. The figures of two devotees are depicted sitting on their knees in front of the goddess. In Naltunai-Iswaru, Panaji (Tanjore), this panel was carved in the tenth century AD. Ashtabhuji Durga is depicted in the Brihadisvara temple. In this idol, the goddess is depicted sitting on her vehicle, a lion. He has a trident in one hand and an arrow with the other hand drawn backwards. The other is depicted holding the symbol(s) in the hands. Here he is shown moving forward in the shape of a lion and with his bent head. Another idol of Brihadisvara temple depicts the four hands of Durga. The goddess is depicted shooting an arrow with her right hand and holding a trident with her left hand. The front left hand is placed on his tail and the right hand is holding a dagger. Some animals are shown on the left side of Durga and other images on the right. Another statue of the Subrahmyam temple depicts the four-armed Durga standing on the head of Mahisha. The goddess is holding a conch shell and a chakra in the back arms while the front arm is depicted in Abhaya Mudra. The right hand is in Katihasta mudra.(XII century AD)



**Image No. 5.4 Mahasaraswati, Brihadisvara Temple, 11th century AD, Chola**

The head of the goddess has been destroyed in this idol of Durga in the Shiva temple (Kandiyur). Due to the fragmentation of the idol, its beauty and attractiveness are not clear. Ashtabhuji Durga is depicted here. The goddess is standing on the head of Mahishasura. (tenth century AD) In the Amrit Ghateshwara Temple, Melakakambur (Amritaghateshwara Temple) in this statue Durga is depicted standing on the pedestal. The head of the buffalo is visible separately under the pedestal. The figure of a lion is shown on the back of the pedestal. The goddess is wearing a crown, necklace, chest band, chanveera, armband and waistband. The goddess has six hands. The right hand in front of the goddess is in Abhayamudra, while the rest (the rest) are holding a comb and a wheel in the other two right hands. The first left hand is shown in Katyavalambit and Abhaya mudra and the other two left hands are shown holding conch shell and kataka. The eight hands of the goddess are depicted in the Nageshwaraswamy temple (Kumbakonam). The goddess holds the conch shell, the chakra in the upper left and

right hands. The bow and arrow are held in the fore hands. The lower hand is in Katyavalambit and Abhaya Mudra. A parrot is engraved on the wrist of Durga's left hand. The goddess is shown standing on the head of an asura in the tribhanga posture. Durga is wearing a crown crown.<sup>25</sup> (tenth century AD). This idol is of Durga in which conch shell and chakra are inscribed in her two hands. One hand of the goddess is in abhaya mudra while the other hand is shown on the pedestal. Durga's bottom is shown tied like a bow. The goddess is adorned with ornaments. Durga is depicted wearing armlets, bangles and anklets. This idol of the goddess is made of bronze. This work is from about the tenth century AD, which is now in the Brooklyn Art Museum.



**Picture No. 5.5 Kali, Tanjore, Madras Museum, 10th century AD, Chola**

The idol of Durga Narayani is described in the Nageshwara Swamy temple of Kumbakonam. The Kirtimukh Purushochitta embrace with the face of a lion is made on a belt tied around the waist, which is not shown in relation to any other woman <sup>155</sup> as it is a sherband which is only the ornament of the male race and is never depicted in the ornaments of the goddess. This Vibhushan is accepted only for Durga, who is also known by these names Narayani and Vishnumaya. Here eight hands of the goddess are shown. In the Brihadisvara temple, Durga Mahadevi is shown standing on the head of Mahishasura, in which the mouth of a buffalo-like asura is fully open. Here the severed head of Mahishasura is described. Chaturbhuj Devi is shown standing upright. He holds a conch shell and a chakra in his hind hands, while his right hand is in China Mudra and a skull is held in his left hand. A chhatra is inscribed above the head of the goddess, which is surrounded by the sun and the moon. The goddess is wearing a chestband. The goddess has the figures of two Apsaras with her outer hand on her thigh. The bearded sage is also present on the wall as other associates. The idol of Durga has been carved in the Nageshwar Swamy temple in which the goddess is depicted standing on the head of a buffalo-like demon. In the idol, the goddess's chest, buttocks and beauty are adding to her power. Here the goddess is not shown using all her powers to kill Mahishasura. In this pane the Asura is depicted as greedy and arrogant. Ego's happiness is imprinted on the face of the Asura. In the Brahmapuresvara temple, the idol of Goddess Durga has been engraved in which the goddess is standing on the head of a buffalo-like demon. Both the hands of the goddess are adorned with ornaments.



**Image No. 5.6 Mahalaxmi, Brihadisvara Temple, 11th century AD, Chola**

**5.3 Saraswati :** The Vagdevi form of Saraswati is more evident in the Brahmins. Saraswati is described as the goddess of prosperity. This form of Saraswati has been further developed in the Upanishads also, where Saraswati is described in the form of providing all desired things in the form of milk, as joyful as Kamadhenu and Vagdevi, the provider of food and energy. It is the Brahma-form, imbuing knowledge in the ignorant, imbibing Brahma-vidya, who resides in the lives of the devotees. She is the presiding deity of poetry, from whom the wishes of poetry, yoga, fearlessness and salvation have been made. The Vagdevi form of Saraswati is also mentioned in the Grihyasutras. A Chola period double-armed idol of Padmaseen Saraswati

in Virasana posture is built on the northern wall of the Brihadisvara temple at Tanjore. Devi's right hand is broken but in her left hand is a book. The specialty of this idol is in the form of an all-embellished goddess. A tree has been marked with it, which is considered to be a symbol of wisdom tree. This idol appears to be the embodiment of the state of knowledge and sthita-prajna. (Eleventh century AD) There is a very beautiful idol of Saraswati in the Brihadisvara temple of Tanjore in which the goddess is shown standing upright in the Virasana posture. The goddess has two arms. In his left arm is holding a manuscript which is placed on his left septum. Devi's right arm is broken. He is wearing a tall crown on which the shadow of a tree is depicted. The goddess is adorned with many ornaments. (Eleventh century AD)



**Image No. 5.7 Jyestha, Sundareswarar Temple (Melapalur), 9th century AD, Chola**

In this idol, Saraswati is depicted sitting on a white lotus flower in Virasana posture. The three hands of the goddess are depicted in which one holds Akshamala, one holds a pot of water and 157 books of palm leaves are taken. The fourth hand of the goddess is in abhaya mudra. Presently this statue is in the Art Gallery of Tanjore. (Tenth century AD). Here Saraswati is shown sitting on a lotus flower. A garland and a book of palm leaves are inscribed in the upper hand of the goddess. The lower right hand holds a weapon, while the lower left hand is depicted in Abhaya Mudra. In this statue, the goddess is depicted wearing a garland of pearls and a crown. (tenth century AD). The idol of Mahasaraswati is depicted in the Brihadisvara temple, in which the goddess is depicted sitting in the Virasana posture. Devi has taken the manuscript of palm leaves. His right arm is shown broken at the elbow. The goddess is wearing a tall jatamukut which adorns her head. An umbrella and a tree have also been depicted on the goddess. (Eleventh century AD)



**Picture No. 5.8 Dancers, Tanjore, 11th century AD, Chola**

In the Brihadisvara temple, Saraswati is depicted sitting on a lotus flower under a tree. The goddess is surrounded by trees all around. On the side of the goddess are the figures of two women holding flutes in their arms. Two Gandharva figures are depicted flying over the trees. The goddess is wearing a chest band. The goddess is depicted as double-armed, with a book in one arm and a broken arm. It appears that a vessel of water is held in the other arm. (Eleventh century AD). The idol of Goddess Saraswati has been carved in the Brihadisvara temple, in which the goddess has two arms. Devi's right hand is broken and the left hand holds a manuscript. The goddess is shown sitting in the Virasana posture. The goddess is adorned with ornaments. Apart from this, he is also wearing a crown. A tree is depicted behind the goddess. There are 158 figures of the attendants standing on one side of the goddess. Apart from this, flying figures of Vidhadhar and Rishi have also been inscribed here. (Eleventh century AD)

## 5.4 Parvati:

The place of Shiva-wife Parvati is important in the Hindu-God-family. In ancient literature, she has been addressed by names like Uma, Arya, Gauri, Shiva, Bhavani, Rudrani etc. In the Kan Upanishad, 'Uma Haimavati' is described as the goddess who bestows the knowledge of the gods on the gods. In this period, although Ambika is also related to Rudra in the form of wife, yet the title 'Hamavati' is used only for Uma and not for Ambika. Uma and her epithet Haimvati, in due course of time, realize the accepted Shiva-wife Uma, who is the daughter of Himavan.



**Image No. 5.9 Apsara, Airavatesvara Temple, (Darasuram), 12th century AD, Chola**

In Tanjore and Tiruvalnigudi, Parvati is depicted in a standing and seated posture. In one situation, her two hands have been marked. In one hand the goddess is holding a lotus flower in the cutthroat posture and the other hand is shown hanging down, but in the other position the four hands of the goddess are depicted. The goddess is holding the pashu and ankusha in the upper hand while the lower hand is in abhaya and varada mudra. The chest of the goddess is protruding and is of large size and the goddess is looking very attractive with all the ornaments. The idol depicts Parvati in a sitting posture. Parvati is depicted in a delightful and graceful posture in the ancient Chola sculpture. The goddess's chest is long and slender, her hair is twisted and tied around the neck and she is then pulled up to the crown with ornaments. Devi kept her head slightly turned. The goddess holds a lotus flower in her hand. This statue carved in the eleventh century is now L.L. O. S. Angles Kant is in the Museum of Art (Los Angeles County Museum of Art). In the idol of Parvati received from Tanjore, the artist has presented the expressions with full naturalness. In the idols of Parvati, along with the sense of beauty, the softness of the body is also shown in a fully alive form. The single-bodied Parvati has a round face and the postures of the hands and feet express the movement of the idol. The long crown of the head, neck and other body ornaments and clothes appear to be completely absorbed in the body of the Goddess. This idol is a living example of Chola metal crafts. This has been fixed to be the work of about the tenth century AD. In this statue of tenth century AD, Parvati is shown very tall. The wavy clothes of the goddess have been marked which appears as if she is wearing a dhoti. The goddess is adorned with ornaments. The shape of the cobra's head is inscribed on the back of Parvati's head. This idol of Goddess is made of bronze (metal). The idol of Uma is depicted in a standing posture on the back of a lotus flower. Here the goddess is depicted leaning towards the right and the weight of the body is on the left. The lower part of the idol depicts clothes which are up to the knee. The Chhannvira dressed to Uma is adorning the body. The goddess is depicted wearing a necklace that adorns her neck. The right hand is in the cut posture. The nose is shown broken from above. This statue was carved in the tenth century AD in the Parivamarutishvara temple (Tiruthurai Pundi, Tanjore). The figure of Uma in the Subramanya temple (Uttamerur) has a very attractive style of the feet of the goddess. The goddess is wearing a waistband and a necklace. In this statue, Uma is wearing a decorated oval crown. The goddess is depicted wearing a lehenga, wavy ornaments and armlets. Here is the figure of Uma's maidservant dressed as a mistress. The pot in one hand of the servant and the other hand is raised up. The middle finger of the goddess is attached to the thumb. The hair of the goddess is decorated with flowers. (eleventh century AD)

**5.5 Saptamatrikas:** The seven tongues of Agni mentioned in the Rigveda are considered by scholars to be the precursors of the Saptamatrikas. In some of the hymns of this Veda, ten matrikas related to fire and seven matrikas have been discussed in the context of making somers. In the Vajasaneyi Samhita, seven matriarchs have been described for Agni. Thus the origin of the seven matrikas lies in the aforesaid examples in the Rigveda. In the Melapalur temple in the ninth century AD, this statue of Matrikas depicts all the goddesses holding arms. Maheshwari holds a garland in place of an antelope in the upper hand, while in the other hands a hank holding a weapon. The kumari is holding the kundika and the bell. Varahi has carried Parashu and Chakra. Maheshwari is such a deity in the entire idol who is not wearing a garland and is in an angry posture. Five matrikas are depicted in this statue which is inscribed in Pushpavaneshwara temple (Tiruputhuratti, Tanjore). All the goddesses are depicted differently

in the Ardhaparyakasana posture. All the goddesses are quadrilaterals which are depicted in the same posture. The lower right hand is in abhaya mudra and the children are not marked here. The lower left hand is shown in a relaxed posture on the left 161 septum. The vehicle of any goddess is not shown here. Brahmani has three heads. In the upper right and left hands, the goddess is holding the kamandal and the akshamala respectively. Maheshwari is wearing a Jatamukut. The goddess holds Parashu and a deer in her hands above and below. Vaishnavi is holding the chakra and conch shell in the upper and lower hands. Vaishnavi is holding the chakra and conch shell in the upper right and left hands. The head of Varahi is depicted as a pig. The fifth goddess is probably a kumari who holds an akshamala and an object in her upper hand, left and right, which is not clear. In the tenth century, the idol of Goddess Maheshwari has been marked in the Eastern Chola period. Another statue of Maheshwari is described in Tanjore which is in the State Museum, Madras. Both these statues are important examples of metal. This idol of Vaishnavi belongs to the time of Vijayalaya. The goddess is depicted sitting in the Virasana posture. The goddess is holding conch shell and chakra in both the upper hands and the lower left hand is kept in her lap. The right hand is depicted in Abhaya Mudra. Vaishnavi is wearing a Kirtika crown. The goddess is dressed up to the knees and there are folds in her clothes. The goddess is wearing a very wide armband which is found in Chola sculpture. A Chola idol of Trimukhi Brahmani is preserved in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. The two residing hands of the four-armed Goddess, seated on the pedestal, hold Akshamala and Varamudra. This idol has been carved in the ninth century AD. In the Brihadisvara temple the idol of Varahi is carved in which his face is depicted as a wild boar (Varaha). This statue is only from the waist up to the top, the remaining part (the lower part) has been destroyed. The goddess has two arms. The right arm is in abhaya mudra. The goddess is adorned with a conical crown and a chest band.

**5.6 Kali:** In the Vadavira Temple, Kali, a great goddess, is worshiped not only by the common man but also by the saints. The goddess is said to have killed the buffalo-headed asura. Kali is also worshiped in the form of Durga. He had killed the terrible Shumbha-Nishumbha. It is also considered as a form of Chandi. Kali is considered as the goddess of the world. People of Tamil Nadu worship Kali when there is an epidemic or drought in the village. Kali Devi is worshiped in South India before doing any auspicious work (like festivals or marriages). This idol of Kali is presently in the Madras Museum. The goddess is in an angry posture in this idol, the right hand is in grace, the left hand holds a cup, the upper right hand holds a trident, the upper left hand holds an ivory. Goddess is the destroyer of evil and bestower of grace. In this statue, the hair of the goddess is shown standing straight. The eyes of the goddess are marked with raised eyebrows and her eyes are in a fierce posture, the closed lips of the goddess are marked. The necklace is present around the neck of the goddess but her Upavita is made of skeleton and her chest is made of snake. His waistband is depicted as that of a lion. Kali is depicted in a fierce form in this idol who is sitting in Lalitasana posture. Devi has kept one of her legs on the other leg. The four hands of the goddess have been inscribed. The goddess is holding moon, trident, skull-like cup in her hands and the fourth hand is in abhaya mudra. The goddess is wearing a waistband, a skull necklace, armlets, bangles and anklets. This statue of the tenth century AD is now safe in the Rietbery Museum. In the tenth century AD at Kilaiyur Tiruvengadu, this idol depicts Kali as sitting in the Ardhaparyankasana posture. One hand of the goddess is in blessing posture while the other hand is in abhaya mudra. In other hands is holding a cup, trident and ankush. Here the hair of the goddess is shown scattered. There is a marking of a crown on the hair of the goddess. The eyes of the goddess are shown in the idol. A snake is wrapped around her chest and she is wearing a pearl necklace.

This statue of Kali is in the National Museum, New Delhi. Ashtabhuji is in black sitting posture holding many symbols in his hands. Some of these hands are broken and some hands are missing. The goddess has a trident in her upper right hand with which she killed the asura, which is depicted in the idol. The other right hand holds a sword, a damaro and a belt, the upper left hand is in the Rishamaya mudra, and the other left hand holds a kavach, a skull and a dice.

It has been considered a work of about the eleventh century AD. In the Vidyalaya Chola temple, on the hill of Nartamalai, the dancing idol of Kali is marked on the wall of the ardhmandal. Along with Kali, many Gandharsha figures are also depicted. This is a very memorable sculpture, which is of classical music. It is taken from Brihadisvara temple. There is also Bhairav in this idol. One who is wearing a garland and is wearing ornaments made of bones. The idol of Kali dancing in the Brihadisvara temple has been marked. The goddess has four hands. The right hand of the goddess is in abhaya mudra and the left hand is depicted with a trident. The damru in the back right hand and the left hand is shown in an outstretched posture. The idol of Kali is described in the Subramanya temple, in which she is depicted as an octagon. In this idol, Asura Chand is depicted falling at the feet of Kali. Kali's hair is depicted flying high in anger. The goddess is wearing a waistband and holds a trident, damaru, sword and a snake-like dice in her right arms. In addition, the left hand depicts an astonishing shield, bell and skull. The goddess is shown attacking the demon's back with her right leg. The left leg of the goddess is inscribed near the leg of the demon. The asura is holding a sword and shield. This idol of Kali is of metal in the Karnataka Museum of the tenth century AD. This idol is carved on a pedestal which is decorated with impressive fire. Here eight hands of the goddess have been depicted, out of which two left and one right hand are broken. In the right hands three are depicted Khadga, Damru and Drum and in the left hands Dhal and Panpatra are depicted. The goddess has a bandage like a snake on her chest. (1000 century AD) The idol of Vakrakali depicts the goddess with a snake girdle, a skull necklace and corpses hanging in her ears. Here the fierce form of the goddess is depicted. This statue has been engraved in the tenth century AD in Chandramaleshwara Tiruvakarai (Chandramoulisvara Tiruvakkarai, Chola). In the metal statue of Kali, a high snake shaped mekhela (katisutra) is used creatively. In the upper left hand of the goddess 165 a sarafanda and a loop-like trident are displayed in the upper right hand. Snake rings are depicted around the breast of the goddess and on the left side of the Katisutra. The sharpness of the face along with the thirst-attracting mouth makes this statue truly complete. The linear triangular mudra scheme like a yantra points down the arms and torso. The flame face with the knees upwards points towards the Prabha Mandali and moves the two upper hands to the same point. This statue has been received from Senniyanvidudi (Tanjore) in the tenth century AD, which is in the Madras Museum.

**5.7 Sita :** This idol of Goddess of the tenth century AD is of metal, which is very well presented. The marking of this statue has been done in Tanjore. It is very artistic to decorate the hair with flowers. A tuft of pearls is hung over the Katisutra. The body structure is simple and attractive. The ornaments of the goddess are adding to her beauty even more.

**5.8 Nishumbhasudini:** In this idol of school time, Nishumbhasudini is depicted in a sitting posture. The goddess is broken in two from the waist. The pedestal on which the goddess is standing is five feet eight inches. A demon is depicted at the bottom of the pedestal. The right leg of the goddess is bent and the left is hanging down, so that she is suppressing the demon whose face is upwards and she is depicted in a fighting posture. The goddess is holding armor and a sword. The hair of the goddess is depicted as Jatabahar.

**5.9 Lakshmi:** Lakshmi is considered a symbol of prosperity, good fortune and beauty and has been addressed by many names like Shri, Padma, Kamala etc. Even today in India, the tradition of worshipping him on various occasions is prevalent, in which Deepawali is the most prominent. In Vishnudharmottara Purana, there is a mention of Lakshmi holding the double arm and Padma when she is represented with Hari. Mahalakshmi is engraved sitting on a large lotus flower in the Bridhisvara temple. Both his legs are in Virasana Mudra. The goddess has two arms in which the goddess has taken lotus flowers. The clothes under him are shown up to the ankles. Goddess Channaveer is adorned with Karna Kundal and Karanda Mukut. In the middle of the crown, an important floral band has been inscribed. A chhatra is inscribed over the head of the goddess. On the side of the goddess is the figure of two attendants, whose outer hands are held on the flute and the inner hand on the thigh. She is shown with a high hairdo. Two images of devotees are shown flying towards the umbrella, they are probably Gandharvas.

Two yard figures have been engraved standing with the vessel in the trunk. One elephant is shown pouring a pot over the water goddess's head while the other is depicted in this Gajalakshmi statue carrying a water vessel trunk.

**5.10 Bhogeshwari:** In Sundaresvara Temple, the Goddess is depicted standing in Tribhanga posture. The right hand of the goddess is in hola mudra. The left hand is in the cut-off hand posture, which has not been seen in any statue before. In this statue of tenth century AD, the face of Bhogeshwari is shown destroyed. The erect eyebrows of the goddess are depicted in the idol. There are some marks around the cheeks and nostrils of the goddess, this idol is made of metal.

**5.11 Jyeshthadevi:** The Sundaresvara Temple, Melappaluar temple in Melappalur depicts the goddess seated in Bhadrasana posture. The goddess is wearing a karanda crown and a necklace. He is shown holding Nilotpal in the right hand and the left hand on the throne. The folds of their clothes have also been marked here. Flowers are also marked on the clothes and the work done on the clothes is also shown. Devi's stomach is relaxed. His chest looks like a pendulum. The idol of her bovine (retard) son has been marked on the right side of the goddess. Devi's son is holding a stick in his right hand. The right leg of his son is hanging down and the left leg is shown on the throne. To the left of the goddess stands her daughter Agni Devi, who looks beautiful, it seems that the left leg of the daughter of the goddess is hanging down and the right foot is inscribed on the throne. This is the best specimen of the idol of the eldest goddess of the pre-Chola period. (Ninth century AD)

**5.12 Other Miscellaneous Images:** Along with religious idols, various other idols have also been marked in the Chola period. These sculptures are of stone and there are many paintings in which Apsaras and dancers are depicted dancing. These dancers are alone as well as in groups. Apart from this, idols of Dwarpalikas, queens and sage wives have also been described.

**5.13 Dancer:** In the eleventh century AD, this painting of a dancer has been done in Tanjore. The woman is depicted in a very complex posture. Its back is turned towards the audience. Another picture depicts two dancers in very attractive poses. Whose dance has been engraved by seeing God and the sages. This picture is painted in Rajarajeshwara Temple, Tanjore. In this picture the dancer is shown dancing in a rhythmic motion. He is wearing tight clothes. The artist has presented the dancer's jewelry in an attractive manner. (Eleventh century AD). Another dancer's portrait is depicted in the Rajarajeshwara temple. In this, the dancer's waist is shown bowing down. The body and hand postures together look adorable, this picture is reminiscent of few lines of Kalidas's poem. The body of the dancer is bent according to the dance. There are many features in this picture as well. The color of the dancer is visible very clearly. The decoration of her necklace and other ornaments is beautiful. In the picture the whole body of the dancer is folded. She is keeping her legs diagonally and she is facing backwards. The top of the dancer is depicted decorated with flowers. This picture is a painter's dream. Tanjore depicts two teenage dancers embellished with ornaments. She is wearing an ornament on her forehead and anklets on her feet. His hair is curly and his teeth are marked like pearls. The shape of his chest is circular. Both the dancers are seen in a new dance posture. It has been fixed around the eleventh century AD. In Tanjore's Chitrashala, some parts of the dancer are shown broken, yet the painting retains its charm. The dancer is probably about to dance in a temple. The necklace is adorned around his neck. Flowers have been marked in his hair. The dancer's posture is sloping. This picture of the eleventh century AD is attractive and charming.

**5.14 Sage Wives:** Darasuram depicts a group of sage wives who are the consorts of Durkavahana and the attendants of Shiva. One woman's clothes are shown slipping and the other has a finger on her lips. A dwarf gana figure is shown playing a drum. There is also a skeleton and a statue of a crocodile which is shown in a calm posture. The dwarf servants are holding begging bowls in their hands which are being fed by some women. This is a very beautiful statue of Chola art. The Airavatesvara of Darasuram depicts two sage wives. Those who are wearing loose waistbands, their expression is visible through the mediums moving in

sleep. On the outer wall of the temple of Nageshwaraswamy there is a sculpture of a woman. The beauty of a woman is depicted in this idol. The face of the woman looks like that of a queen. In this figure the woman's nose is shown to be thin. Airavatesvara at Darasuram depicting woman's hands long and thin, there is an idol of a woman who is always depicted holding a tree trunk and a vine. The woman is adorned with many ornaments. But the main attraction of this statue is to have a tree branch in the hand of the woman. The woman is not wearing a crown. It has servants on both sides. Four hands of a woman have been depicted in this idol. The woman is wearing a khadau and is seated on a wooden seat. The woman also has a hostess. A boot is shown standing here. The woman has a flute in her hand. The figure of a deer is shown. The woman is wearing jewellery. This statue is of Lag Mahadevi, the chief wife of Rajaraja-I. In Kumbakonam, the figure of a woman is depicted, which is slightly destroyed. The Dwarapalikas are marked in Darasuram, which are shown standing near the door. The idol of Solmadevi has been marked in the Shiva temple (Kalahasti) of the eleventh century AD. A metal statue has been found. This is a picture of Shembianma Devi from the tenth century AD.

**5.15 Apsaras:** This picture is of two dancing Apsaras whose legs are bent and the waist is bent from the middle. The figures of Gana and Vishnu are depicted playing the mridang (drum) and here the figures of other divine powers are displayed flying in the air. This is a very beautiful scene. The figure of a horse and an elephant has also been depicted in this picture. Apsaras are depicted on the pedestal of a lotus flower in the Korangnath temple. It is looking very beautiful like sura-sundar. She is wearing a garland decorated with pearls, which has come from her shoulder to the chest. Apsaras are decorated with beautiful ornaments. Apart from this, pearl ornaments are shown in their hair. An idol of a princess has been marked in the Nageshwar temple in Kumbakonam. The idol of Apsara is described in the Airavatesvara temple of Darasuram. Apsara's hairstyle is very beautiful. It is decorated with ornaments. The idols of two women have been engraved in the Koragnath temple, in which they are shown as maidservants and they are holding fans in their hands. These are probably nymphs. He is depicted standing on the pedestal of a two-petaled lotus flower. She looks like a celestial beauty who is shown being visible from the lotus flower. She is wearing a garland adorned with pearls, which has come from her shoulders to her chest. She is wearing beautiful round earrings which are marked touching her cheeks. The hair is wearing a crown of pearls. A statue of Mohini has been carved in the Ramaswamy temple of Kumbakonam in which she is standing in the tribhanga posture. He is holding a lotus flower in the right hand and the left hand is in Katihasta mudra. Mohini is decorated with different ornaments. The upper part of his body is naked and the clothes below are shown folded. A small figure is inscribed on his right and in which he is sitting on his knees in Anjali Mudra.

## 6. FUTURE SCOPES

- Integrate cultural and gender studies to explore societal roles and gender perceptions of the medieval period.
- Compare depictions across different regions and times to uncover cultural influences and historical changes in gender representation.
- Use digital tools for archiving and recreate historical contexts using AR and VR technologies.
- Dive deeper into the symbolism and mythological roles influencing artistic portrayals.
- Investigate how political and social shifts affect artistic depictions of women.
- Incorporate research into educational programs and organize public exhibitions to engage broader audiences.

## 7. LIMITATIONS

- Many artifacts are in remote or restricted areas, making access difficult for detailed study.
- The degradation of artifacts over centuries limits the ability to study fine details crucial for accurate analysis.

- Historical records are often incomplete or biased, restricting the comprehensiveness of research findings.
- Modern biases can misrepresent the cultural context and significance of medieval artworks.
- Challenges in integrating archaeology, history, and art criticism due to limited collaboration and funding.
- High costs or lack of local technological infrastructure limit the use of advanced analysis technologies.
- Ancient languages in texts and inscriptions require specialized knowledge, posing barriers for researchers.
- Ethical considerations can restrict the scope of research, especially in artifact handling and excavation.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The Chola dynasty, reigning from the 9th to the 13th centuries, produced an unparalleled legacy in Indian art, particularly in sculpture. This comprehensive analysis of Chola sculpture highlights the intricate blend of religious and secular themes that characterized this period. The Cholas' devotion to Hinduism is evident in the exquisite bronzes and stone sculptures of deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, and their consorts. These religious sculptures, often intended for temples and public worship, are marked by their dynamic forms, elaborate details, and spiritual expressiveness. Equally important are the secular aspects of Chola art, which include depictions of everyday life, royalty, and the natural world. These works reflect the societal norms, cultural practices, and political prowess of the Chola empire. Secular sculptures, often found in palaces and public spaces, provide invaluable insights into the Chola society's values and lifestyle. The Chola sculptors demonstrated remarkable technical skill and aesthetic sensibility, achieving a harmonious balance between form and function, realism and idealism. Their works exhibit a profound understanding of human anatomy, motion, and emotion, contributing to the timeless appeal of Chola art.

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