



## MOMENTOUS ASSISTANCES OF RAJARAJA CHOLA TO THE ARENA OF SCULPTURE ART IN THANJAVUR

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### **Abstract:**

RajarajaChola I, a powerful Chola ruler, envisioned a grand temple that showcased the power and influence of the Chola dynasty. He commissioned a magnificent temple dedicated to Lord Shiva to reflect the architecture and artistry of the Chola Empire. The foundation of the temple was built using granite stones, and an interesting aspect of its construction was the absence of mortar. The stones were interlocked to reveal the engineering ingenuity of the Chola artisans. Its architectural brilliance is evident in several aspects: One of the most striking features of the construction is the absence of a mortar. The huge blocks of granite were fitted together with such precision that the temple stands strong without the use of any binding material. The sculpture of Nataraja in the Prahadeeswarar temple is a timeless masterpiece that represents the confluence of spirituality, artistic expression and cultural heritage. It continues to capture the hearts and minds of people and is a symbol of India's rich artistic and philosophical traditions.

**Key words:** Sculpture, Great Temple, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Architectural Brilliance, Magnificent Temple, Architecture And Artistry, Architects And Artisans, Granite Stones, Interlocked, Ingenuity, Gopuram, Vimanam, Single Canopy, Mythological Scenes And Deities, Celestial Dancers, Iconic Sculpture Captures, Massive Gopurams, Monolithic Structures, Cosmic Dancer, Ananda Thandavam, Spiritual Philosophy, Cosmology And Metaphysics, Neckand Flame, Yalis, Kirtimugas, Bronze Sculptures, Depict Deities, Saints, Captivating

### **Introduction**

The Chola Empire, especially during the reign of RajarajaChola I and his successor RajendraChola I, made significant contributions to the field of sculpture in Thanjavur. Built in the 11th century by RajarajaChola I, the Pragasheeswarar Temple is a monument of Chola sculpture in Thanjavur. RajarajaChola I, a famous ruler of the Chola dynasty in the 11th century, made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of sculpture in Thanjavur. His reign marked a golden age for art and culture, and his patronage was instrumental in the



creation of significant sculptures in the region, particularly at the Prahadeeswarar temple in Thanjavur. Here are his notable contributions:

### **Construction of Pragatheeswarar Temple:**

RajarajaChola I initiated and oversaw the construction of Prahadeeswarar Temple, a masterpiece of Chola architecture and sculpture. Completed in 1010 AD, the temple is a testament to his vision and support for the arts. Also known as the Great Temple, the Pragatheeswarar Temple is a remarkable example of Chola architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was built in the 11th century in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India.

### **Architectural brilliance:**

RajarajaChola I, a powerful Chola ruler, envisioned a grand temple that showcased the power and influence of the Chola dynasty. He commissioned a magnificent temple dedicated to Lord Shiva to reflect the architecture and artistry of the Chola Empire. The construction of Prahadeeswarar temple started in 1003 AD. Skilled architects and artisans were employed to turn RajarajaChola's vision into reality.

### **Innovative Engineering & Architectural Features**

The foundation of the temple was built using granite stones, and an interesting aspect of its construction was the absence of mortar. The stones were interlocked to reveal the engineering ingenuity of the Chola artisans.

- **Vimanam and Gopuram:** The temple has a 66 meter high Gopuram Vimanam (Central Temple Gopuram). The aircraft is covered by a large single canopy weighing about 81 tons. The temple also has intricately carved gopurams (entrance towers) adorned with sculptures and intricate designs. The vimana (gopura) of the temple rises to a height of 66 meters and was one of the tallest in the world during its time. The sheer scale of the structure demonstrates the ambition and architectural expertise of the Chola craftsmen.
- **Pillar Halls:** The temple complex includes elaborately carved pillared halls (Pillar Halls) depicting various mythological scenes and deities. These pillars are a testament to the artistic excellence of the Cholas. The halls (Pillar Halls) in the temple complex have elaborately carved pillars. Each pillar is a masterpiece, depicting various forms of Lord Shiva, celestial dancers and other mythological scenes, showing the mastery of Chola sculptors.
- **Fine Sculptures:** The Prahadeeswarar Temple is adorned with exquisite sculptures of deities, celestial beings and mythological figures. The walls and pillars of the temple are covered with intricate carvings that reveal the Chola dynasty's mastery of sculpture. The temple is adorned with intricate sculptures of deities, mythological figures and divine beings. These sculptures are not only for decorative purpose but also convey spiritual and mythological stories, revealing the artistic creativity of Chola artisans.



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- **Nataraja Sculpture:** One of the most popular sculptures in the temple is Nataraja, the cosmic dancer of Lord Shiva. This iconic sculpture captures the essence of divine dance and artistic expression. The presence of the Nataraja sculpture depicting Lord Shiva in the cosmic dance adds a layer of spiritual symbolism to the temple. It reflects the Chola dynasty's deep understanding of religious concepts and its ability to translate these concepts into artistic expressions.
- **Dedication to Shiva:** Dedicated to Lord Shiva in the form of Prahadeeswarar. It holds immense religious significance for devotees and pilgrims, attracting visitors from all over the world. The architectural marvel of the Prahadeeswarar Temple continues to amaze visitors and scholars alike, a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of ancient Indian architects and artisans. Pragatheeswarar Temple is a testament to the architectural prowess, artistic creativity and cultural heritage of the Chola Dynasty. Its construction is a marvel in the history of Indian architecture, symbolizing the power and devotion of the Chola rulers.

## **Architecture Marvelous:**

Pragatheeswarar Temple is a marvel of engineering and artistic creativity. Its tall vimana (temple tower), massive gopurams (entrance towers), and intricately carved pillars are iconic examples of Chola architecture. RajarajaChola's emphasis on grandeur and scale contributed to the magnificence of the temple's design. Absolutely, the Prahadeeswarar Temple is truly a marvel of engineering and artistic creativity. Its architectural brilliance is evident in several aspects: One of the most striking features of the construction is the absence of a mortar. The huge blocks of granite were fitted together with such precision that the temple stands strong without the use of any binding material.

## **Monolithic Architecture:**

The temple consists of monolithic (monolithic) structures like the giant cupola at the top of the main tower. Weighing around 81 tonnes, this massive stone was carefully raised into its position to demonstrate the advanced engineering skills of the Chola architects. The dimensions and proportions of the temple are meticulously calculated following ancient texts on architecture. Its layout follows the principles of Vastu Shastra, the ancient Indian architectural science, ensuring harmony and balance in its design.

## **Sculptural Decorations:**

Under the patronage of RajarajaChola, the Prahadeeswarar Temple was decorated with exquisite sculptures depicting various deities, mythological stories and celestial beings. The intricate carvings on the temple walls and pillars reveal the artistic finesse of the Chola sculptors.

## **Nataraja sculpture:**

Rajaraja Cholan commissioned the famous Nataraja sculpture depicting Lord Shiva in cosmic dance in the Pragatheeswarar temple. The sculpture is a symbol of the Chola



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dynasty's support for artistic expression and spiritual identity. In fact, the Nataraja sculpture is one of the most iconic and admired sculptures of the Chola period found in Thanjavur, especially in the Pragatheswarar Temple. This sculpture has significant cultural, religious and artistic significance:

1. **Cosmic Dance of Lord Shiva:** The Nataraja sculpture represents Lord Shiva in his form as a cosmic dancer. It symbolizes the cycle of creation, preservation and destruction, as Lord Shiva performs the Ananda Thandavam, the divine dance of bliss.
2. **Spiritual philosophy:** Nataraja dance embodies deep spiritual and philosophical concepts depicting the interplay of various cosmic forces, the rhythm of life and the eternal balance of the universe. It is a visual representation of Hindu cosmology and metaphysics.
3. **Dynamic Pose:** The sculpture captures the dynamic and energetic movements of the dance, with Lord Shiva balancing on one leg and gracefully raising the other. Flowing hair, rhythmic posture and facial expressions exude artistic brilliance.
4. **Intricate Details:** The Nataraja sculpture is adorned with intricate details including jewels, snake around the neck and flame like figure. These details show the mastery of Chola artisans in stone carving and sculpture.
5. **Tourist attraction:** Nataraja sculpture attracts tourists and art lovers from all over the world. Its significance in the field of art and spirituality is a must-see for visitors to the Prahadeeswarar temple.
6. **Inspiration for Artists:** Over the centuries, the sculpture of Nataraja has inspired countless artists, dancers and thinkers in India and internationally. Its influence extends beyond religious boundaries, permeating various art forms and academic discourse.

The sculpture of Nataraja in the Prahadeeswarar temple is a timeless masterpiece that represents the confluence of spirituality, artistic expression and cultural heritage. It continues to capture the hearts and minds of people and is a symbol of India's rich artistic and philosophical traditions.

## **Bronze Sculptures:**

Magnificent bronze sculptures were produced during the RajarajaChola period. Skilled artisans created intricate bronze statues of deities and saints that reflected the aesthetics of the Cholas. These sculptures are known for their grace, intricate details and spiritual aura. RajarajaChola's patronage extended to artists and artisans, encouraging them to push the boundaries of their creativity. Generous royal patronage enabled artisans to experiment with different styles and techniques, leading to the development of distinct Chola art traditions. RajarajaChola I's contributions to sculpture at Thanjavur, particularly at the



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Pragatheeswarar Temple, are an inspiration to art lovers and historians alike, highlighting the Chola dynasty's cultural legacy and lasting impact on Indian art and architecture.

The temple is decorated with sculptures of various deities from Hindu mythology including various forms, deities and celestial beings. These sculptures exude exceptional detail and a sense of divine presence. Ornate carvings of mythological creatures like Yalis (lion-like creatures) and Kirtimugas (demon faces) on the temple entrances and walls show the mastery of Chola artisans in stone carving. The sculpture of Nataraja in the Pragatheeswarar Temple in Thanjavur is the most famous of the Chola sculptures. Depicting Lord Shiva as a cosmic dancer signifies the Chola dynasty's patronage of art and culture. Nataraja sculpture is celebrated for its intricate detail, capturing the dynamic movement of the dance.

## **Chola Bronzes**

Apart from architectural marvels, the Cholas were famous for their bronze sculptures. These sculptures, often on a small scale, depict deities, saints and mythological figures. The bronze sculptures of the Cholas are characterized by their beautiful motifs, intricate jewelry and lively expressions, reflecting the artistic brilliance of the Chola period. Overall, the era of RajarajaChola I saw a flourishing period of bronze sculpture in ancient India. During his reign, skilled artisans created magnificent bronze sculptures celebrated for their artistry, grace and spiritual significance. RajarajaChola I and his successors extended extensive patronage to artists and artisans and encouraged the production of high quality sculptures. Royal patronage enabled artisans to devote their time and skills to creating intricate bronze masterpieces.

The bronze sculptures of the Cholas are known for their beautiful and graceful postures. Deities and mythological figures are depicted in fluid and life-like forms, capturing a sense of divine beauty and serenity. Artisans have paid meticulous attention to detail to depict intricate jewellery, ornaments and facial expressions. Fine details add depth and realism to the sculptures, which are visually captivating. Most Chola bronze sculptures depict Hindu deities, saints and mythological characters. These sculptures serve religious and spiritual purposes, embodying the essence of devotion and faith. These bronze statues were used in many temple rituals, enhancing the religious practices of the time. Devotees worshiped these sculptures as divine images.

## **Heritage and Recognition:**

The bronze sculptures of the Cholas set a standard for artistic expression. Artists who drew inspiration from the aesthetics of the Cholas can be seen influencing subsequent periods of Indian art. Today, bronze sculptures of the Cholas are highly valued globally. They are exhibited in museums and art galleries, preserving the cultural heritage of the Chola dynasty and providing inspiration to contemporary artists. The magnificent bronze sculptures made during the reign of RajarajaChola have not only contributed to the artistic heritage of ancient India, but continue to inspire art lovers, historians and scholars, revealing the lasting impact



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of the artistry and craftsmanship of the Cholas. Apart from the Pragaatheswarar temple, many temples in the Thanjavur area also feature remarkable Chola sculptures. These temples are scattered across the region, exhibiting a variety of artistic styles and themes, reflecting the depth of artistic expression of the Cholas.

Chola sculpture in Thanjavur fascinates art lovers and historians alike and serves as a valuable legacy of India's rich cultural and artistic heritage. These sculptures not only represent the religious and mythological beliefs of the Chola period but also testify to the artistic genius of the Cholas.

## End Notes

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