



Nataraja Artistry of Lord Shiva

For Prelims: Nataraja, Lost Wax Method

For Mains: Indian art heritage

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Why in News?

Recently, The [G20 Leaders' Summit](#) at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, featured a stunning **27-foot Nataraja** sculpture, the world's tallest representation of Lord Shiva in his dancing form.

What are the Key Highlights of the Nataraja Statue in Bharat Mandapam?

- This remarkable Nataraja statue, crafted from an **ashtadhatu (eight-metal alloy)** by artisans from **Tamil Nadu, weighs 18 tonnes.**
- The statue is sculpted by the renowned sculptor **Radhakrishnan Sthapaty** of Swami Malai in Tamil Nadu.
- The design of this Nataraja statue draws inspiration from three revered Nataraja idols: the **Thillai Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram**, the **Uma Maheswarar Temple in Konerirajapuram**, and the [Brihadeeswara \(Big\) Temple](#), a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#), in **Thanjavur**. This offers a deep insight into the **history and religious symbolism of Lord Shiva's dancing form.**
- The Nataraja sculpture at Bharat Mandapam is made using the **lost wax method.**



What is the History and Religious Symbolism of Lord Shiva's Dancing Form?

- **Ancient Origins of Shiva:**

- Shiva, one of the principal deities in Hinduism, has ancient roots that trace back to the **Vedic period**.
- In Vedic scriptures, **Shiva's precursor is Rudra**, a deity associated with natural elements, particularly storms, thunder, and the wild forces of nature.
- Rudra was initially a fierce and fearsome deity, embodying the destructive aspects of nature.
- **Emergence of Nataraja Form:**
 - The concept of Shiva as a dancer, known as Nataraja, began to take shape around the **5th century AD**.
 - Early depictions of Shiva's dance laid the foundation for the multifaceted symbolism associated with the Nataraja form.
- **Shiva Under the Cholas:**
 - During the reign of the **Chola dynasty (9th-11th centuries AD)**, Shiva's Nataraja form underwent significant development.
 - The Cholas, known for their **patronage of art and culture**, played a pivotal role in **shaping Nataraja's cultural significance**.
 - The Cholas were devout Shaivites, emphasizing the worship of Lord Shiva.
 - They constructed grand Shiva temples throughout their territories, with the **Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur being a prominent example**, with a particular focus on Shaiva figures in their sculptures.
- **Evolution of Nataraja Iconography:**
 - Nataraja's symbolism grew more complex under the Cholas.
 - Lord Shiva is a complex deity in the Puranic pantheon, embodying **both destructive and ascetic qualities**.
 - Nataraja, the 'Lord of Dance,' is celebrated for his invention of 108 diverse dances. The dancing Shiva became associated with both **creation and destruction, embodying the dualities of life**.
 - The dance was seen as a cosmic dance, with Shiva as the **cosmic dancer, and the world as the stage**.
 - **Iconic Elements of Nataraja**
 - In iconic representations, Nataraja is depicted within a **flaming aureole or halo, symbolizing the circle of the world**.
 - His long, flowing dreadlocks signify the **energy and dynamism of his dance**.
 - Nataraja is typically shown with four arms, each holding symbolic objects that convey deeper meanings.
 - **Symbolism in Nataraja's Attributes:**
 - Nataraja holds a **damru (hand drum) in his upper right hand, which draws all creatures into his rhythmic motion**, and in his **upper left arm, he wields Agni (fire), symbolizing his power to destroy the universe**.
 - Beneath one of Nataraja's feet lies a crushed dwarf-like figure, representing illusion and worldly distractions.
 - In ornamentation, one ear of Shiva has a **male earring while the other has a female**.
 - This represents the fusion of male and female and is often referred to as **Ardhanarishwar**.
 - A snake is twisted around the arm of Shiva. The snake symbolises the **kundalini power, which resides in the human spine in the dormant stage. If aroused, one can attain true consciousness**.
 - **Nataraja as Protector and Reassurer:**
 - Despite the formidable symbolism associated with Nataraja, he also serves as a protector.
 - The '**abhayamudra (fear-allaying gesture) made with his front right hand reassures devotees**, offering protection from fear and doubt.
 - Nataraja's raised feet and his gesture with his front left-hand point to his feet, inviting devotees to seek refuge in him.
 - **Nataraja's Smile:**
 - One of the distinctive features of Nataraja's iconography is his almost always present broad smile.
 - The French historian Renee Grousset beautifully described Nataraja's smile as

representing both "death and life, both joy and pain."



What is the Lost Wax Method?

- Sculptors who created the Nataraja statue which is placed at the Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, trace their lineage **34 generations back to the Cholas.**
- The crafting process used is the **traditional 'lost-wax' casting method, indigenous to the Chola era.**
 - The lost-wax method dates back at least 6,000 years, a **copper amulet** crafted using this method at a neolithic site in **Mehrgarh, Balochistan (present day Pakistan) is dated to circa 4,000 BC.**
 - Notably, the **Dancing Girl of Mohenjo Daro** was also crafted using this **technique.**
- This method involves creating a **detailed wax model, coating it with alluvial soil, heating to burn away the wax, and filling the mold with molten metal.**
- The Cholas excelled in the lost wax method for producing elaborate metallic sculptures.
- This technique was used to create intricate sculptures for millennia.

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