



Ministry of Culture  
Government of India

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Azadi Ka  
Amrit Mahotsav

Bringing back our heritage:  
Return of  
Tamil Nadu  
Antiquities



प्रत्नकीर्तिमपावृणु

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA





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## INTRODUCTION

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Over the history, but specifically since the onslaught of colonialism, antiquities and monuments have been located, excavated, looted or separated from context as trophies and shipped to private or Museum collections to the West and developed nations in East. The trade in antiquity has become lucrative and a racket. The global community first gathered together to protect cultural heritage after the destruction of art resulting from the World Wars. The Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict ('The Hague Convention') addresses wartime looting and destruction, but has proven ineffective owing to the chaotic nature of war. However, the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970 ('1970 UNESCO Convention') has been more successful because it is broader in its application.

The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1972 (or the “1972 Act”) and the Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 regulate the antiquity trade/exchange in the country. It does so domestically by issuing a license for the dealers to operate and also maintains a register of antiquities that are in the possession of these dealers and other private citizens. Under the Act, export of antiquity is prohibited. Only the Central Government or an authority or agency authorized by it may export antiquities, subject to terms and conditions and in the nature of a loan arrangement. Ministry of Culture has also issued policy guidelines with regard to loan, loanability and the processes associated with it.

Illicit trade in antiquities is characterised by a dichotomous relationship between the rich “demand” countries and the poorer “source” countries. Museums, Art Houses, Universities in developed countries have been knowingly or unknowingly part of the illegal trade for most of the last century. To deter museums from engaging in illegal dealings, the Importing State parties are now seen to be aggressively prosecuting the kingpins and museum representatives responsible for illegal purchases. Government of India (through various offices including Archaeological Survey of India-ASI) retrieved 13 antiquities since 1976 till 2013. However, in the last eight years the GOI has succeeded in retrieving 228 antiquities from various countries like USA, UK and Australia. Much of the recent restitution has also been possible due to bursting of the racket



run by a major Indian player in this illicit trade in July 2012. He shipped items with false customs declarations to dealers and museums worldwide. According to his records, he sold pieces to most of the reputed museums in the world. Much of his collection in India was sourced from the southern states of India, especially Tamil Nadu, where the cases of theft have been most prominent.

Present in the restitution are ten exquisitely crafted bronze sculptures that are case-property of Tamil Nadu. These include two Dvārapālas (Door Guardians), a Kankālamurti, Nandikeshvara from temples in Ambasamudram of Tirunelveli district; a Natarāja from Punnainallur village, Thanjavur district; a four-armed Vishnu and Parvati from Ariyalur; image of Lord Siva and Devi Pārvati, standing on a rectangular lotus pedestal, from Thanjavur; and two statues of child Sambandhar from Sirkali, close to Thanjavur.

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The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 defines antiquities as follows:

- (a) “antiquity” includes –
  - (I)
    - (i) any coin, sculpture, painting, epigraph or other work of art or craftsmanship;
    - (ii) any article, object or thing detached from a building or cave;
    - (iii) any article, object or thing illustrative of science, art, crafts, literature, religion, customs, morals or politics in bygone ages;
    - (iv) any article, object or thing of historical interest ;
    - (v) any article, object or thing declared by the Central Government, by notification in the Official Gazette, to be antiquity for the purposes of this Act,
  - (II)
    - Which has been in existence for not less than one hundred years; and
    - any manuscript, record or other document which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which has been in existence for not less than seventy –five years ;



## Dvārapāla

### Stone Sculpture

Retrieved in the year 2020 from Australia, this sculpture of Dvārapāla (Door Guardian) belongs to the Vijayanagar dynasty dating to 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century CE. The image is heavily ornamented with a *karāṇḍa mukuta*, *karna kundala*, necklaces, *bājubandha*, *keyurah*, *mekhalā*, *valaya*, *kankanam* etc. He is holding gadā in one hand and has another leg risen up to the level of his knee. The sculpture was burgled from Moondreeswaramudayar Temple, Ambasaamuthiram taluk, Tirunelveli district in 1994.



1

Dvārapāla  
of the Vijayanagar dynasty,  
retrieved in 2020 from Australia.



## Dvārapāla

### Stone Sculpture

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2

Dvārapāla  
of the Vijayanagar dynasty,  
retrieved in 2020 from Australia.



## Sculpture of Natarāja

Retrieved in the year 2021 from the USA, this image of Natarāja, a depiction of Shiva, in his divine cosmic dance form, is in *tribhanga* posture, trampling on the *āpasmārapurusha*, standing on the lotus pedestal, is datable to the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century CE. The deity is shown four-armed, wherein the lower right and left hands are in *abhaya* and *varada mudrās*, while the upper left holds a flame of fire in open palm, and, the right hand holds a *damaru*. The left leg is raised in the air, while the right leg is firmly grounded, with a slight bend at the knee. The matted locks of hair are flying outwards, touching both the sides of the circular *prabhāvali*, depicting Ganga on the right side, and, snake on the left. Possibly, *Ānanda tāndava* or the Dance of Bliss is portrayed here. This sculpture was burgled from the Strong Room of Punnainallur Arulmigu Mariyamman Temple, Punnainallur village, Thanjavur district.





3

Natarāja  
of Punnainallur Arulmigu  
Mariyamman Temple, retrieved in  
2021



## Sculpture of Kankālamurti

Retrieved in the year 2021 from the USA, Kankālamurti is depicted as a fearsome aspect of Lord Shiva and Bhairava. The sculpture is shown four-armed, holding *āyūdhās* such as *damaru* and *trishula* in the upper hands and a bowl and a trefoil shaped object, as a treat for the playful fawn, in the lower right hand. A playful fawn, wearing necklace and anklets is seen sprinting merrily and accepting the offering made by the Lord earnestly. An attendant or a dwarf figure is shown holding a wide tumbler over his head with both his hands. All the three images are moulded on a round lotus pedestal, which stands above a rectangular plinth embossed with lotus petal patterns. Adorned in beautiful ornaments such as exquisite *kiritmukuta*, *karnkundalās*, necklaces, anklets, etc. the Lord is depicted in a composed facial expression and is datable to the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century CE. This sculpture was stolen from Narasinganadhar Swamy Temple, Alwarkurichi village, Ambasamudram taluk, Tirunelveli district in 1985.



4

Kankālamurti  
of the Narasinganadhar Swamy  
Temple, retrieved in the year 2021  
from USA.



## Sculpture of Nandikeshvara

Retrieved in the year 2021 from the USA, this bronze image of Nandikeshvara, datable to the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE, is shown standing in *tribhanga* posture with folded arms, holding an axe and a fawn in the upper arms, profusely ornamented, his forearms are seen in *namaskāra mudra*. His *kiritmukuta* and *karnkundalās* are intricately carved, and, his lower garment is also elegantly ornamented. This sculpture was stolen from Narasinganadhar Swamy Temple, Alwarkurichi village, Ambasamudram taluk, Tirunelveli district in 1985.



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Nandikeshvara  
of the Narasinganadhar Swamy  
Temple, retrieved in the year 2021  
from USA.





### Sculpture of the Four-armed Vishnu

Retrieved in the year 2021 from the USA, datable to the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century CE, belonging to the later Chola period. Lord Vishnu is shown standing on a *padma* pedestal holding attributes such as *shankha* and *chakra* in two hands; while the lower right hand is in *abhaya mudra*. The lower left hand rests on the waist. He is shown adorning a *karāṇḍamukuta* and elaborates *makara karnkundalās*. His attire is elegantly ornate. This sculpture was stolen from Arulmigu Varadharaja Perumal Temple, Suthamally village, Udayarpalayam taluk, Ariyalur district in 2008.





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Four-armed Vishnu  
of the Arulmigu Varadharaja  
Perumal Temple, retrieved in the  
year 2021 from USA.



## Sculpture of Goddess Pārvati

Retrieved in the year 2021 from the USA, The image depicts a Chola period sculpture of Pārvati, datable to the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century CE. She is shown holding lotus in the left hand whereas the right is hanging down near her *kati*. She adorns the *karāṇḍamukuta* and elaborate *karnkundalās*. Pārvati stands elegantly in *tribhanga* posture over the lotus pedestal. This sculpture was stolen from Arulmigu Varadharaja Perumal Temple, Suthamally village, Udayarpalayam taluk, Ariyalur district in 2008.



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Goddess Pārvati  
of the Arulmigu Varadharaja  
Perumal Temple, retrieved in the  
year 2021 from USA.



## Sculpture of Siva and Pārvati

Retrieved in the year 2021 from the USA, the image of Lord Siva and Devi Pārvati are seen standing on a rectangular lotus pedestal, placed on a high plinth. Siva is in *tribhanga* posture, shown four-armed, holding a battle axe and fawn in the upper two hands. His lower two hands are in *abhaya mudrā* and embracing Pārvati, respectively. Bedecked in jewels, the sculpture is datable to the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. Pārvati is shown standing in *tribhanga* posture, her right hand shown in *abhaya mudrā*. It was stolen from Vanmiganadhar Swamy Thirukoil, Deepambalpuram, Papanasam taluk, Thanjavur district.



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Siva and Pārvati  
of Vanmiganadhar Swamy  
Thirukoil, retrieved in the year 2021  
from USA.



### Sculpture of Standing child Sambandar

Retrieved in the year 2022 from the Australia, Sambandar, the popular seventh-century child saint, is one of the Muvar, the three principal saints of South India, sculpture datable to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. Legend narrates that after receiving a bowl of milk from Goddess Umā, as is shown by the bowl held in his left hand, the infant Sambandar devoted his life to composing hymns in praise of Lord Shiva; his raised hand points to Shiva's heavenly abode at Mount Kailash, in the Himalayas. The sculpture displays the Saint's childlike quality, while, also empowering him with the maturity and authority of a spiritual leader. This sculpture was stolen from Sayavaneeswarar temple, Sayavanam village, Sirkali taluk, Nagapattinam district between the year 1965 to 1975.





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Standing child Sambandar  
of the Sayavaneeswarar temple,  
retrieved in the year 2022  
from Australia.



## Sculpture of Child Sambandar

Retrieved in the year 2022 from the Australia, the child saint Sambandar, one of a group of sixty-three saints who adored Shiva, lived in the seventh century in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, sculpture being datable to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. Comprehensive sets of imageries of these saints, known as the Nayanārs, are found in all major south Indian temples, where Sambandar has been eternalized for his blissful songs in praise of Shiva. Sambandar may be identified by the pointing index finger of his right hand upwards toward figures of Shiva and Pārvati carved upon the temple tower, who is, in legend, supposed to have given him a gift of milk. The idol from a Temple, Tamil Nadu was stolen prior to June 2005.



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Child Sambandar  
from a temple, Tamil Nadu,  
retrieved in the year 2022 from  
Australia.

## Note





प्रत्यक्षं वद

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