

## A Unique Bronze of Ardhanāri-Naṭeśvara from Abhayagiri Vihara, Anuradhapura

By

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The archaeological team of Abhayagiri Vihara Project, UNESCO- Sri Lanka Cultural Triangle, unearthed a unique bronze of Ardhanāri-Naṭeśvara on the 17 th June 1982. It was deposited 60 cm. under the surface by the south-western corner of the inner wall of the Abhayagiri Stūpa, Anuradhapura. The bronze is 13 cm. high in the 'exceeding bend' (*atibhaṅga*) pose. It is divided vertically in the middle into two halves; the right half is female<sup>1</sup> and the left male. Undoubtedly this half male and half female figure represents Ardhanāri-Naṭeśvara (Indian Androgynous) in the form of Hari-Hara, a composite god of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects of Hinduism.

The style of the bronze has close similarity to the Pallava sculpture at Mamallapuram, and it is markedly different from the Chola sculpture. So the bronze may be given a date between 9th century.

The right half of the bronze represents a female form with female dress and ornaments. The hair cascades down one shoulder. The ear is adorned with the *sarpakuṇḍala* ear ornament. The face with a half smile is extremely beautiful. The eye is wide and long befitting the female. The necklace as it falls around the neck rises at the breast. In the raised hand is a conch shell and the other arm lies low in rhythmic gesture. Both arms are adorned with bangles. The lower part of the body is draped down to the ankle with a *dhoti*.

In the left half (male) the head is done in the form of *jaṭāmakuta*. The face has the rough appearance peculiar to Śiva. A neckless adorns the neck and the ear has the ear ornament of *kuṇḍala*. A cobra stretching from the raised upper hand to the shoulder shows its hood in the front. In the lower hand *kaṭaka-mudrā* is shown. The lower body is draped in a cloth (probably a tiger skin) that covers only the half of the thigh. The leg raised slightly in a rhythmic fashion shows dancing stance.

The conch in the raised right hand is the typical symbol of Viṣṇu and the cobra in the left hand represents Śiva. In all probability, taking into consideration the allied characteristics of this figure, I would say, that it represents Ardhanāri-Naṭeśvara, in other words, Hari-Hara in dancing attitude.



A UNIQUE BRONZE OF ARDHANĀRI-NATEŚVARA FROM ABHAYAGIRI . .

How was Śiva represented in Hari-Hara form ? The Indian thinking related to this concept, of Nara-Nāri from the Vedic era to the present has three phases. From these the later thinking of Hindu philosophers, including Saṅkaracarya, has been created to show the unity of the religious sects Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavaism to avoid conflicts between the two. At this stage, the figure of Hari-Hara was introduced in Hindu temples in order to give the impression to devotees that there is no difference between Śiva and Viṣṇu.

According to the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Śiva and Viṣṇu create the world and its beings. In this connection Śiva represents *puruṣa* and Viṣṇu represents *prakṛti*; by uniting the two, creation was materialised. Though Viṣṇu has been worshiped as a male god he took the form of Mohinī (female) as a half of Śiva.

The *Bṛhannāradiya Purāṇa* states that sage Jaimini recited *vedapāda-stotra* before the image of Hari-Hara. Then the image performed the Tāṇḍava dance. Probably Ardhanāri-Nateśvara represents this event.

Scientists say that the world is composed of two basic elements; electron and proton. In confusianism the two elements have been identified as *li* and *chi* which operate through *yin* and *yang*. Indians from Vedic times have described these life principles in terms like *agni-soma*, *strī-pumān*, *pitā-mātā*, *nara-nāri*, *prāṇa-apāna* etc. So Ardhanāri - Nateśvara or Hari-Hara represents the same nature in an anthropomorphic form.

The artistic value of the Ardhanāri-Nateśvara (or Hari-Hara) statue found at Abhayagiri Stūpa, Anuradhapura, has two aspects; its technical value and its aesthetic value. The technical value is allied to its aesthetic value. Professor Nandadasa Kodagoda of the Medical Faculty, Colombo University, says that the sculptor has strictly depicted the anatomy of both male and female quite accurately in fashioning this bronze of Ardhanāri-Nateśvara. It is, indeed, a remarkable piece of sculpture, particularly because it belongs to an era before the birth of modern anatomical science.

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1. Usually the Female half should be on the left.