

# נאטראג'ה

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## ناتاراجا - العربية-الإنجليزية قاموس - Glosbe

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# ناتاراجا

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नटराज

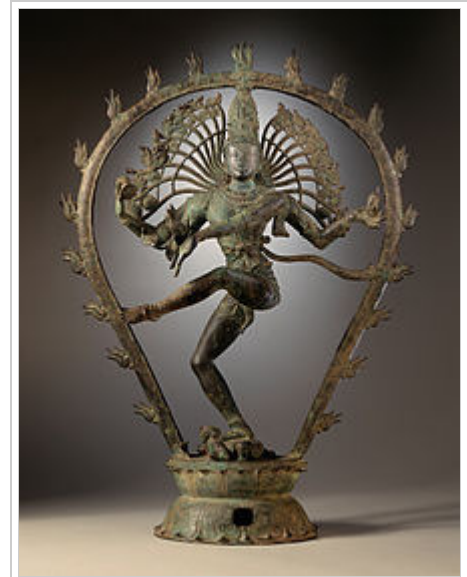
نٹراج

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# Nataraja

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Nataraja** "நடராசர்" "నటరాజు" "नटराज" or *Koothan*"கூத்தன்" , (Hindustani: [nəʈˤrɑːdʒə], *The Lord (or King) of Dance*), is a depiction of the Hindu God Shiva as the cosmic dancer who performs his divine dance to destroy a weary universe and make preparations for the god Brahma to start the process of creation.



A 10th century Chola dynasty bronze sculpture of Shiva, the Lord of the Dance at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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## Depiction

The dance of Shiva in Tillai, the traditional name for Chidambaram, forms the motif for all the depictions of Shiva as Nataraja. He is also known as "Sabesan" which splits as "Sabayil aadum eesan" in Tamil which means "The Lord who dances on the dais". The form is present in most Shiva temples in South India, and is the prime deity in the famous Thillai Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram.<sup>[1]</sup>

The sculpture is usually made in bronze, with Shiva dancing in an aureole of flames, lifting his left leg (or in rare cases, the right leg) and balancing over a demon or dwarf (Apasmara) who symbolizes ignorance. It is a well known sculptural symbol in India and popularly used as a symbol of Indian culture.<sup>[2]</sup>

The two most common forms of Shiva's dance are the *Lasya* (the gentle form of dance), associated with the creation of the world, and the *Tandava* (the violent and dangerous dance), associated with the destruction of weary worldviews – weary perspectives and lifestyles. In essence, the Lasya and the Tandava are just two aspects of Shiva's nature; for he destroys in order to create, tearing down to build again.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Etymology

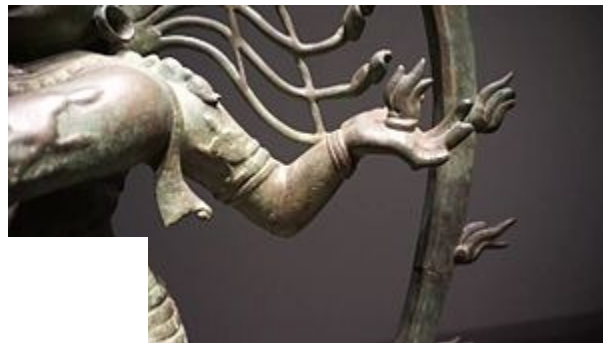
Nāṭaraja in Sanskrit means "Lord of dance".

Koothan is derived from the Tamil word *Koothu*, which means dance or performance. A male dancer is termed *Koothan*. Also known as Natarajan in Sankritised Tamil, meaning Nathiyathin (of dance) Raajan (king).

Naathiyam is another word for dance.

## Characteristics

- A cobra uncoils from his lower right forearm, and the crescent moon and a skull are on his crest. He dances within an arch of flames. This dance is called the *Dance of Bliss*, (Tamil: ஆந்ந் நாண்டவம்) *aananda taandavam*.
- The upper right hand holds a small drum shaped like an hourglass that is called a *ḍamaru* in Sanskrit.<sup>[4][5][6]</sup> A specific hand gesture (mudra) called *ḍamaru-hasta* (Sanskrit for "ḍamaru-hand") is used to hold the drum.<sup>[7]</sup> It symbolizes sound originating creation or the beat of the drum is the passage of time.
- The upper left hand contains *Agni* or fire, which signifies destruction. The opposing concepts in the upper hands show the counterpoise of creation and destruction or the fire of life.
- The second right hand shows the *Abhaya* mudra (meaning *fearlessness* in Sanskrit), bestowing protection from both evil and ignorance to those who follow the righteousness of *dharma*.
- The second left hand points towards the raised foot which signifies upliftment and liberation. It also points to the left foot with the sign of the elephant which leads the way through the jungle of ignorance.
- The dwarf on which Nataraja dances is the demon Apasmara (Muyalaka, as known in Tamil), which symbolises Shiva's victory over ignorance. It also represents the passage of spirit from the divine into material.
- As the Lord of Dance, Nataraja, Shiva performs the tandava, the dance in which the universe is created, maintained, and dissolved. Shiva's long, matted tresses, usually piled up in a knot, loosen during the dance and crash into the heavenly bodies, knocking them off course or destroying them utterly.
- The surrounding flames represent the manifest Universe.
- The snake swirling around his waist is kundalini, the Shakti or divine force thought to reside within everything. This also parallels the cords of life worn by the Brahmins to represent the second rebirth.
- The stoic face of Shiva represents his neutrality, thus being in balance.



## Significance

An essential significance of Shiva's dance at Tillai, the traditional name of Chidambaram, can be explained as:<sup>[1]</sup>

- First, it is seen as the image of his rhythmic play which is the source of all movement within the universe. This is represented by the circular or elliptical frame surrounding the Lord.
- Secondly, the purpose of his dance is to release the souls of all men from the snare of illusion.

- Lastly, the place of the dance, Chidambaram, which is portrayed as the center of the universe, is actually within the heart.

Dancing is seen as an art in which the artist and the art s/he creates are one and the same, thought to evoke the oneness of God and creation.

In the compact spiritual texts of divine knowledge, the holy *Geeta*, there are three basic Guṇa: Satvic, Tamsic and Rajsic. These combine with each other, and the life forms are created as a result of this divine activity. These life forms remain devoid of prana (breath), until the Divine entity infuses them with life. The *Geeta* says the division of the Divine entity is ninefold, of which eight can be known by humans, but the ninth is eternally unexplainable and hidden and secret. These eight divisions are the elements, Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Akash, Mana, Buddhi, Ahamkara.

Nataraja is a visual interpretation of Brahman and a dance posture of Lord Shiva. It is the representation of reality at the time of cosmic destruction. We being life forms, cosmic destruction would mean the disappearance of all life. The half moon shown in the head of Nataraja is a symbol only. The fall of the moon would result in cosmic destruction.

## Images

The Nataraja sect originated in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India. The trajectory of the dancing Shiva is traced from the processional worship of metal icons outside the sanctum<sup>[8]</sup> to the cultic elevation of the Nataraja bronze into the sanctum at Chidambaram.

Archaeo metallurgical studies made on South Indian bronzes by Sharada Srinivasan combined with iconographic and literary evidence showed that the Nataraja bronze was a Pallava innovation (7th to mid-9th century), rather than 10th-century Chola as widely believed. That the depiction was informed of cosmic or metaphysical connotations is also argued on the basis of the testimony of the hymns of Tamil saints.<sup>[9]</sup>

The largest Nataraja statue is in Neyveli, in Tamil Nadu.

The image of "the Lord as the Cosmic Dancer" is shown at the Chidambaram temple, an unusual fact as Shiva is depicted in an anthropomorphic form rather than in the usual non-anthropomorphic form of the lingam.

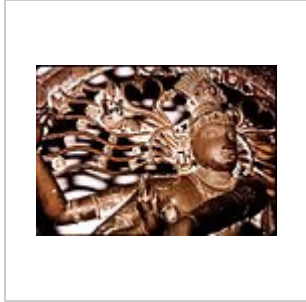
In 2004, a 2m statue of the dancing Shiva was unveiled at CERN, the European Center for Research in Particle Physics in Geneva. The statue, symbolizing Shiva's cosmic dance of creation and destruction, was given to CERN by the Indian government to celebrate the research center's long association with India. A special plaque next to the Shiva statue explains the significance of the metaphor of Shiva's cosmic dance with quotations from Fritjof Capra: "



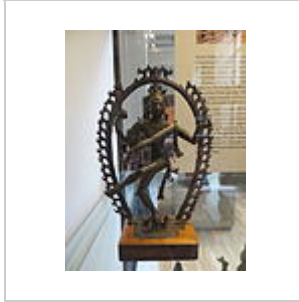
A statue of Shiva engaging in the Nataraja dance at CERN in Geneva, Switzerland

Hundreds of years ago, Indian artists created visual images of dancing Shivas in a beautiful series of bronzes. In our time, physicists have used the most advanced technology to portray the patterns of the cosmic dance. The metaphor of the cosmic dance thus unifies ancient mythology, religious art and modern physics.

## Gallery



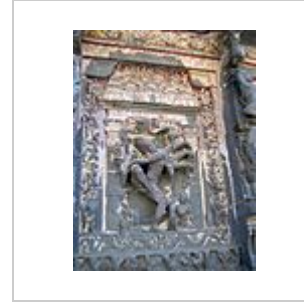
Nataraja, Bronze, Chola Dynasty, Tamil Nadu, Government Museum Madras, India



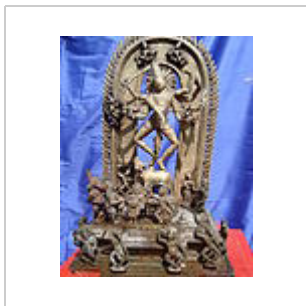
One of the earliest sculptures of Shiva Nataraja, Mid-10th Century AD, British Museum<sup>[10]</sup>



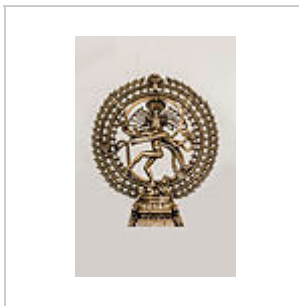
Shiva-Nataraja in the Thousand-Pillar-Hall of the Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India



A Nataraja stone relief, Kailash Temple, Ellora Caves



In the Shiva temple of Melakadambur is a rare Pala image that shows the ten-armed Nataraja dancing on his bull.



Nataraja The Lord of Dance.

## References

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- <sup>^</sup> Nitin Kumar. "Shiva as Nataraja – Dance and Destruction In Indian Art" (<http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/nataraja>).
- <sup>^</sup> Carmel Berkson, Wendy Doniger, George Michell, *Elephanta: The Cave of Shiva* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). ISBN 0691040095
- <sup>^</sup> Michaels, page 218.
- <sup>^</sup> For definition and shape, see: Apte, page 461.
- <sup>^</sup> For the damaru drum as one of the attributes of Shiva in his dancing representation see: Jansen, page 44.
- <sup>^</sup> Jansen, page 25.
- <sup>^</sup> A sacred or holy place (Origin: 1570–80; n. use of neut. of Latin *sānctus*; see Sanctus)
- <sup>^</sup> Sharada Srinivasan, "Shiva as 'cosmic dancer': on (<http://www.sharadasrinivasan.com/data/shivacosmicdancer.pdf>)

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10. ^ British Museum Collection ([http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=223693&partId=1&searchText=Nataraja&page=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=223693&partId=1&searchText=Nataraja&page=1))

## Further reading

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