

Celebrating the Return of India's Lost Cultural Heritage: Union Minister Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat Addresses Press Meet at National Museum

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Union Minister of Culture and Tourism **Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat** today said that the return of the sacred antiquities from the United States marks the restoration of India's civilisational memory and reflects the Government's unwavering commitment towards reclaiming and preserving the nation's cultural heritage under the leadership of **Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi**.

Addressing a press conference at the **National Museum, Janpath**, New Delhi, the Minister described the repatriation of the three historic bronzes from the **Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art** as a significant milestone in India's ongoing efforts to bring back stolen cultural treasures and strengthen ethical museum practices globally.



The repatriated bronzes include a Chola-period *Shiva Nataraja* dating to circa 990 CE, a 12th-century *Somaskanda* (Shiva and Uma), and a 16th-century Vijayanagara-period sculpture of *Saint Sundarar* with *Paravai*. These sacred temple bronzes, originally from Tamil Nadu, had been illicitly removed from India in the mid-20th century and subsequently housed abroad.

The Minister mentioned that antiquities are not merely artistic objects but embodiments of India's spiritual traditions, historical continuity and civilisational memory. He noted that illicit trafficking of antiquities had deprived India of several invaluable cultural treasures over decades.

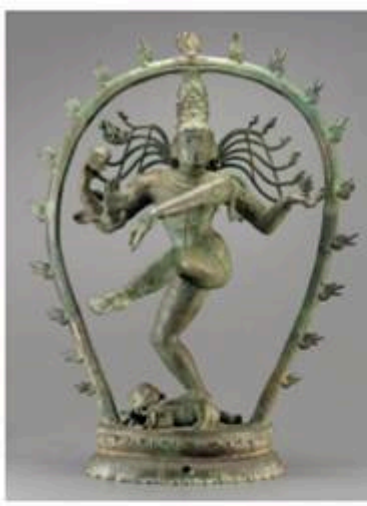


The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**, through extensive provenance research using archival records, field documentation and historical temple photographs from the 1950s and 1960s, successfully traced the artefacts to their original temple sites in Tamil Nadu. The findings formed the basis for coordinated negotiations involving the **Ministry of Culture**, the **Smithsonian Institution** and the **Embassy of India in the United States**.

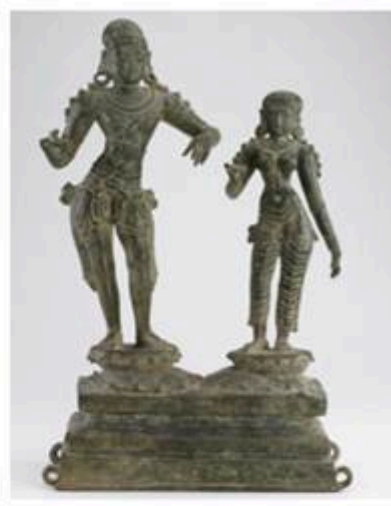


The identified antiquities include:

- **Shiva Nataraja (Chola period, circa 990 CE):** Originally belonged to the Sri Bhava Aushadesvara Temple in Thanjavur district and was photographed there in 1957.
- **Saint Sundarar with Paravai (16th century, Vijayanagara period):** Photographed in 1956 at the Shiva Temple in Veerasolapuram village, Tamil Nadu.
- **Somaskanda (Shiva and Uma) (12th century, Chola period):** Photographed in 1959 at the Visvanatha Temple in Alattur village, Tamil Nadu.



a) Shiva Nataraja



b) Saint Sundarar with Paravai



c) Somaskanda (Shiva and Uma)

The Somaskanda and Saint Sundarar with Paravai bronzes arrived in New Delhi on 12 May 2026, while the Shiva Nataraja will be repatriated following its scheduled display in the exhibition “*The Art of Knowing in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Himalayas.*”

As a goodwill gesture and in support of responsible museum engagement, the Government of India has agreed to a three-year loan arrangement for the Shiva Nataraja sculpture from 2025 to 2028, allowing audiences worldwide to understand its complete historical journey from origin to repatriation.

The Minister also informed that since 2014, India has successfully repatriated 666 antiquities from various countries, including 653 since 2014 alone, through sustained diplomatic, legal and institutional efforts led by the **Ministry of Culture, ASI, Indian Missions** abroad and enforcement agencies.

He further noted that recently, 657 art objects of Indian origin were handed over by US law enforcement agencies to the Embassy of India in the United States, and arrangements are underway for their transportation and verification by ASI experts.

The press interaction was attended by **Shri Vivek Aggarwal**, Secretary, Ministry of Culture; and other senior officials from National Museum, Archaeological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, distinguished guests, and members of the media.

The event reaffirmed India’s resolve to restore and preserve its stolen cultural heritage through international cooperation, ethical stewardship and institutional commitment.

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