

A UNIQUE ARDHANĀRĪ BRONZE FROM SRI LANKA

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The aim of this short article is to make some observations on a unique bronze icon, which is now being exhibited in the Colombo National Museum. This bronze statuette was unearthed at a depth of sixty centimeters from an excavation near the south western corner of the inner precincts of the Abhayagiri Vihāra at Anurādhapura.¹ The icon, which measures nineteen centimeters in height, is cast in the *cire perdue* or lost wax technique.

The image has four hands and two legs and represents a composite male and female figure, with the left half male and right half female. The lower part of the right half of the figure, (i.e. the female half), is clad in a *dhoti* and the single heavy breast is covered with a *kūcabandha* or breast band. The hair on this half of the head cascades down on to the shoulder. The ear is adorned with a *kunḍala*. The ornament around the neck is a small *mālā* or necklace with a pendant. The arms are adorned with bangles. The rear hand is raised and holds a *śaṅkha* or conch while the front hand is hanging down in the *lola hasto mudrā* or the hanging arm gesture. The face is somewhat oval in shape and exhibits a delicate half-smile.

In the left half of the figure, (i.e. the male half), the lower garment, probably a tiger-skin covers only half the thigh. The hair is formed in to a *jaṭā makuṭa*. The ear is adorned with a *kunḍala*. The rear left hand is raised and holds a cobra whose hood is extended forward from the shoulder. The front left hand is in *kataka mudrā*.

The figure as a whole is in a dancing posture, with the left leg slightly raised from the ground, and the weight of the body resting on the right leg. The upper part of the body is bent towards the left, while the lower part is considerably inclined to the right in a graceful and rhythmic manner.

There are at least two opinions regarding the identity of this statuette. Dr. Chandra Wickramagamage believes that the figure represents Ardhanaṛī-Naṭeśvara in the form of Hari-Hara.² Dr. A. H. Miranda is of the view that this figure can be identified as that of Avalokiteśvara and his *śaktī*.³

1. Chandra Wickramagamage, *Quarterly of the Cultural Triangle UNESCO-Sri Lanka Project*, Vol. 1, Dec. 1983.

2. Chandra Wickramagamage, A Unique Bronze of Ardhanaṛī-Naṭeśvara from Abhayagiri Vihāra, Anurādhapura. *Vidyodaya: Journal of Arts, Sciences and Letters*, Vol. 8, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 54-55.

3. A. H. Miranda, The Find at Abhayagiri. *Ceylon Daily News*, August 17, 1982.