

FOLK BRONZES OF WESTERN TAMILNADU



Dr. C. Maheswaran

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FOREWORD

While the study of classical bronzes occupies the forefront of academic-cum-professional platform, the study of folk bronzes (of course, tribal bronzes as well) finds only a secondary importance. This is evident with the availability of lesser number of works on folk (& tribal) bronzes, on the one hand and more number of available works on classical bronzes, on the other hand.

Dr. C. Maheswaran, Curator for Anthropology, Government Museum, Chennai have realized this aforementioned lacuna and that is why he has ventured into the study of folk bronzes of Western Tamilnadu during his curatorial service in that zone. His monograph entitled, "Folk Bronzes of Western Tamilnadu" is a worthy contribution in this direction and accordingly it is included as one of the Museum Publications of 2008-2009.

I hope that this monograph will be useful to the students and scholars interested in the folk bronzes, in general and folk bronzes of Western Tamilnadu, in particular.

Station : Chennai – 600 008
Date : 29-6-2009


(Dr. T.S. SRIDHAR, I.A.S.,)

PREFACE

'Bronze Casting' continues as one of the ancient rural industries of India since time immemorial. Keeping the tradition alive, in Rural Tamilnadu also, the metalsmiths are found to engage in casting bronze items of both sacred and secular domains-without any discrimination.

However, it is disheartening to note that the folk bronzes -- the craftefacts born out of the metal craft of the rural arena-form a neglected field of study.

While I had an opportunity to work in the Western Tamilnadu I get enthralled to observe that certain indigenous communities of that zone are in the cultural practice of utilizing anthropomorphic folk bronzes either as 'deities' or 'votive offerings'. Delving deep into the study of these folk bronzes have enabled us to unravel the cultural history of the respective indigenous communities. And the results of the study of these folk bronzes of Western Tamilnadu are compiled as a monograph entitled, "Folk Bronzes of Western Tamilnadu".

Viewing the significance of the subject matter and the study, this monograph is included in the publications of the Department of Museums for 2008-2009.

I hope that this will be welcomed by people of all walks of life, as a useful reference work.

Station : Chennai – 600 008
Date : 25-6-2009

(C. MAHESWARAN)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On Defining the 'Folk Bronzes'

The bronze artefacts which have been casted by folk artisans without adopting any codification of written iconographic and iconometric parameters to cater the needs of the folk people are termed as 'folk bronzes'¹. Such folk bronzes range from ritual objects such as bells, camphor burners, incense burners, goblets, figurines of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms to household utilitarian artefacts such as vessels, ladles, combs, nutcutters, toys.

1.2 Folk Bronze Tradition of India

The tradition of folk bronze casting in India is dated back to the period of Indus Valley Civilization and consequently the chronology wherein the bronze artefacts get emerged in the annals of human civilization is designated aptly as the "bronze age". Generally, the bronze casting by the lost wax process (technically known as "Cire-perdue") is dichotomized into 'solid casting' and 'hollow casting'².

Accordingly, the folk bronzes came into vogue in India since the dawn of the bronze age (i.e., circa 3500 B.C) to till date. The famous dancing girl of the Indus Valley Civilization (of circa 3500 B.C) and the curious mother goddess of the Megalithic Culture of Adichanallur, Tamilnadu (of circa 700 B.C) stand as testimonies to the art of casting of folk bronze in the Peninsular India. The exquisite and ornate bronze bowls from the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu speak a volume of the ancient metallurgical and artistic tradition of the Tamils. The Toda tribes of the Nilgiris are in the habit of presenting a thick and heavy plate of bronze to their daughters when they get married³. In Rural India, the household articles in the form of bronze vessels, figurines of deities in bronze are gifted to the brides by their mothers. And consequently, even after a passing of a long span of time and several stages of use the bronze artefacts are nurtured at least within the realm of rituals.

1.3 Artisans casting Folk Bronzes in India

The artisans who engage in casting of folk bronzes inhabit various pockets in and around India. In North India, they are known variedly as 'sithrias' (in Orissa), 'Ghantrars' (in West Bengal) and 'Ghoruas' (in Bastar). As nomadic ethnic groups they roam all over the states and cater their artistic service to the needy rural people. Contrary to this, in South India, especially in Tamilnadu the folk artisans who practice the bronze casting are settled caste group known as 'Aasaaris' and they inhabit usually in the vicinity of the rural people. They form one of the sects of

Kammaalars, viz., the Pancha Kammaalars' (i.e., Goldsmiths, Ironsmiths, Potters, Woodcarvers and Sculptors). In Western Tamilnadu, the tradition of Pancha Kammaalars is known as 'Pancha Kammaalar Marabu'⁴. The folk artisans known as the Aasaaris also take the fashioning of bronzes of anthropomorphic forms to be used as deified icons, votive offerings in the indigenous folk tradition. At present, these folk artisans engage in bronze casting by procuring used and worn out bronze utensils as scrape materials and convert them into molten alloy in crucibles and prepare lumps of bronze by pouring it into clay moulds. Such lumps of bronze are converted again as and when required into molten state and such molten alloy of bronze is in turn fabricated into requisite artefacts.

II. GEOGRAPHIC SETTINGS OF WESTERN TAMILNADU

2.0 General

The districts of Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Karur and Dindigul which constitute the Western region in Tamilnadu is referred to as the 'Western Tamilnadu'⁵. With its unifying traits apart from the differentiating traits, this region forms a distinctive culture area. As natural to a culture area, the Western Tamilnadu experiences socio-cultural pressures from its neighbouring states, viz., Karnataka and Kerala. Consequently, we could identify a 'Typical Culture Area' in its core and 'Marginal Culture Area' at its peripheries⁶. The districts of Western Tamilnadu such as Coimbatore, Erode are in geographical contiguity with Karnataka, on the one hand and Kerala, on the other hand while the districts of Western Tamilnadu such as Karur, Dindigul are in contiguity with Kerala alone. Contrary to this, whereas the Erode district forms the typical culture area the remaining districts such as Coimbatore, Thirupur, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul constitute the marginal culture areas.

2.1 Ethnic Bearings of the Geographical Settings

In consonance with its geographical settings, the Western Tamilnadu is inhabited by the indigenous ethnic groups (inclusive of both tribal and non-tribal groups) and ethnic groups of migrant settlers (mostly of non-tribal groups) as well from the adjoining districts.

III. ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTINGS OF WESTERN TAMILNADU

3.0 General

Western Tamilnadu is inhabited by indigenous ethnic groups of both tribal stock and non-tribal stock. Under the tribal stock, we find ethnic groups such as Irulars, Kadars, Mudavars, Malasars (in the Coimbatore District); Sholagars, Uralis, Lambadis, Malai Gounders / Malaiyalis (in the Erode District); Paliyars (in the Dindigul District) while under the non-tribal stocks we find the ethnic groups such as Kongu Vaettuvars, Kongu Kulaalars, Kongu Vaelaalars, Kongu Pallars, Kongu Paraiyars, Kongu Chakkiliyars, Kongu Vannaars, Kongu Naavidhars, Kongu Kaikkaolars, Kongu Vanniyars, Kongu Shaanaars, Kongu Chettiyaars⁷, Dhaevaangars (in almost all the Districts of Western Tamilnadu). On the contrary, the other sects of ethnic stock, viz., Brahmins, Konda Reddys and Marwaris also inhabit this region as the migrant settlers from other parts of Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and North India respectively, representing the non-indigenous ethnic groups.

3.1 Pancha Kammaalars - the Artisan Ethnic Stocks of Tamilnadu

The Kammaalars who are construed as the offsprings of Viswakarma, the celestial master craftsman form the artisan ethnic stocks of Tamilnadu.

Thattaar (Goldsmiths), Karumaar (Ironsmiths), Kulaalar (Potters), Thachchar (Carpenters) and Sthapathiyar (Sculptors) have been identified as the 'Pancha Kammaalars' (Lit. Pancha "five" and Kammaalar "artisans") in the Kongu Nadu, the erstwhile region comprising the present day districts of Western Tamilnadu. It is these Pancha Kammaalars who create, fashion and fulfill the requirements of the society at large.

3.2 Kongu Vaettuvars, Kongu Kulaalars & Kongu Vaelaalars : A Brief Sketch

Among the ethnic stocks of Western Tamilnadu the Kongu Vaettuvars (the then Hunters of the Kongu region) became the settled cultivators quite a long time back and the Kongu Kulaalars (the Potters) who were forced to settle in the region get acculturated with the local dominant community, viz., Kongu Vaelaalars (the settled Agriculturists) who played a major role in the district economy by nurturing it with their hard labour. Interestingly, all these three ethnic groups are identified to possess folk bronzes of anthropomorphic forms either as clan deities or as objects of votive offerings.

IV. FOLK BRONZE CASTINGS IN WESTERN TAMIL NADU

4.0 General

As cited earlier, the folk bronze casting in Western Tamil Nadu is carried out by one of the sects of 'Pancha Kammaalars'. The people of this region engage the traditional metalsmiths in their vicinity to prepare and supply the bronze artefacts to cater their needs. However, the bronze casting in Western Tamilnadu get restricted to the domain of religion due to the proliferation of the metalware industry as an organized sectors, on the one hand and introduction of cheaper metals of higher durability such as iron, steel, aluminium, on the other hand.

The folk bronzes which are continued to be casted till date include objects of ritual paraphernalia like lamps, bells, incense burners, camphor burners, goblets, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines. Now-a-days, even all these ritual artefacts (inclusive of the anthropomorphic figurines) are procured mostly from the nearby metal marts through direct purchase. Government emporiums such as Poombuhar showcase bronze artefacts of all sorts and hence the practice of approaching the local traditional artisans and placing orders before them get further diminished.

The folk craft is, none the less, distinguished by unique significance in technique, conception and aesthetic appeal. In folk bronze castings, form dominates the design but for technical reasons the gaps have to be left in the wax covering they employ many kinds of ornamentation. Sometimes, the simple and straight ornamentation in the form of network is employed to bridge such gaps. However, the smaller gaps are left without ornamentation of any kind. The only exception is in the case of making anthropomorphic forms where the wire-wound wax surface is made smooth⁹.

Lost - wax artefacts cannot be mass-produced for technical reasons to a boom in demand. Each core has to be made and produced individually upto the stage of casting.

4.1 Stages of Folk Bronze Castings in Western Tamil Nadu

The successive stages in the production of bronze images by the folk technique of lost beeswax substitutes in different areas include (i) Core building, (ii) Wax preparation, (iii) Channel building, (iv) Covering the wax, (v) Crucible channeling, (vi) Crucible fitting, (vii) Casting and (viii) Finishing¹⁰.

The details of the process are as follows:

4.1.1 Core Building

The core is made with a mixture of clean sand and fine clay collected from ant-hills and river side respectively. Cow or goat dung is soaked in water and then ground and mixed with clay in equal proportion. This mixture is so soft that only the simplest suggestions of a form can be achieved, laying it flat on a clear floor. Later, when it is dry, it is set up on a base. This first skeleton of the core is then covered with a layer of fine sandy clay. Subsequently, the dry core is scraped with potsherd. The scrapings are collected and mixed with water and the resulting paste is smeared over the core to serve as a polish.

4.1.2 Wax Preparation

Pure beeswax is melted over an open fire and strained through a fine cloth into a basin of cold water where it becomes solid. Great care is taken to keep the wax absolutely clean and free of impurities. Next, it is squeezed through a sieve and recovered in the form of wax wire, thick or thin, as desired. Each wax thread is worked singly around the core one after another, until the whole surface is covered. Then, the wax is smoothed to form a coating of uniform thickness. The working artisan sits in the sun to let the clay core and wax coating warm up uniformly. Over this evened surface, the artisan puts on the necessary elements of the finished design. Heads, arms and legs are always added in solid wax. Sometimes, perhaps as part of the decorative drapery, or even on the figure itself, an opening is made by cutting slits in the wax coating, thus exposing the inner core.

4.1.3 Channel Building

Subsequently, on the finished figure, channels are added to make freeway for the molten alloy. The channels are nothing but the wax rods sufficiently thick to facilitate easy flow of the molten, metal alloy. Two main channels are joined to the covered base.

4.1.4 Covering the Wax

Now, the whole model (excepting the tips of the wax channel) is covered with layer of a mixture of equal parts of clay, sand and cow or goat dung. A second layer is added if necessary, followed by four more layers of clay and mixture of paddy husk.

4.1.5 Crucible Channeling

The path from the wax model to the crucible is formed by two clay pipes. The feet of the pipes enclose the tips of the wax channel and the hands to join so as to form a single funnel. Then, two sticks of bamboo are sent through the pipes so that there is a straight, free passage from the mouth of the funnel to the wax tips. When this attachment is dry the bamboo sticks are removed.

4.1.6 Crucible Fitting

The wax used in the model is weighed before use. The metal alloy required for the casting is then worked out on the basis of a portion of 10 parts of metal alloy to 1 part of wax. Then, the scraps are placed in a crucible of terracotta which exactly fits into the funnel. The charged crucible is joined to the funnel and the joint is sealed with the mixture of clay and husk. Thus, the model and the crucible become a single unit, ready for fixing.

4.1.7 Casting

The furnace used by the folk artisans is wholly underground. The fire hole is a cylindrical one. Its bottom is connected with the surface by an air channel dug from about 1 metre away on the ground and joined to the bottom of the furnace. The inside of the furnace is smeared with cow or goat dung and made spotlessly clean. The mouth of the air channel is fixed to the bellows, made of cow hyde. A layer of wood charcoal covers the bottom of the furnace upon which the figure is kept upright, with the crucible below it. It is held in position by logs piled on top of one another in triangular formation around and over the figure. The logs at the bottom of the furnace are dry wood and serve for kindling whereas the logs at its upper arena are green and serve to reduce overheating which likely to cause cracks in the clay. The heating takes for two to three hours and during this period the fire is slowly and steadily fanned. The process of firing is watched closely and such monitoring is carried out by the artisans with great care. When the colour of the fumes given off by the mould is sulphur yellow the artisans lift the mould carefully from the fire and invert it so as to make the crucible on top and the figure directly below it. Then, the molten alloy is allowed to flow from the crucible along the clay pipe and the runner channels into the mould. In the mean time, the wax burnt out, leaving a free channel throughout the figure for the molten metal alloy to flow through. After complete pouring of the molten metal alloy the mould is kept aside. After half an hour water is sprinkled upon the mould for cooling. Then, the cooled down mould is broken and the figure casted is exposed.

4.1.8 Finishing

Finishing the casting of folk bronze begins after the casted figure is recovered from the mould and the runner channels are cut out. Then, the rough bits and slight bubbles on the figure are attended. That is, these unwanted elements are filed. After which the finished image is scoured meticulously at the river banks with clean sand, giving it a soft and polished look. In case of substantial defects, if any the artisan do not resort to welding, but restore the defective part(s). For example, if there is failure of casting in a part of a leg or an arm the artisan rebuild the missing part(s) in wax on the metal image and build channels as usual carefully seeing the fire is applied not to the metal part(s) but only to the mould of the missing part(s), resulting the recast part joined to the metal image as a whole.

V. FOLK BRONZES OF WESTERN TAMIL NADU: AN APPRAISAL

5.0 General

An attempt is made to present an account of the folk bronzes, especially the anthropomorphic folk bronzes that are in use among three indigenous caste groups of Western Tamil Nadu, viz., Kongu Vaettuvars, Kongu Kulaalars and Kongu Vaelaalars inhabiting the districts of Namakkal, Salem, Erode, Karur, Tirupur and Coimbatore.

5.1 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu : A General Description

It is not easy to indicate the sex in these folk bronzes as ornamentation and erogenic zones are shown markedly in both male and female anthropomorphic forms. Further, both in male and female figurines the entire contour of the body is shown in slender forms (with corresponding slender form of fore limbs and hind limbs). Even the ear lobes are depicted as extended structures in both male and female forms. Hence, either by the presence or absence of moustache and beard and or holding of flowers (in the case of female figurines) or weapons (in the case of male figurines) the sex is differentiated and identified. Interestingly, as most of the male forms are shown normally clean shaved of their moustache and beard, it is the depiction of holding of flowers or weapons that help us in identifying the sex of these folk bronzes.

The female figurines are shown usually holding bud of lotus or lily in their right hand, leaving the left hand to hang down loosely. Contrary to this practice, most of the male figurines are depicted holding usually a weapon in their right hand while the left hand is shown as raised fist. The weapons which the male anthropomorphic forms carry may vary from bow, sword, dagger, whip, club (of different contours). If shield is shown it is depicted in the left arm, in consonance of a sword in the right arm. If bow is depicted it is being shown held by both arms (where the right arm is shown holding its curvature beam while the left arm is shown holding the straight string of it), that too over the chest.

Quite interestingly, in a single and rare attestation, a female figurine is depicted holding towards its breast a baby in its left hand. And the baby, in this attestation, is shown holding the breast of its mother (either for support or for suckling).

Both male and female anthropomorphic forms are always shown in waist cloth, extending normally upto the feet. In most of the cases, the waist cloth of both male and female anthropomorphic forms are shown with fleets or folds (through lines of incisions).

The hinder portion of the figurines are shown as tubular or vase-like forms. The vase like hinder portion is conceived to have originated from the traditional belief that the deities emerge normally from their original abode of tree. The pedestals of these anthropomorphic folk bronzes are normally circular disc in shape and quite rarely raised structures (in the shape of inverted basket-like structures).

5.2 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu

The anthropomorphic folk bronzes identified from Kongu Vaettuvans, Kongu Kulaalans and Kongu Vaelaalans are studied in detail as follows:

5.2.1 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Kongu Vaettuvans

The Kongu Vaettuvans who originally hailed from Vazhavandhi of the Namakkal District while migrating to other parts of the Western Tamil Nadu have deposited their anthropomorphic clan deities of folk bronze figurines in an earthen urn, with a vow that they will assemble in the hamlet during 'Chitra Purnami' (i.e., Full moon day of Chithirai') annually to observe their cultural reminiscences. Accordingly, they gather at Vazhavandhi on every Chitra Purnami, observe worshipping their clan images and then leave for the hamlet of their present habitation (leaving their clan deities). The Kongu Vaettuvans who take care of those clan deities of anthropomorphic folk bronzes were honoured during this annual religious observances by others for their service to the community¹¹.

5.2.2 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Kongu Kulaalans

The Kongu Kulaalans who have been forced by their situation to migrate and settle at the erstwhile Kongu region¹² at present inhabit various parts of the Western Tamil Nadu such as 'Kanchikoil Nadu', 'Poondurai Nadu'. As the number of their folk deities are quite a few, they formulate an agreement among themselves to take in possession of them in cyclic order of 6 months per hamlet. It is interesting to note that the Kongu Kulaalans of each hamlet plan, fix and celebrate auspicious occasions such as puberty rites, marriage rites, pre-natal rites, within this span of time. Special worship is performed while handing over the clan deities to another hamlet. A communal feast is also offered to the party which comes to receive the clan deities in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes. Likewise, the second hamlet also observes special worship to these clan deities after installing them in their temple premises. A communal feast is offered as well to the party from the previous hamlet which accompanied these folk bronzes.

5.2.3 Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Kongu Vaelaalars

Folk bronzes of anthropomorphic form are also in vogue among the Kongu Vaelaalars. But, contrary to the practices of both Kongu Vaettuvars and Kongu Kulaalars, Kongu Vaelaalars submit anthropomorphic folk bronzes as votive offerings in fulfilling their vow for begetting children. For instance, the Kongu Vaelaalars of Veerapandi (in the Salem District) offer folk bronzes of male anthropomorphic form if they beget male offsprings and female anthropomorphic form, if they beget female offsprings¹³. The Kongu Vaelaalars of Mel Urandhai, near Karur are in the habit of offering male anthropomorphic folk bronzes, if they beget male offsprings by adhering a religious observance called 'kadum thavam' (Lit. "severe penance"). All these folk bronzes are kept in safe custody in 'saami veedu' (Lit "god's house"). It is reported that these anthropomorphic folk bronzes are taken into procession during 'padhinettaam perukku' (i.e., the 18th day of the Tamil month Aadi)¹⁴ annually to the nearby river banks and taken to the sanctum sanctorum of the Kaaroor Amman temple on auspicious days such as 'Karthikai Dheepam', 'Thai Pongal', 'Aadiperukku', 'Deepaavali'.

5.3 Significance of Anthropomorphic Folk Bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu

The anthropomorphic folk bronzes of Western Tamil Nadu discussed so far bear physiognomic depictions, culminating in vase-like hinder portions¹⁵. These folk bronzes are realized as significant objects of tangible cultural heritage on several grounds as detailed below:

- i. The anthropomorphic folk bronzes throw more light on the artistic and the aesthetic heritage of Western Tamil Nadu (the erstwhile 'Kongu Nadu'), as they are fashioned and crafted by one of the 'Pancha Kammaalars' of Kongu region, on the request of the indigenous Kongu communities like Kongu Vaettuvars, Kongu Kulaalars, Kongu Vaelaalars.
- ii. The Kongu Vaettuvars have undergone periodic migrations while their clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) remain sedentary. Contrary to this, among the Kongu Kulaalars the clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) have undergone cyclic migrations while the people remain in their respective hamlets. This gives us a clue that the Kongu Vaettuvars are native to the Kongu soil as their clan deities remained in one place) while the Kongu Kulaalars are settlers to it (as their clan deities undertake entourage)¹⁶.
- iii. It is interesting to note that the Kongu Kulaalars (the traditional potters of the Kongu region) who produce terracotta images of clan deities of other communities of the

region on their request are in the habit of placing orders to folk artisans for casting of folk bronzes for their own need. Enquiries revealed that the Kongu Kulaalars were in the habit of producing themselves only terracotta images of their clan deities for their own use in the yesteryears. As the occasional damages occurred to those terracotta images on entourage have caused sentimental outbreak, they shifted themselves to the practice of placing orders with metalsmiths to cast folk bronzes. In this juncture, it is of worth mentioning here of a folk bronze of the Kongu Kulaalars shown seated over an inverted pot¹⁷.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Interestingly, the bronzes that are in utility among the tribal people are also designated as 'folk bronzes' as they are crafted mostly by artisans belonging to non-tribal stock. However, we should bear in mind that the tribal people are also found at crafting of bronze icons, especially in the Central Indian belt.
- ² Yet another practice of bronze casting known as 'piece moulding' is also prevalent which has been carried out quite rarely and that too for preparing robust bronzes only. However, at the onset, the requisite pieces were fabricated out of 'solid casting' process.
- ³ Personal communication from the Toda activist Tmt. Vasamalli Pothili Kuttan, Karsh Mund, Udthagamandalam, The Nilgiris.
- ⁴ The Government Museum, Erode is in possession of a fragment of copper plate document revealing the 'Pancha Kammaalars' in action depicted beautifully over it.
- ⁵ The Western Tamilnadu constitutes the major portion of the erstwhile 'Kongu Nadu', one of the five major land divisions of ancient Thamizhagam.
- ⁶ For details on 'Typical Culture Area' and 'Marginal Culture Area' Cf. the **Dictionary of Anthropology** by E.B. Tylor.
- ⁷ Most of the ethnonyms under the non-tribal indigenous caste groups bear an attribute 'Kongu' in accordance to the land divisions, namely, the Kongu Nadu in which they inhabited for very many generations.
- ⁸ For instance, Anupparpalayam, a semi-urban hamlet within the Tirupur taluk of the Tirupur District of Western Tamilnadu is famous for manufacture of bronze and brass utensils.
- ⁹ 'Dokhra', the Central Indian folk bronze and brass artefacts vary contrastingly with their South Indian counterparts, by revealing the matted designs with obvious gaps in fabrication.
- ¹⁰ Even in the stages of casting of folk bronzes also, the Central India differs considerably with that of the South India.
- ¹¹ Steps have been taken to register these folk bronzes by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu under the Indian Antiquities, Monuments & Art Treasures Act for a long time. But, this venture could not have fructified as the Kongu Vaettuvvars of Vazhavandhi (of the Namakkal District) have not taken up even the requisite initiatives towards this direction.

- ¹² For details Cf. “Madhukkarai Pattayam of the Kongu Vaelaalar” that has been identified and published in the book entitled, **Kongu Naattu Samudhaaya Aavanangal** by Dr. S. Raju.
- ¹³ Out of the 36 such folk bronzes, the authorities of the Kaaroor Amman temple of Veerapandi (of the Salem District) have gifted a dozen specimens to the various museums in Erode, viz., the Government Museum, the Kalaimagal Kalvi Nilayam Archaeological Museum and the History Museum of the Vaelaalar College for Women.
- ¹⁴ Personal communication from Dr.S. Raju, Convener, Kongu Research Centre, Erode.
- ¹⁵ This reminds us the emerging of spirits / deities from their abode of tree, observe the cultural anthropologists.
- ¹⁶ Interestingly enough, such practice of entourage of folk deities have been identified among the Kongu Shaanaars as well, reports Thiru. M. Gunasekaran, Research Scholar, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History, Anaikkatti, Coimbatore.
- ¹⁷ This particular anthropomorphic folk bronze is identified from the Karur District by Dr. R. Poongundran, the then Registration Officer of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu.

VI. SUMMARY

The bronze icons which have been casted by folk artisans without adopting any codification of written iconographic and iconometric parameters to cater the needs of the folk people constitute the folk bronzes. They vary in range from secular objects to sacred objects. While the household utilitarian artefacts such as vessels, ladles, combs, nutcutters, toys, etc., form the secular objects the objects of ritual paraphernalia such as bells, camphor burners, incense burners, goblets, figurines of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms comprise the sacred objects.

In India, the folk bronzes are in vogue since the dawn of 'bronze age' (i.e., circa 3500 B.C.) till date. Both secular and sacred bronze artefacts are continued to be gifted to the brides by their mothers in tribal and rural belts throughout India (irrespective of the geographic barriers such as 'North', 'Central', 'South').

Casting of folk bronzes is carried out by traditional artisans of metal craft. And these folk artisans cater their artistic service to the needy people (both in tribal and rural belts).

The districts of Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul which constitute the Western region in Tamilnadu is referred to as the 'Western Tamilnadu'. With its unifying traits (apart from the differentiating traits) this region forms a distinctive culture area.

In consonance, with its geographical settings, the Western Tamilnadu is inhabited by the indigenous ethnic groups (of both tribal and non-tribal stocks) apart from the migrant settlers.

Among the ethnic stocks of Western Tamilnadu the Vaettuvars (the then hunters) of the erstwhile Kongu region, became settled cultivators quite a long time back and the Kongu Kulaalars (the potters) who were forced to settle in this region get acculturated with the local dominant community, viz., the Kongu Vaelaalars (the settled agriculturalists) who play a major role in the district economy. Interestingly, all these above cited three ethnic groups are identified to possess folk bronzes of anthropomorphic forms which were fabricated by local artisans, the 'Aasaaris', one of the 'Pancha Kammaalars'. While the Kongu Vaettuvars and Kongu Kulaalars possess them as their 'clan deities' the Kongu Vaelaalars are found to offer them as 'votive offerings' to their clan deities as and when they beget offsprings.

The above cited ethnic groups engage the traditional metalsmiths in their vicinity to prepare and supply the bronze artefacts cater to their needs. However, the bronze castings in Western Tamilnadu get restricted to the domain of religion due to the proliferation of the metalware industry as an organized sector, on the one hand and introduction of cheaper metals of relatively

of higher durability, on the other hand. The casting of the folk bronzes are carried out in successive stages of (i) Core building, (ii) Wax preparation, (iii) Channel building, (iv) Covering the wax, (v) Crucible channeling, (vi) Crucible fitting, (vii) Casting and (viii) Finishing.

The folk bronzes of Western Tamilnadu, especially the anthropomorphic forms are revealed as significant objects of tangible cultural heritage on several grounds as detailed below:

The Kongu Vaettuvars have undergone periodic migrations while their clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) remain sedentary. On the contrary, among the Kongu Kulaalars the clan deities (in the form of anthropomorphic folk bronzes) have undergone cyclic migrations while the people remain in their respective hamlets.

This gives us a clue that the Kongu Vaettuvars are native to the Kongu soil (as their clan deities remained in one place) while the Kongu Kulaalars are settlers to it (as their clan deities undertook entourage).

VII. CONCLUSION

According to Ruth Reeves (as quoted in Meera Mukherji, 1977:1), "So robust is the Indian Craftsmans's reluctance to take leave of their traditional craft materials, techniques and design roots that it might almost be called one of their most outstanding culture patterns. Perhaps this reason why India is virtually the only country planted firmly in a handicraft era reaching back over a time cycle of five millennia".

Sadhangu Kumar Ray (as quoted in Meera Mukherji, 1977:1) feels that the metal statues ... appear to have originated in... .. magic and beliefs, gradually. Further, he observes that the "religio-magical statues were actually constructed with cane and bamboo long before the beginning of the use of metal by their inventors. That is why, in these primitive statues the vivid mark of wicker work is conspicuously stamped. Hence, they looked at metal through the medium of cane and bamboo: As a result, the metal images of first stages were cast (in cire - perdue method) in complete imitation of cane reeds, upon a pedestal made in imitation of a bamboo stretcher with criss -cross reeds. For instance, in elephant image, the rigid legs reminds... of knotted bamboo stumps, the flat spirals of the ears of carefully coiled cane and even the head was curiously patterned on a winnowing fan made of split bamboo strips.

Accuracy, precision and an innate aesthetic feelings are the key notes of the folk metal artisans in casting the required folk metal images. A special attitude of mind is again conjured up in producing ritual objects. The thought that some particular objects will be used in worship for inducing devotion may be the driving force behind the minds of the artisans while they cast the ritual objects. Inevitably, this makes the artisan approach his work with a devotion similar to that of a worshipper.

It is needless to point out that the best works of the artisans are made when they are creatively inspired. In such moods they would concentrate upon a work which calls for undisturbed contemplation, as well as sustained technical effort born out of long practice. When they are urged by the sway of a creative rhythm, they work quite hard and produce a series of fascinating works.

The folk artisans have developed their inborn aesthetic sense and technique through a process of trial and error, success and failure over a long period of time. Instead of heedless experiments for "outstripping" tradition, it is always better to let the tradition orient itself to the changing environments.

In Western Tamilnadu although the folk bronzes in anthropomorphic forms are attested among the Kongu Vaettuvars, the Kongu Kulaalars and the Kongu Vaelaalars the practice of offering them as 'figurines for worship' or as 'figurines for votive offering' could help us to draw the differentiating line. And hence, from such differentiating line we may conjecture that the use of anthropomorphic folk bronzes as objects of votive offering among the Kongu Vaelaalars might have originated by adopting the actual practice of upkeeping of such folk bronzes as clan deities by other two Kongu communities, viz., the Kongu Vaettuvars and the Kongu Kulaalars.

Moreover, as the observance of offering of the folk bronzes of anthropomorphic forms are not attested among all sects of the Kongu Vaelaalars but only in Veerapandi (of the Salem District) and Mel Urandhai (of the Karur District), the conjecture gets strengthened further.

APPENDIX - I

CLAN DIVISIONS

OF

KONGU VAETTUVARS,

KONGU KULAALARS

&

KONGU VAELAALARS

A. CLAN DIVISIONS OF KONGU VAETTUVARS

The Kongu Vaettuvar Caste group is sub-divided into the following 191 clans:

1.	Andhi	Vaettuvar
2.	Arichandhira	Vaettuvar
3.	Andhuva	Vaettuvar
4.	Akkini	Vaettuvar
5.	Allaala	Vaettuvar
6.	Annal meela	Vaettuvar
7.	Amara	Vaettuvar
8.	Aalilai	Vaettuvar
9.	Aappa	Vaettuvar
10.	Aamai	Vaettuvar
11.	Irumbuli	Vaettuvar
12.	Ilanga	Vaettuvar
13.	Indhira	Vaettuvar
14.	Iangoor	Vaettuvar
15.	Urimaippadai	Vaettuvar
16.	Uyara	Vaettuvar
17.	Uliya	Vaettuvar
18.	Urumuga	Vaettuvar
19.	Umbi	Vaettuvar
20.	Udhira	Vaettuvar
21.	Urumu	Vaettuvar
22.	Uththira	Vaettuvar
23.	Uyir	Vaettuvar
24.	Unnaadh	Vaettuvar
25.	Ooraali	Vaettuvar
26.	Kanji	Vaettuvar
27.	Karadi	Vaettuvar
28.	Karaiya	Vaettuvar
29.	Karattu	Vaettuvar
30.	Kaththirikalana	Vaettuvar
31.	Kadhukaali	Vaettuvar
32.	Karpoora	Vaettuvar
33.	Kadambuli	Vaettuvar
34.	Karippadai	Vaettuvar
35.	Kadhippa	Vaettuvar
36.	Kalanga	Vaettuvar

37.	Kavundi	Vaettuvar
38.	Karumbunidha	Vaettuvar
39.	Karuvanda	Vaettuvar
40.	Kanni	Vaettuvar
41.	Kaadai	Vaettuvar
42.	Kaasa	Vaettuvar
43.	Kaari	Vaettuvar
44.	Kaattu	Vaettuvar
45.	Kaakkaavadi	Vaettuvar
46.	Kaarai	Vaettuvar
47.	Kaazhaya	Vaettuvar
48.	Kizhanga	Vaettuvar
49.	Keerai	Vaettuvar
50.	Kaariya	Vaettuvar
51.	Kudumi	Vaettuvar
52.	Keerandhai	Vaettuvar
53.	Kunnaadi	Vaettuvar
54.	Kurungaadai	Vaettuvar
55.	Kuluva	Vaettuvar
56.	Kurukkal	Vaettuvar
57.	Kurundi	Vaettuvar
58.	Kurumba	Vaettuvar
59.	Koochchandhai	Vaettuvar
60.	Kooramba	Vaettuvar
61.	Kolli	Vaettuvar
62.	Kottaappuli	Vaettuvar
63.	Kodumudi	Vaettuvar
64.	Kodumba	Vaettuvar
65.	Kodumbuli	Vaettuvar
66.	Konrai	Vaettuvar
67.	Kaomuga	Vaettuvar
68.	Kaodhanda	Vaettuvar
69.	Kaomaali	Vaettuvar
70.	Kaudhaari	Vaettuvar
71.	Sarakku	Vaettuvar
72.	Salangai	Vaettuvar
73.	Sarkkarai	Vaettuvar
74.	Saakkali	Vaettuvar
75.	Saadhi	Vaettuvar
76.	Saandhappadai	Vaettuvar

77.	Silai	Vaettuvar
78.	Siruththalai	Vaettuvar
79.	Surandai	Vaettuvar
80.	Surattai	Vaettuvar
81.	Sulli	Vaettuvar
82.	Sundai	Vaettuvar
83.	Sumba	Vaettuvar
84.	Senganna	Vaettuvar
85.	Saera	Vaettuvar
86.	Saedhaari	Vaettuvar
87.	Sorna	Vaettuvar
88.	Sottai	Vaettuvar
89.	Sithsa	Vaettuvar
90.	Siththa	Vaettuvar
91.	Thazhumba	Vaettuvar
92.	Thaali	Vaettuvar
93.	Thitta	Vaettuvar
94.	Thoonga	Vaettuvar
95.	Thoorai	Vaettuvar
96.	Thoondai	Vaettuvar
97.	Thumbai	Vaettuvar
98.	Thurkkai	Vaettuvar
99.	Thennilai	Vaettuvar
100.	Thoratti	Vaettuvar
101.	Thoyyal	Vaettuvar
102.	Thaerai	Vaettuvar
103.	Nanja	Vaettuvar
104.	Nachchuzhi	Vaettuvar
105.	Nanjai	Vaettuvar
106.	Nariya	Vaettuvar
107.	Naramba	Vaettuvar
108.	Nakka	Vaettuvar
109.	Natchaththira	Vaettuvar
110.	Naara	Vaettuvar
111.	Naadha	Vaettuvar
112.	Nulamba	Vaettuvar
113.	Nudhara	Vaettuvar
114.	Padharai	Vaettuvar
115.	Panaiya	Vaettuvar
116.	Pattaali	Vaettuvar

117.	Pasappi	Vaettuvar
118.	Parippadai	Vaettuvar
119.	Panna	Vaettuvar
120.	Pannaadai	Vaettuvar
121.	Paraippadai	Vaettuvar
122.	Parattai	Vaettuvar
123.	Palla	Vaettuvar
124.	Pambai	Vaettuvar
125.	Paruththi	Vaettuvar
126.	Palagai	Vaettuvar
127.	Paravai	Vaettuvar
128.	Parappula	Vaettuvar
129.	Paththira	Vaettuvar
130.	Paandiya	Vaettuvar
131.	Paasarai	Vaettuvar
132.	Paala	Vaettuvar
133.	Piramba	Vaettuvar
134.	Peechcha	Vaettuvar
135.	Punnaadi	Vaettuvar
136.	Pudhara	Vaettuvar
137.	Putpa	Vaettuvar
138.	Punna	Vaettuvar
139.	Puli	Vaettuvar
140.	Poochchandhai	Vaettuvar
141.	Poovaaniya	Vaettuvar
142.	Pullai	Vaettuvar
143.	Pooluva	Vaettuvar
144.	Poozhai	Vaettuvar
145.	Paereenjai	Vaettuvar
146.	Peyara	Vaettuvar
147.	Perunaal	Vaettuvar
148.	Ponna	Vaettuvar
149.	Pauthram	Vaettuvar
150.	Maniya	Vaettuvar
151.	Malaiya	Vaettuvar
152.	Mandhira	Vaettuvar
153.	Mayila	Vaettuvar
154.	Maadandhai	Vaettuvar
155.	Maachchaadi	Vaettuvar
156.	Maandhappadai	Vaettuvar

157.	Maana	Vaettuvar
158.	Murattu	Vaettuvar
159.	Mugizha	Vaettuvar
160.	Mummudi	Vaettuvar
161.	Muzhakka	Vaettuvar
162.	Mulai	Vaettuvar
163.	Munnai	Vaettuvar
164.	Moolai	Vaettuvar
165.	Moola	Vaettuvar
166.	Moyara	Vaettuvar
167.	Maolai	Vaettuvar
168.	Maokkaali	Vaettuvar
169.	Minna	Vaettuvar
170.	Minukka	Vaettuvar
171.	Meela	Vaettuvar
172.	Raasi	Vaettuvar
173.	Varaaga	Vaettuvar
174.	Vaduga	Vaettuvar
175.	Vanni	Vaettuvar
176.	Vaagai	Vaettuvar
177.	Visayamangala	Vaettuvar
178.	Vilakku	Vaettuvar
179.	Villi	Vaettuvar
180.	Viragu	Vaettuvar
181.	Viraiya	Vaettuvar
182.	Veera	Vaettuvar
183.	Velaiya	Vaettuvar
184.	Vengachchi	Vaettuvar
185.	Vengaanji	Vaettuvar
186.	Verpa	Vaettuvar
187.	Vellai	Vaettuvar
188.	Vael	Vaettuvar
189.	Vaendhai	Vaettuvar
190.	Vaedhari	Vaettuvar
191.	Jeyavaendha	Vaettuvar

B. CLAN DIVISIONS OF KONGU KULAALARS

The Kongu Kulaalar Caste group is sub-divided into the following 32 clans:

1.	Vyaasa	rishi	gaothram
2.	Kaasiba	rishi	gaothram
3.	Kalaikkaottu	maha rishi	gaothram
4.	Kauthama	rishi	gaothram
5.	Maarkanda	rishi	gaothram
6.	Kalina	rishi	gaothram
7.	Kaushika	rishi	gaothram
8.	Evuna	rishi	gaothram
9.	Kaarkkaya	rishi	gaothram
10.	Raoma	rishi	gaothram
11.	Marishi	rishi	gaothram
12.	Naaradha	rishi	gaothram
13.	Sugappirama	rishi	gaothram
14.	Paothaga	rishi	gaothram
15.	Manuvakkiyaana	rishi	gaothram
16.	Brigu	rishi	gaothram
17.	Angraama	rishi	gaothram
18.	Savunaka	rishi	gaothram
19.	Paraasa	rishi	gaothram
20.	Puluka	rishi	gaothram
21.	Kuchchaga	rishi	gaothram
22.	Aththi	rishi	gaothram
23.	Sugapruma	rishi	gaothram
24.	Varuga	rishi	gaothram
25.	Thadheedh:	rishi	gaothram
26.	Vashista	rishi	gaothram
27.	Pathanjaliya	rishi	gaothram
28.	Madhanga	rishi	gaothram
29.	Bharathuthuvaasa	rishi	gaothram
30.	Vaalmeega	rishi	gaothram
31.	Kanaga	rishi	gaothram
32.	Vyaakrama	rishi	gaothram

C. CLAN DIVISIONS OF KONGU VAELAALARS

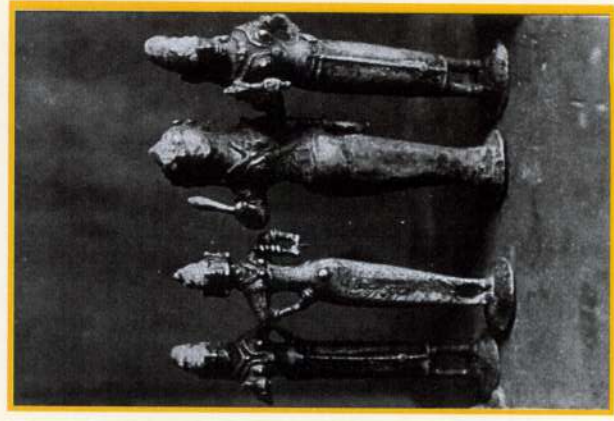
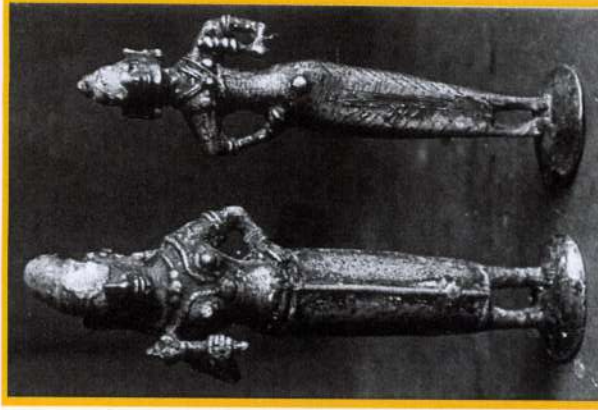
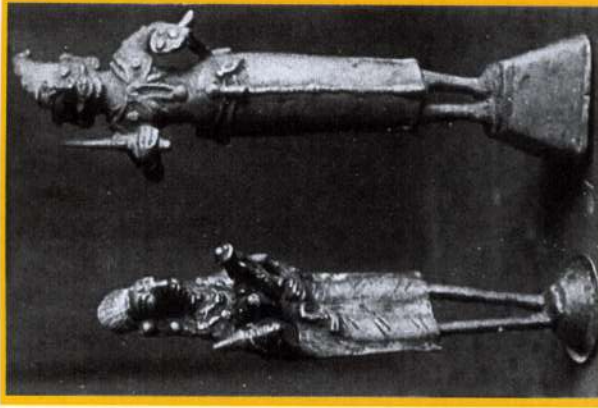
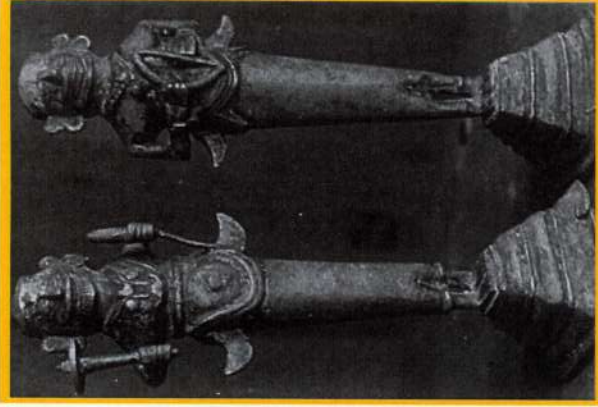
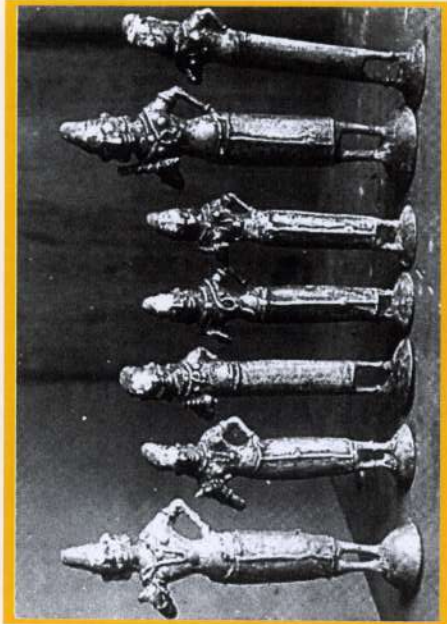
The Kongu Vaelaalar Caste group is sub-divided into the following 35 clans:

1.	Andhuvan	koottam
2.	Aavan	koottam
3.	Aadavar	koottam
4.	Aandhai	koottam
5.	Ennai	koottam
6.	Olukkar	koottam
7.	Oodhaalan	koottam
8.	Kannan	koottam
9.	Kanavaalan	koottam
10.	Kaadai	koottam
11.	Keerai	koottam
12.	Kulayar	koottam
13.	Koorai	koottam
14.	Chemban	koottam
15.	Chemmoodhan	koottam
16.	Chellan	koottam
17.	Chevvaayar	koottam
18.	Chaeran	koottam
19.	Thananjeyan	koottam
20.	Thazhinji	koottam
21.	Thooran	koottam
22.	Dhaevaendhira	koottam
23.	Thoodai	koottam
24.	Neerinniyar	koottam
25.	Pannai	koottam
26.	Pathriyar	koottam
27.	Pavazhar	koottam
28.	Padhuman	koottam
29.	Paandiyan	koottam
30.	Pillaa	koottam
31.	Pandhai	koottam
32.	Periyannan	koottam
33.	Perungudiyaan	koottam
34.	Ponnan	koottam
35.	Poddiyan	koottam

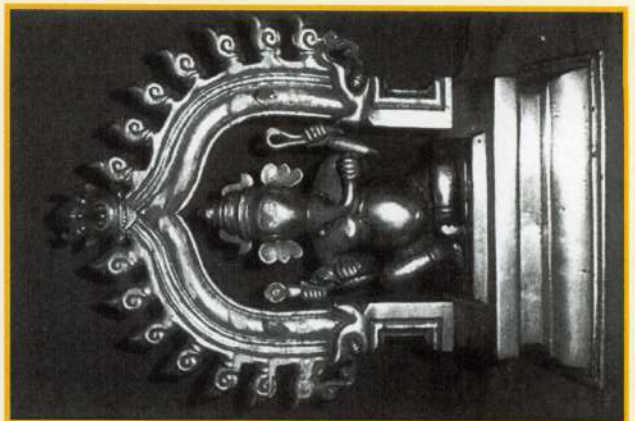
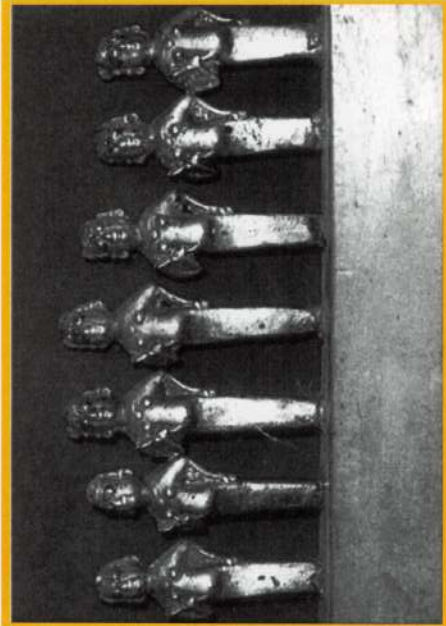
APPENDIX - II

SELECT PHOTOGRAPHS
OF
ANTHROPOMORPHIC FOLK BRONZES
STUDIED FROM
WESTERN TAMIL NADU

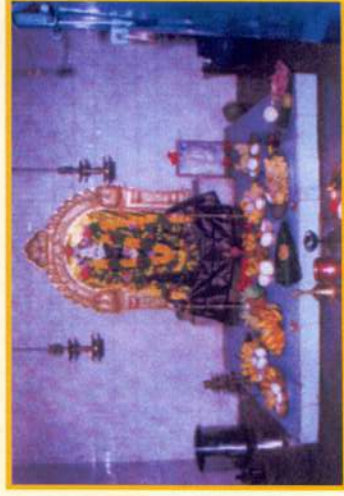
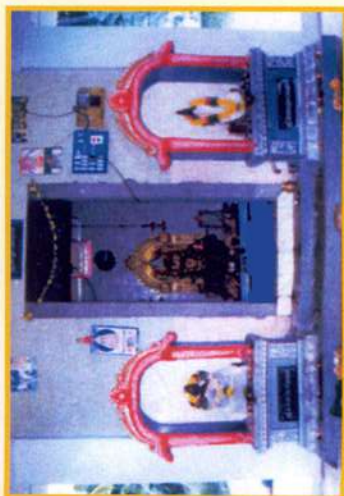
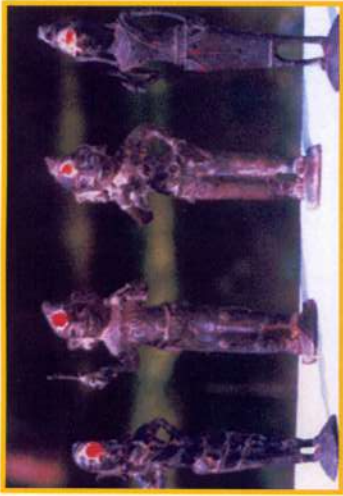
A. ANTHROPOMORPHIC FOLK BRONZES OF KONGU VEATTUVARS



B. ANTHROPOMORPHIC FOLK BRONZES OF KONGU KULAALARS



C. ANTHROPOMORPHIC FOLK BRONZES OF KONGU VEALAALARS



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