



# Shiva as Chandrashekharamurti

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Shiva as Chandrashekharamurti

**Born:** 1100 c.

**Object Type:** Figure

**Materials:** Bronze

**Measurements:** h. 314 x w. 124 x d. 117 mm

**Accession Number:** 757

**Historic Period:** 12th century

**Production Place:** Asia, India

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Shiva is one of the three major deities of the Hindu religion and is the god most commonly worshipped in south India. He is the most powerful of the gods and can act as a creator as well as a destroyer. This dual role is especially well illustrated in the Shiva *Nataraj* ("dancing" Shiva) where he is shown performing a dance of both creation and destruction in a cosmic circle. Shiva's wife, Parvati, can also be known as Durga. His sons are Ganesh, the Elephant God, and the war-like Kartikeya. Like Shiva, all major Hindu gods have consorts, children, many related minor gods and associated animals. They can also have different personifications and names. Thus the pantheon of Hindu gods can seem very confusing, but through them the Hindu communicates with a single underlying truth or reality.

This statue of Shiva is typical of those that are full of symbols to help the worshipper. The description *Chandrashekharamurti* refers to the crescent moon in Shiva's head-dress, very worn, but just visible. This symbolises Shiva's ability to "wax and wane" in and out of the Cosmos. The rest of the head-dress is also worn but it is possible to make out a garland of skulls at the base (as a reminder that death comes to us all). His matted hair piled up with flower decoration makes up the rest of the head-dress. His ear-rings do not match because they represent male and female aspects. The third eye in the centre of the forehead, opened to destroy evil, serves to identify all Shiva statues. He wears a necklace, girdle and armlets as well as a *chakra*, or halo, on the back of his head. Across the chest can be seen the sacred thread worn by all Brahmin Hindus. It consists of three white cotton strings, each of nine twisted strands. This Shiva has four arms, each carrying a significant symbol. The upper right hand carries an axe (signifying destruction), the upper left hand an antelope (signifying man's unsteady mind which darts to and fro like an antelope in the forest, and which must be brought under control). The lower right hand is in the *abhaya mudra* offering reassurance or protection, while the lower left hand points down in *chin mudra*, symbolising realisation of the Absolute. The statue stands on a throne made of inverted lotus petals, signifying perfect wisdom. The cobras

twining round his arms signify cosmic energy. In Hindu mythology the lotus and the snake were the first living forms to emerge from the primeval waters at creation.

Description taken from the 'Art From The Indian Sub-Continent In The Sainsbury Centre' catalogue by Margaret A. Willey (Sainsbury Centre, UEA, 1995).

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