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KURKI HAR, GAYA AND BODHGAYA

EARLY SCULPTURE OF BENGAL

BUDDHIST SHRINES IN INDIA

GLIMPSES OF MUGHAL ARCHITECTURE

A CENTURY OF HISTORIC PRINTS

S. K. SARASWATI

A

SURVEY

OF

INDIAN SCULPTURE

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“मातापित्रोर्गुरुणां च पुण्ययशोऽभिवृद्धये”

संस्कृत-विद्यापीठ-मुद्रा

१११

## PREFACE

There are several books on Indian sculpture, but they deal mostly with its philosophy or iconography, rather than with its history. My esteemed teacher, Dr. Stella Kramrisch, was the first to study Indian sculpture in relation to time and space; but her book (*Indian Sculpture*, Calcutta, 1933), splendid as it is in many ways, is not perhaps meant for the general reader. A history of Indian sculpture, setting forth in clear and comprehensible terms the various trends and tendencies that went to constitute Indian plastic tradition, was felt to be a necessity, and the present work is an attempt in that direction. It brings within its scope a vast field of study, and special emphasis is given to the origins and development of the basic strains and characteristics of Indian plastic art in a historical perspective. It has been my endeavour to interpret the changes of form through the ages as a logical, orderly and organic evolution. How far I have succeeded in this attempt, I leave to the judgment of discerning readers.

*Śodhyo'yaṁ karuṇāvadbhiḥ kṛitibhir-me pariśramaḥ ।*

The extent of the present work is, however, limited in relation to the wide panorama of the subject, and it has not been possible to discuss in detail the history of mediaeval Indian sculpture which, with its many regional ramifications each having manifold strains, offers itself a vast field of study. I have indicated here only the general tenor of mediaeval sculpture in its principal expressions. If opportunities permit, it is intended to issue a companion volume dealing with the history of mediaeval Indian sculpture in all its details.

The book was sent to the press nearly three years ago. My indifferent health, coupled with my deputation



to Nepal as Leader of the Survey of Manuscript Libraries, and certain technical difficulties in the printing of the plates hampered the progress of the work. The delay afforded me an opportunity to consult the two most outstanding publications of the recent years, one by Stella Kramrisch and the other by Heinrich Zimmer.

I am grateful to my esteemed colleagues in the University of Calcutta for their kind interest in this work. My former teacher, Dr. J. N. Banerjea, Carmichael Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient Indian History & Culture, and Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray, Vagisvari Professor of Indian Art, have helped me with many valuable suggestions. Sri Nalini Nath Das Gupta, one of my distinguished colleagues, has kindly gone through the proofs with his characteristic carefulness and discernment. Sri Bratindra Nath Mukherji and Sri Dipak Sen, two of my pupils, have prepared the Index. To all of them I feel deeply indebted for the kind troubles they took for the work.

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, and the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, have been kind enough to lend me a large number of blocks from their respective collections. I express my sincere gratitude to the authorities of these institutions for their sympathies and courtesies in this respect.

Lastly, I have to thank my publisher, Sri K. L. Mukhopadhyay, who, inspite of all inconveniences due to delay in publication, has shown eagerness and courtesy throughout, and my friend, Sri Satyendra Chandra Kar, who has been of immense help to me in getting the book through the press.

University College of Arts,  
Calcutta.

S. K. SARASWATI

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### Abbreviations

- ASR. *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Reports.*  
 Ep. Ind. *Epigraphia Indica.*  
 JAS. *Journal of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta.*  
 JASB. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.*  
 JISOA. *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta.*  
 JPASB. *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.*  
 MASI. *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.*

TEXT



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## I

## BEGINNINGS

(The discovery of the Indus civilisations has carried back the antiquity of artistic activities in India to a very remote past. The Harappa civilisation, which, according to the recently accepted chronology, belongs to a period not earlier than the second half of the third millennium B.C., has bequeathed to us a number of sculptures in different materials and numerous seals with figures engraved upon them.) The style of these objects is already mature indicating plastic practices farther back. Small peasant communities are known to have grown up in Baluchistan and Sind as far back as the fourth millennium B.C. and explorations have succeeded in revealing a sequence of peasant cultures in secluded spots throughout the area.<sup>1</sup> In the earlier stages whatever artistic instinct existed among these isolated communities manifested itself in the creation of polychrome potteries with painted designs of a certain strength and simplicity characteristic of primitive workmanship. It is unfortunate that no remains of plastic arts have come to light in the sites of the earlier peasant cultures. About the first half of the third millennium B.C. two significant cultures are known to have flourished respectively in North and South Baluchistan. The remains of the northern culture are mostly found along the valley of the river Zhob after which the culture has been named. The southern culture is designated after the type site of Kulli in the Makran coast. To some extent these two cultures appear to coincide with each other in certain phases of their



development and to overlap in their latest phases with the Harappa culture of the Indus valley. (It is in the terracotta figurines of the Zhob and the Kulli cultures that we recognise the earliest efforts at plastic activities in India)

The Zhob as well as the Kulli sites have furnished a fair number of terracotta figurines of animals and women. The Kulli sites<sup>2</sup> are particularly prolific in this respect. Not a little interest attaches to the figurines of the humped bull of the Kulli sites because of the appearance of painted vertical stripes across the body and short transverse strokes down the shoulders and fore-legs. The eyes, again, are painted in and the roots of the horns and the neck are characteristically adorned by stripes. These painted adornments recall the treatment of the animal figurines on the Nundara pots and may indicate some religious association. The fact that large numbers of them have been found within restricted areas at such sites as Kulli, Shahi-tump, Mehi-damb, etc. suggests that they might have been offerings massed at a shrine rather than mere toys. The uniformity of the type may indicate that they represent the Indian Brahmani bull which appears to have been an object of popular reverence even in those remote days, as in the present. The figurines vary from two to four inches in length and in spite of a rather coarse treatment and stumpy legs, a naturalistic modelling is evident in the other features. A prominent emphasis is given to the representation of the hump which adds to the forceful delineation of the figure as a whole.

Among the animal figurines those of the bull are the most plentiful, and, in all probability, they had a religious association. Figurines obviously serving as children's toys appear also among the objects of the Kulli culture.



Mention should particularly be made of a bull figurine from Mehi-damb with a hole pierced through each of the stumpy legs and through the hump. Evidently, terracotta wheels, such as have been found in other sites, were fitted to axles passed through the leg holes, the hump hole being intended for the string to pull the figure along. Occasionally, bird whistles have been found, but the appearance of such objects might have been due to contacts with the Harappa culture.

The terracotta female figurines from the Kulli sites, though few in number in comparison with the bull figurines, are also of great interest in the history of Indian sculpture. The female figurines bear no traces of paint. They exemplify a primitive technique in clay modelling the form being reduced to a simple description of the main volumes corresponding to the principal parts of the body. Whatever modelling is there is done by the fingers which pinch up or press down the clay according to the requirements of the form. Such features as the eyes, hair, navel, the breasts, etc. are fashioned by separate pellets or strips of clay applied to the modelled form. Ornaments and head-dresses—and there is an elaborate array of them—are also in the *appliqué* technique. It is possible that the artist found it convenient to work out such details in the flat. The figurines are almost all of the same type, differing only in the details of the jewellery and in the head-dresses. The bodies usually end at the waists in splayed-out flat bottoms. The faces are coarsely modelled and are characterised by extremely narrow foreheads, pinched-up noses and pierced circular pellets for the eyes. In no case is the mouth indicated. The breasts are usually covered by jewellery; where shown uncovered, they are indicated by applied pellets. The hands are usually a-kimbo; in one instance only they are shown raised above the breasts. There is, again, another specimen from the type site of Kulli where the



figure is shown with two infants held in the arms. In spite of the sketchy treatment of the features, each figure has an elaborate hair style and a profusion of jewellery which are done entirely in *appliqué*. The hair is usually coiled up over the head with a fillet round the forehead, the greater mass being looped behind into a heavy *chignon* resting against the nape of the neck. Occasionally, again, the hair falls over the shoulders in front in two broad plaits. The ears appear to be adorned with conical ornaments and round the neck are usually seen elaborate necklaces with oval or circular pendants. Sometimes there is a high collar of beads. The arms are adorned with armlets and bangles.

The nature and purpose of such female figurines are, at present, obscure. The identical and archaic treatment of the face and the body and a conventional position of the hands, on either the waist or the breasts, may suggest some ceremonial or ritualistic connection. Moreover, the flat, spread-out bases of these figurines indicate that they were intended to be set up on some kind of stand or platform. It has been suggested on these considerations that these figurines were meant to represent a female divinity connected with the fertility or mother cult of the ancient times. At the type site of Kulli there has been found a specimen with babies held in the arms and this may lend some support to the above suggestion.

We now turn to the animal figurines from the Zhob sites<sup>3</sup> where, too, representations of the humped bull predominate. They are not, however, as plentiful as in the Kulli sites, nor do they bear any traces of paint. A fragment representing the fore-part of a horse from Periano-ghundai is of particular interest as the animal appears to have been unknown in the other cultures. It may be mentioned in this connection that horse bones have been found in an earlier stratum at Rana-ghundai thereby indicating that the animal



was known in the region of the Zhob valley from rather earlier times. The bull figurines are, more or less, of the same type as at Kulli. They are, however, of a sturdier build and in certain instances one may recognise efforts at a greater modelling of the features implying a mature naturalistic sense. This is particularly noticeable in the figure of a bull from Periano-ghundai<sup>4</sup>, a well-preserved specimen, except for the missing head, measuring a little over eight inches from the front to the back. The feet, instead of being stumpy in shape, are more naturalistically modelled and the sturdy body gives an impression of immense vigour and lordly bearing. Compared with the Kulli figurines this representation shows a far greater artistic experience and may be recognised as one of the most successful animal portraits that have come down from the prehistoric past. As with the Kulli animals, some ritualistic association of the Zhob figurines may also be presumed.

The female figurines from the Zhob valley indicate certain developments in the technique of the production of such terracottas. They are mostly fragmentary, but from a few better-preserved ones it appears that they all ended below the waists in flat-bottomed pedestals. The hands are unfortunately missing in the specimens that have been discovered up till now and we are not in a position to ascertain how they were disposed. The modelling in each case is, no doubt, coarse and summary, but a developed plastic diction is noticeable in the treatment of the face as well of the torso. This can be found in a few terracotta figurines discovered at Periano-ghundai, Kaudani and Moghul-ghundai. An attempt towards a more naturalistic delineation of the face is recognised in the indication of the mouth by an open slit just above the chin. The face is further characterised by a high, smooth forehead, an owl-beak nose and deep eyeholes, which



were probably intended for insertion separately of pellets to serve as pupils. The torso, again, exhibits an advanced modelling in the representation of the full rounded breasts with the nipples indicated. A more naturalistic representation of the volumes implies a developed plastic sense on the part of the Zhob artists. The Zhob figurines, like the Kulli ones, show elaborate head-dresses and jewellery, all separately executed and then applied. The head is usually hooded with a coif or a scarf which falls down the shoulders. A necklace in several strings adorns the neck, the lowest one having, in some cases, a circular pendant. The figurines are of a standard type and, like the Kulli figurines, possibly represent a divinity connected with the primitive fertility or mother goddess. Because of the large eye-sockets, which endow the face with the grim and severe aspect of a grinning skull, some scholars are inclined to recognise in these figurines a terrific embodiment of the primitive mother goddess<sup>5</sup>. It is possible, as already observed, that these sockets were intended for separate insertion of pupils. The practice of filling up the eye-sockets with separate inlays forming the pupils was common in the sculptures of the Harappa civilisation and it appears that a similar technique was also employed in the treatment of the eyes of the terracotta female figurines of the Zhob culture. The appearance of a grinning skull, now presented by a Zhob female figurine, thus appears to have been due to the loss of the applied pupils and the present fearful expression was, in all probability, far from the original intention of the modeller.

In primitive technique and with sketchy modelling these figurines from the Kulli and the Zhob sites represent the earliest extant remains of plastic art in India. In spite of their inadequate technique they suggest a certain naivette and vigour usually characteristic of a primitive art. A certain



stylisation is also evident not only in the treatment of the physiognomy of the figures, but also in the treatment of the hair and the ornaments. The extremely limited scope of the primitive technique might have been responsible for such a stylisation. In the painted cattle figurines from the Kulli sites a schematic treatment is also noticeable in the regular arrangement of the stripes. It is possible that in these painted cattle figurines we have sculptured replicas of the animal figurines on the painted potteries. The Kulli and the Zhob cultures, at least in certain phases of their developments, seem to have coincided with each other, and certain contacts between the two cultures, though unknown in the present state of our knowledge, might not have been quite impossible. The Zhob figurines indicate an advance in plastic diction as is evidenced in the attempt to render more naturalistic forms. The terracotta figurines of the Zhob valley hence seem to imply a sequence in plastic style. In their latest phases the Kulli and the Zhob cultures appear to overlap with the Harappa culture of the Indus valley, roughly belonging to the second half of the third millennium B. C. Among the sites of the Harappa culture there has been found a large variety of sculptural objects and in these the early plastic tradition, as evidenced in the Kulli and the Zhob figurines, may be found to have been followed. The Harappa culture had significant contacts with the Kulli culture on one hand and with the Zhob on the other, and a sequence of plastic tradition may apparently be recognised.

(The Harappa culture<sup>6</sup> indicates a change from the hills to the plains, from the little and isolated peasant communities to the large and highly organised urban communities and from agricultural economy to a commercial economy.) The culture itself covers a vast region connected by a great river



system forming a natural highway of communication. Remains of the Harappa settlements stretch from the Makran coast to Kathiawar and northwards to the Himalayan foot hills. Among the forty settlements that have been known up till now, some represented small villages, others small towns while about three hundred and fifty miles apart were situated two large cities, Harappa on the left bank of the river Ravi in the Punjab and Mohenjodaro on the right bank of the river Indus in Sind. What impresses the observer most is the complete uniformity in the various objects over this vast area—in the pottery vessels, in the houses built of burnt bricks, in the stamp seals with similar designs and the same script, and in the standard system of weights. This absolute uniformity implies the existence of a strong and centralised authority regulating the life and activities of the people over this extensive region.

(Among the achievements of the Harappa civilisation may be mentioned a plastic art that concerned itself largely with the representation of forms in relief as well as in the round. The materials are terracotta, stone and bronze, and in the latter two the achievements are found to be of a developed and stylised order, far ahead of the tradition presented by the terracotta figurines.) The contrast presented by the two traditions—one in terracotta and the other in stone and bronze—offers a rather perplexing problem in view of the apparent contemporaneity of the objects. It is possible that the former represents a popular plastic idiom of the commoner people, perhaps following the terracotta tradition of the peasant cultures of Kulli and Zhob, while the stone and bronze sculptures represent an art of the higher section of the people, already sophisticated because of their elevated position in the society. The distinction in the art idioms was, in all probability, due to class distinctions which appear



to have emerged as a result of the predominant commercial economy that provided the mainstay of this civilisation.

(Although primitive in appearance, the terracotta female figurines—and these are by far the most numerous—are, as a rule, carefully done, the attention, however, being given mainly to detail and finish. Like the figurines of the peasant cultures they are done entirely by the hand by pinching up or pressing down the clay by thumb and fingers according to the needs of the form. Eyes are also made of two separate pellets and the mouth, again, of a small strip applied to the face with a deep straight indentation to indicate the lips. The breasts and the navel, wherever shown, are also by separate pellets or by cones. Usually, the figurines are furnished with elaborate head-dresses and ornaments, all executed in separate strips and pellets and then fixed at their appropriate positions. Sometimes, such strips or pellets are slightly touched up for a more realistic effect. Many of the figurines are found to wear a distinctive head-dress of a curious fan-like shape, rising from the back of the head and sometimes held in position by a fillet round the forehead. The figurines, as a rule, are burdened with jewellery consisting of elaborate neck collars, long chains, armlets, bangles, anklets, earrings, etc. The figures are nude except for a short girdle round the waist fastened by some kind of clasp. Sometimes, the girdle is shown swathed round the body several times. The technique employed in the production of the figures and their dresses and ornaments recalls the one already noticed on the Kulli and the Zhob figurines with which the figurines of the Harappa culture may be said to have been closely related.) There is, however, a greater elaboration of the head-dresses and hair styles, as well as of the ornaments. Moreover, the Harappa figurines do not represent mere busts with splayed-out flat bottoms below the waists, as the Kulli and the Zhob



figurines do. (The Harappa figurines were modelled complete with legs and hands which, again, show a variety of positions, standing as well as seated) In the figurines of the peasant cultures the hands are usually attached to the body, whether they rest on the hips or on the breasts. In the Harappa figurines, however, they are comparatively detached and either hang down along the sides, or are spread out, or carry something with one or both the hands. In these respects the Harappa figurines suggest a greater freedom of movement indicating a stylistic advance on the figurines of the peasant cultures, though the religious association of both appears to be the same. Secular figures, such as female kneading dough, nursing mother, crawling child, etc., also appear among the Harappa figurines.

(Among the large number of terracotta human figurines found in the sites of the Harappa culture we have a small percentage of male representations which are significantly unknown in the peasant cultures. The male figurines are more numerous at the type site of Harappa where they form about one-third of the total finds. At other sites they are extremely rare and this comparative scarcity of the male representations indicates that they were not very popular with the clay modellers) The few examples that have been found have been explained as productions by children to serve as toys. (The male figurines are commonly found seated with the arms either on or round the knees, or joined in front in an attitude of devotion) Sometimes, one of the legs is found doubled underneath, and in rare instances we have figures squatting on haunches. Very rarely they are shown standing, a pose usually characteristic of the female figurines. Except in a few instances they are shown entirely nude and the dress, wherever represented, consists of a scanty girdle fastened round the waist. A few figures are also found to



wear a short beard under the chin. (The technique employed in the production of such figurines is the same as that used in the case of the female figurines)

(Terracotta animal figurines are also found in large numbers in the sites of the Harappa culture. In these figurines there may be recognised a greater naturalistic modelling, though the forms retain those of the specimens found in the peasant cultures. Apart from the bull, a variety of animals may be found represented in Harappa art) We may cite, for instance, the figures of the monkey, the ram, the goat, the rhinoceros, the elephant, the buffalo, the pig, etc. (Animals are also found represented in faience, engraved on steatite seals, etc. and the fauna found depicted in Harappa art may be said to be varied and extensive) They are particularly helpful in reconstructing the climatic conditions of the region in those ancient days. It will be possible for us to take note only of the typical and significant representations having a bearing on the subject under discussion.

Among the bull figurines the short-horned species occurs most frequently and is usually represented with the head lowered, as if ready for a charge. Sometimes, it is shown with garlands round the neck, occasionally with a bell suspended from it. The dewlap, again, is characteristically represented by ridges or by separate strips touched up. Next in popularity comes the humped or the Brahmani bull represented in a form with which we are already familiar in the peasant cultures. In Harappa art they are more naturalistically modelled with an exaggeration of the hump and the dewlap. Of the representations of other animals, the monkey, the ram and the rhinoceros figure prominently. Mention should particularly be made of the figure of a monkey from the type site of Harappa, admirably posed as climbing a tree with hands and feet firmly gripping the branch. The hair is



indicated by incised lines and the tail is shown raised up with the end turned down. Here we have a naturalistic representation of the monkey which can hardly be expected in those early times. The ram appears more commonly in faience, though its delineation in terracotta is not entirely unknown. The representation is usually naturalistic with the fleece indicated by a series of nail-markings. The goat with the twisted horn and shaggy beard is also known. The rhinoceros appears to have been a favourite subject with the Harappa modellers and we have a number of specimens from the roughly executed figurines to the naturalistic representations of the animal. The crude and roughly made ones hardly appear to be more than children's handiworks. We have also more successful representations in which the wrinkled hide of the animal is naturalistically delineated by hatching or by pitting, sometimes with strips of clay applied around the withers and hind quarters in simulation of the folds in the tough hide. Various kinds of birds and reptiles are also found among the terracotta figurines of the Harappa culture.

Among the terracotta objects of the Harappa culture there may also be recognised delightful toys. A few of these are of exceptional interest. Mention should be made, for instance, of animals with movable heads that waggle with a string and monkeys with zigzag perforations intended for sliding down a stick. Along with the former class may also be mentioned toy animals mounted on wheels, a very common motif among the objects of the Harappa culture and not unlike those occasionally found in the Kulli sites. Toy carts, including one in bronze with a canopy above, have also been commonly found in the Harappa sites. They are similar in shape to the vehicles used in the present day and judging from their number they appear to have been very popular with the children of the Harappa civilisation. An unusual



design is also occasionally found in the curved shape of the cart-frame. Fragmentary models of box-like chariots, quite distinct from the primitive cart shape, have also been sometimes found. A bronze model of such a chariot has also been recovered from the type site of Harappa. No doubt, they were replicas of the carts and chariots actually in use in the Harappa civilisation. One other terracotta object, also associated with a kind of vehicle, has been recovered from Mohenjodaro and is of particular interest. It represents a toy chariot of which the forepart consists of the head of a horned ram and the rest, the body and tail of a bird. The hole across the sides of the body was evidently intended for the axle with a pair of wheels and the hole below the neck for a string to pull it along. This type of bird chariot is also known in later times and several examples have been found during the excavations at Basarh in the Muzaffarpur district in North Bihar. They have been found in the Gupta level and the type is closely similar to the bird chariot from the Harappa culture. Apparently, the type survived down to the Gupta times, and it is not impossible that the representations of the bird chariot in Chinese art of the Han period were derived from India. Among other toy objects mention should be made also of bird whistles, not unlike those referred to in connection with the Kulli figurines, which are of frequent occurrence in the Harappa sites.

(A brief mention should also be made of the technique of production of the terracotta figurines, human as well as animal. Entirely modelled by the hand in the process, already in evidence in the peasant cultures mentioned beforehand, the figurines are all solidly built, except in the few bigger animal figurines which are known to have been worked over an inner core of straw. The straw was consumed in the firing leaving the inside hollow.) The small



masks, of which several have been found, appear to have been pressed from moulds, as the thinness of the objects would indicate. (After firing, the figurines, as a rule, were covered with a red wash, light as well as deep, and sometimes with a deep and polished red slip that stood the weathering remarkably.)

(Apart from terracotta, the Harappa civilisation has also bequeathed to us several remarkable pieces of sculpture in the round, in stone as well as in bronze. As artistic achievements, these sculptures stand out from the terracotta figurines and appear to imply a different plastic expression.) These sculptures, again, can be divided into two significant groups distinguished by two different kinds of feeling for form. In the first group belong the two stone statuettes from Harappa and the bronze female figurine from Mohenjodaro. In the second group fall the limestone and steatite statues from Mohenjodaro. Archaeological evidence regarding the exact strata of the findspots of the Harappa statuettes has only been vaguely recorded. The Mohenjodaro sculptures have, however, been found in convincing archaeological contexts which leave no doubt about their belonging to the period of the Harappa civilisation. Certain significant identities between the two groups of sculptures are also evident in the use of inlay and separate attachment of ornaments, unknown in the Indian art of the historic periods. On these considerations, it seems more than probable that the two groups, in spite of their different feelings, belonged to the same period and were both products of the Harappa civilisation.

(Of the two Harappa statuettes, the male torso in red stone represents a well-known piece of sculpture. The figure is shown completely nude. The head and the hands are missing and the legs from the thighs broken away. The head and the hands, made of separate pieces, were fitted



through the socket-holes down the neck and the shoulders. Two large circular depressions in front of the shoulders, apparently hollowed out by a tubular drill, were perhaps intended for inlay of circular ornaments, the tiny holes at the nipples being also meant for similar inlays. Though represented in a strictly frontal pose, the figure with its massive portliness is conceived in full three-dimensional view which implies a mature knowledge in the rendering of human form.) The execution is imbued with a simple naturalism, refined and truthful particularly in the modelling of the fleshy parts. In the front the shoulders are shown slightly thrown back and the treatment of the prominent and distended abdomen surprisingly corresponds to that of Indian sculptures of Kushāṇa date. The treatment of the back with its subtle curves and sensitive rendering of volumes is no less impressive. (The vivacity of modelling is apparent in every feature and also through the entire figure where all the parts seem to be organically and dynamically related with one another by a gliding linearism, in the front, at the back and also at the sides. Such a successful and naturalistic representation of the human figure could hardly be expected in those early days.)

(The other Harappa statuette represents a dancing figure and is executed in a dark grey slate. The head and the hands, separately affixed through the socket-holes in the neck and the shoulders, are missing, and the legs (the left including a part of the thigh) broken away.) From the portion surviving it appears that the right leg rested on the ground and the left was drawn high, while the body from the waist upwards was turned to the left. Both the arms also appear to have been thrown out to the left in the swing of the dance. From the abnormal thickness of the neck Marshall infers that the figure might have been three-headed, though he was aware of the possibility that the head might have been that of an



animal.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the case, the pose suggests one of a rhythmic dance, not violent, but graceful and poised. Compared to the previous figure the modelling is, to a certain extent, summary ; yet the supple and gliding contours, together with the sensitive rendering of the volumes and three-dimensional treatment, endow the figure with a naturalism approximating that of the red stone torso.

(The bronze statuette of a young girl from Mohenjodaro, in spite of its rough workmanship, may also be classed with the two Harappa statuettes. The figurine is in the round and, except for the feet, is in excellent preservation. The legs are bent with the left slightly forward. The right hand is placed on the right hip in what Marshall<sup>8</sup> describes as a "half-impudent posture," and the left hangs down in front. The hair is tucked at the back in a heavy plait that rests against the right shoulder. Among the ornaments, the most remarkable are the coils of bangles that adorn the left arm from below the arm-pit down to the wrist, as against the two armlets and the two bangles round the right upper arm and the wrist respectively.) In details of hair-dressing and ornaments Stuart Piggot recognises in this bronze figurine "a sophisticated version of the female type known in the rough, schematised pottery figurines of the Kulli culture".<sup>9</sup> The disproportionately long arms and legs are perhaps due to the peculiar technique of working in metal. The urge to draw out the metal into long wires might have given such a curious shape to the arms and the legs. In spite of the slenderness of the limbs, the figurine is not without a certain vigour. (The treatment of the back, the hips, the buttocks and the legs is conspicuous for a naturalism in modelling and alertness in movement.) This bronze statuette appears to be inspired hence by the same feelings and concepts which we recognise in the two Harappa statuettes.



As opposed to the above three figures, appears a group of stone sculptures from Mohenjodaro which are of a different class altogether. These sculptures are more formal in appearance and seem to belong to a hieratic tradition. Unfortunately, all the sculptures are fragmentary, a few weathered beyond recognition. They were all executed in comparatively soft stones, usually limestone and alabaster, and one in steatite. The steatite piece is the best preserved of them all and presents remarkable features. (It represents the head and bust of a male figure, draped in an elaborate shawl-like garment passing round the left shoulder and under the right arm leaving the right shoulder bare. The shawl bears all over a repetitive trefoil design filled up with a red pigment. The figure wears a short beard and a closely cut moustache indicated by perfunctory vertical incisions. The hair, also similarly indicated, is parted in the middle and brushed back. A plain fillet with a circular clasp in front surrounds the head and is tied at the back in a knot with the loose ends hanging down. The nose is straight and well-formed, but unfortunately the tip with the nostrils is damaged. The mouth is full with thick and fleshy lips and the ears are of the shape of double shells, each with a deep hole in the centre. The forehead is extremely low and the eyes are elongated and shown half-closed with the upper lids slightly drooping.) They were filled with shell inlay which is still intact in one of the eyes. (In the downward glance of the eyes directed to the tip of the nose scholars recognise an attitude of concentration in *yoga* (meditation) and a corresponding fixation of the mind.) The general finish is exceptionally good, but there is nothing in it of the naturalism of the former group, the whole body being rigidly compressed into garments.

Of a more or less similar conception is the alabaster figure of a seated male, also from Mohenjodaro, although the



execution is rather coarse and summary. The head is unfortunately missing. Here, too, we find a certain abstraction of the body draped in a kilt-like garment, but a more developed sense of modelling is evident in the treatment of the bare right arm, shoulder and chest, and in the soft texture of the flesh which the artist has been able to impart to the bare parts of the body. The kilt-like garment appears to have been the popular dress of the Harappa people and is evidenced in a few other sculptures, also from Mohenjodaro.

Among the sculptures from Mohenjodaro mention should be made of several detached heads in limestone which present striking dissimilarities in facial types, suggesting some attempts perhaps at portrait likenesses. But the examples are so weathered that it is difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion on this point. Of these, the most remarkable is the one with prominent cheek bones, a fairly large nose, a wide forehead and a medium-sized mouth with a thin upper lip and a slightly fleshy lower one. The head shows a closely cropped beard, indicated by deep incisions, and a wavy hair with chevron-wise bands and tucked behind in a knot at the back. A string-like fillet round the forehead keeps the knot in position; the upper part of the knot consists of three separate twists of hair marked by oblique depressions. A small round-headed hair pin is seen on the left-hand side of the lower knot. This elaborate dressing of the hair appears to have been a popular style and may be recognised, at least, in one other limestone head, unfortunately much corroded. The face is imbued with soft and sensitive touches to which the curious saucer-shaped ears present a marked contrast.

In spite of their apparent differences in the conception of the human form these two groups of statuaries are significant as already anticipating the basic characteristics of Indian sculpture of the later ages. The strong naturalistic sense,



exhibited by the former group, along with their plastic volumes and gliding movements, represent inalienable components of Indian sculptural art throughout the whole range of its history. The naturalism and anatomical truthfulness, particularly of the two Harappa statuettes, appear to be startling and some scholars might be inclined to class them with the best products of the classical art of Greece. But, as Marshall describes, "the set of the figures is characteristically Indian".<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they imply qualities without which Indian sculpture of the subsequent periods can hardly be thought of. The strange identity of the red stone torso from Harappa with the sculptures of Kushāṇa date has already been noted. The slender limbs, the attenuated waist and the tilted hips of the bronze female figurine from Mohenjodaro are closely associated with the ideal of female beauty, as evidenced in subsequent Indian literature and art. The second group, particularly the steatite sculpture from Mohenjodaro, has also a significant link with subsequent Indian art in the abstraction of its form and in the treatment of the half-closed eyes suggesting a glance in *yoga* concentration. Far distant though, the sculptures of the Harappa civilisation appear to have been the ancestors of the multitudes of Indian images and figures carved or moulded millenniums later.

The Harappa modellers also showed considerable skill in modelling animal figures in the round in faience and in metal, and their innate plastic sense is evidenced in the bronze carving of a buffalo and the faience model of a monkey, both from Mohenjodaro.

(A discussion of Harappa art must remain incomplete without a reference to the numerous seal engravings which are the most characteristic among the objects of the Harappa civilisation) (They are made of steatite, and two main types are recognised—the first usually square, with carved designs

diverging from one centre ; the many-headed divinity and the standing figures with long arms so that they touch the knees ; the overhigh heads of goddesses which anticipates the *ushni-sha*, i.e., the excrescence on the head of Buddha images ; the mode of sitting ; the part played by the Nāga (serpent) ; and the alignment of repeated figures, as well as the freely symmetrical arrangement of single figures on the surface of the relief."<sup>11</sup>

(Plastic art in India, so far as extant remains go, begins with the peasant cultures of Kulli and Zhob and attains a maturity in the urban Harappa culture, where the activity is found to be more extensive and varied. In spite of different kinds of feelings and expressions, the Harappa art may be said to have already established a conception of art form the fundamentals of which persist through the entire range of Indian sculpture) The trends and tendencies, already established, outlasted the struggles of many novel civilisations and remained active as long as Indian sculpture itself. It has been rightly said hence that the plastic art of the Indus civilisation contains an accumulated store of the tradition ; but there it did not come to an end. As the subsequent phases would show, it persisted further and underlay Indian sculpture as long as it remained creative.<sup>12</sup>

### References

1. For a systematic description of these cultures reference may be made to Stuart Piggott's *Prehistoric India* (1950), chapter IV.
2. An account of the exploration in the sites of the Kulli culture is given in Aurel Stein's *An archaeological tour in Gedrosia* (MASI, No. 43 : 1931).
3. For an account of the Zhob sites and their objects reference may be made to Aurel Stein's *An archaeological tour in Waziristan and Northern Baluchistan* (MASI, No. 37 : 1929).



4. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
5. Stuart Piggott, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 127.
6. Besides numerous articles, a voluminous literature dealing with the various aspects of this civilisation is available. The following may be consulted with profit :
  - (i) John Marshall (ed.), *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilisation* (1931). 3 vols.
  - (ii) E. J. H. Mackay, *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro* (1937). 2 vols.
  - (iii) M. S. Vats, *Excavations at Harappa* (1940). 2 vols.
  - (iv) E. J. H. Mackay, *Chanhudaro Excavations, 1935-36* (1943).
  - (v) E. J. H. Mackay, *Indus Civilisation* (1936) ; second edition (1948) under the title *Early Indus Civilisations*.
  - (vi) N. G. Majumdar, *Explorations in Sind* (MASI, No. 48 : 1934)
  - (vii) Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India* (1950).
7. John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilisation*, Vol. 1. p. 46.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
9. Stuart Piggott, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 187.
10. John Marshall, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 46.
11. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian sculpture* (1934), p. 6.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 7.



## II

### MAURYAN SCULPTURE

The Harappa civilisation, in spite of its being a literate one, has usually been designated as prehistoric on account of the still-undeciphered script of the seal inscriptions. The remarkable uniformity of the material aspects of this civilisation impresses an observer forcefully when he fails to detect any change in the content of the culture during the nine recorded phases of the rebuilding of the city of Mohenjodaro covering a period of seven hundred years or more. The civilisation comes into view in a mature form, though behind it lay the peasant cultures of Baluchistan as the excavations at the type site of Harappa have revealed. In this mature form it is found to be essentially Indian with significant parallels in later times. The end of this civilisation still remains enigmatic, though the suggestion that the Aryan migration might have been ultimately responsible for the final extinction of the civilisation may have some truth in it.

In view of the significant parallels of the Harappa civilisation, including its art forms and motifs, in the historic period, it would appear surprising that a big hiatus should separate this prehistoric phase of Indian art from the earliest historic phase known to us. This period of hiatus saw the consolidation of the Aryans and their gradual absorption with the earlier inhabitants, among which the descendants of the Harappa people represented apparently a predominant section. It is more than possible that a continuity was maintained, though the evidences of such a continuity are still to be discovered through proper explorations. It is gratifying to



note that the recent archaeological policy of the Government of India tends to that direction. Clay modelling represents extensively an art of the people, and the enormous mass of of terracotta figurines, discovered throughout India unfortunately without any definite archaeological context, when properly assorted with the evidence of stratigraphy, may possibly help to fill up the gap between the prehistoric and the historic phases of Indian art history.

(Indian history assumes a more or less continuous character with the sixth century B.C. which saw great ferment in the intellectual and political life of India. The rise of Jainism and Buddhism introduced new ideas that were soon to take deep roots in the Indian soil. Almost simultaneously, we may trace also the growth of the sectarian cults that underlay Hinduism of the later days. Politically, the period marked the emergence of bigger states out of the tribal political organisations of the earlier times. Inspired by ideals of universal suzerainty these states began a contest for empire-building which ultimately culminated in the establishment of the hegemony of Magadha over practically the whole of India.) The coming of the Mauryas represents a definite landmark. They fulfilled the aspirations and ideals of their predecessors on the Magadha throne by unifying the greater part of India under one sceptre and by establishing a strong centralised administration. The avalanche of foreign aggressions was swept away and further menace to it successfully checked. A spirit of self-consciousness and self-reliance was the result. With the expanding of the horizon of political vision the intellectual outlook was correspondingly widened, and it is not surprising that Aśoka could dream of a new world order based on non-violence and universal well-being. (The new outlook, political, intellectual and psychological, proved to be of immense importance for the development of



the formative arts of the country. It is significant that the earliest known phase of historic Indian sculpture begins with the Mauryas.)

Leaving aside the wealth of materials of the Indus civilisations, we have no specimens of Indian sculpture that can be definitely ascribed to the pre-Maurya epoch. But literary references and art objects belonging to later epochs appear to indicate the existence of plastic practices in such impermanent materials as wood, clay, ivory, etc. even in this early age. Such materials sufficed to meet the then social conditions and religious beliefs of the people. No remains, however, are extant because of the perishable nature of the materials used. It is only terracotta, or burnt clay, that is expected to survive and a stratigraphical allocation of numerous terracotta objects, usually found in ancient sites, may help us to determine the history of Indian sculpture from the end of the Harappa period to the coming of the Mauryas.

(With the advent of the Mauryas and consequent new outlook on life and culture stone came to be employed as the medium par excellence for sculptural expression in India, and with this change we reach a sure ground from which to start our enquiry into the condition of the plastic arts of the country during the historic periods. (But the fact remains that though stone as a medium of plastic expression was new, it was handled with such perfect skill and efficiency as to presuppose a long anterior practice in stone-cutting.) The few stone sculptures of the Harappa civilisation indicate, no doubt, the existence of such a tradition in days long gone by. But even the artistic practice and tradition, of which we have any knowledge in the pre-Mauryan epoch, cannot, by themselves, explain the ease and mastery with which stone of huge and heavy dimensions was handled by the artists, and this is a fact that still remains a mystery.



(The theory that the use of the more permanent medium of stone was due to foreign inspiration and that works were carried out under the tutelage of foreign masters, if not by foreign artists themselves, may not be entirely outside the range of possibility. It is a well-known fact that the first three Mauryan emperors, Chandragupta, Bindusāra and Aśoka, maintained friendly relations with the Hellenic West, particularly with the court of the great Seleucid kings who may be described as successors of Alexander the Great and of the Achaemenids of Iran as well. This may indicate the source of extraneous influences, and an adaptation of Achaemenid models has been recognised in the Edicts of Aśoka and in the remains of the Mauryan palace in the imperial city of Pāṭaliputra.)

(The objects of art definitely belonging to the Mauryan period are the columns, popularly known as the *lāṭs*, bearing the inscriptions of Aśoka. They are tall, tapering monoliths of polished sandstone with sculptured capitals, rising to an average height of about 40 feet from the base to the summit.) They stand isolated in sacred sites as self-contained units in open space. Unrelated to any larger architectural composition and for the rather mature and distinct quality of their plastic conception, as evidenced in the richly decorated capitals, these *lāṭs* should preferably be included within the scope of sculpture, rather than of architecture.

(A fair number of such *lāṭs* has been discovered, some in perfect state, others fragmentary. A clear idea of the form and composition of a Mauryan *lāṭ* may be had from the one standing at Lauriya Nandangarh in North Bihar (Fig. 23). They are fashioned out of grey Chunar sandstone and stand directly on the ground without any masonry platform or base, having been kept in position by being simply buried in the earth. The shaft, plain and circular in section, has a slight



taper upwards and is chiselled out of a single block of stone, the capital, surmounting it, being of another piece and fixed to the top of the shaft by means of a copper dowel. The capital is divided into three sections, namely a bell-shaped reversed lotus (commonly known as the 'Persepolitan bell'), surmounted by an abacus that supports an animal sculpture in the round. The entire pillar is distinguished by a precision of modelling and bears on the finished surface a highly lustrous polish the composition of which is still a matter for enquiry.) Several mouldings of variable designs are usually introduced to render the transition from the shaft to the capital easy and graceful.

These columns or *lāṭṣ*, though alike in general form and composition, vary in treatment of detail, particularly in that of the capital. In this connection it may not be out of place to refer to the possibility that some of these pillars might have been standing from before the days of Aśoka. This is suggested by the Rupnath and Sassaram Edicts and Pillar Edict No. VII where Aśoka says that rescripts of the Law of Piety should be engraved on rocks and on stone Pillars (*silāthuva*),<sup>1</sup> wherever such pillars might have been standing. It is not impossible, hence, that the idea of the Edict Pillars was first suggested to Aśoka by some pre-existing pillars, which he also thought of utilising. Indeed, a close examination of some of these pillars clearly indicates them as having been apart from the more well-known Edict Columns. Such is possibly the case with the Basarh-Bakhira pillar. The heavy and stunted dimensions, the rather ill-fitting square abacus on a circular shaft, the apparently crude and clumsy execution of the crowning lion, suggest it as belonging to a more primitive stage in the composition of such pillars when the happy integration between the different components had not yet been achieved. The column at Sankisa has also an



archaic appearance on account of the heavy and plump shape of the crowning elephant and its rather rough workmanship. The abacus has changed from the square to the round shape and is decorated with rosettes and honey-suckle in a low relief with a border ornament at the lower edge which is particularly reminiscent of wooden prototypes. It is significant that the Basarh-Bakhira pillar, at least the portion above ground, bears no inscription. Such is also likely the case with the columns at Sankisa and at Salempur. At the latter place there has been found a fragmentary capital with four addorsed bulls,<sup>2</sup> which from its brilliant polish might possibly be classed in the same group as those under examination. Each of these not only has a more archaic look, but also appears to belong to a lower level of artistic conception, when compared to the Edict-bearing Columns. Their existence, even in the pre-Aśoka days, may not hence be beyond the range of possibility. Again, some of the animals forming the crowning members of the capitals are not particularly associated with Buddhism alone. The Lauriya Araraj column, which, in all probability, was crowned by the figure of Garuḍa<sup>3</sup>, may be regarded to have had a distinct early Brahmanical association. It is not impossible, hence, to regard at least some of the so-called Aśoka pillars as but translations in stone of the primitive animal standards, and if we are not sure about the other Edict-bearing pillars, the Araraj column is, at least, one instance of a pre-existing stone pillar on which the Edicts had been engraved by the orders of Aśoka. Of the Pillar Edicts, that at Rummindei was set up in the twentieth year after the coronation of Aśoka, and others still later. But the differences in the chronology and the style of such pillars, whether already existing or newly executed, do not appear to have been very wide.



The relationship of these Edict Pillars with those of Persepolis has often been stressed. The influence of West Asiatic factors in the art and culture of the period cannot be seriously denied in view of the close contact existing between India and other West Asiatic countries. But it is rather difficult to regard the Mauryan pillars simply as imitations, or adaptations, of the Achaemenian prototypes. There are tangible differences between the two in their respective functions, as well as in their conceptions and styles. Not belonging to any architectural composition, the function of the Mauryan pillars is totally different—a difference that is also reflected in their design and form. The Mauryan pillar, unlike the Persepolitan, does not stand on any base, nor does it exhibit the channelling or fluting which is invariably characteristic of the latter. Moreover, the shaft of the Mauryan pillar is, without exception, monolithic; the Achaemenian invariably composed of separate segments of stone aggregated one above the other. Again, in technique, the Mauryan pillar partakes of the character of wood-carver's or carpenter's work, the Achaemenian, that of a mason. Finally, the design as well as the shape of the capitals are different, due, no doubt, to the new conception of the Mauryan pillars as standing free in space. The supposed resemblance of the so-called 'bell' in the Indian example with that of the Persepolitan is merely superficial. It should be remembered also that the member, with which the analogy is drawn, usually appears in the Persepolitan column as the base, and not as the capital, as in the Indian pillar. The double curves of the Indian member surmounted by the free-standing animal sculptures exemplify rather a new order of capital which is peculiar to India alone. The real affinities with the West are recognised in the use of such decorative motifs as the honeysuckle, the acanthus, the 'knop and flower' pattern, etc.



But in view of the wide divergences in form, design and conception a borrowing from the Persepolitan pillar design cannot truly explain the Indo-Persian affinities. India had long been a part of the West Asiatic culture complex and the key to the problem lies, as Coomaraswamy observes, in "inheritance of common artistic traditions"<sup>4</sup>. Standing independently, the Indian pillars produce an independent effect, simple and harmonious in conception as well as in execution, with a feeling of strength and dignity that remind one of "fresh and elemental strength"<sup>5</sup>.

(The animal figures in the round surmounting the capitals have also come in for much discussion. Their modelling, approaching, to a certain extent, a vivid realism and fine finish, has led scholars to regard them as the handiwork of Hellenistic or Perso-Hellenistic masters.) Animal standards have long been well known in India and the possibility of the design of the Edict pillars being derived from the primitive animal standards has already been pointed out. Some of these pillars might also have been standing before the days of Aśoka, and the animal figures on the capitals of the Mauryan columns exhibit the same indigenous quality of naturalism and volume as has been recognised in the animal figures on the Indus seals. The outstanding examples of such crowning animals are supplied by the celebrated Lion capital from Sarnath and the Bull and the Lion capitals from Rampurwa. The Rampurwa bull (Fig. 25) provides a striking similarity with the figures of that animal on the Indus seals, in form as well as in its modelling, in its quality of naturalism and nervous tension suggested through pent-up volumes following closely the anatomical details. The round abacus is carved with such patterns as the honey-suckle and the acanthus all around. Compared with the bull, the lion figures on the other capitals are more stylised, though an



approach to realism is suggested through the intense muscles and the swelling-up veins. The Rampurwa capital has a single lion (Fig. 24), seated on its haunches, on a round abacus that shows a frieze of ducks in low relief. The pose is conventional and similar lion figures may be seen over the capitals of the columns at Basarh-Bakhira and Lauriya Nandangarh. The lion figure over the Basarh-Bakhira pillar, it has already been observed, is on a lower level of artistic conception. In spite of a realistic approach and a more precise modelling in the figures from Rampurwa and Lauriya Nandangarh, the schematic treatment of the manes indicates that stylisation is on the increase. Of these two figures, again, the Rampurwa lion exhibits a more powerful modelling and a more advanced feeling for form.

The Sarnath quadri-partite (Fig. 22) is, by far, the most celebrated of all these animal capitals. Except for more erect attitudes, necessitated by demands of composition, the treatment is similar to that in the single figures from Rampurwa and Lauriya Nandangarh. The abacus, however, shows an original innovation in having four animals—a striding elephant, a galloping horse, a walking bull and a prancing lion—separated from one another by figures of wheels, all in distinctly bold relief. (The freshness and naturalism of these animal figures on the abacus are rather in strong contrast to the more conventional and stylised treatment of the lions above. However much one may attribute the latter, on account of the execution of the muscles or the treatment of the muzzles and the paws to Persepolis, the “flexible naturalism” which permeates every form in the entire capital is Indian in spirit and breathes, so to say, the tender sympathy for animal kind which is inculcated by the doctrine of *ahimsā* (non-violence) preached by the Master.) A general indebted-



ness to Achaemenid forms is not impossible, but in Indian hands and in Indian atmosphere the dryness and aridity of the Persian tradition became softened and imbued with a new fulness of life and form. A similar quadri-partite, though inferior in execution, also crowned the Edict column at Sāñchī.

(Another animal sculpture, belonging to the age of Aśoka, is also of outstanding importance. It represents the fore-part of an elephant carved in the rock at Dhauḷi (Fig 21), near Bhuvaneśvara (Orissa), over the Edicts of Aśoka, including the two specially meant for Kalinga.) In the modelling and execution of this elephant figure one may recognise a note and feeling different from those manifested in the animal figures surmounting the pillar capitals. It represents a fine delineation of bulky volume and living flesh, natural to that animal, along with a dignified movement and linear rhythm that have no parallel except in the elephant figure in relief on the abacus of the Sarnath capital. (Aesthetically the Dhauḷi elephant is superior to the animal figures on the capitals, though it may be less advanced tectonically.) The only sculpture of the capital group that nearly approaches it in artistic conception is the bull on the Rampurwa capital which also, like it, exhibits a remarkable plastic sense for form and volume along with a quiet dynamism, in strong contrast to the stylised presentation of the lion figures. There can be no doubt that an aesthetic vision and tradition, unburdened by anything extraneous, were at work in these remarkable presentations of animal studies.

(A few massive sculptures, wholly in the round, representing Yakshas and Yakshinis are also tentatively ascribed to the Mauryan period on account of the existence on their surface of a smooth polish which resembled that on the Edict columns themselves.) These figures, however, present



a conception that is wholly unlike that of the Edict columns or their animal capitals. The two groups are sharply distinguished from each other and scholars try to explain this distinction — one as representing the archaic indigenous tradition associated with the Indus remains<sup>6</sup>, and the other as a more sophisticated and eclectic tradition inspired by the court. The explanation, particularly the one with reference to the *Yaksha* and *Yakshiṇī* group, seems to be rather weak. Moreover, among the *Yaksha* and the *Yakshiṇī* figures themselves there exist wide divergences as regards their technique, style and aesthetic expressions. In view of these sharp divergences, which are too tangible to be ignored, it is difficult to place all of them together in one stylistic or chronological phase, much less in the Mauryan phase. A treatment of them should properly be reserved, hence, for a later section in conformity with their chronological and stylistic positions.

(The ancient sites of Pāṭaliputra, Mathurā, etc. have yielded numerous terracotta figurines some of which may be referred to the Mauryan epoch. With the greater use of stone for plastic expression, terracotta art, even in spite of its graceful contributions, is relegated into the background in relation to the monumental works in stone. Terracotta art, slight and tiny though, presents us with a variety of significant forms and motifs and deserves a separate treatment.)

(Whatever the origin and affinities, the plastic style exemplified by the Edict pillars and their sculptured capitals represents an art that was inspired and fostered by the court. Like all court arts, it was, to a certain extent, eclectic with very little emphasis on this or that individual tradition.) The imperial will of the great Aśoka brought it into being and it served his purpose as a vehicle of his policy of *Dhammavijaya*.



It had no deeper roots, either in the collective will of the people or in the soil in which it was made to blossom forth. (The character, no doubt, was Indian ; but even in spite of its Indian character and its superior tectonic quality, it constitutes but a passing phase in the history of Indian plastic art. Like the columns themselves, this art stands isolated from, and unrelated to, what we understand as the formal structure of Indian art.)

### References

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  2. *ASR., Eastern Circle*, 1918-19, p. 45
  3. R. P. Chanda, *Beginnings of Art in Eastern India* (*MASL*, No. 30), p. 23
  4. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 17
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### III

#### POST-MAURYAN SCULPTURE

The next period is an epoch of great sculptural achievements. Freed from the overpowering influence of the court the art reaches a larger section of the people. As a result of Aśoka's patronage the religion of the Buddha had spread far and wide and the zeal for the new religion found expression, in the period closely following on that of the Mauryas, in remarkable artistic achievements distributed throughout the country. Such achievements represent an indigenous artistic movement—a continuation of the ancient heritage of Indus valley art, enriched further by the contributions of the various ethnic elements that began to make themselves felt in the complex fabric of Indian civilisation and history. As in other phases of life and culture, it is not possible to distinguish separately each and every ethnic contribution. The indigenous structure was also but slightly disturbed, and the different foreign trends practically grew into it. The ancient indigenous heritage, as Dr. Kramrisch admirably puts it, "was to withstand, by assimilating, while transforming, whatever racial influx touched upon it."<sup>1</sup>

In the history of Indian art the ancient period, as represented by the plastic remains of the peasant and urban communities of western India, has rendered form in terms of volume. This ancient substratum of earth-bound volume feels a new experience when the solid mass unfolds its vitality with the help of other factors, mainly linear rhythm. The latter consists of a gliding linear movement up and down along the surface, and the pliable form acquires a new balance and integration thereby. This fluid rendering of



volume extends also to depth and endows the figures with an animation, dynamic as well as compact. This coordination between solid volume and its gliding linear movement constitutes the plasticity which is an essential element of classical Indian art. This classical quality is confined not only to sculpture, but is also equally evident in painting. At first, its approach was rather faltering and uneasy, but soon co-ordination and balance were achieved. The new factor made itself felt by about 200 B. C. and it took a few centuries to reach a complete and successful integration of the two. This period hence marks a creative and formative epoch in the history of Indian art.

The artistic movement in the early classical phase was wide-spread throughout the country, having prolific centres of activity, both in the north as well as in the south. In the north the main activity is recognised in the Madhyadeśa at Bhārhut, Sāñchī, Bodhgayā, Mathurā, etc. In the east there was a regional movement in Kalinga, i. e., Orissa. Apart from activities at these places, artistic remains unearthed in other parts of Northern India mark a wide and expansive movement representing the development of a common plastic tradition with the same inherent and fundamental qualities. Local and regional idioms may be recognised, but in spite of such differences in idioms and expressions, all are linked up as parts of the same general movement, the classical movement.

The beginnings of the classical movement may be traced from about the end of the Maurya period. A fragmentary relief (Fig. 34), dug up from among the ruins of Sārnāth from a level referred to about the closing years of the Mauryas, is instructive in this connection. It shows a female figure with the head bent down over the gathered-up knees and hands, an attitude that indicates extreme dejection.



The heaviness of the coiffure, the dress, the girdle and the anklets, all merely sketched, and the stiffness of the cylindrical legs mark a crude and inexperienced technique to which the sweeping curve of the woman's back in profile stands in significant contrast. Equally significant is the delicate modelling of the pulsating female form. It is this linear expressiveness that endows the form with a plastic coherence, in spite of the unequal treatment of each single part. The co-ordination between the outline and the modelled surface, the touch-stone of the classical trend, is already there, though rather faltering in accent.

The art of this early period consists mostly of reliefs and certain problems, connected with the narration of a story, the third dimension, the optical perspective, etc., faced the artists. These the early Indian artists solved in their own way and according to their own beliefs. In this way were evolved certain devices and formulae that do not always follow the notions and standards recognised in the west.

Serving as a vehicle of communication according to the needs of an expanding religion, the art in this early period is mainly narrative, following the early practice of continuous narration. The detailed manner of depicting a particular story or an event leads to the presentation of the various incidents and episodes of it in one and the same relief composition. The figure of the main actor is repeatedly shown to indicate the progress of the story and the basis of connectedness is usually the locality in which the event or the story is said to have occurred. Irrespective of the time that might have separated the various incidents, they are grouped together into one synthetic unit, because they all took place at one and the same spot. The chronological sequence is thus intentionally broken up in favour of a narration that centres round the location of a story or an event. Time



factor is thus regarded as of no import and is eliminated altogether. For the artist, the immovable locality is something stationary and the fact that several incidents happened at the same place may thus be regarded as a link that subsists between the visualisation of the story in the mind of the artist and its delineation with the help of a relief composition. This uni-local, i. e., topographical, method of presentation is specifically Indian and may be recognised as the most logical method of continuous narration with its pivot on something that is solid and not intangible and invisible as the time element.

The problem of the third dimension was also tackled by the early Indian artists in their own peculiar way. The forms are conceived not in terms of depth, but in those of surface. In the relief, hence, the figures are presented above, and not behind, each other, with the result that what according to the laws of optical perspective ought to have been hidden, partly or entirely, is shown in entirety or only partly covered. Again, the objects are large or small, not according to their nearness or distance, as the optical impression would demand, but in accordance with the functional importance of each object. The visibility of the objects is also similarly determined, irrespective of the perceiving eye. Whatever exists is a reality to the Indian artist, and not what the eyes see. And so he arranges his composition according to the demands of the story he delineates regulating the size and visibility of the forms, not with the idea of being optically correct, but of being functionally consistent. On account of these conventions, rational according to the logic of the Indian artists, the flat reliefs look like trays packed with all kinds of forms. Oversecting and foreshortening are resorted to sometimes lending the objects singly a three-dimensional treatment ; but such

treatment never extends to depth so far as the entire composition is concerned.

(i) Sāñchī : Stūpa No. II. Bhārhut

Of the artistic remains of the early classical phase in the Madhyadeśa the reliefs on the ground balustrades of Stūpa No. II at Sāñchī (Fig. 27) come first in stylistic consideration. Executed in very low and flat relief the panels look almost like linear patterns, merely sketched, without any differentiation of planes. In spite of the remarkable sense of decorative design, better adapted to such a purpose, the execution of human form, packed in an unexpected fertility of vegetation, is primitive in technique. The angular treatment of the human figures ill suits the vegetal scheme of composition with its heaving and flowing curves. Occasionally, there may be noticed an approach to modelling by rounded contours. But, still, the figures are without any animation. The main theme of the composition is the flowing linear rhythm of the plant, the creeper and other vegetation, and it is not without reason that Coomaraswamy describes such reliefs as belonging to the "plant style"<sup>2</sup>. A more advanced treatment may, however, be recognised in a group of reliefs on the balustrades of the same Stūpa. This group exhibits a greater knowledge of form, of spatial relations, and of animated and graceful poses and movements. This stylistic advance has been attributed to contacts with extraneous art traditions, but is more probably to be explained as the natural result of the growing consciousness of the artists working in an atmosphere of a living and progressive art movement.

The next phase in the movement is supplied by the reliefs on the gateways and balustrades of the Stūpa at



Bhārhut, executed during the reign of the Śuṅgas (*Sugānām rāje*) as an inscription states<sup>3</sup>. These reliefs are usually accompanied by descriptive labels that give the titles of the subjects depicted. On the gateway posts there are the representations of the *Yakshas*, the *Yakshiṇīs* and other semi-divine beings, while on the balustrades the reliefs depict the *Jātaka* stories and scenes from the life of the Buddha. Such narrative panels are oblong (Fig. 30), square (Fig. 26), round (Fig. 32) and half-round according to the architectonic needs. The coping stone usually shows the wavy and flowing creeper design that meanders along the length binding together the various reliefs dispersed over the surface. The individual forms within a composition are also likewise recognised to be related to one another by a gliding linear rhythm. In the scenes of the previous lives (*Jātakas*) of the Master, the Bodhi-sattva, as he was then called, is represented in human form according to the needs of the stories, but in those of his historical life he is never represented as such. His presence, when occasion demands, is indicated by symbols, such as the Bodhi tree, the Vajrāsana, the parasol (*chhatra*, *chhatra*), the foot-prints, the wheel (*Dharmachakka*, *Dharmachakra*), the Stūpa, etc. The inscriptions clearly testify that such symbols actually stand for the Master. Early Indian art was essentially aniconic.

An advance on the plastic diction of the earlier phase may be noticed at Bhārhut in the relatively greater ease in the attitude of the figures, and in the conscious attempt towards rounded and mellifluous contours. But, in spite of a greater ease and variety in the composition, one may recognise the same aversion to depth, the surface and volumes being more or less flatly conceived. The large-size figures of *Yakshas* and *Yakshiṇīs* on the toraṇa pillars reveal two kinds of modelled shapes, apparently isolated from each



other. Figures of Sirimā *devatā* (Fig. 29), Kubera, etc. look almost like silhouettes, sharply detached from the background, in which a rigid frontality and a juxtaposition of modelled shapes one above the other confront the spectator. An effort towards modelling is made merely by grading the planes of the reliefs in severe and distinctive layers ("an inane superposition of massive forms" as Kramrisch calls it<sup>4</sup>) and then rounding off the contours. A peculiar abstraction is, again, recognised in the treatment of the feet, or of the hands in attitude of adoration, which, irrespective of anatomical accuracy, are turned sideways and presented in their broadest aspect. To these silhouette-like figures the ample curves and flows and variegated attitudes of such figures as Sudarśanā *yakshi* (Fig. 28), Chulakokā *devatā*, etc., offer a significant contrast. Marshall explains this distinction—one as the work of indigenous craftsmen and the other as the result of an influence exerted by foreign artists<sup>5</sup>. In spite of the apparent contrast, however, there is an underlying and unmistakeable link that binds them together, and this is manifest in the conscious attempt to relate three-dimensional extensiveness to the surface, and the harsh contours to the swaying grace and plastic consistency suitable to the gentle and mellifluous curves of the vegetal scheme which is the chief compositional theme of early Indian art. One may trace this effort from the low and flat reliefs of the ground balustrades of Stūpa No. II at Sāñchī (Fig. 27) to the large size *Yaksha* and *Yakshiṇī* figures of both the groups at Bhārhut (Figs. 28 and 29) in almost undisturbed sequence. Here is a conscious and progressive art movement, indigenous in technique as well as in spirit, the fundamental idea of which is to endow the human form the same flowing movement as that of the vegetal scroll.



A flowing linear rhythm, although hesitating in some instances, seems to actuate the majority of the figures at Bhārhut. This rhythm also glides from one form to the other within a given composition and appears to bind, somewhat loosely though, all isolated objects into one unified whole. On the coping stone the lotus creeper meanders along the length in endless waves linking the panels into one continuous pattern. Each single figure and composition, including the entire pattern, become animated thereby. A rhythmical movement, permeating all through, integrates and balances every object and composition into one unified organism.

Another trend, a subsidiary one, is also evident in the art of Bhārhut. A few of the reliefs, quadrangular in outline, emphasise closely packed compositions with schematic rows of harsh figures parallel to the lines of the frame. Not swayed by the gentle and mellifluous curves the figures are more or less static in character, disturbed only by sharp contrasts of lights and shades. This idiom is best illustrated in the so-called Ajātaśatru pillar, in some of the frameless figures on the upright *torāṇa* posts, and also, to a certain extent, in the panel of the Nāga King Erāpata on the Prasenajit pillar (Fig. 26). This apparent disregard for swaying rhythm and balanced co-ordination, which constitute the dominant plastic diction of the period, may appear to be puzzling. It is possible that the craftsmen who were responsible for these reliefs were not yet fully aware of the scope and vitality of the balanced rhythm of flowing curves or of the plastic effect that might be achieved thereby. Whatever the case, the idiom plays only a small and subordinate part in the art of Bhārhut. A fluid linear rhythm, although sometimes faltering in accent, remains the keynote of the style of Bhārhut.

Bhārhut represents an early and primitive phase in classical Indian art. In spite of the relation that exists among the different forms within a composition, the single figures, the main actors of the stories, appear to be unaware of the parts that they are to play in the scenes, and are hence without any expression. They simply exist, and by mere existence they fulfil the needs of the stories depicted. It is hence perhaps that the Bhārhut art has been described as modest and restrained in general tone. But this modesty or restraint, whatever we may call it, cannot be said to be deliberately conscious, either on the part of the artists or of the actors of the scenes. In spite of this apparent drawback, the stories are told with exhaustive clearness; no single details, pertinent to the stories, are left out. Added to these, the descriptive labels leave no doubt about the identification of the scenes. Indeed, the artists are so much engrossed with details that nothing escapes them, be it the tattoo-mark on a person, the ornamentation of a door-frame, the pattern of caparison or upholstery, or the fine veins of a leaf. The meticulous care with which the details are exhaustively worked out has almost a disturbing effect, and it is only with difficulty that an impression of the whole can be obtained.

#### (ii) Bodhgayā

The next important landmark in the history of early Indian art is supplied by the remnants of the square railing that enclosed the early Bodhi shrine at Bodhgayā. Among the donors appear the names of Kuramgī and Nāgadevā, wives of the kings Indrāgnimitra and Brahmamitra<sup>6</sup> who have to be assigned to about the first half of the first century B. C. On the whole, the carvings on the Bodhgayā rail are in the Bhārhut style, but more advanced in technique as well as in



visual and, consequently, in plastic effect. What strikes one at first sight is that the narrative reliefs are freed from all unnecessary details, only the indispensable and essential elements being retained to convey the full import of the stories depicted. A comparison of the same subject—that of the purchase of Jetavana—at Bhārhut and Bodhgayā will bring out this point clearly. Instead of being scrupulously exhaustive, as at Bhārhut, the Bodhgayā version is more suggestive and aesthetically more appealing. This abbreviated form of narration results in less crowded compositions in which the figures move more freely and with greater ease and clarity. On account of a more organic modelling with softer contours and subtler gradation of limbs the body acquires a rhythm, perceptible not only along the surface but also extending into the depth. In three-dimensional extensiveness, again, the composition is more advanced than that of Bhārhut and results in an easier movement of the planes and more harmonious spatial relations. Inseparably linked with the Bhārhut tradition, the art of Bodhgayā represents a convincing advance on the previous achievements. For the first time the composition begins to vibrate with a charming vitality and the body to pulsate with soft, warm flesh. Orderliness, clarity and closer organic relation take the place of unsteady medley of forms and motifs which characterise the Bhārhut style (Figs. 31 and 33).

### (iii) Sāñchī : Gateways of the Great Stūpa

The Great Stūpa at Sāñchī, Bhopal State, is the most stupendous of the early Buddhist establishments and supplies in its splendid gateway carvings a panorama of contemporary life and civilisation with great vigour and dramatic intensity. The circular balustrade and the four *toranas*, which front the



entrances between the quadrants, are of the same technique and design as those at Bhārhut. Carvings, however, appear only on the gateways; the rails were left severely plain. In spite of this limitation of space, the wonderful decorative sense of the artists with their simple and easy story-telling diction, graphic in content as well as in representation, remains unequalled in early Indian art.

All the four gateways are of the same design and each extends a little from the line of the balustrade. Tectonic, and to some extent, stylistic considerations indicate, however, that they were not all put up at one and the same time. The first to be erected was the Southern gateway fronting the steps leading to the terraced berm of the stūpa. On this gateway there appears an inscription which offers a clue as to the date of its erection. One of the architraves of this gateway owed its origin to the munificence of one Ānamda who was the overseer of the artisans of king Śrī Sātakarṇi<sup>7</sup>. This Sātakarṇi was evidently the son of Simuka, the founder of the Sātavāhana family of the Deccan. Sātakarṇi was the third king of the family and his reign is to be placed in the second half of the first century B. C. The southern gate was followed by the northern, the eastern and the western, and this sequence is established by tectonic experiments towards a more harmonious and balanced design of the gateway form. But there are evidences that no great time intervened between the erection of the first and the last of the gateways—the southern and the western. This is evident from the name of a patron, Balamitra a pupil of Ayachūḍa, which appears both on the southern and the western gates<sup>8</sup>. All the gateways thus appear to have been put up within a generation, so to say, in the latter half of the first century B. C.

The carvings on the gateways of the great stūpa at Sāñchi belong, on the whole, to the same genre as Bhārhut



art and mark a distinct advance on the latter. In spite of this connection, however, they indicate a definite turn from the main Bhārhut diction of flowing linear rhythm. Some of the panels and a few individual sculptures, no doubt, are endowed with the graceful lyricism of mellifluous lines, but they are only too few. The Sāñchi trend, again, is unthinkable without a reference to the earlier plastic achievements at Bhārhut. The strenuous effort of a century has enabled the artist to master depth and dimensions and to regulate the contour and with this new awareness and its scope he visualises his subjects in a manner that is quite different. Of this manner we have a few archaic attempts at Bhārhut, as for instance, on the Ajātaśatru pillar. The horizontal and vertical arrangement of the composition, as we see on this pillar, completely unfolds its possibilities in the toraṇa carvings of the great stūpa and leads to variegated and almost bewildering compositions, rich and dramatic in character and epic in quality. The movement is no longer confined to the harsh and schematic treatment of the preceding century, but boldly traverses the composition diagonally and in intersecting planes. With increased depth of the relief and greater freedom of movement the forms are presented at various angles and multitudinous attitudes and poses. No longer are forms and figures conceived singly as separate units in the composition, but several of them are grouped together in well-defined space. In the relief the group now serves as the pivot of the composition, all such groups in a given composition being organically related to one another (Figs. 37-39).

The result of all these developments is a dynamic expansiveness which extends not only along the surface but also to depth. The forms burst forth from the stone, so to say, and spread over the surface almost in endless masses



reverberating the entire composition and illumined by sharp passages of darkness. The dark shades give greater relief to the forms and accentuate their vigorous onrush over the composition in bewildering and tumultuous variety. The chiaroscuro, i. e. the rich interplay of lights and shades, and the strong feeling for volume, coupled with clear-cut outlines and multitudinous angles, attitudes and poses, act and re-act upon one another and produce vital and dramatic compositions surging with life and energy almost to the point of boisterous frenzy. The scenes of the exciting struggle, such as the War of the Relics (south gate and west gate), best illustrate the epic quality of the Sāñchī compositions. In both the scenes the compositions reverberate with vigorous actions and movements, and differ only in dramatic intensity. In the more peaceful scenes the artists were able to portray successfully the easy, free and frolicsome character of the actors, their buoyancy and joy of existence.

At Sāñchī the distinctive trend, characterised by the horizontal and vertical arrangement of the figures in the composition and first recognised on the Ajātaśatru pillar at Bhārhut, reaches its climax and ultimate fruition. Some of the reliefs (Fig. 40), however, adhere to the harsh and schematic treatment of the older version, perhaps the works of artists less alive to the creative urge felt in the majority of the Sāñchī carvings. The dynamic energy that bursts forth in diagonal and intersecting arrangements, in high lights and deep shadows, is found to be absent in the panels executed in the earlier idiom, though the qualities in respect of modelling and sense of volume are the same.

The human figures remain squat and sturdy, but the reserved contours gradually get softened and flow harmoniously from the shoulders to the ankles. The body now



appears as a beautiful and integrated union of the single parts, the fluid contours with their gliding sinuousness leading to a well-constituted whole, no longer shy, hesitating and faltering, but sure and lively in movement. With its masterly rendering of volumes the body denotes collective strength, but without being sensuous, as at Bodhgayā. The guardian figures at the bottom of the gateway posts (Fig. 41) and those of the *yakshas* over the architraves, surging with pent-up energies, now stand firm and stretch their limbs freely and surely. The *yakshinī* dryads on the outcarved branches of the trees swing overhead with easy grace and agility and emphasise the full curves and contours of the charming female form. In the treatment of the drapery, too, a greater energy is noticeable. The stiff and stylised treatment with the flat ends spread fan-wise like ironed aprons, as we see at Bhārhut, now disappears. A greater interest is taken in the weight of the garment and its changing folds, so as to free it from its subjection to the body. Though not successful everywhere, the direction taken indicates a suggestive advance on the earlier mode.

The gateway carvings of the great stūpa portray the contemporary life of India in all its varied forms and existences. The rich and aristocratic life at the court, the busy and exciting life in the city, the homely and modest country-life, and the varied luxuriance of the jungle-life, have all been treated faithfully and exhaustively. Nowhere are there any signs of unnaturalness and the actions expressed are intensely sincere and dramatic. Though there was a glow of religious impulse behind, the authors of these reliefs were men of the world, and it is the worldly life and existence in their manifold manifestations that they so eloquently portrayed with the help of the stories of Buddhism in the simplest and most expressive language. The strong sense of

simple naturalism and transparent sincerity is a trait characteristic of the entire early Indian art. It is an art of the people, free alike from artificiality or idealism, and it is because of this character that it has a wide and universal appeal.

#### (iv) Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri Cave Reliefs

The two adjoining hills of Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri, near Bhuvaneśvara (Orissa), contain a number of caves, all Jaina in affiliation, and a few of these have sculptured friezes and panels decorating their facades. The approximate period of these excavations may be ascertained from the inscription of Khāravela, king of Kalinga, in the Hāthi gumphā and that of his chief queen in the Mañchapurī nearby<sup>9</sup>. Khāravela flourished about the second half of the first century B. C. These two caves, and possibly a few others, were excavated about that period. But all the caves do not seem to have been produced at one and the same time, and the activities in the two hills, apart from the mediaeval excavations in the Khaṇḍagiri, were carried on for about a century, the latest in the series possibly dating towards the close of the first century B. C. or the beginning of the Christian era.

Carvings in the different caves present fairly wide divergences, but belong mainly to the school of Madhyadeśa, as represented by Bhārhut, Bodhgayā and Sāñchī. In spite of this dependence on the Central Indian tradition they may be found to have a local character. The reliefs in the Mañchapurī cave indicate an advance on the Bhārhut idiom in the depth of the relief and plastic treatment of the figures, though the workmanship is poorer and coarser. With the masses modelled in high relief with strong contrasts of lights and shades there is a suggestion of vigorous action and



intense vitality which appear to link these reliefs with the Sāñchī trend. But technical insufficiency results in isolated and compact figures which prevent convincing compositions. The carvings in the Ananta gumphā (Fig. 36), Khaṇḍagiri, stylistically and iconographically, are reminiscent of the Bodhgayā reliefs. The two-storeyed cave, the Rāñī gumphā, is the best decorated of all with elaborate friezes of sculptures (Fig. 35) both in the upper and lower storeys, as well as a few independent figure sculptures. Unfortunately, the subjects depicted have not been identified beyond doubt. In spite of the differences in quality that one may discern in the reliefs of the two storeys, there is an advancement on the earlier achievements, both in technique as well as in style. The compositions are more vital and better integrated, and the conception of a theme and its presentation more harmonious. The execution, however, remains comparatively coarse and lacks the smooth and clear-cut finish of the contemporary Central Indian school. Nevertheless, the reliefs represent a mature tradition, a local movement dependent mainly on the art of Central India. In the Gaṇeśa gumphā are depicted practically the same subjects, though in a slightly inferior style. With the signs of deterioration already manifest in the Gaṇeśa gumphā the movement loses itself in the coarse and conglomerated works in the Jayā Vijayā and the Alakā-purī caves.

#### (v) Mathurā

Mathurā, the home of one of the most important and prolific artistic movements in early India, has also supplied stray, though significant, examples of plastic art which date back its beginnings to a period farther than the one in which the movement reached its supreme brilliance. These early



examples are inspired by the same artistic impulse which characterised the productions of the Central Indian school and have many things in common with them. A few such early sculptures may now be seen in the Mathurā Museum. The two fragmentary figures of *yakshas* with their hard lines, flattened treatment, exaggeratedly large and protruding eyes, and heaviness of dress and ornaments, represent an art, perhaps slightly mature than the Bhārhut style, but less advanced than the easier and more refined conceptions at Bodhgayā. The two *torāṇa* architraves indicate technical as well as stylistic advance in the increased depth of the relief, less heavy appearance and a happier grouping of the figures in the composition. The figure of a dryad, modelled almost in the round on an architrave support from Kāṅkāli Tīlā, anticipates the charming dryads of the Sāñchi *torāṇas*. The movement at Mathurā in this early period runs parallel to the Central Indian school, and with these significant achievements it bursts forth in superb magnificence in the subsequent periods.

#### (vi) *Yaksha* and *Yakshiṇī* Statues

Several massive and independent sculptures, carved wholly in the round, hail from widely distant regions, such as Parkham and Baroda near Mathurā, Besnagar and Pawaya in Gwalior, Lohanīpur, Didārganj and Patna in Bihar. They are usually described as *Yakshas* and *Yakshiṇīs* and this description may hold in the absence of any exact identification. They are carved out of Chunar sandstone and bear remnants of the polish that characterised the finish of the Aśokan edict columns and their sculptured capitals. Because of the material and traces of this polish, usually called the Mauryan polish, these sculptures are tentatively ascribed to the



Mauryan period. This ascription, however, fails to take note of the differences that exist among these two groups of sculptures, namely the sculptured capitals and the *Yaksha* and the *Yakshiṇī* statues. Moreover, there exist also wide divergences among the different sculptures of the latter group as regards their technique, style and aesthetic expressions. The divergences are too tangible to be ignored and become clear when they are placed side by side, particularly the *Yaksha* figure from Parkham (Fig. 44) and that of the *Yakshiṇī* from Didārganj (Fig. 47), the former in its massive burliness and flattened treatment without any co-ordination of the parts, and the latter in its smooth, rounded and naturalistic features pleasingly integrated into a complete whole and inspired by the fluid naturalism of the mature classical tradition. They represent practically two extreme plastic conceptions and the other figures of the group indicate different degrees of expressions between these two. A re-study of these sculptures on these considerations is necessary, hence, to ascertain their chronological and stylistic positions. It may be pointed out at the outset that the material and the polish, which again is not Mauryan in quality, cannot be regarded as sure and sufficient grounds for assigning these sculptures to one particular period when they differ materially in technical aptitudes as well as in plastic and aesthetic conceptions.

In this analytical study, the two sculptures from Baroda and Parkham should come first. Of the Baroda sculpture only the upper part remains, while the Parkham specimen (Fig. 44) is more or less well preserved except for the missing hands and slight abrasions of the surface. We have here a clear expression of massive portliness and volume which may also be found to be the essential qualities of other sculptures of this group. It is strictly frontal in treatment and the modelling suffers from inadequate or insufficient technique. The



masses appear to be superposed one above the other without any conscious organic relation among them. The sides and the back have practically no modelling except a slight chamfering. What we have here is an archaic stolidity, which again is not convincingly expressed on account of a lack of harmony and co-ordination in the composition. The drapery appears transparent where it clings to the body and has been given flat volume where it is free. The plait in between the two legs is interesting and reminds one of similar plaits in Bhārhut statuary.

The burliness and sheer volume, though crudely expressed, connect these figures with the ancient indigenous tradition and gradually this primitive quality experiences the trends and fashions of what has been described as classical Indian art. In the two Patna statues, almost identical in form and conception (Fig 45), and in the *Yakshiṃt* figure from Besnagar (Fig. 43) we have the same archaic heaviness; but the treatment and modelling appear to be easier and freer. In the front, each of the figures exhibits more rounded features, including the arms, breasts and abdomen. The linear contour at the sides is less harsh and has a smoother movement. The drapery is given separate volumes where it does not cling to the body, but indicated merely by parallel ridges of folds where it does. In spite of the general heaviness of forms, the more rounded features and the attempt at freer linear contours separate these figures from the Pārkhām image.

The two torsos, said to be Jaina, from Lohanīpur near Patna are analogous to the Patna *Yaksha* figures, but the heaviness gives place to a stiff and flattened modelling in which the fully rounded features are equally in evidence.

The figure of *Yaksha Maṇibhadra* from Pāwayā (Figs. 46 & 48), though usually classed with the Pārkhām image,



exhibits a greater sense of modelling, front and back both included. It is a well-balanced production and the artist appears to have overcome the conflict between rounded forms and flattened surface which is clearly immanent in the other figures discussed above. A greater co-ordination of volumes, one naturally flowing into the other, definitely shows a mature conception in which one may feel, as it were, the soft, warm flesh. There is nothing primitive or archaic in this figure except its heaviness, but heaviness is a quality inherent in early Indian art and its most potent characteristic.

Equally free from primitiveness is the *Yakshinī* figure from Didārganj (Fig. 47) which stands out as the most outstanding creation in the whole series. The massive body is fully modelled in the round, the sides and the back also not excepted. The full and rounded features, including the prominent breasts, narrow waist, broad hips gradually tapering down the shapely legs, are all kept within the compactness of the whole and within a fluid contour that one may recognise in the rendering of the front, the back and the sides. The plastic treatment of the whole gives a dynamic character to the entire form, further emphasised by the easy and slight stoop and forward movement of the upper part of the body and by a delicate bend of the right knee-joint. No longer is there any sign of the clash between rounded masses and flat surface; the masses coalesce and converge into one another in a free and fluid linear movement, and seen from whatever angle the composition is one of sweeping curves that accentuate and give relief to the volumes and masses. In the sensitiveness of the rendering of the lively flesh, in the treatment of the hair, of the drapery and of the ornaments, and lastly in its graceful stance, we have here a female pattern, urban and sophisticated and classical in its idea and content.



The extremely flattened treatment of the Pārkhām Yaksha (Fig. 44) with its inane superposition of volume after volume compressed between two surfaces, the front and the back, is allied to, and perhaps more primitive than, the relief statuary on the Bhārhut toraṇas of the second century B.C. The other figures are allied to it, though gradually they begin to feel the impress of the trends and fashions of contemporary art movement as outlined in case of the relief compositions of the Central Indian School. The portly statues of Yakshas from Patna (Fig. 45), conscientious in the rendering of earth-bound weight but with greater roundness of features and less harsh linear treatment, are found to be essentially identical with the Yaksha figures crowning the toraṇa architraves of Sāñchī, dated in the first century B.C. In the rendering of these colossal statues, no doubt representatives of the old plastic diction of weight and volume, one may recognise the extension of two-dimensional treatment to three-dimensional depth, as is evident in the relief compositions of the period. The old indigenous plastic diction appears to be inspired by the classical idiom of fluid and sensitive lines and in the Didārganj Yakshiṇī (Fig. 47) we have a successful integration of the two dictions, the old and the new. With its fully rounded form and fluid lines, in the lively and sensitive modelling of the limbs and the almost sensuous touch of the soft, warm flesh, the physiognomical type is not far removed from that of the dainty Yakshiṇī forms on the Mathurā jambs (cf Figs. 62 & 64) and is certainly nearer to them in date. From the static weight of congested flesh joined in a conglomerating manner between two flat surfaces, the front and the back, the figure has freed itself to three-dimensional extensiveness, and though heavy in form, a dynamic movement characterises the entire composition.



## (vii) Western India : Bhājā

Artistic pursuits during this early period were not confined to Northern India alone. Parallel activities may also be recognised south of the Vindhya, and such activities, though broadly connected with the Central Indian movement, have certain qualities that endow each with a local and regional flavour. In Western India there began early a long-continued movement in rock-cut excavations and a series of *vihāra* and *chaitya* caves furnishes us with a succession of interesting materials for a study of the evolution of architectural and plastic forms. The caves at Bhājā, near Poona, represent the oldest of the series and here in one of the *vihāra* caves we have interesting reliefs going back perhaps to the second century B.C. These carvings in their powerful naturalism and treatment of costumes and other accessories recall the Bhārhut tradition indicating a style allied to that of Madhyadeśa. But the movement here has a different character and expression, as is evidenced in the two well known reliefs at the eastern end of the verandah of the *vihāra*. They appear on either side of a doorway and represent Sūrya (Fig. 49) and Indra, the former driving in a four-horse chariot across the sky, and the latter striding on his elephant, Airāvata, over a wide landscape.<sup>10</sup> Sūrya is accompanied on the chariot by two attendants and an escort of riders on horseback, while the quadriga is driven over two grotesque female figures, rightly described as amorphous powers of darkness. Indra is accompanied by a male attendant who sits behind and carries a standard, and the mighty elephant, which with its enormous bulk blots out a greater part of the landscape, has in its upturned trunk an uprooted tree that adds to the vehemence of the scene depicted. Within the landscape appear other interesting details equally vehe-

ment in expression. The compositions rise directly from the surface of the wall and are not bounded by any kind of frame.

The main interest of these reliefs lies in their heavy and bulging forms that seem to have emerged from the matter of the rock itself due to a pressure from within. Coomaraswamy rightly recognises in the Bhājā reliefs "a quality of volume and expansion, quite distinct from plastic modelling",<sup>11</sup> and it is due to this quality that the compositions brook no limit or restraint and extend as far as their inner urge carries them and the surface of the rock allows. Some scholars call this an aboriginal quality characteristic of rock carvings and later manifestations of this trend may be traced in other rock-cut excavations.

#### (viii) Veṅgī and Guḍimallam

Simultaneously with the movement in Western India, as exemplified by the Bhājā reliefs, the Kṛishṇā-Godāvarī delta, roughly the Veṅgī region, in the south also experienced an awakening of artistic impulse. The initial products of this Southern movement hail from Jaggayyapeṭā, thirty miles to the north-west of Amarāvati that eventually comes to be its most prolific centre. The site of Jaggayyapeṭā has for a long time been used as a stone quarry and only a few fragmentary relief carvings are now extant. Yet they are of high interest as illustrating in a marked manner the fundamental character of the Southern movement. Distinguished by an extremely low and flattened relief the carvings seem to be attached to the surface almost like linear sketches. In this respect they are, to a certain extent, akin to the reliefs on the ground balustrade of Stūpa no. II at Sāñchī with the only difference that at Jaggayyapeṭā one may recognise a



greater precision and sensitiveness of modelling, in spite of a flattened treatment and attenuated and elongated forms of the figures. The bodies themselves, in spite of their "unearthly slenderness",<sup>12</sup> are as sturdily built as those in Central India and are inspired by the same sense of plasticity. This preference for slimness and elongation of limbs, along with a precision of outline, appears to be characteristic of this Southern movement, and this local idiom is manifested, in a more telling manner, in the later phases. Early Amarāvati work of the first century B. C. carries on this tradition. The reliefs are slightly deeper cut with a tendency for a more forceful modelling. The bodies, in spite of being slim and tall, remain a bit tough, later on destined to be transformed into the most pliable and voluptuous forms.

Farther south the Śiva-liṅga at Guḍimallam (near Reniguntā, North Arcot district) has a certain unique appearance. It is a realistic representation of the phallus with the anthropomorphic figure of Śiva standing on a crouching *yaksha* carved on its lower section (Fig. 42). The sculpture has been assigned to the first century B.C., a date that may be correct stylistically. The sturdy and vigorous body is confined within a decisive outline and can hardly be related to the Veṅgī tradition, or possibly to the Central Indian of this period. The firm and resolute tread, as shown by the forceful attitude, seems to press downwards and Kramrisch connects it with an aspect of ancient Indian tradition that has not survived.<sup>13</sup>

This initial phase of classical Indian sculpture closes roughly with the beginning of the Christian era. Artistic activities are found to have been wide-spread during this early period and, in spite of local and regional idioms, a stylistic connectedness appears to be immanent among the various movements, however distanced in space they are.

In this early phase are laid the foundations of those basic qualities that are to reach their fullest expressions in the succeeding centuries.

### References

1. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 127
2. *Ibid.*, p. 26
3. An inscription on the Eastern gate indicates that it had been erected by Dhanabhuti during the reign of the Sungas (*Indian Antiquary*, 1892, p. 227 ; also *JRAS.*, 1918, p. 138). The gate and the railing were erected simultaneously as is evident from an inscription on a railing bearing the name of prince Vadha Pala, son of Dhanabhuti (A. Cunningham, *Stupa of Bharhut*, No. 54). The Eastern gate and part of the railing are now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Fragments of architectural members with relief carvings, probably portions of other gateways and rails, have recently been collected for the Allahabad Municipal Museum.
4. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 23
5. John Marshall, Moments of ancient India (*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. 1, p. 625)
6. *ASR.*, 1903-09, p. 147
7. *ASR.*, 1913-14, pp. 4ff ; John Marshall, *Guide to Sanchi*, 2nd ed., p. 52 ; H. Luders, List of Brahmi Inscriptions (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. X), No. 346
8. John Marshall, *Guide to Sanchi*, pp. 40, 50 & 79
9. D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 206-11, 213-14
10. The reliefs have been differently interpreted by E. H. Johnston in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. VII, 1939, pp. 1-7
11. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 27
12. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 35
13. *Ibid.*, p. 35





## IV

### ŚAKA, KUSHĀṆA, ĀNDHRA

(The early phase in classical Indian art, as outlined above, represents a formative stage in which foundations were laid of those trends and tendencies that were to form the essential and characteristic qualities of later Indian sculpture. The further development of artistic movement covers the early centuries of the Christian era in which the trends and tendencies reach their maturity and become inherent in the structure of Indian plastic art.) The artistic activities, wide-spread in the earlier period, become, however, centralised in a few distinct localities, particularly at Mathurā in the north and in Veṅgī in the south. Apart from these two well defined centres there flourished a prolific school in the north-western part of India, a school that owed its origin to an extraneous and eclectic art tradition commissioned to serve an Indian religion. In Western India the earlier trend of Bhājā continued in the rock-cut caves. With these achievements in the early centuries of the Christian era classical Indian art reaches its fruition in the age of the Guptas who established their hegemony over Northern India in the fourth century A. D.

#### (i) Mathurā

(With the disruption of the Maurya Empire north-western part of India was again a prey to foreign aggressions. The Greeks, the Śakas, the Pahlavas, the Kushāṇas, etc. entered India, and there began a scramble for power the details of which are rather tiresome and not unoften free

from confusion.) Some of these peoples advanced far into the interior, but in spite of these constant upheavals, old Indian art continued to enjoy an unbroken continuity along the direction already outlined above. There was no break or disturbance and, except for certain minor details of ornament and presentation, plastic art developed in the Gangetic valley along the lines already determined in the early classical phase. (Mathurā, the converging point of ancient trade routes from all directions, was not only an important and prosperous city in the ancient days, but it also grew up to be a prolific centre of artistic activity where the history of Indian sculpture can be studied in unbroken sequence from rather early times right up to the mediaeval period. The fame and prestige of this great centre of art spread far and sculptures of Mathurā style and workmanship have been found in widely distant regions. For the history of Indian art few sites of India are of greater interest and importance than Mathurā.)

• (The early phase of artistic activity at Mathurā, recognised through a few stray and isolated finds, is closely linked up with the Central Indian school of Bhārhut and Sāñchī and has been dealt with in that connection. The great period of Mathurā art begins, however, with the Christian era and its most prolific output synchronised with the rule of the Kushāṇas who had extended their supremacy over substantial portions of the Gaṅgā-Yamunā doab.) So far as the indigenous artistic activity is concerned it is at Mathurā that we first notice the prolific use of images representing the various divinities, and with the creation and introduction of the cult image there is perceptible already a new direction in Indian art.) The origin of the cult image in India has been a matter of much controversy which is beyond the scope of this brochure. In the popular religions of the early



Indians a strong anthropomorphic character was immanent. Though subdued as a result of the preponderance of the religion of the Vedic Aryans in the early days of aryanisation, this tendency received a great impetus on the rise and development of theistic devotional cults which may be considered as an emergence of the popular non-Aryan and pre-Aryan fashions and practices, now recognised, absorbed and systematised in relation to Aryan philosophies. It is at Mathurā that this innate anthropomorphism and iconism asserted with vigour and found expression in images of the divinities of the chief religious systems.

(In the new iconography that came into being as a result of the creation and introduction of the image in the religious belief of the people it is the figure of the Buddha that plays a prominent part and conveys the contemporary notions underlying the divine image. With the idea of the divine image expressed in terms of human form the artist's conception of the importance of the human figure and its relation to its surroundings necessarily changed.) The earlier conception of a relief composition is of very little import to this new iconography in which the chief interest centres round the human figure boldly carved and set against the plain surface of the ground. The earlier concept of continuous narration or of spatial relations is of little use in this art and is excluded altogether. (The new direction requires new means of expression and according to the demands new techniques were evolved leading to the development of stereotyped image-stelae with the ideas of the grouping of the central and accessory figures determined by iconographic prescriptions.)

(The image proper, in its initial stage, is shaped, as it were, in the form and content of *Yaksha* primitives and hence on the older indigenous tradition. Indeed, the earliest



Buddha figures, called Bodhisattvas in inscriptions out of deference to old scruples against the figuration of the Master, are intimately related, formally, psychologically and in treatment, to the colossal figures of *yakshas* and *dvārapālas* and like them are characterised by massive earthliness and robustness of form and volume. Several images of the Master, dated in the reign of the Kushāṇa emperor Kanishka, are instructive examples in this connection. One of them hails from Kosām (Kauśāmbī) and was installed in the second year of Kanishka's reign<sup>1</sup>. From Sārnāth<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 50) and Sāheth-Māheth (Śrāvastī)<sup>3</sup> we have two such images, both dedicated by friar Bala in the third year of the reign of the same monarch. A second image from Sārnāth, closely similar to the above, may also be dated about the same period, though a few scholars ascribe it to a slightly earlier date on account of the folds of the drapery appearing on the upper torso<sup>4</sup>. In the other figures the folds do not appear on this part of the body. (All these images are executed in the mottled red sandstone of Sikri and were apparently of Mathurā origin. Each of them represents the Master in a standing pose with the left hand held near the hip and the right, wherever preserved, raised up to the shoulder in *abhaya-mudrā*. A lion is shown on the pedestal between the legs and indicates that the figure portrayed is that of Sākyasimha, or 'the lion of the Śākya race', i.e. the historical Gautama Buddha. The head, wherever preserved, is closely shaven and the forehead bears no mark of the *ūrṇā*. The upper part of the body is only half covered, the right shoulder being left free. The drapery which consists of an upper garment and a lower clings closely to the body and folds are shown in schematic lines over the left arm and in the lower part. The under-garment is fastened to the waist by a knotted girdle, while the upper is wound round the left shoulder and drawn diagonally across the body, the



ends being gathered up over the left lower arm. The hems and ends of the drapery are given separate volumes.) Though in the round, each of these sculptures is conceived in strictly frontal aspect and is static in character. The broad shoulders, the prominent masculine torso, the heavy and massive form firmly planted on the pedestal, the gesture and other features are expressive of enormous energy and mundane force that belong to this world, and not to any concept or idea that is beyond it. The open eyes and the smiling countenance also do not suggest any idea of spiritual introspection. (In this group of sculptures the image comes into view only in its physical aspect as that of a world conqueror; the spiritual form, suggestive of supra-physical divine existence, is, however, yet to come.)

The above series of colossal sculptures inaugurates, so to say, the line of Buddhist images, or for the matter of that of all cult images, extending down to the Gupta period. They indicate, no doubt, the primitive and indigenous tradition of image-making, already evident in the earlier days in the massive *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* figures, discussed in the previous chapter, following the movement of the progressive classical idiom. (This is clearly noticed in other sculptures from Mathurā, both standing and seated, in which there may be recognised a conscious and gradual working towards an expressive contour, a distinct articulation and co-ordination of the different parts and a refined and more effective modelling. Some of these figures have spiral *ushnīshas* while *ūrṇā* is sometimes indicated by a raised dot between the eyes. The halo, wherever preserved, is circular and scalloped at the edge. A few are dated with reference to the reigns of the Kushāṇa kings, Huvishka and Vāsudeva, and they indicate the gradual development of the type chronologically as well as stylistically. In the Kātrā Bodhisattva (Fig. 53) and a few other

analogous figures we have the beginnings of the image-stelae in which may be recognised the rudiments of group compositions that become conventional and stereo-typed in the later images. The heavy and massive form becomes relaxed in course of time, and grows supple and pliable with a gliding linear contour and with smooth and submerged shadows playing all over the surface (cf. Figs. 54 & 56). But in spite of these developments towards refinement and elegance, the figures remain earth-bound, as in the earlier days, with no suggestion of any spiritual idea or concept. This is true not only of Buddhist sculptures, but also of other cult images, Jaina and Brahmanical. The iconographic details gradually reach their fulness, but the spiritual grace, the true import of the image of a divine being, is found to be lacking.

The Mathurā artists were aware of the contemporary Gandhāra art tradition of the North-West and certain Buddha figures and reliefs give indications of this awareness. In several figures of the Buddha the drapery hanging down in semi-circular folds is found to cover both the shoulders, while in a few, also the feet. The head, again, is not shaven, but covered with curls. Coupled with these, the eyes and the lips are full and sharply cut, the upper eye-lid being especially heavy. These features, unknown in early Indian sculpture and in the Mathurā type of Bodhisattvas, might have been due to contacts with the Gandhāran tradition. More definite evidence of such contacts is provided by certain motifs, such as the woman and the acanthus, the vine with fruits, etc. These are, however, late incidents in the history of the Mathurā school and constitute a very small fraction of the productions of that school. It may be that the popularity of the Gandhāra school might have influenced the Mathurā artists on simple grounds of competition. Though apparent, Gandhāran influence on Mathurā art appears to be very



slight, however. Certain motifs were evidently borrowed, but there was practically no change of technique or style, and whatever influence came from outside was assimilated and drawn into the fabric of Indian plastic tradition according to Indian notions and requirements.

Certain groups of Mathurā sculptures, all dealing with strong drink and inebriation, have been classed as Bacchanalian and their interpretation is still a matter of uncertainty in spite of various discussions. In several sculptures of the group (Fig. 58) foreign touches are marked in the treatment of the drapery, in stance, and in general features of the composition, and the theory that the motif was inspired by foreign subjects might be possible. Similar is the case with the so-called 'Heracles and the lion' composition. But such motifs did not form part of the Indian art movement, nor did the Bacchanalian scenes, inspite of the seeming popularity in this period, survive in subsequent Indian art. They are just passing fancies which might have touched the imagination of the Mathurā artists, and are of very little import to the history of Indian art as a whole.

Mention should be made in this connection of a few large-size portrait statues—those of Kanishka, Wema Kadphises (?), and Chashtana (?)—which belong to a style and class that stand apart. The statue of Kanishka (Fig. 52), the king of kings, represents an extremely linear and angular conception in which the figure, though free, is entirely set into the surface and is frontal in the most rigorous sense of the term. The main effect is one of a flat and compressed surface of harsh angles and sharp lines in which the ponderous volume of the early Indian tradition and the plastic rhythm of the classical are equally absent. The other two statues represent different stages of this expression, which is, no doubt, Central Asian or Scythian in inspiration. But this remains just a

mere passing incidence in the history of Mathurā art and of Indian art as well.]

(A particular kind of Mathurā sculpture is represented by votive slabs, known as *ayagapaṭṭas*, which were erected in Jaina shrines for the adoration of the arhats. To this class belong also the so-called 'Holi' reliefs. These votive slabs are Indian in conception and treatment, the figures and other features of the composition following the indigenous art movement in all details.) Particularly interesting is the Āmohini relief<sup>5</sup>, in all probability pre-Kushāṇa in date, which exhibits all the mass and volume of early Indian art as also its character of relief composition. The *ayagapaṭṭa* from Kankālī Tīlā<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 59), showing the seated figure of a Jina in the centre, is a pleasing study of auspicious symbols and motifs treated with a remarkable sense of harmonious and decorative grouping. In the 'Holi' relief, now in the Mathurā Museum, the artist's venture to represent perspective is worth noticing. These slabs are Indian in spirit as well as in technique and characterisation and must be classed with the indigenous art movement.

(So far as the Indian art movement is concerned, the rigidity of the physical mass and volume softens down later on to an unprecedented elegance in the alto-relievo sculptures on the front sides of the rail pillars from various sites of Mathurā.) At the back sides there appear the narrative relief panels from the legends. On the front sides, however, are represented, with very few exceptions, nude or semi-nude female figures—*yakṣiṇīs*, *vṛikṣhakās* or *apsaras* and such subjects as toilet scenes—the connotations and implications of which are anything but religious. Related unmistakably to the *yakṣiṇīs* and tree-nymphs of Bhārhut, Sāñchi, Bodhgayā, etc., formally and iconographically, these figures have attained greater freedom of movement, of gestures and attitudes,



along with increased plasticity and refinement of physical mass. The increased plasticity leads to the creation of alluring female forms of which the aim is frankly sensual and suggestively erotic, though the figures themselves are possibly derived from popular religious beliefs in nymphs and dryads connected with vegetative fertility. The contemporary terracotta figurines from various sites in Indo-Gangetic plains supply analogies and parallels of such figures in miniature. Whatever the purpose, these figures, with their full round breasts and hips, attenuated waists, and smooth texture of the warm living flesh, emphasise physical charm as their substance and sensuous appeal for their aim, further accentuated by such gestures, as an outward thrust of the hip, a slight turn of the head or hand, and frankly coquettish countenance (Figs. 55, 62, & 64). Even in the male figures, very few of which appear on such pillars, the smooth and resilient flesh is not devoid of sensual charm (Fig. 56). Indian art at this period is found to be unreservedly addicted to everything terrestrial and the entire plastic sense is steeped in the physical. The physical and worldly aspect of art, so clearly emphasised in the Mathurā school, is seen in its violent and boisterous frenzy in the contemporary art of Veṅgī in South India.

(The vast repertoire of the Mathurā school may be recognised to be a natural and consistent growth of early Indian art with its foundations on Indian soil and on indigenous trends and traditions of the closing centuries of the pre-Christian era. The dominant fact of Indian history of this period is, no doubt, concerned with the various foreign peoples and races who entered India, fought for political power, and were ultimately Indianised and absorbed in the vast current of the Indian population) Extraneous influences naturally reached Mathurā, apparently also in her artistic

pursuits, but such extraneous contacts remained as mere incidences and the course of the indigenous art movement was in no way disturbed. The prevailing and dominant tradition was Indian and no amount of alien idiom could change its character. Rather, whatever touched upon it was drawn into the basic fabric of Indian art which continued unhampered, and Mathurā bequeathed its rich heritage to the development of Indian art in the subsequent centuries.

### (ii) Gandhāra

The sculptures of the Gandhāra country, embracing the North-Western provinces of India and part of Afghanistan, represent a fundamentally different art and is outside the scope of the natural and consistent growth of the Indian movement dealt with in the above pages. The soil upon which it grew belongs, however, to India and it is mainly because of this that a brief discussion of the school is necessary in a book on Indian art.

Situated close to the North-Western gates of India, the territory lay exposed to foreign contacts and influences from time immemorial. The Persians, the Greeks, the Śakas, the Pahlavas, the Kushāṇas, etc. came and settled there, and the result was the birth of a hybrid culture that found expression in an eclectic school of art, prolific in output and more or less, contemporary with the flourishing period of the indigenous art movement at Mathurā. The Gandhāra movement is usually described as Graeco-Buddhist, but it has to be borne in mind that the school comes into view only after the Greek domination of this part of India is already a thing of the past. The principal patrons were the Śakas and the Kushāṇas who came from Central Asia. The technique employed is unquestionably borrowed from Hellenistic standards,



as modified by such trends as Iranian, Scythian, etc., but the themes depicted are Indian, almost exclusively Buddhist.

Already in the centuries preceeding the Christian era the different peoples who had settled in the North-West and the Punjab had come under the influence of Indian religions. This fact is testified to not only by inscriptions recording religious benefactions, but also by the appearance of symbols and deities associated with Indian religious cults on the coins of the foreign rulers. The spread of Indian religions among these foreign peoples is an interesting study, and it is through the influence of such religions as Buddhism, Bhāgavatism, etc., that the foreign peoples were gradually Indianised and absorbed in the vast current of the Indian population. The Gandhāra school of art, devoted to the service of Indian religions but mainly following an extraneous and eclectic art tradition, represents really a stage and process of this Indianisation and has to be viewed in that light.

The Gandhāra school of art is best known because of its most prolific productions and important remains have come from Jalalabad, Hadda and Bamiyan in Afghanistan, the Swat valley (Udyāna), Taxila (ancient Takshaśilā), Takhti-Bahi in the Yusufzai country, Bala Hissar at the junction of the Swat and the Kabul rivers, Charsada, Palatu-Dheri, Ghaz-Dheri, etc. The material employed is usually a dark grey slate in the early period and stucco and terracotta are the favourite mediums in the late.

The dating of Gandhāra sculptures is rather a matter of uncertainty. The question of the origin of a different direction or of a different style, as the Gandhāra school certainly was, apart from the larger, uniform and consistent indigenous development, is an embarrassing one and opinions usually vary regarding the problem and date of its origin.



The excavations of Marshall at Taxila, carried out with much exactness and circumspection, are responsible for establishing a certain order in the elucidation of dates, and these, coupled with the results of other excavations and finds, appear to indicate that the ruler associated with the earliest remains of Buddhist art of Gandhāra was Azes I belonging roughly to the middle of the first century B.C.<sup>7</sup> The school had thus begun to take shape after the Greek power had already declined, but before the Kushanas had come upon the scene. The days of its expansion coincide with the reign of the great Kushana kings, particularly of Kanishka, and the school continues an abundant production till the third and the fourth centuries A.D.<sup>8</sup>

Though derived, technically and stylistically, from an extraneous and eclectic plastic standard, the themes were of Indian origin and according to some scholars the importance of the school consists in the revolutionary procedure of representing, for the first time, the image of the Buddha in anthropomorphic shape. Independent images, either seated or standing, occur very frequently, and in the numerous representations of the scenes from the life of the Master, which form the principal repertoire of the Gandhāra artists, he is depicted, with very few exceptions, in human shape. This new orientation in Indian religion and art is said to be due to the contribution of this eclectic school. The point has just been touched in connection with the images of Buddha-Bodhisattva from Mathurā, based on indigenous plastic and iconographic ideals. The Gandhāra Buddha plastically belongs to an extraneous plastic standard, but "follows Indian tradition in every essential of its iconography"<sup>9</sup>. Though bearing all the iconographic marks and traits of the Indian tradition, the Buddha of Gandhāra is rendered in terms of divine figures of the Graeco-Roman pantheon and with such



features as are wholly foreign to Indian notions. Robed in a thick garment arranged in the fashion of a Roman *toga*, with hair arranged in wavy curls, with a physiognomy and expression unknown to Indian norms, and sometimes with a moustache or turban, Gandhāra artists turned the Buddha into an Apollo, and such representations, however popular to an eclectic population, failed to satisfy Indian standards and Indian mind. The reliefs representing the scenes from the life of the Master, even in spite of their minutest details, appear to be mechanical reproductions (cf. Fig. 60) without any spontaneity or emotional character that distinguished the reliefs of early Indian art as evidenced at Bhārhut, Sāñchī, Bodhgayā or Amarāvati. Moreover, such representations, as those of the Indian lotus in the fashion of a prickly artichoke, indicate that the Gandhāra artists did not always find themselves at home in translating satisfactorily Indian ideas. The Buddha image of the Gandhāra school, as a whole, also conveys the same impression. The Mathurā Buddha lacked spiritual expression, so also did the Gandhāra one. But the former, based on indigenous standard, plastically and iconographically, expressed an Indian conception and was true to the Indian ideals psychologically as well as culturally. In this respect the Mathurā Buddha-Bodhisattva may be described as a more successful representation of the Master than the Gandhāran which represents a foreign style and ideal, though in the service of an Indian religion. "Judging from expression, intention, conception and artistic mastery of the subject the Buddha-Bodhisattvas from Mathura are purely Indian."<sup>10</sup> The Gandhāra Buddha, though a resourceful adaptation of Indian notions, is foreign in conception and outlook. It is possible that so far as extant remains are concerned the Gandhāra Buddha might have been prior in date, but as Kramrisch significantly observes, "in no case does



priority establish a claim of the Gandhāran type as the origin of the Buddha image."<sup>11</sup> Bachhofer, by a skilful analysis of the two types, has shown that the Buddha-Bodhisattavas of Mathurā were anterior to the influx of the Gandhāran tradition at Mathurā.<sup>12</sup> The Gandhāra influence had nothing to do with the indigenous type which served as the model for all Indian images of the subsequent days.

The chronology of the Gandhāra art, it has already been stated, has been in a state of uncertainty and flux. A rough order, obtained as a result of the latest researches, has already been indicated. The earliest specimen of this art, so far discovered, is the Bimaran reliquary which circumstantially has to be dated in the reign of Azes I. The reliquary is adorned all around with figures in niches between slender pilasters supporting semi-circular ogee arches. The mobility of the figures is striking, and the free and dynamic quality is further accentuated by the flowing treatment of the drapery, conceived plastically as a separate volume with its own weight and covering the body entirely from the shoulders to the ankles. The free-standing Buddha from Loriyan Tongai, dated in year 318 of an unspecified era (probably Seleucid, i.e., 6 A.D.),<sup>13</sup> is in a static pose confronting the spectator (Fig. 63). In spite of its indifferent preservation, the drapery can be recognised to be plastically treated as a separate and voluminous mass, though there is a conscious attempt to make the forms underneath the garment visible. The movement towards a diaphanous treatment of the drapery became gradually prominent and asserted itself fully in the third and fourth centuries A.D., and might have been due to contacts with the indigenous tradition of which such a treatment was the ideal. The well-known Buddha from Takht-i-Bahi, now in Berlin, appears also to belong to the same period as that of the Loriyan Tongai image. In the Buddha from Charsada,



dated in year 384, again in an unspecified era (Seleucid in all probability, i.e., 72 A.D.),<sup>14</sup> the design of the transparent drapery becomes more pronounced, and in the standing Buddha from Takht and the seated Buddha from Sahri-Bahlol it reaches a convincing solution. The image of Hārītī from Skarah-Dheri bears again a date in an unspecified era, year 399, i.e., 87 A.D., if referred to the Seleucid era which is probably the case.<sup>15</sup> The drapery clings to the body closely with small parallel folds thus suppressing the transparency to a certain extent. It has a certain rough and rustic strength which is also noticeable in the figures on the Kanishka reliquary from Shah-ji-ki-Dheri; the latter, however, is far superior in execution. In these two objects there are signs of stylisation which become characteristic of Gandhāra art of this period, and throughout the second century A.D. the style follows a path of progressive schematisation, and fluted drapery with parallel folds is the rule (cf. Fig. 65). The early group of Buddha figures from the latter half of the first century B.C. down to the first century A.D. is characterised by clear and impressive heads with long and beautifully drawn curves outlining the lineaments, and showing locks of hair in wavy curls overflowing the *ushnīṣa* wherever it is marked (cf. Figs. 68 and 71). The body is balanced with clear-cut proportions and the attitude is relaxed. The second century A.D. in Gandhāra art represents a period of decadence and provides a strange contrast to the contemporary artistic movements in Northern and Southern India.

Gandhāra art thus comes into being during the period of Śaka domination. The art of the Greek princely courts, of which specimens are as yet wanting except on coins, was a strongly coloured Hellenism, and this under the Śaka and Kushāṇa patrons assumes a local character in the service of Indian religions, particularly Buddhism. The spell of



Hellenism, felt in the earlier productions, gradually becomes less manifest and a schematisation in the second century A.D. leads to a degeneration of the earlier artistic forces.

From the third century onwards a revival of artistic tendencies of the first century A.D. appears in view. Stone sculptures have become rare, both in quality as well as in quantity; stucco and terracotta of easier tractability are the favourite materials of this period. The style is much more free than the schematic productions of the second century A.D. The drapery, again, is progressively of the transparent gossamer type and in the body treatment the harmony of rhythmic lines, as we feel in the earlier productions but much softened down, is more in evidence. In the attitude of the figures there is noticed again the same tendency to relax. The two significant centres of this late phase of Gandhāra art are Mohra Moradu and Jaulian. This art is nearer to the works of the first century A.D. than to those of the second. The revival of artistic impulse in Gandhāra after a period of decadence has naturally to fall back upon the earlier productions of the first century A.D.<sup>16</sup> Geographical as well as ethnic reasons probably precluded the possibility of turning to the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley for artistic inspiration. It is this late Gandhāra tradition which was carried to Central Asia and China via Afghanistan. ✓

In the fabric of Indian art as a whole the Gandhāra school occupies nothing more than that of a mere passing phase and has but very little contribution, except in a few motifs which again were quickly Indianised. In aesthetic import and significance the products of this school can hardly be compared to the spontaneous productions at Bhārhut, Sāñchī or with those of the later schools of the Gupta and Pallava periods with all their emotional and spiritual content. This eclectic art is an eastward expansion



of Hellenism, as transformed by strong Iranian and Scythian elements and applied to Indian subjects. From the Indian point of view it is an westward expansion of Indian culture in a foreign and eclectic garb. As Dr. Kramrisch eloquently observes, "Gandhāra.....occupies a position apart. For, if it is Indian and colonial from a Hellenistic point of view, it is Hellenistic and colonial when viewed from India."<sup>17</sup>

### (iii) Western India : Kārle, Kānheri

In the early centuries of the Christian era the reliefs in the rock-cut caves of Western India tell of plastic experiences, undoubtedly related to what has been described as an aboriginal trend characteristic of rock-cut carvings, as noticed at Bhājā, and at the same time bearing the impress of the all-pervading classical tradition, as developed at Mathurā. The heaving plastic mass, broad and extensive in content, feels the awareness of the disciplined rhythm of the classical trend and seems to be inspired by that ideal. The panels bearing the figures of the donors in the caves at Kārle (Fig. 51) and Kānheri illustrate this significant phase of the Western Indian plastic idiom. The plastic exuberance enclosed within a powerful frame has, in the ample, but disciplined, modelling, a latent power that seems to be almost on the point of bursting forth. But this latent vitality is kept restrained within an animated body, calm and self-assured in the awareness of its own strength. Illumined by a spirit of sustained expectancy this art shows further scope and possibilities in the subsequent period.

### (iv) South India : Veṅgī

In South India the school of Veṅgī had already made itself felt as a definite movement as early as the second

58-59 century B. C. The initial attempts represented by the Jaggayyapetā reliefs (see above pp. 58-59) give evidence of certain individual characteristics and traits that distinguish this southern movement from the northern. Early Amarāvati reliefs of the first century B.C. carry on this southern expression which, in the early centuries of the Christian era, bursts forth into unprecedented activity. Amarāvati<sup>18</sup> marks the centre of this southern movement and has bequeathed to us a large series of reliefs indicating a prolific and sustained artistic activity that reaches its height in the second century A.D. Besides, Nāgārjunikoṇḍa<sup>19</sup>, Alluru, Gumadidurru<sup>20</sup> and Goli<sup>21</sup> have each left a fair amount of works. Such an abundant wealth of remains can hardly be found in any other school or phase of Indian art. It has been estimated that at Amarāvati alone nearly 1,700 square feet of space had once been covered with carvings. In technical proficiency and plastic quality the school of Veṅgī has, again, a distinct place in the history of early artistic activities in India.

The distinctive traits and idioms that characterised the early phase of the Veṅgī school (second-first century B.C.) have already been discussed (see above pp. 58-59). In spite of a marked individuality, distinctly local in character and expression, the school cannot be regarded as isolated from the general style prevailing throughout the period in other parts of India. In the subsequent period the school continues to thrive in all its local peculiarities, but such products of the Veṅgī school cannot be dissociated from those of the contemporary movements in Northern India. Rather, the North as well as the South illustrate generally the same directions. The southern movement, as represented by the Veṅgī school at its height, constitutes, however, a more intensified expression of the same common style.



The artistic activity at Amarāvati begins in the pre-Christian era and continues for several hundred years. The remains consist of carved slabs belonging to the rails and drum of the stūpa which is now gone. They constitute a very extensive series of sculptures; but as the ruins were used for a long time as a quarry for limestone many of the reliefs are now lost. A substantial remainder may, however, be now seen in the British Museum, London, and in the Government Museum, Madras. The remains at Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa are also fairly abundant and consist of a similar series of reliefs. Generally, they belong to the second-third century A.D., a period that represents the most prolific phase of Veṅgī art. To this phase may also be placed the reliefs from Alluru and Gumadidurru. Scarcely, however, the remains at these places attain the level of those from Amarāvati which, as already observed, marks the centre of the Veṅgī school. In the reliefs from Goli may be recognised a loss of the earlier plastic quality and disciplined rhythm, which is also noticeable, though not in so remarkable a degree, in certain later works of Amarāvati and Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa. An exhaustion seems to have followed the peak of perfection reached in the second century A.D., and with these late works the school of Veṅgī ultimately dissolves. The plastic movement in Veṅgī is important not only because of its prolific output of remarkably outstanding qualities, but also on account of the manner in which it carries on the traditions of early Indian art, develops them in its own spectacularly dramatic way and finally leads on to the bold and imposing compositions of the subsequent Pallava-Chālukya period.

In the remains from the site of Amarāvati we have the most significant and instructive examples for a study of the Veṅgī art in all its aspects. The few works of the first

century B.C. are characterised by a slenderness of form and a corresponding shallowness of relief, already noticeable in the works of the previous century from Jaggayyapeṭā. Compared to the plastic achievements of Jaggayyapeṭā early Amarāvati reliefs are slightly deeper cut and, as a consequence, the figures appear to be of a sturdier build. The body is composed of strongly accentuated masses organically related to one another within a sure and decisive outline. The dress of the figures has close affinities with the garments seen in the figures of the Sāñchī reliefs. The means of representation, particularly such compositional element as a predilection for diagonal movement, may be found to have its parallels in the Sāñchī idiom. In general plastic effect, also, the Amarāvati reliefs of this period offer close analogies with those of the Madhyadeśa school.

In the first century A.D. the leading idiom of Amarāvati is represented by a "heavy and spreading plastic form" in which the linear sensitiveness of the earlier works suffers to a certain extent. It is from this trend that one may trace the heavy body structure generally employed in certain second century reliefs from Nāgārjunikoṇḍa. In such reliefs the precision of outlines is, to great extent, subdued "for the sake of a densely packed plastic contiguity", as Dr. Kramrisch says.<sup>22</sup> The reliefs from Alluru and Gumadidurru also share these characteristics.

In the works of Amarāvati of the second century A.D. the school of Veṅgī blossoms forth in all its characteristic qualities. Inscriptions found at the site<sup>23</sup> indicate that during the reigns of the Sātavāhana princes, Vāśishṭhīputra Śrī Pulumāvi, Śrī Yajña and Śrī Śivamaka Sāta (who may be roughly placed in the second and third quarters of the second century A.D.), extensive additions and embellishments were carried on at Amarāvati. A new zeal appears to have inspired a



renewed artistic activity along with a recovery of the disciplined linear movement of the earlier trend. Amarāvati works of this period capture again the most distinctive characteristic of the southern movement.

The Amarāvati artists of this period seem to have been inspired by a sense of exuberance as well as extravagance. The outer and the inner faces of the two rails and the casing slabs of the stūpa are now found to be covered by a rich web of figures and ornaments (Figs. 57, 66, 70, 76 and 77). The South at this time is known to have maintained a flourishing maritime trade and the wealth that poured in as a consequence is likely to have supplied a dominating motive force in the brilliant and unprecedented efflorescence of plastic activity. The artistic movement in this part of the country appears to have been more continuous. Here the Indian genius pursued its course more freely without any spectre of foreign domination, as in the North, to disturb or thwart its tendencies. The Veṅgī art of this period represents, hence, the logical sequence of the highly linearised plastic tradition that we see in Jaggayyapetā and early Amarāvati works.

The linearised idiom of the Veṅgī school expresses itself more ardently in the Amarāvati reliefs of the second century A.D. On the whole, the artistic movement at Amarāvati is more elegant and elastic. In this art a supreme importance is given to the human figure (cf. Figs. 57, 66 and 70). To quote Bachhofer:<sup>24</sup> "The men are the main point, and it is their actions and doings which are to be perceived above all; whereas the landscape and the architectural surroundings come in the second place and the eye is expected to dwell on them only as upon something accompanying the tenor of human actions."

The reliefs are slightly deeper cut and the modelling rounder and fuller. The lines are precise and at the same



time more sensitive. The delicately modelled bodies exhibit heavy, heaving torsos supported on legs of unearthly slenderness. The forms are elongated and at the same time of sturdier build (cf. Figs. 57, 66 and 70). With the emphasis given to the human figure nature, seen in all its exuberance in the early classical phase, gradually recedes from its importance and is ultimately eliminated. It is as if the human figure now assumes the function that nature served in early classical art and conveys fully its exuberance, elasticity and pliability. Rocks and streams and vegetation occur, no doubt, but merely as inert signs to indicate location or for their own symbolical significance. With hardly any plastic coherence they merely serve to fill in the reliefs. It is the human figure which forms the pivot of the Veṅgī art. "Scene after scene teems with tall and slender human figures; they are everywhere in abundance, in all poses and attitudes, in action and movement, in ease and relaxation, in high tension and elegant langour, sitting, standing, bending, flying, dancing, hanging, hovering—always exhibiting sturdy but delicately modelled bodies with heavy heaving shoulders borne on a pair of slender, supple legs, all definite in their precise and exuberant outline, and characterised by an amazing elasticity of movement."<sup>25</sup>

The subject matter of Amarāvati works and of Veṅgī art of this period is, no doubt, religious, as the inscriptions testify to. The purpose is to depict the legends of Buddhism in all their infinite details. But the art itself is hardly religious. It is significant, as Bachhofer<sup>26</sup> observes, "how religion is being used as a pretext for the purpose of singing a wildly enthusiastic, rapturous paean of worldly life." The ideal of disciplined life or of worldly renunciation is nowhere in evidence. Rather, it is the elegant and exuberant life of this world which the artist aims to depict. He confines his



themes to the doings of a mundane court (cf. Fig. 57) and society—themes that would lend a human appeal to his works. In delineating such themes he does not hesitate even to go beyond the liturgical convention. The real tenor of the legend is concealed by a description of court life or of the joys of worldly existence. And what a rich description it is! Every scene teems with youthful forms of aristocratic build in all possible attitudes and bends (cf. Figs. 66 and 70). The tall, slender and attenuated forms jostle one another. The smooth and resilient flesh, seemingly pleasurable to the touch, lends a sensuous effect to the figures. This is more so with regard to the delicate and alluring female forms with their full busts, heavy hips, coquettish countenances and almost serpentine suppleness (cf. Figs. 57 and 70). Coomaraswamy<sup>27</sup> describes Amarāvati art as “the most voluptuous and the most delicate flower of Indian sculpture”. There is no doubt that this art is sensuous, and even frankly so. But compared to the unabashed lewdness of Mathurā the sensuousness of Amarāvati seems to be more refined and more restrained. Amarāvati art is, no doubt, saturated with a naive paganism. But it is the innocent delight and joyous freshness which the artist aims at in his female forms of Botticellian elegance. What the artist tries to express is the love of life and the joy of existence. The stories and the legends that he depicts are transformed, hence, into “intensified instances of life”<sup>28</sup> in its fullest enjoyment and experience. Here we have the wildest transports of joy alternating with outbursts of violent passion. Everything is dramatic, mobile and agitated. A nervously irritated disposition seems to have taken hold of man. Bachhofer<sup>29</sup> rightly observes: “A passionate sense for everything terrestrial manifests itself, as if Indian art had taken leave of this world with a tumultuous feast, before deliberately entering the cold fields of spirituality.”



A clearly expressed contour of the individual figure with a perfect integrity of line in all its smooth and gliding flexibility closely knitting it into an organic entity speaks highly of the aptitudes and capabilities of the artists. They seem to have advanced greatly also in respect of compositional coherence. Seldom does a particular composition lose its obvious unity. Each composition seems to have been knit together by the rhythmic lines that effectively portray the movements and directions of the figures (cf. Figs. 57, 66, 70, 76 and 77). The movements glide from figure to figure and bind the whole scene together. The subject matter in all its dramatic intensity is another unifying factor in the composition. The arrangement of the figures and settings in a number of planes constitutes, again, a notable technical advance on the part of the artists. This has been sought to be attributed to extraneous influence. It is worth while to note, however, that attempts in this direction had already been made at Sāñchī. The alternation of erect and squatting attitudes prevents an arrangement of the figures in rows. Further, there is always the endeavour on the part of the Veṅgī artists to render an effect of depth extension. This is achieved in a variety of ways. The bodies are turned and bent at various angles (cf. Figs. 57, 66 and 70)—front, back, sideways and even spirally—with the result that the shallow area which is left around obliges the eye to penetrate to the depth. Oversecting and foreshortening are increasingly applied thereby leading to an illusion of depth. Again, the principal scene is often shifted to the background thus compelling the gaze of the spectator to wander to the depth. In the representation of the interiors the artists are also found to have mastered depth in an ingenious manner. Further, there is also a suggestion of perspective in the attempt to vary the sizes of figures in the successive planes.



The attitude of the Veṅgī artists is, in the main, confined to a portrayal of the joys and delight that pervade this worldly life and existence. It is hence that they always show a preference for youthful figures in the height of their vigour and elegance. Old age is purposely ignored as such an aspect is likely to disturb the rapturous enjoyment of life. Pot-bellied dwarfish figures of *gaṇas* are introduced in some of the compositions and they serve to accentuate, by contrast, physical charms of the other figures. Individually also, the figures themselves, with their sturdy bodies carried by limbs of willowy slenderness, depict a tension between the perfect and the opposite, as Kramrisch<sup>30</sup> observes. A conscious contrast is also effected by the alternation in the same composition of the winding movements of the figures and the rigid verticalism of architecture (cf. Fig. 70). In the glaring light of the tropical sun the silhouettes of the figures and other contents of the composition are highly accentuated by deep shadows. Rightly has the style been described as picturesque, and it is this effect which the artists had calculated their works to have.

The mastery of technique of the Veṅgī artists, manifest in a variety of directions, results in manifold interlacings of the elements. The figures seem to emerge from the depth in sweeping and breathless movements and achieve roundness in the process (cf. Fig. 70). The individual figure is carried by a dynamic rhythm which extends beyond the limits of the figure to the group, binding the entire composition in a large and sweeping movement, often parabolic in shape and thus "dynamically open".<sup>31</sup> The attempt towards a dynamic compositional unity, first begun at Bhārhut in a faltering manner, reaches its maturity and fruition in the Veṅgī reliefs.

Along with a portrayal of the worldly life in all its vehemence the Veṅgī artists show further a new capacity for



rendering psychological states. The powerful emotions of the human heart, its joys and sorrows, ecstasy of enjoyment and experience, passionate outbursts and tender moods, triumphant elation and painful depression, intense devotion and religious fervour, kindly solicitude and sundry other sentiments, both noble and ignoble, find appropriate expressions in the hands of the Veṅgī artists. The figures now seem to live with all the fibres of their own beings and faithfully play the parts that they are to perform in the scenes. It is, however, only the body lineaments that convey the different moods and sentiments. Spiritually and, to a certain extent, intellectually also, the figures still remain unenlightened.

Veṅgī art attains the height of its expression in the Amarāvati works of the second half of the second century A. D. and the above observations apply to this phase. The works from the other places seldom reach this level. In the third century A. D. the clearly expressed contour is no longer in favour and gradually dissolves under the onrush of wild and petulant movements, almost amounting to a kind of maenadic frenzy. In this milieu it is difficult to distinguish any definite and palpable form. "The entwining and interlacing of the figures", Bachhofer<sup>32</sup> observes, "mock at all attempts at discriminating clarification and arrangement." Already in the second century A. D. the dynamic movements of the bodies are found to have extended beyond their limits. In the tremulous and disintegrating lines and curves of the later phase, now almost in a state of confusion and anarchy, some scholars recognise an attempt to escape from the limitations of the body, but with the help of the body.<sup>33</sup>

A discussion of Veṅgī art is not expected to be complete without a reference to the images of Buddha, both standing and seated, which occur fairly abundantly, either as isolated statues or within the relief compositions. As a



rule, they have spiral *ushnīshas* and the drapery is found to leave the right shoulder bare (cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Fig. 139). In a few images, however, the garment covers both the shoulders (cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 137), but the number of such images is insignificant. In body physiognomy as well as in the style of the drapery with its folds indicated by incised lines and overlapping ridges the Veṅgī type of Buddha images appears to have been closely allied to the Mathurā type of Buddha-Bodhisattvas. The folds of the drapery exhibit an ordered rhythm of undulating lines which impart a feeling of movement to the body underneath and its expansiveness. The massiveness of the Mathurā type has, however, been much softened down in Veṅgī in conformity with the slimness of the southern idiom. A significant deviation may be recognised in the narrow and oval shape of the head (cf. Benjamin Rowland, *Art and Architecture of India*, Pl. 72) in contrast to the roundness of the facial contour of the Mathurā type. The Veṅgī type of Buddha is known to have extended to Ceylon, and Buddha images of this type, and possibly of South Indian workmanship, have been found in far off Champā and Celebes.

#### (v) General Review

A general review of classical Indian sculpture of the early centuries of the Christian era will at once reveal the worldly character of this art. Never is India known to have been so steeped in everything terrestrial as in this period. Love of life and joy of existence supply the keynote of this art. The human body constitutes its most fundamental point. Its asset is also the human figure. At Kārle the human figure is illumined by a proud and sober serenity

along with a gay cheerfulness suggesting a sense of comfortable enjoyment (cf. Fig. 51). This tone becomes freer at Mathurā which brings in the fulness of the human body in its physical charm and sensuous beauty, coupled with a general disposition of a beautiful carelessness (cf. Figs. 62 and 64). This further changes in Veṅgī art into a violently agitated experience. In the earlier phase Sāñchī had introduced "gaiety, emotion and vivaciousness born of a fuller acceptance of life and its joys and movements".<sup>34</sup> Along with a refinement of the physical sensuousness of Mathurā, Veṅgī carries on the above Sāñchī tradition and transforms it into the wildest enjoyment of life almost to a point of fury. Neither before, nor in the succeeding periods, has the human frame been conceived as an organic growth, as something fresh and living, as it was at Sāñchī, Kārle, Mathurā, and Amarāvati. Instead of being realistic, the artist always confines himself to the sphere of youth and grace. His ideal is, no doubt, the classical Indian ideal of handsome men and beautiful women, the former with broad shoulders, mighty chests and tense abdomens, and the latter with full bosoms, narrow waists, broad hips and almost willowy suppleness. The forms with warm and resilient flesh seem to vibrate. Along with this, we recognise a technical sufficiency which faithfully renders the optical impressions and spatial relations of objects together with an illusion of depth. All this proceeds from experiences gathered through centuries of efforts and experiments, and the fact that the achievements of Veṅgī art had their beginnings at Sāñchī clearly precludes the theory of any extraneous influence. In the subsequent phase classical Indian art reaches its spiritual fruition and one misses the spontaneity and vivaciousness of worldly life which characterise the plastic activity of the early centuries of the Christian era. Without these achievements,



however, the import of subsequent Indian art can hardly be fully apprehended.

#### (vi) Ivory-Carvings

Our account of this phase of classical Indian art is likely to remain incomplete without a reference to the art of the Indian ivory-carvers. The Indians knew from very early times the various uses of the tusk of the elephant for domestic as well as for artistic and decorative purposes. Ivory-carving has been an ancient craft in India. Ivory objects, mostly of domestic use, have been unearthed in excavations at several places, including the excavations at the Indus valley sites which go back to about the third millennium B.C. In ancient literature frequent mention is made of ivory-carvers (*dantakāra*, *dantaghātaka*), and it is the ivory-carvers of Vidiśā who were responsible for the carvings on the south gate of the Great Stūpa of Sāñchī. The *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana mentions dolls and toys made of ivory (*gajadantamayī duhitṛikā*) as suitable gifts to a newly married wife. The *Amarakosha* also mentions dolls made of ivory as a speciality of the Pañchāla country. The *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa and the *Śiśupāla-badha* of Māgha refer to earrings and other ornaments made of ivory. The *Bṛihat Samhitā* of Varāhamihira mentions ivory as a suitable material for inlay with wooden furnitures and incidentally also refers to the portion of the tusk suitable for such works. In the *Harivamśa* also we find reference to the use of ivory in architecture, and windows made of ivory are mentioned in connection with the description of the palace of the Asura king Hiraṇyakaśipu. The use of ivory pricks for bridling horses by Indians is also referred to by Arrian.

The above are illustrative, though not exhaustive, of the various uses of ivory in ancient India. The remains of

ancient ivory-carving are however, very rare, probably because of the extremely fragile nature of the material and the disintegrating climate of the country. The lack of remains does not necessarily indicate that the art was not practised in India, as of such a practice we have abundant references in ancient literature, and of these only a few have been quoted above. An inscription on the south gate of the Great Stūpa at Sāñchī proves the existence of a guild of ivory-carvers in the region of Vidiśā even in the first century B.C.

Early specimens of Indian ivory-carver's art have recently been laid bare, not in India, but beyond her limits. Favourable climatic conditions have perhaps led to their preservation in these tracts. One such specimen has been recovered among the ruins of Pompei in far-off Campania.<sup>35</sup> It was found in a corner of a colonnaded portico of a large private house in the famous city that was buried about the end of the first century A.D. by the eruption of the volcano. Under pressure of the debris it had been splintered into little fragments. The fragments restored make a charming little piece (Fig. 79) representing a female figure in the full bloom of youth and adorned with heavy and sumptuous jewelleries and coiffure. On either side appear two smaller female figures, repeating the type, features and costume of the central figure, though in sharper and more rigid forms which, while producing a sense of primitiveness, have the effect of suppressing the daring sensuality of the main figure. There is a circular hole drilled from the top of the main figure through the axis to a depth of about the level with the loins, the aperture being intended for a metal pin to support either some sacred symbol or, more possibly, some object of practical utility like the mirror.

The central figure is shown nude or dressed in an extremely diaphanous robe and is seen standing with the legs



crossed. The broad full face with wide open eyes, and fleshy mouth with soft and full lips give an expression of happy sensuality to which the full and almost spherical breasts lend an effect of triumphant physical beauty. The heavy hips glide down to the rounded legs in a flowing contour. The figure is two-handed, the left caressing the ear pendants, the right, turned behind the neck, touching the rich coiffure at the back. Complicated forms of jewellery adorn the figure. Particularly noteworthy are the sumptuous treatment of the hair enclosed in a series of ornamental festoons at the back, the large pin issuing horizontally from the head-dress, the heavy girdle, and the rows of rings tightly clasping the lower legs and the fore-arms of the figure. The small females flanking the central one are shown in the function of attendants holding caskets, perhaps containing cosmetics. The main figure may, hence, be described as a lady at her toilette.

This ivory piece with the charming, yet somewhat candid, sensuality of the female form is a typical product of ancient Indian art, recalling the well known *yakshi* figures from Mathurā. The types and forms of jewellery and of sumptuous coiffure are also encountered only in early Indian art. The subject, too, is quite familiar in India, analogous representations being frequently met with in the rail figures of Mathurā. In the freedom of pose and in the fulness of forms, the free and frankly sensuous Mathurā *yakshis* (cf. Figs. 62 and 64) supply the exact parallels of this little ivory caryatid that seems to have somehow strayed from India to far-off Campania. The long journey of this product of pure Indian workmanship is a part of the interesting story of the trade contacts which India had in those days with the western world. The city of Pompei was buried under the ashes of the eruption of the Vesuvius in 79 A. D. Obviously the ivory figurine has to be assigned to a date prior

to that catastrophe. From the physiognomy and style it may be dated about the close of the first century B. C. or the beginning of the first century A. D.

In ancient times Afghanistan was within the orbit of Indian culture. Lying on the direct route of various racial movements and migrations, this area saw interesting culture complexes, remains of which are being gradually laid bare by recent scientific explorations. Begram, to the north of Kabul, has been identified as the site of the ancient city of Kāpiśi, frequently referred to in literature—Indian, Classical and Chinese—and in inscriptions and coins. The French Archaeological Delegation, under the leadership of Mon. Hackin, carried on extensive explorations at this site and laid bare, among other things, a considerable number (a few hundreds) of small ivory plaques, probably representing remains of jewel or toilet caskets of light wooden frames.<sup>36</sup> The caskets have long crumbled to dust and the plaques, too, are in a state of decay and disintegration. They range from pieces merely engraved in very shallow relief, amounting almost to linear sketches, to real sculptures (Figs. 67, 72 and 78). Whatever the nature of the carving, they are characterised by bold and sure outlines enclosing carefully modelled bodies which appear in the fulness of their volumes and depths. Some of the plaques with their sketch-like engravings (Fig. 78), which emphasise, however, a maximum of modelling, seem to recall Veṅgī sculptures of the pre-Christian era. The figures and other details are engraved with deeply incised contours which, with an enveloping line of shadow, give relief to the forms and convey in an ingenuous way the subtle nuances of the modelling. Such pieces appear to have been originally painted and in a few traces of colour still remain. Slightly deeper reliefs with the compositions teeming with figures in multitudinous attitudes and poses



(Fig. 72) are reminiscent, again, of Veṅgī art of the early centuries of the Christian era. The slenderness of the forms and the manner of grouping might also have been allied to the Veṅgī tradition.

It is not with the South Indian classical idiom alone that the ivory plaques of Begram betray their affinity. An acquaintance with and inspiration from the classical idiom of Mathurā are also evident in a large number of plaques which show deeply cut reliefs in which the physical types, especially of the female forms with their rounded volumes, bulging hips, attenuated waists and candid sensuality, find their parallels only in the figure sculptures on the rail pillars of Mathurā. The subjects (elegant toilet scenes are the most preferred), poses and such accessories like the ornaments, the drapery, etc. are also characteristically Indian. The decorative motifs, such as lotus flowers, birds, winged monsters, etc., bear distinctive marks of their derivation from Indian art, a fact which is also noticeable in the representation of the architectural elements in these plaques (Fig. 67).

These dainty little pieces of ivory from Begram exemplify a prolific and brilliant art tradition, bold and forceful in form, and charming and graceful in execution. In a few plaques un-Indian costumes (cf. Fig. 78) and decorative motifs may, perhaps, be recognised. But such incidences are very few. Formally and stylistically, these ivory plaques belong to the domain of Indian art. They represent an art of extreme elegance and high sophistication, an art depicting the worldly life with a joyous freshness and beautiful unconcern, as we find in classical Indian art. The style as well as the contents of the plaques leave no doubt regarding the source of inspiration of this art. It is significant to find how Afghanistan, now outside the pale of India, supplies us with the most considerable remains of early Indian ivory-carving.

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## V

### TERRACOTTA

Earth or clay has been regarded as the primeval plastic material, not only because of its ready availability, but also on account of its easy tractability. It is the passive, i. e. the least-resisting, material that lends itself to shape very easily. It thus satisfies the creative impulse of the ordinary man, as much for aesthetic expression as for domestic and ritualistic needs. A more or less durable form is imparted to productions in clay, either by hardening through exposure in the sun or by firing. Burnt clay or terracotta has thus served as an easy and convenient plastic material from time immemorial.

Plastic practices in India appear to have begun with the terracotta figurines of the peasant cultures of Kulli and Zhob. An abundant production in terracotta is also encountered in the urban culture of the Harappan phase. These terracotta figurines and their plastic import have already been discussed in the first chapter. The products reveal a primitive technique and may be considered as expressions of a plastic style already in the process of formation (cf. Pl. I). In spite of the rude and primitive technique, an approximate sequence indicating a formative style may be ascertained in the objects of the different cultures. A gradually growing sense of modelling and elaboration and the attempt to render greater ease and freedom of attitudes and poses, recognised in terracotta figurines of the Harappa culture, exemplify a style trying to rid itself from the limitations of the primitive technique and conventions.



Beside the stone and bronze sculptures the terracotta art in the urban Harappan culture seems to represent a popular plastic idiom of the common man having connections with the terracotta tradition of the peasant cultures (see above, p. 8). This idiom seems to have continued in the succeeding phases and terracotta remained one of the most favourite mediums of artistic expression for the commoner people. This is evident from the enormous mass of terracotta figurines that have been unearthed in ancient sites throughout India, particularly in the riverine plains. Unfortunately, proper records and data with regard to stratigraphical evidence of such objects are extremely meagre, if not lacking altogether. What is required is an assortment, on the evidence of stratigraphy, of the numerous terracotta objects that are usually found in the scientific excavation of an ancient site. It is a good sign that the Archaeological Department of the Government of India is devoting greater attention to the proper recording of stratigraphical evidence, and when this is done one can, perhaps, expect to classify scientifically the numerous terracotta finds from the ancient sites. Their sequence may help us to determine the evolution of Indian terracotta style in particular and, consequently, of Indian sculpture in general. In the present state of our knowledge the absence of such scientific evidence is being keenly felt.

To a scientific observer it may appear that a complete and comprehensive charting of terracotta finds on the evidence of stratigraphy is expected to determine satisfactorily a sequence of the vast mass of Indian terracotta figurines from the different sites. There are, however, serious difficulties in this process. The recording of stratigraphical evidence of terracotta finds in the earlier excavations has

been arbitrary to a certain degree. In the present state of our knowledge, stratigraphical evidence, even if correctly recorded, can be expected to furnish little conclusive data with regard to the date of a particular object. As it now is, there are evidences of objects, apparently belonging to different dates, being found in the same level of occupation, or of a later piece being recovered from a level lower than that of a find of an earlier date. There might be various reasons for such circumstances. A tiny piece, as the terracotta objects generally are, is likely to be disturbed from its original level due to some confusion underground, either by some actions of men or of nature. It was the custom, again, to preserve such objects in households even for centuries before being discarded when damaged. It is not unlikely, hence, that objects of different dates should be found accumulated in the same pit. It is because of these circumstances that Kramrisch significantly observes, "there is no such thing so far as terracottas are concerned as a Maurya level, etc."<sup>1</sup> In spite of all these, we cannot, without a due consideration, brush aside stratigraphical evidence which may be found helpful for a general scheme of classification. Again, many of the significant terracotta figurines, relevant for a study of this art, represent accidental finds and no accurate data with regard to the level of their discovery are available. The evidence of the terracotta technique and its gradual advance may, under the present circumstances, be utilised for a clue to an approximate sequence of the terracotta objects. It may be found possible, perhaps, to establish a course of evolution of terracotta art on this basis. But here, too, some caution must need be used, as will be indicated later on. The affinity of a terracotta form with that of the plastic style in stone of known date also offers a certain definite clue as to the relative age of a particular object.



The importance of terracotta as a medium of artistic expression in the pre-historic Indus civilisations has already been indicated. The terracotta art seems to have been a favourite idiom in the historic phases also. Beside the monumental works in stone the terracotta objects of the historic phases may appear to be slight and tiny. But what it lacks in size is amply compensated for by the abundant and prolific productions indicating an extensive and popular idiom of plastic expression. A variety of significant motifs and forms may be found in terracotta. Its use was extensive and purposes varied. Objects and artifacts in terracotta were intended chiefly for domestic use and worship and household decoration, for children's toys, for popular religious and magical practices. Seals were made out of that material for purposes of documentation and such seals bear in their engravings the impress of an artistic impulse of the people. The poor and the humble folk satisfied their craving for personal decoration by fashioning out delightful ornaments in clay and terracotta. In brick buildings terracotta served as the most suitable and convenient material for decorating and diversifying the exterior walls, not only by variegated mouldings of different shapes and patterns, but also by continuous dados of plaques. Apart from aesthetic significance, the terracotta art, in its varied uses and applications, supply invaluable data for a study of the life and culture of the people.

It is proposed to confine our attention here to a discussion of the terracotta art of India to the period collectively covered by the three previous chapters. A study of Indian terracottas leads to their broad division into two well-defined groups—one indicating a primitive form and experience and the other showing the impress and formulations of a stylistic advance natural to a progressive art movement in a chronological sequence. In form and technique



the former differs but little from the terracotta figurines of the pre-historic Indus civilisations. What is further interesting is the fact that the primitive type has been found in association with the other, and that terracotta objects of the primitive type are also being fashioned out by the rural people even in the present day. An eminent scholar, hence, describes this type as the "ageless" in distinction to the second which is designated as the "timed variation".<sup>2</sup> The products of the ageless type seem to be as important as those of the timed variations for a comprehensive study of Indian terracotta art. It should, however, be emphasised at the outset that in the absence of any proper mode of chronological or stylistic grouping it would be rather a hazardous task to impute any chronology to these objects, except in a few instances where the evidence of fashions in dress and ornaments might furnish a clue as to their relative chronological position.

The ageless type, whether representing a human figure or an animal, is characterised by a modelling that reduces the form to a simple description of the main volumes of the figure corresponding to the principal parts of the body, such as the head, the torso and the hands and the feet. The human figures are fashioned entirely by the hand by means of such rough and ready devices as flattening and rounding the body, pinching up and pressing down soft clay according to the requirements of the form, and drawing the ends of the limbs into conical points—all done by the simple pressure of the fingers. Eyes, lips, ears, navel, hair, etc. are indicated either by mere scratches or incisions, or by strips and pellets separately fashioned and applied on the summarily modelled form. The *appliqué* technique is also employed for delineating ornaments and head-dresses, and usually the form is burdened with them. Most of the human figurines represent females with heavy and bulging hips and prominent, rounded



breasts, sometimes with the navel and abdomen clearly marked. They seem to be associated with the primitive conception of a mother or fertility goddess.

The animal figurines of this group represent mostly horse, elephant and ram, and, like the human figurines, were fashioned by the hand. The modelling is reduced to cylinders, cones and kindred geometrical shapes representing their bodies and limbs. Like the human figurines, again, ornaments, trappings, etc. and also such features as the ears, manes (in case of the horse) and horns (in case of the ram) were separately fashioned and applied. Clay and terracotta figures of horses and elephants were often offered to village deities, as they are even today, and the practice appears to have been wide-spread throughout the country. There is a plausibility also in the suggestion of Kramrisch that such animal figurines were intended as conveyances (*vāhanas*) of the divinities, and that such figures in early Indian art might stand for the symbols of the deities concerned.

The terracotta figurines of the ageless type were entirely made by the hand; but with the time-bound group the mould also came into use. Nearly every ancient site in India has yielded a very considerable number of terracotta objects of varied shapes and forms. They constitute, perhaps, only a fraction of the total production in this medium. The most prolific centres were Takshasilā (Taxila) in the Punjab, Mathurā, Śrāvastī (Sāheth-Māheth), Ahichchhatrā, Kauśāmbī (Kośām), Bhītā and Rājghāṭ in Uttara Pradesh, Padmāvati (Pawaya) in Gwalior (Madhya Bhārat) Pāṭaliputra (Patna), Buxar and Vaiśālī (Basarh) in Bihar and Tāmralipti (Tamluk), Mahāsthān and Bāngarh in Bengal. Besides, stray and sporadic finds are also recorded from other places. The artistic movement in terracotta thus seems to have been extensive and wide-spread throughout Northern India. In



the South also the terracotta tradition comes into view as a result of the recent archaeological excavations in Hyderabad.

The rather large number of objects, unearthened till now, indicates a wide range of probabilities within the time-bound group of terracottas. It is possible, no doubt, to discern certain local features with regard to objects of each site. Kramrisch particularly recognises three distinct types in the objects found respectively at Patna, Buxar and Mathurā, the terracottas from other sites representing, according to her, local variations and adaptations of the types from the above three sites.<sup>3</sup> The three types, however, do not appear to be entirely separated and isolated from one another. A certain general resemblance in head-dresses, hair-styles and ornaments and a comparative affinity of the mode of execution seem to suggest points of contact which connect the activities in the various sites as belonging to one common movement. The variations that are noticed are not of such a character as to justify their division into definite and well-marked types.

The earliest in the time-bound series of Indian terracottas appear to be those in which the faces are found to be impressed from moulds, with the hair, head-dress and even the ears separately made and added. The heads, thus fashioned, were affixed to the bodies modelled by the hand exactly in the process that we notice in figurines of the ageless type. The drapery and ornaments on the body are also applied. The additive mode of figure-composition, so tenacious in the ageless type, seems to have been the predominant technique also in this group, only the face and, to a certain extent, the accessories showing such traits and characteristics that might indicate clues to their relative chronology. The additive technique in terracotta art, it should be emphasised, has been the most persistent and figurines with moulded faces and



modelled bodies are known to have survived in all phases of Indian art even up to the present day.<sup>4</sup>

Complete figures of the earlier phases of Indian terracotta art are extremely scarce. Of the few nearly complete figurines, two from Mathurā seem to be highly interesting in this context. Both represent female figurines, each in a strictly flattened and frontal aspect, with the attributes of fecundity highly emphasised, as we find in the extremely exaggerated pelvis and full, rounded breasts. The navel, in each case, is deeply marked. One of them,<sup>5</sup> now in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, is complete, except for the hands which are broken away. This figure is burdened with a cumbersome array of ornaments and jewellery. On the head appear beaded discs of ornaments from which tassels appear to be hanging down. From each ear hang two heavy rings, while the neck is furnished with a heavy collar. On the body there appear wavy strips of ornaments or drapery the nature and character of which are difficult to ascertain. The hips are encircled by a heavy girdle (*mekhalā*) and the lower legs by a pair of anklets. The legs are stumpy in appearance and form almost a parabolic curve at the upper end. The head is impressed from a mould and has wide open eyes, broad nose and wide mouth with a slightly fleshy lower lip. The body is entirely modelled by the hand and the ornaments are all separately fashioned and applied. The other figure,<sup>6</sup> now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (U.S.A.), is also nearly complete, but for the lower portions of the right leg and the left hand which are now missing. In technique as well as in conception this latter figure is evidently allied to the former; only there is a lesser array of ornaments which enables us to appreciate the form more convincingly. The modelling appears to be more delicate and sensitive, and the stumpy shape of the legs and longish conical appearance of the hands,



both with fingers unmarked, stand in definite contrast to the soft shadows playing all over the torso. Kramrisch is inclined to place the former figure to about 200 B.C. or slightly earlier, while Coomaraswamy assigns the latter to the pre-Maurya age on the supposed affinity of this figure to that engraved in *repoussé* on the gold plaque from Lauriya Nandangarh.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the actual date, the two seem to be much too allied to be differentiated chronologically by a wide gap.

The terracotta figurines of Maurya date, as may be ascertained from those assigned to that age, appear to be characterised by remarkably individual traits in respect of physiognomy as well as of expression. Their ascription to the Maurya epoch may not always be founded on absolutely sure grounds; but their very individuality marks them as forming a distinct class by themselves, as significant as the sculptural art in stone of this epoch. In respect of size such terracotta figures also stand out from the rest of Indian terracottas which are usually miniature in size. Many of the examples have been discovered at Pāṭaliputra, the Maurya capital, a fact which may lend some conviction to their assignment to the age of the Mauryas. A few of them, namely a standing female figurine and two detached heads, have been found from the site of Bulandi Bagh "in the dark blue soil enveloping the ancient wooden rampart" of the Mauryan city.<sup>8</sup> Another standing female figurine has also been recovered from the same site in a later excavation.<sup>9</sup> The association of these terracotta figurines from Bulandi Bagh with the Maurya age thus appears to be convincing. The two standing female figurines from Bulandi Bagh appear to belong to the same conception. In spite of a frontal treatment each represents a complete figure in the round. But for the faces which are pressed from the moulds the figurines are modelled



by the hand. The first seems to have been built up in separate parts and put together before firing. This figurine wears an elaborate array of heavy apparel with fluttering hoops in the front and at the sides. Over the head appears the rich bicornate head-dress of almost manifold elements. In spite of the rigid post-shaped legs the position of the hands (the left broken away) may indicate an attitude of dance. The second female figurine from Bulandi Bagh, bereft of the heavy garments and ornaments, shows a slender and disciplined body with the most subtle and sensitive modelling. The thinned garment, clinging fast to the body, has an almost diaphanous effect. The elongated limbs add to the delicate appearance of the figure which seems to be a refined version of the conception noticed in the previous specimen.

Of the two detached heads from Bulandi Bagh, the one with the bicornate head-dress<sup>10</sup> seems to have been related to the above female figurines in facial physiognomy, while the other, that of a boy,<sup>11</sup> has a strongly marked individuality in its happy and radiant expression. Coomaraswamy describes the latter as "one of the most sensitive and skilful productions of Indian art at any period." The youthful figure of a seated *yogin*, discovered by Jayswal from the site of Bhiknapahari,<sup>12</sup> has a perfectly refined treatment and modelling all over along with a glowing countenance. The ornament of beads, the *ūrdhva-liṅga*, and what appears to be a snake hood over the head may associate the figure with the conception of Śiva. The treatment and expression may indicate a date in the Maurya period, though Jayswal is inclined to class it as pre-Maurya. The two vase-shaped male figurines, also from the same site,<sup>13</sup> exhibit, again, a high degree of individualised expression which, coupled with their provenance, may connect them with the Maurya terracotta



art. Reference may be made also to two other detached heads belonging, in all possibility, to this phase. One is that of a male (Fig. 80) from the site of Golakhpur and the other that of a female (Fig. 81) from Bhiknapahari.<sup>14</sup> Superb in modelling, each bears the touch of a master craftsman's hand. The shaven head of the male (Fig. 80) with drooping eyelids has a calm and pensive mood, while the female (Fig. 81) with her full cheeks, rounded chin and soft fleshy lips has all the graces of a youthful feminine face. What connects the above examples together is an individualised expression imparted to each. Such individualised treatments are difficult to be met with in any other phase of Indian terracotta art.

The remarkable torso of a female figurine from near Golakhpur seems to be an outstanding production.<sup>15</sup> Conceived entirely in the round (Fig. 73), the figure with its soft and rounded volumes has a delicate and perfect modelling, front, back and sides all included. As is usual in the other terracotta figurines, ageless as well as time-bound, we have here a youthful type in the full bloom of femininity, with large and globular breasts, with the nipples indicated and an appearance of a slight droop because of their weight, distended abdomen, heavy hips and buttocks and soft contours suggesting a sensitive warmth of flesh. Profuse ornaments, which seem to be separately applied, bedeck the figure. A jewelled belly-band and a girdle of four strings of beads of different shapes, passing just below the buttocks at the back, add to the ornate effect of the figure. A double-stringed ornament of beads passes diagonally across the body from the left shoulder and is drawn up at the back along the right hip. From it frills and tassels appear to hang down along the left side of the torso covering partly the jewelled girdle in front. Or, this last may represent part of an upper garment that resembles a frilled gown. From the waist hangs down a



close-fitting drapery following the contours of the thighs and with frills shown in front. Kramrisch<sup>16</sup> assigns this figure to the family of the *yakshiṇī* statue from Didārganj (see above, p. 55, Fig. 47). But the form and modelling of the terracotta figurine, though seemingly of the same conception, appear to indicate a date anterior to that of the Didārganj *yakshiṇī* figure. Jayswal, from the level of its find, would assign the terracotta figurine to the early Maurya epoch. The level, as already observed, cannot be always relied upon, but a date in the late Maurya early Śuṅga times for this figurine might not seem improbable.

With regard to Indian terracottas the problem of chronology, for reasons already stated, is a much controversial one, and differences of opinion are, not unoften, considerable. Scholars generally hold that terracottas with modelled bodies and moulded faces and with jewellery and apparel affixed were characteristic of the Maurya epoch. But this cannot be regarded as always true. Such terracotta figurines are known to have continued even in the Śuṅga period when moulded plaques become generally frequent. The most significant terracotta figurines that might have some association with the Maurya epoch have been discussed above. With regard to a few others, usually ascribed to this period by some scholars, the ascription cannot be said to be beyond doubt. The terracotta figurines from Buxar (Shahabad district, Bihar),<sup>17</sup> bearing certain definite and individual characteristics in headgear and ornaments, do not seem to have been earlier than the varied productions of the Śuṅga period, in spite of the early date assigned to them on account of the great depth at which they have been found. The delicate touches in their facial treatment appear to associate them generally with the Śuṅga idiom. The two heads, one of a female from Kośām (Fig. 74) and the other of a male

from Mathurā (Fig. 75) may also be ascribed to the Śuṅga phase, though certain scholars are inclined to class them with the Maurya.

Before passing on to the Śuṅga terracottas it will be profitable to refer to two significant terracotta figurines which appear to be related to the Mauryan conception, though there is hardly any other evidence to date them in the Maurya age. Both of them represent standing female figurines and are nearly complete. One of them<sup>18</sup> hails from Tamluk (Midnapur district, Bengal). Tamluk represents the site of the ancient seaport city of Tāmralipti and is recently proved to have been a prolific centre of ancient terracotta art. Such terracottas have usually been found in association with ancient cast coins of copper and an early date for these terracottas can easily be inferred. In the terracotta figurine under examination the face appears to have been pressed from a mould and affixed to the separately modelled body. The left hand is *akimbo*, and the right is stretched along the side in a curve parallel to the drapery which spreads out about the waist. The drapery is composed of *appliqué* plaques and consists of a hooped skirt, held by a belt, and a scarf. The ornaments are heavy and in *appliqué*, but the number is much reduced, a fact that enables one to determine the essentials of its modelling and composition. The head is delicately modelled with soft and subdued shadows adding charm to the full and rounded face. The bust, likewise, is perfectly modelled and such qualities of modelling are enhanced by the contrast presented by the primitive technique of *appliqué* plaques for garment and jewellery. The Tamluk specimen has a distinct affinity with the two standing female figurines from Bulandi Bagh (see above, pp. 104-05) and may be classed with them chronologically as well as stylistically. The other figurine hails from Pokharṇā in



the district of Bankura (Bengal)<sup>19</sup> and essentially resembles the Tamluk specimen, though lacking in its finish, perhaps due to extreme corrosion. The execution also is on an inferior level. In conception, however, it seems to be related to the Tamluk and Bulandi Bagh figurines, but belongs, possibly, to a later date.

The terracottas with moulded faces and modelled bodies are followed by miniature plaques, each bearing a figure or figures in relief, entirely produced from moulds and then touched up and finished before firing. In this series, too, it is the female figurines that predominate. Such plaques have come up from various ancient sites of India in a fairly abundant number, and a large proportion of them may be placed in the Suṅga-Kāṇva period, roughly second and first centuries B. C. The earlier ones, as in the contemporary plastic movement in stone, are characterised by flattened reliefs, heavy forms and harsh linear schemes. Soon they give place to pleasing specimens in which the reliefs are higher, the forms more refined and more sensitively modelled, the lines more disciplined, and the contours and gradation of planes better regulated. As a rule, the figures are heavily coiffured and wear elaborate apparel and jewellery concealing, to a certain extent, the loveliness of the delicately modelled body. The types are considerably varied, and in the prolific terracottas of this group with their varied modes of coiffure, dress and jewellery one may find ample materials for a study of the fashions and tastes of the time.

In this general study of Indian sculpture it is not possible to refer even to the principal types of this group of terracottas, and it is proposed to confine our attention to a significant example or two as epitomising the qualities and characteristics of Suṅga terracotta art. Kośām, the site of Kauśāmbī, among other places, has been a prolific centre of early

terracotta figurines. A female figurine from Kośām is reproduced here (Fig. 82) as a characteristic example of this phase. The figurine wears elaborate adornments consisting of jewelled and beaded ornaments of various shapes and designs. The treatment of the coiffure is elaborate, decked as it is with strings of beads, jewelled bands and a turban-like roll on the left side of the head. The ears have heavy pendants and the neck is adorned with a close-fitting collar and a beaded chain of several strings. In the fore-arm may be seen a few pairs of bracelets, while a girdle of several strings passes round the waist. Except for the ornaments, the upper part of the body is bare ; from the waist downwards hangs an extremely thin drapery which, instead of concealing, reveals the delicate contours of the thighs and the legs. The sensitive modelling of the face and of the bust is also noteworthy. The hands seem to be joined in front just below the breasts. The left leg is bent and from the attitude the figurine seems to represent a graceful female danseuse.

Tamluk has been a prolific centre of ancient terracotta figurines, and finds of early terracottas have occasionally been recorded since a long time. Recently there has been found a large number of fragmentary terracotta forms, a few of which may prove to be of considerable interest. Among the Tamluk terracottas of this phase mention should particularly be made of an almost complete plaque, the like of which is seldom to be found in the whole range of Indian terracotta art. It represents a discovery made long ago and had been lying forgotten for more than half a century. When it was again brought to the notice of scholars a wrong inference was made regarding its findspot.<sup>20</sup> It will be found useful, hence, to discuss this interesting object rather in detail.

The plaque was found in four pieces ; but the pieces have been fitted together to form an almost complete female



figure except for the feet and the ankles (Fig. 85). A highly ornate specimen, the female figurine is overloaded with elaborate jewellery and rich apparel. It is remarkably well preserved and the surface is very little worn down. Apparently the entire plaque was produced from a mould and was later on touched up and finished with a scraper or a knife. The ornamental details were made with stamps and were carefully finished afterwards. The relief is full, though the face, because of the exuberance of ornaments and coiffure, appears rather flattened.

Quite a variety of ornaments and decorative motifs were employed in this highly interesting specimen. The background is found to be stamped over with countless twelve-pointed and six-pointed rosaces. Apart from this ornament of the background, the figure itself wears elaborate burdens of coiffure and jewellery and it would be worth while to quote from the excellent description of Professor Johnston:<sup>21</sup>

"The head-dress is elaborate; the hair itself seems to be enclosed in a close-fitting bonnet (or fillet), bordered with four rows of beads and terminating in two flower tassels, the frontal hair being just visible. . . . On each side of the bonnet are two turban-like rolls of cloth, each bound with a belt and highly ornate. The left-hand one, which is the larger in accordance with the usual practice of this class of figure, is made up of five vertical strips with dependent tassels or strings of beads at regular intervals, while the right-hand one appears to be in a single piece, embellished with six rows of a flower ornament between which are strings of beads. Stuck into the latter are five emblems . . . Their exact identification would perhaps help us to guess whom the figure represents. The lowest one is an *aṅkuṣa* . . . and the middle one an axe. The two on each side of the latter

are of the *triśūla* shape, familiar to us from Sanchi and other sites, the lower one being surmounted by a crown and the upper by a triangular piece, possibly they are two types of *vajra*, . . . The top emblem might be a flag, a *dhvaja* . . . or some kind of chopper. Each of the five has a string of six beads hanging from the top. Emblems of this type are frequently referred to in literature, though often difficult to identify on the monuments. A terracotta plaque, recently found in Kosam and now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, shows the same series and presumably represented the same goddess; it is in a much poorer condition and less complete than our figure. On the north gate of Sanchi there are to be seen two bracelets of similar symbols . . . These two series include the *aṅkuṣa* and *vajra*, but give no help towards the identification of the other emblems. Between the masses of the turban rises a crown with five rows of star-shaped ornaments, presumably a jewelled cap containing the hair. A similar, but larger, crown occurs several times on the Śuṅga railing at Bodhgayā, and the head-dresses of the same general type are not uncommon in the art of the Śuṅga period, both sculpture and terracotta. The ears have two large circular highly decorated rolls, that in the right ear being shown side view, and the other one frontally; from each hang a number of tassels or strings of beads. These rolls again are familiar as was known from many recently discovered terracottas. Round the neck is a heavy necklace, the details of which are rather worn and unimportant."

The dress is also elaborately represented and according to Professor Johnston admits of two possible interpretations. It appears to consist either of a sleeveless tunic, fastened to the waist by a girdle and reaching down to the knees with an under-skirt that extends nearly to the ankles, or of a single garment with flounces. The dress passes over the



left shoulder, but leaves the right shoulder bare. A border is indicated by the top part of the dress. Close-set shallow lines, made by a comb-like instrument, indicate the folds,<sup>22</sup> and at the bottom appear two series of bead strings ending in tassels. In the upper part of the strings may be seen four paunchy figures, two shown on each thigh, squatting on haunches and with the hands raised to the heads. Similar figures are also found to appear in the same positions on a terracotta figure, said to have been collected from Kauśāmbī and once in the Ow-Wachendorf collection. Around the hips is a girdle in three rows, the upper and lower of gadrooned beads and the central one of small circular stamps. This girdle seems to be held in position by the hands and possibly with a fastening or support indicated by a small flat object above the top row in the centre. Professor Johnston thinks it curious that such a girdle should be worn above the drapery, but this practice appears to be widely in vogue as appears from terracotta figurines and from stone statuary as well. A broad ribbon passes over the right shoulder and round the left hip, like a bandolier, with four figures, possibly intended as amulets. Professor Johnston describes them as a pair of fish, a bird (with the head broken), a sleeping doe and a *makara*. Bead strings are suspended to the ribbon and the amulets, and one or more scarves are shown passing over the right and left upper arms and terminating on a level with the knees. The upper arms are bare, but the lower arms bear each four heavy bracelets.

The general affinity of this plaque with the Indian Museum and the Ow-Wachendorf specimens, said to have been recovered from Kauśāmbī, led Professor Johnston and, following him, other scholars to think that this remarkable piece also hailed from the same site. But, as we have already seen, there can be no doubt any longer that this outstanding

terracotta figure originally came from Tamluk, the famous Tāmralipti of ancient days. Among the recent Tamluk finds, now in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University, there may be recognised at least two fragments which seem to be closely allied to our piece in all the important details. From associated objects and from the indications, noted above, the plaque appears to be dated in the second century B. C.

With regard to the identification of this remarkable terracotta figurine divergent views are held. Such views are, more or less, tentative, and no definite opinion is possible on this point in the present state of our knowledge. From the emblems worn as crests Professor Kramrisch describes the figure as representing the *apsaras* Pañchachūḍa produced at the churning of the ocean. Professor Johnston, however, summarily rejects this view, as, in his opinion, figures of *apsaras* should be shown as nude. He discusses at length the question of identification. From the analogy of the bandolier with amulets, found in several objects with votive significance from the Near East, he thinks this figure also to have a similar significance. "It looks," he says, "as if we are dealing with the cult of a mother goddess, which we know was wide spread over the Near East, and indeed over most of the then known world at this time, and which seems to have prevailed in India from time immemorial, to judge from archaeological evidence made available in the last twenty years." He cites a reference to a goddess, called Māyā, in the *Saundarananda kāvya* of Aśvaghoṣa and finds mention of an Indian Mother Goddess, Maiya, in the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus, No. 1280, where this goddess is invoked as bringing the flood in the Ganges. The goddess, referred to, as Maia in the Papyrus, appears to be the same as Māyā of Aśvaghoṣa, and from the description in the Papyrus she is



known to have been worshipped in the Gangetic valley as a goddess especially associated with rain and fertility. Though he was not quite definite, Professor Johnston thinks that "such an identification meets the requirements of the case, and that, if it is the wrong answer, the right one, when found, will be of similar character."

Among the varied and considerable remains of terracotta art of this phase reference may be made to one other interesting specimen from Basarh (ancient Vaiśālī), representing a winged goddess<sup>23</sup> very rarely met with. The goddess stands facing on a lotus (which, according to Coomaraswamy, is one of the earliest examples of lotus pedestal in Indian art) and is flanked on two sides by lotus stalks with buds and blossoms. The arms are held *akimbo*, while two wings are shown on the shoulders. A profusion of ornaments bedecks this figure, and among these, the pearl-fringed bracelets are worth noticing. Coomaraswamy assigns the figure to the Maurya or a slightly earlier date. The plaque is entirely moulded and the general style cannot be ascribed to a date earlier than the Śuṅga period. A fragmentary specimen of the type has also been found from Basarh,<sup>24</sup> while two other later representations of the winged goddess occur, one in a bronze specimen from Akhun Dheri, possibly of Kushāṇa date, and the other of a similar date in a stone relief from Mathurā<sup>25</sup>. A terracotta mould showing the figure of a male counterpart of the winged goddess from Basarh and essentially resembling it in respect of accessories and details has recently been recovered from the site of ancient Tāmralipti. The mould, which belongs to the Śuṅga idiom, is now deposited in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University.

In the Śaka-Kushāṇa period various ethnic types and fashions are represented in terracotta art, a clear reflection

of the racial influx that was characteristic of the period. Mathurā and Taxila represent two prolific centres of this art, while Ahichchhatrā, Kauśāmbī, Bhiṭā, Rājghaṭ, Vaiśālī, Bāngarh, etc. have each supplied conspicuous objects. The repertoire of Kushāṇa terracottas is also varied and, apart from figures of already known types and motifs, various homely scenes and popular stories enrich the subject matter of this art. A superbly modelled terracotta head from Mathurā (Fig. 83) with a radiant smile of joyous existence illustrates the worldly attitude of this art, as in the plastic style in stone of this period. The terracotta plaque from Rājghaṭ with the figure of a hermaphrodite accompanied by an animal (Fig. 86) reveals, again, a similar attitude in its sensuous physical form. The Bāngarh<sup>26</sup> figurines (incidentally it should be mentioned that a few terracotta moulds have also been recovered from Bāngarh) seem to be permeated also by similar attitudes, while the terracotta plaque of an unknown provenance with a male figure carrying a bow and a sheaf of arrows (Fig. 87) bears all the charms of an attenuated male form. This plaque belongs possibly to the third-fourth century A. D. The terracotta art of this period seems to represent a movement, parallel to the contemporary plastic art in stone, and bears the stamp and impress of the latter. It is, likewise, as worldly and physically minded. With well-modulated forms and smooth and sensuous contours, the animated and lively terracotta figurines of this period supply an interesting picture of the varied secular life, rich in social content and significance.



## References

1. Stella Kramrisch, Indian Terracottas (*Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. VII, 1939, p. 105).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
4. Indian potters of the present day still make clay images in this technique. The body is modelled by the hand, the ornaments are impressed from separate moulds and then applied, and the head, again, pressed from a mould (and they have moulds of varying sizes according to the proportions of the images) and then affixed to the shoulders by means of a tenon.
5. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, Pl. 6.
6. Benjamin Rowland, *Art and Architecture of India*, Pl. 69B.
7. A. K. Coomaraswamy, Archaic Indian Terracottas (IPEK, 1928, p. 68). Rowland also holds a similar view (*Loc. Cit.*, p. 24). Coomaraswamy is inclined further to class with it certain other terracottas having a general affinity with this figurine.
8. ASR., 1917-18, Pt. I, p. 27, Pl. XVI; also A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 51.
9. ASR., 1926-27, Pl. XXXI, Fig. k.
10. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 14.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 6, Fig. 16.
12. K. P. Jayaswal, Terracottas dug out at Patna (JISOA., Vol. III, 1935, p. 126, Pl. XXXII, Fig. 1).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 126, Pl. XXXII, Figs. 2 & 3.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 126, Pl. XXX, Figs. 1 & 4.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 126, Pl. XXXI.
16. Stella Kramrisch, Indian Terracottas (JISOA., Vol. VII, 1939, p. 107.)
17. A. Banerji Sastri, Remains of a pre-historic civilisation in the Gangetic valley (*Journal of the Bombay Historical Society*, Vol. III, 1930, pp. 187-91 & Pls.)
18. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, Pl. 7.
19. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 205.
20. The terracotta plaque was recovered from a mound at Tamluk, along with several copper cast coins, as a result of the erosion of the river Rupnarayan which cut away a part of this ancient seaport city. It was exhibited in a monthly meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, now the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in the year 1883 and was apparently presented to the Society, along with the few copper coins, discovered on the same occasion and under similar circumstances. An illustration of the figure was published in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1883, Pl. III; also pp. 113-14. The remarkable plaque was, however,

eventually lost and remained forgotten until late Professor E. H. Johnston communicated the notice of a terracotta figurine, now in the Indian Institute, Oxford, in the *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology for the year 1937* (Kern Institute, Leiden), Vol. XII, p. 16, Pl. V, and later on published a detailed article on it in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. X, 1942, pp. 94-102, and Pl. IX. A comparison of the illustration of the plaque, published in that *Journal*, with that in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1888, cited above, leaves no doubt that the terracotta figurine, now in the Indian Institute, Oxford, is the same that was discovered at Tamluk and exhibited in the monthly meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in March, 1888. In size, in general likeness of the figure in each illustration in respect of its bearings, ornaments, apparel, coiffure treatment, etc., in the peculiar arched mark on the forehead and in marks of the breaks in the plaque, the figures in the two illustrations are exactly identical, and the identity of the original of the two illustrations cannot be questioned. The present writer discussed these points in a monthly meeting of the Asiatic Society in December, 1949 (*Year Book of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1949, pp. 174-75). He also wrote to the Indian Institute, Oxford, specifying the aforesaid points of identity and requested them to communicate their views after a comparison of the original with the illustration in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1888. Mr. T. Burrow, the Curator of the Indian Institute, Oxford, wrote back in reply that he had no doubt about the identity of the terracotta piece, now in their possession, with the one from Tamluk exhibited at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1888. He further added that he could find no reference, among their records, to the time or mode of its acquisition by the Institute; but he thought it likely that it was acquired by the Institute shortly after 1888 when late Professor Monier Williams was actively engaged in collecting materials for the Museum from various parts of India. Professor Johnston and, following him, other scholars have inferred that the plaque probably came from Kauśāmbī, which was a prolific source of early Indian terracottas. It is now definitely known to have originally belonged to Bengal, and all scholars agree that it represents the most valuable record of Indian terracotta art.

21. E. H. Johnston, A Terracotta figure at oxford (*JISOA.*, vol. X, 1942, pp. 94-102, Pl. IX.)
22. Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 24; also *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Fig. 57.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 21 & 230, Fig. 16; also *Archaic Indian Terracottas* (*IPEK.*, 1928, p. 71 Fig. 25).
24. *ASR.*, 1922-23, Pl. X, b.
25. V. A. Smith, *Jaina Stupa and other antiquities of Mathura*, Pl. XVIII.
26. K. G. Goswami, *Excavations at Bangarh*, pp. 18-19, Pl. XX, Figs. 2 & 4.



## VI

### GUPTA SCULPTURE—HEIGHT OF THE CLASSICAL TREND AND AFTERMATH

In the first quarter of the fourth century A. D. the Guptas established themselves in Magadha, and with Magadha as the base of operations successive rulers of the dynasty extended their imperial hegemony over the greater portion of Northern India. One of the Gupta emperors, Samudragupta, uprooted the various kings of Āryāvarta and conducted victorious expeditions south of the Vindhya. The states outside the imperial domain, including islands like Simhala, recognised the supremacy of this mighty conqueror and offered acts of service and obsequence, as we find recorded in the Allahabad pillar inscription of this Gupta monarch. His son, Chandragupta II Vikramāditya, defeated the Śaka satraps and extended the boundaries of the empire as far as Surāshṭra (Kathiawar) in the west. About the middle of the fifth century A. D. there appeared a new foreign menace, the terrible Hūṇas. Though their advance was at first checked by the valour of Skandagupta, the empire of the Guptas declined and ultimately collapsed as much by the avalanche of foreign inroads, as by inherent internal separatism and consequent disintegration. In the first half of the seventh century A.D. Harshavardhana of the Pushyabhūti family raised up another imperial fabric in Northern India with Kānyakubja (Mahodaya=Kanauj) as the centre. This empire also proved to be short-lived and separatism asserted again leading to the emergence of a strong regional consciousness, political as well as cultural. With this conscious regionalism begins the mediaeval age in Indian history.

The rise of the Gupta dynasty in Northern India marked the close of a period in which the political interest was dominated mainly by the various foreign peoples, the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Pahlavas and the Kushāṇas. This alien factor disturbed, for a time no doubt, the course of Indian history, particularly in the north-west. But these foreign peoples actually settled in India and very soon ceased to be reckoned as outsiders. They adopted Indian religions as well as Indian ways of life, and were ultimately absorbed, beyond recognition, into the vast current of Indian population. It was a grand synthesis that spoke eloquently for the strength and vitality of Indian culture and the elasticity and adaptability of Indian social structure. The rise of the Guptas signified the reappearance of a unified rule over the greater portion of Northern India. This led to the resurgence of a conscious national ideal, over the alien, and this ideal spread throughout the whole country. It is not surprising, hence, that the period saw the efflorescence of Indian genius in all its aspects. The previous period, in spite of the political events being dominated by the foreigners, had been an epoch of consistent artistic activity, in the north as well as in the south. The indigenous tradition in plastic arts continued its course undisturbed and recorded significant achievements. The Gupta period witnessed a heightening of the aesthetic consciousness leading to the fulfilment and culmination of the earlier trends and tendencies. The classical tradition reaches its supreme expression in what is described as the golden age of the Guptas.

#### (i) New Aesthetic Ideal

As a culture epoch the period of the Guptas may be said to have extended from the fourth to the close of the sixth century A. D. This has been an age of great artistic



activity that was inspired by an intellectual consciousness hardly paralleled in any other phase of Indian history. A long and consistent course of evolution through the preceding centuries prepared the way for a complete florescence of the artistic genius of the people. In the Gupta period all the various trends and tendencies of the artistic pursuits of the preceding phases reach their culmination in a unified plastic tradition of supreme import in Indian history. The outstanding achievements of Gupta sculpture are to be studied and understood, hence, in terms of its heritage. Gupta sculpture is the logical outcome of the classical sculpture of Mathurā and Amarāvati ( Chapter IV ). Its plasticity is derived from that of Mathurā, its elegance from that of Amarāvati. Yet, a Gupta sculpture seems to belong to a sphere that is entirely different. A refinement and definition of form and a greater delicacy of contour are inherent, no doubt, in the consistent and logical evolution of the classical idiom, and these the Gupta plastic style achieves in a perfectly normal manner. What separates the Gupta sculpture from that of the previous phase is in the atmosphere that it breathes.

The classical art of the previous phase was passionately addicted to this mundane world and it is the physical existence, in the literal sense of the term, that attracted the attention and engrossed the vision of the artists. The lush sensuality of Mathurā and the careless abandon of Amarāvati undergo a distinct transformation in the hands of the Gupta artists who seem to have been working for a higher ideal. A new outlook appears to have emerged to inspire the artists to rise above this mundane world—the world of senses—and bring their productions within the confines of reason and intellect. The period of the Guptas ushers in a heightened intellectual consciousness which permeates all forms of activity. Literature, sciences, arts, etc., all feel the impulse of

this heightened intellectual ferment. A new orientation in the attitude towards art is noticed in the attempt to establish a closer harmony between art and thought, between the outer form and the inner spirit. This leads to new aesthetic aspirations which transcend the world of senses and try to record higher experiences and deeper realisations. Art now becomes the conscious vehicle of the intellectual and spiritual conceptions of the people.

Since the early phase of classical art the human form has gained much in importance. At Bhārhut and Sāñchī ( Chapter III ) the human figure appears in the composition as a part of nature, and being accommodated within the unending curves of vegetation gradually acquires a contour that aims at a suggestion of the ceaseless flow and rhythm of the creeper. In the early centuries of the Christian era, at Mathurā and Amarāvati ( Chapter IV ), the worldly attitude which prevailed lends a greater importance to the human figure. It has now an exclusive existence, apart from and independent of the world of vegetation. In the composition it is the human figure that now becomes the focus of attraction, and all other forms are subordinated to it, being used mainly to give it relief and emphasise its importance. The idea of the divine image, conceived in terms of the human form, elevates it, theoretically at least, to supra-human level and adds to its possibilities in this direction. In the Gupta period with the complete realisation of these possibilities the visible image becomes the vehicle of the invisible divine concept and the plastic art reaches its destined spiritual goal.

With the growing importance of the human figure nature recedes into the background, but in so doing it leaves behind its unending and undulating rhythm in the human form. In the eternally flowing movement of the rambling creeper one may recognise the ceaseless flow of life in this



world. The movement now passes on to the human figure, clinging to and permeating the form "now entirely moulded according to this unending rhythm", as Kramrisch<sup>1</sup> admirably puts it. The principle which formerly resided in the flowing vegetal design is now transferred to the human form which, hence, becomes the conscious vehicle of the inner movement of life. The endlessly flowing device of the creeper conveyed the suggestion of a movement extending beyond the limits of the composition. But when transferred to the human figure this movement is strictly confined within the limits of the form, though "dynamically active" therein. The frenzied worldly existence of the previous phase is brought under discipline, mental as well as physical, in which all worldliness has vanished. A concentrated inner energy endows the figure with vitality. A subtle mental experience, arising out of the conquest of the mind over the body, illumines the entire figure with a calm spiritual expression, best conveyed not only by the disciplined body, but also by every lineament of the face. The eyes with drooping eye-lids betoken an inner vision arising out of meditative absorption in *yoga*. As the vehicle of the flow of life and of complete spiritual experience, the human frame of the divine image rises above the level of mere physical existence and the image reaches its true spiritual import.

The human figure, termed as the image, is, hence, the pivot of Gupta sculpture, and this, as the conscious medium of the divine concept, experiences certain distinct transformations in respect of modelling. The strong physical and naturalistic rendering, characteristic of the previous phase, is now subdued and gives place to a rarified and idealised modelling of the human form. A new canon of beauty is evolved leading to the emergence of a new aesthetic ideal. This ideal is based upon an explicit understanding

of the human body in its inherent softness and suppleness. The preference for a youthful form has already been recognised in the previous phase. Since the urge of life-movement is the most vital in youth it is almost always the youthful form that the artist selects for representation. The aesthetic and ritualistic canons, systematised in a later age, echo this predilection for the youthful form in no uncertain terms. A study of the canonical prescriptions governing the representation of divine beings would show that almost without exception the gods and goddesses are enjoined to be shown as perpetually young. The gliding sensitiveness of the soft and pliant body with its smooth and shining texture facilitates free and easy movement, and though seemingly at rest, the figure seems to be infused with an energy that proceeds from within. This is true not only of the images of divine beings—Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jaina—but also of ordinary men and women. It is the sensitiveness of the plastic surface that the artist seeks to emphasise, and for this all superfluities, such as elaborate draperies, jewelleries, etc., that tend to conceal the body, are reduced to the minimum. The wet or transparent drapery, hence, becomes the fashion in this age.

Even if nature is practically eliminated from the composition during this period, it is interesting to notice that the volumes and curves found in nature supply the norms for the representation of the various parts of the human body to be co-ordinated in a form that is at once naturalistic and aesthetically ideal. The flower, the leaf or the trunk of a tree, a bird or an animal constitutes the criteria on the similitudes of which the different parts of the body are enjoined to be rendered. According to Indian view of art a superior uniformity and grace of form may be recognised in the animal and vegetable worlds than among



the human beings. The *Śukrantisāra*<sup>2</sup> expresses this attitude in a significant statement : "Perchance one (man) in a million has perfect form, perfect beauty". It is, hence, certain delicately conceived similes from the world of nature that supplied the Indian artists with the proper criteria for the representation of the ideal form. A few such conventional similes may not be out of place here by way of illustration.<sup>3</sup>

The face is to have the smooth and ovoid shape of an egg, the forehead that of a bow and the eye-brows are to follow either the line of a delicate *nim* (*margosia*) leaf or that of a bow. The eyes are to resemble a wagtail (*khañjana*), a deer's, a *śapharī* fish, a lotus or a lotus petal, according to mood. Eyes express a variety of emotions and a proper suggestion of the different moods requires different norms. The eyes of women are particularly restless and the Indian aesthetic canon has a number of similes to express the different emotions and temperaments. The *khañjana* is a small bird with a dancing gait and its playful gaiety characterises beautifully the darting glance of a woman. The deer is a simple and innocent animal and the tender and innocent look of a woman is appropriately compared to that of a deer. The small *śapharī* fish (*puntius sophore*) is, by nature, restless and seems to be an apposite simile for the quick and restless glance of a pretty damsel. The lotus bud eyes convey a suggestion of serene peacefulness, while the lotus petal eyes with their drooping eye-lids, that of a calm and contemplative mood. The nose is to resemble a sesame flower (*tilaphula*), usual in the representations of goddesses and women, or the beak of a parrot (*śukanāsā*), seen in the case of gods and men. The red and luscious *bimba* fruit forms an appropriate simile for the soft and moist lips in their fulness. The neck is compared to a conchshell (*kambugrīva*), the three spiral turns at the

top supplying the similitude for the folds. The torso is broad in the upper section and attenuated in the lower, the latter in case of gods and men being compared to the waist of a lion, and in case of goddesses and women, to the middle of a kettle drum (*ḍamaru-madhya*). The shoulders are to have the form of an elephant's head (*gajatuṇḍa*), while the arms are to resemble the trunk of a young plantain tree, firm, smooth, as well as resilient. The long and sensitive fingers are to have the fulness of a beanpod. The firm and resilient trunk of a plantain tree is an apt simile for the thighs, which have sometimes been compared also to the trunk of a young elephant (*karabha*). The calf of the leg is to have the shape of the swelling abdomen of a spawning fish, while the hands and feet are compared to lotus flowers or young leaves of plants.

The human body is thus found to be composed of parts rendered in terms of similitudes drawn from various elements of nature, and the result is an idealised form illumined by a supreme sense of organic and rhythmic beauty. One part naturally melts into the other, and in the rendering of the body there is nothing abrupt that might hinder or interfere with the fluid and suave contours. It is in the Gupta period that one may recognise a conscious preference for these ideal norms and the writings of Kālidāsa, the greatest of our classical poets, are replete with illustrations of such similitudes in the description of the beauty of human body. The following verse in his *Kumārasambhava* ( I. 49 ) describing Pārvatī's perfect beauty epitomises admirably the entire Indian attitude in this respect :

*sarvopamādravyasamuchchayena yathāpradeśam viniveśitena /  
sā nirmītā viśvasṛijā prayatnād-ekasthasaundarya-dīḍṛikshayeva //*

These norms were gradually systematised in the form of a definite aesthetic canon that was to constitute the standard



for all future artists. By following these norms the artist is properly trained and disciplined for the representation of ideal beauty.

The intellectual discipline lies further at the root of the evolution of the various attitudes (*āsanas*) and gestures (*mudrās*) for the proper rendering of the different actions and moods to be attributed to the figures. A general classification in respect of attitudes is that of standing, seated and reclining positions. With regard to the standing posture subsidiary poses, measured in terms of *bhaṅgas* or flexions of the body, may be recognised. *Sama-bhaṅga* is the straight and erect pose, a pose of equipoise, in which the two vertical halves of the body are symmetrically disposed and the *sūtra* or the plumb line, passing exactly along the middle of the body, corresponds to its vertical axis. This pose is resorted to in order to show the divine being in his irrefutable calmness and immutability. There are poses, again, in which the plumb line, instead of corresponding to the axis, is disturbed in a greater or lesser degree according to the flexion or flexions imparted to the body. *Ābhaṅga* represents the pose of a slight flexion with contours subtle and delicate in their suavity. In *tri-bhaṅga* or the pose of triple flexion the curves themselves are full of elasticity and pliability, such a pose being calculated to endow the body with the utmost plastic effect of which it is capable. An emphasised form of *tri-bhaṅga* with the triple flexion considerably exaggerated is *ati-bhaṅga*, characteristic of the rendering of nervous moods and dynamic emotions and actions.

With regard to the seated posture *sama-bhaṅga* is identical with what is known as *vajra-paryāṅka* or adamant pose in case of the Buddhist figures, especially those of the Buddha. The pose is particularly associated with the scene of his enlightenment at Bodhgayā and is symbolic of his steadfast

resolve when he took his seat on the *Bodhimaṇḍa* under the pipal tree. A rigid pose with the legs crossed and soles upturned and with the upper part of the body upright and immovable characterises the *vajra-paryāṅka* and expresses austere and contemplative concentration, further enhanced by the downward glance of the eyes with drooping eye-lids. In *Kumārasambhava* ( III. 45-48 ) Kālidāsa describes the ascetic Śiva in similar terms, the pose being referred to as *paryāṅka-bandha* with the erect and immovable body resembling a flicker-less lamp (*nivṛta-nishkampa-iva-pradīpam*). A slightly relaxed pose is what is known as *padma-paryāṅka* or *padmāsana* in which the legs are simply gathered up on the seat and the soles are not required to be upturned. A much more relaxed pose is recognised in *ardha-paryāṅka* or *lalitāsana* in which one of the legs gracefully hangs down, or in what is known as *mahārājalīlā*, i. e. kingly pose, in which one of the legs, playfully as it were, is raised upon the seat. In either case the body, instead of being upright and rigid, is characterised by an easy and expressive contour. Such poses are classed under the general designation of *sukhāsana*, signifying an attitude of comfort. Reclining positions are seldom met with. The two most well known motifs of this position are presented by *mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha and Vishṇu in *Śeṣha-śayana*.

Indian aesthetic canon has evolved, again, a clearly formulated language of gestures. These gestures, *mudrās* as they are technically called, consist of certain definite conventions in finger plays and hand poses, each of which has a significant meaning. The commonest of such gestures, and perhaps the earliest to be represented, is what is known as *abhaya-mudrā*, signifying the boon of fearlessness, associated, so far as Buddhist iconography is concerned, with the incident of the taming of the mad elephant, Nālagiri, by the Buddha at Rājagṛha. In this *mudrā* the hand is required to be shown



on a level with the shoulder with the palm turned frontwards and the fingers raised. A *pañcha-mukha Śivaliṅga* from Bhiṭā (Uttara Pradeśa) of about the first century B. C. shows, perhaps, the earliest rendering of this gesture in art. The *dhyāna-mudrā* (also known as *samādhi-mudrā* and associated with the figures of the Buddha) is the gesture of deep absorption in meditation. It occurs in association with the attitude of *vajra-paryāṅka* and requires the hands to be placed on the upturned soles of the feet, one upon the other, with the palms upwards and the fingers stretched. These two *mudrās* are frequently met with in early images of the pre-Gupta age, but simply as mere inert symbols. Gupta art, with a heightened intellectual consciousness, not only makes a greater use of the symbolic gestures, already known, but further endows them with significantly artistic forms. It also introduces others, equally potent in their aesthetic and spiritual imports. With the figures of the Buddha are associated two other conventional gestures, *bhūsparśa-mudrā* (*bhūmi-parśa-mudrā*) and *dharmachakrapravartana-mudrā*. The first is associated with the scene of enlightenment at Bodhgayā in which the Master, when assailed by Māra, called on Mother Earth as witness, an action that is symbolised by the Buddha, while seated in *vajra-paryāṅka*, touching the ground with the fingers of his right hand that hangs down over his right knee, palm inwards. The second signifies the great event of the turning of the Wheel of Law by the Buddha, that is, his preaching of the first sermon, in the deer park (Mṛigadāva) at Isipatana (Sārnāth). This is represented by the two hands held near the breast, the right, turned outwards, with the thumb and the forefinger meeting each other, and the left, turned inwards, with the thumb and the forefinger joined and the remaining fingers touching those of the other hand (cf. Fig. 94). This *mudrā* seems to be a combination of *jñāna* (signify-

ing attainment of wisdom ) and *vyākhyāna* ( signifying exposition ), the former symbolised by the left hand and the latter, by the right. Another gesture, frequently met with, is the *varada-mudrā*, signifying the granting of a boon, which is rendered by the hand, usually right, hanging down with the palm outwards and the fingers stretched. *Vitarka-mudrā* or the gesture of discussion is symbolised by the hand shown on a level with the shoulder with the palm turned outwards and the middle or index finger touching the tip of the thumb. *Añjali* or the gesture of devotion is represented by the two hands joined palm to palm near the breast. Besides, there are many hand poses, such as *kaṭaka-hasta*, *lola-hasta* ( *lamba-hasta* or *gaja-hasta* ), *patāka-hasta*, etc., described in Indian texts on aesthetics. Innumerable are the gestures and poses defined in the Indian *Śilpaśāstras*, and each of them signifies one or other aspect of a divinity, a symbol, so to say, for a certain action or mood. Religious symbolism apart, Gupta art transforms each *mudrā* into an elegant artistic motif, potent and vibrant with an inner consciousness of its real spiritual function. Rene Grousset<sup>4</sup>, the noted French critic, beautifully expresses the spiritual and aesthetic quality of Indian *mudrās* in his following remarks: "Never, indeed, has the spiritual value of the hands—those flowers of the flesh, which hold in their chalice the whole of human tenderness and thought—been comprehended with such mystical insight. The whole of the great peace of Buddhism is contained in the gesture known as *dhyānamudrā*. The whole of the Blessed One's 'power of gentleness' is revealed in the *abhayamudrā*. .... On the other hand, what calm assurance in the gesture by which he takes the earth as his witness ; what supreme elegance—the finished grace of reason in the perfect sage—in the gestures of discussion and of the *dharma-chakra* ! .... When the Buddhist *mudrās* find interpreters



worthy of them, they are, if we may be allowed to borrow the language of Ruskin, 'gestures of the soul', transposing pure moral beauty into its direct aesthetic equivalent."

It should be emphasised, however, that the new aesthetic canon, outlined above,—that is, the canon of attitudes, poses and gestures—does not come into being suddenly, but is the result of an intellectual process which takes a clear and explicit direction in the Gupta classical phase. A few centuries elapse before the canon reaches a definite and systematised shape. This is true also with regard to the canon of proportions (*tāla-māna*) and iconographic norms (*pratimā-lakṣhaṇa*). In each of these it is the Gupta classical art that sets the standard for the subsequent art movements to follow. The intellectualism that characterised the Gupta classical movement declines, however, in the subsequent period, and a mechanical systematisation leads to an unavoidable stylisation which ushers in the mediaeval phase in Indian art history. All aspects considered, Gupta sculpture represents the highest expression of Indian artistic genius, an expression in which one may discern a complete harmony between art and thought, between the form and the ideology that it stands for.

#### (ii) Mathurā and Sārnāth

Plastically Gupta sculpture is the logical outcome of the Kushāṇa art of Mathurā, and it is interesting to note that the Gupta plastic conception, in the sense that we have defined above, seems to have had its beginnings in the Mathurā ateliers. Among the sculptures, betokening what we describe as the Gupta classical ideal, the earliest, at least so far as extant remains go, is an image of Bodhisattva (so styled in the votive inscription) from Bodhgayā (Fig. 92). The image was consecrated in year 64 of one *Mahārāja* Trikamala of uncertain identity. The problem is whether the date is to

be referred to the regnal year of this king, or to an era<sup>5</sup> which is not specified. The palaeography of the inscription may ascribe it to the fourth century A.D., a date which also seems to be supported by the style of the sculpture. The image, no doubt, hails from Bodhgayā, but its Mathurā origin is apparent, not only on account of the material in which it is executed but also of its style which clearly illustrates the plastic tradition of Mathurā. The physical form with its massiveness and heavy stolidity is explicitly a statement of the Mathurā conception of images. The folds of the garment on the left shoulder and forearm are reminiscent, again, of the Mathurā type of drapery. But these represent conventions that are concerned simply with the outward appearance of an image. In spite of these, a miraculous transformation seems to have taken place in respect of the artistic character of the image. The rigid geometrical composition introduces a stern discipline which seems to restrain all earthly bearings of the monumentalised body and to endow it with a concentrated energy that has its root in the within. Similarly, the eyes with drooping eye-lids and glance directed to the tip of the nose appear to be looking inward, signifying the mind absorbed in deep meditation. With this transformation the image attains its true spiritual import. "The Bodhisattva from Bodhgayā", Kramrisch<sup>6</sup> says aptly, "is the first image in India which by its form signifies what its name implies." The movement for imparting a spiritualised character to the image is recognised even in the earlier phase in the gradual attempt to subject the body to some kind of restraint and discipline, and the image of Vishṇu from Taxila (Fig. 88), although heavy and stolidly built, nearly reaches the level, plastically at least, because of its smooth and refined contours. The spiritual significance, however, is yet to be attained, and it was left to Mathurā, one of the most prolific centres of early



classical tradition, to complete the process by adding an expression of inner spiritual experience rendered explicitly in the entire physiognomy of the body as well as of the face of the Bodhgayā Bodhisattva, referred to above. Indeed, the principal theme of the plastic art of this period is concerned chiefly with the representation of a disciplined body and conquered mind, and this is true not only of images of Bodhisattva or Buddha, but of other divinities as well. The Śivaite head from Mathurā (Fig. 89), now in the Calmann Galleries, London, also probably of the fourth century A. D., signifies the same spirit of calm and concentrated inner absorption. The splendid image of the Buddha, seated in *dhyāna-mudrā*, at Anurādhapura<sup>7</sup>, Ceylon, is one of the most felicitous productions of the new aesthetic idiom. Indian in plasticity as well as in the spirit that it breathes, it has justly been admired as one of the great masterpieces of Indian art.

The Bodhgayā image, referred to above, represents a happy and successful combination of the stolid dignity of the Kushāṇa idiom with the restrained grace and inner spiritualism of the Gupta. The heavy stolidity of the fourth century gradually sheds off its stiffness and toughness in the fifth when the new idiom reaches its apogee. The image now acquires an easy and reposeful attitude born, no doubt, of an inner peace resulting from the conquest of the mind, already achieved and naturally taken for granted. Plastically, a soft and delicate modelling with easy and flowing contours and melting planes leads to a beauty of definition as well as to a spirit of calm and peaceful contemplation. With a smooth and luminous body, seemingly weightless in existence, the image appears to breathe the enjoyment of supreme bliss arising out of an inner serenity of the mind. Sārnāth, where the Buddha preached his first sermon (literally turned the Wheel of Law), was one of the most active centres of this

new idiom, and remarkable specimens of sculpture from this hallowed site supply a noble commentary on the gradual advance of the new aesthetic ideal. Such image as the Bodh-gayā Bodhisattva, evidently of Mathurā origin, furnished the prototype to the artists of Sārnāth, as certain works of early date<sup>8</sup> (c. fourth century) clearly demonstrate. Yet, as Kram-risch<sup>9</sup> says, "the Sārnāth version of the Mathurā prototype is subtler than the original." Scholars are agreed that in the Sārnāth images of the fifth century a greater delicacy of execution, along with a sensitive treatment of the seemingly weightless body and an intensity of expression emphasising a spirit of calm and reposeful peace, must be regarded as an independent contribution.

The Sārnāth idiom becomes acknowledged even beyond the confines of that school, and its influence is clear and explicit in other centres of artistic pursuits as well. Mathurā, though it could not entirely shake off the heaviness and volume characteristic of its earlier works, also feels the elegant impulse of the refined Sārnāth trend. There is no longer any trace of mask-like coldness that pervaded the earlier images. The entire physiognomy, in spite of a certain massiveness and ponderosity, seems to feel the delicate touch of the Sārnāth idiom in the organic and rhythmic relation of the volumes and planes and the harmoniously integrated contours, and is at the same time illumined by a deeper sense of spiritual introspection. In case of the standing figure the erect *sama-bhaṅga* attitude is rigidly maintained. The volume of the drapery dwindles down almost to nothingness, but the folds, again a traditional Mathurā motif, still persist, though simply as thin and parallel curved ridges that closely adhere to the body, which is visible underneath the 'ribbed' robe in the disciplined majesty of its modelling. In spite of a plastic refinement and spiri-



tual absorption, the image at Mathurā remains statuesque in its own dignity (cf. Figs. 90 and 100), while that at Sārnāth with its slender and sensitive treatment of the body, carried almost to a point of exaggeration, seems to soar above in the supreme enjoyment of its own blissful experience.

Sārnāth introduces not only a delicacy and refinement of form, but also a relaxed attitude by breaking the body, in case of the standing figure, slightly on its own axis, thus imparting to it a certain liveness and movement, in contrast to the columnar rigidity of similar Mathurā works. Even in case of the seated figure, the slender physiognomy carries itself a notion of movement, unearthly in its bearing. The Sārnāth artist transforms the drapery into a completely transparent sheath for the body closely following the modelling in all its subtle nuances. The folds have been discarded altogether; an indication of the drapery only survives in the thin lines on the body suggesting the edges of the garment. The sides that fall apart are given, again, a flimsy muslin-like texture. The body in its smooth and shining plasticity constitutes the principal theme of the Sārnāth artists. But this body, resolved into the "purest plastic essence", remains aloof from all worldly stirrings and allurements.

Sārnāth has produced a fairly large number of sculptures which illustrates this distinctive idiom in a remarkably beautiful manner. Among these, the sublime image of the Master represented in the act of turning the Wheel of Law (i.e. preaching the first sermon) is admittedly one of the masterly creations of Gupta classical sculpture (Fig. 94). The image is carved in Chunār sandstone and has a surface texture of shining smoothness. The Master is shown as seated in *vajra-paryāṅka* with the hands held near the breast in *dharmachakrapravartana-mudrā* (the gesture of preaching).

Below, on the pedestal, is shown the Wheel, flanked on two sides by seven kneeling figures, five of shaven-headed monks representing the first adherents to the faith, and the remaining two, possibly the donor couple. In spite of the rigidly static pose, the entire physiognomy with its gliding planes, pure and harmonious limbs and soft and mellifluous contours is imbued with a notion of lithe movement that seems to throb within. Again, a subtle discipline permeates the entire figure, physically as well as mentally. This is evident as much in the smooth and rhythmic treatment of the body as in the ethereal countenance suggestive of a mind absorbed and in serene enjoyment of spiritual bliss. A purely decorative background is supplied by the throne with two leogryphs supporting a lintel with *makara* ends, and a circular nimbus (*prabhā*) exquisitely carved with a broad foliated ornament within beaded borders. The decorative *prabhās*, it should be noted here, are characteristic also of the Mathurā images (cf. Figs. 90 and 100.)

Among the abundant productions at Sārnāth, few, however, reach the spiritual and aesthetic level of the above image. Nevertheless, in the majority of creations Sārnāth maintains a heightened intellectual and aesthetic consciousness of more than ordinary interest. The softened plasticity and the sublime spiritual grace constitute striking features of the Sārnāth idiom and in Gupta classicism this idiom plays the most conspicuous part. A gradual emphasis on slender form and refined contours ultimately leads to an almost weightless physiognomy that seems to have soared above all earthly moorings.

The Mathurā and the Sārnāth idioms signify collectively the Gupta classical tradition reverberations of which may be felt, in varying degrees, in the artistic activities throughout the country, in the north as well as in the south. The achieve-



ments of Sārnāth, as exemplified by the preaching Buddha, registers a spiritual elevation which is but seldom attained in art. Rene Grousset<sup>10</sup> describes an image like this as representing "an art so inspired by intellectualism as to be a direct expression of soul through the purely ideal beauty of form." This achievement remains the ideal which the artists strive to reach, but seldom succeed. Nevertheless, this striving seems to bind the art movements in different centres by the same plastic and spiritual aspirations.

### (iii) Madhyadeśa

With Mathurā and Sārnāth as the two outstanding centres of Gupta classical art its influence spread rapidly in Madhyadeśa. It is not to be expected, however, that every production of this classical phase would reach the supreme level of artistic and spiritual experience recorded at Sārnāth, or even at Mathurā. The image of Kārtikeya (Fig. 93) in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan (Hindu University, Vārāṇasī) and the head of Śiva or Lokeśvara (Fig. 96) in the Sārnāth Museum, though representing eminent creations of the Sārnāth idiom, are plastically heavier and spiritually inferior. The reverberations of Sārnāth seem to have extended still farther. In varying degrees they touch the Eka-mukha Liṅga (Fig. 95) from Khoh (Nagod, Madhya Pradeśa), the Apsaras from Gwalior<sup>11</sup> (Madhya Pradeśa), the Gaṅgā (Fig. 97) from Besnagar (Madhya Pradeśa, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.) and the sculptures of the Śiva temple at Bhumārā (Nagod, Madhya Pradeśa)<sup>12</sup>. But all these are characterised by a relatively broad and terse modelling and not too facile contours. Nevertheless, the poise and balance that distinguish the Sārnāth idiom are equally evident in these sculptures. The architectural pieces from Garhwā, near Allahabad (now in the Lucknow Museum), bear interesting reliefs (Fig. 99) that are

characterised by a plastic treatment, subtle and refined in the manner of Sārnāth. Though forming group combinations, each figure has a bearing of noble detachment, born of the attitude characteristic of the age. The image of Buddha (Fig. 91) from Mankuwār (Allahabad district), heavy and stolidly built and with a shaven head, is plastically nearer to the Mathurā tradition, but the drapery is treated in the Sārnāth fashion. According to the inscription on its pedestal the image was consecrated in the (Gupta) year 129 (A.D. 448-49). Evidently representing a survival of the older Kushāṇa idiom, this image seems to stand apart from the contemporary trend which is one of a greater refinement and sublimation of the plastic content. The plastic content, it has already been observed, reaches an almost unearthly perfection at Sārnāth in the latter half of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century A. D.<sup>13</sup>

The all-pervading Gupta classicism appears to have made its influence felt even where other forces might be seen to have been at work. The sculptures in the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh ( Jhānsī district, Uttara Pradeśa ), though slightly later in date, are interesting in this context. The basement of the temple is embellished with sculptured friezes depicting scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while the walls proper are provided with alto-relievo sculptures in niches, one on each of its three sides. The *Rāmāyaṇa* panels<sup>14</sup> seem to belong to the older idiom of narrative reliefs with all their characteristic spontaneity, but this spontaneity, in stead of representing a wild and frenzied existence, is found to be governed by a certain discipline in the manner of the age. The modelling, though broader and coarser, is nearer to the Gupta classical ideal, while to the same ideal belongs also the spirit of dignified poise and calm detachment which the figures portray. The relievo sculptures in the niches of the walls, plastically as well



as spiritually, reflect still more the impact of the Gupta classical tradition. The Nara-Nārāyaṇa relief (Fig. 120) breathes the aroma of the classicism of Sārnāth not only in the sublimity of its conception, but also in its plastic rendering. The two principal figures, with their elongated and flowing contours, rarified modelling and attitude of inner absorption, reach almost the height of spiritual experience recorded at Sārnāth. The figure of Viṣṇu Anantaśāyin (Fig. 112) is likewise permeated by the classical ideal; with a broader and heavier modelling and rather hardened outlines, it appears to belong, however, to a lower level of artistic and emotional experience. A kind of stupor seems to have overtaken the Gupta classical ideal.

In Mālava the contemporary plastic idiom belongs, no doubt, to the unified Gupta classical tradition; in general, however, the types are sturdier, possibly an inheritance from the older Sāñchī idiom. This is evident not only in the images of Gaṅgā from Besnagar and of the Apsaras from Gwalior, already referred to, but also in several other sculptures, such as lintel from Pāwayā<sup>15</sup> (Gwalior Museum), the Gandharva couple from Sondani<sup>16</sup> (Gwalior), as well as in the figures carved out of the living rock in the caves at Udayagiri, near Bhilsā. The Buddhist reliefs in the caves at Bāgh also share this quality. Indeed, it appears that the rock-carving has a technique and idiom of its own, and this fact is nowhere so clearly expressed as in the monumental relief of Varāha Avatāra at Udayagiri (Fig. 111). In this conception of epic grandeur Viṣṇu assumes the boar form (*vārāhi-tanu*) and rescues the Earth goddess from the primeval waters. The carving belongs to the early fifth century A. D. and shares the average plastic qualities of the Mālava idiom, as swayed by the Gupta. Yet, it seems to stand apart. In this cosmic scene, as Kramrisch<sup>17</sup> recog-

nises, "forces more vital and at the same time more ancient and deep rise into gigantic appearance". Kramrisch's estimate<sup>18</sup> of this remarkable conception is inspired and it will not be out of place to reproduce it.

"What had mattered in the Indra and specially in the Sūrya relief at Bhājā has now reached its zenith. Cosmic myths are wrested from the stone in a language of pure plastic form. Upheavals of the sun, water and earth coagulate into compositions for which there is no man-made law. Primevally organic in its animal-human appearance, Vishṇu-Varāha rises from the waters ; the latter, however, are but a regularly incised pattern of parallel wavy lines, unruffled by the mythical event. The rising and penetrating of the lingering, heavy, yet commanding mass of Vishṇu betrays no effort in carrying out its mission of rescuing the earth-goddess. The body, from its elephantine legs and arms, gathers the dignity of cosmic confidence in human shoulders and boar's head.

"The convolutions of the Nāga, worshipping in the security of its swelling hood and curling out of it, make the pedestal of the rising Vishṇu, who lifts and carries with him goddess, garland and lotus stalk, all serpentine in roundness and movement. The undifferentiated state of formlessness seems just left behind. It still clings to the figure of the Varāha avatāra, and paradoxically completes the power of composition.

".... .... The Varāha relief, in its tough and slow plasticity, heaving with the very breath of creative earth, belongs to the same mentality which had been at work at Bhājā, and now marks the rock with the more differentiated impress of a later age. While currents from Sārnāth, etc. touched upon the sculpture of Central India, the connectedness with the tradition of the Dekkhan matters more at this phase."



## (iv) Eastern India

The influence of Sārnāth made itself felt in Eastern India. The Prāchyas, or the peoples of the East, seem to have been ethnically different from those of Madhyadeśa and to have culture strains essentially of a divergent character. Temperamentally, the Easterners are an emotional, people and at Pāhārpur<sup>19</sup> (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal) at a later period certain stone sculptures and terracotta plaques are found to be imbued with a great warmth of emotion. The reliefs on the pillars from Chandimau<sup>20</sup> (Bihar) are, likewise, distinguished by a vivacious emotion. Such sculptures possibly indicate the pre-existence, in this part of the country, of an indigenous art tradition which, while being swayed by the soft and sweet melody of the classicism of Sārnāth, leaves its own impress on the art of Eastern India in an emotional appeal of a certain delicacy. The eastern version of the classical idiom of Sārnāth thus comes to be distinguished by an emotional feeling which even the sublimity of the Sārnāth inspiration fails to suppress. There is, at the same time, a subtle change in plastic context and the figures acquire thereby a sensuous import, hardly to be expected in the spiritual and impersonal creations of Sārnāth.

Several sculptures from different parts of Eastern India fully illustrate this eastern trend in its emotional and sensuous bearing. The colossal copper image of Buddha (Fig. 104) from Sultānganj (Bhāgalpur district, Bihar, now in the Birmingham Art Gallery) has the tranquil suavety and luminosity of similar figures from Sārnāth. The graceful *ābhaṅga* stance is evidently a contribution of the Sārnāth idiom. Parallel incisions on the surface of the body indicate a survival of the Mathurā tradition of drapery folds, but

the subtle modelling shines through the transparent robe in as effective a manner as at Sārnāth. The link with the Sārnāth idiom is obvious, plastically as well as ideologically; yet, the emotionalism of the eastern trend is equally evident, to quote Kramrisch,<sup>21</sup> in "the nervy manner in which pointed finger-tips are bent slightly backwards, deeper shadows round the eyes, and the lines that are more drawn from the nostrils to the mouth". The stucco figures round the circular brick structure at Rājagṛiha (Rājgir, Bihar), known as Maniyār Maṭha, exhibit, again, a fine, but emotional and sensuous, rendering of the plastic form in soft and supple roundness (Fig. 105). Unfortunately, these sculptures have now disintegrated away and the loss is to be regretted as they formed the most felicitous specimens of the distinctive eastern trend. The standing image of Buddha (Fig. 103) from Bihārail<sup>22</sup> (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal) recalls the sublimity of the Sārnāth conception in a greater degree. But if the emotional note is, to a certain extent, subdued in this image, it is emphatically evident in the two images of Sūrya, one from Deorā<sup>23</sup> (Bogra district, North Bengal) and the other from Kāśīpur (Twenty-four Parganas, West Bengal). The body type, in each case, is sturdy, though not exactly in the Mathurā fashion, and is characterised by a latent energy that wells up from within. The fine gold-plated bronze image of Mañjuśrī (Fig. 108) from Mahāsthān<sup>24</sup> (Bogra district, North Bengal) is a near counterpart of the Sārnāth images, plastically as well as spiritually, but a subdued emotionalism, characteristic of the eastern trend, illumines the rendering of the entire physiognomy, including particularly the face and the fingers. A soft and emotional rendering of the face characterises also the stucco head from Tejandī (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal, now in the author's collection) and few terracotta



plaques from Tamluk (Midnapur district, West Bengal, now in the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University). This emotional idiom is known to have extended farther east, as is illustrated by the carvings on the door-frame from Dah Parvatiyā (Darrang district, Assam) with the characteristic motifs of the river goddesses, Gaṅgā and Yamunā (Fig. 117). The eastern version of the Gupta classical trend endows the sublimations of Sārnāth with an emotional feeling and sensuous charm which are essentially human and belong to this world.

In the reliefs on the pillars from Chandimau<sup>25</sup> (Bhāgalpur, Bihar) the eastern idiom of emotional vivacity is more in evidence. This is due, not in a little measure, to the narrative character of the reliefs. The story that the reliefs depict had also an intense emotional appeal, and this may account for a different aesthetic impulse and experience, apart from the spiritual sublimity of the Sārnāth idiom. A near parallel of such a narrative idiom is also found at Sārnāth in the carvings on a lintel illustrating the Kshāntivādin Jātaka. In the Chandimau carvings the plastic content, though generally belonging to the Gupta classical tradition of simplified and integrated modelling, exhibits, nevertheless, a different ideal altogether. The physiognomical type is short and stumpy, though distinguished by roundness of limbs and flowing outlines. The decorative embellishments, which are emphasised to a degree, are deep and obliquely cut, and their curly ramblings appear to set off the figures in equally emphatic and vivacious movements. Here we have a tradition, local and indigenous in inspiration, which, swayed by the Gupta classical ideal, produces an idiom, homelier and more human in character when compared to the highly intellectual bearing of Sārnāth.

## (v) Western India

The classical impulse was not confined within the Gupta domains proper, but spread further in the West and in the South. In the West it is the Mathurā idiom that is generally followed. The Govardhana-dhāraṇa panel from Māndor<sup>26</sup> and the door panel from Nāgarī<sup>27</sup>, both in Rājputanā, continue the older tradition of narrative reliefs. The physiognomical treatment, along with the poise and balance, belongs, no doubt, to the Gupta classical ideal, the sturdy and massive body type being evidently a Mathurā contribution. A certain stiffening of plastic rendering characterises these Rājput sculptures and might have been conditioned by a different ethnic factor.

Further west, Sind has supplied several notable sculptures of the Gupta classical phase. Of these, the bronze figure of Brahmā (Fig. 110) from Mirpur Khās (Karāchī Museum) is one of the most well known. The figure is in the round and is remarkable in more ways than one. The erect stance might indicate some link with the Mathurā idiom. The distended abdomen, lending a flabby appearance to the body, is, no doubt, conditioned by iconographic reasons. These apart, the figure may be recognised to have been a product of Sārnāth classicism, plastically as well as spiritually. The soft and subtle modelling, along with the flowing contours, the transparent treatment of the drapery under which the body shines forth and a calm and beatific expression of the face suggesting an inner absorption, all indicate an inspiration from the sublime idiom of Sārnāth. What is more, a sensuous and emotional feeling, not unlike that of the eastern trend, is also immanent in the treatment of the full round faces and of the slender fingers. The nearest parallel to this is supplied by the copper Buddha from Sultānganj (Fig. 104) in Bihar. Gupta classical ideal pervades, no doubt,



a wide stretch of territory, but the extension of the distinctive characteristics of a local version of the classical tradition, namely the eastern, to an extreme corner of Western India is interesting. It is more so because of the absence of any remains of this local version in any of the intermediate regions. The question naturally arises whether the Brahmā figure from Mirpur Khās was produced locally or had been imported from a region lying further to the east.

(vi) Deccan

From the beginning of the classical phase the Deccan has been the home of significant art movements which, though not generally unrelated to those of Madhyadeśa, are distinguished by a different plastic feeling and expression. The autochthonous tendencies, noticed in these art movements, do not exhaust their possibilities entirely, and the Gupta classical ideal, when it reaches the Deccan, reacts on the contemporary art of this region in a degree according to the strength or otherwise of the autochthonous trends. At times the Gupta classicism is but feebly expressed and the idiom is largely determined by the earlier autochthonous heritage. Even when the impact is stronger, it appears that there is a lack of proper understanding of the Gupta classical concept, and the result cannot be said to have been always happy. The import of Gupta classicism of the North grows thinner as it travels towards the South.

Sculptural remains of the fifth century A. D. are very few in the Deccan. From the sixth century there appears to have been a prolific activity and a few eminent specimens are worth noticing as illustrating the trends and tendencies of contemporary Deccanese sculpture.

The colossal Śivaite image from Parel (Fig. 115), Bombay, is an outstanding piece of sculpture, the exact signification

of which still remains uncertain. Here we have a unique conception showing the god "in his threefold presence"<sup>28</sup>, vertically one above the other. This central theme has been likened to a *Linga*, and from it emanate, again, multiple representations of the god, two on each side. The two lower figures of the central theme, as well as the emanations, have each two arms, while the uppermost figure is many-handed. All of them appear to be absorbed in deep meditation, though the sturdy bodies themselves are replete with a latent energy that seems to be almost elemental in bearing and wells up from within. The emanations bodied forth by this latent energy are dynamic in movement, but seemingly leaning to, and supported by, the central theme. The entire modelling is rarified and the strength and vitality, stored in the chests, create a powerful mass rooted, so to say, in the primeval deep. A flowing outline, clearly expressed, characterises each of the figures and all seem to cohere to the central theme. The massive dynamism of the powerful bodies is a heritage from the earlier rock-cut tradition of this region; but the serene attitude of *yoga* concentration and, to a certain extent, the swaying plasticity seem to be distant reverberations of the classical idiom of *Sārnāth*.

In the rock-cut reliefs of the caves at *Bādāmī* the principal figures are, likewise, distinguished by powerful bodies, often massive and monumental in proportion. The modelling, too, is full, though, to a certain extent, coarser and more generalised. The plastic content, again, emphasises a latent energy that seems to rise "from deeper and more vital sources". But whereas in the Parel sculpture, or in the relief of *Vishṇu* on *Ananta*<sup>29</sup> in Cave No III at *Bādāmī*, this energy lies latent and concentrated within the physical frame, shown as ever in tension, in the majority of the reliefs in the *Bādāmī* caves it is destined to break forth in powerful and



dynamic gestures. This is most forcefully expressed in the relief of Vishṇu as Trivikrama in Bādāmī cave No. IV.<sup>30</sup> A terrific movement is suggested in the outstretched arm and leg, but therein the movement does not stop. It encompasses the entire panel the limit of which is the wall itself. In other reliefs the dynamic movement may be slightly weaker (cf. Fig. 102), but the import is practically the same. In each composition it is the principal figure that constitutes the dominant theme, and to it every other feature, be it the apparel or the accompanying figure or figures, is subordinated. What is significant, again, is that the dynamic movement suggested by the principal figure, instead of being contained within the limits of the body, extends beyond the shape and encompasses the entire composition. Everything in the composition is thus borne within an expansive dynamic content that proceeds from the principal figure. It would be wrong, however, to think that the minor figures also share in the main movement. They simply exist wrapped, as it were, by the dynamism of the principal theme. The heavy and monumental body expressing a vital energy that extends over and encompasses the entire composition imparts to the Bādāmī reliefs an import and significance that are hardly to be expected in the Sārnāth ideal. The live rock bursts forth, as it were, under the impress of a superhuman energy and aboriginal vitality.<sup>31</sup>

Such a dynamic outburst, so incompatible with the notion of Gupta classicism as expressed at Sārnāth, belongs to a tradition that is essentially autochthonous in manner as well as in character. The reliefs of the Bhājā caves of pre-Christian date exemplify this tradition in a primitive state. This tradition, characteristic particularly of rock-cut carvings, has a long history. The Udayagiri Varāha (Fig. 111) and the Bādāmī reliefs represent eminent productions of this

tradition which, in the subsequent centuries, may be recognised in its supreme expression in the reliefs of Elephanta (Deccan) and in the open air rock-carvings of Mahāvalīpuram (South India).

The very notion of the rock-cut tradition is not compatible with the ideas underlying Buddhism and images of Buddha, the calm and compassionate teacher. In the Gupta classical phase, mainly under the patronage of local sovereigns, a number of Buddhist caves was excavated in the Deccan. These caves, in significant contrast to the earlier ones, bear innumerable figures of Buddha, either standing or seated, in the facades, in the triforiums over the aisle pillars of the chaitya halls, in the walls of the monastic caves, and so on. Even the votive chaityas in the later series of the chaitya caves bear on the front sides the images of the Master. The earlier caves were also likewise ornamented during this period with figure sculptures. The reliefs of the Buddhist caves of this phase at Ajaṇṭā, Kārle, Aurangābād, Kānheri etc., illustrate a plastic content and treatment which appear to be nearer to the Sārnāth ideal. At Ajaṇṭā the plastic treatment is, to a certain extent, sensitive; but being concentrated in height the figures seem to be of sturdier build.<sup>32</sup> A quiet poise and balance also distinguish such figures. In spite of the nearness, however, of the physical forms to those of Sārnāth, the Ajaṇṭā figures lack the essential quality of the classical ideal of the latter. There is neither any idea of spiritual introspection, nor that of illumination. Rather, the idea conveyed by the Ajaṇṭā figures is one of mental stupor and drowsy exhaustion. The reliefs at Kārle and at Aurangābād also reveal, more or less, the same characteristics. At Kānheri<sup>3</sup> the pose is further stiffened and the modelling becomes more tightened. The reliefs of the Buddhist caves of the Deccan, though sharing the characteris-



tic plastic content of the Sārnāth Buddha figures in varying degrees, generally lack the spiritual import of the latter. As one scholar aptly says: "Compositionally detached and without any inter-relatedness of inner idea or outer rhythm, the insensitive stiffness of the figures reveals that, at least so far as Buddhist art in the Deccan was concerned, the meaning and significance of the fluid and luminous thought that produced the weightless figures of the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley were but little understood and experienced."<sup>34</sup>

Aihole was an important centre of early temple-building activity in the Deccan. In the sixth and the seventh centuries many temples were erected at this spot, mainly under the patronage of the Chālukya kings of Bādāmi. The reliefs in these temples<sup>35</sup> are characterised by swaying outlines which impart to the figures a rhythm, almost lyrical in bearing. The plastic forms are sensitive as well as refined. The preference, at least in the sixth century sculptures, is for slender and elongated shapes. In the swaying linearism of the figures, in their quiet poise and balance and in the soft and delicate plastic treatment there may be felt in the Aihole reliefs certain reverberations of Sārnāth; but the spiritual quality of the latter is hardly there. The elongated and supple forms seem, however, to be contributions of the earlier Āndhra idiom of Veṅgi. In this respect the Aihole sculptures of this phase supply a link between the earlier Veṅgi sculptures and the subsequent tradition of the Pallava sculptures of the South.

#### (vii) Post-Gupta Trends

The period of the Guptas, as a culture epoch, may be said to have extended from the fourth to the end of the sixth century A. D. This period saw the full efflorescence of Indian sculptural art, the fulfilment and culmination of the

earlier trends and tendencies that had been in operation for centuries. Even after the collapse of the Gupta imperial fabric a greater part of Āryāvarta remained spell-bound by the heightened aesthetic qualities of the Gupta classical ideal, and the achievements, recorded during the period, were continued even during the next phase till about the middle of the eighth century A. D. After the fall of the Gupta empire Harshavardhana, in the first half of the seventh century A. D., reared up a certain semblance of imperial unity in Northern India. But after his death disintegration again set in. This disintegration made itself felt not only in the political sphere, but in the social and cultural spheres as well. South of the Vindhya, the Deccan and the Tamil land, had sharp differences and these differences came to be consciously manifested along with the rise of dynasties with imperialistic ambitions in each of these two regions. Throughout the country the tendencies towards separatism gradually gained ground and the people began to adhere more and more to local tastes and prejudices. A conscious regional outlook emerged as a consequence and came to occupy a prominent place in the life and culture of the people. In the field of art this regional outlook led to the growth of provincial schools which, though the process seems to have been long in operation, became clearly manifest about the middle of the eighth century A. D.

In Āryāvarta the Gupta classical ideal disintegrated after its supreme outburst in the unearthly creations of Sārnāth of the sixth century A. D. For about a century and half plastic art in Āryāvarta remained in a state of stupor. The classical ideal declined as a consequence, and with the decline of the classical norm local predilections gradually came to the fore leading to the formation of the regional schools. The story of the art movement in the south—in the Deccan



and the Tamil land—is, however, to a certain extent, different. In both the regions there were momentous productions illustrating the fulfilment and final achievement of the earlier autochthonous trends after a certain rarification of such trends in the Gupta classical phase. Ultimately, however, local trends also made themselves felt in the art of the south.

### 1. Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley

In the seventh century plastic art in Āryāvarta follows, more or less, a routine course. It is a matter of fact continuation, so to say, of the achievements of the past century. But the mental and aesthetic consciousness that lay behind the sublime creations of Sārnāth had become dulled and and came to be felt less and less intensely. Even the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley, that had been the centre of the highly intellectual Sārnāth idiom, shows signs of numbness in respect of artistic practices. The idiom had reached its apogee in the preceding century and had exhausted all its possibilities. The classical ideal had reached its goal. What more could the artists of the subsequent generation do but to linger, to quote the beautiful expression of Kramrisch,<sup>36</sup> "in reminiscences of the past"?

A mechanical repetition leads to a position in which the style becomes formal and, necessarily, artificial. With increasing stylisation the soft and sensitively modelled form of almost unbearable grace and refinement, held together by a fluid and melting contour, ultimately disintegrates. Gradually there prevails a general heaviness of form coupled with a coarseness of treatment. In the heavy and coarsened plastic texture there can be seen neither the expression of spiritual illumination, nor the beauty of definition that characterised the earlier works. A "brooding heaviness" as Kramrisch<sup>37</sup> calls it, grips the form.

Even sculptures from Sārnāth, which may be assigned to this period, bear these traits. The physical type, though descended from the ideal of the preceding century, grows heavier, but without the dynamic content of the Deccanese tradition. With increasing heaviness there is also noticed a certain lack of definition. Further, there is no idea of spiritual abstraction that distinguished the earlier works. The sculptures betray a progressive schematisation in which the distinctive import of the idiom is gradually being submerged. In respect of images of Buddha a new attitude, that of *pralambapādāsana*, is introduced (Fig. 118). This attitude is calculated, perhaps, to endow the figures with some amount of relaxation, in contrast to the highly concentrated attitude of *vajraparyāṅka*. Even such relaxed attitude does in no way compensate for the drowsiness that seems to have overtaken all form. In the eighth century a firm linear discipline is recaptured and tightens up the modelling, thus arresting the process of disintegration before it could go far.

In Mathurā, and its sphere of influence as well, a similar process may be seen to have been at work. The lower part of a female figure from Mathurā (Fig. 113) and an image of Padmapāṇi from Saṅkīśā (both in the Indian Museum, Calcutta), each with a smooth and refined texture and assignable to the seventh century, represent possibly the last remnants of the Gupta plastic ideal in that region. In the latter the modelling as well as the linear context already show signs of disintegration. In a few images from Mathurā, like those of Sarasvatī, Pañchika and Hārītī and a Nāga couple (all in the Indian Museum, Calcutta), belonging to a slightly later date, the mediaeval traits are fully manifested.



## 2. Eastern India

Even in the best days of classical art the abstraction of the Sārnāth idiom had been less intensely felt in Eastern India. The eastern version of the classical idiom, distinguished by a certain amount of sensuousness and emotionalism, failed, no doubt, to attain the soaring heights reached by the sublime creations of Sārnāth. The Eastern trend, in spite of its contact with the Sārnāth idiom, had its moorings on this earth and this was not without an advantage either. In the seventh century also this trend appears to remain potent in all its consistency. A group of stone sculptures<sup>38</sup> in the basement wall of the great temple at Pāhārpur (Rājshāhī district, North Bengal) fully bears this out. In a few of these, such as the sculpture showing an amorous couple erroneously described as Rādhā and Kṛishṇa (Fig. 123) or the figure of the river goddess Yamunā,<sup>39</sup> the refined sensuousness of the Eastern trend is found to be fully valid. The smooth and suave contours define in each case a slender form undoubtedly sensitive in modelling, but not exactly in the manner of Sārnāth. The tendency, however, is towards a general heaviness of form (Fig. 122), as in the rest of Āryāvarta. But the plastic texture still retains the subtleties of sensitive modelling and definitive contours. One of the most eminent examples of the Eastern trend of this phase may be seen in the figure of a lady on a jamb (Fig. 100) from Bhāgalpur (Bihar). In the soft and well-modulated young form one may recognise a charming combination of the plastic ideals of the Gupta classical norm with the graceful and vivacious sensuousness of its eastern version. The ideal beauty of the female form, so eloquently epitomised by Kālidāsa, seems to have its plastic counterpart in this elegant sculpture from Bihar. Nālandā,

which has usually been described as the spiritual extension of Sārnāth, has also supplied several notable sculptures of this phase, and such sculptures are also found to be touched by the warm caress of the emotional Eastern trend.

In a second group of Pāhārpur sculptures<sup>40</sup> the plastic traits of the Gupta classical norm are found much subdued and the sensuous and emotional import of the Eastern trend generalised and rarified to a certain extent. A third group of Pāhārpur sculptures,<sup>41</sup> belonging to a period not earlier than the eighth century fully illustrates the strength and vitality of an autochthonous art idiom along with its dynamic and emotional content. It seems to represent an art of the people, naive and vivacious in an extreme measure. Though the execution is crude and coarse, the lively and powerful compositions are of supreme aesthetic and social significance. Unaffected by any sophistication, the art is truly human in its appeal, and seems to have deeper roots. Seldom has such an idiom found expression in stone. The proper vehicle of such an idiom must certainly have been terracotta that has been a popular medium of artistic expression with the common folk since a hoary past. The long dados of terracotta plaques adorning the walls of this colossal temple at Pāhārpur illustrate in an abundant manner the working of this popular and autochthonous art idiom in terracotta, and the third group of stone sculptures at Pāhārpur appears to constitute a parallel projection of a popular tradition in a higher medium. It is true, the terracotta plaques and stone images of this group do not belong to the phase under discussion, but are contemporaneous with the date of the temple which was erected in the time of Dharmapāla sometime in the close of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth. But they presuppose



certainly earlier practices in this popular idiom, specimens of which are not extant now.

The Pāhārpur sculptures of the second group, referred to above, may be assigned to the seventh century. Though contemporary to the sculptures of the first group, they present an idiom that is essentially different from that of the first. In this second group of Pāhārpur sculptures there is hardly anything left of the plasticity and lyricism of the Gupta classical norm. The refined sensuousness of the eastern version is evident only in a generalised manner. These sculptures imply a style, far removed from the Gupta classical trend and from its eastern version as well, but are nearer to what comes to be known as the Pāla with the rise to power of this dynasty in Eastern India in the eighth century. In plastic content, as well as in import and iconography, they may justly be regarded as the precursors of the conventional Pāla images of the subsequent days. A few isolated specimens, like the Chaudagrām metal images of Sarvānī and Sūrya,<sup>42</sup> the bronze image of Śiva (Fig. 127) from the Sunderbuns, the Kākadīghi Viṣṇu,<sup>43</sup> etc. also belong to this category, and these, along with the second group of Pāhārpur sculptures, signify a gradual movement that ultimately leads to the emergence of the Pāla school of sculpture. The connection of this intermediate group of sculptures with the Gupta is evident, in spite of the modifications that have taken place, in the body type which is derived certainly from that source. At the same time an impact of the popular indigenous idiom is noticeable in a general heaviness and coarseness of plastic texture. The popular indigenous idiom represents an art of dynamic action, while the Gupta classical norm that of calm and contemplative repose. It is the meeting of two opposing ideals in the sphere of art that ultimately leads



to the creation of the hieratic Pāla school. The transition from the classical to the mediaeval phase is a gradual process and in Eastern India this process is more clearly discernible than in any other region.

### 3. Central India

In the vast stretch of territory below the Gangetic plains plastic remains, so far known of this phase, are few and far between. There are sufficient indications, however, of widespread artistic activities, scattered throughout the different parts of the modern state of Madhya Pradesh. The impetus to temple-building activity in this region, noticed since the Gupta period, must have been accompanied by plastic practices. A proper and systematic exploration of the entire tract, long overdue, is expected to bring to light many new and important materials for a study of Indian temple architecture in its formative stage, as well as for a better understanding of Indian sculpture in its phase of transition from the classical aspect to the mediaeval.

In the earlier phase plastic art in this region, though generally sharing the disciplined rhythm of the Gupta classical norm, is characterised by a relatively broad and terse modelling and sturdier form. The latter seems to be an inheritance from an early plastic diction, autochthonous to this region, on which Gupta plastic ideals react, but only in a lesser degree. To the Gupta idiom may be attributed the linear discipline felt in varying degrees in such sculptures, and also a certain differentiation in modelling. The few known sculptures that may be assigned to the seventh-eighth centuries, such as the Mātrikā figures from Bherāghāt (Jabalpur district)<sup>44</sup> or figures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas from Sāñchī,<sup>45</sup> signify a gradual disintegration of definitive contours together with a certain coarsening of treatment.



These are, no doubt, the tendencies of the post-Gupta trends in the whole of Āryāvarta. With a slowing down of Gupta classicism the autochthonous tendencies seem to assert themselves again. Heavy and broadened forms with a condensed plasticity distinguish the art of Central India of this phase. In a few (Fig. 98) Gupta classical flavour still appears to be immanent; but, generally speaking, with increasing sturdiness of form along with a terseness of treatment the art of Central India at this period seems to betoken a feeling, akin, to a certain extent, to that of contemporary Deccan.

In the west, in Rājputanā and Gujarāt few examples of sculpture are extant now of this phase; but whatever records are available indicate a plastic trend not far removed from that of Central India. Certain wooden reliefs from Brahmor (Chambā)<sup>46</sup> appear also to be allied to the Central Indian trend. A few metal images from Chambā (Cf. Fig. 137), belonging to the close of the seventh century or the beginning of the eighth, and characterised by a linear sharpness are already mediaeval in content as well as import.

In the seventh-eighth centuries, as mentioned above, an increasing desiccation of the Gupta classical ideal takes place throughout Āryāvarta and ushers in the mediaeval. The process of transition from the classical to the mediaeval is slow and gradual. In regions where remains are abundant one is enabled to trace the process in all its details; in others where records are not abundant enough to allow such a study, the destined course can only be indicated.

#### 4. Deccan

In the seventh and eighth centuries a momentous outburst of artistic genius in the South presents an emphatic contrast to the general state of torpor that had seized

and overwhelmed plastic activities in Āryāvarta. In the Deccan as well as in the Tamil land a heightened aesthetic consciousness leads to an ultimate fruition of the earlier autochthonous heritages.

Artistic activities of the Deccan of this phase are mostly of the rock-cut order. The rock-cut mode, recognised in a rather primitive, yet distinctive, fashion at Bhājā, is seen to unfold its possibilities at Udayagiri and Bādāmī and to reach its final creative perfection in the caves at Ellora, Aurangābād and Elephanta. "With rocks as material and caves as the setting for sculptures"<sup>47</sup> the potentialities of this distinctive mode are fully explored. Dynamic compositions, a single one sometimes extending from wall to wall, cover the surface with multitudinous forms.<sup>48</sup>

The Brahmanical caves at Ellora, like Rāvaṇa kā Khai (No. XIV),<sup>49</sup> Daśāvatāra (No. XV),<sup>50</sup> Rāmeśvara (No. XXI)<sup>51</sup> and Dhūmar Leṇā (No. XXIX),<sup>52</sup> contain outstanding pieces of sculptures, assignable roughly to the seventh century, which illustrate the rock-cut mode in the height of its expression. The themes, mostly drawn from the mythology of the great god Śiva, are conceived each on an epic scale and grandeur. The physiognomical form in each case is broad and heavy, as in Bādāmī works of the previous phase. Nevertheless, a more differentiated modelling, soft in rounded volume and plasticity, and refined contours, apparently classical in flavour except for agitated tension, may be found to qualify all Ellora works generally. A dynamic energy permeates each figure and seems to transcend the limits of the physical frame. In compositions expressing powerful actions and movements this energy appears to be accumulated and stored up in certain parts of the body in accordance with its attitudes, flexions and gestures. Condensed and localised though, the energy spreads through



the mighty physique and radiates even beyond its limits by the inherent dynamism of the rock-cut mode.

In Ellora carvings the sacred myths have been described with vivid and dramatic force, and gods and goddesses seem to live and act. No longer do the figures appear steeped in absorption, as in Bādāmī. An animated consciousness of the vital functions infuse each of them with life that surges within. The figures awake to their surroundings and expand to the moods and actions appropriate to the themes. No longer do the myths appear as mere inert symbols. They are rendered with telling sincerity, grace and vehemence due to the nature and character of the themes. In Ellora carving we have living and masterful portrayals of the sacred lore of Hinduism.

The relief-panels, as a rule, are embedded in deepest recesses of the interior walls, flanked, moreover, at the sides by heavy projecting pilasters. They are thus set back into the depths of two-fold recesses, each panel confronting the light and space as available in the interior. As a result, light and darkness play with equal liveliness on the reliefs which seem to emerge towards space in a slightly diagonal direction. The plastic conception and its setting thus appear to be integrally related, and it is this relation that lends a character and significance to the carvings of the Ellora caves.

This relation seems to have been more fully exploited in the reliefs of a cave at Aurangābād (No. III). Though Buddhist in theme, the reliefs are characterised by the same plastic and compositional concepts that distinguish the Brahmanical reliefs of Ellora. Two groups of worshippers<sup>53</sup>, carved almost in the round against two lateral walls, kneel facing the figure of the Buddha, shown enthroned against the middle wall. With luminously dark body, each figure with an individual expression of "expectant prayer and

devotional surrender" seems to draw within itself every human votary who enters the shrine for adoration. "This intimacy of the object of devotion and concentration, the stone effigies of the worshippers and the living bodies of those who may enter, is the widest possible application to which plastic conception of volume lends itself with the help of modelling and light and darkness."<sup>54</sup>

In the eighth century the cave style continues in the Deccan and records outstanding achievements in the grand conception of the Kailāsa temple at Ellora and in the grottoes of Elephanta. But the full import and significance of such works cannot be satisfactorily apprehended and understood without a familiarity with the contemporary temple sculptures in this part of the country. In the Deccan at this time, along with cave excavations, notable experiments are being made in structural forms, and the temples at such places as Aihole and Paṭṭadakal, Ālampur and Mahākūṭa, supply important landmarks in Indian temple architecture. Exuberant sculptural works embellish these temples, but the plastic style registers a tradition that seems to stand apart from that of the cave reliefs. The difference is best illustrated by a comparison of the rock-cut panels of Bādāmī with the the reliefs in the Aihole temples, both approximately contemporaneous in date (ante, p. 149). Paṭṭadakal rises into importance in the eighth century to which period apparently belong also the temples at Ālampur and Mahākūṭa. Among the temple sculptures of this phase the foremost are those of the Virūpāksha<sup>55</sup> and the Mallikārjuna<sup>56</sup> temples at Paṭṭadakal and those at Ālampur<sup>57</sup>. They appear to connote a blending, though not yet an integrated one, of two seemingly opposing ideals—the heavy physiognomical form, characteristic of the rock-cut idiom, in impact with the slender and elegant physique, apparently a heritage of



Veṅgi in the ultimate analysis. Aihole sculptures of the previous phase (ante, p. 149) carry on this latter tradition, rarified, to a certain extent, by the Gupta classical ideal. It is this tradition which spreads southwards and moulds, in a large measure, the Pallava idiom, to be described presently. This Pallava idiom, in its turn, reverberates to the north and imparts to the contemporary Deccanese sculpture a new sense of form. As a consequence, eighth century temple sculpture at Paṭṭadakal or Ālampur, while shedding off some of their heaviness, retains, nevertheless, powerful bodies distinguished by a slender suppleness and easy and graceful movements. But the combination, rather at an initial stage, seems yet to be vague and faltering.

In the magnificent carvings of the rock-cut temple of Kailāsa at Ellora two trends are found to reach a creative synthesis. The Kailāsa at Ellora has justly been regarded as a supreme creation of human art for the unique boldness of its conception and the magnificence of its execution. A vast temple complex, completely hewn out of the rock as it is, it seems to have been a fitting sanctuary for the god Śiva whose favourite abode is the Kailāsa mountain. Superb carvings, depicting the myths and legends associated with the god and stories from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* cover all the free surfaces of the monument. Conceived with an epic grandeur and treated with an attitude and felicity rarely met with, they constitute collectively one of the most outstanding phases of Indian art.

"In these", observes Kramrisch<sup>58</sup>, "the southern element is absorbed by the tradition of the Dekkhan. The slender type of the body, with its easier and quickened gestures, is assimilated by the heavier form of the Dekkhan with its sustained power." A happy and perfect fusion of two distinctive currents, one of an animated dynamism sustained



by powerful forms and the other of easy and conscious grace, leads to mighty compositions that break forth in movements, forceful and often tumultuous in the intensity of expression. A dynamic energy, pent-up and potent in its forebodings in the previous phase, now releases itself in portentous actions and gestures. In every theme it is the supreme psychological moment, either of elation or of abandon, that has been chosen for representation and rendered with a vehemence that has seldom been equalled. A fleeting gesture, caught at the moment of its highest tempo, becomes transformed into an eternal sign for the supreme fact of a particular myth or a divine act. Every mood, be it the exaltation of the dance of Śiva Nāṭarāja<sup>59</sup>, the fury of Śiva Bhairava<sup>60</sup>, the terrific speed of flight through the air<sup>61</sup>, the force of destruction<sup>62</sup> or the sweet instinct of love, has been expressed with appropriate and consummate sincerity. In these superb and masterful carvings the drama of life itself, as it were, has been presented in its varied facets. Innumerable are the themes and subjects depicted on the Kailāsa temple and no description, however eloquent, is adequate enough to convey properly an idea of the various forces and experiences of life rendered in terms of divine myths and legends.

Among the many fine and bold reliefs a few may be briefly noted here by way of illustration. There is the scene of a couple clasping each other in tight embrace<sup>63</sup>. Rene Grousset considers this scene, which he describes as that of the 'kiss', to be "one of the most powerful works in the art of the whole world". In a masterly fashion the artist has depicted here a joyous and idyllic rapture as well as a care-free abandon, in the intensity of the moment so to say. The monumental scene of the Rākshasa king Rāvaṇa's attempt to dislodge the mount of Kailāsa<sup>64</sup>, the



abode of Śiva, is, again, a forceful and felicitous rendering of a divine myth. The moods and actions represented are varied, and everyone has been faithfully portrayed. In the lower half of the composition we find the Rākshasa king trying to uproot the mountain and the titanic effort required for such a cosmic upheaval is embodied in the twenty arms of the Rākshasa king shown in concentrated energy. The mountain, it seems, feels the tremor of the violence, and the goddess, agitatedly shrinks and clutches at her lord, while a maid takes to flight. But the god keeps himself serene and unmoved and sets order in the turmoil by the simple gesture of pressing down a foot. Admirable in its breadth and powerful in the visualisation of the widest possible varieties of moods and sentiments with equal felicity, this rock-cut composition stands unrivalled for its dramatic vigour and quality in presenting an epic theme.

A detailed and differentiated modelling that characterises each figure is, no doubt, responsible, to a great extent, for much of the effect achieved in these superb carvings. In respect of modelling the rock-cut tradition of the Deccan absorbs the Pallava idiom of the south, which governs the physiognomical form. This fact is best illustrated in the figures of Śiva and Pārvatī and in those of the river goddesses in the entrance porch, which with their tall and slender proportions recall those of the rock-cut reliefs of Mahāvalīpuram. Again, as Kramrisch<sup>65</sup> admirably puts, "depth and darkness are parcelled out according to the demands of psychological suggestiveness with which the artist invests each single figure". The emotional effect is emphasised by a careful and conscious manipulation of space, light and shade. The action is set in a deep box-like hollow from the darkness of which the figures seem to emerge according to the depth of the relief which, again, is graded into a



number of planes by receding cuts. Such graduations are determined by the requirements of psychological differentiation, each mood and each sentiment being described in its appropriate setting according to varying degrees of intensity arranged in accordance with the direction of forthcoming. It is to this masterly disposition of the various elements of the composition that lends elaborate dramatic effect to each relief as a whole. The rock-cut Deccanese tradition, after centuries of experience, reaches the highest state of accomplishment in the supreme carvings of the monolithic Kailāsa temple at Ellora.

Perhaps the last great achievement of cave sculpture in the Deccan is to be found in the spectacular carvings of the grottoes of Elephanta,<sup>66</sup> an island situated not far from Bombay. Unaffected by the Pallava idiom of the south, the autochthonous heritage in rock-cut plastic tradition reaches a supreme perfection in mighty forms, solid and rounded in volumes and almost elemental in their bearings. Weighty and massive bodies, as if swelling from within, carry the notion of an exuberant vigour, dignified as well as dynamic in content, but serene and sublimated in secret exaltation of the divine power. The modelling, in each case is simple and, to a great extent, generalised; yet what a momentous idea of dynamism, coupled with that of a deepest absorption in the joy of existence, is suggested in the heavy and powerful forms contained within firm and pure outlines! The giant sculpture of the Śivaite Trinity (Fig. 119), set at the end of a nave within the cave, has been the subject of much discussion with regard to its iconographic significance. That apart, by its powerful form, distinguished by a sublimity of spiritual expression, it represents the supreme height of India's aesthetic vision. In it the autochthonous rock-cut mode may be said to have reached its final destiny.



## 5. Tamil Land

An artistic movement of great consequence flourished under the aegis of the Pallava rulers of Kāñchi who emerged as the dominant power in the south in the seventh century. Their dominions included parts of the Andhra country and the movement inaugurated by them imbibed and carried on the traditions of the earlier Veṅgi school. Mahendravarman (c.A.D. 600-630), one of the most remarkable figures in the history of Tamilian civilisation, was a great patron of the arts. His many-sided accomplishments are evidenced in the multiplicity of the titles that he assumed: *vichitrachitta* (myriad-minded), *chetthakāri* (temple-builder), *chitrakārappuli* (tiger among the artists), etc. This highly gifted monarch initiated a vigorous art movement in the south. In his time were excavated many cave shrines which seem to represent an innovation in this region.<sup>67</sup> His son, Narasimhavarman Mahāmalla, ushered in a new direction by shaping free-standing monolithic shrines (*rathas*) from granolithic boulder-like outcrops at Mahāvalīpuram (Māmallapuram), the sea-port city founded by him. These were attended with an eminent sculptural output, and the gigantic open-air rock-cut myth of *Kirātārjunya* was also a remarkable production of this phase. These significant works of the Pallava phase supply the foundations of the subsequent *Drāviḍa* sculpture.

The Veṅgi school continued to linger till the fourth century and possibly even later. The impetuosity of the earlier production slowly gave place in the later works to a less severe repertory of elegant and attenuated form. It is this Veṅgi style in its later phase which the Pallavas inherited. But the Pallava sculptors could not entirely ignore the rock-cut idiom of the Deccan and the reliefs of Bhairava-

koṇḍa,<sup>68</sup> distinguished each by a heavy physiognomical form, bear the impress of the contemporary Deccanese tradition. The contribution of the Veṅgi school, however, principally determined the character of the Pallava style. The Pallava sculptures, says Rowland,<sup>69</sup> "retain the extremely graceful attenuation of the forms at Amarāvati, and are animated by the same feeling for movement and emotionally expressive poses and gestures". While this is true with regard to the physiognomical form, extremely slender and elongated in plastic content, the figures themselves seem to be more disciplined; the vehemence and intensity of the emotional frenzy of the earlier inheritance have been thinned down a good deal. At least this is so when the figures are presented in an architectural context.

At Mahāvalīpuram the noble theme of *Kirātārjunīya*<sup>70</sup> has been carved in high relief and covers an entire face of a cliff, approximately ninety feet in length and twenty-three feet in height. It is a fine illustration of an epic myth conceived and composed on an epic scale. No artificial frame or boundary delimits, in any way, the composition which rushes over the surface as far as the rock permits. Here the rock itself has become the material, every feature of which, including the vertical cleft, has been utilised to suit the needs of the theme. One is reminded of similar earlier conceptions at Bhājā and Udayagiri, but here at Mahāvalīpuram the rock concept attains a supreme expression in which the entire mass of the rock, as Kramrisch<sup>71</sup> observes, "allows itself to be organised into relief." The vast and illimitably expansive composition includes within its fold a complete world, so to say, of men and animals, of gods and ascetics, of Nāga deities and semi-divine beings, all in life size. In the breadth of its composition it is a real masterpiece, "a regular fresco in stone", if one may be allowed



to use the term. Every figure has been modelled with a loving care, and the plastic form, so supple and graceful in its slenderness and refined contours, could scarcely be improved upon. In spite of the multiplicity of figures of various kinds crowding the composition, everything is balanced and well-integrated. There is no idea of vehement actions and gestures, as at Ellora. A restrained movement all through lends poise and dignity to the figures, singly as well as collectively. The relief is graded in such a manner that the figures seem to be in a continuous process of emerging from the flat face of the rock. The wholesale impression is one of the joy and ecstasy of existence, frank and direct in a detached way, and, therefore the more touching. The epic myth serves as the vehicle, not for any spiritual quest, but for depicting life in its natural surroundings and in its various facets.

An intense naturalism distinguishes all figures. The aged ascetic prostrating himself in adoration before the shrine or the one practising austerities standing on one leg, the couples hovering in the air, nay the whole array of gods and men, are so amazingly naturalistic, each in his characteristic mood and gesture, as to have a direct appeal. The animals particularly, masterful portraits as they are, reveal the artists' sincere sympathy with and deep understanding of the inherent character of each species. To cite a few instances, it would be better to quote from the eloquent observations of Rene Grousset<sup>72</sup>:

"Perhaps we may even say that here the Indian art of representing animals.....reaches its height. What majesty there is in the group of elephants<sup>73</sup> in adoration..... where they seem to be presiding in the name of the animal kingdom over an august mystery! What life there is in the 'ascetic cat'<sup>74</sup> standing on its hind legs a little further on!

And what supreme elegance in the pair of deer<sup>75</sup> which look on at the scene from a cave opposite, on the left-hand side, with the life-like action of the stag scratching his nose with its hind foot ! Moreover, the cliff....is not the only one which has masterpieces to show. There is another rock-carving which has preserved for us an admirable and intensely life-like pastoral scene<sup>76</sup> of the milking of a cow which is licking her calf's back with a deft movement of the tongue. More amazing still is the monolithic sculptured block showing a family of monkeys<sup>77</sup> with the male picking vermin off the female while she suckles her two little ones : here again we have a keenly observed scene, as humorous as it is realistic."

The breadth of composition of the open-air *Kirāt-ārjunīya* relief may be recognised, to a certain extent, in a few other reliefs in the cave shrines at Mahāvalīpuram. For instance, we may refer to the scenes of Durgā fighting with the buffalo demon<sup>78</sup> and Viṣṇu in his eternal sleep on the coils of Ananta<sup>79</sup>, in the Mahisha-maṇḍapa, and of Viṣṇu in his Varāha form rescuing the goddess Earth<sup>80</sup> in the Varāha cave.

The reliefs on the rock-cut *rathas* of Mahāvalīpuram are set in shallow rectangular panels between two slender pilasters on the two sides<sup>81</sup>. It is this rectangular frame, vertically set, which governs the composition of the relief. Architectonic in context, the figures are also architectonic in character with an emphasis on verticalism enhanced as much by the tall and slender forms as by the high and pointed crowns placed on the heads. Whatever bend the body may assume is also in accordance with the architectonic frame in which it is set. The verticalism of the frame and pilasters determines a shape, contained within a refined and disciplined outline and elongated and almost pillar-like in



appearance. There is nothing of the swaying grace, as in Āryāvarta, everything being fixed by a rigid architectonic discipline. This is as much true of the male figure as well as of the female, of the figures shown in pairs, and even in groups not supposedly related to an architectonic context.

The Pallava style, it has been emphasised already, concerns itself with a tall and slender physiognomical form, apparently an inheritance from the Veṅgi idiom of the Andhra country. The thin and elongated limbs, almost tubular in shape, emphasise the tallness of the figure. The ripe sensuousness of the Veṅgi idiom, however, gradually wears thin, and is almost absent in the Pallava which emphasises a simplified and, to a certain extent, a sublimated modelling. The bodies, nevertheless, retain their pliancy and, instead of the relaxed languor of the Veṅgi figures, a disciplined vitality permeates the Pallava. The latter in the male figures is enhanced by broad shoulders supported on an elongated torso, no longer nervy in modelling as in the Veṅgi type. The female figures, usually leaning on their male companions, are much slighter in appearance with their slender waists, narrow chests and shoulders, smaller breasts, sparse ornaments and garments and generally submissive attitudes. These qualities apply equally to human as well as divine beings. There is no idea of deep or subtle experience in any of them. Reserved and dignified in aloofness, the attitude expressed is characteristically impersonal. Rock-cut though, the reliefs appear on the face of the rock or in shallow caves. There is, hence, no deep mystery, nor intense play of light and shade, as in the contemporary caves at Ellora. Emerging out of the formless mass of the rock everything seems to be clear and evident. The Mahāvalīpuram reliefs seem to stand apart from the contemporary works, either in the Deccan or in Āryāvarta.

Mahāvalīpuram sculptures seem to represent the final achievement of the classical trend in the south. In the reliefs of the Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñchīpuram (eighth century) there is a further thinning down of the plastic context ; but as in Āryāvarta a firmer outline arrests the process of disintegration and ushers in the mediaeval phase in the art of the south. The remarkable figure of Durgā<sup>82</sup> now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.), inseparably linked up with the Pallava idiom in respect of form, seems to belong to this phase.

#### (viii) Terracotta

Among the abundant artistic productions of the period covered by this chapter there is a fairly large quantity of terracotta objects recovered from various ancient sites in Āryāvarta. It is desirable, hence, to include in this chapter a brief, but separate, treatment of this form of art. Such terracotta works have been found in many places. Among these, mention should be made of such sites as Hārwan in Kāshmīr ; Sāhri Bahlol, Takht-i-Bāhi, Jamālgarhi, etc. in the Punjab ; Hanumāngarh and Bikānir in Rājasthān ; Brāhmaṇābād and Mirpur Khās in Sind ; Pawaya in Madhya Pradeśa ; Sāheth-Māheth, Kāsiā, Kośām, Bhitargāon, Bhiṭā, Ahichchhatrā and Rājghāt in Uttara Pradeśa ; Basār in Bihar ; and Mahāsthān, Tamluk, Bāngarh, etc. in Bengal. It is evident from the above list of the findspots of terracottas that they are more abundant in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā basin. The rich deposit of silt and clay of the riparian plains explains the rather large number of terracotta remains in this region. It is significant to note that they are conspicuous by their absence in the country to the south of the Vindhya. Being by nature fragile it is presumable that many specimens of terracotta art have been lost. Only a



fraction of the total output seems to have been preserved to us. Kālidāsa and Bāṇa, two of the great literary figures of this period, refer to artistic practices in clay and terracotta in a manner that signifies a great popularity of this form of art, at least in Northern India, in those days.

Clay and terracotta had been the vehicles of the artistic expression of the common man from time immemorial. In the period denoting the final fruition of the classical trend they remained to be so, as is evident from the abundant remains. The uses of terracotta in the life of the people have already been mentioned in chapter V in connection with the treatment of this art in the previous phase. In the Gupta period with the introduction of structural practices in the field of architecture there began an increased activity in brick constructions, and the scope of terracotta art was naturally widened. Apart from the usual categories, terracotta now came to be employed in architectural decoration. Carved bricks and tiles, with vegetal, human and animal motifs, have come from Hārwan (Kāshmir), Hanumāngarh and Bikānir (Rājasthan), Brāhmaṇābād and Mirpur Khās (Sind), Sāheth-Māheth, Bhitargāon (Fig. 125) and Kāsiā (Uttara Pradeśa), Mahāsthān (Bengal), and other places. Further, terracotta plaques with figures of divine and semi-divine beings, mythological scenes (cf. Fig. 128), popular stories and scenes of everyday life were used to decorate the walls of temples and other religious establishments. In such uses terracotta art may, to a certain extent, be compared to similar contemporary plastic practices in stone. Terracotta art is usually less sophisticated and more human, and such appearances are recognised even in the figures of divine beings and in the representations of divine myths, done in terracotta. Separate images of divine beings were also fashioned in clay and terracotta; but these have mostly perished.

Stylistically these images seem to bear the impress of the Gupta classical tradition, but spiritual experience in such figures in terracotta appears to be less intense. A few isolated fragments mostly detached heads, represent the remnants of such images. Among these, two heads (c. sixth century), one from Pawaya (Madhya Pradeśa) and the other from Ahichchhatrā (Uttara Pradeśa), may rank among the remarkable productions of Gupta classical art. The first,<sup>83</sup> now in the Fort Archaeological Museum, Gwalior, belonged to a male deity. In spite of the dreamy inlook suggested by the slightly drooping eyelids, a sensuous and more human rendering is evident in the treatment of the cheeks, lips, nostrils and chin. The second (Fig. 130), now in the National Museum, New Delhi, seems to be an even more felicitous rendering of the female face in all its alluring charms. It has been identified as the head of Pārvatī, a view that appears to be justified. Kālidāsa in his *Kumārasambhava* describes the classic beauty of Pārvatī, and this description seems to have been faithfully visualised in this dainty terracotta head. The whole appearance is so gracefully divine! Particularly noticeable is the treatment of the hair with neat ringlets arranged along the temples, and with an elaborate and richly ornamented knot at the back. This elegant treatment of the hair seems to reproduce an aristocratic fashion of the age.

Terracotta art largely concerns itself with representations of the scenes of everyday life, and as such its social import appears to be immense. It is needless to repeat what has already been stated in this regard in an earlier chapter (Chapter V). One or two specimens of this kind belonging to this phase may be cited by way of illustration. A terracotta medallion in the shape of a lotus flower from Mahāsthān (Bengal) shows a human couple (Fig. 132), apparently



in conversation with each other. It depicts a homely and intimate scene, suggested as much by the attitudes of the figures as by the caressing gesture of the male. Rājghāt (Uttara Pradeśa), near Banaras, has yielded a fair variety of every day scenes in terracotta, and they depict the daily life and pursuits of the common people in many facets. These pieces, it appears from the holes in the top sections, were intended for hanging on walls as items of interior adornment of houses. Rājghāt specimens are usually small in size, and among the large number of objects a fair proportion consists of detached heads in miniature (Figs. 129-131). The variety of coiffure treatment, presented by them, illustrate the varied fashions of the day in this respect. Stylistically these objects bear also the impress of the Gupta classical idiom in a simplified and rarified modelling that characterises each of them. What is usually termed as the Gupta classical concept in art is all-pervading, and in Āryāvarta it touches all fringes and all branches of art, though in varying degrees.

### References

1. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 54.
2. Śukranṭisūtra, Chap. IV.
3. A. N. Tagore, *Some notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy*.
4. Rene Grousset, *Civilisations of the East*, Vol. II, India, pp. 146-47.
5. Alexander Cunningham (*Mahabodhi*, p. 53) refers the year to the Śaka era, while R. P. Chanda (*ASR.*, 1922-23, p. 149) refers it to the Gupta. The latter view seems to be supported by the palaeography of the inscription and style of the sculpture.
6. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Fig. 291.
7. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 61.
8. *Ibid.*, Fig. 53.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

10. Rene Grousset, *Loc. Cit.*, pp. 141-42.
11. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 173.
12. R. D. Banerji, *Śiva Temple at Bhumara* (MASI, No. 16).
13. Cf. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 62.
14. Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 167.
15. ASR., 1924-25, p. 165, pl. XLIII, c & d.
16. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 60; Benjamin Rowland, *Art and Architecture of India*, p. 144, pl. 87.
17. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 68.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
19. K. N. Dikshit, *Excavations at Paharpur* (MASI, No. 55); S. K. Saraswati, *Early Sculpture of Bengal*, pp. 36-37, 72-80; Figs. 20-24.
20. ASR., 1911-12, pp. 161-66, pls. LXXIII-LXXV.
21. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 67.
22. S. K. Saraswati, *Loc. Cit.*, pp. 20-21, Fig. 4.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22, Fig. 5.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23, Figs. 6 & 7.
25. ASR., 1911-12, pp. 161-66, pls. LXXIII-LXXV.
26. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 166.
27. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 61.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
29. R. D. Banerji, *Bas Reliefs of Bādāmi* (MASI, No. 25), pl. XVIIa.
30. *Ibid.*, pl. XVI, IXa.
31. Some of the bracket figures in the verandah of Cave No. IV at Bādāmi are characterised by elegant modelling and swaying contours with a preference for refined and attenuated forms (Cf. MASI, No. 25, pls. XIXa, XXa,c; Heinrich Zimmer, *Art of Indian Asia*, pls. 130-31). A few ceiling panels are also found to be similarly treated. Such figures seem to betoken an ideal which is not far from the classical Sārnāth one.
32. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 154.
33. Cf. *Ibid.*, Fig. 164.
34. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. III, *Classical Age*, p. 524.
35. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 165.
36. Stella Kramrisch, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 77.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
38. For a general description of the Pāhārpur sculptures reference may be made to S. K. Saraswati, *Early Sculpture of Bengal*, pp. 32-41.



39. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46, Fig. 9.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 55-57, Figs. 12-18.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39, 72-80, Figs. 20-24.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30; N. K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brāhmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, p. 204, pl. LXX; p. 172, pl. LIX.
43. JPASB., Vol. XXVIII, pp. 178-79 pl. 7, Fig. 1.
44. JAS., Vol. XXII (to be issued)
45. R. C. Majumdar, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 77.
46. J. Ph. Vogel, *Antiquities of the Chambā State*, p. 7, Fig. 2.
47. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, p. 37.
48. The latest series of Ajañṭā caves belongs to the seventh century. At Ellora there are three groups of caves, Buddhist, Brāhmanical and Jaina. The earliest in the Buddhist group date from the sixth century, while the Jaina group began to be excavated from about the eighth. The reliefs in the Buddhist caves of the seventh century, though distinguished by an identical plastic concept as those of the Brāhmanical caves, lack the dynamic import of the latter.
49. James Burgess, *A Guide to Elura Cave Temples*, pp. 23-25.
50. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 202-03.
51. *Ibid.*, pls. 227-34; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 98.
52. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 235-39;
53. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pls. 96-97.
54. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 85.
55. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pls. 66-69;  
Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 304-307.
56. *Ibid.*, pls. 300-302; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pls. 71-72.
57. *Ibid.*, pls. 72-75, 77.
58. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 86.
59. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pl. 223.
60. *Ibid.*, pl. 217.
61. *Ibid.*, pl. 212.
62. *Ibid.*, pl. 210.
63. Rene Grousset, *Loc. Cit.*, Fig. 76, p. 239; also Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pl. 213.
64. *Ibid.*, pl. 211.
65. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 88.
66. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 248-265.
67. King Mahendravarman proudly describes his cave temples as composed without bricks, mortars, metal or timber (*anishṭakam asudham alauham adrumam nirmā-pitam*) in the Mandapagattu inscription (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XVII, p. 17).

68. Cf. A. H. Longhurst, *Pallava Architecture* (MASI, No. 17, pt. 1), pls. XVb, XVII and XVIIIa.
  69. Benjamin Rowland, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 181.
  70. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 272-273. It is usual to identify this vast relief as the scene of *Gaṅgāvataraṇa* or the 'Descent of the river Gaṅgā', an ennobling theme described in great detail in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and many of the *Purāṇas*. Some Scholars would describe it as 'Arjuna's Penance', the central theme of the famous *Kṛatārjuniya* episode of the *Mahābhārata* and the subject of Bhāravi's *kāvya*. Recently (*JISOA*, Vol. XVIII, p.p. 58 ff.) T. N. Ramachandran has discussed the iconography of this enormous panel in detail and shown good grounds for identifying the composition with the famous *Kṛatārjuniya* myth.
  71. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 79.
  72. Rene Grousset, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 232.
  73. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pl. 283; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 80.
  74. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pl. 277.
  75. *Ibid.*, pl. 278a.
  76. *Ibid.*, pls. 290-291, 293.
  77. *Ibid.*, pl. 278b; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 79.
  78. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 284-285.
  79. *Ibid.*, pls. 286-287; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 84.
  80. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pl. 282.
  81. *Ibid.*, Cf. pls. 279, 281, 283.
  82. *Ibid.*, pl. 288.
  83. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 49.
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## VII

### EPILOGUE

Up till the latest phase of classical sculpture Indian art admits of a common denominator which can be felt throughout in varying degrees in accordance with the strength or otherwise of the regional trends. The decline of the classical concept is followed by an increasingly conscious emphasis on the regional factors until they assert over the classical. This happened about the middle of the eighth century A. D. which may be regarded as marking the transition from the classical to the mediaeval phase of Indian sculpture. The classical heritage, however, was never lost sight of. It is on the foundations of the classical that the mediaeval Indian sculpture<sup>1</sup> grew.

The classical quality in Indian art consists in what is called the plasticity of the rounded and modelled form contained within a fluid linear outline. With the assertion of the regional trends the plasticity of the classical concept suffers to a certain extent, but not in equal degrees in all the regions. In the mediaeval phase there is recognised generally a gradual thinning down of the plastic context along with a growing linear sharpness. These two lead to a gradual disintegration of the classical form, and together they constitute what is called the mediaeval concept in Indian art. A few scholars would trace the beginnings of this concept to the impact of the linear idiom of northern art which entered India with the various foreign peoples coming from the direction of Central Asia. The fact that this linear concept was more emphatically expressed in the regions where there were strong influxes of such foreign peoples lends a plausi-

bility to this view. What is called the northern art idiom is, however, still an indeterminate factor and the problem awaits further investigation.

The mediaeval concept is more emphatically felt in the art of painting. Sculpture is essentially a three-dimensional art and plasticity had been the basic quality of Indian sculpture from the earliest times. As such, the flatness, inherent in a linear trend, could have but very little appeal to the Indian sculptor. It would be wrong, hence, to suppose that the flat linear trend of the mediaeval concept was valid for whole of India. Its impress, again, was felt in varying degrees in the different regions. It was Western India, mainly Gujarāt and Rājputanā, and the western Himalayan tracts, which recorded certain concessions to this linear trend; but in these territories its impact, again, was slow and gradual. The other regions of India remained, more or less, aloof from the mediaeval concept and continued to draw their inspiration from the rich legacy of the classical tradition.

As in the preceding phase the human figure is also the pivot of mediaeval sculpture. The human figure reached its highest sublimation in the Gupta classical phase when the divine image, rendered in the shape and form of a human being, assumed a supra-human aspect and attained its true spiritual import (ante, pp. 122-23). In this sublimation one may recognise an artist's vision and realisation of the divine being and the intellectual process involved therein. Already, artistic norms and iconographic standards, based, no doubt, on the creations of these supreme experiences, were in a state of formation. In the mediaeval phase these were systematised into definite canons, namely of iconographic norms, of proportions, etc. Indian art has always been essentially a religious art, and with the standardisation of the canons in the mediaeval phase all artistic activities came to be



governed by canonical prescriptions. To an Indian the image is just a medium for meditation and concentration upon the divine principle, and this act demands that this medium, *yantra* or instrument as it has been aptly called, must be endowed with all *lakṣaṇas* or signs as detailed in the iconographic texts. No longer is there any scope in this process for individual artistic experience. The result is a mechanical stylisation in accordance with the iconographic standards that were once based on the visions and experiences of old masters. There is an abundance of output, in the north as well as in the south ; but in each art province one is confronted with practically the same forms repeated endlessly. Under such conditions it is not to be expected that the mediaeval phase should produce any great art ; but, on the whole, the artists maintain a fairly high level of artistic excellence, due, no doubt, to the accumulated tradition of the past which they received as their heritage.

As a *yantra* or instrument, the image has to suggest the divine being in the totality of his presence, endowed with all his attributes and accompanied by his attendants. Such conception demands a composition that takes the shape of a stela in which the figures are graded in a number of surfaces in accordance with their respective importance. The heights of the figures are also regulated accordingly. The principal figure faces the devotee. In form as well as in composition the images of different divinities generally resemble one another, except for the attributes and other accessories which distinguish one from the other.

Art in the mediaeval phase, under conditions stated above, becomes academic in the sense that the appreciation of a particular object requires a knowledge and comprehension of the idea underlying it. This age is characterised by a great development of tantricism which permeated, in

varying degrees, every important form of religion of the day. The esoteric character of the cults and religious practices is unintelligible except to the initiated few. Mediaeval art has neither the spontaneity of early Indian art, nor the impress of spiritual illumination arising out of the supreme realisations of the artists of the classical phase—qualities that are far more universal in appeal. Mediaeval sculpture reflects truly the beliefs and practices of the period and, as such, gradually becomes more and more exclusive. Comprehensible only to a limited class of priesthood, it becomes, hieratic in the extreme, and loses touch with the general tenor of the life of the common man.

The above comments apply generally to the innumerable cult images, found in each of the art provinces of mediaeval India and once enshrined in the mysterious dimness of the *garbhagrihas* of temples. Apart from these, the temple walls are replete with rich and varied wealth of carvings, among which, again, predominate the figure sculptures. The latter may be divided into two distinct groups. To the first category belong the accessory divinities (*pārśva-devatās*, *parivāra-devatās*, *āvaraṇa-devatās*) which are treated in much the same manner as the cult images themselves, except for the slight deviations necessitated by the exigencies of their architectonic context. The majority, however, are decorative in character, so to say, and the motifs consist of human, animal, as well as vegetal and floral devices, each pattern having its position specified in the temple scheme. The treatment of these motifs, including the human, is less hieratic and more relaxed, unhampered, as the artists were in respect of such themes, by canonical regulations. Not unoften there may be recognised a good deal of naivette and spontaneity as in the earlier phases of Indian art. The figure sculptures, as well as other devices, are fashioned



and executed with equal care, and "though the former are outstanding in height of the relief, and therefore in consciousness, the latter do not stand back in wealth of motifs."<sup>2</sup> Among the figure sculptures it is the female form, in an endless variety of attitudes and poses, that recurs most frequently. In many of the art provinces the conception of female beauty repeats an ideal, nearly as full and voluptuous as in the early centuries of the Christian era. In purpose as well as in effect, the sculptures on the temple walls differ greatly from the cult images of the period.

In the mediaeval phase art movements in the different regions are clearly separated from one another. Nevertheless, all styles traverse a path that is, more or less, uniform. With their derivations from the classical idiom, as swayed by regional conditions, the provincial styles slowly move apart as the local factors come to be more and more emphasised. An increasing attention to meticulous details and a growing fondness for elaboration and ornamentation may be felt in each one of these styles as centuries pass by. Uninformed by any personal vision or individual experience the artists in each art province usually maintain a high level of craftsmanship, and their works are distinguished generally by a mechanical grace and elegance. In the later phases, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the exaggerated tendencies towards elaboration and ornamentation lead to an overburdening in which the form itself is lost in a maze of details. The products, particularly of the twelfth, testify to a complete desiccation of every earlier inspiration and the failure to discover anything new. The end comes with the Islamic conquest of Northern India about the close of the twelfth century. There are exceptions, however, to this general tendency in a few of the art provinces, for example, in Orissa and the Tamil land, which carry on the

tradition at a fairly high level for sometime more.

The abundant output of mediaeval Indian sculpture admits of a division into a number of movements, defined according to the following geographical regions : Eastern India, Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley, Central India, Western India, Punjab and the western Himalayan tracts, the Deccan and the Tamil land. Each of these regions develops a distinctive plastic style of its own. Of these, the first and the last are more well known, not only on account of the abundance of remains, but also because they are found to continue the classical tradition, more or less untouched by the mediaeval concept.

In Eastern India, Bengal and Bihar, under Pāla and Sena rule, constitute one artistic zone (Figs. 124, 126, 134, 136, 138-152, 154-156), and Orissa another. (Figs. 153, 157-165). The movements in these two zones are, to a certain extent, allied, as both continue to draw their inspirations from the storehouse of the classical tradition. The respective expressions are, however, different, as one was derived from the eastern version of the classical idiom of Sārnāth, while the other seems to have preferred a heavy physiognomical form along with its rounded plasticity, an inheritance from an earlier classical trend. In the former the bulk of the extant remains consists of cult images, in stone as well as in metal, and occasionally in wood and ivory (Fig. 142)<sup>3</sup>. Whatever the material, a metallic precision characterises the works of which the artistic level is, on the whole, fairly high. The influence of this school extends beyond the limits of Bengal and Bihar and lies at the root of the development of plastic arts in Nepal (Figs. 166, 168) and Tibet, and, to a certain extent, in Burma and Java. In Orissa the temple sculptures (Figs. 153, 157-158, 160-165), culminating in the magnificent figures of



Koṇārak (Figs. 157, 164-165), occupy a conspicuous position in the history of mediaeval Indian art<sup>4</sup>. Herein the classical concept of the early phase, along with its urge for spontaneous naturalism and sensuous import, may be seen to have been at work. The extant cult images<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 159) are fewer in number and less intense in artistic vision and experience.

The Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley has yielded very few specimens of mediaeval sculpture, possibly on account of the depredations of the political turmoils from which the territory has suffered in successive ages. In the mediaeval period this tract was the hub of the empire of the Gurjara Pratihāras who, it is natural to expect, furnished a momentum to artistic pursuits in this region. Very few vestiges, however, now remain, and the few extant examples from Sārnāth and other places indicate that the mediaeval style in this area was, to a very great extent, allied to that of Bihar and Bengal. The contours, however, are sharper and plastic content more stiffened (Figs. 167, 173), possibly as a corollary to a hesitating intrusion of the mediaeval concept. The so-called Rukmiṇī (Fig. 170) from Nokhās (Etah district, Uttara Pradeśa), with its smooth and softened plasticity and suave contours, offers a pleasing contrast to the general trend of mediaeval art prevalent in this region.

Central India has been a great centre of artistic activities from rather early times. In the mediaeval period three royal dynasties, the Chaṇḍellas of Jejakabhukti, the Paramāras of Dhārā and the Haihayas of Tripurī, flourished in the different parts of this region, for a time ruling simultaneously with one another. The plastic traditions developed under these sovereigns, though different, to a certain extent, in forms as well as in expressions, admit yet of a common denominator which may be designated as the Cen-

tral Indian mediaeval trend. Lying midway between Eastern and Western India, each with a distinctive style of its own, the Central Indian trend may be found to partake of the characteristic features of both. The heavier physiognomical form and ampler plastic volume seem to have been reminiscences, however, of the earlier plastic trends in this part of the country. There is hardly anything left of the inner vision and experience that characterised the Gupta classical trend and lingered, almost to the last, in the Eastern Pāla school. With an increasing stagnation of modelling the form, in spite of ample curves and volumes and a certain amount of definition, loses in plastic elegance and sensibility. The result is a stiffened and mechanical grace (Figs. 171-172, 174-175) which, despite a conscious stamp of technical perfection, fails to impress. The temple sculptures<sup>6</sup> also share these characteristics in a general way. There is, no doubt, an impression of greater freedom and relaxation, but such an impression is only artificial. There are dynamic movements suggested by extreme flexions of the body (Fig. 175) round its axis; but these are feats simply of technical skill that fails to impart any vitality to the attitudes portrayed.

The western province of mediaeval Indian art comprises of Rājputanā, Gujarāt and Kāthiāwār. It is in this region that the impact of the mediaeval concept is more emphatically felt, particularly from the tenth century onward. Rājputanā<sup>7</sup> stands slightly apart being less susceptible to the influx of the mediaeval concept (Figs. 169, 176), perhaps due to a stronger hold of the classical tradition. Otherwise, the movements in these three regions are linked together formally and psychologically. In the cult images<sup>8</sup> the classical concept is extremely thin. A predilection for sharp edges leads to a strained modelling, and the content itself is dry and desiccated. The temple sculptures<sup>9</sup>, as a



rule, exhibit a certain amount of relaxation, but still, the impact of the mediaeval is more strongly felt than in other regions (Fig. 177).

Extant examples of mediaeval sculpture in the Punjab hill states seem to register two traditions existing side by side. A group of sculptures in the Kāngra valley and in the Chambā state is characterised by a softer, though not subtler, plasticity and suave linear content, inherited, no doubt, from the Gupta classical ideal. In this isolated region the Gupta plastic idiom seems to have survived throughout the mediaeval phase in a rather striking manner. At the same time from the eighth century onward there appear sculptures which record the impact of the specific mediaeval concept in their mechanical compositions with sharp and incisive outlines and petrified plastic content, often flattened and elongated in texture. In Kāshmir varied traditions, from the Hellenistic one of Gandhāra to the Eastern Indian Pāla idiom, may be found to have been at work. Plastic trends of the Punjab hill states and of Western India also appear to have reached Kāshmir. But each trend occurs, more or less, as an isolated factor, and no attempt seems to have been made to harmonise these various influences.

In the Deccan there is a vigorous artistic activity in connection with the architectural movement under the aegis of the different dynasties of kings holding political power in this region. But the brilliant days of plastic expression seem to have been over. The movement, as is usual in the mediaeval phase, continues in a mechanical way with no spark of life, so to say. Ultimately in the later Chālu-kyan phase there emerges an extremely florid style which reaches an emphatic expression during the Hoysala regime<sup>10</sup>. The output is decidedly large, the reliefs are bold with smooth and rounded plastic masses, and the decorative motifs

deeply undercut with a flawless sense of draughtsmanship and chiaroscuro effects (Figs. 178-179). But the form itself is lost in the exuberance of decorative details. Technical skill apart, there is hardly anything to commend in a style of this kind.

In the Far South, i. e. in the Tamil land, there are, however, momentous productions that illustrate a brilliant culmination of the classical idiom as modified by the Pallava. At a time when the classical heritage is universally on the decline South India not only carries it on, but leads it into fresh channels of fruitful expression. The Cholas supplant the Pallavas as the dominant power in the South and inherit, along with the political hegemony, their predecessors' art tradition. This they continue during their regime and with an enlightened outlook explore its further possibilities so as to lead it to a final fruition.<sup>11</sup> In this state they bequeath their art to the dynasties coming successively after them. In this way the style remains vital for a much longer period than in Northern India.

A vigorous modelling together with a facile contour, evidently a heritage of the Pallava idiom, characterises Chola works of the tenth-eleventh centuries. At the same time the plastic texture is easy and flexible, and animated by a soft tenderness that seems to pulsate beneath. Under a dignified bearing of self-composed discipline there flows a vital current that appears to illumine the pose and attitude intended to be portrayed. In the hands of the Chola artists the classical idiom acquires a new interpretation which adds further to its potentialities. In the subsequent centuries, though the treatment is slightly hardened, the tradition continues without any sign of exhaustion till a rather late period. An intense spiritual and emotional movement, arising out of a kind of *bhakti*, leads to a greater urge for



creative visions and expressions, and it is these new sources of inspiration that act as checks to mechanical repetitions. Abundant productions, in stone as well as in metal<sup>12</sup>, illustrate a style, vigorous and creative, that blossoms into manifold forms and compositions, naturalistic as well dynamic, and at the same time sedate and sublime (Figs. 180-184). To cite only one instance, one must refer to the grand conception of Naṭarāja or Śiva in his cosmic dance (Fig. 182). In it the vision of the South Indian artists has bequeathed a motif that is, perhaps, without a parallel in the entire range of world art. In the perfect realisation of the profound symbology underlying the conception, along with the balance, rhythm and poise inherent in it, it ranks as one of the supreme creations of Indian art.

### References

1. Mediaeval Indian sculpture with its many regional ramifications, each having manifold strains, offers a vast field of study. The scope of the present work is too limited to admit of a detailed treatment of the subject. It has been possible here to indicate only the general tenor of mediaeval sculpture in its principal expressions.
2. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, p. 97.
3. Stella Kramrisch, *Pāla and Sena Sculpture* (*Rupam*, No. 40) ; R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, pp. 532-47.
4. Heinrich Zimmer, *Art of Indian Asia*, pls. 326, 338-343, 357-371.
5. *Ibid.*, pls. 372-373.
6. *Ibid.*, pls. 314-318 ; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pls. 122-123.
7. *Ibid.*, pls. 117-118 ; Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pl. 392.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, pl. 320.
9. Cf. Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 131.

10. Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Loc. Cit.*, pls. 388 (wrongly ascribed to Bengal), 428, 432, 434-435.
  11. *Ibid.*, pls. 415-417; Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India through the ages*, pl. 114.
  12. Mediaeval South Indian sculpture is deservedly well known through its eminent productions in bronze and copper.
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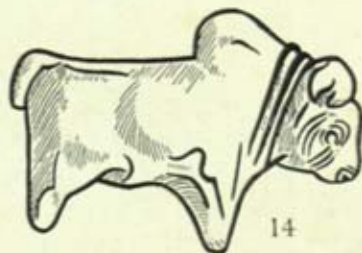
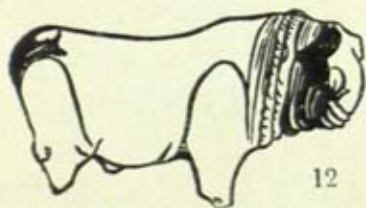
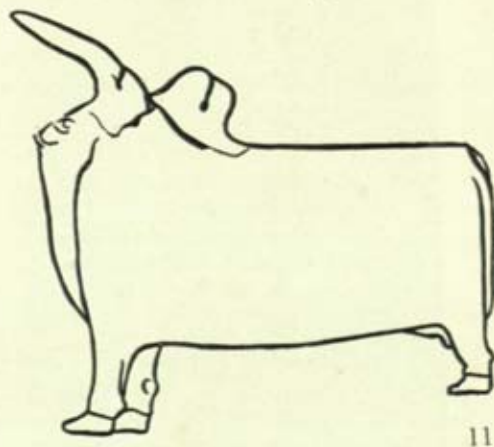
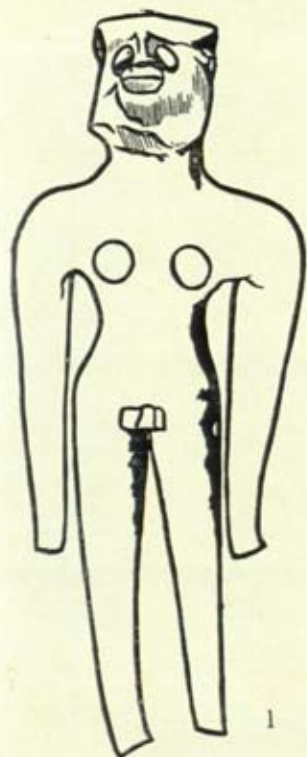




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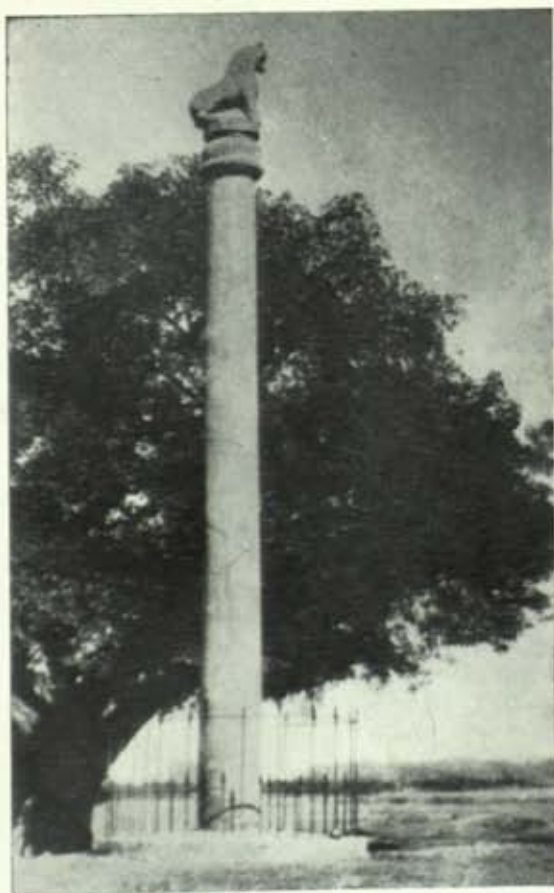




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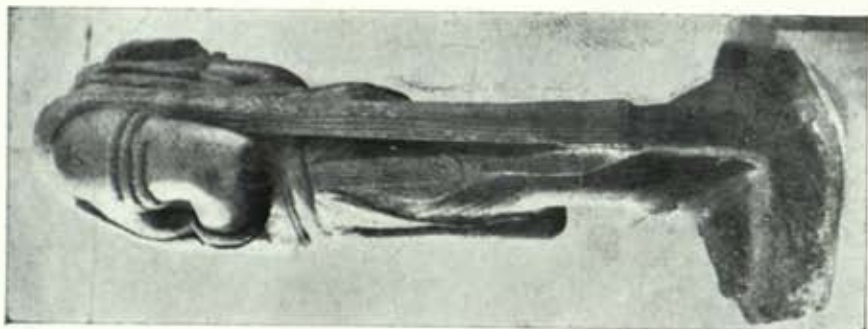
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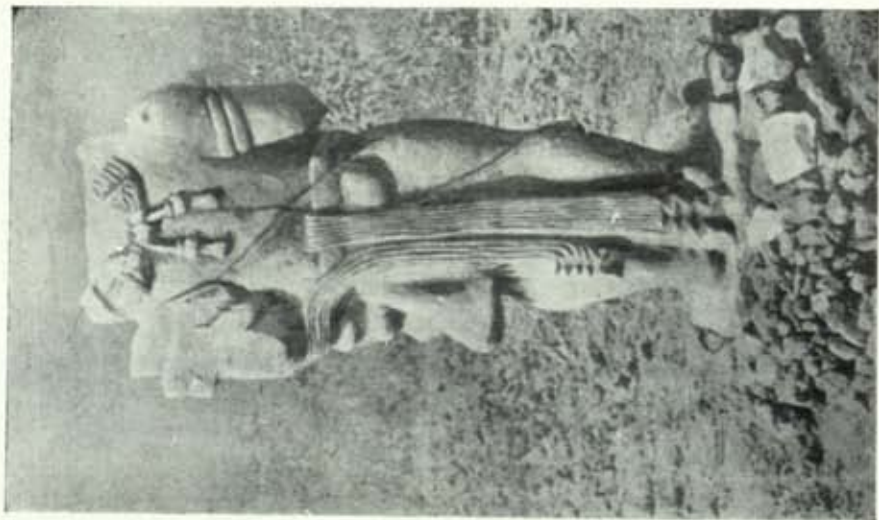
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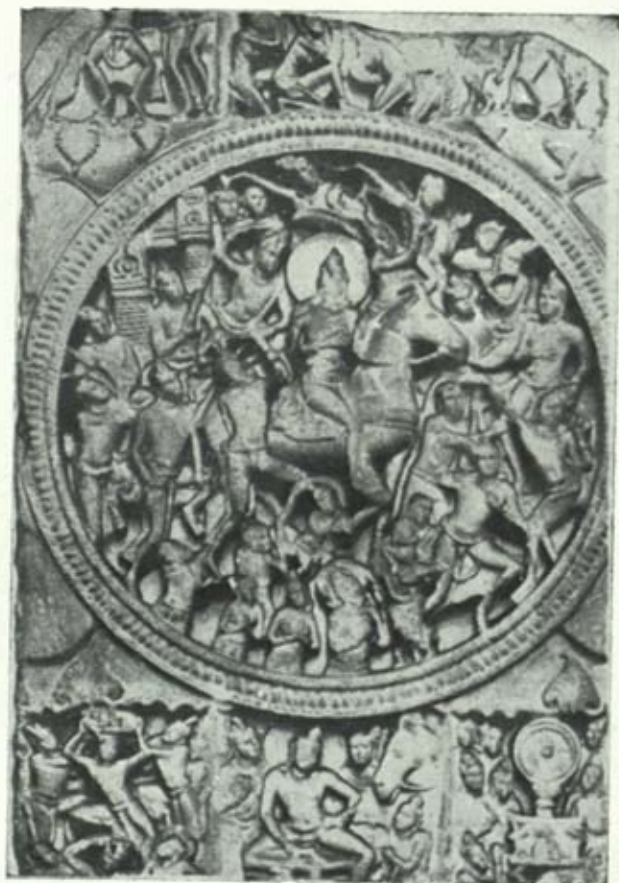


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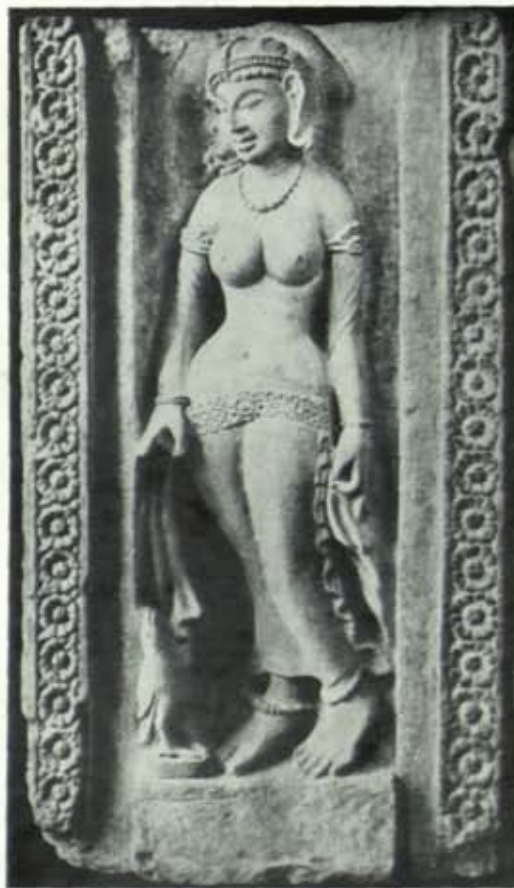
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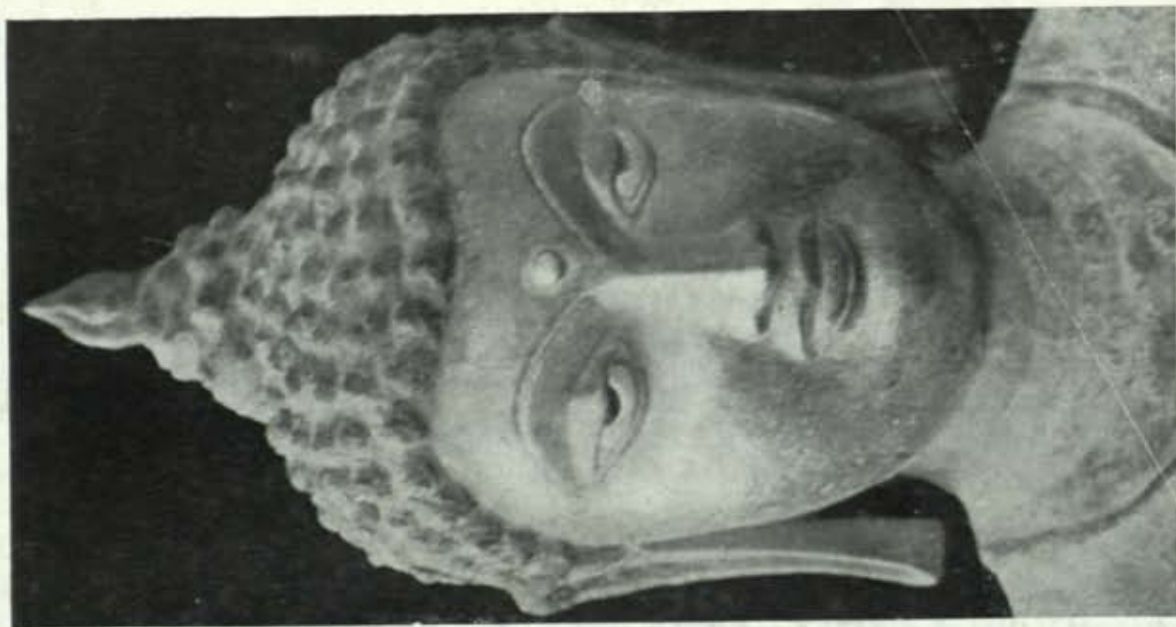


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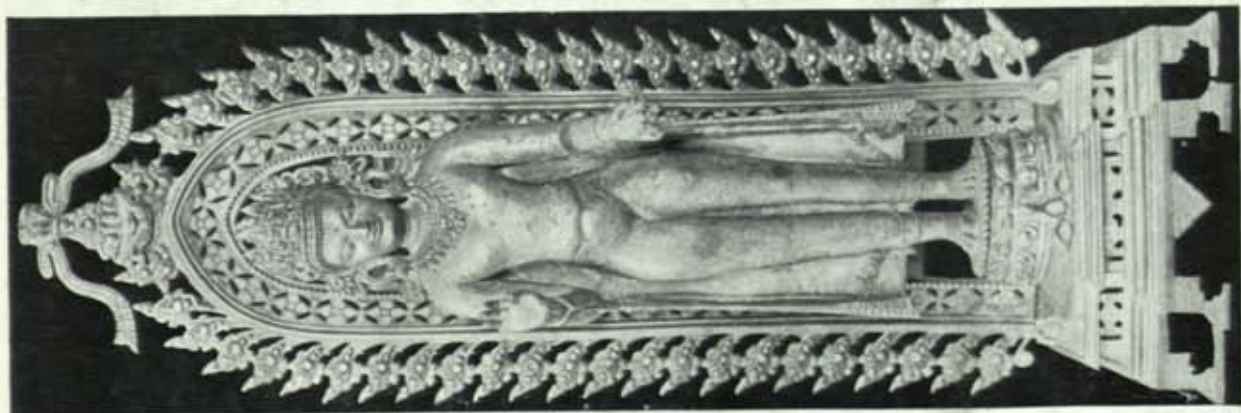


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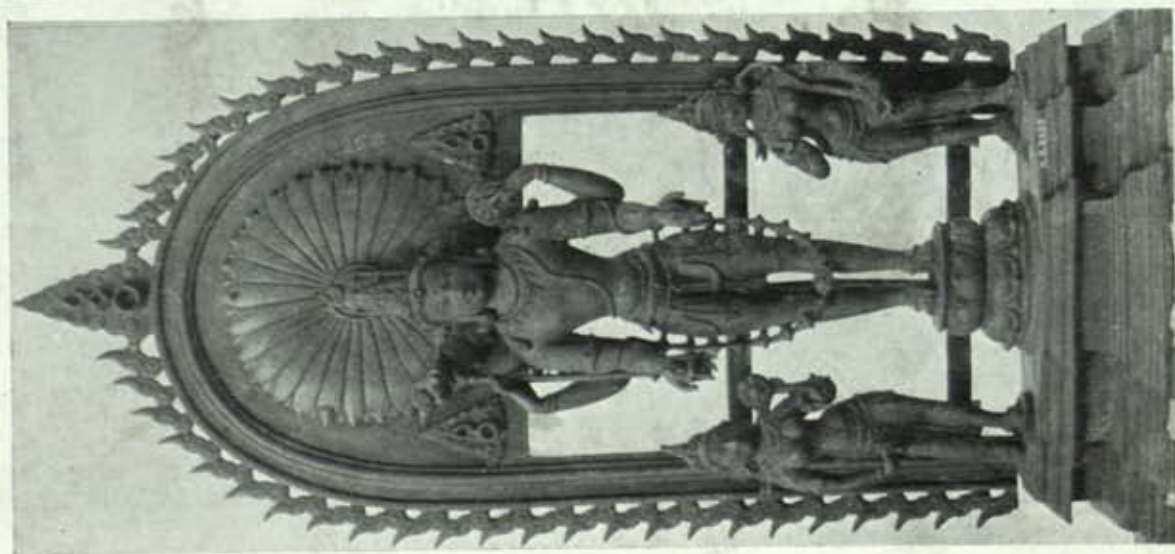




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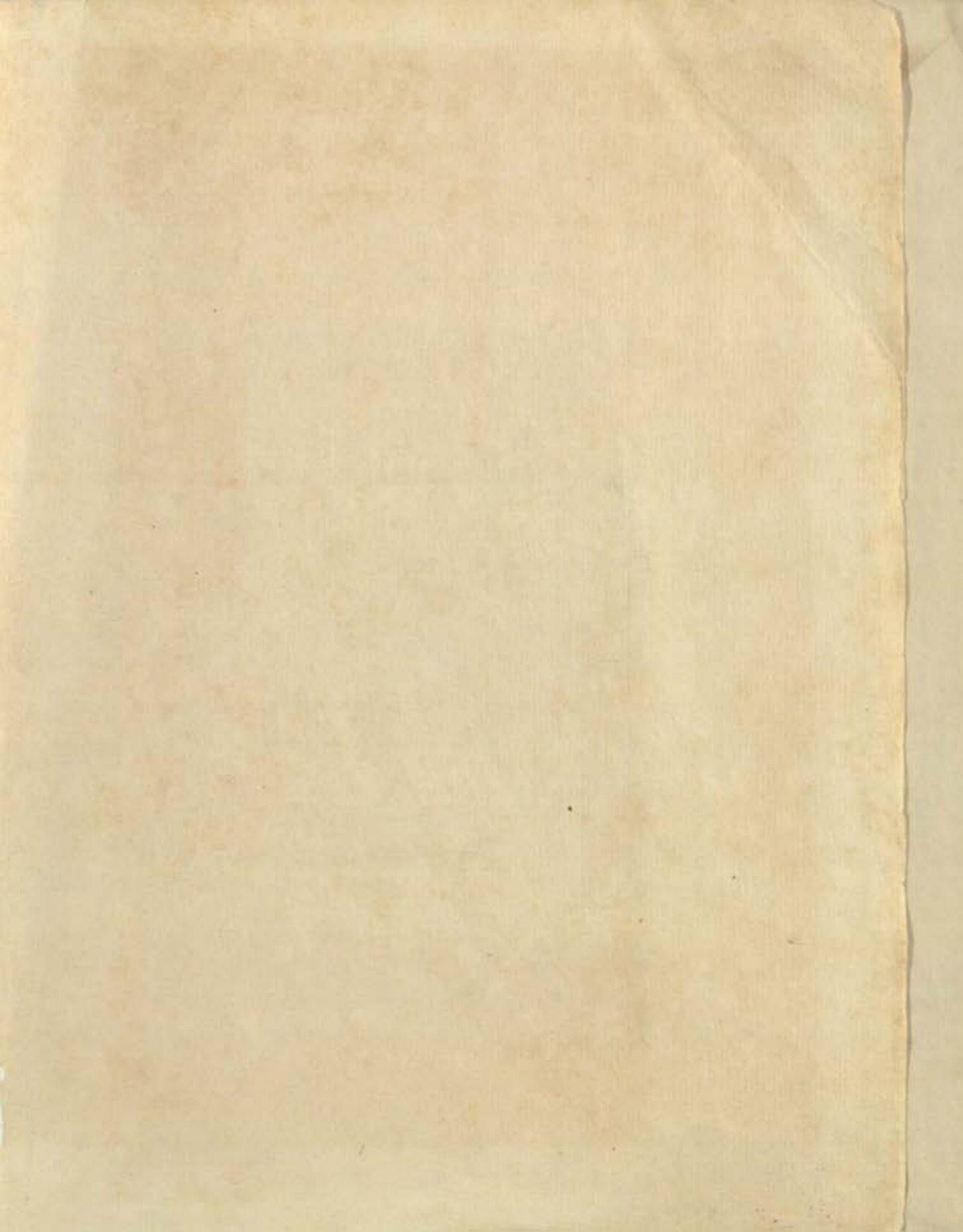
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