

## LECTURE

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### ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF ELEPHANTA

The elephanta caves are widely believed to have been carved during the reign of an early Kalacuri king (third quarter of 6th century), who ruled the Konkan area. The stele bearing the dedicatory inscription was removed from the site by the Portuguese centuries back. Mr. Rajesh Singh, a research associate in Kala Darshana division gave a talk on 'Art and Architecture of Elephanta' (January 24). He sought to highlight those points that set apart these caves from other temples. The Early Kalacuris were the followers of the *Lakulisa-Pasupata* sect of *Saivism*. The great *Yogisvara* image on the left of the north entrance (to the caves) that occupies an important place in the sculptural program of Elephanta is indicative of the yogic practices which must have once gone hand in hand with the complex ritualistic exercises undertaken inside the cave by the *Lakulisa-Pasupata* devotee. *Lakuslia* was the founder teacher of this sect who eventually attained to the *Sivahood* (salvation).

The *Trimurti* image at the end of the north-south axis is one of the images that has received considerable attention and various explanations have been given for it. The image, over five meters in height, has generated a great deal of discussion among scholars. Early scholars believed it to be the Hindu trinity representing *Brahma*, *Visnu* and *Mahesa*. This identification has now been set aside. Now it is argued that the faces visible are only those, which could be carved, to be seen from the front while a fourth is implied at the rear, and even a fifth, facing upwards, in accordance with the five faces of Siva described in *Visnudharmottara*. The three faces may represent respectively *Aghora-Bhirava* (an angry form of Siva), *Siva* and *Uma*. These faces also denote the forms of power of the universal *Brahman*: *sattva* is depicted by the central face, *tamas* by the angry countenance, and *rajas* by the tranquil face at the right. Other sculptural panels have their own stories to tell. The complex nature of their iconographic, aesthetic and ritualistic aspects considered in junction with the development of cave architecture in general are bound to arouse far greater curiosity in future.