INDUS CIVILIZATION 2500-1500 B.C

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Chaitya Hall, Bhaja, Maharashtra

The beginning of stone sculpture in India goes back to a very remote age. The excavations carried out in 1924, at the ruins of Mohenjodaro on the Indus river and Harappa in the Punjab, brought to light a highly developed urban civilization, archaeologically known as the Indus Valley or Harappan Culture. It flourished from C.2500 B.C. to 1500 B.C. These ancient cities had a systematic lay-out, wide roads, spacious houses made of bricks, and an underground drainage system, somewhat like our own. People worshipped the Mother Goddess or Goddess of fertility. Trade and cultural contacts existed between these cities and those of Mesopotamia of which the evidence is the occurrence of the seals, as well as similar carnelian beads, knobbed pottery, etc., at both places. Clay was the earliest medium in which man began to mould and we have discovered a large number of terracotta figurines from these Indus Valley sites.

Among the few stone figurines, a male torso of polished red lime stone from Harappa, chiselled in the round, is remarkable for its naturalistic pose and sophisticated modelling, highlighting its physical beauty. This lovely figure makes one wonder how at that remote age, it was possible for the sculptor to carve as beautifully as was done very much later in Greece in the 5th century B.C. The head and

Priest, Clay, Harappa, Pakistan

arms of this figure were carved separately and socketed into the drilled holes of the torso.

Another noteworthy example from this urban culture is the bust portrait of a bearded nobleman or high priest, from Mohenjodaro, weaving a shawl with trefoil pattern. It bears a close resemblance to a similar figure discovered in the Sumerian sites of Ur and Susa.

The figure of a male dancer belonging to the same period and discovered at Harappa is an important carving showing how music and dance had a great place in life almost 5000 years ago. It amply proves the dexterity with which the sculptor 5000 years ago, could catch beautiful movements of dance poses and express them in stone by the graceful twist of the body from the waist upward. Unfortunately, it is in a damaged condition, but it still reflects the great mastery with all its vitality and grace.

The bronze dancing girl of the same period discovered at Mohenjodaro is perhaps the greatest surviving achievement of the metal work of the Harappan age. This world-famous figure shows a female dancing figure standing as if relaxing after a dance number, with her right hand on her hip and the left dangling free. She wears a large number of bangles, probably made of bone or ivory on her left arm together with a couple of pairs on her right arm.

Dancing girl, Bronze, Mohen-jo-daro, Pakistan

The statuette is a great master piece of the art of the metal craftsman of the period who knew the art of bronze casting in the *cire perdue* or lost-wax process.

This terracotta figure representing the large sized mother goddess is one of the best preserved and comes from Mohenjodaro. The significance of the broad pan-like appendage on either side of the

coiffure of the goddess is not easily understood. Since she is the bestower of fertility and prosperity, she was worshipped for this very purpose. India is traditionally a country where more than 80 per cent of its inhabitants are agriculturists who naturally worship gods and goddesses of fertility and prosperity. The pinched nose and ornamentation flatly laid on the body and pressed on to the figure and the general folk effect in art are most interesting. The sculptor at Mohenjodaro was adept in his art and could fashion both realistically as well as stylistically.

Bull, bronze, Mohen-jo-daro, Pakistan

The terracotta figure representing a bull is a forceful representation, eloquently proclaiming the special study of the anatomy of the animal by the modeller who fashioned the figure. The animal is shown standing with his head turned to the right and there is a cord around the neck.

The pair of squirrels is interesting in a very natural and characteristic fashion seated on their haunches and nibbling at some fruit.

The toy animal, with a moveable head from Mohenjodaro, belonging to the same period i.e. 2500 B.C., is one of the most interesting objects found during the excavations which shows how the children were kept amused and happy with toys that they could manipulate by moving their heads with the help of a string.

Toy animal with movable head, Terracotta, Mohen-jo-daro Pakistan

A large number of seals have been discovered in the excavations. They are made of steatite. terracotta and copper

and are of various shapes and sizes. Generally they are rectangular, some are circular and few are cylindrical. Almost invariably they bear on them the representation of a human or an animal figure and have on top an inscription in pictographic script which has not been deciphered so far.

Seal : Pasupati, Stone, Mohen-jo-daro, Pakistan

This seal shows a seated figure of a Yogi, probably Shiva Pashupati, surrounded by four animals - a rhino, a buffalo, an elephant and a tiger. There are two deer shown under the throne. Pashupati means the lord of animals. This seal may throw light on the religion of the Harappan age. Most of these seals have a knob at the back through which runs a hole and it is believed that they were used by different guilds or merchants and traders for stamping purposes. When not in use they could be worn round the neck or the arm like an amulet.

A fine example of an animal study shows a humped Brahmini bull of great strength and vigour. It is a great artistic achievement of that early date. The modelling of the fleshy part of the bull's body is very realistically depicted.

There are small seals of intricate workmanship and of great artistic merit, astonishing examples of the artistic skill of the sculptors. Such exquisite works of art could not have come about overnight and clearly suggest a long previous tradition.

Harappa and Mohenjodaro are now in West Pakistan. About a hundred sites of this culture, have been found in India, and a few of them excavated so far, have disclosed

that the Indus culture was spread over an extensive area.

Jewellery, Mohen-jo-daro, Pakistan

The Indus civilization came to an end in about C.1500 B.C. probably due to the Aryan invasion of India. Except for some antiquities of the copper hoard culture and ceramics, no trace of any plastic art is found during the next 1000 years. This may perhaps be due to perishable materials like wood which were used in fashioning art forms which could not withstand the rigors of time. The carvings of flat surface, as met with at Bharhut and Sanchi, are an echo of an earlier tradition in wood or ivory. But this intervening period of about 1000 years is important, because it was during this time that a synthesis took place between the fertility cults of the Dravidians, who were the original inhabitants of India, and the Aryan elements of rites and rituals. The Indian way of life and thought as embodied in the earliest scriptures, the Vedas and the Epic literature, were developed and the blending of the Aryan gods with the more ancient Buddhism and its contemporary religion Jainism, also made their appearance in India in the 6th Century B.C. These faiths have much in common with each other and represent the ascetic trend in Hindu philosophy. The teachings of these reformed faiths by Gautama Buddha and Mahavira, had a deep impact on the masses. It is the concept of these three religions, which later found expression in plastic art forms.

An these sculptures were originally parts of temples or other religious monuments to which they belonged both aesthetically and functionally.

BUDDHIST SCULPTURE

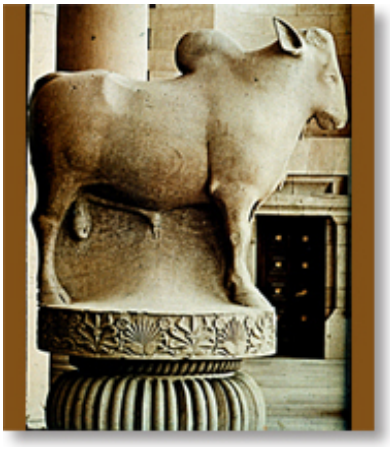
BUDDHIST SCULPTURE

Lion capital from Ashoka Stambha, Stone, Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh

The earliest historical sculpture in India is of the Mauryan age in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C. It is a bold and massive style marked by a certain realism freely employing foreign elements from Achaemenid Persia. The great Buddhist Emperor Ashoka caused the erection of monolithic pillars of sandstone, 30 to 40 feet high, crowned by animal figures like the bull, lion and elephant, and had them inscribed with the Buddhist concepts of morality, humanity and piety, which he wished his people to follow. Famous Ashokan pillars are from Lauriya Nandangarh in Bihar, Sanchi and Sarnath.

The most remarkable of them all is the highly polished monolithic lion-capital found at Sarnath, which is now the Emblem of the Government of India. It represents four roaring lions back to back facing the four cardinal directions. The round abacus is decorated with four *dharmachakras* or wheels of law, alternating with an elephant, a bull, a horse and a lion, all carved with masterly skill. The abacus is supported by a bell-shaped base consisting of a lotus with *dharmachakra*, which perhaps symbolized the victory of righteousness over physical force. The superb modelling of the figures executed in a realistic manner with a certain stylization, is invested with a great power and dignity, and reveals the aristocratic and international nature of Mauryan art.

To a distinguished student of art, a close look at the capital will be highly rewarding. The four lions on top are highly formalistic and



Bull Capital,
from Rampurva, Bihar

stylised. This will be evident from looking at the mane of the lions which is represented as little flame shaped bunches of hair, not at all naturally done, but in a stylised manner. Again, the upper lip of the lions has been shown by three incised lines which is formalised and stylized. We must remember that it was only Ashoka who started making extensive use of stone for sculptures and great monuments whereas the previous tradition consisted of working in wood and clay .

A close look at the animals on the abacus will reveal that these animals are not static or rigid. They have been very keenly and lovingly observed in nature and are very naturalistically represented, full of life.

The bull capital of Ashoka from Rampurva, Bihar, also belonging to the third century B.C. is an interesting study as it is a mixture of Persian and Indian elements. The lotus capital is entirely formalistic. The motifs on the abacus are beautiful decorative elements like the rosette, palmette and the acanthus ornaments, none of them Indian.

However, the crowning element of the bull capital, that is the bull proper, is a master-piece of Indian craftsmanship, showing a humped bull, well modelled, with its soft flesh beautifully represented, with its strong legs, sensitive nostrils and the ears cocked as if it were listening.

At Dhauli, in Orissa, there is a masterly representation of an elephant depicted as if emerging from a rock which has been so cut that it resembles the front part of an elephant including the head and trunk etc.

Unfortunately, it is in a sad state of preservation, nevertheless, it is interesting as almost the first attempt at carving a colossal animal figure out of a rock or a boulder. This representation of an animal is in the indigenous tradition of the country.

Chauri-bearer (Yakshi), Lime Stone, Didarganj, Bihar

Excellent specimens of the Mauryan craftsmanship in fashioning the human figure are provided by the colossal statues of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis,* the deities of fertility and abundance. The *Yakshi*.

from Patna Museum is a striking example of 3rd-2nd century B.C., fashioned by a gifted sculptor. The figure wearing elaborate jewellery and a heavy undergarment, though massive and bold in its execution, portrays in a grand manner, the Indian ideal of feminine beauty in her full breasts, slender waist and broad hips. The sculptor in India took delight in fashioning his beautiful creations in poetic or visual metaphors in preference to direct observation. The surface of this lovely figure bears the typical lustrous polish of the period.

Another striking example of Mauryan art in the 3rd century B.C. is the handsome torso of a male figure from Lohanipur. The modelling of the figure executed in a realistic manner, is invested with a wonderful vitality. It probably represents a Jain Tirthankara or a Saviour of the Digambara sect.

Worship of the Bodhi Tree, Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh

After the decline of the Mauryan empire, the Sungas succeeded to power in circa 185 B.C. They ruled the central and eastern parts of Northern India. Their native style, distinguished by its simplicity and folk appeal is best represented in monolithic free standing sculptures of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis,* discovered from Gwalior and Mathura; and the fragments of the beautifully carved gate and railings of the Buddhist stupa at Bharhut, now preserved

in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The narrative art of Bharhut, depicting Jatakas of Buddha's previous birth in sculptures, the decorative art of Sanchi and the Jain Stupa of Mathura belong to the same tradition. They all have an echo of wood construction and the style of the sculptures seems related to carving in wood or ivory, basically the exploitation and elaboration of a flat surface, governed by the law of frontality as distinct from 'perspective' presentation. Whether it is the representation of Buddha by his lotus feet, an empty throne, a pair of fly whisks or the *triratna* symbol, or the nativity of Maya Devi by the two elephants elegantly giving an *Abhisheka* or bath to the new born, pouring water from the *kalasha* or jars, the language employed by the artist is that of symbols.

When the artist visualises a *Yakshi,* the nature spirit, or the fertility symbol Sura-Sundari, the Celestial beauty, her eye-brows are like the arch of the bow, her eyes a curved fish, her lips a lotus petal, her arms an elegant creeper, her legs tapering like the trunk of an elephant or a plantain tree. The allegiance of the artists is to what he considers reality in a dream or a poetic metaphor. And it is this visualised, idealised image that he hopes and strives to present most faithfully, among the several deities of fertility and other scenes sculptured on the railing pillars of Bharhut. The figure of Chulakoka Devta is a notable specimen of Sunga art representing its indigenous character and folk quality. She stands gracefully on an elephant with her arms and one leg entwined around a flowering tree, as she is a tree goddess. The profuse jewellery and the mode of wearing the under garment and the head-dress demonstrate the feminine fashion of the period. The figure suggests a certain elegance which we find with greater exuberance in the later Kushan sculpture. The inscribed label at her right side, gives us the names of the *Yakshi* and also states that this pillar was the gift of Arya Panthka.

There are several interesting Jataka stories, and Bharhut forms a treasure

house of fables, visually represented. In this medallion the gift of the Jetavana park by Anantha Pindika, by covering the ground with golden coins before it was presented by the merchant prince, is most graphically represented.

Another good example of Sunga art of the second century B.C. is the jovial figures, the dwarfish *Yaksha* from the Pithalkhora caves in Central India, carrying a bowl of abundance on his head. The care-free broad smile on his face and his rotund belly indicate that he is fully satisfied in all respects. The two amulets strung on his necklace ward off evil spirits from his devotees. The back of his right hand bears an inscription giving the name of the sculptor as Krishnadasa who was a goldsmith by profession. Generally speaking Indian art is an anonymous art, as the sculptor or the artist never sought to glorify himself. He always gave of his best as a humble offering to God or to his patron, the king, who was an image of God.

Though it may seem strange, Buddha is never represented in human form in Buddhist art before the Christian era, as his spirituality was considered too abstract for the purpose. The adherents of the Buddhist faith followed the Hinayana path as a means of attaining salvation. Buddha's presence in early Indian art is, therefore, suggested by symbols like the Bodhi tree under which he attained enlightenment, the wheel of law, his foot prints, the royal umbrella, the stupa and an empty throne, etc.

The relief-medallion from the fragment of a railing pillar of the stupa at Bharhut datable to the 2nd Century B.C., shows the worship of the Bodhi tree by four figures. Buddha had attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. Here the tree symbolizes the presence of Buddha.

In the fragment of an architrave from the gateway of the stupa at Bharhut; we can observe the great love, understanding and affection that the early Indian artist had for animals and plants which he took pains to study in great detail. On either side of this architrave, are men and elephants in action, skillfully shown, paying homage to the Buddha, represented by the Bodhi tree shown in the centre.

Sanchi Stupa No.1, detail of Torana, Animals Worshipping Bodhi Tree, Madhya Pradesh

The Kishvakus continued the great art traditions of the Satavahanas. They were responsible for building the stupas at Nagarjunikonda and their equally beautiful carvings.

The powerful Satavahana Kings of South India were great builders and from the 2nd century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. they studded their empire with several splendid monuments which were richly embellished. They excavated cave temples and monasteries along the Western Coast of India and erected several Buddhist stupas. The lavish carvings on the Sanchi stupa gateway which were also executed during their reign, proclaim the high skill and technical proficiency of the Satavahana sculptors. Stupa worship was an ancient form of honouring the great dead. Stupas were built not only to enshrine relics of Buddha and Buddhist saints, but also to commemorate events of religious significance. The outstanding example of an early Buddhist stupa built during the 3rd and 1st century B.C. is preserved at Sanchi in Central India. It is a solid structural dome raised on a terrace and surmounted by a railed pavilion from which rises the shaft of the crowning umbrella. The stupa was originally a mud funerary mound enshrining in its core the sacred relics of the Buddha or his disciples, such as hair, bits of bones, etc. The present stupa at Sanchi was originally constructed during Ashoka's reign but was considerably enlarged and the circum- ambulatory enclosure as well as the outer enclosures was added in the 1st century B.C. The passage is enclosed by a railing having four

gateways facing the four directions. The Buddhist carvings on both faces of the architraves and on all sides of the uprights of these gateways are remarkable for their crowded scenes, perspective and pictorial effect in stone.

Sanchi Stupa No.1, Yakshi, Madhya Pradesh

In a part of the Eastern Gate of the Sanchi stupa there is a scene depicting a bracket figure of a Vrikshika or wood nymph. In this we can see that the sculptor has advanced a great deal since he had carved the frontal, though to a certain extent rigid, human figures, in the 3rd-2nd century B.C. The sculptor has succeeded in truly portraying her as a tree goddess hanging as it were from the branches of her tree, with nudity clearly shown suggesting that she is a fertility goddess. He has also succeeded in giving it a three dimensional effect, i.e. length, breadth, and depth by ridding himself of the back-slab and by evolving a *tribhanga* posture (thrice-flexed) to bring out the contours and the beauty of the female figure.

The Vessantara Jataka from Goli, belongs to the 1st century A.D., in his previous birth Buddha was Prince Vessantara, who was never tired of giving away everything he had in charity. An elephant that assured prosperity to his realm, and was considered its most precious object, was presented by the Prince to the people of Kalinga who sought to make prosperous their land which had suffered from a drought. The infuriated

people of his own kingdom insisted on the King, his father, banishing Vessantara to the forest with his wife and children. The story is a touching one recounting the Prince being put to severe tests but has a happy ending.

Of a later date, circa first century A.D. and more mature in skill, are the carvings from Karle. Noteworthy are the Dampati and the Mithuna figures as also the pairs riding the magnificent elephant crowning the pillars forming imposing colonnades. The figures are more than life size and are represented with powerful and muscular physique.

Taming of Nalagiri Elephant, Amaravati, State Museum, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

A famous carving depicts the adoration of the feet of the Buddha by four women and belongs to the second century A.D. from Amravati. Here the composition and the disposition of the limbs delineating the beauty of the curvatures in form, the mood of intense devotion combined with bashfulness and humility so natural in women, mark it out as a great master-piece.

A relief medallion from Amravati belonging to the second century A.D. is a masterly representation of a scene showing the subjugation or taming of Nalagiri, a mad elephant let loose on the Buddha in the streets of Rajagriha by his wicked cousin, Devadatta. The great commotion and anxiety caused by the rush of the mad elephant at the Buddha is forcefully brought out and thereafter the furious animal is shown calm and kneeling at the feet of the Master.

There is a richly sculptured slab from the Buddhist stupa which once existed at Amravati. Another remarkable example of the elegant style of Amravati in

the 2nd century A.D. is seen in the beautiful railing cross-bar. The subject, treated here is the presentation of Prince Rahul to his father, the Buddha, when the latter paid a visit to his family in his former palace. The presence of Buddha is here symbolised by the empty throne, his footprints, the wheel of the law and the triratna symbol. On the right are his followers clad in robes and on the left, the inmates of the palace. In the distance, behind the curtain, are seen an elephant, a horse, and attendants. The coyness of the young Prince trying to hide his face behind the side of the throne and extending his folded hands in salutation, the delicate delineation of the difficult poses of the kneeling figures worshipping the Buddha, the magnificent execution of the crowded composition in three-dimension, all speak volumes for the sculptor who fashioned this masterpiece with a wonderful pictorial effect.

he Ayaka or cornice beam with a sequence of subjects is a typical example of the art from Nagarjunikonda. The qualities already seen at Amravati, as for example mentioned in the previous para, are to be found in abundance in this. The beam has been divided into rectangles displaying scenes from the Jataka tales interspersed with loving couples within small compartments made by the spacing pillars. There is a multitude of humanity represented, palace war and loving scenes representing both male and female figures in a variety of animated postures. The artist now displays complete mastery over the human form that he has achieved gradually over the centuries. The figures are full of life and movement executed with consummate skill based on observing life in reality.

After Alexander's invasion of India in 326 B.C., the Indo-Greek, Indo Scythian and Kushan kings ruled over its north-western territories and under their patronage emerged a distinct style of sculpture, popularly known as the Greco-Roman, Buddhist or Gandhara art. It was a product of the combination of Hellenistic, West Asiatic and native elements. Greek and Roman techniques, modified according to Indian requirements, were employed in fashioning the Gandhara sculpture which truly represents Indian culture in a Western garb. The subject-matter treated is predominantly Buddhist. Its area extended from Takshila in India to the Swat Valley in Pakistan and northwards to areas in Afghanistan.

Head of Buddha, Gandhara period, 2nd century A.D.,

Uttar Pradesh

The first century of the Christian era's revolutionary change, had far-reaching effects, not only on the art of India, but also on the artistic development of Buddhist countries of Asia. Buddha who was hitherto designated only by a symbol, was conceived in human form. His person was given some of the 32 suspicious bodily signs associated with the Mahapurushalakshana, such as the protuberance of the skull, the hair-knot, bindi between the eyebrows and elongated ears. This change came about as a result of the new changes that had crept into the religious outlook of Buddhism due to the influence of the Devotional School of Hindu Philosophy, requiring the worship of personal gods. It must have exercised profound influence on the religious approach of the masses towards Buddhism. The image becomes henceforth the main element of sculpture and worship. Possibly, the emergence of the image of Buddha in Gandhara and in Mathura was a parallel development. In each case, it was produced by the local artist craftsmen working in the local tradition. At Mathura it clearly emerges from the *Yaksha* tradition. The Gandhara image might seem to resemble Apollo in some extraneous forms and does look characteristically Greco-Roman in drapery, but even there most of the images represent Buddha as seated in the typically Indian Yogic posture, a feature completely unknown to the Hellenistic tradition of art.

The relief panel showing Buddha's Great Departure is a fine example of Gandhara art of the 2nd century A.D. Forsaking his wife, child and future kingdom in the quest of eternal bliss, prince Siddhartha is shown riding away on high favourite horse, Kanthaka, whose hoofs are lifted by two *Yakshas* to prevent the sound being heard by his family. His groom Chhandala, holds the royal umbrella over his head. Mara, the Evil one, along with a couple of his soldiers and the citygoddess are urging the Prince to abandon his pious intention. This incident, which was a turning point in the life of Gautama, is effectively portrayed.

Another typical example of Gandhara art of 3rd century A.D. is the figure of a standing Bodhisattava. His right hand is shown in the gesture of protection. He is wearing a rich turban, a string of amulets across his body, and strapped sandals on his feet. The pedestal contains a pair of Corinthian pillars. The athletic figure wearing a moustache, the heavy drapery folds of the garments and the strapped sandal all reveal the Greco-Roman influence.

The Kushans, who came from Central Asia, ruled over vast territories of the north from the 1st to the 3rd century A.D. During their regime, Mathura, just 80 miles away from Delhi, was throbbing with great artistic activity, and its workshops even catered to the outside demands for sculpture. Now icons of Brahmanical gods and goddesses and Buddhist and Jain divinities, which characterized the subsequent evolution of Indian art were produced experimentally. Some magnificent portrait studies of the Kushan emperors, together with several noblemen and women were executed during the period in the characteristic red and red-speckled sandstone of Mathura.

Seated Buddha, Stone, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

The Buddhist religion greatly flourished under the patronage of Kushan emperors, and several images of the Buddha and Bodhisattavas were produced after the earlier *Yaksha* types. Here, we may point out the difference between a Buddha and Bodhisattava. Buddha is one who has attained the enlightenment of supreme knowledge, while the Bodhisattava is still a candidate for it. A typical example of the image of Buddha, as it was evolved by the Kushan sculptor in the 2nd century A.D. shows him seated cross-legged on a lion-throne, under the Bodhi tree, with his right hand in the gesture of assuring protection, while the left is placed on the thigh. The eyes are wide open and the protuberance on the skull is indicated by a single curl coiled to the left. The hands and feet are marked with auspicious symbols. Two fly-whisk bearing celestials, standing on either side, are

shown above. This type of image of the Buddha reached perfection in the Gupta age, three centuries later.

Fair maidens, in gracefully flexed postures engaged in making their toilet or in dance and music, or in garden sports and other pastimes, created by the master craftsmen of Mathura, are a glowing tribute to their high artistic skill and ingenuity in the portrayal of feminine beauty in all its sensuous charm. Among the several beautifully carved railing pillars, which once adorned a stupa at Mathura, these three are the most famous ones. The one on the right shows a lovely damsel holding a bird cage in her right hand, from which she has let loose a parrot who has perched on her shoulder. The parrot is narrating to her the sweet and loving words, which her lover spoke the night before, and listening to them, she is feeling amused. In the center is a charming lady, standing gracefully with her left leg crossed infront, settling her heavy necklace with her right hand. The lady on the left holds a bunch of grapes in her left hand. She has plucked a grape and is holding it in her right hand, luring the parrot, perches on her right shoulder to repeat to her the words of her lover. In the balconies above, from the left it can be seen, a lover offering a cup of wine to his lady love, the second is offering a flower and the one on the right holding the toilet tray is assisting his beloved in her make-up. These figures, though appearing nude, are draped in diaphanous lower garments. They stand on crouching dwarfs, probably symbolising the miseries of the world, which are stamped out by the charm of a fair maiden.

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GUPTA SCULPTURE

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The foundation of the Gupta empire in the 4th century A.D. marks the beginning of another era. The Gupta monarchs were powerful upto the 6th cenutry in North India. Art, science and literature flourished greatly during their time. The iconographic canons of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist divinities were perfected and standardised, which served as ideal models of artistic expression for later centuries, not only in India but also beyond its border. It was an age of all round perfection in domestic life, administration, literature, as seen in the works of Kalidasa, in art creations and in religion and philosophy, as exemplified in the wide-spread Bhagavata cult, which identified itself with an intensive cult of beauty.

With the Gupta period India entered upon the classical phase of sculpture. By the efforts of the centuries, techniques of art were perfected, definite types were evolved, and ideals of beauty were formulated with precision. There was no more groping in the dark, no more experimentation. A thorough intelligent grasp of the true aims and essential principles of art, a highly developed aesthetic sense and masterly execution by skilled hands produced those remarkable images which were to be the ideal and despair of the Indian artists of subsequent ages. The Gupta sculptures not only remained models of Indian art for all time to come but they also served as ideals for the Indian colonies in the Far East.

> In the Gupta period all the trends and tendencies of the artistic pursuits of the proceeding phases reached their culmination in a unified plastic tradition of supreme importance in Indian History. Gupta sculpture thus is the logical outcome of the early classical sculpture of Amravati and Mathura. Its plasticity is derived from that of Mathura and its elegance from that of Amravati. Yet a Gupta sculpture seems to

Vishnu Anantasheshashayee, Vishnu Temple, Deogarh, Uttar Pradesh

belong to a sphere that is entirely different. The Gupta artist seems to have been working for a higher ideal. 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 forms and the inner intellectual and spiritual conception of the people.

The art of Bharhut, Amravati, Sanchi and Mathura came closer and closer; melting into one. In the composition, it is the female figure that now becomes the focus of attraction and nature recedes into the background, but in doing so it leaves behind its unending and undulating rhythm in the human form. The human figure, taken as the image, is the pivot of Gupta sculpture. 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 soft and pliant body of the Gupta sculpture 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 Jain 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, jewellery, etc., that tend to conceal the body, are reduced to the minimum. The wet or transparent clinging drapery hence became the fashion of this age. But the sensuous effect of these draperies especially in the case of female figures, was restrained by a conscious moral sense, and nudity as a rule was eliminated from Gupta sculpture. The great artistic creations

of the period were invested with sweet and soft contours, restrained ornamentation and dignified repose. Under the patronage of the Guptas, the studies of Mathura and Sarnath produced several works of great merit. Though Hindu by faith, they were tolerant rulers.

The magnificent red sandstone image of the Buddha from Mathura is a most remarkable example of Gupta workmanship datable to the 5th century A.D. The great Master, in all his sublimity, is here shown standing with his right hand in *abhayamudra,* assuring protection, and the left holding the hem of the garment. The smiling countenance with down-cast eyes is robed in spiritual ecstasy. The robe covering both shoulders is skilfully represented with delicately covered schematic folds and clings to the body. The head is covered with schematic spiral curls with a central protuberance and the elaborate halo decorated with concentric bands of graceful ornamentation.

Standing Buddha, Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh

The finished mastery in execution and the majestic serenity of expression of the image of Buddha came to be adopted and locally modified by Siam, Cambodia, Burma, Java, Central Asia, China and Japan, etc., when these countries adopted the Buddhist religion.

The image of the standing Buddha is an excellent example of Gupta art in its maturity from Sarnath. The softly moulded figure has its right hand in the attitude of assuring protection. Unlike the delicately carved drapery folds of the Mathura Buddha, only the fringe of the diaphanous robe is here indicated. The perfect execution of the figure matched by its serene spiritual expression is truly worthy of the sublime being.

Sarnath introduces not only a delicacy and refinement of form but also a relaxed attitude by bending the body in the case of the standing figure, slightly on its own axis, thus imparting to it a certain litheness and movement in contrast to the columnar rigidity of similar Mathura works.

Even in the case of the seated figure, the slender physiognomy conveys a feeling of movement, 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 folds that fall apart are given, again, a firmly muslin-like texture. The body in its smooth and shining plasticity constitutes the principal theme of the Sarnath artists.

The culmination of these characteristics seen in this sublime image of the Master represented in the act of turning the Wheel of Law is one of the masterly creations of Gupta classical sculpture. The image is carved in Chunar sandstone and has a surface texture of shining smoothness. The Master is shown as seated in *Vijraparyanka* with the hands held near the breast in *Dharmachakrapravartana Mudra* (the gesture of Preaching). 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, lintel with *makara* ends, and a circular nimbus (Prabha) exquisitely carved with a broad foliated ornament within beaded borders. The decorative *prabhas,* it should be noted here, are characteristic also of Mathura images.

During the Gupta period the characteristic elements of the Indian temple emerged and the plastic forms began to be used admirably as an integral part of the general architectural scheme. The stone carving from the temples at *Deogarh* and those from the temples of *Udayagiri* and *Ajanta* are excellent specimens of figure sculpture in their decorative setting. The large panel of *Sheshashayi Vishnu* from the *Deogarh* temple*,* representing the Supreme being slumbering wakefully on the serpent *Ananta,* the symbol of eternity, in the interval between the dissolution of the universe and its new creation, is a magnificent example.

Detail Vishnu Anantasheshashayee, Vishnu Temple, deogarh, Uttar Pradesh

The four-armed Vishnu is reclining gracefully on the coils of the *Adisesha,* whose seven hoods form a canopy over his crowned head. His consort Lakshmi is massaging his right leg and two attendant figures stand behind her. Various gods and celestials are hovering above. In the lower panel, the two demons *Madhu* and *Kaitabha,* in an attacking attitude, are challenged by the four personified weapons of Vishnu. The whole composition fashioned with a masterly skill, breathes an atmosphere of serene calm and an agitated tension, making it a superb piece of art.

A magnificent representation of Vishnu belongs to the Gupta period, 5th century A.D., and comes from Mathura. The typical gown, the *vanamala*; the charming string of pearls twirled round the neck, the long and elegant *yagnopavita* are all characteristic of early Gupta work.

Ganga and Yamuna, two life-sized terracotta images, originally installed in niches flanking the main steps leading to the upper terrace of the Shiva temple at Ahichhatra. belong to the Gupta period 4th century A.D. Ganga stands on her vehicle, the *makara*. and Yamuna on the *cacchap*. Kalidas mentions the two river goddesses as attendants of Shiva and this occurs as a regular feature of temple architecture from the Gupta period onwards, the most notable example being the door jambs of the Brahmanical temple of Deogarh. Clay figurines (Terracottas) have great value as sources of social and religious history. In India, the art of making figurines of baked clay is of great antiquity as we have already seen at Harappa and Mohenjodaro where terracottas have been found in large numbers.

The Head of Shiva is an elegant example of Gupta terracottas, depicted with matted locks, tied in a prominent and graceful top knot. The expression on the face is noteworthy and both the figures, of Shiva as well as Parvati, are two of the most charming specimens from Ahichhatra.

The Head of Parvati with the third eye and crescent mark on the forehead. Her hair is beautifully arranged in spiral alaka-locks, with braid fastened by a garland and adorned by a floral boss. She is wearing a round earring with the

Swastika mark on it.

The Vakatakas were paramount in the Deccan, contemporary with the Guptas in the North. The high watermark of perfection in art achieved in their region can be best seen in the later caves at Ajanta, the early ones at Ellora and those at Aurangabad.

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MEDIEVAL SCHOOLS OF SCULPTURE

MEDIEVAL SCHOOLS OF SCULPTURE

Another excavated cave about a hundred years later is the magnificent prayer hall or Chaitya, at Karle in the Poona district. This too has been excavated from the living rock and is unparalleled for its lofty and elevated impression. The size is truly stupendous, 124'x46-1/2'x45'. With well proportioned great and bulky pillars, carrying capitals of great originality holding up a vaulted roof that has real rafters of timber inserted into it, a ribbing inherited and copied from wooden structure. The columns are strong and bulky, surmounted by sculptured capitals. In the far distance there is a stupa with a wooden umbrella on top and astonishingly the original wood has survived unharmed to this date.

Instead of the classical dignity, sobriety and simplicity, the sculpture is now more and more tending towards ornamentation, creating highly ornate art objects, with strange and unusual imaginary creatures, such as half human, half monsters, etc.

The characteristic of this new form of style of art is the difference with classical art in attitude, if not in skill and aptitude. Loveliness and idealisation are still the artist's passion as they were for artists in the early classical period, but love of the ornate, decorative details is now dominant over classic simplicity. There is more complication, ornamentation and enrichment. There is an erroneous view that the Indian artist was a strict conformist with the rules laid down in the *shilpasastras* specifying how the gods of the Indian pantheon are to be shown in images. One look at the variety and individuality of Indian sculpture will clearly demonstrate that as styles went on developing the sculptors frequently departed from the texts and rules laid down, and delighted in those departures and the liberties they took with the bodies of humans and even of gods and goddesses. This will be abundantly clear if we compare any two images of a given deity, such as the Buddha image. The sculptor had attained sufficient dexterity, maturity and skill to be able to infuse a certain individuality in his work of art, a stamp of his own likes and dislikes tastes of the period,

his own predilections. This is a sign of maturity, of life, of dynamism. Strict uniformity, ingenuity and conformity with the rules laid down in the *shilpasastra* texts during the ages would be a sure sign of the decadence of this great art in the country. If art has to grow, it has to react to the changing circumstances of different times, inclinations, tastes and as it is the business of art, good art; to reflect contemporary society with its different taste, style also has to change. One look at the magnificent art of Indian sculpture, and sculpture through the ages in any Museum would satisfy the inquisitive mind of this attitude from age to age. The most remarkable achievement of the new artist of this age was to contribute a dreamy, floating quality to the figures of the flying gods and freer movement than in the classical period; on the other hand there is a tendency towards increasing elegance and slenderness of form. There is a new beauty in women. The hips are more slender, the waist more supple, the legs longer. The face still continued to be stylized and the breasts full and firm. The woman is no longer the mother goddess but a divine charmer.

One such superb example of the sculptor's art is a lovely figure of Vrikshika, or a celestial damsel, from Gyraspur, in Gwalior, standing in a gracefully flexed pose, against a tree. She is decked in ornaments and attired in a finely patterned drapery which produces an effect of rightly decorated silk. Her coiffure is artistically arranged. The ringletes on her fore-head and the gentle smile playing on her lips add to the charm of the lovely lady. The delicate delineation of the graceful contours have been chiselled with such masterly skill by the gifted sculptor that what we are looking at is not rough, hard and cold stone, but soft, living, pulsating form.

Descent of Ganga, Detail, Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu

The Gurjara Pratiharas had a vast kingdom that embraced the territory of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh. Their rule in the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries saw a great cultural renaissance. An artistic movement of great importance flourished under the aegis of the Pallava rulers of Kanchi and they are credited with having built the seven monolithic pagodas, the *rathas,* in Mahabalipuram. Some of the

outstanding sculptures that are credited to their patronage are the Mahishasuramardini in relief, Girigovardhana panel, Arjuna's penance or the Descent of the Ganga, Trivikrama Vishnu, Gajalakshmi and Anatasayanam. In the annals of Indian art there is perhaps no better example of the representation of the Elephant than that in the Arjuna's penance scene. The celestial world, the temporal world as well as the animal world has been shown with masterly skill.

Apart from the celestials there are hunters, sages, disciples, wild animals like the lion, tiger, elephant and bear. The representation of these animals is very naturalistic and shows delightful delineation of line. The radiation of peace and calm by the sages is reflected in a meditating cat around which a number of rats are frolicking.

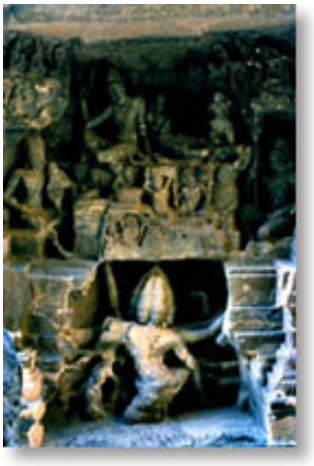
Close by to the South-West of the Ganesha Ratha and behind Arjuna's penance is the cave known as Varahamandapa, a fine specimen of its type. The hall at the front has two-lion pillars and two pilasters and beyond this, in the center, is the cell guarded by two *Dwarpalas*. One of the panels represents Varaha raising the Earth from the ocean, wherein she was submerged. A remarkable feature is that the snout of the boar has been modelled with great care and the head of the animal has been handled with such dexterity that it blends in a natural way with the human contour of the rest of the figure in the panel. Surya, Brahma, Rishis and the goddess Prithvi are shown surrounding and adoring Varaha. The right foot of Varaha rests on the hoods of the Naga king Sesha. The delineation of lotus leaves and flowers and ripples suggests water.

In all these examples the vigour of the composition is unique. The Pallava style concerns itself with a tall and slender physiognomical form. The thin and elongated limbs emphasise the tallness of the figure. The female figures are much lighter in appearance, with their slender waists, narrow chests and shoulders, smaller breasts, sparse ornaments and garments and generally submissive attitude. The figure sculpture of the Pallavas is natural in pose and modelling. The front of the torso is almost flat, and the ornamentations simple in high relief. Yet it is infused with a certain amount of vigour and fluid grace.

A great masterpiece is the carving from Mahabalipuram showing the great goddess Durga engaged in a fierce battle with the buffalo headed demon aided by their respective armies. Riding on her lion she is rushing at the powerful demon with great courage. He is moving away, yet watching for a moment to attack.

It represents the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil, in which the good ultimately triumphs. The dramatic movement, emotional intensity and visual realism noticed in this sculpture are worthy of a master craftsman. Later Pallava sculpture shows greater details of workmanship, lighter anatomy and more developed artistic finishing. The high and cylindrical crown of Vishnu, heavy drapery, thick cord at the waist with prominent loops and tassels, and the mode of wearing the under-garment are all Pallava characteristics worthy of note.

In the middle of the 8th century the Rashtrakutas wrested power from the Chalukyas. They created the greatest wonder of medieval Indian art in their Kailasa temple at Ellora. Quarried out of a hill and solid rocks, it is sculptured on a grand scale. The bold and magnificent carving in this temple shows the Rashtrakuta style of tall and powerfully built figures, reflecting with spiritual and physical poise. The beautiful architectural rock sculpture from Cave No.29 at Ellora shows the marriage of Siva and Parvati. Siva holding the hand of the bashful Parvati occupies the centre of the composition. To the right Brahma, the creator, is actively engaged in stirring up the flames of the sacred fire. The parents of Parvati stand behind her to offer their daughter to the great god. A number of gods assembled to witness the function are shown hovering above the principal figures. The dignified grace of the divine couple and the gentle solemnity of the occasion have been portrayed by the sculptor with a masterly skill.



Another magnificent sculpture at Ellora is a panel depicting Ravana shaking mount Kailasa. In this remarkable scene the quivering of the mountain can be felt, and Parvati is shown greatly agitated, turning to Siva, grasping his hand in fear while her maid takes to flight but the Great God is unmoved and holds on fast, pressing down the mountain with his foot. The lower half of the composition exhibits Ravana exerting all the force of his twenty arms against the mountain.

Sculpture, Ravana shaking Mount Kailash, Kailash Temple, Ellora, Maharashtra

A classic panel showing the king of the Naga and his queen, belonging to Ajanta, 5th century A.D. shows them seated on a throne attended by a hand maiden. The sculptural work at Ajanta merits as great attention as the world famous wall paintings.

The Vakataka traditions are derived from the earlier Satavahana which can be clearly seen in the many carvings of Ajanta and in the painted and carved figures at Ajanta. It is only the decorative elements, chiefly composed of pearls and ribbons, so characteristic of the Gupta-Vakataka age, that distinguishes them from the simpler, but notable sculpture of Amravati.

The cave-shrine at Elephanta is another great monument of the Rashtrakutas, which contains the famous Mahishamurti. The three heads emanating from one and the same body represent three different aspects of Lord Shiva. The central face with a calm and dignified appearance shows him as the creator, the one on the left, with a severe look, portrays him as the destroyer and the third, to the right, with a calm and pacific expression.

Trimurti, Elephanta Caves, Maharashtra

The Mighty Cholas who succeeded the Pallavas and ruled over South India from the 9th to 13th centuries A.D. created the great temples at Tanjavur, Gangai Kondo Cholapuram, Darasurama, which are a veritable treasure house of their art.

At the Brihadesvara temple at Tanjavur which is the most mature and majestic of the Chola temples, sculpture there has attained a new maturity which is evident in the gracefully modelled contours of the figures, their flexed poses, delicate ornamentation, pleasing faces and a certain freshness, all of which add charm to the work. Chola art not only influenced the art of Ceylon, but it travelled as far away as Java and Sumatra.

Nataraja, Brihadeshvara Temple, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

A good example of Chola craftsmanship in the 11th century is the relief carving of Siva as Gajsurasamaharamurti. The irate god is engaged in a vigorous dance of fierce ecstasy after having killed the elephant-demon, who has given so much trouble to the *rishis* and his devotees. The hide of the demon is spread aloft by the god, using it as a sort of cover. Devi stands at the lower right corner as the only awe-struck spectator of the divine act of retribution.

The later phase of Chola art, in the 13th century, is illustrated by the sculpture showing Bhudevi or the earth goddess as the younger consort of Vishnu. She stands in a gracefully flexed attitude on a lotus base holding a lily in her right hand, while the left arm hangs along her side in *lolahasta*.

The Chandellas, who ruled from 950 to 1100 A.D. constructed towering temples in central India, like the Kandariya Mahadev temple at Khajuraho. These were sculpted with human representations of endless variety. The sculptor here preferred the slender taller figures with a considerable accentuation of linear details.

A charming specimen of the Chandella art of the 11th century is this figure of a woman writing a love letter. Behind her right shoulder are the fingernails marks inflicted by her lover, while embracing her. Recalling the pleasures of which she had experienced in union with her lover and longing for another meeting with him she is prompted to write a love letter. On either side of her stands an attendant.

Equally fascinating is the graceful celestial beauty shown standing under a stylised mango tree. Holding a mirror in her hand, she is applying her make-up and getting ready to meet herlover. Two diminutive figures stand in attendance, carrying the toilet requisites in a bag and a satchel. This sculpture is datable to the 11th century A.D. The magnificence, perfection of design and sculptural profusion at Khajuraho is outstanding in Indian Art.

Gods, goddesses, *apsaras,* men and women standing or seeming to be in action, with their well developed and voluptuous bodies, stand liberated from their frames, to emerge in a living world of their own. The art of Khajuraho is a world of beauty. The lovers locked in an embrace which is approximately carved, display a throbbing passion. Varying moods are brought into relief by a slight change in the smile, a little difference in expression and in the pose. The sculptures of Khajuraho are such great master-pieces of Indian sculptural art that they can be admired both individually as well as cumulatively.

Great impetus was given to art under the reign of Pala rulers in Bihar and Bengal during the period 730 to 1110 A.D. They were Buddhist by faith. They greatly encouraged centres of learning like Nalanda and Vikramasila, where the stupas and monasteries gave ample scope for the sculptor's expression of an art which found stimulus in religion. During this period art reached technical perfection. The Pala Style is marked by slim and graceful figures, elaborate jewellery and conventional decoration. Their sculptures from Bihar are somewhat thick set and heavier in their general proportions of limbs than those from Bengal. The Pala rulers had intimate relations with Java which are evident in Hindu-Javanese sculpture, and painting of Nepal, Kashmir, Burma and Thailand.

Nayika, Lingaraja Temple, Bhubaneswar, Orissa

Some amount of stylisation is noticed in the later phase of Pala art, but the tradition is continued under the Sena rulers in the 12th century until the Islamic rulers overran the country. An excellent specimen from Mahanad in West Bengal is this lovely figure of the personified river goddess Ganga. She stands gracefully under a tree, Kalpataru, on a lotus, holding a water-vessel in her hand, symbolising prosperity and plenty. The ends of her scarf draped around the arms, trail on either side. She is adorned with profuse jewellery and wears a lower garment reaching to the ankles. The figure is expressive and the workmanship is of a high order.

The kings of the Eastern Ganga dynasty who held sway in Orissa from the 7th to the 13th centuries have left monumental temples at Bhubaneswar, Puri, and Konarak which are richly embellished with wealth of

sculptures.

By the middle of the 9th century A.D. especially in Orissa, there developed a school of sculpture which, among other things, took sensuous delight in the lovely forms of women. There are numerous sculptures of beautiful female figures on the face of walls.

The Orissan temple has many such representations of young and charming creatures with a seductive smile, luxurious hair full of jewellery, they are, called *Nayikas*. There are others equally beautiful, lightly clad but having a multitude of belts, bracelets, armlets, necklaces, ear-rings and hair ornaments. Similar lovely women are seen to appear everywhere as if growing out of trees and creepers, themselves like beautiful flowers and vines, often holding on to branches of trees and standing on floral ornaments. They are nymphs, and spirits that live in trees and shrubs and animate them. What distinguishes them from earlier specimens is that in this period they have become exquisitely beautiful girls, mostly underdressed and sometimes absolutely nude. They are shown decorating the walls and temples in Orissa, which become vast forests of ornamentation, crowded with flowers, scrolls and elegant geometric design. Most of these lovely ladies stand in various dance poses.

The famous temple at Konarak, was built by Narasimhavarman in the middle of the 18th century and dedicated to Surya or the sun-god. It has been conceived as a huge stone chariot on immense wheels, dragged by seven rearing horses. The temple is now partly preserved. Its presiding deity, the sun-god as seen here, is depicted in the typical north Indian manner, wearing boots, chain-mail armour, holding a lotus in each hand. He is riding a chariot driven by seven horses. On each side are his two wives, Chhaya and Suvarchasa, and the attendants Danda and Pingla. The figures

Surya riding chariot,

above are shooting arrows to dispel darkness.

Surya Mandir,
Konarak, Orissa

On the plinth of the Jagmohana of the temple, at a height of about 50 feet from the ground, are installed colossal celestial musicians facing in all directions, playing on different musical instruments. These celestial maidens are shown playing the Veena. The massive proportions and powerful modelling of the figure, and a gentle smile on her face, express a sense of harmonious delight.

Another celestial maiden, similar to the Veena player, is this drummer. They are all in pink coloured sandstone of a rough texture. These figures are of colossal proportions yet very elegantly and beautifully carved.

Manjira Player, Surya Mandir, Konarak, Orissa

There are, besides, serious scenes where a teacher is shown surrounded by his students, in animated postures, full of life.

Narasimha, the great builder of the Konarak temple is shown here on a swing in his harem, surrounded by beautiful women and listening to music.

Another scene shows him appreciating literature in an assembly of poets patronised by him. Yet another shows his tolerance for faiths by presenting him before Siva, Jagannath and Durga. There are several other similar representations of his life, and Konarak, with its rich sculpture, may be considered a storehouse of 13th century culture in Orissa.

The image of Surya from the Sun Temple at Konarak drawn by seven rearing horses, one of which fully caparisoned, is of monumental proportions.

The Orissan artist without giving up the conventional lines of grace and vigour, produced images which were

faultless in the perfection of their form and vitality. The examples of this school have sensuous charm and beauty of form. The Mithuna, or a pair of amorous lovers, glows with the exuberance characteristic of Orissan art. They have the eternal smile of lovers who are absorbed in each other. In point of time as well as technique, Orissan art culminates in the famous Sun-temple at Konarak.

The traditions of the marble sculpture of Gujarat in Western India are seen in the profusion of intricately carved sculptures which decorate the Jain temples at Mount Abu, Girnar and Palitana. The beautiful image of the four-armed Vishnu, the Hindu god of preservation, was fashioned in the 13th century A.D. under the characteristic attributes, that is the mace, the discus and conchshell. The hand which hold the lotus is now lost. The weapons are again shown as personified attendant figures on the base. On either side are seen the conventional decorative motifs, and the miniature image of Brahma and Siva, within rectangular niches. The Dilwara temples at Mount Abu are the outstanding productions of the western school in the Jain tradition. They are not monuments of architecture, but are sculptural master-pieces, placed one upon the other to fashion one of the sculptural wonders of the world. The ceiling of the Dilwara temple, especially, is one of the world's master-pieces of intricate sculptural carvings.

The Hoysalas were another South Indian dynasty who asserted themselves in the Mysore region about the beginning of the 12th century. The temples they built at Halebid and Belur look like lace work in stone. The decoration is elaborate, the emphasis being more on ornamentation than movement or the grace of the human body. Hoysala sculptures are somewhat squat and short, highly embellished, or almost over-loaded with ornamentation, but yet are pleasing to behold.

A splendid example of the Hoysala sculptural art is portrayed in the carving showing Lord Krishna holding aloft the mountain Goverdhana to save the inhabitants of Gokul from the wrath of Indra, who let loose torrential rains to teach them a lesson for their insolence, in paying homage to Mount Goverdhana instead of worshipping him. The Mountain with its forest and animal kingdom is held aloft by the youthful

Mohini, Chennakeshava Temple, Belur, Karnataka

Krishna on his left hand, sheltering the entire population of Gokul, including the cows.

By this time we have come very near to the end of our journey and we find that in the 13th century A.D. love for the beauty of the human figure has been completely smothered. The artist takes delight no more in the depiction of the beauty of the handsome male or the loveliness of the female body. On the contrary the human body almost completely disappears under a fantastic mass of decoration and ornamentation which become more important than the human figure.

In the sculpture of the period showing a woman holding a fly-whisk and other figures, we come to the almost total disappearance of the body. A few centuries earlier, her lovely figure in sinuous curves, would have been glorified. Now nothing is left of that beauty. Ornamentation has truly run riot. The belt, the necklaces, the crown, the armlets and bracelets even the tree behind and above her is changed into a fancy scroll work of drapery.

The last great Hindu Kingdom in South India was of Vijayanagara. During this regime, from circa 1336 to 1565 A.D. several beautiful temples were erected at places like Tadpatri, Hampi, Kanchipuram, etc. Carving in these temples show the Chola and Chalukyan art traditions. During this period representations in narrative forms of the Ramayana and Krishna Bal Lila became favourite themes. The Vijayanagara emperors caused excellent portraits to be carved by the sculptors to immortalise them in the vicinity of their favourite deities.

One such fine example is of Krishnadevaraya at one of the Gopuras at Chidambaram. The final flicker of this however, is seen in the amazingly virile sculpture in titanic proportions carved by the sculptors of Tirumylnayak, and the Gopura and the

Pillars with Horse rider, Meenakshi Sundareshvara Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu

courts of Meenakshi temple at Madurai.

The 17th century was a great period of titanic work under the Nayaka of Madurai and Tanjavur. During this period the animal motif with fantastic detail as seen in the outstanding sculpture at Srirangam temple in Trichinapally, may be seen. Though, stylised, this art is full of vitality. A pair of rampant, furious horses whose heads support the pillars, are carved with great skill and vigour. The riders are shown in realistic poses trying to control them. Each sculpture is realistic though the conception is fantastic.

Though traditions of stone sculptures continued, no major sculpture movement survived under the Mughal and the other Muhammadan rulers Under the Muhammadan rulers great impetus was given to architecture, but sculptures are rarely found and even those available are products of local chieftains. During the British regime no proper patronage was provided to sculptors and the whole tradition of Indian art almost came to a standstill.

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MODERN INDIAN SCULPTURE

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The basic characteristics and problems of contemporary Indian Sculpture are very similar to those of contemporary painting. If anything, it is even more alienated from the great Indian tradition, though and even more strongly hinged to the modern, eclectic, international concept.

It began in the academic style, based on mid-Victorian ideas of naturalism and smugness, and was a legacy of the British. This mannerism was perpetrated in the government art schools and colleges established around the century in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and elsewhere. The inane achievement of this so called realist or naturalist school never even attained the height of real academic excellence and has remained a far cry from the iconographic, symbolical and religious ideals of Indian sculpture through the ages.

And then, when our sculpture was freed of this yoke, towards the 'forties' it looked again as in painting, to the western world for inspiration, resulting in similar processes of experimentation and eclectic exercise. From then on the story of contemporary Indian sculpture is the story of a transition from academism to well-defined non-objectivism. We have been introduced to new and unconventional materials, most certainly in the manner of employing them, such as, sheet metal, welded bric-a-brac wire, plastic, hardware and junk. Here and there, our sculptors may have achieved worthwhile results in tune with the milieu, but this achievement is not comparable with the results attained in the field in the shape of a renewed interest in folk and tribal art. But, largely, the preoccupation is still with shape and form, polish and texture and mid-way abstraction. Contemporary Indian sculpture has not shown either the speed or variety of painting and has not arrived at the logical 'cul de sac' which in the case of painting has provided the necessary height and perspective to a meaningful introspection, which is called the 'Journey's End' is a symbolical painting that reaches beyond the explicit pictorial elements of the work. The crouching, gasping camel set against an arid

desert in the twilight hours has a relevance to life in general.

Painting : 'Woman plucking flowers' by Gagendranath Tagore

Nandalal Bose is regarded as the most distinguished pupil of Abanindranath Tagore and his influence was considerable on more than one generation of artists. In the painting of a woman in the act of doing 'Pranam' one sees both simplicity and directness of his pictorialism as also the significant impact on his work of the vitality of folk art.

Kshitindranath Majumdar was also a renowned pupil of Abanindranath. The beautiful picture of Spring owes its inspiration to the Indian miniatures. Kshitindranath was known for his soft palette and the grace and lyrical quality of his drawing. He is almost unique in this respect.

Jamini Roy was a contemporary of the artists mentioned above, but he, more than anyone else, sought an entirely different path of expression, which had a tremendous impact on subsequent painters, deeply inspired by the Bengal folk tradition. His images and ideas as in this painting of 'Pujarinis' are direct, singularly stylised, and conceived in emphatic flat spaces and strong lines.

Painting : 'Pujarins' by Jamini Roy

Ganganendranath Tagore shared very much with the painters of the Indian Renaissance but, he, like the distinguished poet-painter Rabindranath, was an individualist of an extraordinary order. His paintings have something considerably common with cubistic approach as in this fantastic study of the magician. His paintings are distinguished for his individualistic, highly dramatic concept of light and shadow.

Abdur Rahman Chughtai was greatly inspired by the Bengal School. But he was equally influenced by Persian thought and art, and with these two he developed a style of his own romantic and poetic with flowing lines and a palette to match his nostalgic mood.

The study of a Head in an example of the work of Rabindranath Tagore who took to painting in his late years under an irrepressible urge. His images come forth from the subconscious regions, from dream and fantasy and have an archetypal quality.

K. Sreenivasulu like Jamini Roy, was greatly moved by folk art and rural life. By virtue of the directness, decorative effects and stylisation, his work should be understood along with Jamini Roy's. Sreenivasulu drew much inspiration from the art heritage of South India, particularly from the mural tradition of Tanjavur and Lepakshi.

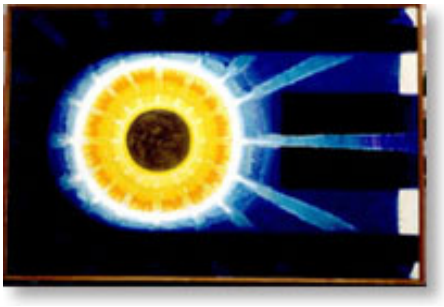
With A.A. Almelkar we enter a different phase of contemporary Indian painting. It is still largely inspired, both in technique and figurative, by Indian miniature and mural tradition. But one can see the very individualistic approach to the compositional problems which had marked a departure ideologically.

What is said above is exemplified remarkably in this simple painting by K.K. Hebbar. The raphic symbolism of the bride and bridegroom, the large use of white, the panel of musicians at the bottom, point altogether strongly at the new concept of structural organisation.

We see the full realisation of this concept and a glimpse of its enormous possibilities in Laxman Pai's 'Autumn'. In Pai's vision, man and nature are inseparable, two aspects of man and nature into a fantastic amalgam admirably. The image is elementary but highly suggestive.

Paintings from the sixties by J. Swaminathan belongs to a phase of contemporary Indian painting wherein one sees an attempt, again, to rediscover sources of indigenous inspiration. The Tulsi plant that sprouts from the Vrindavan against a symmetrical pair of conical rocks is one kind of such a resultant image on which Swaminathan has achieved very substantial and individualistic imagery.

The radiating, iridiscent concept of light by Biren De is another such effort. What Biran De achieves is a vision of spiritual light, a primeval, self-emanating concept of light. The dark centre, and the concentric effulgence emphasises this vision admirably.



Painting : 'June 70' by Biren De

The concept. of the human figure and of landscape has undergone a veritable transformation in the hands of the contemporary artist. A painting by Sailoz Mookherjee, of a mother and children, is an early work. The emphasis is on the composition and the concern with the basic formal concept of the figures as a whole rather than on the details.

The picture of Kathakali dancers doing their make-up by S.D. Chavda exemplifies his meticulous draughtsmanship. The strong sinewy bodies of the dancers, their postures, are very ably achieved. The rendering of the figure is unerring and the various elements of the picture are soundly distributed.

K.G. Subramanyan's cock-seller carries abstraction of the figure further, and in a way acquires much expressive power. The prancing cocks, the attenuated man and the cart which carries cocks and the vertical complex of houses, all this is deliberately so conceived.

Painting : 'Cock Seller' by K.G. Subramanyam

In "Two Figures' Husain reduces the figures to a purely orchestrated concept of colour, in mutual contrast. The physiognomy is further abstracted with the barest of details. Husain has ever been deeply moved by Indian life and people, particularly by the rustic and picturesque rural life. Husain has built up a remarkably personal iconography over the course of years.

In an early picture of the '50s, Satish Gujral expresses the idea of desolation beautifully by a semi-surrealistic imagery. The gaping emptiness in the background, the suggestion of a man in a state of utter collapse and the noose, are all part of this weird imagery.

Ganesh Pyne's 'Mother and Child' is not as simple. as it seems. It has an air of fantasy and this is true of his paintings in general. The way the mother and child confront the viewer and the intent stare of the eyes emphasise the inherent mystery of the painting.

A collage is an organisation of an assortment of materials, both conventional and unconventional to produce an integrated pictorial concept. Piraji Sagara uses dismembered odds and bits of old wood and carvings together with pieces of metal and paint. The result is paradoxically both modern and traditional. The work relates to a legend on the sun.

A painting of F.N. Souza, of a landscape of a sprawling complex of buildings. It is highly individualised to suit the artist's structural consideration. It is familiar but has an element of strangeness about it.

Avinash Chandra's 'Orchard' goes very much further in the same direction, almost into the realm of fantasy. The sun-like entities floating in the sky, the shape of the trees, and the rhythmic cluster of patterns that inter-play, are part of this fantasy.

There are houses and houses. Most of them are nondescript. But some have character. And here is a house by N.S. Bendre, which has a remarkable character, a portrait in itself. Bendre works minutely emphasising every detail to achieve the essential spirit of this strange house.

For more than a decade and a half Shanti Dave has been painting in a style that is deceptively abstract, as one called 'Snow Shade'. It is no doubt a pronouncedly non-objective appearance which is brought about by diligent hard work and by unconventional use of materials, like wax and encaustic, along with time honoured oil paint. He uses script, blocks with folk figures etc. to animate the surface and to create the texture. Finally what one feels is a world which is both old and new.

One of Gaitonde's early works is unequivocally non-objective. The wide space in which the strips of red and other coloured areas float have no meaning, symbolical or explicitly. The dimension is purely plastic in this work, although in his recent work one notices a positive metaphysical element creeping in.

Sculpture, "Triumph of labour' by D.P. Roy Chowdhury, Delhi

Ramkumar has painted a lively abstract landscape in subtle grey and green. The rhythm of the tones and the criss-cross lines more than suggest the basic idea of flight. Ramkumar was a figurative painter to begin with, then went to landscape seriously from which he now distils these abstracted, unpeopled flights into the realm of non objectivity.

An important monumental work by the renowned sculptor, D.P. Roy Chowdhury, is called the 'Triumph of Labour'. The strong muscular bodies of the men hauling the work, their very animated postures make this an extremely expressive work. In fact it may be said that Mr. Roy Chowdhury belongs to the expressionistic school.

Altogether in a different vein, but an equally expressive work is a bust of a buoyant young woman by Ramkinker Baij. The radiant, youthful face and the ample bosom typify vitality. Sculpturally speaking the texture is highly expressive and full of energy.

The interpretation of a philosopher by B. Vithal is of a head which is everything and Vithal resorts to an accentuation of all physiognomical details, such as the nose, the half-open eyes, the long ear lobes, etc. to convey the basic idea.

The sculptor, Sankho Choudhuri, emphasises the physical attributes in a most vital manner in the sculpture of a woman preening herself. The raised arms, the flowing lines, the rounded graceful form add up to the image of Youth again.

Quite often, in the case of sculpture, the material determines the fundamental formal concept as in his bull by Raghave Kaneria. Full of energy and brute strength, the bull is poised to charge. The contours emphasise

movement.

An elongated sculpture of 'A Man' by Davierwalla carries the concept of figure in sculpture to an altogether different level. The animated face and raised arms give it a weird, unearthly character. There is an attempt to reduce the essentials to the minimum. The character of the metal is emphasised.

Mahendra Pandya conceives in a sculpture the stone as a solid mass with the barest suggestion of the two figures, just enough. The emphasis, as it should be in the case of stone, is on mass and volume in this upright sculpture.

A simple, pastoral scene of a couple angling by the river side is an early work by Haren Das, which is rather conventional, unambiguous and expressively illustrative. A very competent work in its style.

Sunirmal Chatterji's 'Manali Village' is a straight forward, conventional landscape. It exploits, within limitations, the specific characters of texture of the woodcut medium.

Somnath Hore's 'Birth' springs out of a dream. Therefore, the emphasis is on the combination of unusual pictorial elements. The rose itself is the most prominent. It is an etching and the artist exploits all the possibilities of the medium suitable to his theme.

In 'Study-3' Dipak Banerji makes the etching medium yield even more specific effects in this principally non-objective work. The sharp line, the variegated texture, the incision, the relief, have all the excellence of an etching.

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