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DEVANGANA DESAI\*

## *Social Dimensions of Art in Early India\*\**

### I

Art activity is a social process in which the artist, the work of art and the art public are interacting elements<sup>1</sup>. The social history of art explores the dynamics of the relationship between the patron/public, the artist and the work of art in the context of the social formation of a given period of history. The dynamics of this relationship changes according to the changes in the economic base of the society. The change in the artistic activity could be linked, among other factors, with the changes, due to the new mode of production, in the patron class and in socio-religious institutions and ideologies, which in their turn create new requirements and fresh opportunities for the emergence of new forms and content in art<sup>2</sup>.

A preliminary requirement for the socio-historical study of Indian art, needless to say, is an acquaintance with monuments and art objects themselves as well as familiarity with chronological analyses worked out by art historians and, at the same time, adequate knowledge of the social forces at work when the art under study was produced. The social history of Indian art then is an interdisciplinary study combining the areas of art historical and social historical research of the period concerned. This is a field where joint efforts of both art historians and social historians can lead to fruitful results.

Indian art historical writing today is almost emancipated from the stereotype of the superiority of Greece and from the Western standards of perspective. A lively debate is going on among art historians on the limitations of dynastic appellations to art styles with an increasing realization that the rulers influenced not so much the form as the extent of art styles. Dynastic appellation is retained by some scholars as 'convenient denomination', but 'there is now visible a shift from classification based on dynasty to one based on region'<sup>3</sup>. Indian terminology of Silpa-texts is widely used to describe monuments, and the correspondence of texts and monuments is being investigated. In this field contributions by M. A. Dhaky, P. O. Somapura, Krishna Deva,

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K.R. Srinivasan and K.V. Soundara Rajan are noteworthy. The *Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture*<sup>4</sup>, edited by Michael Meister, M.A. Dhaky and Krishna Deva, some volumes of which are recently published by its systematic classification of important temples based on region and dynasty/period is a good contribution to the study of Indian art. We do not intend to present here a historiography of Indian art, some aspects of which are covered by Pramod Chandra<sup>5</sup>. M.S. Mate<sup>6</sup>, Ratan Parimoo<sup>7</sup>, and that of terracotta art by the present speaker.<sup>8</sup>

Social aspects of art are woven into the fabric of Stella Kramrisch's essays and books written since 1929 though not directly within her terms of reference.<sup>9</sup> One of the pioneering works in the field of social history of art is Prof. Niharranjan Ray's *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art*, originally published in 1945, which was then acclaimed as the first sociological study of the two important phases of ancient Indian art. His *An Approach to Indian Art* (1974) discusses a number of broader issues on the meaning and social function of art presenting arguments of ancient Indian thinkers and aestheticians. Amita Ray's book on Andhra art<sup>10</sup>, R.N. Misra's monograph on ancient Indian artists and their institutional set-up, based on epigraphical and textual material,<sup>11</sup> Vidya Dehejia's work on patronage of early Buddhist art and temple art<sup>12</sup> are some of the noteworthy studies bearing on social aspects of Indian art. A concern with broader social context for the work of art is being felt in the writing of the present day art historians Joanna Williams, Gary Tartakov and others who are primarily working on style and chronology of images and monuments. I may mention that I have been concerned with the social milieu of the Indian temple in my study of erotic sculpture, and have examined the social background of ancient Indian terracotta art.<sup>13</sup>

It is common in books on conventional history to put under 'society': dress, ornaments, food and drink, furniture and similar material artefacts. There are several books dealing with cultural life as depicted in art, for instance, of Nagarjunakonda, Ajanta or Khajuraho. Certainly such works are useful documentation on cultural artefacts. But in this essay we are not dealing with 'Society in Art', rather our term of reference is 'Art in Society', how early Indian art was conditioned by social factors.

## II

In recent years considerable work has been done in the field of social and economic history of India, which if taken into account by art historians can give a deeper perspective into the study of Indian art. It would be rewarding to have a dialogue between the two disciplines—social history and art history.

D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar and other historians have made significant contributions to the study of ancient Indian social structure which can help us to view art in the total context. Their

assessment of the past frees us from certain ahistorical assumptions seen in the early writings on the everlasting norms and unchanging values of Indian art, and on the idealization of the relationship of the artist and the patron. Ancient Indian society was not static, but there were periods of change which influenced social institutions as well as other aspects of life,<sup>14</sup> including art.

Prof. R.S. Sharma's outline<sup>15</sup> of broad phases of economic change in ancient India helps us in relating changes in art activity to changes in socio-economic conditions. His significant finding on the decay of towns from about AD 300 onwards, based on the survey of more than 130 excavated sites in the country,<sup>16</sup> and gradual changes in the agrarian system and the beginning of feudal tendencies also from about this time calls our attention to a new social formation and to major changes in life around this period.<sup>17</sup> In the 4th-7th centuries ancient Indian society was in a stage of transformation. Urban centres began to decline from the close of the 3rd century and finally were deserted towards the close of the 5th and 6th centuries AD. Pointing to the shrinkage in the trade network which coincided with the decline of urban centres from the post-Kushana through the Gupta period, B.D. Chattopadhyaya also says. 'The decline was geographically widely distributed, and since this observation is based on a study of archaeological sequences at a number of early historical sites, both of northern and southern India, the chronology decline of this urban phase is not a matter of speculation.'<sup>18</sup> R.N. Nandi has made an interesting observation, based on epigraphical sources, on the migration of brahmanas from the towns, which archaeologists find in a state of decay in the 3rd-4th century AD, and the same places declared as *tirthas* by the Puranic writers of the early medieval period. He finds 'the three processes of decay, migration and sanctification' simultaneously observed in case of Mathura, Vaishali, Ayodhya, Gaya and other ancient towns, which turned into *tirthas*.<sup>19</sup>

The socio-economic pattern gradually changed from the commodity production and market-conditioned economy of towns of the previous period (i.e. c. 6th century BC-AD 300) towards feudal mode of production from about AD 300. As Romila Thapar puts it: 'The Gupta period (fourth and fifth centuries AD) marked the beginning of a major change in the agrarian system with the assignment of land grants and revenue grants to both religious and secular assignees resulting in a new politico-economic structure in many parts of the sub-continent.'<sup>20</sup> The new economy was marked by urban contraction and agrarian expansion and its impact was felt more from the end of the 6th century. B.N.S. Yadava says, 'The *samanta* system or the feudal complex which comes into clearer view in the sixth and seventh centuries, and later revealed more than one phase of development, was the most outstanding phenomenon of early Middle Ages.'<sup>21</sup>

On the basis of the above observations on the socio-economic changes we have divided our study of the social milieu of early Indian art in three broad periods:

- (i) c. 300 BC-AD 300 (with its sub-periods)
- (ii) c. AD 300-600
- (iii) c. AD 600-1300 (with its sub-periods)

These time brackets,<sup>22</sup> no doubt, are useful rough frameworks in order to see the general trends in socio-economic patterns and artistic manifestations, but it should be remembered that in the social sphere there cannot be a sharp dividing line at a particular period of time. Changes are gradual and their effects spread out over a number of years. Moreover, there are variations from region to region.

Broadly speaking, the first period falls within the urban phase (the 'second urbanization' of India) and on the basis of economic change has been divided into two phases: (1) c. 300-200 BC, when there was state control of production under the Mauryas and the pan-Indian perspective; (2) c. 200 BC-AD 300 characterized by commodity production and Roman trade in the post-Maurya period.<sup>23</sup> For showing the contrast of the Maurya court art with the post-Maurya phase at Bharhut and Sanchi we have put them under one section: the 3rd through 1st century BC.

The period AD 300-600, synchronizing for most part with the rule of the Gupta and Vakataka dynasties, witnessed on the one hand partial feudalization of the land system and the rise of local units of production, and on the other hand reaped the fruits of prosperity and *nagaraka* culture. It is a transitional period which combines some of the characteristics of the first and the third periods, and in the sphere of art is marked by what is called the 'classical' phase of Indian art.

The effects of feudal economy are more clearly felt in the third period of our study, i.e. c. AD 600-1300. Between AD 600-750 there was a rise of numerous petty states in northern India under whom local centres of art sprang up. In the peninsula vigorous art flourished under the powerful rulers of the Chaulukya and Pallava dynasties. The 8th-9th centuries witnessed the rise of the three major ruling houses, viz. the Palas, the Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas. There was a spurt in art activity in this period. The period AD 900-1300 saw the climax as well as weakening of feudalism. Mild urban process, also called third phase of urbanization, began in some parts of the country from the close of the 9th century<sup>24</sup>; however the early medieval urban experience is different from that of the ancient towns. Rural urban continuum without a clearcut demarcation of rural and urban boundaries is reported by scholars in south India, Bengal and other regions.<sup>25</sup> Under the numerous independent dynasties such as the Chandellas, Chedis, Cholas, Chaulukyas and their feudatories who amassed wealth and power, temple building reached monumental proportions as never before. Art

was interpreted according to various regional schools which flourished in this period.

The time span is too vast to cover in the Address, but here we shall present some major trends in art against its social background and raise some issues of mutual importance to historians of art and society.<sup>26</sup> In each period the art supported by the newly rising class is vital and significant. The art we are examining was associated mainly with the religious monuments. The network which operated in the support of religious monuments and the production of art changed according to the socio-economic forces of each period.

During the period 300 BC-AD 300 the country experienced great activity in trade and commerce, when towns emerged on the trade routes—the Uttarapatha, Dakshinapatha and other routes covering vast areas in the northern and central India, the Deccan and Andhra region having links with Central Asia and the Roman world. In this period of urban growth, it was mainly the Buddhist and Jaina monuments which were supported by the trading and artisan groups. Symbiotic relationships between monasteries, mercantile and artisan guilds under an overall royal support led to a close nexus of religion, economy and polity, the details of which need to be worked out in different regions taking into account ecological and cultural factors.<sup>27</sup> Monuments were commissioned on joint co-operative effort by a large number of common people each one of whom could contribute cash donations.

Under the *samanta*-feudatory system, on the other hand, the building of temples acquired social importance. *Purtadharma*, which consisted in building temples, tanks, and undertaking public works of charity, got emphasized in the Puranas and Smritis, and became the dominant ideology of the period.<sup>28</sup> At the economic level, temple building could be extensively undertaken as feudal conditions had given rise to a proliferation of *samantas* and rulers of numerous principalities, all of whom possessed their own villages and village folk whom they could dispose of freely to religious institutions, as is borne out by the Chinese account of AD 732.<sup>29</sup> All of them separately built temples and Buddhist *viharas*, and not jointly as in case of the Buddhist and Jaina monuments of the previous period. The emergence of the Rajputs in about the 7th century and their efforts for validation of their status accelerated the incidence of donations to brahmanas (*brahmadeya*) and to temples (*devadana*).

The growing number of land grants to brahmanas and their migration to countryside could lead temple building to a wider area and at places which had not earlier been exposed to Sanskrit influence. Brahmanical religion effectively used legendary narratives of the Epics and the Puranas in its temple art from 5th century AD onwards.

Meanwhile, the Smarta-Pauranic religion in its evolution was influenced by the magical elements such as *mandala*, *yantra*, *mantra* of another powerful religious movement known as Tantrism which

emerged in the border areas as a result of Brahmanical colonization of tribal areas through the process of land grants.<sup>30</sup> Tantrism in its historical development from about the 5th century AD<sup>31</sup> also underwent changes in its esoteric and *aghori* (terrible) practices. Tantrism was an important force in the early medieval period and it is therefore necessary to point out the different levels at which its influence was felt: (1) esoteric Tantrism with its ritualistic rigour, (2) Tantrism at a 'popular' level as associated with some of the early Medieval Tantric sects, and (3) the general influence of Tantrism in various areas of Indian culture through the fusion of some of its magical elements and practices in the Puranas, Nibandhas, etc.<sup>32</sup>

While the content of temple art during 6th-13th centuries was influenced by Tantric elements and beliefs at the general level through its permeation in the Puranas, the temple and its art were also greatly influenced by Tantrism at its 'popular' level through some of the sects like the Pasupatas, Kalamukhas and the Saiva Siddhantins (of moderate right hand order) who received ample royal patronage. The Pasupatas had their network spread from about the 6th century in many regions of India. The Saiva Siddhantins wielded considerable influence from the 10th century on royal families and temples of central India, Maharashtra, Andhra and Tamil Nadu.<sup>33</sup> The *acharyas* of this sect incorporated architectural and iconic canons along with rituals in their texts such as the *Isanasivagurudevapaddhati* and *Somasambhupaddhati*, influenced construction of the temple,<sup>34</sup> and possibly mediated between royal patrons and architects in designing of the temple. This is an interesting area for research.

The influence of the Bhakti poets, Nayanmars and Alvars, was felt in art, religion and polity of south India during the Pallava-Pandya rule on which some work has been done by scholars. Of special interest is the role of the Bhakti poets in supporting the temple institution, for most of their hymns were directly connected with particular temples and *sthalas*.<sup>35</sup> This was the period of social transformation in south India as reflected in the development of huge agrarian corporations presided over by temple-centred Brahmanical settlements, *dana* to temples and brahmanas by the rulers who sought their support in legitimation of their authority.<sup>36</sup> It seems that the conjoint forces represented by the king, the brahmanas, the temples and the Bhakti poets operated in power politics of the period disseminating Brahmanical culture. There was effective mass response inspired by the poets which helped remove dissensions prevailing within various sections of the society and bringing about the atmosphere of harmony and political integration.

Now we shall have a glimpse of some trends in art in the three broad periods of our classification.

## III

## c. 300 BC-AD 300

## THE THIRD THROUGH THE FIRST CENTURY BC

The art of the first empire under the Mauryas, who ruled a vast territory from the Khyber to the Deccan, reflects the stern austerity and formal conventionalism of court art, as demonstrated by Prof. Niharranjan Ray.<sup>37</sup> The Sarnath capital is one of the highly finished and finest examples among the numerous monolithic columns of Asoka bearing his message of Dhamma. The art under Asoka was symbolic, suggestive and international in outlook. But after the Maurya rule the art of the Buddhist monuments at Bharhut and Sanchi reverted to the indigenous style and narrative form of the *charana-chitras* (portable picture galleries).<sup>38</sup> Why was the three-dimensional form and advanced technique of the Maurya art given up in the post-Maurya art which was represented in terms of surface rather than depth?

The change in the style can be accounted not on the basis of the exhaustion of style but on the basis of the difference in the socio-cultural situations of the two arts and their social functions. As is well known, the Maurya rulers borrowed heavily from the Achaemenian and Hellenistic arts. Asoka tried to discourage popular festivals, gatherings (*samajas*) and the observation of vows (*vratas*) as is seen from his edicts. But after the disintegration of the Maurya empire there was a revival of popular elements both in religion and art. The art of the Buddhist monuments of Bharhut and Sanchi shows strong links with the tribal and village cults of the Yakshas, Nagas and tree spirits.<sup>39</sup> The names of some of the donors in inscriptions suggest their association with tribes and clans.

In contrast to the individualistic tastes of the Maurya ruler, it is the collective tastes of the people that found representation in the post-Maurya art. This was possible because art now became a cooperative effort of a large number of people, merchants, artisans, monks, nuns who could donate to Buddhist monuments. At Sanchi out of 631 donative inscriptions, only three mention royalty, while the largest single group of donors, about 200, were monks and nuns hailing from different towns.<sup>40</sup> The Magadhan dominance in art and economy gave place to the flowering of numerous centres between Bengal and Punjab having independent coinage system. The surplus was widely distributed among smaller kingdoms. The social position of craftsmen improved as they were independent persons earning cash income.

Terracotta art also reflects the changed social situations of the two periods. While the Maurya royal society and upper classes of Magadha commissioned special potters (*rajakumbhakaras*)<sup>41</sup> to produce artistic terracottas resembling Hellenistic figurines, the country outside Magadha was producing crude terracottas for cults and rituals. But in the post-Maurya period with the wider distribution of surplus and rapid progress of urbanization there was an unprecedented market

for terracottas. Large number of people had purchasing power to buy luxury goods, including art objects. Terracotta-making rose to the level of an industry and terracottas became commodities for the market, the relationship of the potter-artists and his clientele became to some extent indirect due to the agency of the market. The potter-artist met the mass demand for terracottas by the use of moulds, which in their turn influenced the art of terracottas. Compositions in linear relief, as in stone carvings of Bharhut, appeared in terracotta art.

#### THE FIRST THROUGH THE THIRD CENTURY AD

With the active Indo-Roman trade in the early centuries of the Christian era, the number and position of trade and craft guilds further increased. Numerous Buddhist establishments appeared on the trade route sites of the western Deccan, Andhra and Karnataka supported by extensive donations from commercial and artisan groups, monks and nuns, queens and noble ladies. Nearly 800 rock-cut caves were excavated in the Deccan during the Satavahana period of which 128 bear inscriptions.<sup>42</sup> Twelve caves record royal inscriptions, but there are hundreds of small individual donations by craftsmen and artisans such as potters, weavers, flower-vendors, braziers, *kasakaras*, ivory workers, goldsmiths, ironsmiths and so on, all of whom in the prevalent economy could accumulate money which was not possible in later village economy. D.D. Kosambi<sup>43</sup> while discussing the various types of donors at the western Indian caves points out that names of donors from different towns are marked on various portions of the caves, but the plans of the caves are unified. The design of the caves was supervised by *navakarmikas* (overseers), who were often monks.<sup>44</sup>

Kosambi has discussed the location of caves near trade routes and also the participation of monastic establishments in trade and commerce. He suggests an intimate connection between the rich monastery at Karle and the wealthy merchants' settlement of Dhenukakata.<sup>45</sup> Monks and nuns who donated to Buddhist establishments seem to have accumulated money as contrasted with the trifling possessions allowed to them by the Vinaya rule. In a recent publication Himanshu Ray has examined in detail the role of Buddhist monasteries in the economic life of the Western Deccan.<sup>46</sup>

During this period prolific schools of Indian art developed in Andhra centres in the south and Mathura in the north, on which many scholars have specialized. What we may note is that archaeologically the connection between urbanism and monasticism is very strong in Andhra. Buddhism flourished in Andhra as long as urbanism and trade flourished.<sup>47</sup> Mathura also was an important commercial town connecting Gandhara with the inland towns of the Ganga basin and those of Ujjain-Bharuch route. It became a centre of artistic activity against the background of vast international trade, extensive cosmopolitan contacts and urban prosperity under the Kushanas whose empire stretched from

the Ganga basin to the Aral Sea in Central Asia, controlling the trade routes between Rome, Iran and China.<sup>48</sup>

The foreign royalty enlisted the support of religion, mainly Buddhism, and to some extent Jainism and Brahmanism, promoted the interest of the mercantile community and enhanced the activity of trade and commerce on which the prosperity of the empire depended. Buddhism in its turn underwent changes in its behavioural and doctrinal aspects and catered to the needs of the mixed population of different geographical areas along with trade routes. The Sarvastivadin sect of Theravada Buddhism, having its texts in Sanskrit was dominant in many areas of the empire including Mathura and Peshawar.

The Kushana rulers further reinforced their power and position by deifying themselves in various ways, specially by embossing nimbus on their portraits, by having grandiloquent titles and by instituting ancestor worship of dead kings. For the first time in India we come across the art of portraiture in the ancestor shrine at Mat near Mathura. Here the Parthian-Iranian models were adopted in strict hieratic frontality.<sup>49</sup>

The socio-religious set-up generated the need for Bhakti or devotion for a personal god. The Buddha and several Brahmanical deities got their first representation during this period. In this context the controversy as to where the first image of the Buddha was made sidetracks the issue of the changes that were taking place in the religious life of the period. The Mathura workshops produced a large number of the Buddha and Bodhisattva images, some for exporting to sites like Sanchi, Sarnath, Sravasti and Taxila. The images show the continuity of indigenous tradition of the massive Yaksha forms.<sup>50</sup>

The inscriptions of Mathura, unlike at Gandhara, indicate Indian names of artists. The sculptor Sivamitra made a life-size image of the Buddha for the Jetavana monastery of Sravasti.<sup>51</sup> The improved position of the stone-carvers of Mathura made possible for them to donate images.

The art of Mathura and Andhra centres reflects opulence and sensualism in the consciously posed Yakshis and female figures in contrast to the simplicity and naivety of the Bharhut Yakshis and Devatas. Bacchanalian themes were depicted at Mathura on *achamanakundis* (water pots for libation) placed in Viharas of monks. The Andhra sculptural reliefs decorating Buddhist stupas emphasized scenes in the life of the Buddha prior to his Enlightenment, his stay in the harem, luxuries of the court and so forth.

As we proceed from Bharhut and Sanchi to Mathura, or from Bhaja and Pitalkhora to Karle, we can notice an increasing sense of depth in sculpture and an advance in the artist's conception of the human figure. The early phase of Amaravati in 2nd-1st century BC, which came immediately after the Megalithic phase of the site, was nearer to the art of Bharhut,<sup>52</sup> but soon with increased urbanism, highly sophisticated and animated art appeared. Amaravati sculptures reveal maturity and

complexity of art. This can be partly accounted for by the progress in the craft of sculpture and the inner development of art. But the increasing cultivation of *sringara* and sensualization in art point to factors external to the sphere of the inner logic of art—to the affluent social climate nurtured on the growing trade and urban development in early centuries of the Christian era. The *nagaraka* or the cultured citizen, well versed in arts, represented the ideal of this urban culture.

## IV

## c. AD 300-600

In this period of transition when the upper classes, mercantile and that of the newly emerging landlords, had amassed wealth that there was an overall development in the arts, both literary and visual arts: architecture, sculpture, painting and terracotta. At this time when the feudal tendencies had just begun to appear, art reflects the zest and vitality of the renewed brahmanism. For the first time in the 5th century AD temples were constructed in permanent material of stone. This was indeed an important landmark in the history of Indian architecture and could not have been possible without the corresponding achievements in architectural methods and techniques, developments in the science of mathematics and engineering. But it was also as much inspired by the growing importance of Bhakti and by the newly established Smarta-Pauranic religion which was associated with the new social set-up.

Temples were built at numerous local centres and feudal headquarters. Art activity was decentralized. This is more evident in central India where monuments of the 5th-6th century were spread over a wide area, many of them away from towns. Temples (of stone and brick) were built at Sanchi, Tigawa, Khoh, Nachna, Pipariya, Bhumara, Deogadh, Darra, Mandasor, Bilsad, Gadhwa, Tumain, Bhitari, Eran, Pawaya, Achichchhatra, Bhitarganv, Ramtek, Mandhal—just to mention some important temple sites.<sup>53</sup> Several temples were built outside the main Gupta-Vakataka domain, e.g. in Gujarat, Bengal, Assam and Punjab.

Building of temples away from the main centres and land grants to brahmanas in uncleared territories led to dissemination of knowledge of agriculture, calendar and technology and boosted agrarian expansion. It accelerated the Sanskritization process in tribal areas and remote villages. The Ramayana and Mahabharata appeared for the first time in temple art at Nachna, Deogadh, Gadhwa, Paunar and other sites.

It would be worthwhile to find out the social status of the patrons of temples wherever epigraphical material is available. How many donors were from the royal families and the *samanta* class? Did merchants or craft guilds donate to religious monuments as they did in the earlier period? The evidence of patronage to a sun temple by silk weavers is well known from the Mandasor inscription of AD 473. While

there are three inscriptions of ministers and feudatories of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vakatakas to the Buddhists, from the main branch and the Vatsagulma branch only one merchant is reported.<sup>54</sup> There are sporadic merchant donations in western India, as for instance, under the Maitrakas a tradesman built a *vihara* in AD 589.<sup>55</sup> Did merchants patronize Brahmanical temples in this period? There is not much evidence of the Gupta emperors' direct patronage for the principal monuments. The only works whose donor was clearly a Gupta emperor are the three Jaina images dedicated by Ramagupta near Vidisha.<sup>56</sup> However, the famous colossal Varaha at Udayagiri rescuing the Earth Goddess is conceived allegorically to represent Chandragupta II who saved the earth from the Saka domination.<sup>57</sup>

At Udayagiri, the two caves No. 6 and 7 have inscriptions of feudatories of Chandragupta II. One is a pious gift made in G.E. 82/AD 402 by a *maharaja* of the Sanakanikas who meditated at the feet of Chandragupta II,<sup>58</sup> while the other by Sabavirasena, a hereditary minister of Chandragupta hailing from Pataliputra, has the inscription in verse which proclaims his intellectual accomplishments.<sup>59</sup> The former in contrast seems to be a tribal chief. The art of their respective caves (Nos. 6 and 7) reveals different qualities, as pointed out by Joanna Williams.<sup>60</sup> While the tribal chief's cave is more parochial in approach, the minister employed carvers who were fully aware of the current style at Mathura. Such details from epigraphs, wherever available, can help us to focus on art at a closer view within the wide-angle framework of the general social set-up. Similarly, Walter Spink's work on Ajanta gives us a microscopic view on developments in these Buddhist caves.<sup>61</sup>

A conscious break from the previous naturalistic style of the Kushana art is noticed by art historians in the Gupta art style with its tendency towards abstraction. Sculpture attained refinement and 'classical' quality at Sarnath and Mathura. On the other hand, local ethnic influences and ideology of neo-brahmanism are reflected in sculptural reliefs of Kausambi, Pawaya, Besnagar, etc. Numerous new forms of Siva and Vishnu, including the Visvarupa (cosmic form) emerged. There was a lively development in the field of philosophy. Yoga and Mahayana Buddhism—which gave spiritual content to sculpture. Sculpture could convey the qualities of inward-looking in their expression, as for instance, the Buddha images of Sarnath, the Ekamukhi *linga* at Khoh and the majestic Vishnu from Mathura. Coomaraswamy refers to 'the close parallels that exist at this time between the development of art and literature: the same abundance pervades the Sanskrit *Kavya* literature, the Ajanta paintings and the decoration of the Gupta reliefs.'<sup>62</sup>

Another significant development in art is that 'the image has taken its place in architecture'<sup>63</sup>, and it gets integrated in the general decorative scheme of the temple, as seen at Deogadh or Nachna. In the great cave temple of the Elephanta island near Bombay, hewn out of

rock in the time of a local feudatory dynasty of the Konkan Mauryas<sup>64</sup> in the middle of the 6th century, not only the images of Sadasiva ('Trimurti'), Siva as Ardhanari or Gangadhara are magnificent as individual sculptures, but in the total configuration of images surrounding the *linga* in the sanctum, they evoke the 'presence of Siva'.<sup>65</sup> The artist has meaningfully planned their placement in pairs, representing the opposite *rasas* (sentiments), e.g. Siva as Aghora (fierce) facing Siva in his placid form of the bridegroom in his marriage scene. The vitality of pauranic myths, the poetic imagery of Kalidasa,<sup>66</sup> combined with the skill of master artists have produced great art in this Pasupata Saiva sanctuary.

Meanwhile terracotta art of the period reflects the social trends in the two distinct categories, viz. (1) the miniature figurines and plaques used by *nagarakas* for rituals and home decoration, and (2) large-sized architectural terracotta figures and plaques associated with Buddhist monasteries (Mahasthan, Mirpur Khas, Devni Mori) and Brahmanical temples (Pawaya, Ahichchhatra, Bhitarganv, Chausa, etc.) which are more homely in character. A specialized craftsman *pustakaraka* (clay modeller) as distinct from *kumbhakara* (potter) came into picture when terracotta sculpture was used for architectural decoration.<sup>67</sup> It is significant to note that the output of miniature terracottas made for urban market dwindled in the post-Gupta period with the decline of towns and market economy. The relationship of the terracotta production with urban market economy in the context of the second urbanization of India is a fruitful area of research in the social historical study of art.<sup>68</sup>

Art historians notice a turning point in style in about AD 550,<sup>69</sup> though lingering 'classical' elements continued in eastern Indian sites. From about this time onwards there was a further growth of local powers. Urban centres in the north and east declined and some of them such as Mathura, Gaya and Vaishali emerged as pilgrimage centres.<sup>70</sup>

## V

### c. AD 600-1300

#### c. 600-900

There was a rise of numerous petty states, about fifty, between the 5th and 7th centuries, and many of them appeared in such areas as had never experienced any regular state machinery.<sup>71</sup> The collection and consumption of surplus was no longer centralized but became more and more diffused and localized. Towns in this period were mainly pilgrimage centres, military encampments (*skandhawaras*) and administrative centres. The *nagaraka* ethos was missing. The distinction between the town and countryside became increasingly blurred. There was considerable agrarian expansion from the close of the 8th century AD, particularly in peninsular India where there was an attempted breakthrough in the mode of agricultural production.<sup>72</sup> Numerous local

centres of art emerged as religious donation also increased with the rise of the proliferation of local rulers and feudatories.

A little before AD 600, the centre of artistic activity shifted from north central India, the heart of the Gupta empire, to southern India, where there was hectic temple building activity under the Chalukya sites at Badami, Aihole, Mahakut, Pattadakal, Alampur, Kudaveli Sangamesvara, and under the Pallavas at Mahabalipuram, Kanchi and other centres, to eastern India in the Chhatisgadh region (Mahakosala) under the Panduvamsis at Sirpur, Kharod, Tala, Palari, Rajim, and several centres in Bihar. Frederick Asher writing on the art of eastern India observes: 'In general, the remains show that especially after the time of the Guptas the arts began to flourish in Eastern India, even though the Gupta period is often called a Golden Age of Indian culture.'<sup>73</sup> However, dated works are few until the establishment of the Pala authority in the area. In western India Brahmanical temples and Buddhist monasteries were built under the Maitrakas of Vallabhi, Chaptokatas of Bhillamala, and Garulakas of western Saurashtra.<sup>74</sup>

The classical idiom was now interpreted in terms of varied local ethnic cultural background, though to some extent the all-India tradition of art still persisted. Krishna Deva<sup>75</sup> has noted Vakataka artistic traditions of Ajanta persisting in the Mahakosala temples of 6th-7th centuries. The earlier Sanskrit trend in culture and art gradually gives way to regional versions. Regional versions of the Ramayana are represented in temples of Pattadakal. Some of the sculptural panels have inscribed labels in which the names of Ramayana characters are localized, e.g. Lakhan, Site, Suppankhi.<sup>76</sup> This suggests the prevalence of a Kannada version of the Ramayana mentioned in the 9th century work *Kavirajamarga*.<sup>77</sup>

Folkish elements are noticeable in sculptural panels of Nalanda temple II (7th century) which has similarities with terracotta panels of Antichak and Paharpur (8th century). Images are expressive of the emotional experience and ideology of the art public. This is evident at Bhubaneswar in the dancers of the Parasuramesvara temple (7th century) and the fierce forms of gods and goddesses at the Vaital Deul (8th century) which is pervaded with Tantric atmosphere.

In this period when the Bhakti poets sang devotional hymns in temples of south India, we come across one of the grandest depictions of Krishna lifting the mount Govardhana at Mahabalipuram, the sea-port of the Pallavas. Here the spectator (devotee) can himself become a part of the scene of cowherds under the mountain and be transformed to the legendary time, away from the time of day to day existence. Another panoramic vision can also be had at Mahabalipuram in one of the greatest moments of India's narrative art depicting the Descent of the Ganga or Arunja's penance.

From about 750 onwards art activity got a further impetus under the feuding but well established ruling families: the Palas in east India, the Pratiharas in north and central India, and the Rashtrakutas in the

Deccan. It is not so much their direct patronage but rather it is the general environment in the vast territory under their rule which could create conditions for the arts to flourish. Within their respective realms, local differences of style became minimized and more unified styles emerged. For instance, under the Palas who brought Bengal and Bihar under their political control, cultural identity of eastern India can be seen in art. Some of the magnificent monuments of India appear in this period of which the rock-cut Kailasanatha temple at Ellora under the Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna I (later half of the 8th century) is a finest example. One can feel here the fighting moods of gods and goddesses engaged in violent struggles against their enemies. Ravana's might is captured in the scene of his shaking the mount Kailasa.

In this period large Buddhist *viharas* were built in eastern India and elsewhere which were lavishly endowed with land and villages. Unlike the earlier Buddhist monuments situated near towns the *viharas* of this period emerged independent of towns, and functioned as self-sufficient economic units.<sup>78</sup> The Nalanda monastery, when Hsuan Tsang visited it in the middle of the 7th century, owned 100 villages. Slightly later, I-tsing mentions 200 villages under this *mahavihara*. Several Buddhist monasteries flourished under the Pala kings, of which the Somapura (Paharpur) and Vikramasila (probably Antichak) were founded by Dharmapala (c. AD 770-810).<sup>79</sup> The wealthy Buddhist establishments of Ratnagiri (Orissa), Mainamati (Bangladesh), Rajbadidanga (Bengal), Sirpur (Madhya Pradesh) are well known, and quite a few were emerging in Tamil Nadu (Nagapattinam acquired importance under the Chola rulers) and Kashmir. Kalhana notes founding of Buddhist *viharas* by the royal families and ministers of Kashmir during this period. With lavish endowments and village folk at their disposal, the Buddhist *viharas*, like the Brahmanical temples, turned into landlords. It seems that artisans were attached to monasteries and remunerated by them either in provisions or the grants of plots of land.<sup>80</sup> There was hierarchy among monks. The Nalanda monastery, according to Hsuan Tsang, accommodated ten thousand monk students. At the recent excavation of the Antichak monastery, the exposed structures, only of one mound out of nine, suggest that it must have accommodated about a thousand persons.<sup>81</sup> Referring to Nalanda, Debala Mitra writes, 'In later period came into vogue well protected self-sufficient monasteries of two or more storeys enclosed by high walls with no openings except the entrance.'<sup>82</sup> It will be fruitful to undertake detailed research on the socio-economic role of the Buddhist *mahaviharas* of the early medieval period, their relationship with the State, and the different types of donors who supported them.

The production of metal sculpture, though known earlier, picked up in the Gupta-Vakataka period,<sup>83</sup> and was increasingly undertaken from the 7th-8th century onwards in eastern India. Kashmir, Chamba, Gujarat, Deccan, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Hsuan Tsang mentions a

colossal 80 feet high Buddha bronze at Nalanda. The production of the large-seized bronze (90" x 42") as from Sultanganj in Bihar in about 7th century testifies not only to the skill of bronze working ateliers but also to an advance in metal technology of the period.<sup>84</sup> Some of the metal casting centres in eastern India were the Buddhist monastic sites of Nalanda, Kurkihar, Mainamati, Paharpur, Ratnagiri and Antichak, where evidence of furnaces, ovens, and crucibles for casting were found.<sup>85</sup> Whether there was trade in metal images is not clear, but Kalhana (*Rajatarangini*, IV 259-263) records that an image of the Buddha was brought to Kashmir on the back of an elephant from Magadha in King Lalitaditya's time (first half of the 8th century AD). This image which Lalitaditya gifted to his minister Chankuna must have been a specially made image for the Kashmir King.

It is noteworthy that from the 7th century onwards the Buddhist Vajrayana pantheon became elaborate and well-classified with multiplicity of gods and goddesses—Dhyani Buddhas and their families (*kulas*), female counterparts and guardians of gates, each with symbol and colour.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, in their evolution by 10th century Vaishnavism (Pancharatra) and Saivism (Saiva-Siddhanta) also had elaborate pantheons. Structurally, both were based on the emanation concept involving a hierarchy of deities as in a pyramid, with Para-Vasudeva or Para-Siva at the apex and a chain of emanated deities or cosmic elements up to the 'gross' earth element (*prithvi-tattva*) at the base.<sup>87</sup> Perceptions and manner of beholding in religion as well as art were much influenced by hierarchical social set-up with its prescribed behaviour of rank and order.

To return to the temple. Richly endowed from the 5th century AD onwards, the temple was actively undergoing experimentation in its ground plan, elevation and *sikhara* design. This is evident in the architectural development we see from the Gupta temples of Sanchi (c. AD 400) and Tigawa (c. AD 450) with plain walls to the Deogadh temple (early 6th century AD) which has cardinal niches or indentations in its exterior wall on three sides containing sculptural reliefs. These reliefs represent various aspects of Vishnu such as Seshasayi, Nara-Narayana and Gajendra-moksha, while his main image was enshrined in the sanctum. This is the beginning of displaying on the outer walls the sculptural manifestations of the main divinity of the sanctum,<sup>88</sup> a practice which continues with further developments in the mature temples of 10th-13th centuries. By 6th-7th century AD the major modes of architecture—Nagara and Dravida—appear but are at an experimental stage. At Mahakut and Pattadakal in the Chalukyan region during the 7th-8th centuries temples of both types stand close to each other, and temples of apsidal plan (Durga temple) are also seen.

The increased architectural activity of the period improved the position of architects and sculptors. R.N. Misra significantly draws our attention to the fact that epigraphs of the post-Gupta period reveal 'the emergence of a new class of artists, viz, *sutradharas*, which was

destined to play an important role in the building activity.' In inscriptions *sutradharas* claimed knowledge of *vastu* texts as well as of the practice of architecture. There was some sort of hierarchical set-up among artists in which the *sutradhara* figured at the top, followed by such categories of artists and workmen as *vijnanin*, *silpi*, *rupakara* and *karmin*. In addition to this there was a labour force to assist the expert artists in manual work.<sup>89</sup>

In this context we may ask whether forced labour (*vishti*) was imposed on artists. Did unskilled labour only come within its constraints or also skilled and expert artists? Potters (terracotta-makers), who in the ancient period were free persons earning cash income, were subjected to forced labour in AD 592 in western India.<sup>90</sup> Forced labour is mentioned in the records of the Maitrakas of Valabhi, the Rashtrakutas and the Gurjara-Pratiharas, but is not mentioned in the Paramaras, the Chalukyas, the Chahamanas, the Gahadavalas and the Chandellas. This possibly means that forced labour was on the wane or its rigours had abated with the arrival of the money economy from about the 10th century AD onwards, though some Kalachuri inscriptions refer to *vishti*.<sup>91</sup>

Regional rulers such as the Panduvamsi kings of Kosala in the 7th century had their own *sutradhara*.<sup>92</sup> Personal interest in artistic activity by the rulers is evidenced in the case of Mahendravarman Pallava who called himself *vichitrachitta* (of inventive mind), and possibly of King Meruvarman of Chamba (c. 700) under whom the famous sculptor Gugga created magnificent metal sculptures.<sup>93</sup> The fact that Gugga's name has been inscribed on the four brass images of his creation indicates the respect under which he was held. The *sutradhara* Sri Gunda constructed a temple for the queen of Vikramaditya II at Pattadakal. Another inscription of this temple town refers to Sarva Siddha Acharyas 'who seem to have represented probably some guild of architects or builders'.<sup>94</sup> At Alampur the architect who built the gate (*mahadvara*) was given gift of land by a feudatory of the Rashtrakuta King Dharavarsha-Dhruva.<sup>95</sup> There is a reference to a Pasupata *acharya's sutradhara* at Jhalrapatan.<sup>96</sup> From the 9th century onwards, the information about the *sutradharas* and other categories of artists grows in volume. There are many instances of personal *sutradharas* of kings of different dynasties and religious *acharyas* on which R.N. Misra provides a good deal of material. The *sutradharas* themselves formed part of the feudal order and held titles like *samanta*, *ranaka*, *thakkura*, particularly under the Ganga and Sena kings of eastern India.<sup>97</sup>

#### c. AD 900-1300

The stupendous architecture and profuse sculptural decoration of temples in the period bear the impress of the opulent patron class—the rulers, queens, princes, military chiefs, religious *acharyas*, *mahasamanta* and other feudal officers. Merchant donations are also

recorded in some areas, but, as B.P. Mazumdar<sup>98</sup> points out, in northern India, except under the Chalukyas and the Vaghelas, not a single merchant has been found to donate a whole village or construct big temples. Donations by merchants were poorer in comparison to those by landed aristocrats. They pulled their resources together as at Siyodani near Gwalior between AD 903 and 968.<sup>99</sup> At Khajuraho *sreshthis* donated Jaina images and ministers built Jaina temples in the 10th-11th centuries. Merchant donations to temples need to be investigated in the context of some growth of mercantile activity in this period. There is also evidence to show that merchants had joined feudal order.<sup>100</sup>

The temple itself had become by this time a feudal organization holding big estates and had in its services a large number of functionaries such as priests of different hierarchical status, *devadasis*, musicians, tailors, barbers, garland makers etc. who were remunerated through land. The Somanatha temple in the early 11th century, for instance, had 500 *devadasis*, 300 barbers and a large number of priests on day and night duties. It is said to be endowed with 10,000 villages.<sup>101</sup> The social position and wealth of the Tanjavur temple built by Rajaraja Chola (AD 985-1014) is well known.<sup>102</sup> Tanjavur blossomed into a huge town consisting of an internal circuit around the temple meant for the residence of the priestly, administrative and other elite groups and an outer circuit for professional and other service groups. It became the royal centre, Rajarajesvara, with its quarters named after the king and his family and also included a series of army contingents. The Chola patronage to the temple, as shown by R. Champakalakshmi, had direct relation to royal power structure.<sup>103</sup>

The growing importance of the temple in the socio-religious life, the staging of dance-dramas, the reciting of the Puranas and other texts, and the celebration of festivals in its premises<sup>104</sup> along with the availability of liberal donations led to the expansion of the size of the temple by addition of new structures. The early Gupta temple consisted of the sanctum and a porch to shelter the worshipper, to which a small hall, *mandapa*, was added in due course. But in the 10th century, a bigger hall called *mahamandapa* with a central platform is seen at Khajuraho, and in the third quarter of the 11th century a special hall for dance, called *rangamandapa*, was constructed at Modhera in Gujarat. In Orissa in about the 12th century Bhakti cult and the *devadasi* institution made it necessary to add *bhogamandapa* (hall for offerings) and *natamandira* (hall for dance),<sup>105</sup> which were constructed on the same axis as of the sanctum (*deul* or *garbhagriha*) and the audience hall (*jagamohana*). With additions of several other accessory structures the courtyards of the Orissan temples became quite large in dimensions: 520 feet by 465 feet of the Lingaraja temple; 665 feet by 640 feet of the Jagannatha Puri temple; 865 feet by 540 feet of the Konarak temple.<sup>106</sup> A comparison of these large enclosures with much smaller area of the *mandala*-like enclosure of the 10th century Muktesvara temple at Bhubaneswar indicates the rapid course of de-

velopment in the three centuries. These grand temples with their accessory buildings and enclosures were like replicas of palace complexes. The god was treated like a king and his abode rivalled in splendour the palaces of kings and feudatories. The Orissan kings dedicated their kingdom to Lord Jagannatha and ruled only as feudatories of the god. Ananga Bhima III's kingdom is referred to in one of his inscriptions at Bhubaneswar as Purushottama Samrajya.<sup>107</sup>

The feudal society valued greatly the heights of buildings and inscriptions proudly mention tall temples (*prasadas*) rivalling mountain peaks. The temples of this period increased considerably in their heights. For instance, at Bhubaneswar the 10th century Muktesvara is 34-1/2 feet high, the 11th century Rajarani is 59 feet high, the Brahmesvara is 60 feet high, the Lingaraja is 148 feet high, while the 12th century temple at Puri is 200 feet high and the 13th century Konarak temple (whose *sikhara* is fallen) is calculated to have been 225 feet high.<sup>108</sup> The growing demand for monumentality of structure involved constructional problems, and the architects working within the rigid pillar-lintel-corbel scheme<sup>109</sup> met this demand by several devices within the grammar of this traditional framework, which we need not discuss here. But one of the changes in the ground plan of the Nagara temple was an increase in the number of the projections (*rathas*) of the exterior wall.

Architects now devised five, seven or even nine *ratha*-projections of the wall which, apart from their structural functions of increasing the load-bearing capacity of the wall, also created extra space for accommodating the divine hierarchy. There were numerous deities with their *parivaras* (families), various *avarana* (surrounding) deities, the eight Dikpalas guarding the temple on the eight points of the compass, and so forth, who needed space to be accommodated on the temple. The religious pantheons—Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina, had considerably expanded by this time. The zigzag arrangement of walls created extra surface for their inclusion on temples.

Architects and their royal patrons loved elaborate and complicated designs in this period. The temple design was much more elaborate in the Bhumija<sup>110</sup> mode of temple in Malwa, particularly in the Nilakanthesvara temple of Udayapur, inscribed AD 1081, and in the Deccan at the Ambarnatha temple (c. AD 1060) near Bombay. In the south, the 12th-13th century Hoysala temples in Karnataka have elaborate star-shaped plans evolved by rotating the square round its central axis.

In the closed economy and localism of the feudal structure art was increasingly conditioned by regionalism and canonization. In the about the 10th century we see several regional schools<sup>111</sup> of art each interpreting the temple according to the social functions, climatic and geographical needs and availability of the building materials in the area. For example, we have in eastern India, the schools of Kalinga (Orissa) and Vanga (Bengal); in central India the four schools<sup>112</sup> of

Jejakabhukti (Khajuraho), Dahala, Gopagiri (Gwalior) and Malwa regions; in western India the schools of Rajasthan and Gujarat which in the 11th century amalgamated to form the Maru-Gurjara school,<sup>113</sup> and so on. Each regional school though influenced to a certain extent by extraneous trends, had its own interpretation of the relation between monumental and plastic form.

Art was influenced by traditionalism which operated through silpa-canons. Silpa prescriptions were incorporated in Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita* (6th century) and in religious texts such as the *Hayasirsha Pancharatra*, *Matsya Purana*, *Vishnu dharmottara Purana*, etc. What is noteworthy is that independent Vastusastras dated before the 10th century are hardly available except the *Vastutilaka* from western India, assigned to the 7th century AD<sup>114</sup> Hsuan Tsang mentions *silpasthanavidya* among the five Vidyas or Sastras which, as Coomaraswamy<sup>115</sup> says, suggests the existence of Silpasastra in the 7th century. From the 10th-11th century onwards a large number of Silpasastras and Vastusastras were written. From Orissa we have *Bhuvanapradipa*, *Silpa Prakasa*, etc.; from Malwa: *Samaranganasutradhara*, *Jayaprichchha*, *Rekharnava*, *Pramanamanjari*, *Rupamandana* (of later date); from Gujarat-Rajasthan: *Aparajitaprichchha*, *Jayaprichchhadhikara*, *Vastuvidya*, *Vastusastra*, etc., and from the south *Mayamatam*, *Tantrasamuchchaya*, *Silparatna*, *Manasara* (of later date), and so on.

The temples built from the middle of the 10th century to about the third quarter of the 11th century show the initial advantages of the adherence to Silpa-canons which transmitted systematized experience of generations without yet inhibiting the emergence of new forms. The temple form reached its final perfection in this period. The Kandariya Mahadeva temple at Khajuraho, the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar, the Nilakanthesvara temple at Udayapur, the Surya temple at Modhera, the Brihadisvara temple at Tanjavur are some of the masterpieces of temple architecture within the matrix of the Silpa-canons of their respective regional schools. But the art of the monuments erected after these great achievements reflects mechanical repetition of motifs and excessive conformism to silpa-canons.

Sculpture in this period was dominated by architectural design of the temple. This becomes more evident in the Bhumija temples of Malwa and the Deccan, whereas in the Maru-Gurjara school of western India, and in the Hoysala temples profusion of sculptural decoration gives the impression that architecture is treated sculpturally. Animal, vegetal and abstract designs and even human figures had their role in temple art of the period as decorative motifs (*alankaras*). However, a closer view at Khajuraho will show us how artists have meaningfully used conventional *alankaras*. But the magnificence of sculpture of the earlier period was now limited by architectural framework. Some of the themes which fascinated artists and patrons were *surasundaris* (celestial females), Tantric *acharyas* in company with women, war

scenes and hunting parties. It is significant to note that the sculptural narration of the epics and Krishnalila finds varying treatment in the temples of the north and south during this period. Although there are some temple sites such as Padhavli and Markandi which vividly narrate stories, the general trend noticed in the north as revealed at Modhera, Nagda, Kekind, Sinnar, Khajuraho, etc. is the abbreviated and decorative treatment of the epic themes. On the other hand the southern regions of Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu witnessed a narrative upsurge which could be a consequence of the Bhakti movement and dance drama traditions.

'Portrait' sculpture, though seen at Kanchi, Mahabalipuram, Belur, Ittagi, Konarak, Dahala, Khajuraho, Abu, etc. was not realistic but an idealized depiction which did not represent the actual portrait of the king or queen. This can be explained on the ground that the Indian artist perceived in terms of 'types' rather than the actual person. For instance, a queen could be represented according to the *lakshnas* (characteristics) depicting a *padmini* (lotus) type rather than drawing her actual portrait.<sup>116</sup> This fixation of types, which explains the absence of realistic portraiture in India, at least up to the Mughal times, is seen not only in the visual arts but also in court literature, donative inscriptions, eulogies, etc. Instead of giving the actual account of kings in their *charitas* and inscriptions, the court poets presented romantic account, as for instance, the *Vikramankadevacharita* of Bilhana.

There is a hierarchical scale in the portrayals of kings at Belur (12th century) and Konarak (13th century). The royal figure is shown big and the other functionaries decreasing in size according to their status. Feudal hierarchical considerations entered into the description of residential architecture in the *Aparajitaprichcha* (81, 2-10) of Gujarat in the 12th century. This Vastu text specifies the size of the residence of nine categories of nobles according to their relative status in feudal hierarchy. Moreover, the feudal titles of the *gajapati*, *asvapati* and *narapati* seen in royal charters<sup>117</sup> of the period find correspondence in the sculptural mouldings of the *gajathara*, *asvathara* and *narathara* on 11th-13th century temples of several regional schools including those of central India and western India (Maru-Gurjara).

## VI

We have had a general picture of art under feudal conditions. Now before we end this Address let us briefly halt at Khajuraho to have a closer view of its art.

The temple town of Kharjuravahaka had more than 25 temples built under the Chandella Rajput kings, their feudatories and Jaina ministers between AD 900 and 1150.<sup>118</sup> The architects of the three Hindu *sandhara* (having built-in circumambulation path) temples of this town, viz. the Lakshmana (AD 954), the Visvanatha (AD 1002), and the Kandariya Mahadeva (c. AD 1050) have employed puns (*slesha*)<sup>119</sup> and intentional double-meaning language

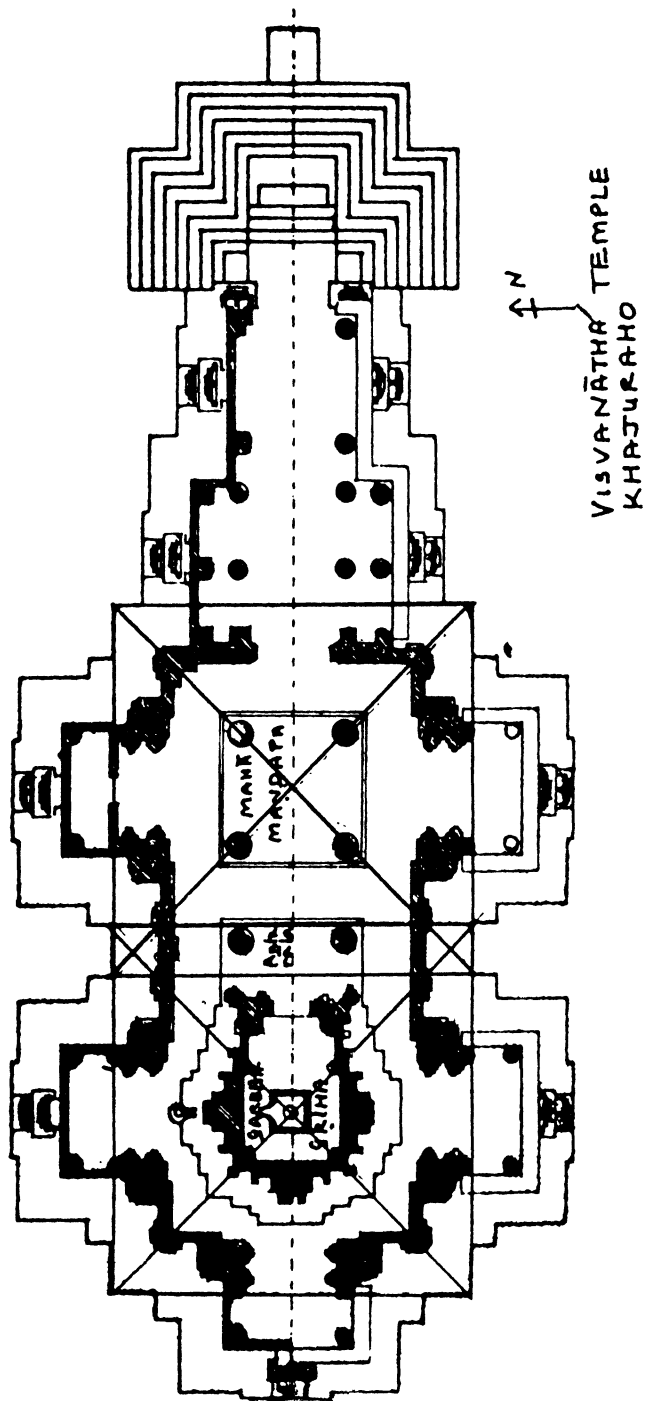


Fig. 1 Ground Plan of the Visvanatha Temple, Khajuraho showing overlap of two squares of the Mahamandapa and the garbhagriha. (After Archaeological Survey of India)

(*sandhyabhasha*), the code language used by the Tantrikas to conceal esoteric doctrines from non-initiates.<sup>120</sup> They have expressed this ambiguous language on a special architectural part of the temple, viz, the juncture wall (*kapili* or *sandhi-kshetra*) connecting the sanctum (*garbhagriha*) and the great hall. Only the three above mentioned *sandhara* temples of the site have juncture walls formed by an overlap of two squares (Fig.) whereas the *nirandhara* temples without inner ambulatory do not have such an overlap of two squares on their juncture.

Let us clarify at the outset that these were not temples of the extreme Kaula-Kapalika sects. On the contrary, the Lakshmana temple was dedicated to Vaikuntha, a composite form of Vishnu, and was affiliated to Pancharatra Kashmiragama,<sup>121</sup> which at this stage of its development had admitted Vedic elements.<sup>122</sup> Its inscriptions supports Trayidharma of the Vedas and the protection to cows and brahmanas.<sup>123</sup> Its patron king Yasovarman honoured brahmanas. His son Dhangadeva got settled brahmanas well-versed in the Vedas near the Visvanatha temple which he built before AD 1002, and also performed the *tulapurushadana* ceremony. The Visvanatha temple further mentions the royal priest Bhatta Yasodhara who, according to a copper plate of Dhanga, was a brahmana of the Bharadvaja *gotra* and a follower of the Vajasaneyi Sakha.<sup>124</sup> Dhanga donated a village to him on the occasion of a lunar eclipse. As I have discussed elsewhere, there is a strong possibility that Saivism of Khajuraho was of Saiva Siddhanta sect which was of moderate order.<sup>125</sup> Both the Pancharatra Kashmiragama and the Saiva Siddhanta at this stage of their development in this region seem to be within the Misra Tantric-Vedic religion and the Brahmanical fold.<sup>126</sup>

The Lakshmana temple was the first mature temple in the elite Nagara style at Khajuraho and was constructed by king Yasovarman when he was still a feudatory of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, but was consolidating his political power and social status. In building this majestic temple he asserted his power and proclaimed his acquiring of the prestigious image of Vaikuntha (Vishnu) from his overlord Devapala and his conquest of the strategic Kalanjara fort. The inscription builds up a fighting mood in the description of Vaikuntha as 'Daityari' (enemy of demons) slaying 'Kapila and others', with a roaring voice, and at the terrestrial level, king Yasovarman is called 'kunthitari', who has dulled his enemies (Gurjara-Pratiharas, Chedis and others).<sup>127</sup> He is further equated with Vishnu and Krishna. Interestingly, twelve sculptural reliefs of the sanctum wall depict Krishna slaying demons.

There is yet another level of power struggle between the combined forces of Brahmanical religion against the non-Vedic heretical sects which had earlier got ascendancy. This struggle is metaphorically expressed on the juncture wall of the Lakshmana temple by projection of the theme of the play *Prabodhachandrodaya* or its prototype. I have examined the details of this philosophical play in the context of the

Lakshmana temple's sculptural scheme in another article,<sup>128</sup> and have also discussed the gap of a hundred years between Krishna Misra's *Prabodhachandrodaya*, possibly staged in the Chandella king Kirtivarman's court in about AD 1060, and the Lakshmana temple's sculptural presentation of the theme in AD 954

The *Prabodhachandrodaya*<sup>129</sup> centres around the fight between the two sons of Manas (Mind), viz. King Viveka (Discrimination) and Mahamoha (Great Delusion). The play supports the orthodox Vedic order, Upanishadic teaching and Vishnu-Bhakti and attacks the non-Vedic sects of the Kapalikas, Kshapanakas and Vajrayana Buddhists. It has prayers addressed to Vishnu in his Vaikuntha form (Act IV).

The Lakshmana temple's artist has indicated King Viveka in sculpture subtly through a suggestion (*dhvani*) by placing near him a *surasundari* with *hamsa* (swan). *Hamsa* suggests "discrimination" between milk and water (*nira-kshira-viveka*). King Mahamoha is suggested by another *surasundari* who is similar in description to Mithyadrishi (Error), the beloved of Mahamoha in this allegory. So here at Khajuraho, the artist has judiciously used conventional motifs of *surasundari* and *mithuna* which, when observed independently of the contexts, are motifs of Indian temple art, auspicious *alankaras* (ornaments), but perceived in the configuration and in the context of other sculptural figures are revealed as part of the allegorical play.

Khajuraho art is highly sophisticated and Sanskritized. The knowledge of words and their multiple meanings was important to Khajuraho artists, whether poets or sculptors, and they have displayed their love of puns or double-entendres in both visual and written language. There was a healthy dialogue between the sculptors and men of letters, who replied to each other's puns.<sup>130</sup> The Lakshmana temple's inscription writer Madhava-Kavi was a son of grammarian (*sabdanusasanaviduh*). Rama-Kavi, who belonged to a poet's family of the Sabara lineage, has used several puns in his eulogy of the Visvanatha temple.

My iconological study of the highly evolved and well-planned Kandariya Mahadeva temple indicates that its images correspond to the Saiva Siddhanta system. The architect has placed a unique image of *Chatushpada* (four-legged) Sadasiva,<sup>131</sup> the pivotal figure of Saiva Siddhanta system in the great hall. *Chatushpada*, literally four feet (of the image) refers to the four *padas* (parts) of the Satva Siddhanta system, viz. Jnana, Charya, Kriya and Yoga. We are reminded of the Sarvadarsana-samgraha of the early 14th century which defines this Saiva system as *Tripadartham* (of *Pati*, *Pasu* and *Pasa*) *Chatushpadam Mahatantram*. It seems that the *sutradhara* of the temple has attempted to indicate through visual language the highly structured metaphysical order of this Saiva Tantric system in the images and their placement in the scheme of the temple, as its empirical study indicates. He has deliberately chosen erotic motifs to decorate the juncture walls linking the hall for devotees and the

sanctum of the divinity, as an intentional code language, *sandhya bhasha*. The surface meaning is erotic and deludes non-initiates, but beneath lies a hidden meaning expressing perhaps a yogic exercise or a stage in meditation.<sup>132</sup>

Such a well integrated placement of images, and the employment of *slesha*, *dhwani* and *sandhya bhasha* in sculpture implies a *sutradhara*, well-versed not only in art, architecture and poetics, but also in the metaphysical system of the sect to which the temple belonged. The Kandariya Mahadeva temple does not preserve a dedicatory inscription (except for a line on its pilaster), but the inscription of the earlier Visvanatha temple mentions its *sutradhara* Chhichha by name who was 'well-versed in Visvakarmastra'. The contemporary Paramara King Bhoja (c. 1010-1055) in his Vastu text *Samaranganasutradhara* (chapter 44) states that the architect (*sthapati*) should be proficient in various sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, astrology, prosody, philosophy, art, etc. So it is not unlikely that the architect could design such a complex scheme of a temple in this period.

However, it is more likely that the architect was guided in the placement of images by the religious *acharya* who had grasped the metaphysical structure of the system. The name 'Urdhvastva' of an *acharya* is found inscribed below another four-legged Sadasiva image, now in the Khajuraho site museum.<sup>133</sup> The name suggests his affiliation to Saiva Siddhanta sect whose network had spread to other parts of central India, viz. Dahala, Malwa and Gwalior.<sup>134</sup> It is well known that the Rajagurus Isanasiva Pandita and Sarvasiva Pandita influenced, the rituals and construction of the Chola temples. The Saiva Siddhanta texts, written in the south, such as *Isanasivagurudevapaddhati*, *Somasambhupaddhati*, *Mayamatam*, etc. have chapters on iconography and architecture. In fact these as well as the Pancharatra texts<sup>135</sup> are more detailed regarding *sthana-nirnaya* (placement) of images than the Vastu or Silpa texts. The role of religious *acharya* in influencing the architect needs to be examined wherever material is available.<sup>136</sup> He could be an intermediary between the architect and the patron in this period.

The Kandariya Mahadeva temple represents a phase of India's temple art and architecture in its creative and meaningful moment when artistic form was harmoniously integrated with conceptual significance. The rhythms of its majestic architecture with its hierarchically placed images in relation to the Centre can be felt even 900 years after its construction. Its artistic excellence transcends social dimensions.<sup>137</sup>

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120. *Sandhya-bhasha*, intentional language, has been used by Tantras at least from the 5th century AD onwards to conceal their esoteric doctrines, including the *sadhana* of Kundalini Yoga. S.B. Dasgupta and Mircea Eliade have drawn attention to several enigmatic metaphors in the songs of the Nathas and the Sahajiya saints. For instance, 'Kanha has killed the mother-in-law (sasur), and sisters-in-law (nananda) of the house, and killing the mother (ma) has become a Kapalika.' This does not mean that he actually was a Kapalika, but he makes a symbolic use of language and words to refer to the arrest of the vital winds and the control of the mind. See S.B. Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, 3rd ed. Calcutta, 1974, p. 169, and *Obscure Religious Cults*, revised ed. 1976, pp. 413-424; Mircea Eliade, *Yoga*. . . , pp. 249 ff, pp. 410-411.
121. V.S. Pathak, 'Vaikuntha at Khajuraho and Kashmiragama School', *Journal of Madhya Pradesh Itihas Parisad*, 2, 1960, pp. 9-18.
122. Although in its earlier phase the Pancharatra faith was non-Vedic, in its historical development a connection with the Vedas was brought in 'to secure orthodox sanctity for their cult'. See Suvira Jaiswal, *op.cit.*, p. 48. But the fact remains that Vedic elements were admitted in the Pancharatra religion at this stage.
123. 'Stone Inscription of Yosovarman, of the year 1011', ed. F. Kielhorn, *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. I, pp. 122-129, v. 49.
124. 'Khajuraho Stone Inscription of Dhanga, V.S. 1059', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. I, pp. 137-147; Nanyaura Plate 'A' of Dhanga, V.S. 1055, ed. Kielhorn, *Indian Antiquity*, Vol. XVI pp. 201-204.
125. My paper, 'Man and the Temple, Architectural and Sculptural Imagery of the Kandariya Mahadeva Temple of Khajuraho', presented at the Destiny of Man Seminar, convened by Thomas Maxwell during the Festival of India in Great Britain, 1982. My other paper on the subject, 'Prevalence of Saiva Siddhanta at

- Khajuraho' has been sent for Prof. R.S. Sharma Felicitation Volume, ed. by D.N. Jha. Meanwhile S.N. Chaturvedi presented a paper on Saiva Siddhanta at the U.G.C. National Seminar held at Khajuraho in 1987, which further reaffirms my position.
126. The Misra religion combining Tantric and Vedic elements was recognised by the Puranas, viz, the *Bhagavata*, *Padma* and *Kurma*. See P.V. Kane, *op.cit.*, V, ff, p. 924; V.S. Pathak *op.cit.*, p. 2, 51 ff. Pathak suggests Misra Smarta religion at Khajuraho.
  127. Devangana Desai, 'Vaikunthaas Daityari at Khajuraho', in *Vaisnavism in Indian Arts and Culture*, ed. R. Parimoo, pp. 254-260.
  128. Devangana Desai, 'Sculptural Representation on the Lakshmana Temple of Khajuraho in the light of *Prabodhachandrodaya*'. *Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts*, Vol. XI, 1982, pp. 99-108.
  129. *Prabodhachandrodaya of Krsna Misra*, Sanskrit text with Eng. tr. by Sita Krishna Nambiar, Delhi, 1971.
  130. Devangana Desai, 'Puns and . . .' in *Kusumanjali*, p. 384.
  131. R. Awasthi, 'Two Unique Sadasiva Images of Khajuraho', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 53, 1975, pp. 211-215; J.N. Banerjee, *Religion in Art and Archaeology* (Vaisnavism and Saivism), Lucknow, 1968, pp. 79-80.
  132. Devangana Desai, 'Placement and Significance of Erotic Sculptures at Khajuraho', in *Discourses on Siva*, ed. Michael Meister, Philadelphia, 1984.
  133. *Ibid.*, pl. 160. No. 1098 of the Khajuraho Museum.  
The name 'Urdhvasiva (Urdhasiva) was read by A. Cunningham, *Archeological Survey of India, Report 1883-84* Vol. 21, p. 63, and by Krishna Deva in personal communication.
  134. V.S. Pathak in *Bharati* No.3 pp. 28-50, Also J. Van Troy in *Indica*, Vol. II, 1974.
  135. H. Dantel Smith (ed. and annotated), *Pancaratra prasada-prasadhanam*, (chapters 1-10 of the Kriyapada, *Padmasamhita*)—A Pancaratra Text on Temple-Building, Madras, 1963, pp. xviii-xix, 9.
  136. *Ibid.*, The Chief artisan—variously called in the Pancaratra Samhitas as *sthapati*, *silpin*, *rathakara*, *takshaka*—works in close association with the *acharya* who hired him and to whom he is directly responsible. See also S. Kramrisch. *The Hindu Temple*, pp. 9-10. It is significant in this context to mention an inscriptional evidence on Udega, the Chief architect of the Sarasvati temple at Gadag who was a disciple of Sri Kriyasakti Pandita (a Kalamukha *acharya*) of the nearby Trikutesvara temple. See S.H. Ritti, 'Udega the Chief Architect of the Sarasvati Temple at Gadag' in *Indian Epigraphy, Its Bearing on the History of Art*, pp. 213-214.
  137. Arnold Hauser clarified in *The Philosophy of Art History*, 1959, p. 8, 'All art is socially conditioned, but not everything in art is definable in sociological terms. Above all, artistic excellence is not so definable; it has no sociological equivalent'. Also Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension—Toward A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, 1979 edition, London, pp. 7 ff, 24, 25, 29, discusses 'the metasocial dimension' of art and certain qualities of art which transcend the specific social content and form and give art its universality.