

## SEVEN

### C O N C L U S I O N

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As seen in the foregoing chapters the representations of woman at Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta range from goddess to terrestrial women. In the rock temples of these sites generally woman appears as a decorative motif. As discussed in the preceding chapters, this auspicious motif appears repeatedly in different forms. It is clear from the locations and the multiplicity of the images that at some places even the goddesses were treated as a decorative motif by the carvers of these temples. The attractive figures of the goddesses, apsarās and surasūdarīs adorn the temple walls, pillars, brackets, door frames, parapet walls, lintels, almost all members of temple architecture and make it worthy for gods to dwell in.

These figures decorating the temples by their auspicious presence must necessarily be beautiful and to be beautiful and charming they must be proportionate too. The Silpa texts prescribe different sets of proportion for goddesses, demigoddesses and terrestrial women. As described earlier this motif was subjected to canonical formulas and was streamlined. Muscles and joints were never shown on the images. This elimination of muscles and joints, of course, was aimed at creating supra mundane beauty. The same is true about the tāla-māna prescribed for various images. The Silpa texts prescribe different head-height ratios for different categories of women. Apart from the prescribed tāla-māna for carving female figures, the silpa texts also describe the shapes of various limbs and facial features of female figures. The shapes of various limbs and features recommended by the silpa texts are based on similes of shapes found in nature.

As discussed earlier the canonical recommendations about shaping the various limbs have been followed by the sculptors and artists of Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta because these marks of beauty were considered to be auspicious<sup>1</sup>, but the tālamāna prescribed for the images of different goddesses and demigoddesses appears to have been ignored barring some exceptions. In the paintings and sculptures of these places we often see the bow shaped eye brows, sesame flower like nose, bandhujīva flower-shaped lips<sup>2</sup>, conch like neck, etc., but rarely we see the images carved strictly according to tālamāna. The figures of the goddesses in the panels depicting various mythological theme as well as the independent images of the goddesses are not in the madhyama daśatāla; nor are the images of apsarās in navatāla.<sup>3</sup> The general head-height ratio

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1. Brhat Samhita, Ch.70.

2. बन्धुर्जीव कुसुमौपमो धरो मांसलो रुचिरबिम्ब रूप मृत  
Brihat Samhita, Sloka 6, Ch.70. Sastri, S.S.  
(Ed). p.579.

3. See Ch.3.

is seven or seven and a half which is the normal human proportion. As stated earlier in tendency to follow the normal human proportions is noticed whenever the artists are given freedom. The decorative panels, obviously not meant for worshipping, gave the sculptors maximum freedom of expression and hence the sculptors put aside the canonical prescriptions of tālamāna and followed the normal human proportion.

The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata<sup>1</sup> prescribes costumes and ornaments for goddesses, apsarās, vidyādhariś nāginīś, etc. It also prescribes the colours of their costumes; but whether the sculptors of these places followed these prescriptions or not is left to guess since the original plaster has peeled off.

The typical female figure at Ellora is in Sapta

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1. Ghosh, M., Ed., pp.418-419.

or Sārdha sapta tāla. Except the river goddesses in the independent shrine at Kailasa, this proportion seems to be fairly constant. The woman in these sculptures is neither tall nor short and has pleasing countenance. Her features are refined and reflect the poetic and canonic ideals. Her hairstyle is generally of flat cushion type and decorated with pearl strings. She wears disc type ear-rings, pearl necklaces, armlets, bangles, girdle and anklets. Her firm, rounded and auspiciously exaggerated and close set breasts, pressing each other reflect the poetic ideal. With her outsize breasts and wide hips she appears appealing. Her bare breasted figure clad in diaphanous antariya which reveals her attractive form, appearing almost nude has high a sensual charm. Her curvaceous form is as attractive as her features. The diaphanous lower garment does not obstruct the perception of her attractive form. Generally she is seen standing in tribhanga, the posture which accentuates her curves, and the

end of her lower garment is seen on her left thigh. The ornaments, necklaces and girdle resting on her breasts and hips contrasting the soft and smooth convexities of her limbs enhance the beauty of her ripe femininity. Her drapery often includes līlavāsa dupattā, an accessory for captivating the beholder's heart. The manner in which she is seen holding the end of her dupattā in lolahasta is very artistic. Sometimes the accessories include lilākamala<sup>1</sup>, the full blown lotus flower. This typical Ellora figure appears as a goddess, apsara or dwārapālikā at every nook and corner. For the sculptors these goddesses, apsaras and dwārapālikās were women first and the supra terrestrial beings afterwards and hence they carved them all equally beautiful and equally ornamented. Except the crown, which is seen in some of the independent

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1. Sivaramamurti, C., Sanskrit Literature and Art, p.23.

figures of goddesses, the ornaments and drapery do not show any discrimination between the goddesses, apsarās and dwārapālikās. The same is true in case of the female figures of Ajanta. In the narrative paintings we often find that the maids are ornamented equally as the queens. Their hairstyles are also equally complicated. The bhramarakas appear on the forehead of queens as well as of maids. The drapery, too, does not show any differentiation. Often the queens and maids too, are seen clad in striped āntariya. The maids are frequently as beautiful as the queens and the complexion is not the criterion of beauty for the Ajanta artists. The figures with dark complexions are not less beautiful than those having fair complexions.

This shows that the artists and sculptors of these places had genuine interest in female figures and it is out of this love that we find the beautiful female figures carved everywhere. Originally

secular, the art was harnessed for religious purposes. The way female figures are painted at Ajanta, it appears to be the work of skilled professional guild artists and not of the amateur monk artists. The deep understanding with which female figures are painted appears to be impossible for the Buddhist monks.<sup>1</sup> The lush and sensual females appearing in the sculptures and paintings have high tactual and visual appeal and as pointed out by Herbert Read, when this is achieved the sculpture or the painting has the highest aesthetic value.<sup>2</sup> The comely female figures appear to be throbbing with life and stand up to the highest aesthetic test of tactual appeal.<sup>3</sup>

The naturalism in the painting of the female figures

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1. Khandalawala, K., Indica, 95-6, Also Rawson, p. Cultural History of India, p.200.
2. Read, H., Art of Sculpture, p.70.
3. Rawson, P., Indian Art, p.29.

at Ajanta is striking. The facial expressions, gestures of hands and stances are extremely natural. The keen observation, unfailing memory, brilliant visualization and command over brush-work have enabled the artists of Ajanta to paint female figures in utmost natural poses. These full bodied charming damsels appear to be so real that "at the dead of night", writes Dorothy Larcher, 'One could hear the soft clashing of anklets, and that, in the silence, glances which flash from those long eyes might even break into whispering'.<sup>1</sup>

The well developed curvaceous figures with pleasing plumpness possess all feminine charms. Their refined features reflecting the poetic and canonic ideals and dreamy, drowsy half closed eyes lend them extra sensual charm. A very apt remark about the glances cast through the semi closed eyes is found in the Gathasaptasati. According to the poet such

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1. Herringham (Ed), Ajanta Frescoes, p.20.

glances are unbearable even for Kamadeva.<sup>1</sup>

The grace which the artists of Ajanta have bestowed upon the female figures is extraordinary. The supple female figures often in tribhanga, revealing the alluring contours, though often exaggerated to make them more beautiful, speak of the sensitivity of the Ajanta artists towards the beauty of female form as well as its distinctive expression.

Although the Ajanta artists were perfect in depicting all the facets of feminine charm, their extra ordinary skill can be seen in painting of the palms and fingers. The palms of these beauties open like flowers and the fingers appear like petals. The decorative treatment given to the female figures culminates in the drawing of palms and their expressive gestures. In portraying

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1. निद्रात्सपद्घुर्णशीलतिर्यञ्चलर्धतारकालोकाः  
कामस्यपि दुर्विणहा दृष्टिनियातः शशिमुखाः

Sloka 148, Gathasaptasati, Ed. Joglekar, S.A.  
p.109.

various emotional moods the Ajanta artists have always excelled. In many of the Jatakas we come across masterly depiction of emotions. The subtle shades of various emotions not only infuse life in these figures but lend them extra charm.

Though the majority of the female figures appearing on the walls of Ajanta caves are elegantly drawn, there are also some examples of poorly drawn figures. Anatomically imbalanced drawings are not rare. The figure of Irandati on the swing in the Vidhurapandita Jataka of cave No.2 is an example of anatomically incorrect representation. Her hips are highly exaggerated and the tapering legs are disproportionately thin. Often in Ajanta paintings one finds that in the drawings of female figures the portion above the waist is comparatively more carefully drawn. The face, neck, breasts and the waist are delineated with greater care than the legs. The thighs and legs drawn to resemble the plantain stalk are sometimes too thin to bear

the body weight.<sup>1</sup> The flaws like these are however, minor and they do not affect the normal level of beauty of the figures significantly.

The Vishnudharmottara says that a painting should have appeal for all. "The Master praises the rekhas (delineation and articulation of form), the connoisseurs praise the display of light and shade, women like display of ornaments, to the rest of public richness of colour appeals".<sup>2</sup>

The firm expressive line of Ajanta artists defining lyrically the convexities of the beauty of female form has been admired by art connoisseurs.<sup>3</sup> The sure, sweeping and masterly brush-line of Ajanta has no parallel in the world art. The modulating line, sensitive to differential

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1. Aall, I., Ajanta Murals, (Ed) Ghosh, A., p.46.

2. Kramrisch, S., (Ed.), p.6.

3. Griffith, Herringham, Solomon, et al.

emphasis on the contours of female body moves freely with elegant ease. The command with which the line work of Ajanta artists defines the palms, fingers and toes of female figures is simply amazing. Even to copy these figures is extremely difficult.

Though directional light and cast shadows are absent in Ajanta paintings, the female figures except those in the very early compositions are not in the so called flat style. The plasticity of form is achieved by adding shading and highlights to the figures. The highlights appearing on eyes, eyelids, nosetips, lips and the convexities of limbs not only enhance the rounded plasticity of the curvaceous female figures but make them alive and desirable. Highlights also appear on the ornaments making them more realistic. The six limbs described by Yasodhara in his commentary on the kama sutra of Vatsyayana are well reflected

in the drawings of female figures of Ajanta.<sup>1</sup>  
The abundance of ornaments as stated in the  
Vishnudharmottara has definite appeal for  
women. The artists of Ajanta have not only  
liberally adorned their female figures with  
various ornaments but also with beautifully  
decorated hairstyles. The female figures of  
Ajanta have appeal for the connoisseurs as  
well as the commoners.

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1. रूपमेदाः प्रमाणानि भाव-लावप्ययोजनम् ।  
सादृश्यं वर्णिकायं इति चित्रं षडंगम् ॥

Vatsyayana; Kama sutram (Ed) Sastri, G.D.,  
p.30.