

## **“Yakshi from Didarganj” A Symbol of Beauty and Perfection in Ancient Indian Sculpture**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Sculpture in India is one of the media for story-telling and its theme is overwhelmingly religious. The densely populated land teems in the temples and shrines, and the buildings are encrusted with sculptural works, which form a vast picture book of popular religious tales. Elie Faure eloquently described the Indian temples and the sculptural style that derived from the tropical south, in the book “Historic de l’ Art” “Everything may swell into a figure-the capitals, the pediments, the columns, the upper stages of the pyramids, the steps, the balustrades, the banisters of stairways, formidable groups rise and fall-rearing horses, warriors, human beings in clusters like, grapes, eruptions of bodies piled one over the other, trunks and branches that are alive, crowds sculptured by a single movement as if sporting from one matrix.....”

It becomes obvious to know something about the gods for whom the temples were erected, for divinities are always extensions of men’s hopes and fears. These hopes and fears are not eternal. They change in degree, if not in essence, for non-religious reasons, economic growth, political ambition, technological development, war and cultural aggression all these kill off old gods, create new ones and above all influence the visible expressions of representation in stone and paint. It is thus the historical environment that partly accounts for the immense diversity of Indian art.

Ancient Indian art was always close to life, reflecting and using the forms of nature and man. In the early Buddhist sanctuaries everyday life was always displayed in the sculptural decoration in one way or the other. It is necessary, however, to bear in mind that since the earliest phase of Indian art the human form has gained much importance being a part and parcel of all the succeeding ages till date. In the compositions of Bharhut -Sanchi the human figure became the focus of attraction, and all other forms were subordinated to it, being used mainly to give it relief and emphasize its importance. With the growing importance of human figure, nature receded into the background, but in so doing it left behind its unending and undulating rhythm in the human form. The human figure, termed as the image, is hence, the pivot of Indian sculpture and this, as the conscious medium of the

divine concept; experiences certain distinct transformations in respect of modeling. The preference of the youthful form has always been recognized in the sculptural art. Since the urge of life movement is the most vital in youth, it is always the youthful form that the artist selected for representation of which yakshi of Didarganj is one of the best examples. Nothing was beyond the skill of these artists, neither battle-array nor the vivid delineation of episodes. They could unite a tender naturalism with idealism as never before. And in the doctrine of transmigration, they had discovered a unity of creation which inspired them to weave animals, trees and men and women into the harmony of collective life.

I want to display before the readers the study of yakshi of Didarganj other yakshi figures whose shoulders loaded with broad chains, arms and legs covered with metal rings, and the body encircled with richly linked girdles which obviously prevented Indian sculpture from producing an anatomically correct form, yet the main anatomical facts are remarkably well treated, especially the difficult movement of the hips. In fact it is very surprising that in yakshi of Didarganj we find such a high degree of technical achievement and careful study of anatomy on the whole. The swelling roundedness of form is denoted by the constructing tightness of the belt and by the contrast of the straight and angular tubular limbs with swelling convexities of bust and pelvis. In the frankness of the form it is a perfect illustration of the union of the spiritual and sensual metaphor that runs like a thread through all religious art in ancient India. These forms of yakshis represent the beliefs of the common man could easily identify himself with such culture and life-style. There is an all pervading serenity or cheerfulness and this lady displays her charm with frank innocence. Voluptuousness and passion is as important as grace and spiritual charm. Stylistically this form of yakshi is distinguished on certain grounds - the colossal size, massively built body with emphasis on muscular strength, free-standing, carved in rounds, the drapery consisting of a heavy dhoti hanging below up to the ankles fastened with a heavy girdle, and the ornaments consisting of heavy ear-rings, long necklaces, a flat necklace, armlets etc. as regards its position in the evolution of Indian art the most natural suffusion is that it was executed during the Mauryan period. It was just the time when stone was being used for architecture and sculpture under the direction of the Mauryan emperors Chandar Gupta and Ashoka.

Schlumberger (1996), the head of the French archaeological mission in Afghanistan from 1945 to 1964, in an article "the Didarganj Chauri Bearer-a view point" translated by Madam Schlumberger, made a comparison on two styles of maiden-hair, one accurately dated and well known in vogue among the ladies in Rome, the other in vogue among the ladies in India. The most striking feature of both is the frontal roll or loop of hair. One can see that the three main elements of the Roman head-dress, the loop, the plait and the bun, also found in the Indian head-dress. To the yakshi of Didarganj is added a kind of diadem of pearls just above the loop and apparently fastened to the plait at the crown of the head by a clasp or a hairpin visible. Karl Khandavala in his research article (1989) "The Didarganj chauri-bearer another view point" considered the fact that the usually accepted date for the Didarganj Chauri-bearer is the third century B.C, during the rule of the Mauryas. According to him the main stress on an early first century A.D dating rests on a method of dressing the hair namely with a "roll" of hair on the forehead. The "roll" is not an ornament though it has been mistaken as such, the method of dressing the hair. The "roll" on the forehead seen in the Didarganj Chauri-bearer became, a very common coiffure of the Kushan period female figures where often strands of hair on the "roll" are clearly noticeable though thinly engraved thereon. He concluded with the fact that we never have yet seen a single Kushan female figure which can sculpturally be compared to the Didarganj chauri-bearer either in size, material

and polish, modeling, nuances, surfaces, material and polish can or with the distinctive character of the modeling nuances, and surfaces of the Didarganj figure. Such modeling, material and polish can only be seen in the Asokan capitals to take the best examples for comparison. The Didarganj figure, has all the features of Asokan sculpture namely size, material (chunar sandstone), high mirror-like polish, modeling surfaces, majesty and technique.

Thus the Didarganj is very distant and a best example of beauty and perfection from any other known large size yakshi figures of the successive times. If compared to other yakshi figures this yakshi from Didarganj exhibits a greater sense of modeling including front and back both, with a well balanced production. It stands out as the most outstanding creation in the whole series. The full and rounded features, including the prominent breasts, the narrow waist, the broad hips gradually tapering down to the shapely legs, are all kept with the compactness of the whole and within a fluid linear contour that one may recognize in the rendering of the front, the back and the sides. The plastic treatment of the whole gives a dynamic character and articulation to the entire form, further emphasized by the easy and slight stoop and forward movement of the upper part of the body and by a delicate bend of the right-knee joint. No larger is there any sign of clash between rounded masses and flat surface; the masses converge into on another in a free and fluid linear movement, and seen from whatever angle, the composition is one of sweeping curves that accentuate and give relief to the volumes and masses. In the sensitive rendering of the warm and lively flesh, in the treatment of the hair, of the drapery and of the ornaments, and lastly in the graceful stance we have here a female pattern, urban and sophisticated and classical in its ides and contents. From the static weight three-dimension extensiveness, and though heavy and solid, a subtle and sensitive rendering and a dynamic movement may be found to characterize the entire composition. With its fully rounded form and fluid lines, in the lively and sensitive modeling of the limbs and the almost sensuous touch of the soft, warm flesh, it would not be an exaggeration if compared with the dainty yakshi forms of the Mathura rails. In the rendering of these colossal statues, representatives of the old plastic diction of weight and volume, one may recognize the extension of two-dimensional treatment to three-dimensional depth, as evident in the contemporary movement of Madhyadesa.

There can be no other sculpture than the Didarganj chauri bearer to illustrate effectively the description by kalidasa-slim, youthful, with fine teeth and lips (red) like ripe bimba fruit, attenuated in the waist, with eyes like those of the frightened doe and deep navel, slow of gait by the weight of the hips and slightly bent by her (full) breasts. She is supposed to be the first and the best in the creation of the feminine by the creator. Such a figure seems to be attracting others through her gestures and expressions, art of dressing her hair, having and keeping teeth beautiful, expressing her deep feelings through her eye movements. In Kumar Sambhava Kalidasa has beautifully described the full breasts, which adds to be beauty of a woman. There he says, “pair of fair breasts of the lotus-eyed one, with dark nipple in the center, so developed rubbing against each other that even a lotus fibre could not go between them, is seen effectively in most yakshi sculptures but not the least in yakshi from Didarganj. Kalidasa wonders whether the marvelous beauty of the long blue eyes of the beautiful eyes of the beautiful woman with furtive glance, was taken from the eyes of the fawns or whether it is this beautiful human eye which the animals got. Kalidasa is the most venerated of all our poets. This sensitiveness has always endeared him to poets and readers alike. He is a poet to inspire, his knowledge



of fine arts being of the highest order. In his own time and later, all over the land his verses were on the lips of every devotee of art. Painters and sculptors loved to ponder over his vivid descriptions. Without any effort they found expression in his works as they chiseled the stone or painted the wall.

Yakshi from Didarganj is artistically the best of the various other round sculptures through all the ages till date. Ray observes "Those life size plastically round statues belong to different aspects and phases of Indian art. they are all Indian in form and appearance, in style and treatment, and they have hardly any relation only with the court art of the Mauryas," Thus, yakshi of Didarganj is supposed to be a masterpiece of Indian art. it would be difficult to find in any country such an example of ancient life size sculpture superior or even equal to this beautiful work of art, which successfully combines realistic modeling with idealistic dignity, and is finished in every detail with perfect accuracy.

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