

A Comparative Study of Stylistics Features of Didarganjyakshi and Bhutesaryaksis in Indian art

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ABSTRACT

The study is based on the most important sculptures in ancient Indian history as those of yakshis in Mauryan and Mathura period. These are the two best known sculptures which display the skill of ancient sculptors in representing figures with a powerful presence and advancement in their treatment. I have chosen the first school of Indian sculpture which began with the Mauryas and then the masterpieces of the Kushans treating the body as the most disciplined; for the elegant bodies seem to pulsate with the glow of vital energy. The heavy physicality of Didarganj Yakshis soon partly realized by the relaxation of the flesh and an open-eyed smiling countenance. The Bhutesaryakshis on the other hand to attain full soft roundness with an air of complete ease of serenity and sensitivity. The full round breasts and full heavy hips of these female figures are the conveyors of idea of fertility suggesting warm and living flesh. But there are certain stylistic differences in the above-mentioned sculptural forms due to the role of various rulers and patrons in various dynasties like Sunga, Satavahanas, Kushans etc. It is probable that economic condition and social institutions were very important in bringing such stylistic changes from one particular period to another rather than geographical positions. Certain motifs like female headdresses, some ornaments like necklaces, show differences between the Mauryan and Kushan sculptures. Apart from this their handling of body postures with relatively much freer movement of varying degrees is noteworthy. All these motives, based on magic, superstitions, religious rituals and mythology, were pooled together by the dynamic and growing societies of India and superb height of workmanship and design were achieved, as is evident from the earliest sculpture of the Mauryans to the sculpture of Kushans. Most interesting fact is that how the gap between Maurya's 1st century B.C- 2nd century B.C and the Kushans 1st century A.D. 2nd century A.D. is justified and the figures acclaim same kind of solidity and sensitivity in the history of Indian art till date.

Key Words : Yakshi, Mauryas, Kushans, Fertility

INTRODUCTION

The visual art of early period of ancient India has very little survived since there has been a wide gap and nobody can be certain when Indus valley art began. Historically Indian art begins with the figurative terracotta and ceramic wares. In extension to this the art evidenced number of miniature reliefs, either hand modelled or pressed in mould displaying erotic and gorgeous girls and fantastic animals. The rise of new religious sects like Buddhism and later Jainism proved new status of Indian art and architecture. The architecture comprised of stupas,

chaitya halls and viharas and became the most important monuments of ancient India. In the decoration of these major religious monuments we find the best specimens of Indian art. At a number of places like Bharhut, Sanchi, Amravati, Mathura there are decorative and figural reliefs and these were evolved to ornament the various Buddhist stupas and their feelings and torii gateways. At first the style was in low relief and flat, often angular, and primitive but in the growing time these figures became bold, heavy, and sensual. The concept of yakshas and yakshis thus originated for the decoration of railings of all Buddhist stupas, chaityas and viharas. A dynastic guide

of sculptors grew up, and were able to carve colossal polished stone into voluptuous figures of yaksha and yakshi. The best-known example is the Didarganj Yakshi and Bhutesar Yakshi to be discussed and compared on stylistic ground in the study undertaken by me. I still remember when I was awe-inspired to the master standing figure of the Didarganj Yakshi, a statue which seems to be carved directly out of rock, stepping out from the imagination of primitive folk, the weight of the torso and the huge pads of her buttocks reminding us of the heavy gait of a mother who is a symbol of fertility.

Already in one leap, we then seem to jump from basic rhythm of early sculpture to the grace of Buddhist art sculpture to the grace of Buddhist art which flourished in Sunga period, Sanchi and Bharhut. Similarly, then go through the chronology of the Kushan period, the "golden age of Mathura school of sculpture, remembering the full-size figures of Bhutesar Yakshis displaying rhythm, patterns of plastic expression with a feeling of awe and reverence.

I am certain, that this fresh approach will yield results, excite strange sensations, and enrich the readers with a knowledge of the world which surrounds us and realize the significance of basic truth about ancient Indian sculpture.

METHODOLOGY

The literature review was the only way to undertake such a research since this is a historical research as adopted by me. To go through the existing literature in order to acquaint myself was the method to collect the data and increase my knowledge in my area of interest. The literature review has been an integral part of the entire research process to make a valuable contribution at every step. It helped me to understand the roots of my study, clarify my ideas and develop my methodology at a large scale. Since an important responsibility in research is to compare our findings with those of others it is here that the literature review plays an extremely important role. Reviewing literature of course has been time consuming, frustrating but the higher the academic level of the research, the more important it becomes to thoroughly integrate the findings with previous and existing literature. Literature review helped me to understand the subject area better and to conceptualize the research problem clearly and precisely. It also helped me to understand the relationship between the research problem and the body of available knowledge in the area.

Literature review ensured me to read widely around the subject area to conduct my research study. First, I reviewed the literature in a broad area of interest and then gradually limited down to my particular area or subject. The two sources helped me extensively in this i.e. the books and journals. After identifying several books, articles as useful, the next it was to start reading them extensively to pull together themes and issues which are associated with the area. The information obtained from different books and journals now needed to be sorted under the main theme, highlighting agreement, and disagreements among the other authors and identifying the leftover questions and gaps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical findings and archaeological excavations:

Yakshi of Didarganj also known as Chauri bearer or a fly whisk holder is a highly polished creation by the great Ashoka as dated to 2nd century B.C. Some historians and archaeologists take it to the 3rd century B.C, while others argue that according to the basis of its ornamentation and treatment it belongs to the second century B.C and thus broadly speaking it is the pride of Mauryan period. It is quite difficult to put it in a definite time period because according to the discoveries no other artefact has been found from the same site or location. According to a Patna museum publication, the then commissioner of Patna EHS Walsh recorded in a letter that a simple person by the name of Gulam Rasool saw something big huge block of stone sticking to the banks of river Ganga near Didarganj. When the nearby other people planned to dig out the stone, at that very moment the statue was discovered. It is also believed that for years this stone had been sticking out of the muddy banks of the Ganga near Didarganj and was used as a washing board, people found something different, they eventually uprooted the stone which turned out to be the statue of a woman, buried, face down and thus was discovered the whisk bearer or Chauri bearer of Didarganj. Thus, here lies the confusion which is the most tragic point in the history of India as always. There are just oral narratives and no one can guarantee any authentic certainty. This kind of situation comes throughout the Indian art history and it becomes quite difficult and frustrating for the researcher's students report writers to believe and what not to believe. In most of the cases people usually continue to mix mythology with history. The historical method engages itself with interpreting certain facts and figures

trying to build a narration in linking all the available facts and evidences but certain loopholes always exist. Mythology as compared needs no facts or evidences since it is a faith or belief so can travel for millennia.

History needs to record evidence to preserve the remains of the past and believing in those evidences and then to interrogate in the light of new instruments of investigation. Mythology is above all quiet free form such problems. It rests on belief which seems to be eternal truths which existed and needs no questioning. Thus, literature and such historical information have a direct or indirect bearing on the research topics. These aspects are thus considered as a basis for developing my research topic. Another concern of the research paper is the Bhutesar Yakshis preserved in Indian museum Kolkata, also referred to as the Imperial museum at Calcutta in British Indian era texts is the largest and oldest museum in India and has a rare collection of antiques, paintings, sculptures, medallions etc. Out of these are objects the Bhutesaryaksis are noteworthy. These Bhutesar Yakshis are a series of yakshi reliefs on railing, dating to the second century B.C during the time of Kushan empire. The reliefs were found in the Bhutesar mound around the remains stupa, near Mathura and thus later preserved in Indian museum Calcutta. Yakshis are the mystical beings of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain mythology. They are depicted often as beautiful and voluptuous with fleshy cheeks, wide hips, narrow waists, broad shoulders, knotted hair and exaggerated spherical breasts. These yakshis are seen standing above crouching figures and are praised for their delicacy of their rendering, the absence of heaviness, despite being plumpy and fleshy, and there smiling and play full countenance. Such features make them as noteworthy examples of Indian art. The yakshis were as discovered by Alexander Cunningham in 1881-1882. Sir Alexander Cunningham was a British army engineer with the Bengal engineer group who later took lot of enthusiasm in the history and archaeology of India. In 1861 he was appointed to the newly created position of archaeological surveyor to the government of India and he founded and organized archaeological survey of India. He wrote numerous books and monographs and made extensive collection of artefacts. He also conducted excavations at Sarnath in 1837 along with Colonel F.C. Maisey and made careful drawings of the sculptures. In 1854 he published *Bhilsa topes*, an attempt to establish the history of Buddhism based on architectural evidences. His contribution to the archaeological findings India and

his major achievements identified Tanila, Sangala, Kaushambi, Shravasti, Vishala, Nalanda etc. All such representations invoke beauty with all its perfection of physical form and ornamental and decorative makeup paying homage to the ideal of spiritual realization and symbolism. Serenity, repose, calmness, joy control over the object of senses, perfect knowledge, compassion, and wisdom- these are actually some of the great principles of life and character with which the divine images have been depicted throughout the Indian sculptural art.

Comparative study of Deedarganj Yakshi and Bhutesar Yakshi:

Yakshi of Didarganj is considered as a masterpiece of Indian art. It would be difficult to find such an example of a life size sculpture in any other period in the history of India. The form successfully combines realistic modelling with idealistic dignity in all the possible details and accuracy. Mr. Jayaswal has assigned it to the modern period though professor Sarasvati considered it to be earlier. The careful treatment of jewelry, coiffure, and clothes, show intense preoccupation with the worldly life of the people in that era. The diaphanous drapery is so delicately treated with incisions which heighten the sensualist level and appearance such kind of figure holds the characteristic of north western religion the so-called baroque ladies. This type of figure of yakshis in India have also been named as baroque by the archaeologist because of their extremely elaborate hairstyles and ornamental decorations. But their flat buttocked shape and emphasis on female sexual characteristics lead us inevitably to believe that they are goddesses of fecundity, fertility named as mother goddess and yakshi. And aspect of such figure is quite true that the statues represented an indigenous folk tradition as an against the official art of Ashoka. And at times this seems to be convincing in view of the treatment of the sculpture as regards their technique style and aesthetic expression. Yakshi from Didarganj is known for its smooth rounded and naturalistic features plastically integrated and articulated into a complete whole and inspired by the fluid linearism of the mature classical tradition. It represents practically an extreme plastic conception while other figures of same time indicate different degree of expression. A re-study of this sculpture on these considerations is quite essential in order to ascertain the chronological and stylistic position.

Yakshi of Didarganj (Fig. 1) stand out as the most outstanding creation in the whole series of statue of yaksha

and yakshi. Her massive body is fully modelled in the round, even the side and the back not exempted from this detailed approach. The full and rounded features including the prominent breast, 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 which one recognizes in the rendering of the front and back and the side. This rendering gives a dynamic character and articulation to the entire form which is further emphasized by the easy and slight stoop and forward movement of the upper part of the body and by a delicate bend on the right knee joint. No larger is there any sign of clash between the rounded masses and flat surface; the masses converge into one another in a free linear movement, and seen from whatever angle, the composition is one of sweeping curves that accentuate and give relief to the volume and masses. In the sensitive rendering of the worm and lively flesh, in the treatment of the hair of the drapery and of the ornament and also in the graceful stance we witness here a female pattern, urban and sophisticated and classical in its idea and content. From the static weight of congested flesh, the form has freed itself two three-dimensional extensiveness and though heavy and solid, subtle, and sensitive rendering and a dynamic movement may be found to characterize the entire composition. With its fully rounded form and fluid line in the lively and sensitive modelling of the limbs and the almost sensual touch of the soft, warm flesh it would not be an exaggeration if compared with the beautiful and dainty yakshi figure in the Kushan period on the Mathura rails at Bhutesar. In the rendering of these colossal statues no doubt representatives of the old plastic diction of weight and volume, one recognizes the extension of two-dimensional treatment to three-dimensional depth altogether.

The art of Mathura school advanced rapidly dated 2nd century A.D. both in spirit and technique in its true sense. The sculpture was no longer static but seemed to emerge from the frame as though to meet the spectator. The Kushan art continues further the same indigenous tradition of folk inspiration of the joy arising from the life of the senses and displaying open air feminine sports and pastime but their emphasis is increasingly human especially the urban females. Mathura appears as a great centre of artistic creative activity. This blossoming reveals nearly all the traditional Hindu deities and the evidence of the Jain and Buddhist traditions which appear to be already deeply rooted. The outstanding sculpture of this

great age of the Mathura school is again the form of shalabhanjika or so called yakshi figure represented with soft living flesh every limb been carved in sensitive line. Harmonious blend of physical form with inner feeling expressing natural happiness was a novel innovation of the art of this age. Not laden with heavy or numerous ornaments, the figure is not only slim straight and static but relaxed. They display a certain grace movement and the youth full body symbolizing a great flow of energy. The vigor and vitality are toned down and substituted with delicate treatment and linear rhythm. Feminine charm was exhibited probably for the first time with a different aim. While earlier the woman in sculptural art was shown as a deity, devotee, or domestic person the Mathura artists infused grace, delicacy, rhythm and inviting gesture in these figures.

There can be no other sculpture then the yakshi of Didarganj (Plate 1) to illustrate effectively the description of Kalidas in his verses- slim, youthful with fine teeth

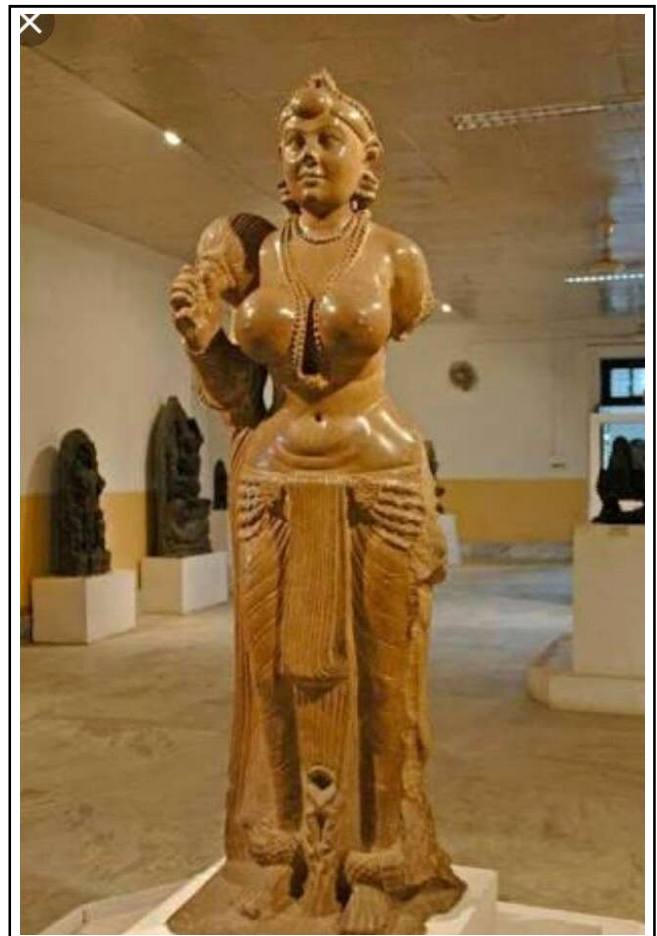


Plate 1 :

and lips (red) like ripe bimba fruit, attenuated waist eyes like those of the frightened doe and deep navel, slow of gait by the weight of the hips slightly bent by the weight of her (full) swollen breasts. She is supposed to be the first and the best in the creation of feminine beauty in the world. Kalidas wonders whether the marvelous beauty of the long blue eyes of the beautiful woman with furtive glances was taken from that of the eyes of the fauns or whether it is from the beautiful human eyes the animal got. She is depicted in diaphanous garment on the lower body, so thin as to reveal nudity and proportion and to make her very attractive sexually appealing. The upper part of the body is nude to acknowledge her as a symbol of fertility like the mother goddess figure of previous time in Indus valley civilization. The pleats projecting between the legs in incised line add charm to her beauty and dress. The dhoti tied around the waist by beautiful girdle is quite attractive. This broad girdle makes her more urban and sophisticated. The most striking feature is the frontal rope or loop of hair on the forehead. This peculiar headdress includes three parts: the frontal loop, a plait joining that loop to the occiput, and a bun at the nape of the neck. There is also added a kind of diadem of pearls placed just above the loop and apparently fastened to the plait at the crown of the head by a clasp or a hair pin visible. Thus, we can realize the beauty as endowed by Indian sculptor and their liking for heavy and superfluous jewelry and intricate ornaments, or taste illustrated also by the necklace, bracelet, earring, and the girdle. The long necklace falling between the breasts is another attractive feature of the statue, the falling necklace further enhances the beauty of the full grown and swollen bare breasts and the heavy anklets make the legs more steady and proportionate and beautiful. These heavy anklets create a balance with the heavy thighs under the transparent dhoti and the thighs and legs seem to be very sensuous and appealing. On account of its size, polish, modelling, majesty, and technique. It is one of the most beautiful and perfect creation of Mauryan sculptors till date.

The Bhutesar Yakshion the other hand are another sensuous and lively creations in Indian history dated to 2nd century A.D. all these yakshi are in different poses and attitudes usually in tribhanga pose or 's' curves when there is the twist or bend in the body at the neck waist and hips. One of the yakshi is holding grapes or little mango fruit in her right hand and a jar in her left hand (Plate 2). She seems to be quite erotic with a bend at the hip. The swollen breasts, thin waist and broad hips

enhance her graceful movement and pose. Another reaction is shown after the bath wearing clothes (Plate 3). The perfect anatomy, chiseled curves and contours and her rhythmic action impart subtle grace and charm to the young female. Out of this series next yakshi she is looking into the mirror (Plate 4) with her head tilted to the left side in the act of adjusting of pendant of her ear. The body seems to be relaxed on one leg while the other straight, again ornamented with heavy jewelry due to which the heavy breasts, thin waist and broad hips seem to be more appealing. Yet another yakshi is holding a cage (Plate 5) in her right hand while her left hand resting on the hip. The head is tilted elegantly on the left side and she is conversing with the parrot in the cage recording the love of her lover. Her heavy thighs and long legs end up in heavy anklet which make the leg appear slimmer and sensuous. Yakshi putting on necklace (Plate 6) is another beautiful sculpture of these Bhutesar Yaksis. Her right hand is on the necklace while the other holds the drapery tied around the hip. The figure holds a little smile on her face which gives her a pleasing look. The necklace worn by her is unique and attractive. Yakshi holding



Plate 2 :



Plate 3 :

grapes (Plate 6) is also in tribhanga pose holding a bunch of grapes in her left hand with her right hand on her attenuated hip. She also bears this same smile as the other Bhutesar Yakshis with usual ornaments. All these Bhutesar Yakshi bears a striking resemblance to each other and are stylistically different from yakshi of Didarganj in the style, attitude, poses, posture, rhythm, grace, ornaments, draperies all together. All Bhutesar Yakshis have been depicted quite nude in most of the cases upper part is bare revealing the breasts while in (Plate 7) we can see a diaphanous garment covering the right shoulder and crossing the left hip. The drapery is so transparent that the breasts seems to be bare but a close study witnesses a cloth on the upper part. The lower part of these yakshis is nude except for a broad girdle around the lower hip covering the lower abdomen while leaving the rest of the legs bare ending up in heavy anklet standing on a dwarf. A cloth belt is tied around the waist with a loop hanging and the end of the drapery flowing making a comparison with the skin of these female which is so smooth and soft and subtle as ensured by the artists.

On basis of hairstyles an ornament and jewellery

there can be noticed certain differences between the Didarganjand Bhutesar Yakshis. The Mathura yakshi are usually depicted with long hair tied in a special style without any special kind of head dresses as such. We find the depiction of ‘chatulatilaka’ adorning their heads. It consists of beautiful circular ornament suspended by a gold chain centrally near the parting of the hair (Plate 2, 5). The peculiar kinds of ear ornaments are also witnessed on these mathurayakshis. Kundala is the common term for the ear ornament. Karnapura is also seen on these females for filling the lobe of the ear circular layers. Some figures are adorned with pearl tassels hanging up till the shoulders and beautiful jhumkas (Plate 2, 7). Amongst the neck ornaments there are many attractive phalakhara, phalakavalaya, phalakhara is composed of a number of strands of gold or other gem beads with flat rectangular slabs at intervals which may be 3 or 5 or 7 in number. In Kushan sculptures the necklet most favoured is ekavali unlike that of long dangling necklace of yakshi at Didarganj. Ekavali is a simple short necklace composed of pearls with a central gem in some of them. Bhutesar Yakshis are adorned with small necklets. Some of the



Plate 4 :



Plate 5 :



Plate 6 :



Plate 7 :

yakshis have been represented with elaborately carved necklets studded with gems and interesting beads (Plate 5, 6). There are also different types of bracelets made of gold copper and ivory and the yakshis have been shown wearing number of bangles on wrists. The plain and beaded bangles were in much use as worn by Bhutesar Yakshis also depicting multiple bangles up till the elbows in the form of simple rings (Plate 5, 6, 7). Rasana or mekhala are infinite in variety in all these females. These girdles have always used to give a sensuous appeal to the thin waist and broad hips tied on the lower abdomen. They are always broad tied below the navel point made of multiple rows of circular coins beaded together and these girdles are almost the same on all yakshis (Plate 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The anklets worn by these yakshis is also alike being quite simple and very broad. This anklet is usually broad to give a slender look to the heavy thighs and long legs. These anklets are plain and devoid of any elaborate designs (Plate 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).

Conclusion:

To conclude it can rightly be said that the Mathura Yakshi and Didarganj both appear as icons of femininity in Indian art, with their laden of new symbolic and artistic values. Several layers and levels of meaning begin to occur around these sensual females with passage of time. On stylistic grounds and ornamentation certain differences and changes can be noticed but the underlying meaning of these yakshis has remained the same throughout. An emphasis on the monumental, earthly, and primitive quality is in abundance in all such females. They have been the symbols of growth, bounty, plentitude, integrally linked with the vegetal motifs of flowering and reproduction. The woman’s body became analogous with nature and represented with unparalleled frankness and transparency”. The exaggerated breast of these yakshis

described as” heavy with milk” and” drooping with, the weigh of beauty” explains more the science of fertility and maternity. These life size figure engage the viewers on many counts: style of their modelling, the voluptuous nude anatomy, ample hips, drooping breasts. There grace and dignified charm make them exquisite example of feminine attractiveness and whoever they were, the certainly seemed other religious in meaning or spiritual in their treatment. As a result, it can be admitted that they were the most beautiful women which depicts that ancient Indian sculptor was obviously a thorough master of drawing, all in making all the details sure and clear, and thus used his knowledge to create extraordinary beauties in Indian art. The wealth and beauty of these compositions pay a tribute to the skill and ability of ancient Indian sculptor.

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