



WOMEN AND DEITIES
Women through the ages
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Foundation Day



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Introduction

"India is, the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only."

Mark Twain

India is a sculptural nation and the stories in stone told by the *shilpins* or sculptors from ancient to contemporary times dot the nation. It's sculptural history extends from the free standing sculptures jewel like sculptures from the Indus Valley i.e. the dancing girl to the larger than life commemorative sculptures of the gods to political icons of the land. It stretches from the deity in the sanctum sanctorum to the external facades of temples to either embellish or communicate to the laity, Indian sculptures are not only guardians of temples but virtual storytellers of their times.

The decision to tell the story of India's cultural history naturally fell on the sacred figure of 108. This figure emerges from the Upanishadic tradition, of Indian Philosophy which in turn is embedded in the Chandogya Brahmana of the Sama Vedic tradition of the Indian Vedic tradition. 108 has a special significance in India's spiritual trajectory. In Indian thought it was considered a sacred number as much of Indian philosophy is preoccupied with sacred geometry. 108 is therefore a recurring number of great significance throughout ancient India. 108 plus one is the number of seeds or beads in the sacred *rudraksha mala*. This is meant to represent the 108 Upanishads. Some say this number signifies the coming together of the *jiva* or being and the *paramatma* or supreme power. The

Sri Yantra, which is an interlinking of nine triangles and symbolises masculine and feminine energies and in turn the universe's creative energies, encompasses 108 points. When the Goddess Sati burned herself to ashes in anger at her father's insult to her husband, Lord Shiva, the Destroyer carried her body over the earth. Where the parts of the goddess' body fell to earth they are said to have created 108 *shakti peethas* or places of great spiritual potency. These 108 destinations still house shrines and are considered holy pilgrimage destinations.

When it comes to sacred names of the gods and goddesses, many of them such as Lord Shiva and the Goddess Ganga have a 108 sacred appellations. It is said that those who chant the 108 names of Lord Shiva will be bestowed with blessings. 108 is also considered a significant number in other Eastern philosophies such as Jainism and Buddhist thought, with Tibetan Buddhist *malas* having 108 beads. The number recurs throughout Buddhist stories, as well.

Rupa saubhagyad dhyana bhavo jayate

By a harmonious form a meditative mood is induced.

Vastusutra Upanishad (2.23)

In India, everything, even an aesthetic experience, is layered and nuanced. The advanced aesthetic philosophy stemming from the ancient Indian text the *Natyashastra*¹, popularly attributed to Bharata Muni, went on to colour all the areas of the Indian aesthetic experience, extending to sculpture, as well. Indian aesthetic theory has developed at a point between the first century BCE and fourth century CE, coalescing in the *Natyashastra* which is considered to be the seminal text on Indian aesthetics.

The *Natyashastra* the iconic text on dramaturgy (4th century CE) is not merely a text, its probing and profound views on the performing arts in particular arts has given it an exalted space as a path breaking canon, relevant particularly in the appreciation of traditional Indian arts. The *Natyashastra* is the one of the primary texts which lays down the theory of *rasa* which over time became the basis of the understanding and appreciation of the Indian aesthetic experience.

According to the *Natyashastra*, the aesthetic experience, can be divided into eight primary emotions viz. anger, sorrow, laughter, fear, disgust, heroism, delight and astonishment which bring about the moods or *rasas* of *saundarya* (beauty, erotic), *hasya* (comic), *vibhasta* (disgust), *karuna* (pathos), *bhayanaka* (terrible, odious), *adbhuta* (marvellous), *shanta* (silence), *vira* (heroism) and *raudra* (fury). The ninth *rasa* which was an addition said to be made by philosopher and aesthetician Abhinavagupta (whose commentary on aesthetics is still greatly relevant today) was the *shanta* *rasa* or the *rasa* of quietude or tranquillity is particularly relevant in our reading of Indian sculpture. The very essence or flavour

or *rasa*/juice or flavour of the human experience is said to be contained within these nine moods. The skilled sculptor would be able to move the audience to feel these emotions, through gestures, postures and figure grouping, thus advancing the aesthetic experience. The Indian visual aesthetic is emotionally rich, leading to *ananda* or spiritual bliss. This *ananda* can be further heightened if the *bridaya akasha* or inner core, as per the Chandogya Upanishad, is fused with the *chitta* or creative core. The mind can thus be elevated to a transcendental realm or the *brahman*, the ultimate reality.

As sculptural theory had its roots in the canons defined by the Natyashastra, the ideal sculptures would, in theory, follow the complex theories of spatial relations developed by this master text. In terms of composition, the navel became the central point with corresponding horizontals and verticals. The movements of the major joints and their positions were matched with these points and further with the expressions, developing a whole range of poses that encompassed the seated and the standing. Sculptures, in the Indian canon, were often inspired by dance. The figures seemed to have been captured and stilled as if they had been in motion, performing the appropriate dance poses and gestures, adhering to the rules laid down by the Natyashastra. There is a comprehensive codification of the medians/*sutras* and postures. The postures are further classified as both symmetrical (*bhanga*s) and asymmetrical (*tribhanga*/tribent, *dvibhanga*/doubly-bent and *abhanga*/single bent). The *sthanas* comprising the seated, standing and reclining body poses are also delineated. The dance movements find tremendous expression across temple sculptures along the length and breadth of the country. It seems that ancient Indian aesthetes pursued the ideal of harmony as demonstrated by the concept of *sama* or symmetry.

Bharata's widely accepted *rasa* theory is that the flavour or juice or *rasa* was not a natural occurrence; it was a quality that the human act of creating dramatic art imbued in the cultural product, in this case sculpture. Abhinavagupta held that the experience of *rasa* could be divided into two parts, *rasayate iti rasab* and *paramananda*. The first means that which is relished and the second meant supreme bliss. Thus,

the pinnacle of the sculptural arts would seek to inspire, to excite one's imagination by way of the senses. The two-fold experience would deliver one from the realm of the senses to the realm of imagination, the latter being a world the aesthete has created for himself or herself, realising the ideal.

Often much of the established canon for art and painting could be said to be traced back to the Natyashastra which had set out principles for iconography known as *pratima lakshana*. 'Pratima' translates into 'image' and *pratima lakshana* are the rules that must be adhered to by the *shilpin* in the creation of his art. In the Indian canon, an artisan is known as a *shilpin*, and sculptors fall under this classification.

Each Pratima or image particularly painting is based on the theory of *shadanga* which literally translated into the six limbs of art. each work of traditional art must have in it the six qualities which go. Vatsyayana speaks of the *shadanga* theory in the Kamasutra

Roopabhedah pramanani bhava-lavanya-yojanam |

Sadrishyam varnakabhangam iti chitram shadakam

To put it simply a painter or a sculptor must be fully conversant with *roop-bheda* which means form, *pramanani* or proportion, *bhava* or infusion of emotion, and *lavanya-yojanam* or grace, *sadradyam* or verisimilitude), and *varnika-bhanga* the knowledge of colour scheme.

The Shilpa Shastras lay the foundations of Indian sculptureⁱⁱ. These are a body of ancient Indian Sanskrit texts that lay out the theoretical aspect of image production including architecture and sculpture. The study of images from the iconography to the iconometry is expounded upon in the treatise that is contained within them. Some of these texts are the Rupamanada, the Shilpa Rathna and the Kashyapa Shilpa Shastra. It is important to note that it was the arts that emerged first and the commentaries and

analyses stemmed from them which went on to become canon in the form of the Shastras. A number of the Puranic texts also contain comprehensive commentary on sculpture such as the Matsya Purana and the Vishnu Purana.

The Indian Shilpa Shastras, the canons of which underline the principles of representing the human body, have a specific form of measurement. One form of such measurement is the '*sutra*' and another is '*tala*' derived from a metre of performance. There are five vertical *sutras* which lay down the structure of the proportions and measurements which go into the making of a classical human body. The *brahmastura* represents the force of gravity and is the central axis which runs through the entire body from head to toe.

The *madhyasutra* runs from the crown of the head through the chest and the navel, knees and the inner sides of the feet. The remaining three *sutras* are the *parsvasutra*, which is from the side of the forehead to the centre of the ankle joint, the *bahusutra* which starts from the shoulder and ends on the ground and the *kaksasutra* which runs vertically from the side of the armpits all the way to the fifth toe of the foot. Combining the axis the *sutra* with '*tala*' the unit of time and using different permutations and combinations, the *shilpin*/sculptor could fashion the sculpture into innumerable postures and positions.

The *shilpin* meditates on a *dhyana shloka* (mantras that precisely describe the image to be carved) of the deity he is sculpting while at work so he could better envision that deity in the stone. The *dhyana mantra* that facilitates meditating on the Devi is as follows: "I resort to Mahakali, who hasten faces, ten legs and holds in her hands the sword, disc, mace, arrows, bow, club, spear, missile, human head and conch, who is three-eyed, adorned with ornaments on all her limbs, and luminous like a blue jewel and whom Brahma extolled in order to destroy Madhu and Kaitabha, when Vishnu was in mystic sleep."ⁱⁱⁱ

The story of Indian sculpture can be traced to antiquity to the Indus Valley Civilisation where from terracotta seals to the statuette of the dancing girl sets the tone for the unending tradition of Indian sculpture. From stones to wood, from grass to metal rarely is a medium left untouched by the creative

genius of the traditional *shilpin* to the contemporary artist who fashions out of waste or arte povera to the ephemeral sand sculptures on the expansive beaches of present day Odisha.

Women have always been lavishly sculpted, the gaze varying, from reverence to commodification. Such has been the attitude towards the feminine within the Indian cultural consciousness where the naked steatite figurine of the dancing girl stands with a hand provocatively on her hips, her pelvis with small breasts and an almost boyish figure, with a stylised hairdo to the adornment of only jewels sans clothing. The dancing girl becomes an icon of the prehistoric period.

From the materiality to the thematics of Indian sculpture, again the range is eclectic and enormous. The biodiversity of the land provides a variety of materials for sculptures. From the shifting sands, to granite, from bamboo to the strong teak, from the fragile glass to the sculpted rock cut temple at Ellora. The temples in the history of Indian Art beginning with the first brick temple at Bhitargaon during the Gupta period dating to approximately the fifth century to the organically shaped Lotus Temple in New Delhi completed in 1986, to the monumental ninth century Chidambaram Temple in Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, from the poetry in stone of the Sun Temple in Konarak from around the thirteenth century to the delicate filigree work in the twelfth to fifteenth century Jaina Temples of Ranakpur in Rajasthan, the coastline of India is dotted with temples. And on almost every important mountain peak where a temple sits, individual and commemorative sculptures reflect the cultural diversity and the plural culture of the wonder that is India.

Temples were once known as *devalayas* or *devagrihas*, literally 'the home of the Gods.' Temples were the site of the pinnacles of the Indian sculptural tradition. In their construction, one could draw parallels with the body, which could be considered the body of the god. This is where the marriage of

architecture and sculpture is demonstrated, the temple and the icon are linked, both physically and symbolically. Temple ground plans are often conceived as mandala and patterned along the same. It is planned along the lines of a *Sri Chakra* and the central *bindu* is said to be the focal point. The temple is considered to be an extension of the central deity.

Individual sculptures too have their continuing lineage. From the dancing girl in the Indus Valley to the stunning Parvati, from the Chola period in Tamil Nadu, from the primordial lingams in the deep South of the subcontinent to the supra human gigantic Gomateshwara in Shravanabelagola in Karnataka to the hugely commemorative statues of political leaders which are a legacy from the notion of divine kingship in ancient India, sculpture tells the story of India.

Raison d'être:

For a country wedded to myths and legends where there is not one story but multiple stories to the making of images the landscape of sculpture becomes riveting. Within Indian the tradition of sculpture has a rare unbroken continuity. Thus the title of the book From the Dancing Girl to Mayawati. From the petite dancing girl as she is known from Mohenjo Daro to the self-promoted commemorative statues of Mayawati the powerful chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, one of the twenty nine states of India, with her branded Birken bag, India presents a unique canvas of sculptural images.

This particular book attempts to show the entire gamut of a survey of Indian sculpture from high classical art to the vernacular language of the three dimension art pieces of India. Since the survey spans almost five thousand years, to have sub-sections would make both the reading and viewing a more enjoyable experience. India constitutes a vast subcontinent of strongly contrasting physical features. In addition, there are corresponding variations in the climate, agronomy and human settlements. Physical barriers, however, in the shape of mountains and oceans have, to a large extent, preserved India's geographical unity and integrity; it is, as it were, a reservoir rather than a conduit. The Indian subcontinent has seen the rise of distinctive provinces and other states, each with its own

political and cultural history and specific characteristics, which must be seen within the context of the unity alluded to above. Political events, and more notably, socioeconomic developments have set their stamp on the respective cultures of these Indian states and not least upon their art. The wide spread variety of cultural topography makes the task of drawing timeline a tricky affair, that needs to take into consideration the play of political regime, social structure and cultural background. The periods have been done bringing a wide sweep of the umbrella, combining art history and stylistic representation. The timeline followed in this book is determined by the matrix of time, space and style. To closely follow the popular chronological structure of Indian history, the following chapters are divided according to the century:

Ancient	Pre-history- 9 th century
Medieval	10 th century- 18 th century
Modern	19 th century- late 20 th century
Contemporary	Late 20 th century – present 21 st century

Ancient (Pre-history- 9th century)

Indus Valley

Beginning in the prehistoric Indus Valley, specifically in Harappa, the birth of the Indian sculptural tradition can be seen in the various statuettes and seals that were excavated here. This dates back to approximately 3rd century BCE. The Zhob and Kulli cultures in Balochistan^{iv} show remnants of terracotta figurines and in the partly overlapping Harappa many of the objects excavated were sculptural in nature. Polychrome painted pottery evidence the existence of peasant civilizations in Baluchistan on

the banks of the Zhob. The clay models of bulls were prevalent in Kulli regions, demonstrating early modelling techniques. It is possible that the female figurines were ceremonial. The techniques are primitive, as can be seen in the way the face was fashioned and the body and arms were conventionally positioned.

Almost primitivist in style, female statuettes fashioned from terracotta abounded in Harappa, with care taken in their detailing and finish. Figures in bronze and stone were more sophisticated than the terracotta figures. The Harappa sculptures were finished complete with limbs while the Zhob and Kulli figures were fashioned as busts. While terracotta animal figurines were also present as were a small percentage of male statuettes, females were more in number. The female figurines demonstrated a large selection of poses, seating and standing, with the hands detached, along the sides of the body or armed with something.

One of the most well-known examples of Harappan sculpture is the dark grey slate male figure in the throes of a dance. This figure could have been ithyphallic in nature, though the incomplete nature of the form leaves the matter to the realm of conjecture. Some theorised that the figure had three heads given the girth of the neck. The pinnacle of sculpture from Mohenjo-Daro is the bronze dancing girl, with her small breasts, hair in a braid, posing with a great deal of attitude, one hand on the hips and the other held at her side. Another noteworthy sculptures from Mohenjo-Daro is the famous bearded priest with his flowered shawl. There was a proliferation of seals that depict human and animal figures, the seal of the seated, cross-legged and possibly three headed *Pashupati*, perhaps a proto-Shiva figure, being notable.

Mauryan Sculpture (Approximately from 3rd century BCE)

The reasons for the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization remains unclear however it is largely attributed to migration due to natural or economic reasons. The next landmark of Indian sculpture is the Mauryan period from the fourth to second century BCE. Here is from where India took the national emblem the Ashoka Chakra which was inspired by the lion pillar at Sarnath. The Ashokan edicts had the

influence of the Achaemenids of Iran. The towering Ashokan columns of polished sandstone were hallmarks of this period.

Important Ashokan edicts are the Lauriya Nandangarh (with its powerful and proud lion), the Rampurva Bull (similar to the Indus seals) and the Ashokan Lion Capital. The Lion Capital of Ashoka has the four lions seated on an inverted bell lotus, the Persepolitan bell or *purna-ghata*/water vessel, the latter which is found in the ancient Iranian capital of Persepolis. Though it has both Achaemenids and Persepolitan influences, the Ashokan pillar has a distinctive Indian look and feel as it is an inverted lotus or the *purna ghata*, which is totally rooted in the Indian tradition. There is a continuity of animal figures which are modelled with a polished finish that could be said to be the workmanship of Hellenistic and Perso-Hellenistic greats. Some recurring animals are the lion, the elephant and the bull.

Some scholars associate these animal symbols with the Buddhist tradition. The lion is the Shakya *simha* or the lion that represented the Shakya clan which Gautama Buddha belonged to. The elephant is associated with the birth of Buddha. In one of the oft repeated tales about the Buddha's birth, his mother had a dream in which a heavenly white elephant entered her womb signalling the conception of the Buddha; here the symbolism is taken further by the iterations of the story that hold that the elephant had a lotus bloom in its trunk. The bull is also representative of the Buddha, one of the epithets he was known by was *Shakya pungava*, *pungava* meaning bull. This theory could be considered to have a degree of truth because of Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism.

Yakshis/female nature spirits are found at the Sanchi Stupa in Madhya Pradesh, once known as Madhyadesa, sculpted along the gateways, depicted along with the natural imagery of trees, which they are associated with. Another example is the *yakshi* at Amravati, the site which was known for its ties to Buddhism.

The classical period of Indian sculpture can be said to have begun as the Mauryan Empire was ending. There is an abundance of relief carvings on stupa gateways and stone railings. In the Bharhut Stupa, dating back approximately to the first century BCE, there is an expansion in not just movement but also in modelling. On the pillars of the gateway are more *yakshas*, *yakshis* and figures illustrating tales from the Buddhist Jataka stories, which tell stories of the Buddha in his past lives; the Bodhi tree, the *chatta* or parasol and the wheel, all deeply Buddhist symbols can be seen. The figures have a greater harmony and are more rounded such as the Sudarshana *yakshi* and the Chanda *yakshi*. These full-figured *yakshis* are with a sensuous fertility. The Sanchi Stupa is said to belong to the early classical period, with highly decorative designs, the sculptors depicting the body with a greater fluidity, masterfully portraying softness of flesh across study forms as can be seen in the yakshis. The sculptural stories here relate Buddhist tales.

With its roots in the Mauryan Empire, as Emperor Ashoka made sweeping efforts to propagate Buddhism, Buddhist art began to develop and spread. The caves at Ajanta and Ellora with their majestic rock cut caves are stellar examples of the same. Though they date back to the 1st century BCE, there was an expansion later under the Gupta Empire from 4th century CE.

In Orissa too, the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri, the traces of Jaina art can be seen, with the expansive bas-relief carvings dating back perhaps to the 1st century BCE. The lush, fecund *yakshis* and large, heavy *yakshas* of the Mathura sculptural tradition were widely known. The Parkham *yaksha* is one of the most celebrated in the world as is the Didarganj *yakshi*, reminiscent of the Venus de Milo, with her full hips swathed in a pleated sari and her spectacular ornamentation. The Mathura tradition shows more sophistication than the Bharhut works, in both modelling and composition.

The Deep South

(Approximately 1st century BCE)

This covers the Krishna Godavari delta in the Deep South is the Vengi region. Stone carving became popular in flat reliefs, similar to the reliefs on the ground balustrade at Stupa II at Sanchi. The features are elongated and slender which is a mark of the South Indian style that was developed later. Moving steadily southwards one of the most exemplary *shivalingams*, the Gudimallam, is seen which dates to about the second or third century BCE. The Gudimallam is a famed brown five foot tall *shivalingam* of 1 BCE, deemed to be one of the first representations of Shiva who is depicted alongside the *lingam* aloft a crouched *yaksha*. The form is a far cry from the Vengi style, with a well-built body. The Gudimallam *lingam* is perhaps one of the closest representations of the human phallus.

Kushan, Mathura and Gandhara Art in the North

(Approximately from the 1st to 6th century CE)

While there were many local interpretations and representations sculptures across the land, there were certain areas that were central hubs of the arts such as the Northern Mathura and Southern Vengi. The beginning of the classical proportions in Indian sculpture was seen at the end of the Mauryan period and found its efflorescence at the height of the Gupta power, the Golden Age in Indian history. With the end of the Mauryan Empire, an onslaught of invaders such as the Kushanas, the Pallavas, the Sakas and the Greeks led to an influence of their artistic styles on the indigenous Indian ones. There was a continuity of sculptures with the Saka and Kushan period. Kushan art signalled a glorious period of Mathura art. The majestic headless sandstone figure of King Kanishka, dating to approximately the 1st or 2nd century CE, attests to this.

This era was also the onset of a great period in Buddhist art. Many figures of Gautama Buddha date back to this period, the shoulders wide, face smiling, head shaved, the torso broad, the folds of drapery depicted schematically. The figures grew to be more elegant, depicted seated as well as standing, with the scalloped halo being an important hallmark and the red sandstone being the preferred material. The female figures were sensuous surrounded by natural imagery, highlighting their fecund nature. Further

North, the Gandhara sculptors also turned their hand to depicting the Shakyamuni, however this is not part of modern day India. The style here was markedly Greco-Roman, and the statues of the Buddha that resulted had Hellenistic markers, the material preferred being grey phyllite or terracotta. The nose was markedly aquiline, the clothing similar to the Roman togas. The emaciated Fasting Buddha with gorgeous detailing of protruding ribs is one of the most recognised works of this school.

The Gupta Period

(Approximately from 4th century CE)

The Gupta period laid down what is known as the canons of classical sculpture. Amravati sculpture began to flourish in the 1st century CE. During the second century, the characteristics of the Vengi School began to flower across Amravati works. The *purna ghata* is a recurring leitmotif in the art and Amravati can be thought of a great example of the Southern idiom with its grace, elongated but slender forms, while the torsos are sturdier.

The Guptas brought in a new aesthetic ideal leading to a golden age in Indian art, thought and literature. The artistic traditions of the past came together and were elevated to give rise to a style that kept the best of each world, from the sensuousness of Mathura to the free spirited Amravati style, giving the human form even more import and the movement, as Stella Kramrisch elaborates was, “now completely moulded according to the unending rhythm.”

Thus the human form was given the greatest significance in Gupta sculpture. There were certain constants that were meant to be adopted in the idealised sculptures. Here the idealised Indian beauty was seen in the depictions of gods. The divine beings were sculpted in human form. The face was to be the shape and texture of eggshells and the moods would variously mean that the eyes were depicted like that of a deer, wagtail, fish or lotus with a woman’s playful glance to be like that of the merry *khanjana* bird or a restless fish. Goddesses and women were to have noses like the sesame flower and waists like a

kettle drum. Men's and gods' noses, however, were to be like a parrot's beak and their waists like that of a lion. The lips were to be modelled after the delicious, red *bimba* fruit.

Gupta art took great pains to craft the mudras of gestures to their artistic pinnacle and establishes the style to be followed with regard to proportions/*talamana* and iconographic rules or *pratima lakshana*. One of the iconic works of this period is the Sultangarh Buddha, fashioned from copper which is a culmination of the various styles that the Gupta period was a confluence of. The drapery is akin to that of the Mathura school, combined with the elegant *abhanga* pose and muted modelling of the form which have been borrowed from the Sarnath School of Art.

Within India, keeping these points in mind, there were regional variations given the morphology of the people. Metal and stone works ranged from across Assam in the east and Bihar in the West while the eastern works were filled with sensuality and emotional import. The reliefs found on the pillars at Chandimau in Bihar in the West also display a heightened emotionality.

Deccan (Approximately from the 6th century CE)

The Deccan is the region beyond the Narmada river and covers a wide expanse of the Indian topography, including the culturally rich areas of Karnataka, Vidarbha and Telangana. In the Deccan, while there were fewer sculptural works to be found from the 5th century CE, it becomes clear that the understating of Gupta classicism was not very thorough. The rock cut caves at Badami are large and powerfully depicted, imbued with a sense of dynamism which are at odds with the Gupta sculptural ideal. The Chalukya kings of 6th and 7th century CE at Badami were great temple builders. Here the Southern idiom as seen in the Vengi tradition is apparent in the long and slim forms while the balance and grace could be said to be borrowed from the Sarnath School.

Perhaps most synonymous with the Deccan are the carvings in the caves at Elephanta, Mumbai, the forms immense and simple yet exuding the idea of divinity in the Shivaite tradition. However, the Gupta

sculpture was the peak of classical Indian sculpture in which formal beauty and ideology converge beautifully.

Medieval (10th century - 18th century)

The medieval period in India cannot be said to have been begun on any exact date, however the period from the tenth century onwards can be said to be a pre-medieval or early medieval era, establishing the new period sometime in the 1200s. Medieval sculpture in India followed and built upon the bedrock that classicism laid down.

Here, the established rounded forms grew more slender and becomes more exclusive, reflecting the beliefs of that period, in doing so shunning the common people.

In the medieval era, there was much Hindu iconography with gods and goddesses in their *garbha grihas* or sanctums as well as sculptured stories across the walls of temples. Perhaps the maximum number of sculptures of the Hindu gods and goddesses were created during the medieval period. Figure sculptures and carvings dominated. There were depictions of the complementary divine beings such as the *parsva-devatas*, the *parivara-devatas* and *avarana devatas*. There was a proliferation of the female form across the figure sculptures from the *surasundaris* to the *alaskanyas*.

Eastern India (Approximately from the 8th century CE onwards)

The area which is present day West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh with an accent on Buddhist sculptural traditions the stylistic and facial features more akin to those of China and Japan. Buddhist sculpture was prominent, reaching its apogee by the 12th century CE under the Pala dynasty of Bihar and West Bengal. Among other works, the bronze statues of the Buddha being the most famous even going on to influence art across Nepal, Tibet, Kashmir, Indonesia and Burma. While the Gupta ideal was the inspiration there was a markedly more sensual treatment of the body. In Orissa the cult images again followed the rules of Gupta classicism, with Lalitagiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri being significant hubs of Tantric Buddhism. The sculptures during the 10th century were more compact and tighter. Orissa was a great centre for temple building activities from the 7th century onwards and hence is well known for its large array of temple sculptures from animal and human figures to depictions of flora. Some of the best pieces of figure sculpture from here are at the Lingaraja, the Brahmeshwara and the Rajarani temples in Mukteshwara in Bhubaneswar. The Sun Temple at Konark is known both for its intricate decorative elements as well as the larger than life figures seemingly frozen in dynamic motion.

Central India (From approximately the 7th and 8th centuries CE onwards)

Of course, the medieval period is acclaimed for giving the world the numerous depictions of amorous couples as is especially seen in Khajuraho in present day Madhya Pradesh. There began to be a taste for elaborate ornamentation which reached a climax when the Islamic influences began to filter into the

country under new Islamic rulers in North Indian towards the end of the twelfth century. The model being taken in this book is that of Khajuraho. Nowhere in the world has the beauty of the woman been displayed as in the beautiful temples of Khajuraho where sculptured stories show women in various stages of toilet as well as heavenly *apsaras*, elephants, copulating couples and even at least one example of a same sex couple; the aesthetics of the erotic are plain for all to see though they are not greatly influenced by the Gupta ideal. These temples were built under the Chandella rulers with the almost 900 figures of the ornately designed Kandariya Mahadeva being noteworthy. The figures are rounded and encompass, as noted, both human and animal forms. It is possible that the rise of tantric practices and worship of Shakti or the female energy is what gave rise to this erotic imagery as *tantra* as a philosophy held that oneness with the Absolute could be achieved through sexual union.

South India (Approximately from the 9th century CE)

Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the two states which are part of this definition. Mention cannot be made of medieval South Indian sculpture without acknowledging the lasting contribution the Chola Dynasty made. The Chola bronzes were the most famed while other metals such as brass and copper alloys were also in use. This was the peak of metal sculpture with the sculptors elevating the classicism that was laid down by the Pallavas to new heights. The forms are slim, elongated, full of both grace and poise with the ornamentation and garments only serving to highlight the harmoniousness of the pieces. From the early tenth and eleventh century pieces, we can say that while the appearance was sturdier, the forms grew more elegant and refined.

There was a proliferation of stone work across the temple pillars, walls, *gopurams*, notably the Meenakshi temple at Madurai. However the metal sculpture is what this age was esteemed for especially their interpretations of the Brahamanical gods in free standing bronze. The Cholas were known for smaller and more personal shrines as well as for enormous processional statues. The interpretations of the deities such as Devi, Shiva, Vishnu, were particularly favoured and also featured in their temple carvings. The Nataraja or Shiva in his avatar as Lord of the Dance is synonymous with the art of this period, a fabulous example being the bronze figure in the Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur, dating to the 12th

century. Other aspects of Shiva such as Uma-Shiva, the Kalyansundara (wedding), Rama etc. are other well-known examples of Chola works. The bronze figures of Parvati, Shiva's consort, are said to be the epitome of feminine sensuality and grace. Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi, Brahma and other divine beings and saints were popular sculptural subjects. The elegant postures, charm and sense of rhythmic movement in these figures is exemplary, for example the Parvati and Nataraja from Tiruvarangulam.

North India (Approximately from 11th century CE onwards)

While there was not much sculptural work being produced in the Ganga Yamuna Valley in the medieval times, what was found, again has its roots in the ideals laid out in the Gupta period. A well-known figure is that of an eleventh century Jaina Sarvatobhadra with four Jinas on each side. An architectural figure of Vishnu from the twelfth century is another work from this time.

However, the major contributions came from the Mughal dynasty. While the Mughals were known primarily for painting and architecture, their contribution cannot be marginalised. From the sixteenth century, beginning with Emperor Babur, the Mughal dynasty held sway over a large swathe of the north of the subcontinent. Known as great patrons of the arts, architecture and sculpture flourished under them, bringing in markedly Islamic and Persian influences. Architectural elements and embellishments became important here as did stonework. The Mughal *jalis* or latticed screens in elaborate ornamental designs began to creep into the architectural language. While Islamic sculpture is aniconic, there are some examples of sculptures such as the ruined elephants at Emperor Akbar's capital Fatehpur Sikri found near the Hathi Pol or Elephant Gate and at the Sunehra Makan (Akbar's mother Hamida Banu Begum's palace) with its chiselled frescoes of elephants, bears and swans. The sculptural Elephant Tower or Hiran Minar at Akbar's capital, set with elephant tusks was a formidable emblem of Akbar's might though it is said to be a commemorative monument to the emperor's favourite elephant. Along with the other arts and literature that he patronised, Akbar also encouraged stone carving, going on to commemorate the defeated Chittor warriors Jaimal and Fateh Singh depicted riding on elephants at the elephant gateway or *Hathi Pol* to his palace at Agra Fort.

Jehangir would also erect statues, eschewing the aniconic art traditions of Islam, examples being the life sized marble figures of Rana Amar Singh and the Rana's son at the Agra Fort.

Ostentation became the watchword especially during the reign of Shah Jahan, whose name is almost always mentioned in the same breath as the luminous Taj Mahal and Pearl Mosque, both at Agra. This reached its zenith, perhaps, with the sculptural marvel, the bejewelled Peacock Throne, set with precious gems.

Modern Sculpture

(19th century- late 20th century)

A period of transition from the Mughal to the modern included the period we call the Company School, large scale commemorative sculptures were placed by the British, the Dutch, the Portuguese and the French who controlled different parts of India till the entire country was colonised by the British in 1857. These sculptures will be part of what is called modern sculpture. Modern India saw a decline of the Islamic influence and an influx of European visitors who eventually went on to gain a foothold as rulers. The latter ranged from the British who, under the East India

Company, gained power in 1857 and perhaps most significantly impacted Indian culture during the modern period, to the French, Dutch and Portuguese who all maintained trading posts and settlements in India, leading to a degree of cultural dynamism.

During the modern era, the Indian artistic and sculptural tradition began to absorb from the Western techniques sometime in the beginning of the twentieth century. A number of Indian sculptors went on to adopt subjects that were not religious in nature, marking a shift in subject matter from the spiritual to the secular. The style of sculpture now was less idealised and more realistic in keeping with the European schools. At this time the great art schools across the country in the metropolises of Kolkata, Mumbai and more were flourishing by espousing the Western techniques and standards. The eroticism and openness that was once the hallmark of Indian sculpture was influenced by the European gaze which was more conservative.

French master Rodin had a great impact on the works of a number of modern Indian sculptors such as D.P Roy Chowdhury. D.P Roy Chowdhury is one of the modern masters best recognised for his academic realist approach to sculpture and for being one of the foremost sculptors to immortalise the leaders of the freedom movement through his works. A fine specimen of his modern work, the Gyarah Murti, depicting Mahatma Gandhi and ten followers during the Dandi March, can be seen on Sardar Patel Marg near Willingdon Crescent in Delhi. Here the plural nature of the Mahatma's followers has been carefully depicted through attention to detail, from the different attire of two women followers, to the marks and deep symbolism that make it clear that the other followers are a Christian man of the cloth, a Dalit, a turbaned Sikh, a farmer etc. It is a lovely testament to the sculptures that began to take on a nationalistic identity during and after the struggle for Independence. Another of his singular works is Triumph of Labour, again at Delhi, which illustrates in detail the musculature of the men in the work.

With the departure of the British after nearly two centuries of foreign rule, came the true onset of the modernist period in the 1940s in India. While the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group was creating a

new modernist Indian identity in the realm of painting, a number of sculptors such as Ramkinker Baij, were forging similar paths in the sphere of sculpture. Ramkinker Baij was a pioneer of fusing Indian classicism with western methods to produce a fresh and distinct style. A lovely example of this blend of tradition and modernism can be seen in his sculptures of a *yakshi* and *yaksha*, nature spirits and guardians of wealth, once a ubiquitous leitmotif in ancient Indian art. His sculptures are depicted standing guard at the gates of the Reserve Bank of India, fittingly where the wealth of the nation is regulated.

Thus, the new language of Indian sculpture was a confluence of east and west, bringing in new materials. These new modernist sculptors, like Picasso was doing in the west, began to look to the indigenous Indian traditions and drew inspiration from them, bringing them into this new visual language. Where Indian sculpture was once a sphere of romantic ideals^v became a platform to express the effects of industrialisation on modern man, brought on by the rapid urbanization and the Industrial Revolution.

K.S. Radhakrishnan's works resound with a feeling of motion, such as *The Human Globe* and *Song of the Road*, which seem to harken back to the idea that sculpture is dance frozen in motion. His figures are often lithe and long limbed, energy seeming to burst forth from within them, arrested in flight.

Prodosh Dasgupta, who trained in the art of sculpture under DP Roy Chowdhury and then at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, was one of the foremost modernists of his generation and had a radical bent. His works were quite solid and larger than life, notable for their concavities, many of which were representations of the human form, playing with materials as varied as stone, clay, bronze or cement. Perhaps most noteworthy are his depictions of female figures, evoked through lush and rotund shapes with an abundance of curves, building on his life's work of thinking about the representation of the human form in art.

One of the most eminent students of Ramkinker Baij, Sankho Chaudhuri, a formalist, seemed to bring together the disparate worlds of tradition and modernity in his work. A student of Shantiniketan, he became known for his wooden works, in particular and for depicting European ideas in keeping with the spirit of Indian sculpture, evolving for himself, a distinct and singular space. Trying his hand at materials from cast iron to wrought iron to terracotta, his wooden sculpture could perhaps be considered most notable.

Amarnath Sehgal wore many hats and one of them was that of sculptor. His sculptural works were evocative and many of his early sculptures are filled with a sense of pathos, depicting, as they do, the plight of the poverty stricken such as the noted *Cries Unheard*. His works could bring forth political commentary and were a product of the time, dealing with the many issues the newly Independent nation was facing. As he admitted, he took inspiration from his environment, working in metal and stone, his sculptures can be considered to be in the realm of the abstract.

This was a time of great innovation as sculptors began to break out of the mould and discover not just new materials to work with but also new styles that lifted Indian sculpture to the international stratosphere. These works were flavoured with the sculptors' individual experiences of the world, their personalities, their idiosyncrasies in a way like they never had been before, allowing for a whole world of new possibilities to open up in the realm of sculpture. A trend began midway through the sixties when the works became more indigenized and the use of local materials, techniques, forms, frontality, linearity, iconicity became more definite.

Contemporary Sculpture

(Late 20th century – present, 21st century)

Like the modern period, the contemporary period too had its own dynamic inclusions. The contemporary period in India witnessed unprecedented growth, the challenges of globalisation, and the celebration of a unique culture where tradition and modernity co-exist in happy matrimony. From the beginning of the 1970s, the increased globalisation led to a more open and cosmopolitan world. In the modern era the sculptors were caught in the push and pull of, at first, conforming to the European traditions, and then, breaking out of them to assert an independent Indian identity. In the contemporary period the sculptures went a step further to evolve into something more eclectic and individualistic, leaving, for the most part, the religious tinged and iconographic ideals behind. A neo-figuration trend that began midway through the sixties and spread into the seventies and early eighties. Here the human figure was used as is exemplified in the works of some prominent contemporary Indian sculptor like Dhruva Mistry and Ravinder Reddy. Dhruva Mistry's art is deeply rooted in the fantastic and religious themed images that are perhaps conjured by his Indian identity. Much of his work, style and concerns, reflect this strong and layered cultural anchorage. Ravinder Reddy's sculptures are hugely arresting. He works largely with busts. The wide eyed, boldly coloured heads are enormously striking. In the eighties works began to take on more political hues. In the nineties, artists began stretching themselves to push beyond the limits of the established sculptural tradition as can be seen in the works of N. N. Rimzon^{vi}. Rimzon's was influenced by a wide spectrum of inspirations from indigenous classic art forms to German realism and expressionism, to modernism, he dipped into a range of diverse movements, making him inherently post-modernist. His work is contextualized within the cross-current of a nation in transit and conflict.

Installation art, which could be thought of as a natural progression of sculpture, began to become popular through the world and also in India. Sculptors broke out of the mould of traditional materials and began to further the experimentation that had begun in the modern period. Now sculptures could be made of materials as disparate as sand, cow dung, guns, fibreglass, wire and even pigment. Found objects are also being increasingly used as is light and lens-based work. While traditionally the materials used were chosen for their durability, this is not the case any longer.

There is now often a participatory element to contemporary sculpture. The artist entices the viewer to engage with the work in some way or the work interacts with the environment so it is constantly changing and providing the viewer with a new aesthetic experience every time it is viewed. There was an influx of surrealism, social and political commentary, feminist ideas and more as the post-modern sensibilities and the effects of movements such as Dada, Avant Garde, cubism and more began to quickly take root. Some of the more well-known names of this time are Anish Kapoor, Rina Banerjee, Subodh Gupta, Satish Gupta.

Often these contemporary sculptures are works of public art such as Anish Kapoor's 2001 piece *Sky Mirror*, an almost monolithic, finely polished reflective work of stainless steel that is positioned in such a way so that it reflects the changes in the sky and the immediate environs of the sculpture. In contemporary times, sculpture thus lends itself beautifully to the domain of public art. Gagan Vij and the Delhi Development Authority's work in Delhi, a gigantic sundial, also blurs the lines between traditional and contemporary, bringing back the concept of the sundial, the numerals across it in Devanagari script with Indus Valley seals across it, all the while incarnated in a contemporary avatar.

In the contemporary period, sculpture began to be taken out of the white cube of the gallery space and the walls of the temple and began to find its way outdoors. Sometimes this has taken the form of enormous sand sculptures such as the ones created by Sudarshan Pattnaik, an artist from Odisha who often uses the beach as his canvas.

Some pieces of contemporary sculpture sit, quite literally, at crossroads, for example the sculpture of a rocket that marks the eponymous Space Chowk in Rourkela. Another aspect of the contemporary sculptures is their intersection with conceptual art. A host of innovative approaches are being taken as sculptors such as Sumedh Rajendran, S Nandagopal, Ravinder Reddy, Bharti Kher, Subodh Gupta, Satish Gupta and more begin to push the boundaries of not just materials but of what sculpture can do,

often leading the viewer to re-examine matters from the social to the sexual to the political to the environmental in the context of globalization.

Still one more genre of contemporary statues are the self-promotional, commemorative statues such as the ones commissioned by Uttar Pradesh politician Mayawati which depict her in her now iconic salwar kameez with a branded Birkin bag, combining the worlds of public service and luxury in a way that seems to be a commentary on modern day politics.

Thus, perhaps we might say that contemporary sculpture blurs the boundaries between sculpture and installation art, sculpture and conceptual art, sculpture and new media and pushes the envelope in novel and exciting ways.

Folk and Tribal Sculpture

No book on Indian sculpture can be complete without including the vernacular narrative on Indian sculptures. Folk arts and crafts are an integral part of our lives, closely associated with everyday life through objects of regular use, in festivals, ceremonies and rituals, and also as a means of self-expression. Traditional folk and tribal art which in contemporary language is defined as the indigenous and the vernacular has 'beautility' as its defining language. Indigenous sculpture has embedded in it myth, magic, and often a functional quality to it. In the visual language of sculptures, there rests a deeper level of significance that works through the received tradition i.e. folk and tribal art. It is important to mention, when we move to folk and tribal making of the sculptures, the materiality of the sculptures is not restricted to clay or stone, but we get a wide spectrum of material play lying between brassware, ivory, bamboo and metal.

In India, folk and tribal arts of the indigenous people evolved parallel to the mainstream production of sculpture which had embedded within them a strong individual stamp with a long and illustrious history of vernacular and indigenous sculptural works such as totem poles, for example those of the Naga Konyak tribe, as well as terracotta figurines and ceremonial masks and other ceremonial objects. Temple sculpture (especially in the form of wayside shrines) and wood carving have always been present among indigenous communities. For example, the historic Kamakhya temple which is associated with yoni worship, tantra and the veneration of Shakti, could be considered a tribal shrine where the Garo and Khasi tribes, chiefly matriarchal, led the charge, dedicated as it is to Kamakhya, once considered a tribal goddess. While it is associated with the worship of the mother goddess, the temple contains a structure like a beehive. This is circled by panels on which are carved stunning images of Ganesha, temple dancers, animals, women giving birth and women menstruating, reasserting the temple's beginnings as a seat of mother goddess worship.

Many tribes have a long sculptural tradition for example the Gonds. Some Gond artists such as Japani Shyam have used the environmentally rich themes and intricate style (so similar to Australian aboriginal art) to evolve a sculptural language in contemporary times that fuses the current and the traditional. Bankura terracotta horses, from Bankura, Purulia and Jharkhand are examples of terracotta sculptural figures that are synonymous with folk art in the region and which have entered the mainstream

consciousness. The Bastar craft has its singular tradition of metal casting which is seen in the 'dhokra' style.

In the south, wood carving and sculpture can be said to have amalgamated in the *rathams* or intricately carved chariots. The southern part of India holds in itself a rich story of tribal craft where every generation keeps the tradition alive by passing on a craft to the succeeding one. Due to their eternal designs these crafts have a great market value worldwide. One of the most popular of these crafts is 'bamboo craft', in which tribes like *Kotas*, *Todas* and *Kurumbas* who live across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, make mats, baskets lamp shades and wall hangings from bamboo. Although it originates from a place called Bidar in Karnataka, *bidriware* is inlay work of silver against a black background, made from an alloy of zinc and copper, and is most famous in Andhra Pradesh. Other popular craft forms of the region are the *dhokra* bells, *kota* pottery, and *toda* tribal embroidery, the latter two made by the *Kota* and the *Toda* tribes respectively.

As with food, clothing, and art, the craft traditions of India have their singular stylistic features. As with traditional wood carving, which go back to the pre Mauryan period (3rd B.C. E) each of the 29 states of India have their very own aesthetic style.

All of the city palaces and Hawa Mahal in Jaipur, Red Fort in Delhi, Taj Mahal in Agra highlight the North India had a tradition of carved wooden doors with intricate designs, brass inlay and trellis-work for windows. The frontier state of India Punjab has its own specific areas where wood carving engraved its own unique sensibility i.e. Hoshiarpur for its inlay work and furniture with lacquer work in Jalandhar. Manipur was an important centre for *tarkashi* (metal thread) work, centres of which have now come up in Delhi and Jaipur. The sculptural wood carvings are also present across houses in Gujarat's balcony supporting brackets and West Bengal wood beams. Kashmiri lattice work is another sculptural marvel that makes its presence felt and embellishments of carved wood can thus be found from temples in Shankardeva Namghar in Puri, Orissa to Dhekiakhwa Bornamghar at Jorhat, Bharali Namghar at Nagaon. Ivory, horn and bone carving is also a historically significant folk art across the country, evolving under the Mughal rulers. With the coming in of the Mughals arrived the establishment of a glorious Mughal era after the return of Humayun from exile in the court of Shah Tahmasp of Iran. The Mughals, with their innate love for beauty and art, were not just the most aesthetic connoisseurs but also the greatest patrons of art. They set up ateliers for manufacturing objects of great beauty. They loved jade, ivory, precious stones and used them even in their sculptures. While most regional centres and principalities had their own distinct style and usage, the Hoysala kingdom which was situated in modern day Karnataka used ivory in making religious deities, secular sculptures and even embellishments for furniture and architecture panels.

Under Sikh rule the Punjabi city of Amritsar had developed a flourishing ivory carving industry. However, a ban on the poaching of ivory in the seventies greatly reduced the scope of this art. The craftsmen there specialized in making table lamps and linked bracelets made out of single pieces as well as miniature chess sets. In Varanasi, an important pilgrimage centre for Hindus and Buddhists, designs were based on local traditions like lord Krishna leaning against the Kadamba tree and playing on his divine flute, or the Buddha in different postures and sizes. West Bengal has its own style of carving, influenced by the local folk traditions as well as by the Mughal influence as introduced by the Nawabs of Murshidabad.

In the deep south of Kerala a robust tradition of metallurgy flourished and is still alive. An example of this is evident in the beautifully finished, deeply sensual 'theyyam' masks. The 'theyyam' masks also speak of a strong feminine, cross dressing identity of the performing arts i.e. the dance traditions of the state.

What makes the indigenous traditions spectacular is the fact that they are very much part of the living expressions of the country and are the important sites where tradition and modernity live in judicious harmony.

And it is this interplay of cultural diversity, plurality which gives India its title 'The wonder/*adhbutam*' that is India.

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