

Indian Temples and the Erotic Sculptural Art

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Introduction

Sex in the religious art of Indian culture presents an interesting subject. Such widespread and riotous sexual depiction throughout India could not obviously be the creation of the whims and caprices of a few individuals but must be the reflection of the social reality of the period. Its spread and variety could not have been fortuitous, bearing no relevance to the socio-cultural background¹. A sexual representation in Indian religious art is undertaken here to understand and explain the socio-cultural forces behind the seemingly anomalous situation. Sexual representation was not an isolated occurrence confined merely to few places, Social conditions giving rise to it were common and instead of studying them piecemeal and automatically as social conditions, The root of the problem lies not in the social conditions of particular temple sites or regions, which express sex largely or loudly, but in the social conditions common to all-Indian culture². Explanations for this cultural phenomenon have so far been sought mainly at idealistic levels. Sexual expression has been interpreted as the symbolic representation of the Eternal Bliss or the over manifestation of *Kama*. But the problem is not solved by such a prior speculations, the actual representation of sex with themes involving orgies and bestialities³. These idealistic hypotheses also explain why, in this particular period of history, there is such a vast outburst of sexual depiction, there is also a tendency to explain these sculptures as symptoms of degeneration and sexual indulgence. This factor does explain, to a certain extent, their historical development but leaves out one of the significant aspects of the situation, viz. the presence of the sex in religious art. The bhogis (voluptuaries) would be satisfied with the decoration of palaces and the aphrodisiac function of sexual themes on their objects of daily use. It is when sex is represented on religious monuments that it poses a problem to us⁴.

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The emphasis in the empirical reality the observation of actual sexual representation, its nature it is necessary to know, for instance, whether the motifs display sexy-yogic poses, whether they are placed in the interior and on the garbhagriha walls, etc. The rejection or acceptance of views should be based on the observation of sculptures. Without knowing what is actually portrayed, it is no use delving into idealistic rationalizations and justifications. An interesting and significant discovery was made on such visits to places in the same region⁵. It was clearly revealed that the nature and type of erotic motifs were conditioned by the architectural conventions of the regions. Erotic figures of the same region showed a pattern different from those of other regions. Each region thus appears to have had its own interpretation of erotic motifs as reflected in the size and placement assigned to them in the architectural scheme of the temple and the nature and extends of erotic display. Temples erected in the period (900-1400C.E) reveal the influence of regional conventions⁶. Our concern is to give the general social background of sexual representation in Indian culture. It was realized that in order to understand the rationale of erotic figures in religious art, it was necessary to study them before they were conventionalized in silpa-canon. Forms, once accepted in art, have a tendency to become conventionalized and assume the character of motifs. In the culture of India which glorifies traditional values, the process of conventionalization became a major factor leading to persistence and inertia in the use of motifs⁷. The prolific depiction of sex on medieval temples, though resting on numerous other factors, is also embedded in the tradition of art. It has its own history in the art of Ancient India and therefore cannot be adequately treated without taking into consideration the earlier representation of sex. O.C. Gangoly, one of the first scholars to bring this subject to the fore, has traced the historical development of erotic motifs and has suggested the possible connection of erotic motifs in Early art with those in Medieval art. His treatment of *mithuna* as an architectural motif is one significant contribution to the erotic art⁸.

All important religious sects of the country – Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina have presented erotic motifs in their art. Sexual representation was a pan-Indian cultural feature. It implies a common cultural substratum which influenced religious sects all over India. This common substratum is seen in those beliefs and practices which show the primal connection between sex and religion. In sanction to sex in religious art can be seen in magic-religious beliefs and practices, what is it that sustains its depiction and leads to its prolific display.⁹ Not a single *Silpasastra* speaks of profuse depiction and it is obvious that no religion will go so far as to specifically advocate loud and large-scale depiction of sex. Besides religious sanction, the analysis of sociological factors which generated the permissive atmosphere and mood underlying this depiction is an essential part of our inquiry. It is necessary to find out why so many temples were built in this period and why erotic motifs were depicted on them so prominently and profusely. It may clarify here that our interest in erotic representation is from the point of view of its socio-cultural, anthropological and historical aspects. We are directly concerned with aesthetic appreciation of erotic art.¹⁰ It is for this reason that the photographs are selected not for the artistic excellence of sculptures but because these sculptures unfold the essential elements of this cultural phenomenon. It is also for this reason that sexual representation in the temples of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka and Tamilnadu receives almost the same importance as that in the elegant and magnificent temples at Khajuraho and Konarak.¹¹

As sexual motifs in sculptural art present a variety of themes, some sort of classification is considered necessary for the sake of clarity in presentation and avoiding ambiguity and confusion. It should be borne in mind that no classification, however exhaustively made, could accommodate all instances of sexual representation in temple art. The artists had no classification in mind. The term “*erotic motif*” as used in the work does not denote an iconographical fixed form.¹² The nature and content of the motif according to the spatio-temporal setting. The word “erotic” is used here as expressive of sexual love. It covers an extensive range of sexual expression from the mild gesture of the lover’s putting his hand on the chin of the beloved to the extreme form as represented in the scenes showing the sexual act. The elementary erotic motifs in Indian art are the *mithuna*, the *maithuna* and the erotic group. Over and above the man-woman relationship, the portrayal of individual men and women in sexual and auto-erotic attitudes and in relationship with animals, known as bestiality, is also included in the term erotic motif.¹³ The word *mithuna* means a couple or a pair who may or may not be involved in an erotic relationship. Wherever used by us, the word indicates a human couple unless specifically stated as *naga-mithuna* or a pair snakes, *hamsa-mithuna* or a pair of swans, and so on *maithuna* means coitus. *Maithuna*-couple hence is used here as indicating couple in coitus. The expression “erotic group” is used for scenes which depict more than two people in erotic activity. We have classified the erotic group into different types according to the amatory activities of the participants and the number of men and women involved in the group. There are, theoretically, innumerable possible types of the erotic group, but we have given six basic types and their sub-types which are commonly found in Indian sculptural art.¹⁴

Thus, the sexual outburst of the previous centuries had subsided in the Vijayanagara period. It seems that the period of about two hundred years between the Hoysala and Chalukya to Vijayanagara sculptures represents a change in the approach to sexual depiction on temples. The Pre-Vijayanagara sculptures, now preserved in the site-museum, show that erotic motifs were carved on the *kakshasana* railings. The Portuguese traveller Domingos Paes (1520-22 C.E) mentions temples of Krishnapura near Vijayanagara as having “many figures of men and women, all in lascivious attitudes.” But the present remains of Vijayanagara period clearly show that there had been a considerable diminution in sexual representation on temples in the course of two hundred years. Erotic motifs were depicted only in unfrequented parts of the temple, e.g. on pillars and on tall *gopurams*.¹⁵ They were few and far between and were always placed in a manner so as to remain hidden from the sight of the public. They were probably considered to be magico-defensive in function and were therefore not entirely eliminated from the sculptural scheme of the temple. The large number of the medieval temples from the different regions shows us that in the period under review the treatment of the erotic motifs is in accordance with the conventions and traditions of the regional school of art. Each region has a distinctive approach towards sexual motifs which is reflected in the place and size assigned to them in the architectural scheme of the temple and in the choice of their thematic content.¹⁶

Erotic’s Sculptures

The erotic’s sculptures in India are to be found fairly widely distributed but confined to a limited period. We find them on the temples, at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh (900 C.E) to 1050 C.E) Bhubaneswar, Konarak and Puri in Orissa (750-1250 C.E) the Limbojimata Temple at Delmel, Mehsana (10th century C.E); the Nilakantha temple at Sunak near Baroda. In the art of the other parts of India (11th century C.E) and Modhera

(1200 C.E) in Gujarat the Bodoli temple (8th century C.E) and the Bhanddevra temple (10th century, renovated in 13th century) near Ramgarh in Kotah;¹⁷ the Ambikamata temple (960 C.E) at Jagat in Udaipur; and the Adinatha and Chowmukhi temples (15th century) at Ranakpur near Udaipur in Rajasthan; the Ranganayakaswami temple, Gandikota Cuddapa; the Virabhadraswami temples of Koilkuntole, Kurnool, and Guntur Districts (12th century) in Andhra Pradesh the Prasanna Chenna Kesava temple, Somanathapura (1270 C.E) the Tirupurintakesvara temple 1070 C.E), Badami, Shimoga; the Kedareshvara temple, Halabid, 13th century in Karnataka. Thus most of these temples in India bearing erotic sculptures are to be found in Central India (Madhya Pradesh), Western India (Gujarat), and Eastern India (Orissa) in the North, and in Southern India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu) mostly date from the 10th to the 13th century C.E).¹⁸

The fact that erotic sculptures were not displayed on many temples in the North and more in south especially in Tamilnadu. Though widespread neither the devadasi institution, nor sculptures moralizing their achievements were universally employed. The strength of orthodox public opinion against pornographic disfigurement of temple walls adequately explains it. As regards the portrayal of ascetics, there have been always any dasis who have fallen from the path of virtue and who have used the garb of a saydsti to enjoy physical pleasures.¹⁹ A public display of this dichotomy between their preaching and practice could help the devadasis to meet the threat of the orthodox opinion, which emphasized virtues of brahmachary, chastity and renunciation. The *Kamasashtra* and the contemporary literature contain ample evidence of the social status the ganikas or courtesans so enjoyed, and the atmosphere of permissiveness that prevailed. Coupled with the philosophy of Vimacirathism us they have helped to promote sexual promiscuity as well as made such sculptures acceptable to the elite.²⁰

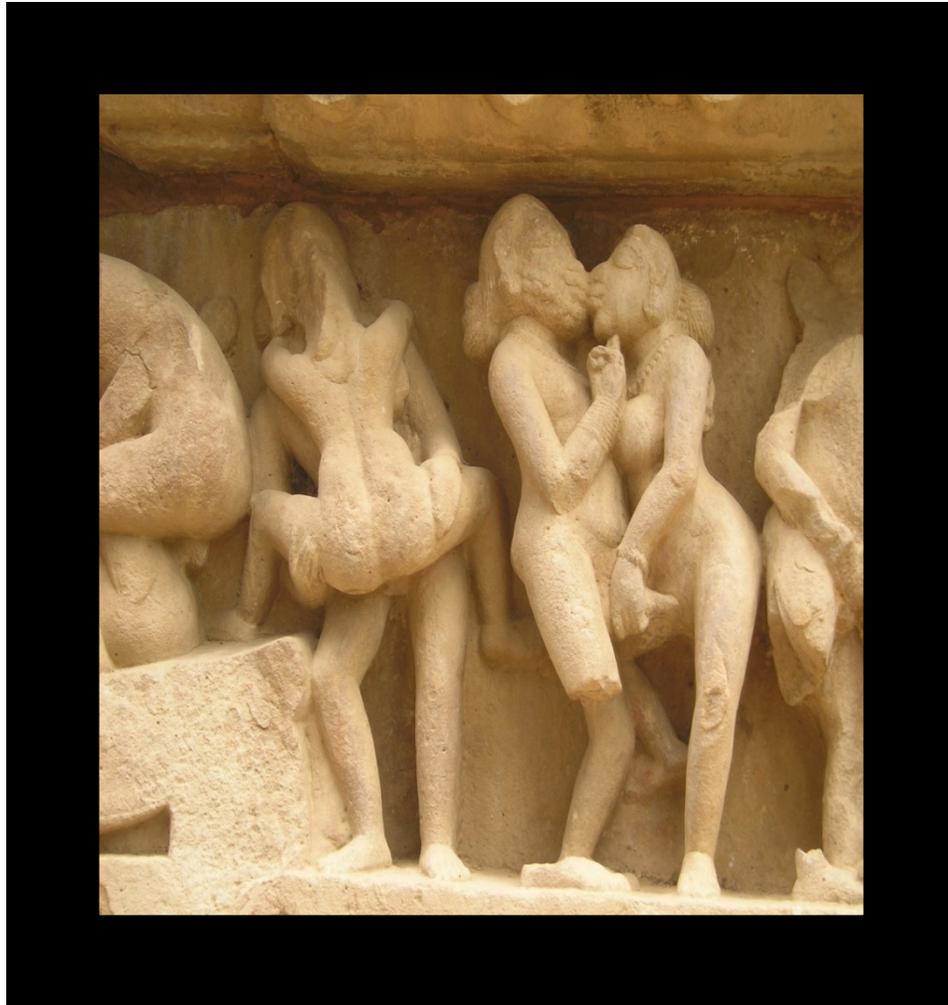


Interpretation of the Erotic Sculptures

At the outset, we must distinguish the erotic (maithuna) sculptures from the voluptuous couples (mithuna). We are here primarily concerned with an explanation for the frankly, any brutally, sexual in as much as the sexual act the coitus and its perversions, are depicted without hesitation or prudery. Numerous interpretations have been advanced by scholars to explain these *maithuna* sculptures on Indian temples. It has been argued that the Kaula-Kapalika cults were very powerful all over the country by the (10th to 11th century C.E.)²¹ These cults flourished in the area around Khajuraho and Bhubaneswar. Some of the temple sculptures support this view. Completely nude ascetics, haven-headed or with heavy curls, holding a club and a Kamandalu, or gurus dressed in a lion cloth and wearing a sacred thread and an upper garment over the shoulder, a necklace and arm bands of rudraksha beads and with hair arranged in a chignon over the head, are shown engaged in sexual acts.²² In the South, they are called Bhairava Yogis who, according to Ramanuja have six marks: a necklace, an ornament, an ear ornament, a crest jewel, ashes, and the sacred thread. None of the ascetics at Khajuraho, Konarak, and Bhubaneswar etc. are shown with '*Nara-astbi munda-mild*' or performing a human sacrifice before Bhairava or Kali or drinking liquor out of a human skull or worshipping Kali, Bhairava, Chamunda, or Chinnamasta.²³ The women shown in the company of these ascetics are not Kapila vanitis, considering their ornaments and coiffure.

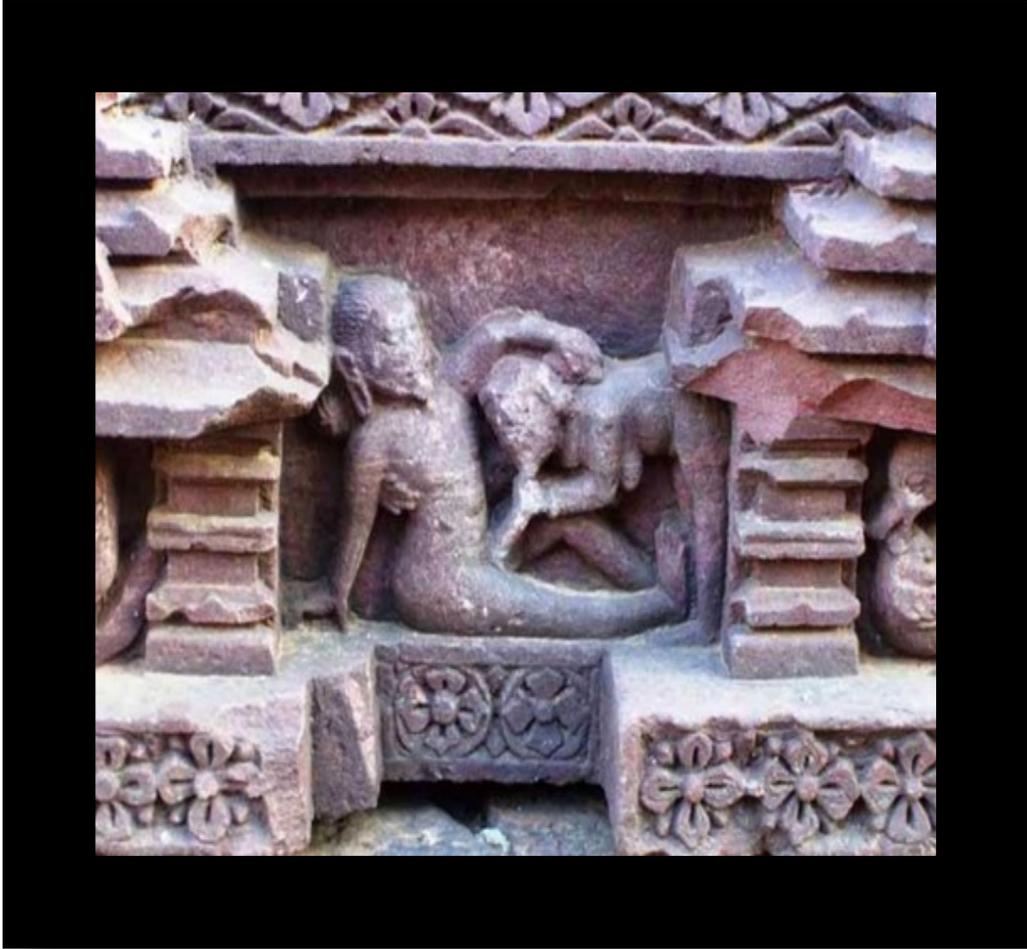
Sex in Society

The Architectural grandeur and sculptural splendor of Hindu temples and Buddhist monuments rest on the moneyed class that commissioned them, the class representing kings, royal relatives, ministers, merchants, feudal lords and chieftains. Art is influenced by tastes and interests as its patrons and public and general picture of the sexual mores of the upper levels of society. We have presented their attitudes towards sex as reflected in the meticulous cultivation and study of the art of sex and have examined their sexual behavior in the context of polygamy, concubinage, prostitution, extra-marital relations, etc.²⁴ We have also described their behavior on festivals, showing the worldly and sensual aspects in the celebrations which were originally meant for fertility purposes. Their non-religious art is examined to show that, in this sphere too, sensualism is the keynote. The predominance of the bhoga (pleasure) element in the wealthy tended to bring in worldly sensualism and material exuberance in the depiction of auspicious erotic alankaras on religious monuments patronized by them.²⁵



Sex as Art

Sex was not only uninhibited but was cultivated as an art, the knowledge which brought prestige among the cultured citizens and aristocrats. Vatsyayana advocates the study of his *Kamasutra* to princesses, daughters of ministers, courtesans and to married women with the permission of their husbands. He places such importance on the study of sex as to consider that “a person who is not conversant with the sixty-four arts of the science of love will never be respected among learned men, never be able to fulfill the three aims of life, though he may be quite competent to explain the theory and application of other sciences. On the other hand, simply through knowledge of these sixty-four arts, a man commands a leading position among men and women in the go this or assemblies, although he may be ignorant of other scenes.”²⁶



Worship of Generative Organs:

In certain magic rites nakedness was considered necessary. Some of the Vedic love charms and magic rites were to be performed naked. Nakedness was an important condition in the Tantric rites. The Kathasaritsagara of the 10th century describes a queen performing these erotic rites while standing naked in a mandala (magic circle). In the kalasa ceremony of the temple nakedness was an essential feature. Nudity rites were performed by women until recently in the Khajurho region for the purpose of bringing rain.²⁷ Magico-religious significance has been attributed to generative organs all over the world since early times, female and male genitals, known as yoni and lingam in India, are worshipped and also considered to be endowed with magical power-both auspicious and defensive. Women of south India also sang obscene songs for bringing rain one of the features is singing of obscene songs also with the making represented couple has a magico-religious function. It is considered to be a centre of sacred energy.²⁸

Lingam

The male generative organ, lingam, and draws our attention to Aniconic symbols. Different forms of lingam have been erected on buried dead-bodies as symbols of regeneration and are found in Mirzapur, Chunar (Uttar Pradesh) and Lauriyian and Angarh, Champaran, Bihar. Archaeological sources and also in 'Erotic Element in

Indian Art.’ In fact, the depiction of sex symbols started from the Mesolithic period. Gradually, these drawings took shape on seals, then as terra-cottas, then on pillars and stupas like Sanchi, Amaravati, and Ahichchatra. Then, they attained sculptural form from (950 C.E.) onwards exclusively on temple walls. No doubt, Sanskrit literature and paintings offered place for sexual symbolism during the period (200 C.E. to 950 C.E.) for instances Ajanta painting and the paintings of Chaurapanchisika.²⁹



Their Imorphic Symbols

Representation of animal motif in the relation with human beings condemns us. Except ‘Sparsa mithuna’ in Vedic literature, on zoophilic symbolism is found in Indian art. In some symbolic sexual arts, a wife is the sex partner and the other partner is animal, mostly a ritual horse. That is why the verses of Sanskrit literature reveal ‘Asvamedha, Yajna: the Chief Queen mates symbolically with the horse by keeping the penis of the horse in her yoni’. Though it was a religious art, it was certainly a zoophilic act. The ceremony of Vresakpi was of the same type. A couple, caressing each other, is perfectly drawn; and, the erected penis of the person is visibly painted which otherwise represents the pre-copulation position. The rhythmic curves of the body are extremely schematic and natural suggesting the state of sexual excitement. The dynamic expressive action is highly appreciable.³⁰

After a critical examination of these paintings it is better to conclude with an understanding that the sexual life of the pre-historic people was not different from the sexual life of the present day people either in per-play activities or in sexual gestures. Hence, the pre-historic people have successfully suggested their way of living through the rock-paintings which shows a perfect and permanent way of expressing their emotions as there was no other via-media to present their style and experiences of life.³¹



Indus Valley Period to 325 B.C.E

The male and female sexual organs from the earliest times served an essential element in popular religious icons, the lings (male organ) and the yoni (female organ) within the female organ symbolized the act of creation, procreation and manifestation. The goddess is completely nude; sitting in a frog style with legs stretched out and displays her yoni “One of the earliest ancient specimens of erotic motifs on the door in Indian art is seen at Nasik Cave III³². The history of Indian temple architecture gets back to the time of Aśoka Maurya in the 3rd century B.C.E. when the rock-cut caves for the Ājīvikas were excavated in the Barbar hills.³³ These are the solid evidences of temple and cult or monastic settlements even if the hazy evidences from the Indic culture (c. 2750-1500 B.C.E) could be kept in the reserve.³⁴

This movement of rock-cut architecture initiated in favour of the sects of Jainism and Buddhist dominated the scene when the Hindu phase begins by about the time of the Kuṣāṇas in the early Christian era³⁵ and acquires momentum under the Guptas in the hills of Udayagiri and Rāmgarh around 400 C.E.³⁶ A continuous array of cave temples and structural pyramidal monuments emerged during a vast span of time from the 3rd century B.C.E to the 3rd century C.E mostly concentrated in Western India and Central India. Macro works in the sites at Bhāja, Beḍsa, Kārle, Sāñci, Nāśik, Ajaṅṭa, Ellora, Auranḡābād³⁷ and so on talk eloquently of the architectural works in stone (Nāśik) and bricks or both combined (Sāñci). The iconographic samples displayed in these centers of art pertain mainly to illustrate the life of the Buddha and the Jātaka tales. In addition to the life of the recluses, they recall how domestic life prevailed in those times. They show how the laity goes to a temple and offer worship. Such domestic illustrations give a glimpse into the ordinary walk of life that includes dress habits and the delineation of rustic or urban life patterns. They include dancing girls who presented recitals in the centers of worship. These are the earliest evidences of erotic art in India.³⁸ This leaves unexplained the over whelming number of the remaining erotic’s sculptures.

Explanations for the erotic's sculptures have also been sought in texts dealing with the architecture of temples and their sculptural decoration. In other words, these sculptures are considered to be more than decorative elements in temple architecture.

Silpa Prakasa-II says "A place without love images (*kama-kald*) is known as a place to be shunned (*tyakta-mandala*). In the opinion of the Kaulacaras, it is always a base, for saken place resembling a dark abyss, which is shunned like the den of Death." Only one verse in the *Samaranganasutradhara* (11th century C.E) recommends men and women engaged in *rati-krida*, love play, under the branches of trees beings how none the body of temples. It has to be noticed that the word used in *Brihat Saythita*, *Agni Purana*, and *Hayasirsapan-caratra* is *mithuna*, which ordinarily means a couple, as distinct from *maithuna*, which means couples engaged in sexual intercourse.³⁹ Again these texts confine themselves to the decoration of the door frames of the temples, and also speak of other decorative elements, birds, trees, pitchers, creepers, *svastika* etc. But the erotic's sculptures at Khajuraho, Bhubaneshwar, Konarak, etc., are not on the door frames only; they appear all over the body of the temples. The other decorative elements like birds, trees, creepers etc., are not so generally present, except trees in the case of *salabanjikas*. Infact Indian art is singularly devoid of elements of land scape like trees, creepers, birds, etc. No doubt the word *rati-krida* of *Samaranganasitradhara* does mean something more than a mered depiction of couples, but the evidences extremely tenuous to provide a basis of the erotic sculptures.⁴⁰

It is significant that *mithuna* is not recommended in therefore mentioned texts for use on secular buildings. They speak of this motif only in respect of Prasaddasor temples. The *Mayama-tam* and *Silparatnam* prohibit figuring of nude figures and of the amorous sports of ascetics on the habitations of human beings. As such it is not a purely decorative motif. On the other hand, *Silpa Prakasa* I, enjoins that *alasa kanya* (or *Kanya bandha* or *naribandha*) as distinct from *mithuna* is indispensable in architecture; " As a house without a wife, as a frolic(play) without a woman, so without(the figure of) woman the monument will be inferior in quality and bear no fruit." ⁴¹ The erotic's sculptures were intended towards of evil, to prevent the building beings struck by lightning. This is based on *Utkalakhbhadaxi*, "No lightning will strike the building where the union (*mithuna*) is imaged." The almost universally common" scare crow" motif towards off evil in use in Indian architecture has been the Kirttimukha, "the face of glory". This symbol has been in use since the beginning of the Pre- historic era, and in any case it appears on different monuments⁴² which pre date the temples of Khajuraho, Orissa etc, but features in addition on the front of the threshold of the Garbhagrha to either side of the lotus stalk in the centre; it is more over seen as a repetitive motive along the scold or base of the temples, where it is known as Grihapatikiin Gujarat and as Rhurmukher-mala, in Orissa; it is also carved on either side of the steps at the base of South Indian temples and forms the beginning or the centre of carved panels of the Vedic".⁴³

"It has its most explicit form on Indian temples from the 10th century onwards, where it is placed on the apex of the Gavaksa of the Sukanasa etc., It appears to be somewhat unusual that the architect should have felt the need for a new evil-repelling device, viz. Erotic scenes, and thought to be more potent than the traditional motif of Kirttimukha. In fact on some of the temples having erotic sculptures the Kirttimukha also appears. It would be add if the sculptors felt the need to reinforce the Kirttimukha motif by depicting blatantly erotic sculptures towards off evil.⁴⁴ This erotic sculpture is that they

portray in stone the various bandhas or sexual poses for embracing and coitus given in the *Kamasudra* and other works on erotic's. Some of the embraces described in Vitsiyana's *kamasutras* etc. Latadvestaka, Vriksidhirudhaka, Standlingana, Ksiranira. Sexual congress poses and extra-vaginal coitus depicted and identified with the *Kamasutra* are Avalambitaka or 'suspended' congress, Sanghataka and Gauyuthika (plural congress), oral congress including Kakila. Coitus with animals, the horse, dog, ass etc. is also shown.⁴⁵ The *Kamasutra*, says that in sexual union a man can adopt the posture peculiar to animals like the dog, monkey, tiger, horse, etc.; and human-animal coitus scenes have been traditionally considered to be virile and hence animal postures might be adopted in these acts. In other words such sculptures are only symbolic, suggestive of the coital postures to be adopted rather than any actual congress between men and beasts.⁴⁶

Assuming that these sculptures do exhibition stone the various postures or bandhas described in the *Kamasutra*, this does not explain adequately why it was found necessary to illustrate them on temple walls. Again, the handbooks on *Kamasutrara* forbid the performance of the sexual act in a holy place or at a road side frequented by travellers. Those who have intercourse in such places attract evil beings that cause illness. The best place is a bed chamber within a private house. According to these injunctions temples could not be used for illustrating the *Kamasutra*. Many scholars have sought to find a philosophical justification for the erotic's sculptures and have quoted scriptures in support. "This state, which is like a man and a woman in close embrace, is a symbol of Moksa."⁴⁷ This symbol is carved on the door jambs of the Garbhagriha and on the walls of the temple, repeatedly, in the many forms in which limbs are conjoined in close embrace and their name of the conjoint symbol of Purusa and *Prakrtias*, *Moksas*, *Mithuna*. She goes on to explain that mithunas practiced and to be held by the siddhaka, is a reunion, for in the beginning the Purusa, the essence, was "like a man and a woman in close embrace."⁴⁸

He adds that sukba, the essential meaning of which is physical pleasure, is the terrestrial equivalent of the transcendental ecstasy or *ananda* and in consequence the two terms are used indiscriminately. "On the basis of the allegories which discussed the *maithuna* (congress) is conceived as a symbol of the highest ideal of Hinduism, moksa (liberation); it suggests another form of union, the re-convergence of the world emanated from God (Prakrti) and of God emanating from the universe or in other words the return to the germinal identity."⁴⁹ There is a frequent representation of "acts which are not directed towards procreation and cannot be readily interpreted as referring to mystical experiences." Perversions like masturbation, use of limbs by women, the practice of lesbianism, fellatio and cunnilingus, which are depicted in the erotic sculptures, could not possibly be equated with the normal sexual act.⁵⁰ The law-givers and the Puranas "held out the threat of sanctions against perversions and these sanctions could be extremely severe involving for example loss of caste." there is something in this theory, but clearly it cannot be used to interpret the representations with which we are here concerned. It has no application, for instance, to the scenes depicting not normal sexual relations but certain aberrations in relation to which say symbolical interpretation is clearly in admissible.⁵¹

He suggests that "Just as the sacred books were kept out of profane and "by certain expedients, similarly" the temples were decorated with obscene themes and representations in order to isolate more effectively those who performed the prescribed

rites within them. In other words, the deliberate obscenity of the texts, designed to exclude the profane, was reflected in the decorations and representations on the temple.⁵² And it is true that these elements are on the outside of the temples, indicating by their presence that the inviolable secret is preserved within the temples for the temple is the counter-part of the architectural equivalent, of the book and of the experiences which it describes."In brief it was means to exclude the profane from the inner precincts of the temples by a riotous exhibition of profane acts on the exterior.⁵³ The temples sculptures on the outer walls, however, virtually amount to a standing public announcement in the best possible publicity technique. Frankly, these erotic's sculptures, far from keeping out the profane, could only lead the licentious to flock to these temples. Sura-sundaris and *maithuna* couples replaced gods on temple walls and niches. In fact, such public exhibitions of voluptuous couples and sexual orgies in sacred places could only help to invest them with dignity and to sanctify them and free them from the social stigma they otherwise suffered.⁵⁴ In short this was an open invitation to sexual license. No longer would the Vidmamirgis be under any compulsion to perform their rites in secret.

But they do not express the pleasure of physical union writ large on the *maithunas* of Khajuraho, Bhubaneswar, and Konarak. Infact, in the case of angry or more precisely fiercest pesit cannot even be remotely suggested that the god and his prajna in embrace exhibit sexual gratification.⁵⁵ It is still more significant that no laymen, princes or others are shown in erotic embraces as in the case of Brahman cal temples. The Buddhist gods embracing their female partners cannot be equated with human couples in sexual congress nor can they be explained by a common *hypothesis*; they belong to two different planes of existence. There is also a fundamental difference between sculptures of gods embracing their consorts and erotic couples.⁵⁶ In the Hindu Tantras, they have male purusa female purusais the quiescent, static principle. In Vajrayina of the Buddhists, it is vice versa, the labale being the active element and the female the static. In any erotic play, rati-krida, active participation by both the partners is essential. This is absent from the Hindu and Buddhist interact divinities in embrace. Whereas erotic sculptures.⁵⁷

Jain temples

The Padrivaniathan Chowmukha temple (15th century) at Ranakpur, Rajasthan. It would, therefore, is erroneous to ascribe the Erotic sculptures solely to the cult of Kaula- Kapalikas. In the Mayamatam'- III (earlier than 12th century C.E) and the Silparatnam(16th century C.E), the term tapasvi-lil-occurs.This has been interpreted to mean the amorous ports of the ascetics and at best explains, without raising any questions of sectarian affiliation, the few scenes howling ascetics engaged in amorous activities.⁵⁸



Early Buddhist Images

Few such scenes of eroticism in early Indian art may be demonstrated here to show the antiquity of the subject. Few of these could be considered to find out the antiquity of erotic themes.

The gateways of Sāñcī illustrate a number of celestial nymphs reclining on trees that are called *śālabahñjikas*. The images are beautifully decorated with several ornaments such as mekhalas, necklaces, a row of ankles but are stark nude, exposing the genitalia.⁵⁹ The image is dated in the 1st century C.E. In another case a man and woman are found in close quarters, the man taking the hand of the woman and persuading to drink something that he holds in a cup. In the nearby panel worshippers are found who pay respects to the Buddha sings of worship such as the Buddha-*pāda* or *stūpa*. The image from Nāgārjuanakoṇḍa is dated in the 2nd century C.E.⁶⁰ Several events of the *Jātaka* stories are illustrated in these Buddhist carvings. People in these scenes appear in a group that pertains to life in villages or cities. Few such events from the *Vesantara Jātaka* and *Mandhata Jātaka* are illustrated in scholarly works.⁶¹ These include some women in a bizarre posture and may represent dancing girls who accompany a troupe to a Buddhist temple. James Fergusson as early as the 1870s drew the sketches of some of these sculptures; e.g.

The Buddha found seated in dhyana and men and women having a *darśana* of the images from both sides. Women in these cases are nude and may be dancing girls.⁶² Another image represents the *parinirvāna* of the Buddha from Cave XXVI at Ajanta in which the colossal Buddha is found reclining. Above the huge relief are found celestials paying homage to the Lord. Below are human beings in various postures such as seated, kneeling or dancing and few of these are partly nude.⁶³ In these cases nudity could not be viewed in the context of eroticism.

Following James Fergusson, C. Sivaramamurti was fond of drawing the sketches of these images that he has illustrated in his works on Indian art. His work on the Amarāvati sculptures, first published in 1942 by the Madras Government Museum is an important work in the present context. These illustrate the dress and ornaments of the people and show them in different postures.⁶⁴

Amarāvati Sculptures

Discovered by Col. Colim Mackenzie in 1797, the British government conducted periodical surveys and the monuments in complete ruins. It is unknown history how these wonderful monuments fell a prey to Muhammadan vandalism or natural devastation is not known. The collectors of the then districts in Āndhra and Madras systematically and periodically removed the broken architectural pieces and slabs to the museums in nearby Āndhra headquarters or the Madras Presidency Museum and England. C. Sivaramamurti, the then Curator of the Madras Museum systematically examined the exhibits and published a report in 1942. Some of these representations of men and women in these broken slabs may be examined in the present study.

In many cases the images of men and women pertain to devotees offering worship to the Buddhist sacred objects such as the Wheel of *Dharma*, *stūpa* and so on.⁶⁵ Some of the images find men and women in semi-nude postures that may not be verbally nude but represent the mass in their habitual dress habits.⁶⁶ Some of these may relate to the Buddhist legends as told in several versions of the *Jātakas*.⁶⁷ Buddhist minor characters such as dwarfs playing and amusing others with their naughty actions.⁶⁸ Some of these appear like erotic illustrations⁶⁹ but actually illustrate the worship of the Buddha. It is not clear whether Tantricism was a matter to reckon with in such an early period.



Flowering of Hindu Art

About 1,500 rock-cut cave temples have been reported from all over the subcontinent of which the majority is concentrated in Western India, Gujarat and Central India.⁷⁰ About 75% of these are of the Buddhist-Jain lineage. Early Hindu images have been reported since the Kuṣāṇa and Sātavāhana times. The iconographic features of these images mostly follow the earlier Buddhist models.⁷¹ Most images of this period are of *yakṣa* and *yakṣīs*.¹⁹ Giovanni Verardi has brought to light a number of iconographical specimens that seem to pertain to the early stages of Tantric art of the Kāmbōja and Gandhāran regions in India.⁷² The most important early findings of this study are the following:

Lajjāgaurī from Kashmir Smast with the legs widened and the yoni displayed. *Sthānaka*-Gaṇapati in *urdhvaretas* (phallus erect) mode

However, the roots of the Hindu phase of rock-cut art and structural temples could be traced in the Art of the Guptas of which the works by Joanna G. Williams and Sribahagavan Simha are noted. These two reference works are not concerned with either the Tantric art or Śākta in a specialized perspective. They throw light on how Tantricism had its roots in Gupta art. Representation of celestial figures in semi-nude postures and those of *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* continued following the earlier Buddhist tradition. Few of these reported in earlier works may be noted hereunder:

Bracket motifs of divine *śālabhañjikas*⁷³·*Urdhvaretas*-Śiva with Umā⁷⁴

Sexually provoking Gaṅgā and fragment of a goddess⁷⁵

Mukha-Liṅgas from Nachna and Kohoh⁷⁶ and so on.

These acquired a wider popularity in the Western Calukyan art in Aihole, Badāmī and Paṭṭadakkaḷ. Delineation of nymphs and *apsaras* continued in the art of the Pallavas and Pāṇḍyas. Particular interesting from the Tantric point of view are the following images that find expression in the structural temples of Aihole:

Brahmā attended by *apsaras* in erotic mode in the Hucchapayya-*maṭha* temple⁷⁷·Viṣṇu in erotic mode with penis erect and women nearby in the Lad Khan temple⁷⁸·*Pūrṇakumbhas* in huge numbers on the plinths of the temples⁷⁹·Woman seated like Lajjā-Gaurī or Yoninilayā and nearby two men standing with erect phallus, which the goddess holds in both her arms.⁸⁰ This is definitely a Tantric ritual image, dated around the 7th century CE. The Tantric orientation of the Ēkampam in Kāñci is acclaimed in literature around the 7th century CE; e.g. the *Mattavilāsa* of Mahēndravarmaṇ I (c. 610-30 CE). Few American scholars argue the Kailāsanātha temple in Kāñci was oriented toward the Yoginī cult.⁸¹

It is understandable from the above study that since the flowering of Hindu art under the Guptas eroticism in one form or the other seems to have entered the realm of art.⁸² The temples of Aihole are positive evidences of the erotic ritual going hand in hand with the temple arts. This acquired a vivid expression in the temples of Central and Eastern India by about the 9th century CE. A number of centers such as Khajurāho and Hīrāpūr provide evidences of Yoginī worship. Besides Devangana Desai has presented a list of temples in which the erotic art attained full-fledged form. Thomas E. Donaldson has studied the temples of Orissa that is more than encyclopedic in nature.



The Yoginī Cult and Erotic Art

The Yoginīs are a group of sixty-four goddesses that are considered to be the main deities of Tantric worship.⁸³ The famous temples for the Yoginīs are from Khajurāho and Hīrāpūr in Central and Eastern India. However, scholars have detected the evidences of Yoginī worship in northern India from the following places that mainly cover the modern states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The places are: Nareśar, Mitauli, Hinajajgargh, Dudhai, Badoh, Lothari, Rikhiyari, Khajurāho, Shahdol, Bherāghāṭ, Rāñīpūr-Jhariāl and Hīrāpūr.

To this list Kāñcīpuram from Tamilnadu is added.⁸⁴ R.K.K. Rajarajan suggests to this list Ellora, Aihole, Tirupparāṅkuṅṅam, Kōyamputtūr, Paḷḷūr should be added. It is also added that several of the temples in Kerala go by the name Bhagavati. Therefore, if a systematic survey is undertaken a number of places from the south could be added to the list of Yoginī temples. Temples with a cluster of erotic images from the basement to the *vimāna* and the integral parts of the temple such as *maṇḍapas* are concentrated in Orissa and the Buṇḍelkhaṇḍ region in Madhya Pradesh.⁸⁵ A cluster of temples are found in Bhuvaneśvara.⁸⁶ The other important centers are Koṅāraka and Pūri, Khajurāho was a region ruled by the Rājput kings of the Chaṇḍella dynasty. They built a number of temples in this temple city such as Kandarīya Mahādeva, Lakṣmaṇa, Vāmana, Chauṣaṭ-Yoginī and a number of Jain temples. The major attractions of these temples are the erotic carvings of which scholars like Thomas E. Donaldson have spent their life time in research.

Conclusion

The political interaction that the imperial Cōḷas had with Kaliṅga seems to have initiated a new course in the artistic output of the Tamils. Since the middle Cōḷa times the erotic arts get into the mainstream of art in Tamilnadu. With the advent of the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka times erotic arts linked with the erotic rituals seems to have very

much impressed the Tamil traditions. We may add there is no Vijayanagara-Nāyaka temple in Tamilnadu that fails to accommodate erotic images. We may add here that there is no exclusive work dedicated to the erotic arts of Tamilnadu. In Tamil tradition the wood-carved temple cars of Tamilnadu are the abodes of the iconography in the erotic arts. Against this historical setting, the erotic images in the Tamil country may be examined and their *raison d'etre* discussed.

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