

SCULPTURE OF ANCIENT KASHMIR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RAJATARANGINI OF KALHANA

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ABSTRACT

The practice of the sculptural art in Kashmir is attributed to divine iconographic tenets as laid down in various texts and practiced through the ages. The large number of exquisite images in stone, metal and other media of plastic art, discovered from various parts of Kashmir, testify the strict adherence to the laid down principles of iconography while expressing the artist's independent thinking innovations within the permissible sphere thus giving rise to a unique style of its own. Through this research paper I will give important Sculptures of ancient Kashmir.

KEYWORDS: Stupa, Chaitya, garudadhwaaja

INTRODUCTION

The earliest glimpses of the sculptural art of Kashmir may be had from the pre-historic period but it seems to have been inspired by the magicodynamism and naturalism. As such it stands out in contrast from the sculpture of the later periods. During the historic period we start getting the examples of sculptural art from the beginning of the Common Era as is indicated by two stone images of Vasudeva and Balarama from the region of Chilas in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The inscribed image with Kharoshtiinscription clearly has a Scythian style of the Kushana period. The geo-political situation of Kashmir had effect on its sculptural art as well as can easily be discerned from the extant pieces of various periods. The Central Asia, Afghanistan, Persia and Gandhara in the north and west, China and Tibet in the north-east besides the main land traditions that travelled continuously from northern plains of India mingled into harmonious

synthesis to give a new form. As such a fine blend of the Gandhara and Mathura schools can be found in the sculptural art of Kashmir. It has been rightly observed that the master sculptors of Kashmir created various types of images in response to the religious needs of the people within the framework of Indian tradition. Yet their study requires an intensive research in view of the intermingling of different art motifs and fusion of various religious doctrines in the valley from Central Asia and other directions. The sculpture of Kashmir followed its own independent style by combining the local ethos with borrowings from more established traditions outside the valley. Its iconography developed accordingly and as a result, by the end of the 5th century CE, a great variety of forms of the Brahmanical deities had emerged. From 7th-8th century CE onwards the school of Kashmir art acquired distinct features, even as it was absorbing Gandharan and Gupta influences reaching its pinnacle of glory in the times of Lalitaditya. The movement sustained till the 10th-11th century CE when its fame spread throughout the Himalayan region and its style was borrowed not only in the adjoining but also in far off lands of Nepal and Tibet. Kashmir has still preserved some good specimens of sculpture and it is not difficult to reconstruct a succinct history of the development of plastic art.

As the *Stupa* of Chaitya (Lalitaditya's minister of Chinese descent) at Parihasapura shows, there are T'ang Chinese models found in the Bodhisatva statues there. But then the king's Indian expeditions resulted in a considerable influx of sculptors trained in the late Gupta tradition. There must have been a surplus of sculptors in Central India at that time because in those years Indian prosperity was dwindling. Whether they came voluntarily or were forced to come by Lalitaditya, we cannot ascertain. But in any case, we find at Marta La reliefs in the best late Gupta style around the plinth of the great central shrine, and likewise on those of the subsidiary temples flanking it on both sides. "They are very elegant, mannered, somewhat sensuous, fashionable, often even sophisticated. Their costume, on the other hand, generally goes back to Gandhara and Sassanian fashions, which then must still have prevailed in Kashmir.

But most of the sculptures found on the walls, on the entrance to the temple and on staircases, depicting the Sun-god, goddesses, or king Lalitaditya with his queens and priest, are the work of local artists, trained no doubt by the late Gupta masters. Their modelling is no doubt

less sensitive, and more static, but instead they have a vitality and strength which for the next two hundred years was the hall-mark of Kashmir sculpture. Also ichnographically they are interesting; for they have preserved quite a number of types which otherwise are rare in India but which are well known to us from Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia and Campa as imports from India-e.g., many 'Tantric' types, or Vishnu riding on Garuda, etc.

Sculptural art of Kashmir with distinct characteristics by a real synthesis of the influences from Gandhara and Gupta schools plus the elegance in details and symmetrical proportions in body and look stamped by the Kashmir artists- reached its apogee under the rule of the Utpala dynasty. The four-headed Visnu (Visnu-Vaikuntha), heavily ornamented and clad in dhoti with a dagger attached to the jewelled girdle at his waist is the most popular figure of the period. The powerful frame of the body exhibits vigor and discipline and the emotional expression of the face is in sharp contrast to the passionless, calm features of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas of the earlier sculptures found at Pandrenthan and Parihasapura. Other sculptures too, for example, Kamadeva seated between his consorts, Rati and Priti, KPK a amid his Gopis, Ganga, Yamuna, Trimurti, Ardhanarishvara, Ganesha and Lakshmi, icons so much varied, reveal the same innate emotion, depth of feeling and above all vigor.

After the Utpalas the history of plastic art in Kashmir is written in decay. With the continued internecine warfare in the valley, and the fall in the material and moral standards of the kings and the court (the patrons of art and letters), sculpture and iconography touched a low level. We have, however, echoes of the Kashmir art in the sculptures in the later temples of Babor and Kirmchi in Jammu. In the Valley building in stone was abandoned in favour of the cheaper material-timber. Wooden temples were built at that time in great numbers, whose blockhouse construction seems to survive in the peculiar type of Kashmir mosques. Examples of their richly carved decoration survive only outside Kashmir Valley, at Marol in Lahaul, and in some early Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh, Spiti and Guge. They reveal the same facade design but elaborated into fragile filigree thronged with delicate figures in chapel niches or on lotus flowers.

Kalhana makes copious reference to the consecration of images of various gods and goddesses made of copper, silver, gold and stone by kings, members of their family, nobles and individuals. Referring to a story of the bygone days he talks of an image of Satakapalesha and the 'circle of the Mothers'. The latter was perhaps a prototype of the *Chaunsathayoginis* or the *Saptamatrkas* of the later period. Our author again refers to the erection of statues of gods and Sivalingas at Theda and Bhimadevi, located on the banks of Dal Lake by the king SamdhimatAryaraja. During the rule of Pravarasena II, who was a devout worshipper of Siva, we are told that the king wanted to erect a Linga called Pravaresvara at the village Saritaka, an image of VisnuJayasvamin is said to have miraculously occupied that place on the base with the sacred diagram. Again Pravarsena is said to have consecrated the image of Vinayaka named Bhimasvamin. As an indication of the co-existence of various religious faiths we are told that Pravarsena's maternal uncle named Jayaendra installed an image of the Buddha named Brhadbuddha. Another image of the Buddha is said to have been erected by Amrtaprabha, a wife of king Ranaditya. The same king, in an interesting story related by Kalhana, is said to have installed two statues one each of Hari and Hara. They were named as Ranasvamin and Ranesvara respectively.

LalitudityaMuktapida's rule has been described by Kalhana as a period of great building activity for religious purpose as it was famous for the political glory of the king. He talks of an image of Nrhari form of Visnu that was suspended in the air with the help of magnets. Though the material used for it is not specified, it appears to be made of metal. The chronicle tells us that this king got an image of Visnu named Muktakesava made of eighty-four thousand *tolakas* of gold installed at Parihasapura. Another image named Parihasakesava that weighed eighty-four thousand *palas* of silver was also installed. It was probably in the form of Visnu-Sesasayin and adorned with pearls. Another silver image of the same god in Govarhanadhara (Krisna) form was also installed. Yet another image of the Boar incarnation of Visnu called Mahavaraha, which had golden armour was also installed by the same king. Another image of Visnu named Ramasvamin was also consecrated by the same kingLalituditya's queen

Kamalavati also put up a large silver image of Visnu named Kamalakesava and his minister Mitrasarman put up a

Sivalinga. He is said to have erected a fifty-four *hasta* tall stone-pillar, in front of these, topped with an image of Garuda. We have the famous examples of such Garuda-pillars at Besnagar (2nd century BCE) and Eran (5th century CE) amongst others. This shows that the tradition of erecting *Garudadhvaja* continued till this period even in Kashmir. Queen Didda (980-1003 CE) is said to have placed Vaikuntha images of Visnu in shrines as acts of her piety, may be to cover up her evil deeds. But it shows the popularity of this form of Visnu images in the valley, a large number of which have survived to this day.

Even a Vaikunthamatha is mentioned in the 12th century. Unfortunately

Kalhana does not provide any details of the iconography, for the obvious reason of that falling beyond the scope of his work, but the description clearly shows that images of various incarnations of the god as well as of other deities like the Buddha were quite popular in Kashmir and were made of various metals and stone.

Lalitaditya is said to have erected a giant copper image of the Buddha called Brhadbuddha that weighed eighty-four thousand *Prasthas* of copper. It is difficult to say whether this image was an incarnation of Visnu or the Buddha, though the latter possibility is greater. His Tuhkhara minister Cankuna also installed lofty golden images of the Jinas (the Buddha). Later on the king Ksemagupta (950-958 CE) is said to have taken away a brass image of Sugata (the Buddha) from Jayendravihara. However, two Buddha images are said to have been spared by king Harsa (1089-1101 CE) on request when the king was in good mood. The strife that hit Kashmir in the later times of our study show a large-scale destruction. There is a reference to a great fire in Srinagar in the time of Sussala (1121-28 CE). In the rubble of the burnt down religious buildings is said to have remained a blackened image of the Buddha. These references tell us about sculptural activity on one hand and their destruction on the other. The large number of beautifully carved images from Kashmir stands a living testimony to the existence of numerous exquisite images mentioned by Kalhana in his work as a tribute to the sculptural art of the valley.

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