



FLAMBOYANCE : MAGNILOQUENT AND FLORID

The positive eclecticism of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa era reached its highest splendour in the Kailāsanātha temple and the Rāvaṇānugraha is the culmination of this interjacence of various idioms¹. The threads of different lineages get intertwined in a cord so firmly that they almost fuse into each other at some junctures. The Rāvaṇānugraha is a representative example of the possible outcome of such a fusion. In many other cases, the interlacing lineages, while contributing to the chord also retained their independent existence. In the course of time, the youthful tension and the tensile strength of this chord is lost and the contributory fibres gradually begin to fray due to aging. The evolutionary pattern, the destiny of an individual idiom and the rate of change or the acceleration of the change would vary from idiom to idiom. The plastic intentions of each of these idioms are different, the tangible manifestations also vary accordingly but when the idiom succeeds in creating the closest possible parallel of the archetypal image or rather the abstract intention, all such palpable symbols do have something in common, whatever period or regional variations do they represent. It is that notion on the basis of which the aesthetic tradition is structured. That 'common element', call it 'beauty', or 'significant form' or anything else, is indicative of the success of that form in reflecting the artists' conception and intensity of

feelings. When the concept is borrowed and the feelings are without intensity, the expression is imperatively weaker and needs to be supplemented with extrinsic embellishment, the tendency that is known as 'rococo' in Western terminology. Even in India this inclination can be commonly seen in the medieval phase and hence ornateness is considered as a characteristic feature of medieval sculpture. Alongwith elaborate ornamentation, body flexions, an unjustified agility and also a synoptic approach in the delineation of the subject matter are some of the features that are observed in this phase but the sculpture, ornate in the real sense of the term, is seldom seen at Ellora. The *Prṣṭhasvastika* Naṭarāja (Fig.74) from Lañkeshwara or the elaborate *ghaṭapallava* motifs from the same cave, the River Goddesses relief (Fig.75) from the small shrine in the courtyard of Kailāsa can be cited as some of the examples, where the sculptor has revealed his intentions to decorate the sculpture, but if seen in the light of the decorative accent of Indian sculpture, these sculptures do not represent the nomenclature. This much of ornamentation can be seen even in the classical phase of Indian sculpture. The *mekhalā* of Dhammekha stūpa, the *prabhāmaṇḍala* of the Sarnath Buddha images or the pillars from Ajanta caves should strengthen this argument. Ornamentation that fails to integrate with the form is never seen in Ellora; not even in the Jain caves which are much later in date. By the eleventh century the sculpture from Rajasthan Gujarat, Karnataka² or any other part of the country becomes intricately decorative.

Similar delineation is not only absent but is even difficult to visualize in the caves at Ellora or for that matter in any cave temple. Cave sculpture, particularly from the Deccan is too robust and vigorous to culminate into such ornateness. The temporality and temperament of this sculpture would not allow itself to be so. As a repercussion the flamboyance converges into pomp. The later cave sculpture exploits this inherent asset to its maximum. To overwhelm the spectator it grows unmanageably colossal but since the gusto and passion is lost, it appears inflated, swollen, devoid of inner vitality and elegance.

The co-existence of these two tendencies impel us to detect, which one of these two lineages tends to be florid and which one of them gets magniloquent. The sculptures mentioned before (the Naṭarāja from Laṅkeshwara, the River Goddesses) alongwith some other sculptures from the Laṅkeshwara, reveal this feature. Though they are not exactly ornate, some deliberate ornamentation is evident in these sculptures. All these sculptures lack an impulse, instead they appear contrived. They may satisfy the canonical prescriptions but the reverberation of life is hardly resonant in them.

The gestures, the costumes, the ornaments and moreover the theatricality in these sculptures—save the River Goddesses clearly denote their kinship with the Pattadakal idiom. In the course of their evolution, they seem to have evaded the interfusion that took place and managed to retain their character, to a great extent. This

sculpture also remains ill-conversant with the manoeuvring of space that the Deccan cave sculptors had mastered and fails to establish any relation with the realm in which it has been placed. Relatively, the Pallava artisans from the very beginning tackle with the provided space a little more imaginatively, though they too cannot rival the Deccan sculptors in their ability to activate the space. The sculptures on the north wall of the Nandiṃaṇḍapa (Fig.77) indicate the further emanations of the Pallava tradition.

The indigenous Deccan idiom does contribute to the Raṣṭrakūṭa style but it does not evolve independently at Kailāsa. It perhaps reached its summit even before the commencement of this project and therefore, while contributing to the enrichment of the alloyage in the crucible of Kailāsa, this style is seen to be ageing and degenerating in the vicinity of Kailāsa but not within it. Surrendering all the secrets of the visual language that had been codified through centuries to the newly arrived idiom, this waning style comes to an end.

The last phase of its life cycle can be seen at Ellora and at Dhumarlena in particular. Due to its obvious similarity with Elephanta architecture and iconographic programme it has been placed in the early phase of Ellora by most scholars including Spink³ and Soundara Rajan⁴. But the date of Elephanta is still a debatable issue. The decisive evidence from Elephanta has been lost and hence the monument is being provided a date-bracket either in accordance with the dynastic rulers or the religious cults followed by the dynasties⁵.

In this particular case, since the monument is of Śaiva Pāśupata faith: it logically is attributed to the Kalachuris who as stated before, are the devotees of Paśupati⁶. But that does not help us to pin-point the specific ruler of that dynasty that patronized this project and whether it was in the beginning of his reign or at its end. Considering the highly evolved sculpture from the great cave, the date ascribed to it seems too early. Atleast this cave from the island does not seem to be earlier than A.D.580⁷.

Since the architecture of Dhumarlena and its ground plan in particular is derived from Elephanta, the former is placed immediately after the latter. The architectural mouldings or the pillar types are quite similar to Elephanta but the compactness of Elephanta is not discernible in Dhumarlena. As the scale increases, the harmony between the pillars and the space in between is disturbed, and the feeling of enclosure experienced in Elephanta is lost. The darkness in Elephanta adds more density to the space, making it more palpable, and the tangible space that keeps hovering in every cubicle charges Elephanta with mystery. The over-illuminated interior of Dhumarlena rarifies the density of space and holds it at a mundane level. The grandiloquence of Elephanta converges into magniloquence at Dhumarlena and that is manifest more conspicuously in the sculpture.

The iconographic programme is very similar to the one at Elephanta but each of the sculptural panels from Elephanta emerges from the

mysterious depths of the rock. Those from Dhumarlena are carved without sensing the life of form hence the huge protruding masses from these sculptures are reduced to just a cold lump of stone when compared to the protruding and pulsating volume of the Elephanta reliefs.

The Kalyāṇasundaramūrti (Fig. 78) is perhaps the only reasonably good sculpture from this cave and presumably the earliest of these. The qualitative and stylistic difference between this relief and the others also suggest a short hiatus in the activity at this site, as only this sculpture conforms to the date of the architecture of this cave, which I think is not immediately after Elephanta. As stated before, it is a lesser imitation of the latter. If we wish to treat the cultic reference as decisive evidence and insist on attributing this Pāśupata Śaivite monument to Kalachuris, it should be attributed to Buddharāja and not to Shankaragana. Its scale and pomp does indicate that it could have been an imperial monument. At this juncture we are obliged to refer to the transitory political scene in the northern regions of Maharashtra.

Though there is a controversy about the exact years of reign of Shankaragana and Buddharāja, the reign of Buddharāja cannot be pushed earlier than A.D.600⁸. Mangalesha, the Chālukyan ruler defeated him somewhere around A.D.602⁹. But it is not clear whether

the region around Ellora was conquered in this conquest. It was after repeated warfare between the Kalachuris and the Chālukyas, that western Maharashtra, Kuntala and Vidarbha were conquered by the Chālukyan rulers including Pulakeśin II¹⁰. Obviously the regions near the Southern - most limits of the Kalachuri empire must have been taken over by the Chālukyans and it must have taken some time to reach upto Ellora for them, which means that though the Chālukyan conquest over Kalachuris started in A.D.602, Ellora was not included in the Chālukya territory atleast till the second decade of the 7th century. This I presume is the period when the work at Dhumarlena was in progress. It must have commenced at the advent of Buddharāja's reign and either due to repeated failures on the warfront or due to the loss of this particular territory the work ceased to continue in the first or second decade of the 7th century¹¹. This date also corresponds with the one that is derived from the stylistic development of the architecture at Dhumarlena. The comparison given before, brings home the conclusion that Elephanta and Dhumarlena are not chronologically adjacent to each other and hence Dhumarlena should be much later a monument that it is considered to be.

The hiatus mentioned before is conspicuously noticed in the sculptural development of Dhumarlena. After the Kalyāṇasundaramūrti, the work seems to have discontinued, or to be more precise even this sculpture was not complete at the cessation of work. The three figures in the lower right corner of this sculpture do not stylistically correspond to

the rest of the panel. A comparison between this sculpture and the other panels from this cave will illustrate this disparity better. The former, though much inferior to the representative examples of the Western Indian style, does retain the linguistic pattern of that region. The traces of inherent elegance, although faint, are discerned despite the waning vigour and vitality. The sculptor has not forgotten the role of active space in a sculpture and the dynamic reciprocal relationship of form and void. If the awkwardly dancing Naṭarāja image (Fig. 80) from the same cave is contrasted with the Kalyāṇasundara, the incongruity is starkly noticeable. The limbs of this Naṭarāja image are set clumsily, the proportions are naive and the stance is ridiculous. Both these sculptures cannot belong to the same date-bracket and not only that they cannot even be perceived as a resultant of a rectilinear evolutionary continuation of the previous stage.

The Dhumarlēna Naṭarāja is one of the clumsiest in Indian sculpture. Though the other sculptures from this cave are qualitatively better than this image, none of them can even reach the level of the Kalyāṇasundara which itself is not of a very high standard but it has at least retained the sense of monumentality. All the sculptures of these caves are poorly conceived, loosely composed, and clumsily executed. The sculptors chose to work on a large scale but even after enlarging the figures of the protagonists to suit that scale, the challenge of the empty space around them was difficult to meet with. They filled it up cursorily and hesitantly without any scheme or

intrinsic logic. No two characters from these reliefs can develop a psychical relationship and hence the total composition looks more like medley than a unified, coherent expression.

One of these sculptures facing the Kalyāṇasundara, poses a very interesting art historical problem, though aesthetically it is the least stimulating - the relief depicting Śiva and Pārvati on Kailāsa (Fig.79). The compositional pattern is derived from the earlier sculptures depicting the same theme. It is divided into two halves and in the lower register one of the figures stands out conspicuously due to its stylistic traits which are alien to this cave. It appears to be of Chālukyan origin. M.A.Dhaky has pointed out this image alongwith many other Chālukyan - looking images at Ellora¹². In his paper he expresses his amazement over the Chālukyan element being introduced here at such an early date, but he doubts if it can be explained on political grounds and attributed to the Chālukyan ruler Mangaleśa. He further opines that it might be the contribution of stray artists of the Chālukyan region to this monument, which is logical as the addition is too minor to enable to reach such conclusions. But at the same time, a monument progressing under the patronage of a dynasty does not have to be in a style which is prevalent in their homeland and that too when it is being executed at a place so distant from it. The Rāṣṭrakūṭa monuments in Madhya Pradesh, like Dhamnar, faithfully subscribe to the idiom which was in vogue in that region at that

time. Similarly the Chālukyans could have extended supplementing grants to a monument which was abandoned due to the cessation of the Kalachuri reign in this region and allowed it to be in the indigenous style.

The second phase of the Dhumarlēna is an uproarious culmination of an uninterrupted art activity of several centuries which had already started going into hibernation. The hollow pomp of this contrivance is indicative of the spent force of vitality. The colossi (Fig. 81, 82), extremely non-vibrant, non-agile, pose aimlessly before the viewer, claiming a very faint association with the glorious tradition. At this juncture the art of sculpture in Maharashtra lies inert for a few decades, until the fresh currents from the *Teñkaṇa Dīśā*¹³ reach this land in the mid-eighth century and awaken and revitalize this dormant tradition.

REFERENCES

1. The problem of Kailāsa is discussed at length in the next chapter. Some of the issues overlap each other, as the later developments at Ellora are not rectilinear. To elucidate the idea of magniloquent flamboyance, a brief reference to the later development at Kailāsanātha is essential.

This might apparently disturb the chronological sequence of this dissertation; however, while examining the complex matrix of stylistic developments at Ellora, it was found unavoidable.

2. In the Dīlwada temples of Abu, the Modhera temple in Gujarat, or in the Hoysala temples at Halebid and Belur, either the sculpture itself is reduced to a decorative pattern, sacrificing its autonomous existence, or the decorative motifs are loaded on the sculpture. This kind of ornamentation is never seen in any of the cave temples.
3. Walter Spink, 'Ellora's Earliest Phase' The Bulletin of the American Academy of Benares Vol.I, Nov. 1967, pp.11-22.
4. K.V.Soundara Rajan, 'Cave Temples of the Deccan' Delhi, 1981, Fig. 3.

5. (i) The inscription that was found on this island was sent to many scholars to be deciphered, by the Portugese governor. In transit, perhaps on the way to Portugal, it was lost. See Charles Collins 'The Iconography and Ritual of Śiva at Elephanta', Albany, 1988.

(ii) The island of Gharapuri was under the rule of the Koṅkan Mauryas as derived from their records viz. the Vādā inscription of Suketuvarma (Bombay Gazetteer, Old Series Vol.XIV pp.372-373) or the Goa copper plate of Chandraverma (ABORI, XXIII, Vol.23 pp. 510-513).

The rule of the Kalachuris and Chalukyas was also extended to this island after the Mauryas and hence the patronage of this cave has always remained a controversial issue. As discussed in the previous chapter, on the basis of cultic references, it is attributed to the Kalachuris and on stylistic grounds Parimoo affiliates it to the Vākāṭaka art tradition.

6. Refer to note 8 from Chapter 'The Delayed Appearance'.
7. Charles Collins, op. cit., too attributes a much later date as compared to previous notions. He dates this cave to c. 575 A.D. Even W.Spink places it around 555 in the chart published alongwith 'Ajanta to Ellora' Marg XX No.2, March '67, pp. 5-6.

8. The Abhona copper plate of Shankaragaṇa (CII, Vol.IV, Part I No.12) is a dated grant of this sovereign, issued in the K.E. 347, i.e. 597 A.D. and hence Buddharāja's reign can be considered as commencing around 600 A.D.
9. The Mahākūṭa inscription of Mangalesha. Carol Radcliffe Bolon, 'The Mahākūṭa Pillar and its Temples, Artibus Asiae, Vol.XLI, 1979, p. 253.
10. Gulam Yazdani, 'Early History of the Deccan' pp. 205-211.
11. V.V.Mirashi, 'Dantidurga, the founder of the Rāshtrakūṭa Imperial Power' Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda, Vol.I No.1, 1951. also attributes a date closer to this i.e. 620 A.D., for the eradication of the Kalachuri rule from this region.
12. M.A.Dhaky, 'The Dravidian Sculptures in the pre-imperial Rāshtrakūṭa Cave Temple in Ellora', E.C.S.A., Delhi, 1988.
13. This literally means 'the south'. The inscriptions from the Virūpāksha and Pāpanātha temples at Pattadakal mention a *sūtradhāra* from *tenkaṇa diśa* which probably refers to *sūtradhāra* hailing from the southern regions or it can also be interpreted as the architect looking after the south wall or side of the temple (Indian Antiquaries X, p. 170).