



CLASSICISM COCOONED

This chapter tries to probe into the problem of the inaugural activity at Ellora employing several different methodologies simultaneously, since none of them taken singularly is adequate enough to lead us to a specific conclusion. Together they can fill up the lacunae of each other and project a clearer picture of the art activity in this region and give us a better understanding of the stylistic lineages and their evolution and interactions.

The history of the Deccan gives us an account of the ephemeral rules and domains of several post-Gupta dynasties in this area¹. A student of art is compelled to take note of these developments though it may not be his prime concern. The varied styles seen in the corpus of sculpture in this region cannot be explained irrespective of the political developments. The sculptural lineages pouring in are responsible for the Ellora style of sculpture, to understand which, it is necessary to trace each lineage meticulously and if necessary using a methodology that is apparently extrinsic to this dissertation.

To sense the *zeitgeist* of this era we will have to look into the literal and canonical texts contemporaneous to this art activity since the artistic sensibility and the plastic intentions of that age are discerned through them.

Alongwith the thirty four numbered caves at the Ellora complex, there are several smaller caves and burrows in the vicinity. Some of them are just a little larger and deeper than a *devakoṣṭha* sometimes having a facade with two thin, small pillars with no sculpture in them, or sometimes a vulgar later version of the Maheśamūrti carved in low relief on the back wall. Most of these caves are not significant architecturally or sculpturally and hence are always overlooked by the scholars working on this baffling site. Two of such caves, if we call them caves, are carved behind the waterfall in the horseshoe scarp between Caves 27 and 29.

One of them is a small cavern housing two *dvārapālas* and four other small images. The outer wall shows some portions of highly mutilated images. A part of a standing Viṣṇu (Fig. 1) and the river Goddesses with *chhatras* (Fig. 2) over their heads are flanking the doorway.

In some of the works on Ellora this small cavern is mentioned as Cave 28. A brief description of this cave can be seen in Soundara Rajan's 'Cave Temples of the Deccan'² and also in an article by

M.N.Deshpande³. The description given by Soundara Rajan is a little confusing. It mixes up sculptures from two different caves (27 and 28). There is one more cavern between Cave 27 and Cave 28 which also has two standing images of Śiva and Viṣṇu (Fig. 4). The image of Viṣṇu attracts the attention of the viewer for two reasons, namely, the way the deity holds his attributes, and the attributes themselves. The image has four arms, three of them intact, holding a *gadā* and a *chakra* in the upper right and left hands respectively and a small fruit-like object (*bījapūraka*) in the lower right one. The fourth hand, badly mutilated, was probably holding a *śankha* as commonly seen in the other images, holding a fruit instead of the usual *padma*. The *gadā* is held in *udbāhu* position - the arm is raised above the shoulder and the shape of the *gadā* is also different from the one found in later images. It is a long slender *musala* like mace which is seen in the images of the *Kusana* or early Gupta phase as also the manner in which it is held. The other hand, holding the *chakra* also suggests an early date to this image, in which the *chakra* is actually held between the fingers. A mutilated fragment of one more Viṣṇu image can be seen on the walls of the other cave. Only a part of the image showing the lower left arm resting on the head of a small human figure, perhaps an *ayudha puruṣa*, is preserved. On iconographical grounds and with due awareness of their provenance, these images can be dated back to 4th-5th century. However, we sometimes find such early iconographical features in

later images too, and an example can be cited at this very site. In Cave 16, a standing Viṣṇu image from the rear corridor behind the shrine proper, shows all the early iconographical features though it is not earlier than the 8th century; need to also examine these sculptures by applying some other criteria before proclaiming them as the earliest from this site. Since this dissertation claims to inquire into the stylistic development of Ellora Brahmanical sculpture, trying to demarcate the possible framework of the stylistic phases should be its prime concern. But at a place like Ellora which was surrounded by the territories of the Vākāṭakas, the Aśmakas, the Ruchikas, the Traikūṭakas and the Āndhras - the dynasties of the post-Gupta Deccan, consistently at war with each other and struggling for supremacy - will it be logical to expect the sculptural tradition to follow the deterministic progression ? This is a phase when different cultural lineages were conflicting and unknowingly interacting with each other. In a way, it is a phase of cultural and as a result, aesthetic confusion, and therefore, the problems of patronage and authorship of the monuments does not remain extrinsic to the investigation of stylistic development.

That is why it becomes obligatory to take note of the political developments in this region during the 5th-6th century, and check if the data derived could be of help in confirming the date bracket that has been attributed to these monuments. Fortunately a lot of

inscriptional evidence has been compiled by pioneers like Buhler, Bhagwanlal Indraji, Mirashi and scholars like Shobhana Gokhale, B.Deshpandey and H.Thosar are supplementing it with fresh information and interpretations - in turn giving rise to new controversies. The political picture of the Deccan is getting clearer in the light of this discussion. In the present context, two of the dynasties of this period will have to be scrutinised viz. the Vākātakas and the Traikūtakas. Both these royal houses seem to be of Vaiṣṇava faith and it seems that this region was under their hegemony during the 5th-6th centuries at least for a few decades.

There is a controversy over the origin and geneology of the Vākātakas, the distinguished dynasty which had played a great role in the art activity of this period and this region; a super power which had claimed the status of "Samrāṭ" even before the rise of the mighty Gupta emperor Samudragupta⁴. In the present context, the 'mulapurusa' of this dynasty - Vindhyakirti I or Vindhyaśakti who is also mentioned as *Vākātakavamśaketu* in the inscription of Cave 16 of Ajanta, seems to be a key figure. Dr.Mirashi opines on the origin of the founder of the Vākātakas empire, that he was probably an ordinary *gr̥hapati* during the times of the Sātavāhanas, whose name is found in an inscription from Amaravati, as *Vākātakas*. Mirashi also states further that the origin of this dynasty should not be traced with the help of place names as in the case of Traikūtakas

from Trikuṭa, since this word is used as a proper name and not a family name in this inscription. He gives a convincing argument to prove the Āndhraite origin of this dynasty and also of the Vallur family which served these emperors for generations⁵. Bhau Daji considered him as one of the Yavana kings or belonging to a lesser caste like the Ābhīras, Gardhabhilas, or Muruṇḍas, who came to power after the fall of the Śātavāhanas⁶. According to Vākātaka records, the Vākātaka crown-prince Gautamiputra was married to the daughter of the Naga king Bhavanaga of Padmavāti (modern Pawaya) in C.300 A.D.⁷. This relation with a so-called lesser family strengthens Bhau Daji's speculation. Vindhyakīrti is mentioned as *dvija* - the adjective for *brāhmaṇas* and birds who are born twice - is a very interesting fact and it is quite possible that the Vākātaka from the Amaravati inscription and *Vākātakavamsaketu* Vindhyaśakti are not two different personalities and after the fall of Śātavāhanas, he must have renamed himself as Vindhyaśakti and hence is called *dvija*. It is necessary to mention here that his name is not found as an emperor in the Vākātaka inscriptions and records. The *gotra* of this dynasty mentioned in the above said inscription is *Viṣṇuvṛddha*⁸. All these facts together lead us to a speculation that Vākātaka, an Abhīra *gṛhapati* joined the mainstream of Vaiṣṇavism after rising to power. We know about several powerful Abhīra generals serving in Kṣatrapa armies and who rose to power after the fall of the

Sātavāhanas, particularly in Maharashtra. Majumdar and Alatekar inform that the sources of information are silent about the history of western Kṣatrapas during C.230 to 275 A.D.⁹ and the Epigraphical and Purāṇic evidence shows that the Abhīras rose to power in Maharashtra during the 3rd century¹⁰. The period mentioned is the approximate period of Vindhyaśakti's rule i.e. 255 to 275 A.D. This speculation will be supported with some more evidence at a later juncture.

Though it is not possible to attribute the patronage of the sculpture mentioned in the beginning to Vindhyaśakti, a contention that Brahmanical sculptural activity started at Ellora before the arrival of the Pāśupata Śaivite cult to this region and that the Vaiṣṇavite caves near the scaro could be the beginning of this activity does merit some consideration at this stage. These apparently insignificant caves seem to be inspired by the small Vaiṣṇavite caverns from Ramgarh and Udaigiri. The size of the caves, the Gangā-Yamunā figures on the outer wall with *chhatras* on their head, and the iconography evince several similarities with the Gupta tradition, though being stylistically distinct¹¹.

At this stage, we will have to take a note of the fact that most of the early Brahmanical sculptures found in this region and Vidarbha are Vaiṣṇavite and are starkly different from Gupta Vaiṣṇavite sculpture not only iconographically but stylistically as well.

Nagardhan, Ramtek, Pavnar, Nağara and Nachna are some of the Vākāṭaka sites where Vaiṣṇavite sculpture is found and it is very different from Udaigiri and Mathura sculpture. Since the Ajanta and later Ellora sculpture reveals a Gupta influence, this particular group of sculptures poses a problem in a study of the evolution of Ellora sculpture and in our understanding of its relationship with its predecessors. Most scholars either just ignore these sculptures or consider them as later additions without any specific reason.

As a matter of fact they can be comfortably placed somewhere around A.D. 450 when Vaiṣṇavism was widely popular in this region. They may not be the projects of the Vākāṭaka royal house but they are certainly of that age when the Vākāṭakas were ruling this area.

We cannot overlook the fact that most Brahmanical sculpture from Vidarbha and Marathwada region that can be attributed to the Vākāṭakas or their times is Vaiṣṇavite. Ramtek has two temples devoted to the incarnations of Viṣṇu-Narasimha and Trivikrama. The cave at Dharashiv has relief carvings of *Kṛṣṇalīla* on the lintel, many of Pavnar sculptures are also identified as *Kṛṣṇalīla* panels by Jamkhedkar and Deglurkar¹² and at a site which is even earlier to all these, Nagara from Bhandara district, a number of Viṣṇu images have been discovered which are now in the collection of the Central Museum, Nagpur and are dated to the 5th century A.D. Dr. Mirashi has shown with the help of substantial evidence that the emperors of the

Vākāṭaka dynasty had patronized the Śaivite as well as the Vaiṣṇavite faith. Alongwith the Śiva temples which were constructed during this phase, we find several Viṣṇu and Rāma temples built by the royal family itself.

The other Vaiṣṇaite dynasty reigning in this region which should also be given a thought in this context, is the Traikūṭaka dynasty. The copper-plates found in Western Maharashtra and Gujarat give us a fairly-clear picture of the Traikūṭaka rule¹³. The well-known inscription from cave 16 at Ajanta claims the sovereignty of the Vākāṭaka ruler over Trikuṭa along with Kuntala, Lāṭa, Āndhra, Kosala etc.¹⁴ Still considering all the evidence furnished by the Traikūṭaka, Vākāṭaka and Kalachuri inscriptions, it appears that though they withstood the skirmishes with the Vākāṭakas, the Traikūṭakas finally succumbed to the Kalachuris sometime around A.D. 533 (the date of the second Matvan plate).

It is now almost unanimously accepted by most scholars that the Traikūṭakas were the successors of the Abhīras in the Trikuṭa region around Nasik. They honoured the Abhīra era and like Abhīra rulers, their names too end with the suffix 'sena'. Except for Indradatta, who is considered to be the *mūlapuruṣa* of this dynasty, but even this name is found in a legend on Darhasena's coin and it may only be an epithet. The capital of the Traikūṭakas was Vijayaniruddhapura, a name derived from the name of one of the Vṛṣṇivīras, and the

mountain from which they derive their family name is known as Govardhan. It is not clear when and how Darhasena rose to a status of a ruler who could perform an *Aśvamedha* ¹⁵.

None of the records of the 3rd-4th centuries from the Deccan evince major usurpations of the existing power and yet almost all the important dynasties of the Deccan trace back their roots to this period. The records or inscriptions are issued by established sovereigns whose *mūlapuruṣa* is always a mysterious figure. The rise to power of the sovereigns issuing the inscriptions is also vague. In the short span of a few decades, a number of *Aśvamedha* and *Vājapeya yajñas* were performed in the Deccan proclaiming the *yajamāna* as 'Samrāṭa'. This ambiguity in the origin of these dynasties and their desperate attempts for social status alongwith the factual data regarding the names of the kings, the era they honour and the culture they belong to gravitate towards an assumption that many of these rulers were originally from the Abhīra lineage. They were already in power, and at some juncture they altered their identity. The Traikūṭakas too can be one of the such dynasties of Abhīra origin.

The sculpture from Ellora revealing an affiliation with the Abhīra pantheon could be linked with the Traikūṭaka region too. An obvious affinity between some of the Ellora Buddhist sculpture with the later phase of Nasik sculpture should also be considered in this context.

All this argument is not to put a small group of sculptures - not even very significant aesthetically - to an earlier date, but to understand a very important phase in the sculptural history of the Deccan, a place where linear evolution in art is impossible to trace because of its geographical situation and the political turbulence during that period.

The phasewise study of art is an age-old phenomenon, accepted of course with some reservations, all over. The core of this concept has been formulated by early scholars like Wincklemann¹⁶ and others who had classified Greek sculpture in four phases. A similar development can be observed in Indian sculpture after the Śunga period and Western scholars as well as the Indian scholars emulating them, tried to apply it unchanged to our context. Stella Kramrisch in her long article on Pāla and Sena sculpture in Rupam warns in the very beginning that 'Indian art in its development essentially differs from the course artistic matters took in Europe'¹⁷. We know the Western classicistic characteristics made the early generation of Art Historians put Elephanta caves in the 8th century¹⁸ due to inadequate acquaintance with the decorative accent of Indian arts and only the inscribed landmarks of Indian art helped us to place these wrongly dated masterpieces into a proper date bracket. But there are many more works and monuments which have yet to come out of the mist of controversies, only because the given methodology is not used with caution. However, our visual data furnish information which is contrary to linear progression. A study of this development in India

appears to suggest that the transition from Kuṣāṇa to Gupta - which are generally considered as the pre-classical and classical phases in Indian sculpture - shows an intermediate phase which lacks the vitality of archaic expression and the accomplishment of classical sophistication. This is not to suggest a conclusion but a tentative hypothesis and a possible direction of research.

This is an effort to understand whether the texts which were contemporaneous to that art- activity which is in focus in the present context, can provide us with some more details that can help us towards a more coherent study of the stylistic progression through these centuries. On one hand the literary texts and their formal and stylistic characteristics can help us to trace the *zeitgeist* of the age¹⁹. In the present context, only two Prākṛt texts can be cited viz. *Gāhāsattasai*²⁰ and *Setubandha* or *Rāvaṇavaho*²¹ which are not adequate enough to make any definite statement. Therefore, the only other possibility is to search for a discussion on this aspect through the canonical texts of that time, in this case, the *Chitrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara* of course.

It is needless to mention that such canonical texts are derived from the existing works of art and that they naturally reflect the ideals that have been followed by the art manifestations of that era. Considering all the controversies about the date of the *Viṣṇudharmottara* it can be safely put in the 5th-6th century and many of the merits of

chitra listed down in different Chapters of the *Chitrasūtra* can be observed in the paintings of Ajanta as well as the sculpture that is carved upto that time. In *Adhyāya* 41, one of the smallest chapters of this text - we come across the discussion of the varieties of *Chitra*. They are *Satya*, *Vainika*, *Nāgara* and *miṣra*. The *Adhyāya* also gives their definitions. Though there are only five verses devoted to this discussion, they have attracted the attention of all the scholars who have worked on the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. Shivaramamurti devotes a whole chapter "Classification of Painting"²³ to discuss these four and a half *śloka*s and the others have also interpreted these verses in different ways. The second *śloka* reads as follows :

यात्किञ्चिल्लोकसादृश्यं चित्रं तत्सत्यमुच्यते ।
दीर्घाङ्गं सप्रमाणं च सुकुमारं सुभूमिकम् ॥ २॥ .

Coomaraswamy relates *satya* to *sāttvika*²⁴ but Raghavan opines that such interpretation is not possible²⁵. Stella Kramrisch, the first to translate this text, explains *satya* as a realistic picture in an oblong frame²⁶. The term *satya* itself and the further description *yatkicchi-llokasādrśyam* alone can justify this explanation though Shivaramamurti has objected to the oblong frame, pointing out that mounting and framing was never in vogue in India. The elongated *dīrghāṅga* quality applies to the figures in the picture and not to the picture as a whole. So in this context the figures should be elongated and proportionate. The text adds two more adjectives which are not given much attention to by the scholars, *Sukumāra*, *subhūmika* -

the figure should be tender, (I prefer this word to "delicate" as suggested by Shivaramamurti) and placed against a proper background. It does not prescribe for a mere imitation like a mirror reflection as some of the later text like *Mānasollāsa* or *Śilparatna* do²⁷ but the naturalism of *Chitrasutra* - slightly stylized - prescribing elegant, well-built figures of tall stature, also revealing the tenderness of skin, placed against proper background - probably showing details of the locale - is almost a description of Kuṣāṇa or Amaravati sculpture.

The second variety is *Vainika* which is

चतुरस्र सुसंपूर्णं न दीर्घं नोल्बणाकृति ।
प्रमाणस्थानलम्बादयं वैणिकं तान्निगद्यते ॥३॥

Chaturasra again is not a square frame but symmetry of form. Shivaramamurti proves it giving several quotations from different texts. *Vainika chitra* should be symmetrical, complete in its form (?), with no exaggeration or elongation, nor having heavy volume, proportionate, rich in stances, well balanced and well finished. Motichandra adds a few more qualities to this list but those are not faithful to the verse²⁸. Shivaramamurti says that the reason for the *vāṇa* being brought in here is not quite clear and suggests further that the pleasant and lyrical quality in this *chitra* and the melody of *vāṇa* can

the reason of this comparison. To my mind the simile here is formal and not essentially qualitative. The balanced and symmetrical form of the *vīṇa*, having two *kumbhas* of equal size at both the ends could have inspired this term. The word *vīṇa* has one more connotation in the *Brhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira. It refers to a particular configuration of stars when all the planets are situated in the seven houses. Considering that the *Brhatsaṃhitā* and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* are almost contemporaneous sixth-century texts, it is quite likely that the author of the latter was well-acquainted with the contents of the former. The feature *chaturasra* could thus have been a derivation from this harmonious placement of planets²⁹. The *Kāmandakīya Nītiśāstra* explains the term *chaturasra* as regular and harmonious³⁰. This *vaiṇika* variety seems to be a little more sophisticated than the *satya chitra* gradually acquiring sophistication but also losing vitality of form which is seen in the virile earthbound expressions of the earlier variety, which feature is always seen in the transitional phase where new values are yet to be achieved, and stipulated, and the old ones are being discarded.

The third variety is *nāgara*. The term itself indicates the perfect sophistication and the description strengthens it further

दृढोपाचितसर्वाङ्गं वर्तुलं न घनोल्बणम् ।

चित्रं तन्नागरं ज्ञेयं स्वल्पमाल्याविभूषणम् ॥४॥ .

Anand Coomarswamy and Stella Kramrisch consider *nagara* as of the City or 'urban'. Motichandra calls it classical. Shivaramamurti also says that it is a sophisticated and restrained style of execution of pictures where all the limbs, well rounded (modelled) are firmly and powerfully set, not to be exaggerated and with great restraint in jewellery and floral decoration. All these qualities remind us of the classical phase of Indian sculpture.

The fourth variety is *miśra* which shows mixed characteristics and hence is not very important in the present context.

Priyabala Shah, another exponent of this text³¹ tries to interpret these terms as regional variations like the ones used in architectural terminology (*Nāgara*, *Dravida*, *Vesara*) but that leaves *satya chitra* unnoticed and the other explanation also does not sound convincing. Shivaramamurti finds it impossible to read geographical interpretations into it³². To me, they seem to be different phases of Indian art.

If the *Viṣṇudharmottara* is a sixth century text, its author must have been acquainted with all the developments of Indian art and that is precisely what is discernible from this categorisation. *Nāgara* clearly denotes the classical idiom but the other two varieties also reveal some classical features in them and that is why instead of interpreting them as archaic they could be explained as early classical. All the three varieties together speak about the developments of Indian art from the 2nd to 5th - 6th century. The period can be extended or

compressed according to different regional variations. If classical sculpture from Mathura and Sarnath is taken as *nāgara* then Govindnagar, Nachna, Udaigiri, Besnagar, Pawaya and Gaya etc. will be *vaiṇika* and Kuṣāṇa should be taken as *satya*.

In the Deccan and the South an independent lineage will have to be traced outside the Gupta territory as scholars like Shivaramamurti³³ have always felt and is strongly being advocated by Ratan Parimoo³⁴. The distinction between the two morphological types is further supported by Joanna Williams who observed that the "naturally draped and softly modelled Buddha types of this area could have hardly contributed to the harsher early Gupta idiom"³⁵. The Krishna valley sculpture should be taken as the *satya* phase of this lineage and the *nāgara* phase is achieved a little later than Gupta Art at places like Ellora, Badami and Mahabalipuram with some regional variations of style and time at each centre. At some of these places like Mathura, a consistent development from *Satya* to *Nāgara* can be seen. The style also gets percolated or diffused to different places at different stages of maturity, but it cannot reach the maturity that has been acquired at a centre having consistent activity e.g. the sculpture reliefs of Rāmāyaṇa from Nachana, though sharing the same admiration with Mathura sculpture just because they belong to the same style and period, are qualitatively far inferior to Mathura sculpture. Shamalaji and the other Gupta sculpture from Gujarat can never equal the magnificence and sensuousness of Mathura Gupta sculpture, which is also

true about Ajanta sculpture. The deliberations are similar but the excellence differs. According to Parimoo³⁶ "it is tentative, hesitant, not fully formed. It is groping..... it is heterogenous..... like different hands and different workshops and several inconsistent styles, which result in diverse individual images and sections..... it is not unified and integrated with the architecture of the rock cut cave." All these observations are true probably because Ajanta sculpture was not germinated in that soil. It was still trying to adapt itself to and grow with the surroundings and before it could develop into the Nāgara sophistication, the sculptural activity at Ajanta came to an end³⁷ which had reached here at its *Vaiṇika* phase. When the post-Kuṣāṇa or early Gupta sculpture, leaving behind its libidinous, rustic but fascinating virility, the irresistible earthly, erotic fervour, was inclining towards a parole which in Joanna Williams' words is having an intellectual flavour and abstracting tendencies³⁸. The intuition got replaced by deliberations converting the pulsating volume into static forms.

An interesting parallel can be observed in other forms of art like literature. Hāla Sātavāhana's *Gāhāsattasai* and Pravarasena Vākāṭaka's *Setubandha* or *Rāvaṇavaho* represent the two phases in the evolution of Prākṛt literature from the Deccan. It is said that quite a few *Gāthās* have been added to *Sattasai* in the later period but still the bulk of it is pre-Vākāṭaka. *Gāhāsattasai* has a strong smell of sweat and semen. The libidinal energy which is at the seed of this expression gets weakened in *Setubandha* due to the growing verbal articulation.



Gāhā is true to life in its own way, like Shudraka's
This literature, on its way to sophistication, in the transitional phase,
like a cocooned larva or chrysalis becomes almost lifeless and wooden,
in the process of metamorphosis.

Coming back to Ajanta, one of the sculptural manifestations of the
Vākāṭaka era, it becomes necessary for us to give a thought to some
other Vākāṭaka sites like Mandhal, Mansar, Pavnar and Ramtek (Fig.6-18)
and see whether Ajanta represents the sculptural style of the
Vākāṭakas, if there exists any style that can be labelled as the
Vākāṭaka style. The Śiva images from Mandhal (Fig. :7) are unique
examples of unusual iconography and that is why could attract the
attention of scholars. Otherwise, they are of a lesser quality, having
no aesthetic significance. They are stocky, heavy and with an inert
surface. Mansar Batuk Bhairava (as identified by Shivaramamurti) (Fig.
18) is closer to some of the Nidhi images from Ajanta (Fig.19) and is
one of the examples of grotesque elegance-like in the Gaṇeśa images - a
combination only Indian sculpture could successfully achieve.

The sculpture from Ramtek displays a different plastic intention than
Mandhal or Pavnar. It reveals an inclination towards monumentality and
colossality and has the gusto and pent-up energy that can rival Badami
sculpture. The Keval Narasiṃha and the Trivikrama sculptures are
temperamentally different from the sculpture from other important
centres of the Vākāṭaka empire. Its robust physiognomy and

and monumentality is later continued in Aurangabad. Though most art-historians have consented to the theory of 'Ajanta to Ellora via Aurangabad'³⁹ today, I strongly feel that except for the group of Dancers from Cave 7 at Aurangabad which shows an affinity towards the Māravijaya panel of Cave 26 at Ajanta, the rest of the sculpture from Aurangabad is too expressionistic to be compared with the calculated delineations at Ajanta.

The Pavnar sculptures are quite different from the rest of the Vākāṭaka sculptures. They are tall, slender and very elegant figures with supple movements and graceful stances. The Pavnar Gaṅgā (Fig.15) can be classified among the most beautiful female figures that Indian sculptors have ever carved. Her full and fleshy thighs heavy voluptuous bosom and a slight bulge in the lower belly make her extremely sensuous - like a Chola bronze. The slender elegance of this figure, and the graceful swift movements of the figures from Pavnar reliefs, most of them based on Kṛiṣṇalīla (Figs.11-14) remind us of Krishna valley sculpture. Not only the figural characteristics but also the manipulation and construction of space that is seen in some of these sculptures e.g. the Kāṁsa Vadha relief (Fig.13) is very similar to Amaravati sculpture (Fig.12). In Amaravati, the movement of the protagonist is echoed and reinforced by the other accompanying figures being almost in similar postures. Gombrich and Arnheim have also noticed such compositional features. Gombrich calls it 'Chorus effect'⁴⁰ and Arnheim traces various principles of similarities⁴¹. Pavnar reliefs also use this device

to add to the dynamism of the total composition. Scholars have observed a similarity between Amaravati sculpture and Ajanta paintings, but seldom in Ajanta sculpture⁴². It is also felt that the visual language of Ellora sculpture shows an affinity towards Ajanta painting and vice-versa, both of which owe something to the complex grammar of the Veṅgī idiom.

The Pavnar sculptures reveal a pronounced Amaravati influence, which is also observed in Ajanta painting. At Ellora, it gets diffused and less pronounced probably because Ellora draws inspirations from several sources viz. Western India, Nasik, Kanheri and the Eastern Vākāṭaka school from Vidarbha. At Ellora a group of sculptures, never considered to be very significant by scholars, shows characteristics of the phase groping for accomplishment. It is considered to be late by most of the scholars including Deshpande⁴³ and Walter Spink⁴⁴ who nevertheless dates the Cave (No. 27) in which they are situated as one of the earliest from this complex. He opines that the sculptures must be a later addition. The reason he gives is that they are of the Vaiṣṇavite faith and the Vaiṣṇava emphasis is out of place in this phase of Ellora.

The two panels having three figures in each of them, flank the door of this cave which shows several architectural similarities with Cave 16 of Ajanta and a few other earlier monuments. One of these panels depicts Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva standing in a row (Fig.20). The other

is identified as Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa and Subhadrā (Fig. 21) by Deshpande. Several panels or sculptures depicting a female Goddess flanked by Vasudeva and Saṁkarṣaṇa are found in the Mathura region datable to the Kuṣāṇa or even the pre-Kuṣāṇa era and are identified as Ekānāmśā, the Śakti or Yogamāyā of Viṣṇu who was born as the daughter of Yashoda and Nanda and considered as sister of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, by N.P.Joshi⁴⁶. In his book on Indian iconography, he mentions several images of Ekānāmśā and barring one or two from Eastern India and one small image from Badami, all of them are from the first five centuries of the Christian era. Surprisingly, this relief from Ellora is not mentioned in that book.

In the present context, the representation of Ekānāmśā itself suggests an earlier date for this sculpture and demands for a re-examination of the chronology of Ellora sculpture. It will also be relevant to mention here that the iconographic details of this image with two arms, one holding a lotus and the other in *Katyāvalambita* position tally with the description in the *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* which is a Gupta period text⁴⁷, and also with the description in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*⁴⁸.

The other sculptures from this cave mentioned above perhaps suggest the supreme deities to whom these incarnations are related. Vasudeva known as the incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the *Pāñcharātra Saṁhitā*s Saṁkarṣaṇa is often identified with Rudra Śiva and *Halāyudha* is also one of the epithets of Śiva. The third deity Brahma has a relation with Ekānāmśā who is considered to be an *Amśā* of Prajāpati according

to *Mahābhārata*. The presence of these supreme deities of the Hindu pantheon can be explained in this manner, which otherwise seems very curious. One more sculpture of Mahiṣamardini also can be related to Ekānamśā as in the later period Ekānamśā either gets eliminated from the Vaiṣṇava pantheon or if she appears in some texts like the *Harivaṁśa*, she appears either as Vaiṣṇavī Mahāmāyā, Gajalakshmi or she is identified with the Śaivite Goddess Bhadrakālī which is worshipped by out-laws or thieves⁵⁰. *Viṣṇudharmottara* says, that the girl after being dashed against the stone by Kamsa, escaped and re-appeared in Vindhyachala in the form of Durga, who is worshipped by her clan - the Vṛṣṇis and the Abhiras who had inherited that culture. The name of the founder of the Vakataka dynasty Vindhyaśakti probably speaks of this Abhira faith and not his conquest over the Vindhya region. There is no evidence to prove his victory over Central India.

These sculptural panels were placed in a later date - bracket possibly because of the Southern accent that is apparently in them, but a closer examination discloses several features which are not Pallava. The shoulders are not unusually broad like the Mahabalipuram figures. The torsos are tapering at the waist but show natural width and proportions at the chest unlike the Pallava sculptures in which the torsos are just a little broader than the thighs. The slenderness is closer to Vidarbha sculpture than Pallava sculpture and have a higher degree of naturalism. The limbs are fuller and well-modelled and do not taper regularly at the extremities like chalksticks, as we see in Mahabalipuram sculpture.

Krishnakumar⁵¹ ascribes a very late date to these sculptures which more or less corresponds with the date suggested by Deshpande i.e. C. 9th-10 century. He attributes these panels to the Yadavas of Devgiri but as observed before, by this time the Ekanamsa sculptures are almost extinct from the Brahmanical pantheon. Towards the end of his article he admits that the style of these sculptures suggests a date which is much prior to the one that has been ascribed to them. He observes that the decorative carvings from these sculptures could be placed at the end of 5th century. Yet, he cautiously places the group around 600 A.D.

In Ajanta, one comes across a number of images carved in similar, simple arched niches. The niche, sometimes is also embellished with a decorative *torana* but only after the image is carved completely. Here at Ellora, the images are carved and finished but the arches are yet to be decorated with *toranas*. The sculpture itself too, shows a marked similarity with Ajanta⁵² and to some extent, Nasik sculpture. The similarity with Nasik sculpture can be substantiated better citing the Ellora Buddhist sculpture. Rather, just because it is seen in isolation, devoid of the reference of the Buddhist sculpture from this site and also the other related movements of this period, these sculptures are placed in a later date-bracket. A comparison with a similar panel with three standing figures in a row from a small cell at the southern end of the corridor of Cave 11 could shed more light on this problem but unfortunately, the photograph I have of it, is

miserably under exposed. This sculpture is almost a later version of the Trideva panel and is certainly not later than 6th century. If juxtaposed with this panel, the sculpture from Cave 27 appears much earlier due to the sophistication of the former. This course of sophistication is a vivid indication of the fact that the lifelessness or the inertness in the sculpture from Cave 27 is not a product of schematism or dogmatism suggesting deterioration, as scholars tend to believe but it is a phase with a potential of a pupa, dormant apparently but latently maturing.

An attribution of these sculptures, to the Vakataka or Traikutaka era, on one hand demarcates the inaugural activity at Ellora and on the other, with the help of the stylistic features of a transitional phase, discernible in the artistic expression of that age and also stipulated, however cursorily by a contemporaneous treatise, configures the course of developments in Indian sculpture.

REFERENCES

1. The dynasties were the Vākātakas, Aśmakas, Ruchikas, Kuntalas, Traikūtakas, which seemed to be conflicting with each other as is evident from the inscriptions of the Vākātakas in Ajanta for e.g. the inscription of Vārāhadeva in Cave 16.
See below Note 14.
2. Soundara Rajan, Cave Temples of the Deccan, A.S.I. New Delhi, 1981.
3. M.N.Deshpande 'Veruḷchi Leṇi' Marathwada Diwali Issue, 1958.
4. V.V.Mirashi (trans. Ajay Mitra Shastri) in Hindi 'Vākāṭaka Rajavamśa ka itihāsa tathā abhilekha' Varanasi, 1964, p.23.
5. Ibid - p.11
6. Ibid - p.19
7. Ibid p.24 and R.C.Majumdar and A.S.Altekar, 'The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age', New Delhi, 1986.
8. V.V.Mirashi op.cit. p.56.
9. R.C.Majumdar and A.S.Altekar op.cit.
10. Bhagwansingh Suryavamshi 'The Abhīras : Their history and culture' Baroda, 1962.
11. The similarities were pointed out by my friends Madhavi Athalye and Jayaram Poduval respectively. Jayaram cited several Gupta temples including Bhumra having Dvarapālikas with Chhatra. I feel that though the idea and iconography is derived from the Gupta

sites, there is no trace of Gupta idiom in the sculpture.

12. A.P.Jamkhedkar and G.B.Deglurkar '*Pavnār śilpapatāchā punarvichār*'
(Marathi) Yugavāñī, Nagpur, April-May, 1974,
pp.24-29.

13. The copper-plate grants which refer to the Traikūṭaka rule are :

1. The Pardi copper-plates of Darhasena of K.E. 207 (A.D. 457).
2. The Surat plates of Vyaghrasena of K.E. 241.
3. The Kanheri plates of K.E. 245.
4. The Matvan plates of Madhyamasena of K.E. 256.
5. The Matvan plates of K.E. 284 (A.D. 534).

The first three of these have been published by V.V.Mirashi, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol.IV Part I Nos. 8,9 and 10 and the other two have been published by Shobhana Gokhale (Marathi) Bhāratīya Itihāsa aṇī Sāṁskṛitī. Jan. 1972 and Oct. 1972, respectively.

14. Published by Bhau Daji in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society Vol.VII 1862, p.56. However, Mirashi cautions us from taking the eulogy literally as the composers of such eulogies were prone to exaggeration.

15. Brahmananda Deshpandey '*Elephanta āṇī Rāmeśvara Lenyānchya Kālāvar navīn prakāśa*'
(Marathi) Shodhamudrā, Aurangabad,
1976, pp.113.

16. Wincklemann, "Reflections on the painting and sculpture of the
Greeks : with instructions for connoisseurs 1765. Parimoo Ratan :
The idea of form and style in Indian Sculpture, Aspects of Indian
Art and Culture, S.K.Saraswati commemoration Volume, Editors J.
Chakravarty and D.C.Bhattacharya 1983. In the article Parimoo
gives a comprehensive account of the development of the study in
European art history.
17. Stella Kramrisch, Pala and Sena Sculpture, Rupam No.40, Oct.1929,
pp.107-126. Also included in 'Exploring Indian's Sacred Art' Ed.
Barbara Stoler Miller, Philadelphia, 1983.
18. J.Fergusson and J.Burgess, 'The Cave Temples of India' London
1880, pp.467 ff.
19. The term *zeitgeist* is used here in a specific sense, keeping
in mind the limitations of the concept. Although it was generally
criticized in the 1950's, for the reason that such generalization
may do injustice to individuals, I personally feel, that with all
its shortcomings and limitations, such generalizations help us to
get a deeper insight into our historical understanding.
20. S.A.Jogalekar. 'Hāla Sātavāhaṇachi Gāthāsaptasatī'
Pune, 1956.
21. Ghatge 'Maharashtri Language Literature' Journal of the University
of Bombay Vol.IV Part IV. Ghatge feels that the language of

Setubandha goes nearer than the *Gāhā* to Sanskrit. It is believed to be a composition by Pravarasena the Vākāṭaka ruler.

22. The *Viṣṇudharmottara* is put at a later date i.e. in the eighth century by Stella Kramrisch (Text and Translation, Calcutta, 1924) and Śivaramamurti (Chitra-sutra of Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter II, New Delhi, 1978) places it in the Kuṣāṇa-Gupta transitional phase. However, considering the style of the language and the contents it appears to be a post-Gupta text. Also refer to Priyabala Shah for the discussion on the date of V.D.(Text and Translation, Baroda, 1961).

23. Sivaramamurti - ibid pp.64-68.

24. ibid

25. ibid

26. ibid

27. सादृश्यं लिख्यते यत्तु दर्पणे मातिबिंबवत् ।

Mānasollāsa of Somesvara Srigondekar, G.K. Gaekwad Oriental Series, 2 volumes, Baroda, 1925. Verse 900. Śilparatna of Śrikumara 145 repeats the words with minor changes.

28. C.Sivaramamurti op.cit. pp.64.

29. I am thankful to my friend Shri Nishigandh Deshpande, who suggested this possibility to me.

The reference is found in the Sanskrit English Dictionary, Monier Williams, Oxford, 1976, p.1005.

30. Kāmandaki was a pupil of Chanakya Viṣṇugupta whose work is known as *Kāmandakīya Nitisāstra*, ibid p.384.
31. Priyabala Shah - *Viṣṇudharmottara* , text and translation ,2 volumes Gaekwad Oriental Series, Baroda, 1961.
32. Shivaramamurti - op.cit.
33. Shivaramamurti, Amravati Sculpture in the Madras Museum, Bulletin of the Madras Govt.Museum, New Series, General Section, Vol.4 1942.
34. Parimoo Ratan, Some problems of Ellora from the point of view of Buddhist Caves, Ellora Caves, Sculpture and Architecture, New Delhi, 1988, pp.180-203.
35. Joanna Williams, The art of Gupta India, Princeton, 1982.
36. Parimoo op.cit., p.185.
37. Māravijaya and Paṇinirvāṇa sculpture from Cave 26, I feel should be treated as exceptions. They appear much evolved compared to the rest of Ajanta sculpture. The Māravijaya can be a later addition to the original programme of the cave. This possibility is discussed in the following chapter.
38. Joanna Williams op.cit.
39. W.Spink suggested the mobility of Ajanta artisans to Ellora via Aurangabad (Marg Vol.XX No.2 March 1967) and Geri Malandra (Ajanta to Ellora - back again. Art of Ajanta New perspectives,

New Delhi, pp.440-453) and Gary Tartakov (Ajanta and Early Chalukyans, ibid, pp.453-467), also subscribed to his views.

40. Gombrich , Art and Illusion, Bollingen Series XXXV, 5, 1961.
41. Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception - A psychology of the creative eye, 1964.
42. The affinity between the two is noticed by many art-historians namely S.Kramrisch, C.Shivaramamurti, D.Barret and B.Gray. For a comprehensive discussion of these correlations, see Parul Dave 'Correlatives between Ajanta Painting and Amaravati Sculpture,' Art of Ajanta, New Perspectives, New Delhi, 1991).
43. Deshpande op.cit. p.46.
44. W.Spink - 'Ellora's earliest phase' Bulletin of the American Academy of Benaras Vol.I, November 1967, pp. 11-23.
45. Deshpande op.cit.p.46.
46. N.P.Joshi *Bhāratīya Mūrti Śāstra* (Marathi) Maharashtra Grantha Nirmiti Mandal, Nagpur 1979, pp.220-21.
47. एकानंशापि कर्तव्या देवी पद्मकरा तथा ।
काटस्थवामहस्ता सा मध्यस्था रामकृष्णयोः । विष्णुधर्मोत्तर . 85.72.
48. एकानंशा कार्या देवीं बलदेवकृष्णयोर्मध्ये ।
काटिस्थवामकरा वरोजमितरेण चोद्धति ॥ बृहत्संहिता 57.27.

49. Nilkantha, the commentator on Mahābhārata gives the etymology of Ekānamśa in Vanaparva, Ref. P.L.Gupta. See below.
50. Suvira Jaiswal, 'The origin and development of Vaiṣṇavism', Ref. Parmeswar Lal Gupta, 'Ekānamśa and her image'. The Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol.LIV, January-December, 1968.
51. Krishnakumar, 'An Ekānamśa relief of Ellora' Journal of Indian History CX LIV Dec. 1966, pp.111-132.
52. The Kīrita Mukuṭa of Māra from Māravijaya of Cave 26 and also the short Yajñopavita will hint at the similarities between the sculpture of Ajanta.