



CLASSICISM - THE DELAYED APPEARANCE

Passing the inaugural, uncertain excavations, the groping, tentative sculpture at Ellora enters into a phase which is somewhat evolved, though not fully, but certainly heading towards a specific objective. If a cerebral attempt to define an ideal objective and a conscious effort to achieve it is the 'classical attitude', it is evident in the middle phase of Ellora, i.e. Cave Nos. 21, 14 and 17 along with some of the Buddhist Caves, which are normally placed in the earliest quarter of activity by the majority of scholars¹. The major sculptural activity at this site started at this juncture but certainly not in an impetuous manner. It evinces an extremely conscious progression. The stylistic consistency sensed through several sculptural panels suggests a small number of guilds and sculptors working on these ambitious projects. Perhaps the architects did have fairly sizeable teams at their service but the guilds of sculptors seem to have consisted of very few members, which could possibly grant the opportunity for a young talented apprentice to rise higher in the heirarchy². These compact groups appear to be freelancing on different projects for different patrons. The abundant inscriptions from the Buddhist monuments all over the country furnish a fairly clear picture of the patronage of art activity but most of the Brahmanical monuments keep their lips tight in this context, compelling us to derive conjectures

with the help of available material. Here, in the present context, the striking similarity in the sculptural panels from different caves suggests that the sculptors' guilds were not necessarily committed to a specific project; instead they took up commissions at different sites and moved over from one place to another³. Even at this very site, the chisel of a certain master is discernible in different caves and on different sculptural panels. This kind of mobility could have prolonged the activity to a great extent and this could also explain the heterogeneity of style in a single cave and also the termination of work in many a cave, which could be a result of a 'labour crisis' and also the possible reason for inviting artisans from distant regions. Only in the late 8th century can the presence of innumerable artists be felt at this site, until then the sculptural art here progresses and evolves at a modest pace.

The caves considered to be the earliest from this complex formulate the core of the Ellora style. All of them have some common elements. Cave 21 and Cave 29 are devoted to the Pāśupata faith but stylistically they are at different stages of maturity, though they certainly represent the same lineage. Cave 29 shares the monumentality of the sculpture from Cave 14 but the gusto of Cave 14 is lost in Cave 29. Cave 14 and Cave 21 belong to different traditions architecturally and sculpturally. The iconographic programme of both these caves is also different from each other and yet in some of the sculptural reliefs, marked similitude gets betrayed which means that

all these caves either closely follow each other or progress simultaneously. The nature of differences whether they are lineal or evolutionary - ought to be examined to derive any conclusions. A probe into possible patronage should also be of help to set up the sequence and chronology.

The patronage of these caves is attributed to the Kalachuris, the Konkan Mauryas or the Chālukyas by some of the scholars and also to the Vākāṭakas sometimes, the dynasty that ceased to rule this region even before the inception of these caves.

Mirashi was probably the first scholar to attribute these three caves to the Kalachuris⁴ and W.Spink⁵, R.N.Mishra⁶ and many others⁷ seconded his opinion. Since the Kalachuris of Mahishmati proudly proclaim themselves as ardent devotees of Lord Paśupati⁸ and since Cave 21 is dedicated to the same sect, there was no hesitation in attributing this cave along with Jogeshwari, Elephanta and one more cave from this complex, the colossal Dhumarlena, to this dynasty which was getting foot-holds in this region after the fall of the Vākāṭakas and the Aśmakas. The large number of Kalachuri coins found at Elephanta⁹ and the one unearthed from the debris around Cave 21 of Ellora¹⁰ strengthened this attribution. Brahmananda Deshpanday, a young epigraphist, after examining the inscription of all the dynasties of this period comes to the conclusion that Northern Konkan along with the other parts of Maharashtra was certainly under the domain of the

Chālukyas from 570 A.D. to 685 A.D. and hence that dynasty, known for the love and patronage of sculptural art should get the credit for the authorship of these caves¹¹. He also mentions that the Norur copper plate describes Mangalesha as a devotee of Kārtikeya and the Saptamātrikas are hailed as guardian deities in Pulakeśi's (I) inscription¹². No wonder, the representation of these deities is found here in Cave 21. Deshpandey gives a logical and rational analysis of all the available inscriptional data but the actual sculpture in situ does not conform to his conclusions. The sculpture from 21 and 29 does not fit in with the Chālukyan idiom and even if it had, these caves would have to be pushed to the 7th century. As Mangalesha was enthroned only in 597 A.D.¹³, which means that the work at this cave reached completion somewhere in 650 A.D., it would be too late a date for this classical manifestation.

The majority of art historians like to believe that the Brahmanical excavations at this site commence with the Rāmeshwara Cave and place the other two and also the Dhumārlena as subsequent to it. About a century ago, J.Burgess and Fergusson dated Cave 29 as one of the earliest from this complex and also suggested that it may be a prototype for the 'later' cave at Elephanta¹⁴. The controversy regarding the date of Dhumārlena will be taken up at a later juncture as this chapter intends to examine the Rāmeshwara Cave as a nexus through all the activities of this age. It is also necessary to remember that the present work is concerned about the dates of sculpture, which may or may not be correspond with the dates

prompted by the architectural elements and motifs. Those can be accepted as the earliest possible dates of the sculpture but all the sculptural panels need not conform to that date. A prolonged activity, consistent or interrupted, or the intrusive images can cause a significant difference in the dates and representation of several stylistic phases and also lineages in a single cave.

Select sculptural reliefs from the Rāmeshwara Cave, at first glance do not reveal any specific stylistic difference but a closer acquaintance with them hints at different sensibilities of expression. Pratap Pal, during a personal conversation, vehemently refuted the sequential interpretation of such disparities. He seems to be of an opinion that these should be interpreted as qualitative inconsistencies. The fact that a better or a lesser artist or even the artists with different creative impulses and expression, do subscribe to the manifestations of a period style or idiom would counter his statement. Even in our own times of fierce individualism the period is betrayed through the expression of an individual. In an age, when several members of a guild were contributing to a single work of art, the stylistic variety may not necessarily be an outcome of individual competence.

In the present context, the sculptural panels from Rāmeshwara will have to be examined carefully as all the sculptures here do not conform to the date or dates attributed to this cave. With some differences of opinions, it has been placed broadly in the first half

of the 6th century by most of the scholars¹⁵. It is also considered to be the first Brahmanical excavation by Soundara Rajan¹⁶ and by and large considered as one of the earliest from this complex. The possible reasons, though not specifically put down, might be either the bracket figures apparently similar to the Badami (Cave III) bracket figures. The brackets from the small living shrine in the South-West extension of Jogeshwari Cave are seldom referred to in this context. The poised, contemplative, sophisticated parole that can rival Elephanta sculpture can be another reason to place it in the closest possible date to the latter. If the evidence provided by the Matvan copper plates¹⁷ is supplemented with the conjectural evidence of the *Daśakumāracharita*¹⁸, the possible date of the Kalachuris' advent in this region can be A.D. 530, and if Cave 19, the small dilapidated Lakulīśa shrine is considered to be the first Śaivite excavation at Ellora then this cave can be placed immediately after that i.e. somewhere around 535 A.D.

Architecturally the cave seems to be significant in many ways. It is one of the very few cave temples with a *nandīpīṭha* in the front and that too with a rare representation of Aditi Uttānapāda on it. A small figurine of the same deity found at Elephanta - published by Sadashiv Gorakshakar¹⁹, the Kalachuri coin found near this cave and published by R.Sengupta²⁰ and the obvious affinity between the ground plan of this cave and some of the lesser talked about caves at Elephanta might strengthen the speculation of the Kalachuri patronage of the

cave. The facade is possibly the most elaborate in the history of Brahmanical caves. The ground plan with a pillarless hall parallel to the facade is extremely well-lit, due to which it appears much larger than its actual dimensions. The side shrines - *upavarṇakas* - on lateral sides are not very uncommon at Kanheri and as stated before, at Elephanta. In short, a good deal of eclecticism and intellectual exercise is cognized through the design.

The cave has few but significant sculptural reliefs; the river goddesses flanking the facade are large in size and conspicuous, the two reliefs inside the *maṇḍapa* on the lateral sides of the shrine depict moments from Śiva-Pārvati's conjugal life, Rāvaṇa shaking Kailāsa on the left (Fig. 22) and the divine couple playing *choupat* (Fig. 23) on the right. The *dvārapālas* adjoining them are from the Padmapāṇi - Vajrapāṇi family from the Buddhist caves of the same complex. All of them together contribute to the compact, homogeneous programme.

The northern *upavarṇaka* has three sculptural panels, Kārtikeya (Fig. 24) on the west and east wall of the chamber respectively and the north wall depicts the Pārvati Parīṇaya (Fig. 26) with great love. This panel is divided into three parts. The southern *upavarṇaka* also shows a similar arrangement having Saptamātrkas (Fig. 27) on the south wall and Śiva Natarāja (Fig. 29-30) and Kaṅkāla (Fig. 31) occupying the east and west walls.

Since there is a good deal of qualitative consistency in all these sculptures, the cave appears quite homogeneous. The two large squarish panels flanking the sanctum are composed symmetrically and are divided into two halves. The protagonists are naturally placed in the upper half - which is a horizontal concave rectangular frame like a cyclorama. The depth in the centre, while providing more space to the central characters, invites more attention from the spectator. The orientation of the relief is centrifugal, due to the characters on the lateral extremities, which are carved frontally but due to the inclined background they apparently change their orientation. The background bows horizontally and creates an illusion of a complex composition. The middle portion is pushed a little deeper as if sunk due to the excess gravity in the centre. The composition is cleverly manoeuvred and intelligently executed, despite the limited vocabulary of the artisans. These limitations are betrayed conspicuously in the Rāvaṇānugraha panel (Fig.22) where the euphoria of the other panel is not discerned. In the Rāvaṇānugraha, the characters from the upper register, placed in a group as participants in the sculptural representation of the episode, fail to interact with each other. They stand passive, and their commitment towards the sculptor is more obvious than their involvement in the act which they are party to, and also with the other characters sharing the space provided to them.

The mighty audacious demon is trying to uproot the mount Kailāsa. One of his feet is folded and the knee planted firmly on the ground. The other is stretched and pressed hard against a boulder for a better thrust. The ten heads of the demon sprout out in a row independently from the shoulders. The hands extend laterally but the composition in its totality fails to manifest an enormous upward thrust.

On top of the mountain the divine couple is sitting awkwardly, almost unaware of the disaster taking place right under their feet. There is no panic, no rage - no reaction of any kind. Even the *gaṇas* are not perturbed at all. They are physically close to each other but fail to interact emotionally. This cold indifference lessens the impact of this sculpture. It is an intelligently designed but incompetently rendered sculpture, probably because the sculptor hails from a tradition that has discovered the beauty of the human figure, the principles of composition, but is yet to discover visual parallels for the tensions of human feelings. The sources of this panel can be traced in some of the sculptures from Western India and also Ajanta. This large relief immediately and vividly reminds the viewer of a small image of the Rāvaṇānugrahamurti from the tympanum of the eastern doorway of Jogeshwarī (Fig. 34). The upper portion of this small sculpture is badly eroded but Rāvaṇa in the lower half is seated in the same stance as the one in Cave 21. The divine couple has quite a few predecessors at Ajanta, particularly in Cave 20 the couples in the panels on the pillars leading to the shrine are precisely in this very posture (Fig. 35).

These images alongwith the *madanikās* which have an affinity with the *madanikās* from the living shrine in the southwest corner of the Jogeshwari courtyard (Fig.36) speak of the Western Indian lineage at Ellora. Sometimes there is an inconsistency of quality, but otherwise the style displays an uninterrupted progression here at this very monument through different caves.

The relief panel on the other side of the sanctum exemplifies it compared to the Rāvaṇānugrahamurti which is rigid and lacking warmth of emotions; this one is far more animated and turbulent. It portrays an intimate moment between Śiva and Pārvati. While playing chousar, Śiva is picking up arguments with Pārvati, who was perhaps trying to take liberties with the rules of the game. The *gaṇas* crowding around are witnessing the dispute. Śiva and Pārvati gaze at each other. Pārvati isolently staring into the eyes of her susceptible husband and raising her hand in interrogation is the personification of '*kṛtakkopa*' contrived rage. And Śiva - the docile spouse is trying to warn her knowing it is trivial. There is an air of amusement around and the medley group is enjoying it, unlike the disciplined attendants from the Rāvaṇānugraha. The *gaṇas* from the lower register are harassing poor Nandī, who is standing the nonsense helplessly. In the light of the conspicuous maturity of this sculpture, one would not hesitate to place this panel as later to the Rāvaṇānugraha.

On the grounds of gradual maturity and growing sophistication, it should not be impossible to outline the sequence of all the sculptures

from this cave. It seems that after the initial scooping of this cave the *dvārapālas* and *madanikās* were the first sculptural embellishments to be done, , immediately followed by the *Rāvaṇānugrahamurti*, which is well composed, designed with geometric meticulousness but lacking emotive endeavour. With added confidence and spontaneity, the master could have created a masterpiece like the *Akṣakrīda*.

A comparison between these two panels can be an ideal case study to gauge the rectilinear stylistic progression of an idiom; provided it is evolving in insulation. In the fifth-sixth century - Deccan and that too at a place like Ellora, it would be absurd to expect it. Right in this cave, when the Western Indian lineage is trying to establish itself and flourishing, some other guild also declares its presence and it seems it was at work right from the inception of the cave, the stylistic traits of which are akin to an idiom that is crystallizing in the Chālukyan regions.

Eventually, a veteran like M.A.Dhaky has noticed the stylistic inconsistency in this one and a few other caves from this phase. He traces the South Indian and particularly Chālukyan element in some of the sculptures from Caves 28, 29 and 21²¹.

The Kārtikeya image from 21, is mentioned by him as displaying Chālukyan features. The fleshier, fuller bodies, the density of volume, the bulging thighs and fleshy, soft palms do speak of Chālukyan affinity with this sculpture.

But the question that has been seldom asked and never answered is - what is the Chālukyan idiom ? Ratan Parimoo is probably the only art historian to opine that the Chālukyan idiom should not be viewed as a monolithic idiom. Instead, he traces several subschools in it²². Due to the number of inscriptions coming to light and being deciphered by the Karnataka epigraphists like S.Padigar²³ and the new research by scholars like Gary Tartakov²⁴, the dates of Aihole temples are being reviewed anew. As a result, tracing the evolution of the Chālukyan style has become an extremely challenging and complex issue. Since the majority of the temples from Aihole are placed at a date as late as the 7th century, the sculpture from Aihole cannot be related to the early phase of Ellora. As it is, they do not show any similarity with the latter. Pattadakal, for its date is out of question. So whenever the Chalukyan idiom is referred to, in this context, of early Ellora sculpture, it refers to Badami in specific, the genesis of which is still undiscovered.

Under such situation and keeping in mind the South Indian element creeping into Ellora sculpture even at such early date, a possibility of a common stock for both Badami and Ellora sculpture, maturing independently but borrowing from the same single source can be thought of. The inscriptions from Badami, mentioning the names of artists indicate their Andhra origin and draw us to probe into the art activity in the 3rd - 4th century Andhra-Karnataka region²⁵. Unfortunately the corpus of material unearthed so far from that region

and representing this period is not adequate enough to draw any conclusion. But the stray examples coming to light from the Kadamba sites²⁶ like Banavasi (Fig. 37) and Sannati, displaying conspicuous similarities with early Vākāṭaka sculpture from Sindhuri, Nagara (Fig. 39), Ramtek, Hamlapuri (Fig. 40) etc. on one hand and their obvious iconographic and formal kinship with the Chālukyan sculpture on the other, call for further investigations. It may not be out of place to mention at this juncture that the Vishnukundin coins are found in abundance in the Vākāṭaka region. The Vishnukundin sites and the rock-cut caves from Andhra too deserve more attention. The matrimonial relationship between the Guptas and Vākāṭakas explains the predominant Gupta element at Ajanta. Similar relationships between the Kadambas and Chālukyas, Vishnukundins and other Tamil-Karnata dynasties in the South, might have proved instrumental in the cultural interactions between these regions²⁷.

Attempts to trace the Chālukyan influence or element at Ellora would compel us to place these caves in the mid-seventh century, because the earlier nearby monument - the Aurangabad Caves (No. 7 in particular) - also reveal a marked similarity with the colossal idiom of Badami. The turgid bodies of these enormous giants are charged with the same pent-up energy. These voluptuous figures can find a match only at Badami (Fig. 41 and Fig. 43). Since we know from inscriptional sources that the Chālukyan rule in this region is evident only in the beginning of the 7th century, if the Chālukyan element is

treated valid then the possible date for some of the Aurangabad caves will be the early 7th century A.D. and sequentially for Rāmeshwara, it will be the mid-seventh century A.D.

As stated before, we are still in the dark regarding the precedents of Badami. Dr.A.Sundara and some younger scholars from Karnataka suggest that Kadamba sculpture is probably the missing link between the Krishna Valley and Badami²⁸. An in-depth investigation of this period in the Andhra-Karnata region will explain the **cumulative effect**²⁹ in the art of the sixth century Deccan. As discussed in the previous chapter, the fourth century seems to be the 'gestation period' of these developments. The Deccan sculptors explore various paroles having different characteristics. These individual experimentations, in the course of time, develop as an idiom or subschool, gradually groping for and heading towards maturity. Each of them have some distinct characteristics catering to the modest requirements of the expression of that phase. With the increasing complexities and subtleties of the subject matter the simplistic parole proves inadequate and is obliged to interact with and borrow from the other possibilities of expression.

In the present context, an independent development of such different modalities can be noticed at different centres in Vidarbha. They grow in seclusion at Mandhal (Fig.7-10), Ramtek (Fig.16 and Fig.17) and Pavnar (Fig.11 to 15), each of these nuclei has its own potential and

periphery. Mandhal is rich in imagination and possibilities of meaning but lacks suppleness of expression. Pavnar is lyrical while Ramtek has monumentality and an imposing presence. These potentials are exploited at a later juncture at different centres.

The sculpture of Aurangabad will have to be reexamined in the context of the adulating lineages. On architectural grounds, the later phase of this compact cave complex is placed between Ajanta and Ellora. Spink³⁰, Geri Malandra³¹ and Gary Tartakov³² seem to subscribe to this view and the architectural features do conform to it, but the sculpture of Aurangabad is radically and temperamentally different. Barring the ambitious sculptural reliefs from Cave 26 at Ajanta - which do not represent the Ajanta style - the rest of Ajanta sculpture, however large in size it might be, lacks monumentality. It is calculated, modest, measured. The spontaneity and intensity of the Aurangabad language does not owe anything to Ajanta. The only precedent that can be thought of is Ramtek. The inner vitality, or to repeat the term from the previous chapter - the libidinal energy - can be traced back only to Ramtek. The Ramtek Trivikrama (Fig. 16) displays the same grandiosity of the Aṣṭabhayatrāṇa Avalokiteśvara of Aurangabad. The turgidity of his limbs, the subtle bulge in the lower belly, due to the tautened *udarabandha* and *adhovastara*, the full bulging thighs and the compact muscular structure is not different than the Aurangabad colossi.

This empowered, charged but a little rustic idiom reaches Ellora immediately after Aurangabad and is, perhaps, mistaken for the Chālukyan idiom. The work of this guild is discerned right from the beginning of Cave 21. It seems that two different guilds - one from Western India and the other from Aurangabad - met with this challenge together. That is why, the river goddesses, which would have been the inaugural carvings of this cave, disclose their different origins. Some sculptures from the Buddhist caves, for example the *dvārapāla* on the south side of the sanctum doorway of Cave 6 (Fig.42) can also be attributed to this "Aurangabad" guild. From the Rāmeshwara cave not only the Kārtikeya panel but also the Mahiṣāsūramardini and the first two images of Vīrabhadra and Brahmāṇi from the Saptamātr̥ka panel (Fig.28) are perhaps contributed by the same guild. The last two figures do not share any similarity with the rest of the matr̥kās. They are seated erect, rather stiffly, with no flexions or movements. Their faces are stern and their limbs are heavier and static as compared to the other elegant beauties. It is altogether a different physiognomy and a different handling. This large panel was started from both the ends but the Aurangabad guild left it halfway and the other guild had to complete it. As speculated in the beginning of this chapter, the artist guilds were not necessarily committed to a single monument. This particular guild, I strongly feel, took up a commission in Cave 14.

Cave 14, the Rāvaṇkī Khāi is the real crux of the maze. This small cave displays all the characteristics of the Buddhist caves. The ground plan is similar to the earlier caves except for the *garbhagṛha* which has been separated from the wall, providing a *pradakṣiṇāpatha* to the devotee. The cells on the lateral sides of the sanctum are not an unusual feature in the Buddhist caves, and a passage connecting those side cells could be added with very little effort³³. The *dvāra-pālas* on the outer wall of the sanctum are not a part of the original programme of the cave. They are later intrusive additions. The placement of the pīṭha adjoining the wall in the sanctum denotes the non-Śaivite origin of this cave. It may not have been dedicated to Devī as Dr.Soundara Rajan suggests³⁴, as there is not enough evidence to believe so except for the two Devī images in the lateral niches and the Gaḷalakṣmi which is a regular feature of many Hindu temples. On the other hand, all the features mentioned above, the very faint outline of a seated image on the inner wall of the sanctum and also the disparity between the pilasters and the sculptures in the *maṇḍapa* promptly indicate the Buddhist origin of this cave. If it is accepted, several issues demand a rethought. Was it an abandoned cave that was occupied by the Hindus ? If so, when and why ? In the light of the present dating of the Buddhist caves, the Buddhist activity at Ellora seems to have continued till the late seventh to eighth century. In that case, either the sculpture of this cave will have to be placed after that, i.e. almost contemporaneous to the Kailāsa temple - or a

rethought will have to be given to the date of the Buddhist caves. The latter possibility sounds more logical.

Caves 10, 11 and 12 are sculpturally the most advanced Buddhist caves of this complex. Is the sculpture from these caves really quite distant from the sculpture of Elephanta (Fig.45) or that of Cave 20 at Nasik (Fig.44) ? The Avalokiteśvara images from Cave 10 or the *gaṇa* images from the *udgama* on its facade (Fig.46) reveal a close relation with the sculpture of Cave 21. The *gaṇa* panel in particular is a direct derivation from the central portion of the lower band of the Pārvati parīṇaya relief from Cave 21 (Fig.25). Of course, the Cave 10 version is in high reliefs as compared to the latter and looks more evolved but they cannot be far from each other in time. The tentativeness and uncertainty in the programming of the Buddhist caves Caves 8, 11 and 12 in particular - even at this developed stage convey the returning tides of Buddhism in this region. It appears that the Buddhist *saṅghas* tried to embark upon numerous projects simultaneously at this site, and due to the fast changing religious milieu and the resultant waning state of patronage, some of them were abandoned in the sixth century itself. The *fin-de-siècle* should not have witnessed much of a Buddhist activity at Ellora.

Cave 14 should have been annexed sometime around 550 A.D. and some of the sculptors already engaged with the other caves like Cave 21, must have contributed to this new project. The iconographic and stylistic correlations are too obvious to ignore.

The compositional patterns, the treatment of space are quite similar in both caves; for example the 'two-tiered' composition with a decorative dividing band is employed in the Akṣakrīḍā in Cave 21 and in Cave 14 the same pattern is followed and used profusely in the panels viz. the Lakṣmi Viṣṇu (Fig.) and the Akṣakrīḍā (Fig. 48) etc. The device of the concave rectangular frame is also utilized in this cave. The Maḥiṣamardini from Cave 14 (Fig. 50) is a direct derivation from Cave 21, with only difference of format. In Cave 14, though all the attributes, the stance, the gestures of the Goddess are precisely like the one in Cave 21, the image from Cave 14 is taller in proportion. Due to the vertical frame, the attendant figures that are seen in Cave 21, are eliminated here but the provided space is not the only reason for the changes in proportion. Presumably it is also a sign of a date later than that of its counterpart from Cave 21. The elongated proportions are observed in the post-classical phase of western as well as Indian art³⁵.

The other sculptures like the Naṭarāja (Fig. 52) also evince the further sophistication of the grandiose locution of the Aurangabad sculpture which in turn reveals an obvious kinship with the Badami Cave 3 reliefs (Fig. 53). This parallelism does not last long as the Badami sculpture does not show its progression or even its ramifications in other Chālukyan sites. Ellora sculpture, on the other hand, shows a consistent maturation.

The robust idiom of Aurangabad adopts the elegance and sophistication of the western Indian parole. The rustic inner vitality gets cultivated into a palpable fluid elegance. The Ravaṇānugrahamūrti from Cave 14 (Fig. 54) and the Dancers group from Cave 7 at Aurangabad (Fig. 57) are at this stage of evolution, but since Aurangabad is evolving in isolation, this stage appears as an immediate sequent of the previous stage. At Ellora, due to the interaction between different lineages, different values, ideals coalesce and consequently the acceleration of this evolution is restricted. The development at Aurangabad is a logical and rectilinear inference of this cycle. At Ellora it must have taken a lot of brain-storming, thinking and rethinking to reach this inference. Apparently these two reliefs are not distant in date if they are seen irrespective of their context. But the complexity of conception, the high tension of human emotions, the range of imagination connotes the intricate matrix of this language. Aurangabad sculpture is full of vitality and energy, but is simpler, literal. Even in the Aṣṭabhayatrāṇa (litany), the eight fears are represented literally, simplistically. The sculptor has yet to accept the challenge of searching into the intricacies of the human mind and of finding a visual parallel to manifest them. He is still preoccupied with the beauty and lyricism of the human body. At this juncture I would like to suggest a new date bracket for a masterpiece from Ajanta - the Māravijaya from Cave 26. (Fig. 56)

The stylistic similarity and the compositional resemblance between the Mārapralobhana panel - the *Māṛakanyās* from the lower register in particular - from Cave 26 at Ajanta, and the Dancers of Aurangabad, is easily noticeable. Since the Aurangabad caves are dated later to Ajanta, the Dancers of Aurangabad are considered to be influenced by the Mārapralobhana. W.Spink opines that this ambitious panel is an intrusive addition to this cave. No other sculpture from Ajanta evinces this kind of intrinsic complexity. This 'difficult beauty',³⁶ speaks of an extremely evolved stage of maturity, almost contemporaneous to the sculpture of Cave 21 and 14 of Ellora. I do agree with Spink about the panel being intrusive but I suggest a much later date to it i.e. after A.D. 530. A guild of sculptors from Aurangabad seem to have been active at Ajanta even after the fall of the Vākāṭakas, because there are umpteen intrusive images all over Ajanta which can be ascribed to the same guild that worked on the Mārapralobhana.

This is the phase when all the different lineages converge into an amalgam leaving behind the traces of their origin. There is a stylistic difference between the Mātṛkas of Cave 14 and 21 but the Kaṅkāla images are extremely similar to each other (Fig.31 and Fig.32). The sculptors from Cave 14 - probably of the second generation - due to the close acquaintance cultivated through several years with the other lineages reach to a summit where the sculpture grows beyond the limits of depiction or representation. It acquires a status of visual manifestation in the real sense of the word. It does not merely

illustrate the subject matter but the 'significant form'³⁷ of the manifestation can transmit the subtlest of the feelings to the onlooker.

The Lalita Naṭarāja, the Kaṅkāla or the Pārvati Parīṇaya from this cave are not merely the iconic or narrative representations of the mythical characters but an incarnation of the changing moods of the divine presence. The complexity in the composition, the lyrical body flexions, the intricacy of the parole is not a derivative of contrivance. The intricacy here is inevitable as it has surfaced from within. It is not a simplistic juxtaposition of black and white but a realization of the subtlest of the hues and tones. Bharata in his *Rasasūtra* mentioned the *vyabhichāribhāvas* as being those that enhance and enrich the expression. These *bhāvas*, also known as *sanchāri* are not necessarily analogous to the *sthāyi* - the principal mood. Instead, they contrast and complement the principal mood. The affectionate Māṭṛkas here are flanked by the gruesome Kaṅkāla and the benevolent Gaṇeśa; the elegant, agile Naṭarāja is accompanied by awkward slouching Bhṛṅgi; the gorgeous madanikās are followed by dwarves, hunchbacks - kuṭīlakas - and the divine beauty of Pārvati is surrounded by the grotesque. The intrinsic tensions of the complex structure of feelings, when they are manifest, acquire a transcendental incandescence.

I am tempted to use the term 'non-discursive symbol' in this context, introduced by Susanne Langer³⁸ to define the highest possible achievement of a work of art, where the abstract feeling is transformed-not translated - into a tangible form. The work of art ceases to be a vehicle or a medium to convey the experience, but becomes an autonomous experience by itself. A conscious aesthetic endeavour to analyze the mystery, called beauty, to define the aesthetic values and to try to create an 'art object' satisfying these prerequisites, results into the manifestation of a classical aesthetic object. It is neither merely a spontaneous overflow of the intuition of an individual, as Croce³⁹ pleads for nor an indifferent intellectual attempt to design and compose a work of art. A classic work of art transcends the limitations of both these approaches to art. It is an intuitive manifestation of a coherent understanding and realization of the structure of the feelings of a sensitive, receptive mind. The technicalities mastered converge into reflexes and the formless finds its form.

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2. R.N.Mishra, Ancient Artists and Art - Activity Simla 1975. Also a paper read by this scholar at the Khajuraho Seminar 1987 traces this elevation of a *rūpakāra* to a *sthapati*.
3. Srinivasa Padigar 1988, Craftmen's Inscriptions from Badami, their significance in Ellora Caves Sculpture and Architecture, Delhi.
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4. V.V.Mirashi, Inscriptions of the Kalachuri Cedi-Era, C.I.I. Vol.IV, p.42.
5. W.Spink, Ellora's earliest phase, Bulletin of the American Academy of Benares, Vol.I, 1967, p.20, f.38.
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8. Krishnaraja is mentioned as a "devotee of Pasupati from his very birth : *Janmenaiya - Paśupati Samāśraya*, and the queen of Buddharaja is mentioned in the inscription as *Pāśupatarājñī*

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12. ibid, p.132. Mangalesha's Nerur Copper plate describes him as Swāmi Mahāsena Pādānudhyāta and the copper plates of Pulakeshi bow to the Saptamatṛka as their guardian deities.
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Fig.3 - Comparative chronology of the cave temples of the Deccan.
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29. 'In a rectilinear progression of an art tradition at times an
unanticipated sudden change is noticed, such abrupt changes occur

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 34. K.V.Soundara Rajan, Cave Temple of the Deccan, New Delhi, 1981, p.114.
 35. The Hellenistic Greek sculpture or the later works of Titian and Michelangelo evince this feature. In India, the Gurjara Pratihara sculptures or the later Ellora sculptures too reveal this quality. The description of Nagara in *Viṣṇudharmottara - Dṛḍhopachī-tasarvāṅgam* probably means the same.
 36. Bosanquet Bernard, Three lectures on Aesthetics, London, 1915.
Bosanquet for a qualitative judgement, suggests a classification of works of art under "easy and difficult beauty". The characteristics of the difficult and hence greater beauty as suggested by Bosanquet are :
 1. Intricacy
 2. High tension of feelings
 3. Width of imagination

37 Clive Bell (*Art*, 1914), Roger Fry (*Vision and Design*, 1920) and the other formalists believe that an ultimate function of a work of art is not to narrate or convey the contents of it but the work of art itself as a significant form can impart an experience to the onlooker irrespective of the content.

38. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*. London, 1953.

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