



Sculptures of Bhubaneswar and its Relation to Karanas and Odissi Dance

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Abstract

Sculptures represent tangible legacy from the past, which is one of the bridges to connect history with the present prevalent situation relating to culture, rituals, traditions, religious records etc. In other words, we can say that Sculpture helps us to reconstruct the missing links in the history of Indian Dance. The sculptures symbolize the past culture and traditions and, in a way, also the daily way of life. They provide a structure of their ideas or philosophy through plastic art. With thorough study and observation, we find that, these art forms still carry our legacy, which we can still relate in the root of our culture and tradition. Dance poses evoke Sculpture as does Sculptural poses which evoke Dance, by which reconstruction of any form becomes easier. Sculpture and dance have common element, that is Human body. Odissi Dance is a sculptural presentation, it needs proper sculptural poses for perfectly presenting the dance form. Some treatises describe all aspects of sculpture and dance. Hence being a dancer, it is important to understand how to prepare for a proper sculptural presentation. We can attempt to analyse the dance poses in terms of Karanas and also to identify sculptural representations of dance with the knowledge of Karanas which is the unit of dance movements.

Key words –Dance, Odissi, Karana, Sculpture.

Both in Sculpturing and Dancing, the human body is used as an instrument of expression. Everything related to figure, face, hands, postures of the limbs, the pose and every turn of the body, each one of them is filled with an inner meaning. It is noticeable, that on one side it expresses the basic idea of an expression and on the other it articulates and heightens the physical and or sensuous features. Without going into the differences of opinions between different experts of the Śilpaśāstra and the Nāṭyaśāstra, we must first analyse the sculptural representation in terms of dance movements, to show how the technique of one art form can be applied, to analyse the finished product of another art form, in this case Odissi Dance. At a time when no written history of Dance existed, we can get a brief idea on the growth and development of Indian dance through the portrayal of dance in Indian Sculptures. We get clear indications from the literary and dramatic work about the type of dance, names of the different dance forms and compositions prevalent during different periods of history. Indian Sculpture shows us visibly in plastic art form, the exact nature of human movement, and the development of stylization in dancing during different periods of history. The consummate skill with which the Indian sculptor has modelled the dancing figure over a period of nearly sixteen hundred years is a rare and



significant fact in the history not only of Indian sculpture but of all Indian arts.ⁱ (Vatsyayan 1968, pg. 264)

Dance has influenced sculptures so deeply that the fundamental principle of filling up space must be based on symmetry and proportion for both arts. The term “Sauṣṭhava” used in Nāṭyaśāstra is comparable to Tālamāna and Pramāna in Śilpaśāstra. The grace of dance is reflected in the flow of lines in the sculptures, which are dance-like, even while portraying prosaic scenes like applying a Tilaka, putting up the tresses etc.ⁱⁱ (Subrahmanyam 1997, pg. 127)

The Tāla as a unit of measurement in space is mentioned by both the Śilpaśāstra and the Nāṭyaśāstra. The definition of the Tāla is quite clear in the Śilpaśāstra and it naturally constitutes the most important and basic unit of measurement. The Tāla in Indian dancing cannot obviously stand for height measurement and the Navatāla and Astatāla measurements cannot be applied to dance; however, the term is often referred to in dance texts while discussing Sthāna, Cārī and the Karaṇa and while describing feet and knee movements. This term is used in dance in the measurement of space on the horizontal plane that is along the Pramāna. Sometimes the movement of the hands and the feet prescribed for Cārīs or Karaṇas can also be understood in terms of the Upamāna which means the measurement of interspaces between parts of the body. In fact, the Nṛtta technique of Indian dance, can be understood to a very large extent, if we understand the concept of the Sūtra and the Māna of Indian Sculpture. Indian dance intentionally imposes upon itself this discipline of limited space. All its movements can be analysed in terms of the relation of the different parts of the human body to the vertical median or the Brahma Sūtra. Movements can also be analysed in terms of the measurement along the different planes denoted by the area which would be covered by the Māna, the Pramāna and the Unmāna corresponding to the dimensions of height, breadth and thickness and the measurements of the interspaces (Upamāna) and the periphery along the circumference (Parimāna). The leg extensions of Maṇḍalas and Sthānas of Indian dance can be measured along the Pramāna. The movements of different parts of the body, especially the chest and the neck etc, can be measured along the Unmāna. The movements of the Recita type and the Bhramarīs take into consideration the Parimāna measurements. Just as Indian sculpture conceives the deflections and poses of the human body along different planes and areas of space, similarly Indian dance also conceives movement in space along the three planes. Characteristically, Indian dance seldom conceives space without these limitations. The vertical ascension in both dance or sculpture is emphasized, but rarely, there is any attempt to spread out or to extend the limbs to the furthest point from the centre of the body. The point of perfect balance can be maintained if there is minimum possible deviation from the centre of gravity, both the Indian sculptor and the Indian dancer follow this rule. Violent movement is depicted only by one leg and the utmost poise and stability of a rare static quality is suggested by the other.ⁱⁱⁱ (Vatsyayan 1968, pg. 264-265)

To analyse the sculptures with the standpoint of Karaṇas, I had to initially think and construct the important elements of movements considering the static pose of the sculpture. As in Talapuṣpapuṭa, the main element is Puṣpapuṭa Hasta, although the limb position can be at any medieval point of movement.

All the sculptures of India can be examined in terms of the single units of movement or static position of the different parts of the body. Each piece of Sculpture can be scrutinised in terms of

the position of head, arms, hands, the incline of the body, the torso and the deflexion of the hip because, the basic treatment of the human form is similar in both the arts. These examples of sculptures can also be analysed in terms of the Karaṇas the unit of movements of the body or those primary movements that condition the movement of the entire body, such as the Cārīs, the Sthānas and certain basic movement of the knees or the waist. We can attempt to analyse all the dance scenes in terms of Bharata's Karaṇas and attempt to identify all sculptural representations of dance with the Karaṇas of Bharata. However, with this analysis we have to compare the theory to make it accurate, because Karaṇas are not a static pose, these all are a sequence of movements.^{iv}(Vatsyayan 1968, pg 269 -270)

Figure 1



Sculpture at Mukteśvara temple in Bhubaneswar. The figure is in seated position, one foot is in Agratalasancara Pāda and the hands are in Puṣpapuṭa. This may represent the finishing position of the Karaṇa Talapuṣpapuṭa and we can apply this Karaṇa in dance compositions in Odissi style.

I have also seen many dance sculptures of Śālabhañjikās, Yakṣas and Yakṣīs, Dvārapālas, Apsarās, Gāndharvas, Vidyādharas, God, Goddess, etc in the temples of Bhubaneswar which can be analysed with the terms of dance. There are many dance poses of Śivā all over the temples of Bhubaneswar. It is not limited to only his Naṭarāja form but also Vīnādhara, Bhairava, Ardhanārīśvara etc. “The unpredictable correlation between mythology, dance, traditions and sculpture associated with Śivās different manifestations, suggests that neither the dancers nor the sculptors have allowed themselves to be confined by rigid rules in their attempt to interpret the mythology. Because dance is such an integral part of mythology and worship of Śivā, it is evident that it has inspired sculptors from time to time to incorporate it into the iconography of diverse manifestations and that the tradition evolved, at least in past, separately from the practice of dance.”^v(Gaston 1982, pg. 176)

The Nṛttamūrtis are characterised by the sculptural style of the period and the region. These Nṛttamūrtis are common in all parts of India as they cannot be seen as a class distinct. The different poses of the Nṛttamūrtis of Garuḍa, Ganeśa, Śivā, Viṣṇu, etc has the characteristic features of the sculptures of the region. From the point of Nāṭyaśāstra it can be identified in terms of Cārī, as it is judged from the movement of limbs or certain characteristic feature of Karaṇas, described by Bharata in fourth Chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra.^{vi} (Vatsyayan 1968, pg. 322)

“As we have seen the Apsarās sculptures are found embellishing the temples everywhere. But in medieval period they were found in profusion on the temples of Orissa and central India.”^{vii}(Varadpande 2007, pg. 111) We are able to see plenty of Sculptures of Apsarās in the temples of Orissa and they are in very graceful female postures, Bharata also suggests these postures for females only. Seeing the body lines of the Apsarā's in both Indian dance and sculptures we can realise the grace and fluidity of the Apsarās. “Apsarā is primordial nature spirit of Indian



mythology basically connected with water. The word ‘Apsarā’ literally means going in the waters or between the waters of the cloud. In early literature she is called ‘Apyayośa’ the woman of water or essence of water.”^{viii} (Varadpande 2007, pg. 10) Ap+Sarās means water and movement i.e. moving in water. It denotes the femininity, softness and beauty as the characteristics of the water nymphs.^{ix} (Subrahmanyam 1997, pg. 126) Apsarās were created by Brahmā to perform in “Kaiśiki Vṛtti”. To perform this Vṛttia dancer needs grace and fluidity, like the Apsarāsportrayedin the sculptures seen almost all over India.

The twin arts of dance and sculpture have grown together under the divine shade of our temples in every nook and corner of our country. Indian iconography has been carefully guided by Indian aesthetics and hence all the Āgama Shastra is influenced by Nāṭyaśāstra.^x (Subrahmanyam 1997, pg. 125) The Āgamas are a collection of scriptures of several Hindu devotional schools. Āgama texts describe cosmology, epistemology, philosophical doctrines and precepts on meditation and practices, four kinds of yoga, mantras, temple construction, deity worship and ways to attain sixfold desires. These canonical texts are in Sanskrit and Tamil (written in Grantha script and Tamil script). Three branches of Āgama texts are those of Śaivism (Śivā), Vaiṣṇavism (Viṣṇu) and Śaktism (Devī). Symbols, icons and temples are a necessary part of Āgamic practice. The Vedas are the path and the Āgamas are the horse.^{xi} (Ghosh 1996, pg. 141)

Each Āgama consists of four parts- Jñānapada or Vidyāpada, Yogāpada, Kriyāpada (construction of temples, designing principles for sculpting, carving, consecration of idols of deities for worship in temples) and Caryāpada. Temple and archaeological inscriptions as well as textual evidence, suggest that the Āgama texts were in existence by 7th century in the Pallava dynasty era. However, Richard Davis notes that the ancient Āgamas “are not necessarily the Āgamas that survive in modern times.” The texts have gone through revision over time.^{xii} (Davis 2014, pg. 12-13)

The concept of divinity as a dancer had blossomed even during the Rig Vedic period, which got crystallised much later, in the shape of lord of dance Naṭarāja. Apart from Śivā, several other deities of the Hindu pantheon were conceived as dancing Gods. Some of them are Indra, Maruts, Ganesa, Karthikeya, Krishna, Manmatha, Pārvatī, Dūrgā, Kālī, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. Among the superhuman beings, there are artists conceived as Apsarās, Gāndharvas, Kinnarās and even the Pramathagaṇās of Śivā. Each deity is prescribed specific postures in consonance with the respective character and form. It is exactly in this context, that the Nāṭyaśāstra gets infused into the Śilpaśāstra. The hand gestures called the “Hastas” in dance and sculpture and called “Mudrās” in Tantra. The sculptor had to study Nāṭyaśāstra as a major part of his syllabus.^{xiii} (Subrahmanyam 1997, pg. 125) The existing Āgamas are derived from Nāṭyaśāstra. Besides the various deities it is pronounced in the case of Lord Śivā. Some of the Śaiva Āgamas including Śilparatna state that Śivā danced in hundred and eight modes but content themselves with the description of nine modes only, as it is very difficult to describe all.^{xiv} (Subrahmanyam 1997, pg. 129) The ĀnandaTāṇḍava, widely known figure of Naṭarāja, is the 24th Karaṇa named ‘Bhujaṅgatṛāsita’. Sakalādhikāra mentions that the beginning of the embryonic universe Śivā danced in the midst of the celestials under the banyan tree. When he was bitten by the serpent Kārkoṭa, he performed the BhujaṅgatṛāsitaNṛtta. The metaphysical and philosophical interpretations of this form of dance, as perceived by the Śaivite saints must have been preceded



by this Purāṇic construction being given an Āgamic visualisation. The choice of the Karaṇa to represent this situation bears testimony to the sculptor's knowledge of the Nāṭyaśāstra. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that there was a Kārkoṭa dynasty which ruled in Kashmir. Apart from Bhujāṅgatrāsita, some of the other Karaṇas which we come across among the ŚivāTāṇḍavas are Catura in the form of Sandhyātāṇḍava; Daṇḍapāda or Lalāṭatilaka, Viṣṇukrānta in Ūrdhvatāṇḍava; Ūrdhvajānu in Kalārimūrti and Apakrānta in Gajasamhāramūrti. Ūrdhvatāṇḍava is called Uddaṇḍa and Atyuddaṇḍanṛttas in Rauravāgama. Apart from those described in the Āgamas, we do come across several dancing forms of Śivā, which have posed problems in identification. These need the help of Nāṭyaśāstra for interpretation. Invariably they fall under the definition of some of the 108 Karaṇas.^{xv} (Subrahmanyam 1997, pg. 130)

None of these, however, have treated the topics of fine arts in the way in which the third Khanda of Viṣṇudharmottara has done. The treatment is comprehensive and systematic, so that one can call it a treatise of the fine arts of ancient India. Moreover, it flew a flood of light on various symbols used in the ancient arts. These important descriptions serve as a reliable guide into the study parts of the tradition of fine arts in ancient India.^{xvi} (Shah 1958, pg. 58) "This interrelation of arts is corroborated by two historical facts. A comparative study of the monumental remains of sculpture and painting on one hand and Sanskrit texts on dancing on the other would show that they are closely inter-related in their subject matter so much, so that these monuments serve as visual illustrations of the verbal explanations of the text. In fact, it is very difficult to understand one without the aid of the other."^{xvii} (Shah 1958, Introduction xv)

Another corroboration comes from the fact that in ancient India a temple was the centre of all arts. The temple was itself an embodiment of architecture. It was decorated with sculptures and paintings. It had halls for music and dance as well as for the recitation of the Kathā Kāvya and drama acting. In fact, all fine arts came there and fulfilled their needs of devotional worship that required aesthetic tastes of high order.^{xviii} (Shah 1958, Introduction xv)

Sculpture and painting are closely related to dance. The rules of iconography appear to have been derived from Nāṭyaśāstra. The Indian sculptures are often the frozen version or representation of the gestures and poses of dance (Cārīs and Karaṇas) described in Nāṭyaśāstra. The Śilpa and Citra are based on the system of medians (Sūtra), measures (Mānas), postures of symmetry (Bhaṅgas) and asymmetry (Abhaṅga, Vibhaṅga and Tribhaṅga) and on the Sthānas (position of standing, sitting and reclining). The concept of perfect symmetry is present in Śilpa, Citra as in Nṛtya and that is indicated by the term Sama. Nāṭyaśāstra and Śilpaśāstra developed a remarkable approach to the structure of the human body and delineated the relation between its central point (navel), the vertical and horizontals. It then coordinated them, first with the positions and movements of the principal joints of neck, pelvis, knees and ankles and then with the emotive states, they demonstrated the principles of static balance, repose and perfect symmetry, and they are of fundamental importance in Indian arts, e.g. dance drama painting and sculpture.^{xix} (Nanda 2018)

The study of the dance sculptures in relation to the Śilpaśāstra and Citrasūtra will be a different study matter along with the study of the Hindu iconography. It would be much more accurate

and meaningful, if I am able to describe the sculptures with relevance to the elements of Odissi dance and identify Karaṇas in that posture.

It is pertinent to note that of all the elements in overall technique of Indian Classical Dance it is the Karaṇas and the Karaṇas alone that have been fully and faithfully preserved in the plastic arts, apparently for the benefit of posterity. ^{xx}(Khokar 1979, pg. 51) I tried to identify these Karaṇas in the Sculptures of Bhubaneswar for the benefit of Odissi dancers. There are some sculptures are described in terms of Karaṇas.



Both the Sculptures show Lalāṭatilaka Karaṇa in Paraśurāmesvara Temple

Figure 2 & 3

Figure 4



The above figure shows some position of the Karaṇas- Nikuṭṭakaka and Bhujāṅatrāsita in Śiśiresvara Temple.

Figure 5



In the above sculpture the middle dancing posture is in Pārśvagrānta Karaṇa, it can also be assumed as Ekapādāñcita Deśī Karaṇa. The two topmost corner figures are in Vṛścika Karaṇa in Brahmesvara Temple.



There are plenty of sculptures which represent Karaṇas. But to properly illustrate and identify all of these one should have thorough knowledge about Karaṇas. Odissi dancers have the full scope to utilise and propel these Karaṇas in front of the art lovers, which is already present in this art form and also represented in ancient sculptures.

References -

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