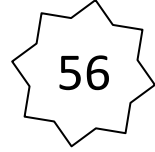


Ālasa-kanyās in the temple sculptures of Odisha

Shalini P Vittal
Bengaluru



Abstract:

Odisha state is known for its architectural beauty, especially in temples of *Paraśurāmeśwar*, *Vaital*, *Lingarāja*, *Rājarāni*, *Konark* and so on. The female sculptures are carved beautifully on walls, *gavākśas*, *śikharas* of temples. They are graceful female figures similar to the ancient motif of *Sālabhañjikā*. They are very playful and lively exhibiting different attitudes, gestures and expressions. They are endowed with delicate charm and reflect most intense and controlled emotions. Hence, such female sculptures are referred to as *Ālasa kanyās* (*Surasundaris*) in *Śilpaprakāśa*. The present study is an understanding of such female figures and categorising them based on sixteen types of *Ālasa-kanyās*. Such types have been identified in sculptures.

Keywords:

Sculptures, Temples, *Ālasa-kanyās* (female figures)

Introduction:

The *Ālasa kanyās* may be the progeny of the *Apsaras*, created to participate in dance and drama performances to entertain the gods. The art of sculptures, architecture, dance, literature, painting is all inter-related and need to be viewed as a cultural process. The idea of the *apsaras* connected with the temples may be the reason for initiating the practice of *Devadāsi* system. *Gandharvas*, *Yakśas*, *Rākśasas*, *Nāgas* and *Kinnaras* become enchanted on seeing the graceful postures of women. In *Śilpaprakāśa*, it is said that “*Ālasa kanyās* should always be placed on the sides of the spire, with *Bhairava* images supporting the *āmalaka*” (Ref: Second *prakāśa*, *śloka* 27). *Śilpaprakāśa* text mentions a *yantra* to denote the posture of the lazy females with predominant oblique lines to indicate *tribhanga* posture. *Ālasa kanyās* are given names, according to her moods, *Ālasa*, *Toraṇā*, *Mugdhā*, *Māninī*, *Ḍālamālikā*, *Padmagandhā*, *Darpaṇā*, *Ketakībharaṇā*, *Māṭṛmūrti*, *Cāmarā*, *Guṇṭhanā*, *Nartakī*, *Śukasārikā*, *Nūpurapādikā*, *Mardalā* and *Vinyāsa-Dhyānākāśītā*. Such *kanyas* have been identified in the temple sculptures of Odisha, based on the characteristics mentioned in *Śilpaprakāśa*.

1. *Ālasa* (the graceful maiden):



The hands should be placed above the head. The navel is on the central *bindu*, and the hip is on the left side. Beginning from the central *bindu*, the right leg should be beautifully made, the left leg, in an elongated beautiful shape is along the oblique. *Chandita* or *Spandita* (Palms turned upwards/downwards) are the two movements.

2. *Toraṇā* (forming an arch)



She is turned to the right side. One arm is joined with the other arm, and touches the triangle. The *Toraṇā* holds one hand in *spandita mudra* and is very attractive.

3. *Mugdhā* (innocent, simple girl)



One hand with the *Nāga mudra* goes in front of the face. The *Nāga-mudra* is on the right, the left arm is along the side of the triangle, it is placed on the hip. The two legs are flexed as before, as in movement. She is adorned with various ornaments.

4. *Māninī* (resentful or offended girl)



The head is turned towards the left side. The breast is somewhat visible at the right side, and the left palm is touching the lower lip. The right arm should be made along the upper oblique line. Again, the forearm is along the oblique line on top and the right palm is over the head. This is called the gesture of pride. The left leg is straight, the right leg is bent, the upper leg is thrust forward and (the foot) touches the wall. She should wear draperies, a beautiful breastband and attractively tied hair. Both eyes are half opened and on the lower lip there is the expression of love (*lāsyā-bhāva*).

5. *Ḍālamālikā* (holding a branch like a garland)



Above the head is the right forearm going along with the branch. The right arm lies on the right-side triangle. The upper portion of the hip lies on the side and the navel in the centre. The left arm is slightly lower and the forearm is in the form of a straight line. On the left side she makes the beautiful gesture of touching the end of the branch. The right leg goes across the width and along the left line. The

right shank goes along the left triangle. The left leg is on the right side standing straight. She rests on the right triangle.

6. *Padmagandhā* (smelling the lotus):

Turned to the left she is always beautiful. She stands more to the left side. The head, trunk and the legs are elegantly poised. The head is in the upper part and the chest in the third division. The left arm is on the side lying along the forearm (bent upwards), she holds a fresh beautiful lotus in her left palm.



The right arm is going down straight and rests on the hip. The right leg is slightly slanting and the lower part is receding backwards. The left leg is straight like a rod along the side of the triangle. The beautiful bunch of hair is resting on the right shoulder. She enjoys the fragrance of the lotus and therefore is known as *Padmagandhā*.

7. *Darpaṇā* (holding a mirror)



The head is placed above the left triangle, and the palm is placed on the hair towards the front. Her looks are turned down towards the right side of the middle line. The lovely (right) arm goes downwards and rests on the middle part of the (right) triangle. Holding a mirror, she is beautiful and gives pleasure to the people. The two breasts are on the left side along the middle-line. The right leg goes down to the left corner, the left thigh goes down evenly along the triangle. Then it slightly bends to the right side down to the base of the middle line. She should be made wearing a beautiful drapery around the hip. This is the lovely maiden by the name of *Darpaṇa*. The mirror can be placed in front of her face in various ways.

8. *Ketakībharaṇā* (wearing ketaki blossom)

On the left side are head, chest, hip and arm. The breasts are located in the centre upon the middle line. The right arm is raised along the right triangle line. The upper arm starts from the uppermost side-*bindu* and goes down to the middle line. The palm placed on the left side above her head is beautiful.



The hand holds *ketaki* petals, this is the auspicious *ketakībharaṇā*. She is a woman with heavy hips, bulging out to the left. In the upper part, she holds a beautiful flower in her hand. The graceful hip and the belly are wholly on the left side. The left leg with auspicious features goes to the lower part of the triangle. Down to the lowest right corner where the foot is on the ground line. Below, the right knee comes forward to the corner of the triangle. Below that, the right shank in crossing (behind the left leg) is charming.

9. *Mātṛmūrti* (image of a mother)



The head is placed upon the middle line and so is the whole beautiful body. The left arm is along the breast, near the left triangle. Starting from the middle line the forearms lie on the horizontal middle line. In (her arms) is the figure of a child near the left triangle. From face to foot, it is on the middle line. Hanging from the right shoulder, the right hand is placed on the thigh. Both feet are placed in a natural way.

10. *Cāmarā* (holding a flywhisk)



She is an attendant of the deities. Her feet are like those of the *Mātṛmūrti*, in the same position. Only the upper part is different. The face is turned towards the right side, and the left arm is within the triangle. The forearm is similar and is placed near her heart. The right arm is in the lower part and the left arm is inside the left triangle. The forearm comes in front, holding the garment by which she is adorned. In her left hand is a fly-whisk, resting on her left shoulder. This is the serene figure of *Cāmarā*, who increases the joy of the gods.

11. *Guṇṭhanā* (hiding herself)



She is a woman concealing herself with a veil, always showing her back, reaching upto the third horizontal line, joined to the head. The hips are placed on the vertical middle line and rest on the *Madhya bindu*. The left arm is in front of the body, touching the lower lip. The right arm is on that side near the upper line of the triangle. The head in the upper part is covered. This young girl, showing her full back, is standing firmly in *vīrāsana*. The left leg is stretched straight down in a graceful manner. The left thigh touches the right triangle, the shin is on the right side and touches the end of the ground line. She sometimes holds a drapery or flowers, or sometimes a fan. This woman is a *mahāvidyā*, she is the adorable *Guṇṭhanā*.

12. *Nartakī* (dancer)



The celestial *Nartakī* is turning her body and looks towards the right side. The head is above in the usual

place, and the arms are raised towards the sky. Above, the hands are joined with interlocked fingers along the middle vertical. The navel is on the *Madhya bindu*, she is attractive, being lost in her dance. The beautiful hip is placed on the *bindu* of the right line. The right leg goes down to the left lower corner. The left leg crossing behind along the middle line is placed on the ground. This *Nartakī* is the embodiment of dance.

13. Śukasārikā (playing with a parrot or a maina)



The head stands on the left side. The left arm is along the triangle and the left forearm is in front on the shapely breast. The right forearm is a little raised upto the right triangle. She is adorned by a parrot/maina, or other beautiful birds, perching on her hand. The navel is on the *Madhya bindu*. Both legs are in a slant, the beautiful left shank is turned towards the wall. By its side the right leg goes lengthwise towards the right. This maiden is known under the name of *Śukasārikā*.

14. Nūpurapādikā (with ankle-bells)



The beautiful body, standing along the vertical middle line is turned towards right. The left arm hangs down on line of left triangle. In right hand, as described before, she holds a beautiful flowerbud. In the lower part of the two legs the right one is bent. The right knee below touches first horizontal. The position of shank is obliquely set towards left side. The left hand is placed where there is a string of ankle-bells; left leg is slanting down to the end of the middle line.

15. Mardalā (drummer):

The head is slightly bent, touching the left line (of the left triangle). The chest and the left arm are on the middle line. The shoulder part on the left side touches the line of the triangle.



Then the beautiful hand is on the horizontal middle line. In the breadth of the middle line a beautiful *mardalā* (drum) should be carved. The right arm behind that (*mardalā*) is up to the limit of the right triangle line, the sole of the left foot rests on the ground. The right foot is at the same place along the middle line. This is the divinely beautiful *Mardalā*, intoxicated with her play. With both the hands (beating the drum on both sides) she gives joy by her rhythms.



ISSN:2582-9513

Pranav Journal of Fine Arts

(A Peer Reviewed Quarterly Online Journal)

16. *Vinyāsa* (well-groomed):

This woman of beautiful limbs is turned to right and her lovely face is seen in profile. The head is on upper lines and she has beautiful shoulders. The left arm is along left side of triangle. The forearm is crossing in front along horizontal middle-line. The other arm has same form and disposition of palm is beautiful like that of a small tortoise mudra. The left leg, starting from centre point is straight like a rod. From the side of that point, right thigh goes down along right triangle and shin goes down to the end. With hands in gesture of doing *japa-nyāsa*, *Vinyāsa* is lost in meditation. With lovely garments on her hips, she is most beautiful.

Analysis: This type of classification has not been seen in the temple sculptures of Bhuvaneshwar. The reason may be that it was present in the earlier times and presently might have got covered due to restoration; hence this type of sculpture might have gone unnoticed. However, the *Ālasa kanyās* like *Darpaṇa*, *Śukasārikā*, *Nartakī*, and *Mugdha* find similarity in their treatment of calling them by different names like *Darpaṇa Sundari*, *Śukabhāṣiṇi*, *Nāṭya Sundari*, *Mukuramugdhā* in DVG's *Antahpuragite*, the songs of which are composed on the sculptures of Belur (Karnataka).

Conclusion: The charm of a woman mentioned as *Ālasa-kanyās* has always engaged the attention of poets, writers, painters and sculptors from time immemorial. A woman is not only a mother, wife, sister or a goddess. The imagination of image gives a beautiful form. The ideal of feminine beauty in her youthfulness has always been there to glorify differently in different periods of time. They provide concrete evidence of an artist's vision of an ideal *Bhāratiya nāri*. She may be a *Nāyikā*, *Dūti*, *Apsara*, *Goddess*, *Yakṣi*, or a Queen. The imagery of such a beautiful lady in her physical form and actions should denote emotions in her most delicate symbol of appreciation.

Bibliography:

- Bhattaraka, Ramachandra (1966). *Śilpaprakāśa*, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.
- Ghosh, Manomohan (2020). *Nāṭyaśāstram*, Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
- Gundappa, DV (2002). *Antahpuragite*, Mysore: Kavyalaya publishers.
- Krishnan, Gauri Parimoo (2014). *The Power of the Female*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd.
- Lal, Kanwar (1970). *Temples and Sculptures of Bhubaneswar*, New Delhi: Arts & Letters.
- Mishra, Purna Chandra (2013). *Mahari Tradition of Sri Jagannath Temple*, <https://www.magazines.odisha.gov.in>Orissareview>jul>engpdf>, 11th Feb'2021.
- Varadpande, ML (2007). *Apsara in Indian Art and Literature*, Gurgaon: Shubhi Publications.
- Vatsyayan, Kapila (2007). *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts*, New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi.

