

Independent Matrika's images: Pratihar's art

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Abstract

The Gurjara-Pratihara's of Kanyakubja (Kanauj) were one of the prominent and earliest Rajputa rulers of north India who succeeded in yielding supremacy over north in circa 8th century A.D. The period between circa 7th to 12th century A.D. in north India has its own importance for its political and socio-economic development, which was marked by feudal tendencies. After the fall of the Gupta empire political unity was shattered which resulted in the emergence of new royal dynasties, and a conscious regional outlook throughout India. The political struggle for supremacy resulted into political fragmentation which vastly affected the socio-economic life of north India. The material milieu of the period had a comprehensive effect on its social structure. An independent image of Matrika was collected by the Haryana state museum from Vill. Uchana, Distt. Jind. The statue is completely broken above the neck. The Matrika is shown seated in Lalitasana on a raised pedestal. On the left lap a child with his right arm are placed on the left shoulder of his mother is seated. The two armed goddess is depicted holding her breast by her right hand to feed the child. The goddess is decked with torque, ekavali, Keyura, Kankana, nupura, scarf and sari (c. 9th — 10th cent a). A broken piece of a saptamatrika's panel's found from palwal (Distt. Faridabad, Haryana) which shows Indrani find Chamunda in seated posture. The facial expression and fine carving of the figure of Indrani are remarkable.

Keywords: Brahmani, Indrani, Yarahi, Vaisnavi, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Chamunda, Jaina deities

Introduction

Brahmani

In the Gurjar-Pratihara period individuals depiction of Manias was very popular. A lot of specimen have been recovered from the various places. A four arm images of Bramain is placed the goddess, in the Gwalior museum which shows three faces of the goddess seated in Lalitisana on a lotus. The upper two arms are mutilated while the lower hands holds aksmala and Kamandalu. On her left Vahana swan is also depicted. In the temple at Batesar Brahmani has been exhibited with her mount swan. One of her right hands is in abhaya mudra and the gala is held in her lower right hand. An akshamala is held in upper left hand while the lower one is in the varadaudra. She has been superb coiffure and wears a double stringed & Ira, a series of six valaya's (bracelet) in each of her hand. Similar representative sculptures with four faces have been noticed in Mankhera and timari temples and preserved in the archaeological museum at Kanauj ^[1].

Indrani

Indrani is supposed to be the comfort of Indra. In sculptural display she has been usually depicted after Varahi in order but before Chamunda in the panels of saptamatrika's. Indrani from Mallidevi temple at Gyliraspur is a representative of the period under review. Here she has been depicted in one of the rathas' of the temple facing south ^[2]. The four handed deity is riding on her mount Gaja (Elephant) and exhibited on a lotus pitha. The khadga and chakra are held in two of her right hands and a lankha and shield are held in left hands. She has been beautifully combed coiffure and wears the chakra, kundala. double stringed ham. Keyfira, valaya and padakataka

and the embroidered sari. The Nand chand group of Matrika's has a line sculpture of Indrani with four hands. She is standing in dvibhanga pose in front of her Vahana elephant. She carries a bell and a vajra in her right hands. the upper left hand holds both a lotus and a rosary. while the lower left carries a child. The depiction of a long jewelled crown is remarkable (c. 10th cent. A.D.). Another image of seated Matrika, who is probably indrani, found from t3atesara (Distt. Agra) is now housed in the Lucknow museum. The mutilated figure shows the two handed deity in Svitstikasana pose with a child on her left thigh. The child is probably playing with a car-ring of the deity (9th cent A.D.) ^[3].

Yarahi

A mutilated image from Badoh (Distt. V idisha), now displayed in the Gwalior museum, represents the bust of a magnificent Varahi image. The deity with the snout of a boar and a female body is finely decorated with Vanamiila and has a halo behind the head. The image is remarkably expresses the vigour and vitality of the deity and belong to the c. 9th cent. A.D. Another sculpture of Goddess farAhi is collected from Pinjore (Haryana) and now housed in the Haryana state museum. In this image goddess is shown four armed and seated on a buffalo in lalitasana pose. The boar-faced deity wears beaded necklace. ekiivalt armllets, braclets and anklets. The face, both the right hands, right leg and the upper hand of the deity are broken. The buffalo, the mount of the goddess, is completely broken excepts both the eyes and horns. In her left lower hands. the goddess, carries a conch and in upper a disc. (c. 10th-11th cent. A.D.) ^[4]."

Vaisnavi

The Gwalior museum also preserves an independent image of a four handed Vaisnavi. In one of her right hands she carries a gada, while the other is in abhayamudra and in her left hands she holds ankha and chakra (10th cent. A.D.).

Mahesvari, Kaumari

An image of four armed Mahesvari is preserved in the Bharat kala bhavan. She carries a mirror, lotus and an indistinct object. The remaining one hand is broken." An image of Kaumari in the archaeological museum, Sagar University depicts the deity with her Allan. the peacock. The two handed image, carries a gada in her right hand while the left one is resting on her knee.

Chamunda

In the entire group of saptamatrika's, chamunda is supposed to be the last Matrika. The Devi Mahatmya chapter of the Markandeya purana refers to detail about the goddess. In the Pratihara art the icons of chamunda have been noticed from Mahua (Shivapuri). Here Chamunda has been shown standing in Sambhanga posture on the /corpse. She wears the Kapalamukuta, Pretakundala, Alundantala, Kankana, Sarpa, Valaya, Katisutra and Padakataka. She has ten hands out of which ten hands are broken. With remaining hands she holds a Kapla, sarpa and gada with her right hands, similarly two of her left hand are broken but a morn, sarpa, kapida, and the gada are held in the remaining left hands. The facial expression of deity is furious. The ribs of the body are visible, and she has the long drooping breasts. A scorpion is shown crawling upon her abdomen. On the stele the figures of cock, owl and musicians are nicely depicted." It is interesting to note that, sometimes chamunda is shown riding on a owl. A fine specimen of Ulukavahini Chamunda is found at Kanauj which represents the four armed deity in youthful appearance. She holds a sword and a shield in her upper hands, while the lower hands are seen near her mouth in a gesture of astonish or anger. Two devotees with folded hands sit near her feet which are resting on two small lotuses. Two garland bearers are also seen above the image. The goddess is adorned with a number of ornaments and a long garland which comes upto her Vahana's neck (c. 11th cent. A.D.)^[5]. A bust of Chamunda is reported from Pinjore (Haryana) and is now displayed in the museum of Kurukshetra University." The upper part of the image shows goddess Chamunda with emaciated body. The goddess might have been carved six handed, but now all the left three hands are broken. In the remaining right three hands, she carries a broken sword, an indistinct object, might have been the rosary and damaru at the right top corner. Her head is decked with a Mundanulla. She wears the Sarpakundala's in the ears and a snake as her Kanthanniki. The open mouth, flabby breasts and a sunken belly make the image very fierce (9th cent A.D.).

Jaina Deities

The Temple no. 12 at Deogarh and Maladevi temple at Gyaraspur are important monuments of the Gurjara-Pratihara period which possess a series of Yaksinis and a few Yaksha

images. I here it may be mentioned that in Digambara and Svetambara texts each Jina is associated with his particular yaksha and Yaksini. Accordingly we find some images of Yaksini's as prescribed by canonical texts. But interesting, at Deogarh as well as at Gyaraspur we also find some Yaksini's, labelled with their names, which are not found either in the Digambara or the Svetambara texts. R.N. Mishra suggested that these were the local popular devi's who were accepted with the traditional Yaksini's of the Jaina religion." Some images of Jaina Yaksini's are depicted in the Jaina temples of Deogarh. These images are of Chakregvar T, Ambika and Padmavat T etc. On the exterior of temple no. 12, sculptured niches represent twenty four Yaksini's. Above each Yaksini there appears a miniature image of a seated Jina. At Maladevi temple, too, we find some Yaksini images which are significant from the iconographic point of view. The LaRitabimba of the temple shows an image of eight armed ChakreSvaT riding on Garuda. Among other Yaksini's, mention may be made of Vanhigikhii. Thriivati PadmavatT, Purusadatta, Mita or Rohini and Kandarp."

A few images are also labeled with their names^[6]. The expressive execution of an image of a Jaina tutelary couple. found from Lachchhagir (Distt. Allahabad)" is worth mentioning. The image represent a couple seated in ardhaparyankosana with their right hands in abhayamudra. Both the figures are shaded by an asoka tree with a Jina figure seated among the branches. The female of the pair holds a child in her lap, behind /whom is an attendant figure. Below the image figures of six devotees are seen. The curled coiffure. ekcivali and necklace of the female are the characteristic of the Gupta period. But the image is dated to the eighth century A.D. In addition to above mentioned images the Jaina temples of the period of Pratihara's depict a variety of icons which includes Laksmi. Sarasvati. navagrahas, astadikpida's, Ganga, Yamunii and Naga-Nagi. Obviously these were the Hindu deities which were assimilated by the Jaina's.

Buddhist Deities

During Gurjara-Pratihara period Buddhism was declining fast. It appears that the religion was confined to Bihar and Bengal. However. Sarnath continued to be an important Buddhist centre and has yielded important Buddhist images of this period.

Tara

Tara the famous Buddhist goddess, in her simplest form, carries the night lotus in the left hand and exhibits varada—mudra by the right hand. Such an image (Fig. 13) recovered from Sarnath is now preserved in the national museum New Delhi. The image represents the goddess seated in ardhapagankiisana on a double lotus cushion. Her Hair is finely combed in dhammilla fashion. A human figure is shown standing to her left, while the other is kneeling near the feet (c. 96-10113 cent. A.D.)^[7].

Secular Images

Apart from the religious Icons and images, the sculptural art

of the Gurjara-Pratihara's period also contains the secular images such as: Surasundariss. Mithuna. erotic scene. young maiden playing with ball. salabhanjika's. female dancer's. Kumarika's and wringing hair scenes. Indian art is a mirror of Indian femininity" [8]. Most striking amongst these figures are those which represent the Surasundari's assuming various beautiful forms to adorn the temple walls. The elegant and graceful image of Surasundri's from Gwalior [9]. deserves mention for its unalloyed beauty. The nymph is standing in a charming posture against a tree. The upper parts of the body is nude, besides other ornaments, a necklace is dangling between her breast. The only clothe which is richly patterned is tide round her waist revealing the sensuousness of her charm. The head is decorated with mautikajala in loops. The other well known life size image of the so-called Rukmini. The long limbed figure seems to have been the portrait of a living sensuous model. There is a masterly blending of spiritual grace with voluptuousness in it. A sculptural fragment from sirsa (Distt. Allahabad)' [4] depicts a young maiden playing with a ball. In this image the maiden is standing with the raised right elbow above her head. The left hand is touching her right breast. The ball is shown at three places on the right arm, above the left shoulder and near the ankle. The form and size of the ball and her breasts are similar. Her attempt of play and circular movement of the ball is shown in an interestingly dramatic manner. During the momentum and rhythm of the play, the maiden was so deeply engaged with a seductive forgetfulness that she was beguiled by her own breast. She touches it in place of the ball. The game of the ball by maidens may have been quite popular in ancient India." But during this period these scene are carved by the sculptor in such a dramatic manner: [6] The Baswasagar (Distt. Jhansi) temple contains a number of beautiful secular image of surasunders in various poses. In a [sculpture a maiden is wringing her wet hair while a swan standing nearby is trying to take the water drop, as if pearls. in its beak. In another niche a surasunda stands elegantly wearing a fine lower garment. A child is standing in front of her with upraised right hand and face. Besides the above-mentioned images, we also have mithuna figures and dancing scenes of the female in Pratihara's art. The fragments of door way surrounds from Unchdih (Distt. Allahabad)" have female figure in different poses and attitudes with their male partners. A pillar from Badoh (Distt. Vidisha) shows the erotic scene where four pairs have been shown. Below inside a semi-circle, the figures of celestial couples are elegantly carved. An architectural fragment from the Allahabad Distt. depicts a beautiful dancing scene. It consists of two groups of dancers and musicians. In the group carved on the left hand of the central figure the female dancer is accompanied by two drummer's and a man playing on flute. Rajgekhara, the poet laureate of the king MahendrapAla refers to the women of his period who were experts in dancing, singing, and playing on musical instruments?' [10] A door way surround of surya temple contain figures of shooting arrows with stretched bows in opposite direction representing Usha and Pratyusha. The depiction of these figures reminds us the women who lived on arms in the

time of king Bhoja. The Sagartal inscription mentions that Bhoja subdued the terrible asuras with the help of a band of women that lived exclusively upon arms. The figure of two Kumarika's are depicted on the architrave of the doorway of Kausambi temple in an interesting manner. The maiden to the left is shown in the act of tying her dhoti and the other is shown adjusting her hair ornament in a mirror. Both the maidens are standing in charming postures. Two female figure may be mentioned here for there different attitude and plasticity, although both the examples were part of sonic bigger images one of them is from Mathura which represents a Kamaladharini standing in elegant tribhanga pose. The depiction of her sari, hairdo and facial expression are remarkable. The other piece is from Unchgaon (Distt. Sitapur) which depicts a lady attendant whose chin is touched by her god. During early medieval period the 'Salabhanijika' motif was innumerate in different forms based on the social life and different types of games played by women folk on various occasions. Sanskrit text like the Viddhagalabhanjika of Rajkkhara describe a good number of art Motifs formed by the women and tree viz. Dohada, Kanduka-kricki, Pakshi-Kridd. Artfabhisarika, Surasundri. Nrtiyabhinya. Paribhogamandana, Prasadika, Snanasundari. and Paribhogadarsini etc" [11]. The frequent mention of tilabhanjika's in literature and their depictions in early medieval art of India substantiate to the fact of its prevalence in the society. An outstanding SALabhanjika sculpture of this period was collected from Gyaraspur (Distt Vidisha). This Icon deserves due appreciation as it exhibits the superb artistic skill achieved by the artist. Here the beautiful damsel is shown standing cross legged under the tree in dvibhanga posture. Both the hands of lady are lost but the remaining parts of the image confirm its complete form and expressions. She is profusely ornamented with the Puspa-kundala, ekavali. two series of tiara's. the shorter one is embedded with diamond beads having three stringed locket suspended with the lotus bud shaped pendants flowing over the abdomen while the larger tiara Iwith pearls beads is hanging between her prominent breasts. The coiffure is nicely arranged and adorned with the flowers. Her short embroidered Kativastra is half tied at the lowest part of the hip as if it is slipping below-a distinctive feature of the Salabhaniika's" [12].

It may be mentioned here that most refined achievement in skill and art of sculptor of the Gurjara-Prathara period is discernible in the secular female figures. In fact the sculptor was free from canons of the iotra's in case of secular images which were used as decorative motifs. They are, therefore, more communicative and sensual.

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