

# INDIAN ART

## FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Talk 2a

Evolution of art in India

From archaic, to classical, to baroque



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*Evolution of art in India*  
*From archaic, to classical, to baroque*



Art manifests itself in any creative expression,  
and every epoch has its own imprint  
on the contemporary art.

One can see in this a change  
in taste,  
in manner and  
in style.

Following this could be quite fascinating.

Thus, for example, when you go to a temple,  
you would not only be interested in  
what an image represents,  
but also about how the present one  
came to be conceived.

In fact, after some initiation,  
you would be able to identify a sculpture  
as to its period and  
its geographical location  
with certain amount of confidence.

In the early phase when the artists are yet to master  
the material,  
the making , including the conventions and  
internalising the subject matter  
the execution could be far from perfect.

This can be called archaic phase.

Yaksha from Parkahm, 3<sup>rd</sup> c BCE



This belong to the earliest period, namely, that of Asoka.

The body is well proportioned, has a strong chest and masculine trunk, and wide, powerful shoulders; a solid figure, but it is stiff, rigid, lifeless and faces you frontally, absolutely symmetrical, with no movement.

It looks almost like a soldier standing at attention.

Yaksha from Parkahm, 3<sup>rd</sup> c BCE



Obviously while attempting to duplicate a wooden statue, the sculptor has concentrated on mastering the medium, and artistic expression yet to mature.

In this period there had been a number of sculptures of narrating a story, like this Buddhist Jataka with a moral, an incident from the life of compassionate Bodhisattva.

Ruru Jataka , Bharhut, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE





Born as  
a golden deer,  
Bodhisattva rescues  
a drowning man,  
and the ungrateful  
man reveals the deer  
to the king  
who wanted take it  
to his wife.  
Bodhisattava  
admonishes  
the ungrateful person  
and gives a sermon  
to the king.

Ruru Jataka , Bharhut, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE



Telling such a story  
within a round  
frame calls for  
imagination and  
technique.

There is river  
where the deer is  
seen rescuing  
in the fore ground,  
hunters on the  
banks and in  
background  
are trees.

Ruru Jataka , Bharhut, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE



Though all important characters are shown in their actions, a technique to show all these artistically, is yet to be developed.

Further, though the animals are almost natural, the human figures are not; they are frontal, rigid and lifeless.

Ruru Jataka , Bharhut, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE



Over a period of time the sculptor has more refined taste and also mastered the medium. Now we can see sophistication in his work.



Naga royal couple, Ajanta, 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE

The king is majestic and dignified and the lovely queen leans lovingly against his shoulder.

That he is a Naga king is shown by the hood above him and by a single attendant standing behind unobtrusively.



Naga royal couple, Ajanta, 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE

Everyone is informal and comfortable.  
All the ornamentation is moderate and  
there is plenty of vacant space around.



Naga royal couple, Ajanta, 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE

Here is classic idealization,  
love of beauty, simplicity and dignity.



Naga royal couple, Ajanta, 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE

Here again is another example of classic idealization, the love of beauty, simplicity and dignity.



Two women, Mallai, 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE



“The two lovely ladies,  
with slender, elegant bodies,  
seem in rest contentedly  
in their niches. . . .

Both stand in elegant,  
aristocratic poses  
of great beauty, attractive,  
gently curving shapes,  
legs elongated and  
their lovely faces seen  
in two different inclinations.

Their grace and dignified  
charm make them exquisite  
examples of feminine  
attractiveness. . .”

- *Charles Fabri*



Two women, Mallai, 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE

Departure from classicism can be seen in this wonderful panel depicting Siva and Parvati in their heavenly abode. The divine couple is excellently modelled, exuding a benedictory grace.

Siva-Parvati, Aihole, 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE



But what disturb are the figures around, filling all the space:  
above float vidyadharas,  
two ascetics on the sides and a few more camping below.  
The sculptors were proficient in modelling, not in composing.  
The tranquil beauty is absent here.  
This is an example of baroque profusion.

Siva-Parvati, Aihole, 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE



The craving for ornamentation  
has possessed the sculptor fully.

That the apasaras is plump  
can be attributed to  
the contemporary taste



Apasaras, Belur, 12<sup>th</sup> c. CE

But the profusion of ornamentation, rich and lace-like jewellery covering almost her entire body, and the foliage of the tree behind occupying all the space around and forming the background is fanciful, and exhibits the craft of the artist, but hardly it is a piece of art. This is advanced state of ornamentation.



Apasaras, Belur, 12<sup>th</sup> c. CE



Studying art according to styles  
could be very rewarding.

But, it may be kept in mind that  
these were not created as art objects,  
but as focus for spiritual meditation.

Then we may be looking at  
from the wrong side of telescope!