

CHAPTER-VIIMEDIEVAL WESTERN INDIAN SCULPTURE - MODELLING THE MEDIEVAL FORM AND STYLE

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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CHAPTER - VIII

ICONOLOGICAL AND SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE DEVANGANA MOTIF

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CHAPTER - VIIITOWARDS A SEMIOSIS OF THE DEVANGANA :ICONOLOGICAL AND SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE DEVANGANA MOTIF :

1.1

TOWARDS A METHOD OF SEMIOSIS :

The semiotic analysis has a universal application as demonstrated by Roland Barthes,¹ which has opened up a whole range of interpretive possibilities concerning human sciences, literature, art, theatre, music, massmedia and so on. The indication of meaning evolving out of the signifier-signified relationship has brought into the field of analysis not only the subject matter but attributes, characteristics, gestures, postures, cultural, psychological, historical and other related factors. When these concepts are applied to analysis of an art manifestation of one region, period or imagery type e.g., the devangana imagery on Nagara temple architecture between eighth and twelfth century, the semiotic analysis offers the appropriately holistic methodology suitable for our study.

Morris's views of semiosis have been found most suitable for our investigation which has three separate dimensions : (a) syntactical dimension of semiosis (b) semantical dimension of semiosis (c) pragmatical dimension of semiosis. Morris, characterizes semiosis as "a mediated taking account of.... the designata are what is taken account of, the sign vehicles are the mediators, the interpretants are the takings-account of, and the interpreters are the agents in the process."² Thus semiosis is the study of the process, participation and relationship

between the components, the designata and the related phenomena.

The syntactical dimension of semiosis is the inter relationship of signs caused by the inter relationship of the responses, of which the sign vehicles are products or parts. The syntactic dimension implicates a primary level of sign relationship.

While the semantical dimension is the relationship of signs to their designata and so to the objects which they may or do denote and thus the term 'denotes' is a primary lexical item in semantics.

The pragmatical dimension of semiosis deals with the relationships of signs to their interpreters, or more explicitly "with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs." It is governed by pragmatical rules which state the conditions in the interpreters under which the sign vehicle is a sign, thus providing information about the interpreter, the dominant thesis of psychoanalysis, pragmatism and sociology of knowledge, are all applications of the pragmatical dimension of semiosis. Pragmatics deals with the functioning of signs as expressions of their interpreters. A clear formulation of pragmatics presupposes the development of syntactics and semantics, as in these latter two the distinction between a descriptive and a pure level in pragmatics, is crucial in the avoidance of ambiguity and confusion.

It is amazingly significant that the principle of dhvani in Indian literary criticism is so closely analogous to the semiotic analysis outlined above. The three potential powers of dhvani : abhidha (denotative), laksana (indicative) and vyanjana (suggestive) have their parallel

implications in the tripartite levels announced by Morris (supra). The dhvani theory has already been referred to in Chapter, I,³ but reiteration of its application to the analysis of the actual devangana motif calls for its recollection together with what one understands by the concept of 'semiotics'. The following analysis of the devangana imagery from its pragmatical dimension calls for the association with vyanjana. Citing the entire range of meanings possible in uncovering the motif of darpana or the svastanasparsa motif, (discussed elaborately in Chapter VI) the iconological connotations also reveal forth. The following analysis (see Graph II) has been formulated on the basis of abhidha, laksana and vyanjana levels of interpretation.

1.2

TOWARDS A SEMIOSIS OF THE DEVANGANA MOTIF :

As can be observed from the above compilation the pragmatic dimension of semiosis is most significant and in our analysis we have throughout attempted it. In the analysis of the devangana imagery of the medieval times we have gone into its postural analysis, also accounting attributes, gestures and subject matter. After analysing its entire imagery we not only became aware of its repetition over more than five centuries but also sharing of it by the neighbouring regions. This led our attention to tracing its antecedants, since it could not develop out of the blue. This search for its roots led us to the primeval fertility goddess, erotically inclined yaksis, vrksakas and salabhanjikas to apsaras and nadidevatas, as visually represented on architectural monuments. The search did not end with documenting the visual forms, but went on to explore the imagery of apsara and yakshi in literature of the Vedas, Puranas, Epics and classical Natya and Kavya.

The architectural texts also enriched our understanding of this motif and its integration with architecture. Hence the visual representation refers to the syntactic dimension in which the similarity of postures, gestures and attributes implicate the parallelism in their imagery on the primary level. While the literary data supports the content with meaning and links up or designates a meaning to their gestures with literary or poetic imagery, the present section will eventually formulate the pragmatic analysis, in which on the basis of the visual and the literary imageries, the iconological and tertiary level meaning will be formulated by grouping the imageries into four categories : 'ascetic', 'erotic', 'creative' and 'emotive'. The 'ascetic' and 'erotic' are fundamentally opposite concepts but the erotic can lead to ascetic as its extreme resultant (Parvati's panchagni sadhana tapa) while the 'creative' can become 'emotive' when overcome by passion (Siva's dance of ananda tandava). Thus such concepts have existed in mythological thinking right from the ancient times and to observe similar formulations in the imagery of the devanganas is a pleasant coincidence. What is significant here is that one has made (probably for the first time) an attempt to correlate the imageries, classify them and read meaning into them by reordering in a homogeneous relationship. The imagery of the devangana thus oscillates between the two polarities or extremes which are diametrically opposite, one acting as the cause of the other, but co-exist physically on one and the same monument.

The inherently auspicious devanganas share a quality with the mortal devadasis and that is Nitya Sumangali for eternity. They are married to the deity and serve on significant occasions or participate in the rituals. The devanganas are protective powers personified,

embodied by beautiful women, charged either by gringaric or by vira (heroic) emotions. Looking at their imagery more closely one found their diametrically opposite characters and plotted them on a vertical, horizontal axis within a circle with the axes intersecting at the centre, and the characters merging or overlapping their imageries like the intermediate shades of primary and secondary colours on a colour circle. (refer Schema II). On the vertical axis the extremes are 'creative - emotive' while on the horizontal axis are 'erotic-ascetic'. The intermediate characteristics which relate both the extremes complete the cyclic motion. Hence the imagery not only oscillates between the two polarities but also circulates in a revolving manner. The 'creative' is the earliest and the most concerning aspect of the devangana imagery, whose origin goes as far back as the yakshi-salabhanjika and the 'woman and tree' motif. Thus under this category are placed putra vallabha, ashokadhada, salabhanjika imagery, which have a clear fecundity - fertility connotation. The creative when bends towards the erotic which is the logical outcome, the intermediate shades are of 'abundance', river goddess, Srilaksmi, svastanasparsa and sadyasnata. This category has features of fertility-potential in it, but visually they share the erotic element of kesanistoyakarini, kharjuravahaka, markatacesta-the imageries with blatant erotic intent. This enhances to take a sexual turn when it becomes more expressive of its emotional under-currents. The demonstration of emotions are observable in alasa, darpana, vasanabharmsa, nupurapadika, prasadhika and paribhogadarsini. They are almost like dancers depicting certain psychological states by striking dance like postures which have erotic overtones. The 'emotive' category contains within its fold the nati-nartaki/sangita-vadini type of devanganas, who are performers of dance and music and strike

characteristic postures. This completes one half of the circle.

The other half is characterized by vira rasa which oscillates between the terrible and the fierce, characterised by demonstrative actions of sarpadhari, khadgadhari, Kirati Bhairavi, Urvasi and Menaka, holding bow-arrow and slaying the opponant. Their postures are dance-like and charged by emotions. The other end of the 'ascetic' is the yogini which represents tapasi and kapaladhari characters, denoting extreme renunciation. They represent austere notions suggesting the ability of the woman to sacrifice and renounce, an equally powerful aspect of her 'will' in comparison of her 'will' to create. In that sense the 'ascetic' shares some shades with the 'creative' and hence completes the circle, by obtaining proximity with it. Ingalls has collated two verses which liken the woman in seperation (viyogini) to a woman in mystic trance (yogini), thus drawing a parallel between sex and asceticism, that is much indulged elsewhere by the classical poets, "Averse from eating, turned from every object of the senses, and this too, that your eye is fixed in trance, again, your mind is single pointed, and then this silence, and the fact that all the world to you seems empty :- tell me gentle friend, are you a yogini or a viyogini? (No.703, pg. 232)⁴

Another verse puns on the nayika's meditative concentration : This delibility of body and lack of all desire, this fixing of your eye in trance and perfect silence; this state bespeaks a heart fixed on one single object.

What is that one, fair lady, Brahma or your lover? (No.715) *4a*

The above two verses focus on the close connection between the conditions in extreme love-lornness and asceticism. It is by the vyanjana or dhvani that the comparison of the two conditions are paralleled. Thus the above explanation using the circular chart is created to explain the emotional, psychological, sociological, visual forces working on the creation and perpetuation of certain devangana imageries.

2.1

DEVANGANA ON TEMPLE MANDOVARA -

The approach taken by us in the preceding chapter was concerned with the analysis of individual devangana motif imagery and the study of their manifestations on various temple sites. In the present section I have attempted to take a closer look at a monument in totality and how the devangana images drape them. Is there a logical order of their subject-matter which dictates the placement of their imagery types facing a certain direction? Do the devanganas have any relation with the dikpalas or the presiding deities of that direction? What light do the texts throw on this issue?

In relation with the presiding cult and the functions ascribed to the monument itself by the tradition (Saiva, Sakta, Saiva, Vaisnava, Jaina) a new vantage point to study the role of devangana needs to be explored. While observing the temple site as a symbolic unit or a metaphor in itself, the role of individual devanganas emerges as micro unit of an alankara or a figure of speech that could be based on a suggestion of eroticism, fertility, asceticism, heroism and so on.

Let us take a look at monuments such as Jagat, Tusa, Kekind, Rani ki Vav, Modhera, Badoli, Kiradu and so on, to study the pattern of

devangana placement on the jangha of the mandovara all around the temple. Before looking at the monuments one also needs to take note of a textual reference suggesting the manner in which the jangha decoration should contain Dikpalas and devanganas flanking each other and their postures, gestures and attributes. Ksirarnava is a fifteenth century text from Gujarat which contains in its Chaturmukha Mahaprasada Svarupadhyaya, the names of 32 devanganas including the order in appearance of their placement and actions. They should be six or eight arms in measurement, dancing and looking down, either in lasya or tandava mode, holding nritya hastas and represent a festive mood on jinalaya along with dikpalas. Yama should be placed in south, Kubera in north, Indra in east and Varuna in west. In south-west place Ksetrapala Nirtti, in north west place Vayu in dancing posture, his movements should be circular and tandava type, his clothes should be shown fluttering. In north east place Isana with eight arms while Agni in south-east. The devangana should be placed in pradaksina order starting with Menaka in Isana. Rambha-Indra in alingana mudra should follow with Rambha holding an arrow and vina in her hands. Even Urvasi playing flute should be placed here in agi kona. In south, along with Yama, should be placed Trilochana playing cymbals and Kamarupa in dancing pose. In Nirtti place Chandravli in anjali hasta while in west along with Varuna place Rambha holding bow and killing an enemy. On her left place Manjughosa weilding swords. Along with Kubera in north, place Padmini holding her right hand near the head and dancing. (Ksirarnava, 82-102) This shows that along with every Dikpala a particular devangana is prescribed, but this scheme is not necessarily followed by the sculptors on the architecture. Let us observe the arrangement pattern on Ambika temple at Jagat.

AMBIKA TEMPLE, JAGAT -

The elegant temple of the reign of Guhila ruler Atlata or his son Naravahana of Mewar is dateable to 960 A.D., and stylistically similar to Shiva temple, Kotai; Lukulisa Temple, Eklingaji (971 A.D.) and Durga Temple, Unvasa (959 A.D.)⁵ The devangana sculptures are placed circum-ambulating the entire temple at the jangha level starting with the mukha chatuski and mukha mundapa to the antarala, mandapa and the actual garbha griha, barring the transept windows of the mandapa projection. The main devakosthas contain the images of Durga Mahisasuramardini, Sarasvati, Ksemankari, Parvati, which are the major manifestations of Goddess Durga.

The dviratha planned temple consists of major phalanas or pilasters which contain dikpalas, devanganas, vyalas and smaller devanganas standing on elephant projecting out of the wall facets. On the udgama level above every devangana and vyala sculpture are placed smaller seated group of figures which represent musicians, dancers, amorous couples and religious rituals. It appears that these groups correspond with the devangana imagery and lend meaning to it and enhance the meaning implicit in the attributes and actions of the devanganas.

Fertility and eroticism are the guiding principles of the south wall. This *raison d'être* can be discerned in the motifs of nupurapadika, khadga and kapaladhari, vasanabhramsa, svastanasparsa, paribhogadarsini and darpana, which are the inducers of active passion and consummate vigour. Amorous and kissing couples are placed above the devanganas-vasanabhramsa and svastanasparsa. This is exactly on the antarala which denotes the joining of the garbhagriha with the mandapa. This seems

to be a case of 'double entendre' and the artist has found the most graphic manner of illustrating it. (Fig. 13)

The south wall contains putravallabha, padmini, amralumbidhari, kandukakrida, alasa and man pulling a lady's garment. While the west wall represents kesanistoyakarini and alasa devanganas. Attempting an interpretation of the total meaning evolving out of the combined understanding of the devangana imagery one can perceive that as the devotee goes in the pradaksina from south to north sides of the temple, he first comes across the devanganas with erotic over tones. This leads him from the realm of the sensual and superficial to the level of introspection and cleansing (darpana, kesanistoyakarini), which finally culminates into a pure, unconcealed and relieved from the worldly clutches. (padmini, kanduka krida, and the one uncovering the garment) (Fig. -)

SIVA TEMPLE, KEKIND

This late tenth century temple from Rajasthan of Maru-Gurjara style brings to light the first ever representation of Sapta Matrikas on the temple mandovara. To my knowledge, this occurrence is not only unique but unmatched. The mandovara design scheme is never repeated again and one is amazed at the extra ordinary creative ability of the sculptors and architects who worked on this monument. The entire jangha is divided into prominently shaped devakosthas. On the karna position are placed the dikpalas while on the pratiratha are the devanganas which boldly project out. The recesses contain the images of the four armed saptamatrikas carrying babies and identified with the help of ayudhas and vahanas. The faces are badly mutilated but some devangana

imagery is identifiable such as, alasa, markatacesta, kesianistoyakarini, padmini and nartaki. The imagery is difficult to discern due to mutilation but stylistically the sculptures of Kekind seem to form a group by themselves which can at the most be compared with the sculptures from Atru for their slim, slender vertically accentuated full bodies. (Fig. 19)

RANI KI VAV, PATAN

This is a magnificent monument and only one of its kind. There are several subterranean architectural monuments all over Gujarat and Rajasthan, but the kind of sculptural decoration and an iconographical harmony between ^{the} socio-religious purpose and its representation are mind boggling. This vav or vavadi is the most enormous building of the Solanki period ascribed to the patronage of queen Udayamati of Bhimadeva I dateable to late eleven century A.D. This seven storeyed architecture below the ground has two parts, the well and the tank. On the walls of the tank and the rings of the well, one observes the placement of sculptures of devanganas, dikpalas with their spouses, Dasavatara and Sesasayi forms of Visnu Parvati, Durga, Matrikas, Mithunas and Ganesa. The buttress walls facing north and south remind the observer of a typical Solanki temple mandovara especially because they alternate with sculptures of devanganas. (Fig. 39)

Rani ki Vav has certain features which immediately caught my attention in the light of the representation of the devangana imagery,⁶ namely the presence of the Sesasayi Visnu, Matrikas and mithunass in conjunction with all the forms of devanganas and the dikpalas with their Saktis on a monument which is traditionally connected with fertility rites

and ritual, and is pronouncedly a source of nourishment and survival for man and animals alike.

The sculptures placed on the walls of the shaft of the well start with Ganesa at the bottom, followed by three Sesasayi Visnu ^{images} one above the other surmounted by Visnu in yogamudra. This strong iconographical feature of placement of Sesasayana form on water reservoirs has been observed by Ratan Parimoo.⁷ But here are sculptures of Matrikas and Dasavatara, Parvati on Goda, Mithunas etc. also placed for auspicious and fertility reasons. The horizontally inclined Sesasayi Visnu images are flanked by devanganas in different moods.

At the level of the first Sesasayi image from the top, one observes the darpana - prasadhika and vira - khatvanga, kapala-damrudhari flanking the Visnu in deep slumber. This shows that opposing imageries of the 'erotic' and the 'terrible' types are placed here. Whereas in the middle level all erotic, sensuous and fertility evoking imageries such as darpana, nupurapadika, ghantadhari, chamaradhari, putra vallabha, alasa etc. are placed. On the level of the third Sesasayi image, the overtly erotic nayikas are placed such as vasanabhrmsa, svastanasparsa, and a nude nayika with snakes entwining around her legs, are noticeable. This imagery is unique to Rani ki Vav which I have observed again only at Markandi (Maharashtra) along with a drummer and at Jalasangi (Karnataka). Further study needs to be done to find out if any ritual associated with serpents is indicated anywhere. (Fig ²⁵⁴ 253)

For fertility and sexuality associated with a Vav, where young newly married couples are brought after marriage to invoke the power of fecundity to beget progeny, induce the sculptors to fashion the

devangana imagery. For example, in the kesanistoyakarini, the devangana is not only squeezing the hair but her simultaneous action of squeezing her own breast indicates the implicit metaphorical sense, ^(Fig. 145) so is the putravallabha, who while playing with the child, plays with the ripe mango fruits leaning towards her. The motif of [↑]khajuravahaka evoking sexuality, has often been noticed at Khajuraho but its popularity at Rani ki Vav, Sunak, and many other sites in eleventh century and later, testifies the potential generative power of the woman and its evocation through erotic imagery. (Fig. 173, 71, 164)

2.2

DEVANGANA ON PILLARS OF NATAMANDAPA :

The Nagara temple architecture offers an enormous scope to the sculptors to carve the forms of the devanganas. At this juncture we focus our attention on the pillars and especially the kumbha, a portion on the base which bear humble sized images of devanganas and their entire imagery. While exploring the pillars one found an affinity between the nritya mandapa pillars of Badoli, Modhera, Kiradu and Gwalior. All these sites have independant, free-standing mandapas in front of the temples known generally as nata mandapa. The devangana imagery carved on their bases bear notice to the survival of its tradition first on the mandapa pillar. It appears quite likely that it was later on adapted for mandovara decoration, a case in point is Badoli. One is almost eager to suggest that it is quite likely that the devangana imagery was always alive in the wooden tradition. Hence in stone it may have stopped some where after Kushana period, but the wooden carving tradition has kept its usage and the devangana imagery still alive. The two wooden pillar jambs from L.D. Institute museum (Fig. 24, 242) represent the same imagery

on its pillars as can be found on the developed mandovara of the Nagara architecture. The Badoli, Ghatesvara temple (Fig.) has a small mukha mandapa and its pillars contain the most elegant, sensuous and almost three dimensional images of devanganas on the octagonal shafts of the pillar bases. They are neither framed nor limiting in their action. This provides a great sense of freedom in their movements and body flexions. Even the pillars of the adjoining torana on the same site contains devanganas and dvarapalas on the pillar bases. Curiously the mandovara of Ghatesvara temple is still bare and no devangana embellishment seems to have caught the fancy of the artists. Therefore the early ninth century period (as has been demonstrated in the chapter on architecture) shows a hesitant beginning of devangana imagery on mandovara, but on pillars it survives and thrives, carrying forward the tradition of railing uprights from the ancient period.

The large natamandapa of Kiradu (Fig. 259) also bears notice to the similar tradition. Here as in the natamandapa of Badoli facing the Ghatesvara temple, the pillars are placed very close to each other and their octagonal shafts are profusely carved with devanganas, many of whom are in dancing mode. Thus even a peep into the natamandapa today can evoke the grandeur of the by-gone age when all these mandapas would be resounding with dance, music and religious recitation.

As the eleventh century approaches, the pillars become more and more embellished with the result that no portion is left bare on its parts. Even the devangana imagery multiplies and more number of images are fitted on the available space. On the Bahu temple of the Sas-Bahu group at Gwalior, the pillars of the natamandapa bear figures almost intertwining their limbs and striking dance like postures. Some are of

musicians while others are of male drummer, and still some more are of the devanganas. Now the sculptures do not articulate independantly. They remain embedded on the main stone, just like the natamandapa sculptures on the Modhera temple. They are actually framed and so they merge with the main ^{block} of the pillar and thus lack the spirit of individual articulation, organic plasticity and movement. At Modhera, both the gudhamandapa as well as the nata mandapa pillars bear the devangana imagery, although both are removed in time. The imagery of natamandapa relate, more with the Rani ki Vav sculptures, especially of the khadgadhari type.

The pillar sculptures of Shantinath temple at Kumbharia (Fig.) have a special niche on four sides within which are placed nati-nartaki figures. They are four armed and confuse us on the first look. But closer observation suggests that in order to show the continuous movement, the sculptor has given the figures additional arms so as to suggest a dynamic movement. The figures are elegant, poised and terse. They strike urdhvajanu, svastika or pristhasvastika like postures and the arms are either in uromandali or urdhvamandali.

Samarangana Sutradhara, Chapter-57, explains quite in detail regarding the placement of apsaras on the various facets of the pillar bases and the toranas along with makara, elephants, vidyadhara, leaves, flowers and other auspicious symbols. Even on the vitana and torana, the placement of apsaras is prescribed. The imagery is not mentioned but the types of prasadas on which their placement is indicated are Sridhara, Puspaka, Mahavraja, Ratideha and Vimanam, besides Meru.

2.3

DEVANGANA ON TEMPLE VITANA

In the light of the above data one finds ample examples of devangana sculptures on the vitanas of the temples at Sunak, Tusa, Sander, Devi Jagdambi, Khajuraho; Sas temple, Gwalior etc.; which are still in situ, while some have been displayed in museums which were actually fixed on the vitana. The terms mentioned in Samarangana Sutradhara, Chapter 57, refer to 'apsaragana bhusita', 'Vidyadhara Vaduvrunda', 'suranam sundaribhischa', 'nagakanya kadambaischa' while Aparajitaprecha, chapter 77, mentions 'yaksi' and 'salabhanjya' to be carved in the vitana.

On the vitana of the Sun temple at Tusa of the mid tenth century (Fig. 250) are carved eight figures of devanganas along with Kamadeva in full conformation with the text, standing on hastimundi. (Fig. 252) (AIIS 28.89). One can also see the rich foliage of the vegetation under which these apsara devanganas stand. One of them is putravallabha, darpana, kumbhadhari and amralumbidhari. Three sculptures are missing. Their garments are fluttering and they are attended upon by small dwarfs. Kamadeva (28.90) is shown with iksudanda and puspabana while on his youthful body beard and moustaches are represented. The waning away of the youth is indicated.

Some more indications of devanganas as bracket figures supporting the lintel and the pillar are indicated in both the texts and its representation especially inside the mandapa, has fascinated me. Observing them on the Devi Jagdambi temple at Khajuraho (Fig. 236) and at Sas temple, Gwalior on the interior pillars of the square platform

(a sort of yajna kunda platform?) tempted me to connect them with each other and the text. Six to eight such salabhanjikas standing under a foliated tree are represented either as vasanabhrmsa, markatacesta, putravallabha, patralkhana, alasa and so on. They preside over the place of ritual worship and act as supports of its pillars. This convention of dancing images, musicians and salabhanjika along with vyalas continues till today on timber architecture in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan on the havelis, palaces and other residential buildings.

The vitana decoration of Abu temple of the Vimalavasahi (Fig. 251) and later temples expand the scope and intricacy of carving. The vitana images of devanganas multiply to almost twenty four and sometimes thirty two. This includes majority of dance postures and the usual devangana imagery gets obliterated for more dynamic representations of bodies in kinetic movement. The ceilings take on a gem-like faceted intricacy and opulence. But even then the scope of devangana sculptures keeps evolving.

On Gurgi pillars of the Rewa Kotwali collection (Fig. 239²³⁹) one observes rows of rishi-kanya figures indulged in erotic/sexual activity, devanganavyalas alternating and such other motifs placed one above the other. The vyalas are frontally placed unlike their profile representation, which one comes across on temple mandovara. The devanganas strike postures like alasa, vasanabhramsas, markatacesta, to name a few. Such an ornate representation of torana pillars is unique and has few repetitions. Toranas are also found at Limbojimata temple Delmal, Vadnagar and Modhera in Gujarat, Vidisha and Badoli in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, on which salabhanjikas are represented as brackets, as was the tradition at Sanchi and Amaravati in the first

century A.D., or on the kumbha of the pillar base, whose antecedents are the Buddhist stupa pillar uprights.

2.4

DEVANGANA ON TEMPLE DOORWAY :

The observation concerning the placement of devangana sculptures on the body of the temple seems to have evolved from the earliest times. The Buddhist and Hindu monuments of Ajanta, Ellora, Aurangabad, Jogeshvari, Udaigiri and Gupta, Pratihara period temple architecture, have all incorporated the image of the woman on the doorways of their sanctuaries. May they be temples, viharas or chaitya, their doorways have contained first the images of salabhanjika-yaksi-vrksika, transitional motifs of salabhanjika - river goddess (nadidevata), to fully developed iconographically evolved Ganga and Yamuna. This has been much discussed in the Chapter on Sculpture. It is quite interesting to note how even in the tenth century and the later temples (randomly selected here) the devangana imagery still persists even though the nadidevata concept has evolved and branched out of it. On the doorway of the Shiva temple, Nohta (AIIS 522.90) the latatabimba depicts the Nataraja, lintel represents the navagrahas, dikpalas, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh and the door jambs represent dwarfs dancing and couples amorously sporting. The corners of the lintel joining with the pillars represent devanganas in svastika pada and uromandali hasta without any other attributes.

The same feature can be observed on Shiva temple at Terahi (AIIS 427.84) doorway lintel, which has Garudarudha Visnu on the lalatabimba and vidyadharas holding malas. The devangana holds a lotus with long

stalk and another one stand with a child and an attendant. (Fig. 248)

On the doorway of the triple Shrine at Menal (AIIS 640-42), the devanganas are shown in katisama hasta and svastika pada holding a bunch of flowers under a foliated tree. There are a number of dwarfs dancing and seated couples indulge in amorous activities. The nadidevatas are as usual at the udumbara level holding a waterpot and wearing fluttering garments surrounded by rich foliage.

In the case of Rameshvara temple, Amrol (AIIS 306-83) the doorway has only one rupasakha in which the uppermost register has devanganas standing in svastikapada and amorously evoking erotic feeling. One of them *is accompanied by* an eager swan looking upto her. The other two registers have mithunas embracing and kissing each other. The pedestals have lotus and other aquatic foliage. (Fig. 246)

On Gyaraspur, Hindola Torana (310.29, 310-30, 310-31) which are the lintels of a torana, the framed images with udgama and attendants of gods, mithunas etc., are interspersed with devanganas striking the most elegant svastika, baddhachari or alidha. There is an alasa, vasanbhramsa, salabhanjika, padmini, markatachesta, chamara etc. Such a representation is not only rare but testifies to the fact that the idea of devangana auspiciousness pervades to all the parts of the temple. (Fig 247)

Thus doorways, of the garbhagriha either have the 'creative', the 'erotic' or the 'emotive' type of devanganas, while the pillar brackets and vitana too have the same class of sensuality, fertility and emotive motifs. The pillar bases do have the vira imagery which represents the kapala, khadga and sarpadhari devanganas. Some even hold the amralumbi and parrot, which signify the coalescence of fertility

and eroticism. Attempting a semiotic analysis of the devangana placement and its ever auspicious 'nitya sumangali' character which combines a coalescence of 'ascetic', 'erotic', 'creative' and 'emotive' nature. They actually determine the character of the monument in totality by multiplying their imagery, repeating and renewing their potency and the potency of the monuments. The most favoured tendency is the 'creative' followed by the 'erotic', since majority of the monuments rely upon the presence of the maternal or feminine images. This is followed by the dance and music imageries in which images of devadasis and their rituatistic performances seem to be captured. The influence of performing tradition can not certainly be over-looked. The ascetic and vira seem to relate to the tantric rituals and imageries which are difficult to explain on the 'denotive' level, but can be explained in the light of the literary or technical data enlightening it.

The presence of devanganas on the pillars and brackets and pilasters (pratiratha) not only suggests that they are the avarana devatas but also that they are the support of the whole universe. The concern for fertility in their imagery and its wide-spread popularity indicates that, in every age mother-hood was the ultimate form, in which womanhood or femininity was looked upto. Thus women were not the 'gates of hell', unlike in the Biblical sense or what has been so far popularised as the 'snare'-like characters, who distracted the man from his path of righteousness.

3.1

TEXT AND SCULPTURE CORRELATION

In the Vedic-Puranic literature we came across several references to the erotic character of the 'gandharva' who is identified as the

violater of women, who takes forms of an ape or a dog or a hairy child and approaches women. The imagery of markatacesta has clear allusion to this imagery, where the monkey is shown pulling the garment of the nayika who strikes him with the branch of a tree. Such comical but sexual interludes make the devangana imagery colourful. The gandharva is also identified with Soma, and there are number of representations especially of the Kushana period, in which they are represented drinking alone or with a partner or swooning under the effect of the liquor. On Ajanta cave 4 (Fig. 258) the devangana is seen embracing a monkey faced dwarfish male holding a wine cup tempting him to drink. Could this be interpreted as a satirical representation on a Buddhist monument of the pqsions of gandharvas and apsaras? The indulgence in the irrational is supposed to be abstained by the monks, thus this might be a subtle way of putting across the idea!

We have already made a note of correlation between devangana-Visnu and Sesasayi form of Visnu on a fluvial monument, like the Rani ki Vav, Patan. The element of fertility and powers of the water to lend fertility have been suitably echoed by the figures of the devanganas imagery on the entire monument. Like-wise one got interested in Surya temple of Tusa (Rajasthan), ^(Fig 256) on which the devangana are elegantly juxtaposed along with the Adityas and the devakostha images of Surya seated on the seven horses. (AIIS 149.33) shows the alasa and kanduka krida devanganas topped by gandharva couples holding garlands. The alasa pose represents 'angadai' or an avastha denoting 'time', so does the movement of the ball signify the sansara chakra. One evokes stages of love while the other evokes the reality principle or meaning of human existence. More significant suggestion or the 'vyanjana' is of time, which Surya stands

for (AIIS 49.31) (Fig. 255) shows the padmini devanganas flanking the Sun seated in his car, while at Tusa, Surya temple (AIIS 582-14) (Fig. one can see markatacesta and padmini. As is found from Visnu Purana that Surya's car every month contains along with an Aditya, two apsaras, gandharvas, rishis, nagas and raksasas. On the central Surya Shrine at Bajramath, Gyrapur (310.75) one can notice all the Adityas on the doorway, while the major three on the lintel have the two apsaras each flanking them. Often one associates with Surya, Usa and Pratyusha, who are represented by holding bow and arrow. But in the medieval period temple doorways, the apsaras are also shown next to them.

On the devakosthas of Modhera Surya temple as well, one comes across the images of devanganas and apsaras flanking the Adityas, Dvadasa Gauris and the Dikpalas, (Fig. 35) They are placed on the lower two registers depicting different activities of the typical devangana imageries. It is observed that they do not tally exactly with the text and the sculptors at Modhera seem to have applied their own logic and criterion for jangha decoration using apsara images. The association of apsara with Surya is definitely strengthened here.

Since we have opened the discussion on the relationship between Apsaras and Surya from the written texts, and found it tallying with the sculptural representation, I thought of exploring the imagery of the 'Usas', the Dawn, which is conceived in the feminine form. Macdonell⁸ suggest that usas is the most graceful creation of Vedic poetry, and there is no more charming figure in the descriptive religious lyrics of any other literature. She is celebrated in about 20 hymns of the Rgveda. Let us study the imagery of Usas which implicitly shares many attributes, characteristics and functions with the Vedic apsaras and the

imagery of the devangana as it is represented on temple architecture. Here are some verses which enlighten the imagery of the Usas. She arrays herself in gay attire like a dancer, she displays her bosom (1, 92⁴, 6, 64²), she is clothed in light and appears in the east and unveils her charm. (1, 124^{3.4}) Does this not remind one of vasanabhrmsa? Rising resplendant as from a bath, showing her charms she comes with light, driving away the darkness. (5, 80^{5.6}). This imagery fits well with the sadyasnata imagery. Like a wheel she revolves ever anew (3, 61³) and reveals the paths of men, manifests all beings and bestows new life (7, 80^{1.2}) She dispels the darkness (6, 64³, 65²) and wards off evil spirits and the hated darkness (7, 75¹). She is often called the mother of kine. (4, 52^{2.3}, 7.77²). This signifies the nature of nourishment, sustenance, moral values and general upliftment of human life.

Usas' connection with Surya is extremely intimate. Surya follows her as a young man would follow a maiden (1, 115). She shines with the light of the Sun (1, 113⁹) her lover (1, 92¹¹). Savitr shines after the path of Usas (5, 81²). She meets the god who desires her (1, 123¹⁰). The dawns are the wives of the Sun (4, 5¹³). But as preceding the Sun in time, she is occasionally thought of as his mother. The physical phenomenon of dawn followed by the Sun has been transformed poetically into the lover/beloved chase and presented in the form of a metaphor. A verse from Dhvanyaloka suggests 'Twilight is full of love, And the day chases her face to face; But oh, look at the decree of Fate, The twain do never meet! (p.23, adhyaya I, 13). This is an example of rupaka (metaphor) and dhvani (suggestion) in which the expressed sense refers to something which is not expressed.

Usas is the sister of the Aditya, Bhaga (1, 123⁵) and the kinswoman (jami) of Varuna (1, 123³). Here the connection with Varuna, the water god, is implied which in the sculpture section has already been discussed. Just as apsaras are connected with Varuna and Indra, Usas also has much to do with the waters. As the elder sister of night (1, 124⁸) she is also associated as Naktosasa. She has been produced for the production of Savitr, and arrives with a bright child. (1, 113^{1.2}). Here the maternal aspect of Usas is suggested hinting at the imagery of putravallabha. Usas is born in the sky (7, 75) and the place of her birth suggests the relationship with it, as most frequently mentioned in Rgveda, she is the daughter of the heaven (1, 30²²).

The goddess is often implored to look upon the worshipper, bring to him wealth and children, to bestow protection and long life (1, 30²², 48¹ etc.). She is resplendant, shining, of brilliant bounty, divine, immortal and bountiful. She is cognate with Aurora. But more characteristically the imagery of Usas is more cognate with the Vedic apsaras and demonstrably with the devanganas of the medieval Nagara temples, which are rich in fertility, eroticism and sensuous expressions of these manifestations by means of dance.

The unresolvable yet unignorable issue is of the imageries of vira type at Modhera and Patan, which are peculiar only to these sites, where one observes the representation of khadga, sarpadhari, munda and kapaladhari, with serpents entwining around their naked bodies. It is quite possible that the artist sculptors in both the sites, would have belonged to the same guild and therefore they shared similar imagery. Another type of vira imagery which depicts the devangana combating with a lion, a fallen foe or simply brandishing swords and

other weapons, is also a favourite with the Gujarat sculptore seen on Kumbharia, Shiva temple, Saraneshwar temple, Abhapur, Navalakha temple, Ghumli and Sejakpur and so on. Thus in the eleventh and twelveth centuries the combating vira devanganas caught the fancy of the artists and hence this motif perpetuated to many sites.

One proposition that I would like to put forward to explore the possible inspiration for the source of this imagery are the types of 'desi' dance forms performed at popular level by acrobats, such as dancing with serpents, garland, balls, knives, swords, pots, cloth, shankha, chamara, stick, vina, etc., which are not only auspicious symbols by themselves, but also showed the virtuosity of the dancers. This clearly distinguishes two types of dance form that have inspired the sculptors of the medieval temples, one is the 'desi' style while the other is the 'margi' one. The 'desi' style dances have been brought to light by V. Raghavan⁹ from Nrittaratnavali and Nrityasarvarsa which refer to pure dance numbers holding the above mentioned articles. It is known that till recently 'nattuvanars' filled 'adavas' and 'jatis' to sword dances, and trained their dancers doing 'varnas' to execute the same with swords. In the course of their movements, they would cut vegetables with the sword which were tied to the body of the girl with precision but without hurting her.

The other type of dance movements which I identify as the 'margi' style depicts classical postures which denotes either a nritta or a nritya gesture. Thus within the range of nati/nartaki sculptures, one observes the references to 'desi' and 'margi' mode of dance representations.

3.2

IMAGERY - TERMINOLOGY CORRELATION

Before concluding this thesis, what one must eventually emphasise is the basic understanding of idea-image correlation and how spontaneously it was evolved. As has been rightly observed by Coomaraswamy, there is no motif more fundamentally characteristic of Indian art from the first to the last, than is that of the 'woman and tree'.¹⁰ The yaksa and yaksi are the vegetation spirits while the apsaras are water borne and air borne. They do reside in the trees just like the yaksis. It was the basic need for fertility and fecundative potential that the two got identified together with the 'tree and woman' motif, to coalesce into the concept of the devangana, which multiplied its imagery and forms to become tangible and palpable in the most sensuous forms of women. Abstract features like smells are associated with them, their limbs are beautiful, their form is ever auspicious, thus they generically began to signify the good aspects of a woman. The potential of the same imagery also contained the elements of heroism and asceticism which can be evoked in particular. Thus when texts were formulated, for example the Silpa prakasa¹¹ of Orissa, it clearly mentions a yantra or a compositional device which contains dvibhangi (or diagonal shaped lines) that signify 'gati', dynamism and kinetic plasticity, which distinguish the nature of the woman from the man. As has been observed by Parimoo with reference to the mithuna sculptures, where the woman stands entwining herself round the male, that the principle of 'sthira-gati' are implied.¹² Thus the creation of the whole range of apsara, yaksi, devangana, mithuna, dikpala images, are a creation of abstract elements of nature, human behaviour and personality transformed and given a physical form, attributes, gestures and postures. This

coexistence of nature and the world of humans suggests the concerns of the medieval man and his attempt to symbolise the cosmic order, in giving a structure to the smaller units of that order, namely the individual imageries, decorative motifs and architectural parts.

A study of the architectural texts suggests that by the medieval period the term *salabhanjika* had focillized into a technical term, denoting a generic architectural feature, which was totally divorced from its original dynamic metaphor of fecundity, pregnant with meaning. The terms such as *yaksis*, *surangana*, *apsara*, *nayika*, *devangana*, *alaskanyas* became popular and part of the parlance of architectural language. They contributed nothing much to the imagery and the source of the imagery which actually came from the creative literature of the *natyas*, *kavyas* and the Vedic-Puranic narrative sources. This finally led to the socio-cultural motif of the 'woman and vegetation' inter-relationship which has even inspired socio-religious rituals and folk cults.

Therefore at the level of codification of the architectural texts, the motif only remained a denotive term and lost its meaning. But for the sculptors the tradition had not died, even if the texts had not made any reference to their placement on temple architecture. It is learnt that from the reference notes of the architect families of Gujarat, some names and imageries of the *devanganas* had been found, which support my view that in the local stone and timber tradition the practice of *devangana* imagery had never slipped. It was very much alive and thriving.

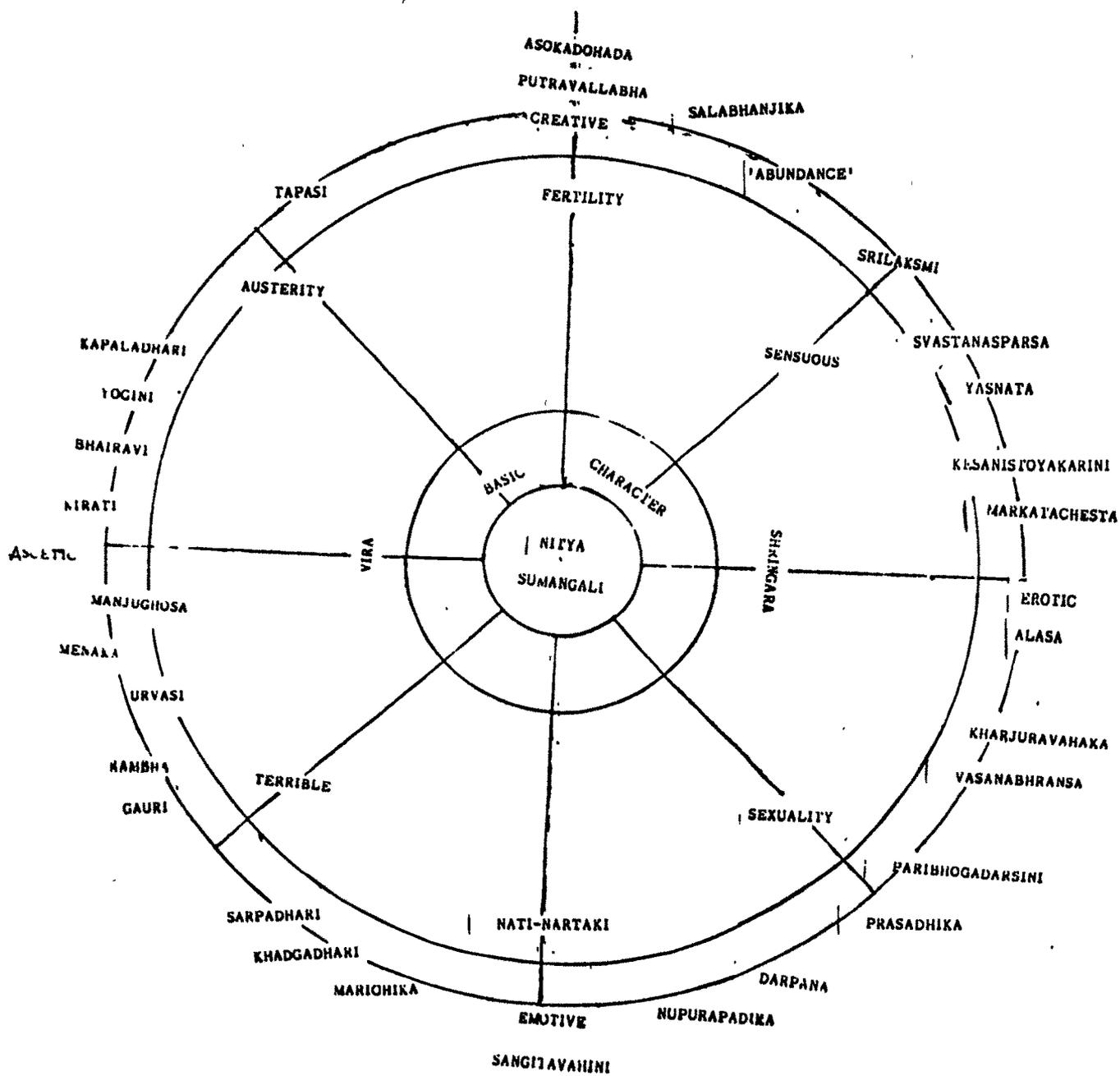
Our next question while summing up the whole discussion is whether *yaksi* and *apsara* can be interchanged as a nomenclature for

analogous principles of vegetation, water, earth, fecundity, abundance and rejuvenation. What kind of mass psychology may have operated in transferring a spring festival as a motif to identify with the imagery of the yaksi? Further, how could a secular motif denoting a chthonic principle get absorbed into the visual imagery of a higher religion and get incorporated to denote an air borne principle of apsaras? The preceding research of the motif, its, possible lineage, its perpetuation at several sites of medieval western India, clearly reiterates, that fundamentally there is no dichotomy between apsara and yaksi. Needless to say, their origins are different but undoubtedly they perpetrate towards the same function, auspicious, fecundative, pleasing, morally uplifting. Dichotomy, if there is any, then it is in the character of the imagery itself which has been conceived and experienced by the masses. This positive-negative polarity is discussed at length in the beginning of the Chapter on 'Semiosis of the Devangana Motif', which brings to light the implicit dialectic in the nature of the feminine. Thus citing a verse from Mahabharata which voices the ambiguity of the nature of the woman says, "Who are thou that clasping the branch of the kadamba tree shinest radiantly in the lonely hermitage, sparkling like a blaze of fire in the night, shaken by the breeze, Oh!thou of fair brows? Exceedingly pleasing art thou, yet fearest, naught here in the forest. Art thou a devi, a yaksi, a danavi a choicest apsara, or fair daitya girl, or the maiden - incarnate of a Naga king, or a foresteress (vanechari) or consort of a night wanderer in the wood or spouse of Varuna, Soma, Yama or Kubera? (Vanapqrva, 265, VV, 1-3)¹³

The above verse in essence conveys more or less the same import that our research has demonstrated in an analytical way. The form of

the devangana embodies the features of all that the above stated forms of the auspicious woman signify. Her nature as amorphous yet definitive, alluring yet enduring, consistent yet staggering, 'shastric' (standardized) yet 'deshic' (variety), physically charming yet metaphorically didactic, this inherent ambivalence simply continues.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF DEVANGANA IMAGERY IN SCULPTURAL FORM
(FORMULATED BY GAURI PARIMOO)



CHAPTER-VIIIICONOLOGICAL AND SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE DEVANGANA MOTIFFOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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