



Fig.19.1 : Vīṇā player, Terracotta

A Note On An Unique Viṇā-player from Ropar

Arundhati Banerji

Ropar in District Rupnagar, situated on the left bank of River Sutlej was excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India under the direction of (late) Shri Y.D.Sharma from 1952 to 1955.¹ The main mound measures 21m high where excavations yielded six cultural periods, *viz.*, Period I : Harappa ; Period II : PGW ; Period III : NBPW or early historical; Period IV : Śuṅga to post-Gupta ; Period V : late historical and Period VI : medieval. Period IV dated from BCE 200 to CE 700, is sub-divided into four sub-periods : IV A - Śuṅga; IV B - Śaka-Kuṣāṇa ; IV C - Gupta and IV D - post-Gupta. This period² is marked by the presence of new fabric of pottery in various types, distinctive terracotta figurines and coins.³ Here we are concerned with only Period IV C , i.e., Gupta period, which revealed an excellent representation of a lady playing a *vīṇā* in terracota.

It may be relevant to mention here that the Gupta period (c.fifth-sixth century CE) is not only known for its classical and artistic grandeur but also for the superb and extremely skilful rendering of the artists. The artists followed a very refined expression in moulding the clay with full of vivid expressions. Clay was fashioned magnificently in a proportionate and naturalistic manner with the use of single moulds, double moulds and half-modelled / half-moulded or completely hand modelled forms. Those cast in single moulds, were available in plenty while those cast in double moulds were restricted in number, resulting into the occurrence of both the forms, solid as well as hollow. The last mentioned variety, cast out of double moulds, made in two parts are then joined together. At times these terracotta figurines are well-baked , treated with a slip and painted in variegated colours.

Among the important sites from where the Gupta terracotta images are reported mention may be made of Harwan (Kashmir); Sahri-Bahlol, Takht-i-Bahi, Jamalgarhi (Peshawar) and Brahmanabad, Mirpurkhas in Sind (Pakistan); Hanumangarh, Bikaner (Rajasthan); Pawaya (Madhya Pradesh); Kasia, Kosam, Bhitargaon, Bhita, Ahichchhatra, Rajghat, Mathura (Uttar Pradesh); Basarh, Kumrahar (Bihar); Panna, Tamruk, Bangarh, Chandraketurgarh (West Bengal) etc.

The artist's expression shifted to the concepts and ideas of Hindu religion which

brought greater value for the production of images of gods , goddesses, comprising the figures of Gaṅgā-Yamunā, Mahiṣamardinī, Śiva-Pārvatī and Sūrya. While the smaller ones served as individual depictions of divine and human beings; the large panels embellished the walls of the temples . All these examples are excellent creations marked by exquisite modelling, softness and sobriety in the use of transparent drapery and ornaments.

The Gupta art also presents the scenes from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purānas* such as Vikramorvaśī, the fight of Yudhiṣṭhira and Jayadratha, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Bhairava, Śiva-*gaṇas* feasting Dakṣa-Yajña, besides many other representations. Animals are also found depicted on the plaques from Paharpur in Bangladesh which are noted for their variety . The plaques in terracotta moulded with the images of divine and semi-divine beings, mythological scenes, popular scenes of everyday life which decorate the temples are no doubt, rich and graceful. These are perhaps the best specimens of artist's creative skill .

The representation of a female musician (Fig. 19.1) in the form of a *viṇā* player⁴ from Ropar in terracotta is one such unique and excellent creation of the Gupta artist. With her head slightly bent down on her right, she sits gracefully with a *viṇā* lying between her thighs and breast. With her delicate fingers she plays with the strings of *viṇā* in a very charming style. The folds of her drapery could be seen near her feet. She sits in a very elegant manner with her legs crossed and eyes open . Modelled with an attractive coiffure consisting of a bun at the back and falling on the shoulder, similar to many other Gupta specimens. She has hair parted in the centre , with a faint curl , it is slightly tied up. She appears attractive with her ornaments comprising bangles (*valaya*) and round ear studs. Also marked are the traces of drapery on her right arm, below her shoulder and an upper garment in the form of a *valkala* and *kañcukī* covering only the upper part of her breasts below the shoulder bones. She looks exquisite with a faint smile on her face. Complete rendering of this *viṇā*-player is marked by softness and sobriety in expression, particularly noticeable in the use of the drapery and ornaments. The representation displays a charming elegance and grace in the entire treatment of her physical features. Calm repose and serene beauty of the face are extremely delicate, expressive of high taste and sophistication of the Gupta art.

References and Notes

1. *Indian Archaeology* 1953-54 - A Review, p. 6 and 1954-55, p. 9.
2. Y.D.Sharma, 'Past Patterns In Living As unfolded By Excavations At Ropar', *Lalit Kalā*, Nos. 1 & 2, April 1955, March 1956 (New Delhi).
3. *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology* (ed.), A.Ghosh (New Delhi 1989), Vol II, pp.377-381.
4. This delineation of a *viṇā*-player also reminds us of a Gupta coin where king Samudragupta appears almost in this manner playing a *viṇā* and also of Vāsavadattā in a Sanskrit play "*Svapnavāsavadattā*" composed by Bhāsa.