

Book Review

Indian Iconography, Musing in Some Unique and Unusual Sculptures

Dr. A.L. Srivastava

B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2011

Pages 184, Photographic Illustrations 102 (97+5), Line sketches 90, Price Rs.1995/-

The book, as its title shows, deals with some unique and unusual sculptures discussing no less than thirty Brahmanical sculptures, mostly from North India. The subject matter has been divided in eight chapters, which in other words is a collection of Dr. Srivastava's scholarly papers published in various Journals or Felicitation and Commemoration Volumes in India and abroad. Discussion on the images of Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Sūrya, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī, a syncretistic icon of Lakṣmī, Durgā and Sarasvatī and a few other sculptures largely of medieval period form the theme of the work.

Correct identification, interpretation and proper understanding of a sculpture, specially of medieval period, require two approaches, extrovert and introvert. Extrovert approach confines itself to physical details, postures, attributes, associated figures including consorts, attendants, mounts, other minor divinities forming the composition and stylistic study of art. All this can be well gathered from the respective descriptions appearing in the *lakṣaṇādhyāyas* of Purāṇas, Śilpa- texts such as *Aparājitapṛcchā*, *Rūpamaṇḍana*, *Śrītatvanidhī* etc., and study of preceding as well as contemporary art schools. Expert handling of camera and capacity of preparing instant line sketches or detailed eye copies are of course the additional aids.

Introvert approach, on the other hand, covers the purpose of specific depiction, its context or related back ground and message the sculptor intends to convey. For achieving this aim one essentially needs thorough knowledge of classical languages specially Sanskrit, various styles of descriptions, allegories, episodes connected with the sculpture, comparative study of parallels, regional trends, 'give and takes' among different faiths and above all a 'deep penetrating eye' (*sūkṣmekṣikā*) escaping no minutest detail of any kind. To convey versatile information thus gathered one must be in know of simple but expressive language with correct vocabulary along with use of punctuational and necessary diacritical marks.

DR. A.L. Srivastava has been blessed with all the above qualities, and that is why he has been able to identify and interpret considerable number of unpublished, unique or

less known sculptures in course of his academic career of about forty years. Large number of publications in the form of books or research papers is there to his credit.

Two images of Viśvarūpa Viṣṇu (Pāla) from Śivasarya and Ujarnath, Gaja-Lakṣmī directly seated on lion (Gupta) from Bilsad, the same deity with flanking lions (Śuṅga) from Kushinagar, Ulūka-Lakṣmī or an Owl being annointed by elephants (medieval) from Jaunpur, Lakṣmī with seated elephants (medieval) from Tryambakeśvara, Maharashtra, twin-faced sculptural panel showing Pārvatī and Mahiṣamardinī (Pratihāra) from Kannauj, the syncretistics icon of Durgā, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī (Pratihāra) from Saraimir, Kannauj are noteworthy valuable finds, which deserve special attention of scholars. Some other figures of unusual nature can easily be termed as 'fresh additions' to our knowledge of medieval iconography. Dr. Srivastva deserves congratulations and it can be well expected that some new sculptural gems would be forthcoming from his pen.

The publisher is also to be congratulated for bringing out the scattered material in beautifully consolidated form with nice getup for the benefit of interested readers and research scholars.

The book may of course be beyond the reaches of some due to its high price.

—N.P.Joshi