

Book-Review

Nature as Reflected in the Art and Architecture of Khajuraho (and Other Chandella Sites)

Prof. S. K. Sullery

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Nature existed even before the appearance of human beings. Human life in global context has evolved in close intimacy with trees, plants and flowers - flora and in equal measure with animals, birds and reptiles-fauna. The flora and fauna forming nature with water, fire, earth, sky and wind occupy a substantial and important place in the total plethora of Indian Art.

The book under review, written by well-known scholar Prof S.K.Sullerey, is a welcome contribution in respect of the study of the Nature through the Art renderings of Chandella period covering a time span from about 9th century CE to the close of 13th century CE. The Chandellas were not merely a significant political power of central India but they were also the custodians of Indian culture, so distinctly revealed in their legacy of art and literature and widely spread in different parts of present UP and MP. The most important of all the Chandella sites was Khajuraho and the author in course of his study has fully utilized its art remains. But at the same time author has adequately taken note of the evidences from other Chandella sites namely, Mahoba. Kalanjara. Dudhai. Chandpur, Madanpur. Deogarh in UP and Ajaigarh in MP.

Although Khajuraho has been centre of attraction of art historians from the very beginning, namely A.Cunningham, E.Havell. James Fergusson, Percy Brown. Stella Kramrisch Eliky Zannas. Krishna Deva. Vidva Prakash, Urmila Agrawal, Devangana Desai and others yet excepting the book of Vidya Prakash (Khajuraho - A Study in the Cultural Conditions of Chandella Society, Bombay, 1982) no other work has ever attempted at the study of the presentation of Nature on the temples and in the sculptures of the Chandellas. Even the book of Dr. Vidya Prakash makes only a brief mention of Nature in Reference to Khajuraho. In view of the importance of environment in 21st century, the present study by Prof Sullerey becomes more relevant. The work makes an exclusive and detailed study of the representation of Nature and thereby the environment.

The present book is outcome of the study undertaken under Fellowship of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. The book divided into seven chapters, has separate Introduction which discusses the importance and scope of the work and also presents the review of previous works. The first three chapters prepare the background for take off for the actual study. These chapters are on Geographical and historical background of Chandella art and architecture, Contemporary Environment and the Main Centers of Chandella art.

The subsequent three chapters from page 59 to 99 under the titles Forestry and Wildlife, Animals and Birds, Water Resources and their Impact present the core of the study but the unnecessary details of Pre-Chandella period in all the chapters should have been condensed to make this work more direct confining to the scope of the study. The important aspect of the book is that the author has fully exploited references of the inscriptions to make the study cogent and comparison oriented. In the chapter dealing with the forestry and wildlife the inscription from Ajaigarh and Khajuraho are particularly valuable to match with the hunting scenes to be found frequently on Lakṣmaṇa, Kandariyā Mahādeva and Viśvanātha temples. In reference to scorpion, the author should have explained the depiction of scorpion on the thigh of or nearby the female figures as the Trāsa motif, suggestive of pangs of kāma in the figures of Vivastrajagnā Apasaras.

The fifth chapter dealing with different animals and birds in terms of their representations in stone and rock takes note of hunting scenes in particular. The presence of lion, elephant and vyāla figures shown in profundity reveal their importance. The author should have given more meaningful explanation for the vyāla figures which reveal the royal power by showing them with different animals (horse, elephant) and bird (parrot) faces and also suggesting respect for the world of fauna. One very interesting example from Ajaigarh represents cow and suckling calf which should have been called Savatsā Go, an auspicious motif of not only the past but also popular in the present.

The sixth chapter dealing with water resources takes note of different rivers and tanks or tālas which provided not only the water hut were also the source of inspiration for depiction of Nature. In this context particularly interesting is the invariable representation of the figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā on the door-jambes of the Chandella temples which underline the importance of water for life as Apa or Prāṇa-tattva and also symbolize purity and devotion respectively so relevant before entering into the main temple - sanctum sanctorum. Such vibrating interpretations were required in the discussions. The Resume presents the succinct overview of the

entire study with some observations which ought to have been explanatory and more direct. The 52 good illustrations covering different aspects of the manifestation of nature add to the value of the book, The detailed bibliography includes not only Sanskrit, Prakrit works but also the Arabic and Persian sources, besides the secondary sources.

In my opinion the present book is a compendium of the dimensions of the rendering of Nature, an essential force of life, in the Chandella art. It will inspire scholars to take up identical works under the titles such as Rashtrakuta, Chalukya, Ganga, Solanki, Kalchuri art. I am sure the present book by Prof. Sullery will be useful alike to the scholars, researchers and lay man. I congratulate the author for this scholarly book.

- Prof. Maruti Nandan Tiwari