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Social dimensions of chandel temple architecture

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Introduction

Besides the religious images, devanganas and erotic scenes, the sculptures of Khajuraho portrayed various facets of life, such as love and hatred, happiness and sorrow, customs and mannerism, cosmetics and hair styles, cloths and ornaments, arts and crafts, religion and belief, social life and economic life prevailing at that time. S.K. Mitra eloquently mentioned that the Chandellas artists attempted to be as realistic as possible judging by the standard prevalent in the country during the time. In the bigger temples, like the Kandariya Mahadeva, Vishvanatha and Lakshmana temple, there are two small friezes in the inner and outer pradakshina depicting social scenes. In the inner pradakshina of the Vishvanatha temple and its third frieze all around the mandapa and the pradakshina are exclusively filled with secular scenes in relief. The massive platforms on which the temples are built are ornately carved with depictions of contemporary life. The various facets of life in social and economic life of Chandellas society as depicted by the portraits at Khajuraho can be understood by the following-

Education and Learning

There are many sculptures in Khajuraho which depict the teacher and student. In one scene of Lakshmana temple, a teacher is seen seated on the floor with a pencil in his right hand and holding a big board with the left hand. A small boy is standing behind the board and is supporting the board and is also seeing what the teacher is writing. There are eight big, four small and two very small boys, scattered in disorder around the teacher trying to see what he has written on the board. In another scene the teacher sitting on slightly raised dais and holding a manuscript in his right hand while the other scene show the teacher seated on cushion with other two pupils sited on cushion -one in front and another at the back writing something on Bhoja-patra and two other persons are standing behind the disciples. In both the scenes the teachers are explaining with uplifted right hand. From the attributes it can be judged that the teachers are probably Brahmins and the teacher-student ratio was smaller as small groups of students are depicted in scenes. Woman education was also at that time, several sculpture shows that both man and women are receiving education.

Trades, professions, calling and vocations

Khajuraho sculptures point out the different professions and occupations of the people of the Chandellas society. The main occupation at that time was agriculture. Chandella kings gave due importance to irrigation also. Large number of reservoirs, lakes and wells were dug out at that time i.e. Shiva agar, Khajuraho sagar and Rati tal etc. testimony it. The architects and artisans and sculptors are frequently depicted at Khajuraho temples. In some scenes the senior architects are shown as bearded and are surrounded by an admiring crowd of disciples as seated or standing while in one scene master architect is carved as drawing a design on board with a group of disciples carrying hammer and chisels. Some sculptures depict labourers carrying loads, masons chiseling stones, female servant carrying water, surgeons operating on their patients, physicians feeling the pulse of sick persons and female artisans engaged in landscape paintings etc.

Hunting was an important occupation at that time. Hunters are frequently represented together with men, carrying on poles, hunted animal like boar and deer.

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In one scene, a boar and a hunting dog with another boar are shown with four horsemen.

Another scene shows three hunters, two of whom are armed with bows and arrows and one has an axe-like weapon on his shoulder. In front of these three men are two wolves facing each other with their front paws uplifted represented as resisting the hunters. A horned deer with his front legs uplifted are shown behind the hunters. Numbers of other hunting scenes are depicted at Khajuraho. Still there are several tribes in Madhya Pradesh who are living on hunting. The hunter probably belonged to the aboriginal class of sabaras or to lower caste such as the meda, mahara or chandala mentioned in the contemporary Chandella inscription.

Sculptures also depicted several scenes of soldiers and civil servant in political scenes. Soldiers are frequently represented together with mahouts, horse-riders and attendants of horses and elephants such as lesikas, standard-bearers, umbrella-bearers and royal servants and attendants. In large number of sculptures professional musicians and dancers are depicted. They are shown as giving performances before the royal personage and public. In many sculptures the dancing girls and devadasis are shown. They are depicted vouching their charms and offering wine to their dupes. Prostitutes formed an allied class and it is also largely shown in the temples. Barbers are also shown, some times as attendant of female figures, carrying a bag on his shoulders and in some scenes they are carrying mirrors or some other article.

Military Life

Numbers of scenes on military life showing its every aspect are depicted. Various scenes show the soldiers on foot or on horse or on elephants prove that there were three divisions of military i.e. elephantry, cavalry and infantry. Camels were mostly used as beasts of burden and seem not to constitute a regular arm. The main weapons wielded by army are sword and shield, dagger and lances, gada and the bow and arrow. The dress of soldiers consisted of only tight fitting knickers reaching a little above the knee. Numbers of scenes also depict army on March with or without war band.

The horse and elephants are represented with or without riders and preceded or followed by footmen carrying arms or haversacks containing provisions. Women are also shown in army. In one scene an armed woman is shown holding a big sword in her left arm and in another scene, a woman is holding an armed soldier, perhaps they accompanied man on wars prove that women took active part in wars at that time. Many panels shows actual fighting scenes face to face and hand to hand fighting, multi-soldiers fighting, fighting on horse back, elephants involved in fighting etc. Few scenes show consultation of kings and army leaders and army ceremonial gaiety.

Dance and Music

Friezes on adhishtana and jangha show several dancing scenes. Generally the musicians and drummers are males while the dancers and singers are females. Drums, flute, vina, sahnai, cymbals etc. are the musical instruments. In some cases dancer is male. In a scene depicted on Javeri temple male and female dancers are holding their hands. In one scene a professional male dancer is dancing in front of a dance teacher at Lakshmana temple.

Female dancer wear tight short choli or angiya showing contours of breast and upper abdomen is also shown exposed. Dhoti is shown in different forms and some times dupatta is

carved on the lower part of the body. Dancers are shown with or without wearing bell-anklets and male dancers are also depicted with ornaments and jewellery.

Dance postures are unique in posture as well as in expressions. In Chitragupta temple a man is playing on a flute and a lady is expressing different moods while in Parshvanath temple a lady is listening to the music. In Lakshmana temple musicians are shown in devotional delight and friezes of the Vishvanatha temple show the vocal music and singing was probably an alapa or raga.

Domestic Life

The domestic life of the people is also carved in the small friezes around the Khajuraho temples. In some sculptures husband and wife are shown probably discussing some family matters. Various couples are shown sitting together and talking with hands joined held in an explanatory attitude. In the Lakshmana temple a couple is shown in which a woman pleases her angry husband and in Devi Jagadambi temple a lady is presenting flower. In some scene man is pacifying her angry wife who is standing with a face swollen in anger or with her back turned towards her husband. A woman in Jagadambi temple has put her restraining arm on the man's right hand to stop him from taking a rash step in anger. A man in Lakshmana temple is shown as pulling his wife holding her plait in his right hand. In the Vishvanatha temple woman is shown as weeping and hiding her tears and is being consoled by man who is trying to remove her hands from the face and in some scenes men are shown as embracing their wives or asking them to forgive with palms joined. In a scene in the Chitragupta temple a lady is shown closing her eyes by putting her hands on them. Probably she is not interested in seeing unexpected things or happenings. Number of scenes of love between men and women are also depicted in Khajuraho. Several other scenes also exhibit the family life. In one scene in Lakshmana temple, a mother is laying down with her baby resting her head on her palm. She is preparing to suckle the baby who is looking fondly at her. Another scene depicts a woman standing and holding her child on her loins and other scene shows the lady as taking the child from the lap of the servant and also holding a toy in her left hand. Fond mothers are depicted as kissing their babies. Other scene shows the mother sitting on a cushion and child playing besides her. Mothers are also shown as playing with the child have a ball in hand and in some scenes the mothers are depicted as teaching the child- how to move on knees, explaining something written or painting on the wall. Women themselves are also shown as reading and writing, dancing or singing and busy in domestic chores.

Family functions are also depicted in Khajuraho. In one scene men are shown either sitting or standing with bowls in hands and women with jugs are pouring out the liquid of the jugs may be wine or soft drink. While in the Vishvanatha temple frieze men are shown as holding pots on serving the liquid to the women and one of the woman is asking for it with her upraised hand and it seems that at social gathering men and women both drank together. In a sculpture a man riding on a horse is shown going on journey while his wife is shown bidding him farewell. Armed men are also shown taking leave of their wives before proceeding on the front.

Although in some scenes men are shown as ill treating the women yet it seems that women were free to take part in every walk of life and enjoyed full freedom at that time. Not a single woman is depicted in veil.

Game and Amusement

There are several sculptures in Khajuraho which depicts various types of games and amusement i.e. hunting, drinking, man-animal fighting, animal combats, wrestling, acrobating, dance and music and gossiping etc. During the medieval period hunting was an important pastime of the member of the ruling dynasty and other members of the aristocratic society. Several hunting scenes can be noticed on the friezes of platform and basement of temples. A royal hunt is depicted in the Kandariya Mahadeva temple. The bodyguards are going ahead. Two royal horse-riders wearing high boots are shown on the back of horse holding the reins in their left hand, but they carry no arms. In between the hind and forelegs of the second horse there is a small boar and horseman is taking a dagger from the man behind him to kill the boar and in another scene a king wearing a turban and long coat is shown on horse back, looking back and attacking a lion with the double-edged sword held in his right hand while the reins of the horse are in his left hand.

The lion has placed his front paws on the loins of the horse as he attacked from the back of the king. In the Lakshmana temple a man is shown kneeling with a bow stretched and aiming a shot at a boar that is in a leaping posture and in another scene two hunters are shown. One hunter is aiming at boar with the bow in his left hand stretched out. The boar has his back toward this hunter while he is attacking the hunter in front who has a big dagger in his right hand and is holding dog by the chain. Hunters are also shown in party and in some scenes trained and tamed animals include the party of hunters. Pig sticking and deer hunting were also popular games. A few scenes of tiger hunting are also shown in which tigers are hunted with javelin from the elephant back. When an animal was killed by hunters, labourers would tie it around a pole and carry it home joyfully.

A man and animal fighting was a very popular form of amusement among Rajputs. Elephant running amuck and trampling men under the feet or tearing or tossing up the unwary with the trunk are very frequently depicted at Khajuraho temples. Such rutting elephants were brought under control by experts with long laces and goad. A fighting scene between an elephant and lion is sculptured in Kandariya Mahadeva temple in which mahout has fallen from back. Scenes depicting man's commend over the beasts like elephants and horses also depicted and fight between elephants seems to be popular sport as it is also frequently figured at Khajuraho.

Wrestling was a favourite pastime for men at that time. Numbers of wrestling matches being carried on in sitting and standing postures are depicted in Vishvanatha and Chitragupta temples. In Duladeo temple some weighting-lifting scenes are also shown.

Several drinking scenes are shown at Khajuraho. Gossiping and story-telling was a common practice both among men and women. Some such scenes showing gossips and enjoying pleasant talk are depicted in the temples.

Numbers of scenes at Khajuraho also depict men and women engaged in different recreations such as playing with the ball, taming birds and monkeys, painting, reading and writing letter etc. In several sculpture ladies are keeping parrots and it seems that they were talking with the birds. A small bird, perhaps a sarika is sitting on the back of the palm of a woman shown in the Jagadambi temple who is carefully flying to shield the bird from the wind with her right hand which is held like a canopy over it. In some sculptures monkeys are shown as pets. In one scene of Vishvanatha temple, a woman

is holding a boy in her lap supporting with her left hand while in her right hand she holds a bunch of mangoes. Down below a small monkey is sitting at her right foot holding her chunri as if asking for mangoes. In the Lakshmana temple a monkey is shown with husband and wife.

Ball game (kanduka-krida) was also very popular especially with the women at that time. In majority of sculptures, women are shown throwing ball with the right hand slightly tilted and in some sculpture she is taking care of her slipping down duppata with left hand. In Lakshmana temple, a woman is shown in a beautiful pose with her back towards the audience. She is in the act of dropping the ball below. She has ball in her right hand which is held overhead to her left side. Such other scenes are also depicted in Jagadambi and Kandariya Mahadeva temple. The sculptors had expected the possibilities of female body to the maximum limit of flexibility by bending, twisting, turning and contorting of the body part as well as the limbs, viewed from the front, from sideways, from the back or combination of all these in such and other similar scenes.

In some scenes the woman is shown painting with a brush on the wall or on the board. Painting seems to be one of the hobbies and form of amusement of women at that time. In a scene in Lakshmana and Vamana temple woman has her back towards the audience and she is looking at the wall with her head backward and painting on the wall.

In another scene woman is painting on wall while standing in a dance pose with her right hand painting overhead. Numbers of painting scenes are shown in Kandariya Mahadeva, Vishvanatha and Parshvanath temples.

Miscellaneous Scenes

In the Khajuraho, there are several other sculptures depicting scenes which are not covered in any of the above mentioned categories. A number of scenes depicting Rishis and Ascetics engaged in different activities are shown in Khajuraho. In Kandariya Mahadeva temple ascetic figures are seated with twelve men in front facing the onlooker, each of these men has a small bag in one hand while the other is in the santa mudra. They seem to be listening to his talk with offerings in their hands. In some scenes Rishis are giving discourses and men reading out something to seated women. In Vishvanatha temple, some ascetics are seating and listing the sermons given by one of their companions. A king is shown as going in procession to listen to sermons of a Rishi in Lakshmana temple. An ascetic is shown in pranayam pose as pressing his nose with his hand in Shantinath temple. In one scene an ascetic is seated in the centre. The man is standing to the left is holding a chhatra while on the right hand stands with folded hands and another scene an ascetic is seated with touching the earth while a male and female attendant on each side are shown.

Kings and royal persons are also shown in several sculptures. In the Shantinath temple, a king is shown seated in a majestic way and a lady is standing before him and it seems to be court scene. In another scene in Lakshmana temple a bearded man is seated on a cushion with a pen in hand. Two female attendants are standing behind him; one of them holds a chhatra. Before the king, there is figure of man holding in one hand the rope which is tied to his waist while the second hand is held in a pose which seems to be explaining and justifying his conduct. Behind the captive stands another man holding the prisoner by the elbow. This is also a judgement scene. In other scene on the Vishvanatha temple a royal person is sitting majestically and behind him standing a lady attendant.

A group of merchants are depicted showing their goods to him. In Chaturbhuj temple a palace scene is depicted in which four royal personages are sitting in a balcony with a pillared railing and roof decorated with beautiful toranas. In Adinath temple a bearded royal personage is shown being attended to while visitors pay their respects to his office or expertise. There are so many other scenes also. The furniture and household articles, dress and ornaments and hair style of both men and women are also notable. All these scenes depict the various facets of life in Khajuraho temples.

Dress and ornaments

Both men and women are shown in fine dress and wearing beautiful jewellery. The women and celestial nymphs are shown covering the upper part of the body with a kind of bodice. Sometimes for decoration and covering the upper part of the body a piece of apparel is shown. In some cases of women, the upper garment was fitted as a blouse or jacket showing curves and contours of breasts. In some scenes women are wearing choli.

For the lower part, women are shown wearing a short sari with one end draping down their shoulders. Another form of the lower garments was a close fitted pair of trousers folded above the ankles. Men are generally shown wearing dhoti or tunic. Children's are shown in knickers. Some figures also wear sacred thread yajnopavita on their upper bare body.

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