# Mauryan Art

Mauryan art is represented chiefly in some animal sculptures intended to stand on columns with flower-shaped capitals and in a few Yakṣa images. These are all characterised by a lustrous polish which went out of use in course of the decadence of this art. The polish was still in vogue in the days of Daśaratha, the grandson of Aśoka and appears on the wall surface of the Gopi and the Vapya caves[1], in the Nagarjuni Hills. There are certain fragmentary sculptures in Sarnath[2] in the Mauryan style which are without this polish. They may be co-eval with the massive but unpolished ground rails of the Great stūpa of Sanchi, which are on palæographic grounds[3] later than the Heliodorus column. The latter also has no polish, so that by the time of Antialcidas and Heliodorus the polish had ceased to be in use.

The present distribution of the Mauryan columns is between Delhi in the west, Basarh in the east and Sanchi in the south. Some of these are in fragments while others have lost their crowning members. The capitals of the Nandangarh and the Basarh pillars are *in situ*, while those of Rampurva, Sanchi, Sankissa and Sarnath have been recovered more or less injured. The lion seated on its haunches appears on the capitals of Basarh, Rampurva and Nandangarh. The Sanchi and Sarnath specimens have four semi-lions united back to back. One of the Rampurva capitals has a bull and the Sankissa capital an elephant, both standing at full height.

The art, of which these sculptures are representative, sprang up under the shadow of the royal throne of the Mauryas. The Mauryan emperors had diplomatic and cultural relations with the ruling powers of Western Asia. Hellenistic art like Hellenistic arms was at this time supreme in that region. The art of the Seleucid kingdom of Syria, says Carotti, though evolving no new school "continued the

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1 A. S. R., Cunningham, vol. I, 1862-65, pp. 48-50.

2 A. S. I. A. R., 1914-15, pl. LXVI. 1-5, 15-23.

3 Dates of the Votive Inscriptions on the Stūpas at Sanchi, Rama Prasad Chanda. p. 14.

4 Carotti, Ancient Art, pp. 208-10.

traditions of the preceding period, especially in the manner of Scopas, animated with that plastic extravagance of lines and forms and that dramatic restlessness peculiar to those times, but which did not prevent the production of fresh masterpieces." The Tyche of Antioch would belong to the school of Lysippus. Several portrait sculptures are the result of a fusion of the two manners of Scopas and Lysippus." Among the busts is one of Euthydemos I, king of Bactriana "a strange type of coarse individuality," now in the Torlonia museum. The splendid gold and silver coins of Bactria[1] "really belong to the history of Greek coinage." The bronze statue of Heracles strangling the lion found in Quetta Miri[2] is of Hellenistic character. The coins of Sophytes are of Greek style and have a similarity with some coins of Seleucus.[3] Lethaby surmises that "at Seleukeia on the Tigris, which was built about 300 B.C., the Hellenistic architects must have come in contact with[4] and have absorbed many of the structural traditions of Mesopotamia." Von Friedrich Sarre[5] has no doubts about the strong Hellenistic influence in the land of the two rivers (Mesopotamia), from the character of the finds made there, so far as they have been published. "From the Persian plateaux," says he, "where excepting Susa lying in the border region, no scientific excavations as yet have been made, we know only of very few ruins and buildings of the Hellenistic period and even about some of these there is still doubt as to whether they belong to a later date—to the Parthian period. We mean the Ionian pillars of a Seleukidian temple in Khurha, the temple ruins of Kengawer and the monument Tak-i-Girra erected at the gate of Asia—the Paitak Pass. The smaller finds of the Hellenistic period from the Iranian Highland excepting the coins are still fewer. A stone head of Satyr coming from the neighbourhood of Kermanschah in Media is similar to a head which, as may be proved, comes from Dinawer, a Greek settlement not far away and not yet explored. They seem to be of the same kind of material. No doubt we have here the work of a Hellenistic artist or an accurate imitation of the same." Sarre further points out certain terrracotta reliefs from Syria

1 Coins of India, C. J. Brown, p. 25.

2 J. A. S. B., 1887, vol. LVI, Pt. I, pl. X, p. 163.

3 Indian Coins, Rapson.

4 Architecture, H. U. Series, W. R. Lethaby, p. 113; Cotterill, History of Art Vol. I, p. 121.

5 Die Kunst d. alten Persien, pp. 24, 25.

and Mesopotamia which must be taken as rare specimens showing the fusion of Persian and Hellenistic art. These represent an archer with barbaric features—possibly Scythian, a Parthian rider and a *reiterin.*

On the other hand the splendid monuments of the Achaemenids considerably survived the fall of their empire and had been standing at the time when Mauryan art was appearing on the horizon. Two fragments of pottery, which probably belonged to the same vase, discovered on the Mauryan stratum of the Bhir mound site at Taxila, illustrate the process in which Persian and Hellenistic traditions were percolating to India. One of these has the ribs or petals which the Persian artist employed for the decoration of the bases of his columns. The other, a fragment of a handle, has at its base "a rough relief which appears to have been the familiar head of Alexander the Great wearing the lion's skin."

The influence of both Persian and Hellenistic arts is recognizable in the Mauryan monuments. "It was in Persia" says Sir John Marshall,[1]" that the bell-shaped capital was evolved. It was from Persian originals, specimens of which are still extant in the plain of the Murghāb at Istakr, Naksh-i-Rustum and Persepolis, that the smooth unfluted shafts of the Mauryan columns were copied. It was from Persia, again, that the craftsmen of Aśoka learnt how to give so lustrous a polish to the stone—a technique, of which abundant examples survive at Persepolis and elsewhere."

It is also proposed to recognize Hellenistic influence in sculptures as the Sarnath capital, "in the masterful strength of its crowning lions with their swelling veins and tense muscular development and in the spirited realism of the reliefs below in which there is no trace whatever of the limitations of primitive art."

All the same Mauryan art was not wholly borrowed and has certain touches of originality which an analysis of its forms could not fail to bring out—for which the artistic genius of India may have been responsible.

This creative genius, the genius that assimilated the forms and technique of Persian art and architecture and breathed into them a new life stands revealed in many ways.

Thus, the shafts of the Persian columns stand on bell-shaped bases,

1 Cambridge History of India, vol. I, pp. 620-21.

like the calyx of a flower reversed or on plain rectangular blocks. The columns of the facade of the rock tomb of Darius at Naksh-i-Rustam have bases with plain circular mouldings.[1] The Mauryan shafts are maintained in position by plain slabs of stone or by brick work. These are however buried in the earth and the columns have an appearance of standing by their own weight. No base could be possibly invented which would not disturb this appearance of stability.

The Persian shaft is, according to Perrot and Chipiez,[2] "fluted in all instances save in the facades of the necropolis at Persepolis and the single column that still remains of the Palace of Cyrus in the upland valley of Polvar. In the latter case the anomaly is to be explained by the fact that the building to which the support belonged dates from a time when Persian art had not constituted itself, and was as yet groping to strike out a path of its own. On the contrary the rock cut tombs are coeval with the palaces of Darius and Xerxes and if in them the shaft is plain, it was because the vaults stood at a considerable height above ground. To have made them fluted therefore, would have still further reduced the column and divested it of a frank clear aspect when viewed at that distance. To obviate so untoward a contingency the Persian sculptor modified the form as the Greeks often did in similar cases."

The Mauryan sculptor, then, need not have borrowed a form which had been discarded by the Persian for ordinary purposes when Persian art came to be in maturity. On the other hand there were indigenous forms as the *Sthuna* of Sāl wood, a specimen of which has been discovered in a funeral mound of Lauria Nandangarh.[3] It is not improbable that some such form supplied the "motif" of the plain and circular Mauryan shaft.

"Persian capitals," writes Lübke[4] "are either formed of two foreparts of bulls or unicorns or they consist of an upright and an inverted cup, the former decorated with strings of beads, the latter with hanging petals and the whole crowned with double perpendicularly placed volutes which betray a strangely fantastic adoption of Ionic forms." The Mauryan capitals have very little in common

1 Early Architecture in Western Asia, Bell, p. 207.
2 History of Art in Persia, Perrot and Chipiez, pp. 87-88.
3 A. S. I. A. R. 1908-09 pp. 123-24, pl. XL.
4 History of Art, Ed. Bunnet, 1868, vol. I, p. 57.

with these crowning members of the Persian columns. On the other hand their resemblance with the bell-shaped bases of Susa and Persepolis is conclusive. The Mauryan architect, then, must have by a bold stroke of imagination transferred the Persian base to the top of his shaft. The Persians had to make their bases solid and massive to the eye so as to impart an appearance of stability and security to the columns. Any indulgence in curvation in their outline would compromise this firmness, real or apparent. The Mauryan sculptor was free from this restraint and some of his capitals are remarkably successful in the freedom of outline. According to Perrot and Chipiez,[1] "the lower portion of the Persian capital in every case detaches itself very abruptly from the column and forms a horizontal line on each side, parallel to the architrave and at right angles to the axis of the shaft. There is no junction or intermediary moulding between the tapering column and the rectangular member at the beginning of the capital akin to the echinus of the Doric capital. Hence it is that the support presents harsh contrasts which imperfectly satisfy the eye and are very near offending it."

The bell capital of Allahabad, of which only the abacus was to be seen[2] crowning the shaft in the thirties of the last century, detached itself somewhat abruptly from the latter. The same harshness of transition seems to have been characteristic of the capitals of the Gutivā and the Rumin Dei pillars. both in the Terai.[3] Their abaci however are not decorated like the abacus of the Allahabad capital. In other columns so far known, the transition from the shaft to the capital is made easy by the addition of mouldings at the bottom of the latter. The Basarh capital has three retreating mouldings—decorated with the rope and the bead and reel designs. Similar mouldings occur below the Nandangarh capital and below Cunningham's drawings of the Sankissa one.[4] In the other capitals, the mouldings are plain. The elegantly ribbed floral bell of the Mauryan capital presents an effective contrast with the massive, smooth and plain shaft which in its tapering form has a charm of its own. This contrast is wanting in the columns of Persepolis, which in their numerously channelled

1 History of Art in Persia, pp. 90-92.

2 Hist. Ind. Architecture, Fergusson, vol. I, p. 57, figs. 4 & 5.

3 Antiquities in the Terai, Nepal, P. C. Mukherjee, pp. 31,32, 34 pl. XVI, fig. 3.

4 A. S. R., vol. I, pl. XLVI.

shafts and triple capitals create an impression of unvaried exuberance.

Ionian and Hellenistic influences are said to be traceable in Persian sculptures from the fifth century onwards. The improved style of the figure sculptures that decorate the basement of the palace of Xerxes' throne, in Persepolis, "betrays the collaboration of Ionian and possibly Greek artists,"[1] says Carotti, "especially in the modelling and in the drapery." The same is true of the friezes from the palace of Darius and the Apadana of Artaxerxes II Mnemon at Susa. "The delicately carved lions and rosettes" which ornament "the mouldings on the architrave and the door jambs" of a rock-hewn tomb of Persepolis, presumably that of Artaxerxes II, suggest, according to Mr. Bell "that later Hellenistic influences were affecting Persian art."[2] Grecian influence is clearly perceptible[3] in the tetradrachms of the satrap Daskyleion (about 400 B.C.) stamped at Kyzikos. Considering the region whence the Mauryan artist borrowed his monumental forms and considering the time, when Hellenistic art had spread over Western Asia, it seems but natural that Mauryan art should evince Hellenistic influences. A comparison of the Susa relief of lions and the Sarnath capital would put this beyond doubt. "The genius of Greece," writes Elie Faure,[4] commenting on the above relief, "which was then ripening could not endure an original form of art subsisting at its side. And as it could not prevent Persia from speaking, it denatured her words in translating them. It is not even necessary to see the Assyrian monsters before looking at the figures of Susa in order to realize that the latter have but little life, that they are heraldic in their silhoutte and rather bombastic in style," In style, in attention to details of form as swelling veins and tense muscles the lions of the Sarnath capital resemble the lions of Susa. They are lacking however, in the dramatic restlessness characteristic of contemporay Hellenistic art. In fact their life is at a still lower ebb than in the Susa figures, their heads with the gaping mouths look still less terrible. Sir John Marshall is for recognizing in this "the tectonic and conventional spirit imported

1 Ancient Art, Carotti, pp. 93-94.
2 Early Architecture in Western Asia, Bell, p. 231.
3 Sarre, Die Kunst d. alten Persien, p. 20.
4 Ancient Art, Elie Faure, p. 106.

consciously and of set purpose to bring the lions into harmony with the architectural character of the monument."[1]

The abacus of the Sarnath capital has, among other elements of decoration a galloping horse spirited in movement and distinct from the background, yet not sharply defined against it like the reliefs of Bharhut. In its modelling and movement this figure is comparable with the two horses in the relief on the Sarcophagus of the Amazons,[2] a Hellenistic work now in Vienna.

The striding lion in the adjoining compartment is a Persian design. The humped bull, an Indian animal, appears in the identical attitude, being walked on by two men in the Persepolitan relief of the Tribute Bearers.[3] Elephants with the embellishment of horns appear, drawing the Biga and the Quadriga in the early coins of the Seleucids.[4] The elephant of the Sarnath capital is unquestionably superior in execution.

It is significant, however, that of the four animals on the abacus only the horse appears in violent movement; the rest are striding on in a leisurely fashion. This demonstrates how the artist was lacking in harmony of conception and was not bold enough to adapt to his purposes types fixed by convention.

The male statues, the yakṣas, unlike the lion sculptures are non-muscular. There is the smallest attempt at representation of muscles below the elbows, just indicating that they belong to the same school. A similar divergence between the forms of the human and animal sculptures is characteristic of Achaemenid art. Evidently the climate and the surroundings of the Persian prohibited the nude form in art, so that the Ionian Greeks who collaborated in the friezes of the palace of Persepolis and Susa, had to remain content with enclosing the figures in exquisitely soft drapery,[5] "which brings out every shade of the outline."

The Mauryan artist had no such restraint as in Persia, so that his sculptures are nude in the upper body. Yet the extravagance of form peculiar of contemporary Hellenistic art and the Kushano-

1 Cambridge History of India, vol. I, p. 621.
2 Ancient Art, Carotti, p. 218, fig. 298.
3 History of Art in Persia, Perrot and Chipeiz, p. 407, fig. 195.
4 Cambridge History of India, vol. I, p. 463, pl. II, figs. 1 & 2.
5 History of Art in Persia, Perrot and Chipiez, pp. 427-430.

Hellenistic art of Gandhara is lacking in them. The surface of the nude body has the gliding finish characteristic of Indian art, though variatious of plane can be felt as the hand is passed over the drapery on the legs. The massive and vigorous conception of the forms, the silent power underlying them and the feeling of dignified repose, must be regarded as Indian traits. If the folds of the drapery happen to be derived from the Perso-Ionic form, their adaptation, like the adaptation of Gandharan folds in the Gupta art of Mathura,is complete.

*Bell capitals of Mauryan columns*

A bell shaped base from Susa is seen in fig. 1. Its surface decoration consists of petals with broad ridges in the middle and narrow borders. The interstices at the bottom are filled up by short mouldings like the pointed ends of leaves. The upper end of the base has a ring of leaves and petals. It is of gently curved outline and its breadth is greater than its height. A "salient" torus is intermediate between the bell and the fluted shaft.

One of the two fragments of pottery from Taxila, "of grey clay burnt to red on the outside and covered with black paint," is decorated with Persepolitan petals with broad ridges and narrow borders. The closer agreement of the petals with the Persian form and their divergence with the Mauryan seem to indicate that the latter was evolved not in the neighbourhood of Gandhara, but is peculiar to the region of its provenance—chiefly the plains of the Ganges and Jumna. The band of bead and reel ornament round the rim of the cup recalls similar work at the bottom of the Basarh and the Lauria Nandangarh capitals.

The capital of the Basarh column has its bell decorated with the same type of petals but the width of the border in each petal has, in comparison with the Susa base and the Taxila cup, increased relatively to the ridge in the middle. The spaces between the ends of the petals are filled up with short mouldings as in the Susa base, but the ring of leaves and petals below the torus of the latter has been dispensed with in the Basarh capital as in all other Mauryan capitals of the same order. Below the petals are retreating mouldings decorated with the bead and reel and cable designs. Between the abacus and the bell there is another prominent cable moulding in place of the Persian torus—an admirable ornament in its "group of twisted lines." Both designs are Western Asiatic. The abacus is square and undecorated on its edge. It is in fact the pedestal

of the sculpture above rather than the abacus of the circular bell capital, being of a form not suited to the latter. The lion which is seated on its haunches—a type known in Western Asia—is regarded as an inferior work of art. The bell, which is of fluent outline, slopes towards the bottom with a greater slant than the Susa base. The upper part is not fully accentuated in its outward bulge. This is because the petals with their ends spreading out are not sufficiently drawn inwards at the bend as in the other capitals. A harmony of line is maintained up to the cable moulding above and likewise in the lion in its front view, but the continuity is disturbed by the square abacus. The width of the bell is greater than its height as in the Susa base.

The Lauria Nandangarh column has its shaft somewhat chipped off immediately below the capital. The lion on the abacus is also injured. The floral bell is like the Basarh capital broader than it is high. It has the same mouldings below and above it. The abacus which is decorated with a row of geese evidently pecking at food—all in relief, is circular and appropriate to the form of the capital and the shaft. The lion above it is in the same attitude as the lion of the Basarh capital. Its workmanship however is superior although the modelling would seem to be bombastic and the strenuousity of the muscles rather extravagant. The sculptor is evidently in difficulties about adapting the crowning figure to the round abacus and the rump of the animal and part of its hind-legs project beyond it in an unbecoming manner. The bell shaped drum is comparatively steep and its upper or convex part is more pronounced than in the Basarh capital. But the transition from the bell to the abacus is abrupt and the single moulding intermediate between the two does not suffice to soften down the effect.

The bell of the Sankissa capital is, according to Cunningham, "low, its breadth being greater than its height in which particular it resembles the Asoka pillar of Nandangarh Lauria, to the north of Bettiah."[1] His drawing of the capital shows the bead and reel and the cable ornaments below the bell and the cable moulding on its neck. The abacus is decorated with rosettes, honeysuckles and Aśvattha leaves etc. with a band of bead and reel at its lower edge. The elephant above is vigorous in execution. The trunk and the tail are missing. The former may have been wound up into a knot

1 A. S. R., vol. I, p. 275, pl. XLVI.

between the tusks as in the drawing above the Khalsi inscription. The body is treated in soft outlines. Details as the veins of the ear flap, the folds of the neck, the toes and the charming creases above the feet have engaged attention. The flesh is spongy in feeling and its transitions are subtle.

The stone between the body of the animal and the abacus has not been removed. This was because the Mauryan artist did not risk totally round images and his sculptures are partly in relief and partly in the round—a mingling of the two processes. The mass of unnecessary material is in this case carved into the semblance of rocks which in their shadows relieve the plain surface of the elephant's body.

The bell is steep in outline and the curve of the convex portion is somewhat accentuated. The lower or concave portion is not however well brought out as it is in the Sarnath capital. The transition from the bell to the abacus is abrupt as in the Nandangarh capital.

The bull capital of Rampurva (fig. 2) agrees with the foregoing in that the breadth of its bell is greater than its height and it has a rope moulding intermediate between the bell and the abacus. The mouldings below it are however plain, unlike the Basarh, Nandangarh and Sankissa capitals. The concave or lower portion of the bell is as pronounced as the convex upper part. The transition from the bell to the abacus is harsh as in the preceding specimens. On the other hand in the shaping of the stone between the latter and the animal above and in the disposition of the front legs there is greater consideration for line. The abacus is decorated with rosettes and honeysuckles, etc. The humped bull, which has lost its horns, right ear and dewlap, is stationary and of vigorous limbs and outline. Details are not wanting and the skin has a firm look. The head is not as distinct from the massive neck as it should be and is held in an unnatural manner. In executing the head and the neck the sculptor has shown his bold workmanship but betrayed his ignorance of the forms.

The Sanchi capital has its bell partially restored in plaster of Paris with the help of a number of fragments which preserve the shape of the original in the restoration. The breadth is not prominent, and the height has increased. It is no longer the same heavy and massive drum as at Basarh and Rampurva and the change from Susa can be noticed at a glance.

The lower mouldings would seem to have been plain. The transition from the bell to the abacus is smoothed over by the addition

of a fillet band over the cable necking. "The abacus is ornamented with four honeysuckle designs separated one from the other by beautifully sculptured geese in pairs confronting each other with lowered heads."[1]

Crowning the abacus is a group of four semi-lions united back to back, with strenuous muscles, powerful claws and swelling breasts covered with schematic curls. The heads are more or less injured. The design recalls to mind the drawing of a pillar in an Egyptian tomb, which is surmounted by a circular capital,[2] showing in the profile the heads of three lions, The lower parts of the figures do not appear and only the lion in the centre has a protruding tongue like the Mauryan lions. Schematic curls appear on the necks. Above the lions is an oblong abacus on which beams or lintels may have rested. Diodorus[3] preserves a tradition that "the famous palaces of Persepolis, Susa and Media were built after the artistic wealth of temples from the sack of Egypt had been conveyed to Asia along with Egyptian artificers." The design may have existed in some perishable material in Persia and thence carried to India, although there is every possibility of an independent invention by a gifted artist.

The Sanchi lions are at their base entirely contained within the abacus and there is no unseemly projection as in the Nandangarh capital. The lines are not confined to a single profile as in the Sankissa and the Rampurva (bull) capitals, nor is there a traingular skyline unpleasant to the eye as in the capitals crowned by lions seated on their haunches. The lines have free play along the bodies of the animals and the profiles are symmetrical in outline.

The flow of line is thus maintained along the whole sculpture—along the bell which is light in feeling and fluent in curves, the abacus which is no longer the pedestal to the lion sculpture above but an organic whole with the bell because of the two mouldings which are intermediary,—maintained right up to the top of the crowning lions. It swells up and sweeps down, being made rhythmic by the alternate expansion and contraction of the forms. The only detracting feature is the cable necking which contrasts the vertical lines of the bell by its own spirals.

1 Sanchi Museum Cat., p. 19.

2 History of Art in Persia, Perrot and Chipiez, fig. 43, p. 113.

3 Ibid., p. 113.

The Sarnath capital (fig. 3) is of the same type as the Sanchi one. The lower mouldings are plain. The bell is light in feeling and elegantly carved, the breadth is not oppressive in proportion to the height. The rope moulding above is replaced by a bold torus. There is the plain fillet as in the Sanchi capital. The abacus is rather prominent being 1′ ½″ high, the total height being 7ft. This may have been due to the necessary insertion of the four symbolic wheels at the cardinal points. The manes of the lions are rendered in curls, rich in volume but still schematic.

The outline of the profile of the Sanchi capital has an outward swell round about the abacus in the middle. In the Sarnath specimen this swell is made boldly accentuated and with the high abacus, the claws of the lions above and the undecorated mouldings seems to enclose an elliptical form.

At the same time the artist of the Sarnath capital has achieved this rythm of line, he has lost sight of other aesthetic considerations. The Sanchi bell with its mouldings and narrow abacus is, like the Susa base with its torus, one organic whole and the same cannot be said of the Sarnath bell, although the transition to the abacus is not harsh. The abacus itself is unduly high and seems about to crush the light and elegant bell with all its super-imposing weight.

The lion capital of Rampurva (fig. 4) is one of the finest products of Mauryan art. Its bell is of greater breadth than height, but this seems to have been due to the desire to contain the whole figure within the abacus. At any rate the joints of the hind legs and the rump are not jutting out as in the Nandangarh capital and the line is continued from the abacus directly along the rounded rump. The bell is elegant with the curves of its outline well brought out and the mouldings which are, like those of the Sarnath capital, undecorated. The narrow abacus ornamented with geese is with the fillet and the torus, a real beauty and in fact seems, as it were, to grow out of the bell like the thalamus of a lotus.

The manes of the lion are in schematic curls which lead the eye along pleasant zig-zags. Some of the curls radiating beautifully from the head form a frame round it. The animal is beautifully modelled, the taut muscles and swelling veins standing out boldly.

The divergences of form between the capitals could be hardly due to the fancies of the individual artist. On the other hand they seem to indicate how the art has groped through them to arrive at self-expression. The capitals of the Rumin Dei and Allahabad columns

have broad fillets at their base which are clearly a development of the fillet below the petals of the Susa base. The Basarh capital with its broad and heavy drum, sloping outline, square abacus—a form ill suited to the circular bell—and crude lion, is unquestionably a transitional work, belonging to a phase of the art when the form of of the capital was not successfully evolved. The Nandangarh and Sankissa capitals are allied to this by the decorated mouldings above and below the bell, which in all of them is broader than it is high. Its outline however is more emphasized and the circular abacus is a departure from Basarh. The abruptness of transition between the abacus and the bell in the Nandangarh, Sankissa and Rampurva (bull) capitals create the impression of the former being the pedestal of the animal above, in spite of its round form. The bull capital of Rampurva in its cable necking, the proportions of the drum and the crudeness in the neck of the animal itself would seem to be allied to the Nandangarh and Sankissa capitals, but the powerful curvation of its outline, and the plain-ness of the lower mouldings link it with the Sanchi, Sarnath and Rampurva lion capitals. Evidently the decorated mouldings of the Basarh, Nandangarh and Sankissa capitals were felt to be overloaded and detracting from the beauty of the bell and given up for simpler and less obtrusive ones. The Sanchi capital is allied with the foregoing by its rope necking, but the fillet above it, the lighter form of the bell, well defined in the curves of the outline, the smooth transition to the abacus and the flow of line along the entire sculpture make it later than the Rampurva (bull) capital. In the Sarnath specimen the linear quality is more developed than at Sanchi and thep lain torus has taken the place of the cable necking. The lion capitals of Sarnath and Rampurva may not be much removed from each other because of the agreement of the mouldings. That the breadth of the bell of the latter is greater than its height may be due to the need of including the crowning figure within the abacus.

These capitals, therefore, may be said to mark one ascending scale of artistic achievement, although the chronology cannot be strongly insisted upon without some striking divergence of form. The feeling for form and the eye for line seem to improve step by step. The tendency of linear rhythm can be felt from the beginning and in view of the same quality of later Indian sculptures may be recognized—not improbably—as the impress of the Indian genius on Mauryan art.

*The human figure in Mauryan art*

The human figure in Mauryan art was represented with equal boldness if less skill than the animal sculptures. Only a few specimens have been discovered. All of these are characterized by the usual brilliant polish. Two are inscribed, but their decipherment has been the cause of a wild controversy among scholars. Patna and Sarnath are the two localities which have yielded human sculptures.

The fragmentary head from Sarnath is remarkable for its massiveness, its bold execution and hard chiselling. The face is entirely broken off and the back of the skull with part of the forehead is all that remains of the head. The latter is framed by a number of conventional spiral curls, Western Asiatic in form. A floral wreath of a pattern common in Suṅga art appears above the curls and there is a crenelated crown of Persian design. Some folds of drapery are seen on the neck. The eyebrow is sharply cut and the remaining corner would seem to indicate that the eyes had been wide open. The ear is naturalistic. The back of the head is boldly shaped and with the short neck from which it is scarcely differentiated gives an impression of strength. The face would appear to have been held up in a slanting attitude; so that the distance from the nape to the chin must have been awkward and affected the shape of the neck. Animal sculptures as the bull on the Rampurva capital would seem to demonstrate how the Mauryan sculptor, though sometimes lacking in understanding of form, was always a bold carver of stone. The Sarnath head would be another example of this.

A Patna statue—the one with its head intact—reveals in places —particularly the face—a hesitation in execution which may be due to the decadence that seems to have affected Mauryan art in its later stages. The figure stands in a perpendicular attitude with its right leg slightly in advance of the left. There must have been an oblong pedestal on which the feet had been resting flat. The left arm, of which the fore part is missing, was bent at right angles and held close to the side. The right hand is broken off from the shoulder, but existing traces show that it was held in the same attitude as in the other statue from the same place.

The upper body is nude except for the "uttariya" or upper scarf which lies across the chest and comes down to the feet from behind the left shoulder. It is for the most part gathered in a broad mass

which expands towards the right hip. The lower garment is made fast to the body by means of a sash, the knot and tasselled ends of which appear about the male organ. It is draped round the body and its right end is drawn up at the front. A peculiar feature of this garment is the absence of the "kaccha" or the end of the scarf tucked up at the back. The folds which are somewhat ornamental are represented by a broad band in the middle with two narrow borders. But as they are not sculptured in high relief and as the drapery is subsidiary to the figure and follows the configuration of the limbs the decorative tendency is effectively modified.

On the chest is a torque decorated with rosettes with the tassels of its ends hanging in a knot behind the shoulders. The left hand has a spiral armlet. There is a pendant on the left ear. The coiffre is represented in mass remaining plain over the crown and indicated at the back by the simplest hair lines. The mode of representing hair, therefore is different at Sarnath and Patna.

The massiveness of the limbs and lack of movement gives the figure a distinguished look. The artist has represented an obese type, its power being simply of mass in bold execution and a dignified attitude.

The back of the head is better formed than in the Sarnath fragment, the neck being distinct from the skull. The fleshy face has its salient features as the lips and nose worn away—all the same it is very crudely conceived. The forehead is narrow and crescent shaped. The eyebrows are raised in the middle. The eyes are wide open with heavy eyelids and long slits. The neck does not happen to be as distinct at the front as at the back and is absurdly perched on the shoulder.

The statue is plurifacial but the different aspects are not skilfully harmonized. The transition between the profile and the back is abrupt and not successfully rounded off. The movement of the right leg is not perceptible at the front and the front view of the neck is not in agreement with that of the back.

Another statue from Patna is seen in fig. 5. Its head and forearms are missing, but the lower portion including the pedestal is intact. A *chaury* rests on the right shoulder, its handle was obviously grasped in the hand. The bust is powerfully shaped but generalized in modelling. A massive garland lies on the chest. The right leg is slightly advanced but this can be discerned only in the back view. The feet are clumsily modelled.

The arrangement of drapery is the same as in the other statue. It is not a flowing robe, but clings close to the form. It is not of a decorative character as in Gandhara. Accordingly, we do not have the gracefully sweeping scarf, the charming frills, the folds which can be elegant sometimes—and all the magnificence of Gandhara. It falls to the ground heavily, revealing the feet at the front and in its simplicity adds to the repose and dignity of the figure.

The Pārkham statue is another sculpture that is dated by Sir John Marshall in the Mauryan period.[1] The great divergence between this image and the Sarnath capital, he explains by attributing this to indigenous craftsmen of the Mauryan period, while the other is evidently the work of a Hellenistic artist. The figure is perpendicular but weighted only on the right leg. The left knee is raised forward though the foot rests level on the pedestal. The left hand came down on the thigh. The right hand is missing and its exact attitude is doubtful.

There are enormous pendants from the ears hanging down to the shoulders. Below the neck is a torque and necklace, the fringed ends of which appear behind the shoulders.

The upper garment is tied like a band below the chest with its end hanging on the left side. The lower scarf is made fast by a sash, the ends of which appear between the legs.

The lower garment has its train hanging at the back without the *kaccha* as in the Patna statues. At the front, it is drawn upwards. Between the legs are the lappets characteristic of the drapery of Suṅga figures. Some of the frills are arranged over the right thigh—a feature that can be recognized on a figure in the Mahābodhi rails. The folds except in the lappets which serve an ornamental purpose are indicated by the barest scratch marks.

The feet are more shapely than in the Patna statue. In the form of the legs in particular, the sculptor essays at truth to nature. In the frontal aspect the drapery is pressed deeply against the limbs and thoroughly reveals their form. The same attempt is recognized in the Patna statues, but the conception of drapery there is different, the forms for the most part being only slightly revealed. This, therefore, is an anticipation of the same feature in later Indian sculpture. The male organ is not indicated. This again reminds us of the figures

1 C. H. I., Vol. I, p. 622.

on the Bharhut rails. The sash which keeps the lower garment in its place seems to cut through the abdomen. The neck shows the same crudeness as in the Patna statues. The head is not even rounded and there is little or no modelling in the face. The back of the skull is flat and thus distinct from the shoulder. The latter is much more accentuated in curve than in the Patna statues, while the spinal channel is deeper. The hips are flat and sharp in outline and make a near approach to the Mathura statues of Bhikṣu Bala set up in the reign of Kaṇiṣka, in this respect. The lower garment completely hides the back view of the forms. The transition from one aspect to another is more sharp than in the Patna statues.

Thus the abdomen,the neck and the head of this figure are primitive features. The train of the lower garment at the back, the swelling curve of the shoulders as well as the attempt at pl urifaciality recall the conventions and the technique of Mauryan art. The absence of the male organ, the revelation of the forms by the drapery pressing close against the limbs and the lappets between the legs are akin to Suṅga traditions. The raised knee and the easy posture would seem to point in the same direction although the execution recalls the boldness of Mauryan art. For, in Suṅga figures the raised knee is indicated by a lateral extention. The absence of modelling at the back is characteristic of later Indian statuary.

The image therefore, would appear to belong to the transition between Mauryan and Suṅga art, to a period when the traditions of Mauryan workmanship were weakening and Suṅga art—the spontaneous art of the people—was appearing on the horizon.

Didargunj in Patna has yielded a highly polished female statue (fig. 6) characterized by the brilliant Mauryan polish. It is 5′ 2½″ high and stands on a pedestal 1′6½″ × 1′ 8″ sq. Its attitude is simple and perpendicular and there is no attempt at the creeper like movement characteristic of the mediæval female figure. In the back view the right leg appears to be slightly advanced, but in the frontal aspect both the feet appear weighted. This is because the sculptor could not unify the different aspects of the statue. The upper body seems to have a stoop to the front. This stoop may have been due to the weight of the breasts. This is enjoyably graceful in Gupta figures. The Mauryan sculptor would seem to have been incapable of representing such a delicate movement and has subjected to it the whole body from the hips upward. The right hand which is held a little apart from the

body is bent upwards at the elbow and holds the *chaury* resting on the shoulder. The left hand is missing and probably came down in a graceful curve on the hip.

The figure displays an enormity of ornaments characteristic of the taste of feminine India to this day. There are huge anklets on the feet and profuse bangles on the only remaning arm. A *kañci* surrounds the hips. A short neclace of beads encircles the neck while a double-stranded one hangs gracefully—"pendulously," between the breasts. Massive pendents—of a patterm which Beharee fashion has not still discarded—decorate the earlobes. "The head itself," writes Dr. Spooner, "is wreathed with ropes of beads or pearls caught up to a point in front, above a large and prominent oval disc of some kind placed centrally over the forehead and thence led backwards in a double line along the parting to find fastening beneath the luxuriant tresses of the coiffre behind."[1]

The lower garment is wrapped round the waist, the ends being drawn up between the legs at the front. The train falls to the ground as in the two male statues. The drapery clings close to the figure, but reveals more of the forms in the front than in the back. The folds are of the same character as in the male statues, but executed in better taste. At the back they follow the lower curvation of the hips and in front converge to the mount of Venus which is hidden from view by a sash hanging from the *kañci*. In this respect the figure contrasts with the early sculptures of Sanchi, of Udaigiri in Orissa and the Kuśan figures of Mathura. The *uttaria* is confined to the back, with its rightend falling to the ground, obviously because the sculptor intended to show off the frontal aspect.

The lower part of the figure is stiff and archaic in the front view. The torso tapers to the feet evidently to emphasize the breadth of the hips. The relieving feature of the statue is its upper half. The full breasts, the slim waist and the broad hips are as the Indian sculptor loved to represent. In the profile the breasts are seen hanging by their weight and the curvation of the hips is beautiful. In all this the artist has introduced a naturalism which adds to the gracefulness of the figure. The channelling of the spine, the creases of the neck, the charming knot of hair at the back, the folds of the waist and that below the navel show him at his best. The transition from one aspect to another is not abrupt

1 J. B. O. R. S., 1919, p. 110.

but rounded off. The features have the sponginess of flesh and are soft in contour.

The face is oval with the chin well brought out in the profile, with flanking ears with their lobes distended by the pendants, full cheeks narrow forehead and small mouth. The tip of the nose is damaged. The eyebrows rise directly from the lines of the bridge and are somewhat arched. The eyes have narrow and long slits with half open lids, but the pupils are not characterized. There are circular hollows round the eyes and the mouth. The face wears an expression of archaic rigidness.

The female sculpture of Besnagar has been attributed by the late Dr. Vincent Smith to the reign of Aśoka, "on account of the style and costume."[1] It is however totally discrepant from the Didargunj image, except in the attempt at plurifaciality and the perpendicular attitude.

The figure is 6′ 7″ high and stands on an oblong pedestal which has been partly broken off at the front. There is no attempt at advancing the right leg.

There are pendants on the ears and massive necklaces which disfigure the chest. On the hips are the usual *kañcis*. The waist cloth is heavy and rude in execution and comes down below the knees. There is no train falling to the ground as in the Patna statues. There is nothing here to match the delightful folding of the drapery of the Didargunj image. The lappets between the legs at the front hint at Suṅga influences having been at work and there is slight attempt to reveal the shape of the hips in the back view. The veiled coiffre and the disc like shape of the face remind of the figures on the Bharhut rails. Looked at from the front, the neck is almost charming, but the same bold execution of the back has been shirked by means of the massive coiffre. The chest is deep and the breasts fuller and rounder than in the Didargunj image and perhaps exaggerated. In the waist which is slim the same amount of detail is lacking. The hips are broad. Although the lower part of the figure is more rudely shaped, still it has less rigidity than in the Didargunj image. This is because there is variation of line near the knees, emphasized by the attempt at drawing out the lower edge of the waist cloth near

1 History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon. p. 62.

the calves of the legs and because the feet are planted in a more natural attitude. The transition from the back to the sides is left sharp.

The Besnagar statue, therefore, would seem to belong to the same period of transition between the Mauryan and the Suṅga art as the statue of Pārkham.

Our knowledge of Mauryan human sculpture, therefore would be limited to the Sarnath head and the three Patna statues. Sarnath has yielded another boldly carved stone head not polished—showing crudeness of neck and wide open eyes—of a different type from the heads of the two Patna sculptures. The lower strata of Sarnath remain to be explored over a considerable area and will no doubt yield very interesting remains, in view of fact that the Sarnath sculptures differ in respect of form from the Patna statuary. Another massive head, also unpolished has been discovered among the remains of the Persepolitan hall at Kumrahr (Site No. I), which has a narrow forehead framed by rude curls, slanting eyebrows of the type of the male statue of Patna, though bolder in execution, open eyes with long and narrow slits as the Didargunj image and circular hollows about the eyes and the mouth as in both of them. Evidently the head is late Mauryan.

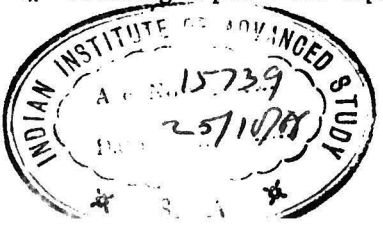
The discovery of these three Patna sculptures was purely accidental and systematic excavation will no doubt bring to light many more. In the present state of our knowledge, the following may be regarded as characteristic of Mauryan statuary.

1. Peculiarities of form :—Misformed neck. Concentration of attention to the upper half of the figure, the lower half remaing stiff. Fleshy face. Eyes wide open with long and narrow slits, without pupils. Hollows round the eyes and mouth. Drapery falling to the ground at the back, rendered in folds with broad band in the middle with two narrow borders.

2. Peculiarities of pose :—Simple perpendicular attitude. Right leg slightly put forward—perceptible only from the back.

3. Plurifaciality which is more or less crude owing to the sharpness of transition from one aspect to another. Conformity wanting between the different aspects.

4. A feeling of power and repose.

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