

The Exploration of Women in Early Indian Art: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Women and their role in art have been explored so many times through studies which can represent a chronology for the changing status and style of such depictions. Even the various styles and forms are connected with the social encounters and religious aspects. The literature already in existence on the representation of the female figure has been explored in this study. The present paper primarily examines Indian paintings by providing an overview of how women are portrayed in early Indian art. In this observation the studies related with pre-historic cave art, Indus Valeey civilization, mural paintings have been taken majorly to construct the narrative for the exploration of women and their role with origin and development.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

Discussion

Women were commonly used as decorative motifs in ancient Indian art. For almost all of the artists, their sensual physique and physical beauty were their top priorities. The prehistoric and historic eras of human history have been separated. History is tied to what happened after writing, while prehistory is related to what happened before writing. Unlike the historical period, there are fewer stories with supporting evidence. The stone, bronze, and iron ages further split the prehistoric era. Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods make up the Stone Age. Through creative creation and non-literary substantiation, prehistoric age evidence can be found. A notable aspect of the Mesolithic period was the presence of rock drawings, which were particularly abundant in the Vindhyan sandstone hills in central India. These paintings portray the Mesolithic cultural journey in a way that is highly attractive and innovative. The relationship between those people's social and religious lives and their hunting and gathering activities has been entwined. They left these impressions in their paintings (Mishra, 2002). Pregnant women are frequently portrayed in the Bhimbetka rock shelters, as are different parts of daily life. Two images of a spider-shaped woman can be recognised as mother goddesses in those paintings, with the first figure depicting a newborn child below her genitalia. Another has been depicted using geometric shapes. Working women have also been displayed in several shelters; for example, in one scenario, a person is climbing a tree with a basket on his or her back, while the person on the right (a woman) is carrying a basket full of

fruits. This might be connected to women's participation in food-gathering activities. There are various representations of dancing and playing that demonstrate the participation of women in leisure activities (Malla, 2013). A renowned historian named Yashodhar Mathpal discovered numerous scenarios in prehistoric cave paintings that emphasise pregnancy and fertility over other important functions for women. He claimed that while observing the Bhimbetka site, he noticed many images in which women have been represented as engaging in sexual activity, such as one picture in which a reclining woman is shown engaging in sexual activity with five men (Mathpal 1984). The Venus of Willendorf, with her vast anatomical form, has been credited with inspiring the conception of fertility; this idea originated in Austria. The ability to reproduce and be fertile is a sign that future generations will continue to exist (Gardner and Kleiner, 2009). According to Kamat (1997), in some prehistoric artefacts, women have been shown as possessing sexuality and procreative ability. Indus Valley Civilization art features nude mother goddesses in an appealing pose with a full breast and wide hips (Tiwari; 1985, Coburn; 1991, Nagar; 1998, Marshall; 1931, Wangu; 2003, Muesse; 2011, Martin; 2012). The tradition of mural painting was where the gender disparity in representations first emerged, and miniature paintings are when it peaked. Until the period of the early colonies, this feature of sensual presentation dominated. The sexuality and fertility features of the paintings have been shown in various ways; the graceful faces and well-proportioned bodies of women have been portrayed in both fully and partially naked forms. With certain flaws in the drawings and colour applications, the same portrayal of beauty and unusual encounters started to appear frequently in manuscript illustrations. Due to religious hegemonies, the elegance and beauty had faded gradually.

Women were shown in miniature paintings with a particularly sensual style. Their movements and bodies were also performed to portray their physical allure and beauty. The male sex has only ever been symbolised in the Indus Valley by animals, specifically through the body and genitalia of those creatures. Following the development of such alive images through visual representation and communication, this could be a way for them to improve and realize their sexual abilities. Numerous clay figures of women with wide hips and full breasts have been shown in this culture to reinforce the exaggerated representation of female sensuality. In contrast to other subjects of portrayal, the sexuality has been exceptionally executed. These feminine figures share a connection with both the mother goddess phenomenon and the notion of showcasing their reproduction capacity. Additionally, goddess-like female sexuality can serve as a metaphor for magical rituals that invoke divine intervention (Muesse, 2011). The Lajja Gauri, also known as the shameless lady (her legs are spread apart to reveal her vulva), is a universal symbol of fertility. H.D. Sankalia first used the term "shameless woman" in 1960 in a paper titled "The Nude Goddess or "Shameless Woman" In Western Asia, India, and South-Eastern Asia". This naked goddess has also been used to promote fertility cults or for sexual worship. Martin concurred that the seals from Harappa's Indus Valley culture contain pictures of Lajja Gauri. The Goddess, having taken on different names and forms, travelled through the trade routes from Mesopotamia to mediaeval India. Lajja Gauri is a colloquial term for the iconographic portrayal of the naked Goddess of conception and fertility worship, and it is also linked to terminology from Indian mythology.

Although the word "Lajja" implies "shame," in the artwork she is shown to be "shameless." She is known as Inanna in Sumerian culture, and she is the Goddess of Love and the Multiplication of

Sacred Prostitution Temples (Martin, 2012). In ancient India, the mother Goddess underwent transformations that allowed her to embody these ideals. Although the phrase "motherhood" is frequently used to glorify mothers, it cannot be used to empower mothers. The anthropological texts reveal matriarchal dominance. In the past, the matriarchy predominated, but with time, patriarchal rule progressively replaced it. Krishnaraj has portrayed the global significance of fertility and the mother goddess after using the phrases from Bachofen. The same mother-Goddess worship has been discovered in a symbolic form in the Indus Valley Civilization. Other images, such as Lajja-Gauri, a dancer, and the Goddess with a bull, also display these links between gender and sexuality. In the Rig-Veda, the idea of Aditi or Lajja-Gauri was debated. She is referred to be the mother of all living things, including Gods, and the unfettered Goddess. There are two different kinds of goddesses: consort goddesses and independent (or unhusbandry) goddesses. In comparison to married Goddesses, virgin and single Goddesses are more strongly portrayed. In numerous paintings, this stereotype of both types of Goddesses is repeated. This specific characteristic has been used as a model for changing female sexuality in society. For instance, Lakshmi is associated with luck or benevolence, while Kali is viewed as the evil Goddess of wrath (Krishnaraj, 2012).

The Indian classical painting tradition, which served as a model for Asian Buddhist mural art. The Gupta Empire, which lasted roughly from the beginning of the fourth century AD until the middle of the sixth century AD, is when the classical tradition first emerged. Similarly to the Renaissance in European nations, this time period is regarded as the pinnacle of Indian art, culture, and literature (Wimalagnana, 2011). It has been noted that gendered representations are prevalent throughout South Asia, especially in paintings and sculptures, which is frequently focused as a gender politics issue but not fully investigated. Many art historians have concentrated on gendered themes through the research of sculpture and representations of women in art from the prehistoric to the colonial periods. The inclusion of painting-related components has prompted discussion of sexuality. Nelson has also stated that sensual displays of couples on the temple and full-breasted, virtually nude Goddesses (Yakshis) were common. They have been dubbed "Sublime and Sensual" and are thought to contribute to the stimulation of visual pleasure. He concentrated his narratives on two types of evidence that had been taken into consideration by Indus specialists: the first was the depictions of gender in figurines, sculptures, and seals, and the second was funeral information (Nelson, 2007).

The mural paintings of Ajanta, which illustrated the legacy of Buddhism together with other associated ideas, served as the foundation for India's painting culture. Then, this impact expanded to several areas, including Ellora, Bagh (Malwa), Badami (Deccan), and the nearby locations. The first miniatures were created in Bihar and Bengal in the eleventh century, and they afterwards flourished in many other locations throughout India in unique styles (Deneck, 1967). Beautiful female forms were depicted by Ajanta artists. Women's grace and gestures are highly fascinating due to their endearing physical attributes. In Ajanta, ladies have been portrayed in their fully adorned forms, wearing transparent clothing and striking poses. This sensuousness of the feminine has also been represented in various Indian mural styles (Chaitanya, 1976). The essence of Goddess imagery and its artistic reflection can be observed in a variety of works of art. Coburn cited certain ancient, ancient manuscripts that claimed the goddess was personified. He debated the Devi Mahatmya of the Fifth Century, which contains Sri Sukta, in a Rig Vedic appendix, the Durga Stotra that Arjuna learns from Krishna in some Mahabharata versions just before the Bhagavad Gita, the Harivamsa's

hymn to the Goddess of Sleep, and other early accounts of the baby Krishna's birth. However, the Devi Mahatmya is the first thorough progression of accounts relating to the Devi (Goddess). The Goddess, according to the hymns, possesses the same imposing masculine grace as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel sculpture. The Goddess is also connected to the Tantric religion and is thought to be a big God's counterpart, or Shakti, or inner force. He also argued against the documentation of this ritualistic literature, which was created by man alone and adopted by everyone (Coburn, 1994). Pal also outlined the function of the goddess in Indian culture by discussing her various manifestations in Hinduism. He claims that in addition to being revered by followers of other religions, Devi is also known to Muslims as Nanibibi. He said that there was ample tangible evidence from prehistoric archaeology to conclude that popular piety among subcontinental residents was focused toward Goddesses rather than Gods. Devi's very concept has been extensively studied, along with its appropriate rites and representation in art. For understanding Goddess cult in art and architecture, the role of Devi Mahatmya cannot be avoided. Furthermore, during the colonial era, the Goddess was elevated to the status of the biggest deity in Bengal, but during the religion of patriotism in India, her form of Bharat Mata was more widely accepted (Pal, 2009).

In this line of inquiry, it is determined that although early Indian paintings have been studied from a variety of angles, there have been very few investigations of how women are portrayed. Numerous studies, but in a very condensed manner, depict the projection of women from prehistoric to ancient periods.

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