



## Feminine Beauty in Khajuraho Temples, India

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### Abstract

*Sculpture art in India has leading place in the history of world art. The sculptures of the ancient temples of Khajuraho represent the subtle warmth of classical Indian modeling. Large numbers of female figures were included in the sculptural strategy of the medieval temples of India. In Khajuraho sculptures, the women are sculpted from all the worlds. Here women appear in various themes. Ideals of feminine beauty in myriad forms and features are depicted in the temple. The sculptor of Khajuraho has tried to work out very carefully on every part of the woman's body from physical penance to divine pleasure. No doubt, we find their sculptural representation adorned with exquisite jewellery and beautiful dress, making them look very beautiful by accentuating their forms. The Khajuraho women with sculptured body, rounded hips and clinging serpentine grace of limbs the feminine ideal gives impression of a spiritual divine beauty.*

**Keywords:** Beauty, Khajuraho, sculpture art, feminine.

### Introduction

Architecture, in the words of Garbett, 'is the art of well building' - the art of giving to a building all the perfection of which it is capable i.e. Fitness, Stability and Beauty. One school of artists holds that without 'beauty' decorative or emotional, there can be no architecture. So, architectural ornamentation of building and the adaptation of apt aesthetic detail in their construction are given great importance. The most striking feature of the Hindu temple is also the profuse use of ornamentation on its surface. This ranges from narrative stone relief's to depiction of figural, floral, animal, geometrical and other foliated designs. Khajuraho is famous throughout the world for its exquisitely carved temples in stones. The artistic temples of Khajuraho are brilliant examples of medieval Indian architecture. The Khajuraho Sculptures are famous for its art and amount of details in the art.

On Khajuraho temples, many aspects of Indian life are depicted together with gods and goddesses, warriors, musicians, animals, etc. But the most common and popular depictions which have been carved are women and sex. "The naribandha is in dispensable in architecture, As a house without wife, as frolic without a women, so without a figure of a women the monument will be of inferior quality and bear no fruit..., A place without love-images in the opinion of Kaulacaras always a base, forsaken place.....a dark abyss"<sup>1</sup>. The sculpture of Khajuraho has been inspired by an exquisite beauty of woman that explored one represented her in superb human joy with morbid physical structure. Women have been profusely depicted on the temples of Khajuraho. Silpa Praksha, a 10<sup>th</sup> century art text from Orissa describes and instructs the sculptor on the 16 types of women who best

decorate a monument" and how they should be carved "within the confines of an upright angle." These 16 kinds of women include darpana (looking into a mirror), alasa (relaxed and indolent), ketaki-bandha (adorn herself with ketakiflower), nartaki (a dancer), vinyasa (pensive) etc. While some of these kinds of women are easily visible in the Khajuraho sculptures, some other types of women also adorn the walls of Khajuraho. Even the gods have been shown with their wives and wives look very emotionally at the god who warmly cares their consorts, mostly she is placing her arms around god's neck and He is gently cupping the breast. Such sculptures of woman comprise heavenly fairy-dancer (apsaras), youthful heavenly nymphs (surasundaries), youthful human (nayikas) and women sporting with trees (salabhanjikas). They are figured either in round or in high or medium relief on the outer or inner walls, pillars and ceilings. The sculpture of women of Khajuraho seems to be belonging to three worlds:<sup>2</sup>

Patal lok (Nether world): i. Nagkanya or serpent girls with cobras' hood. ii. Mrityu lok (Mortal world): Nayika or beautiful lady, Devdasi or temple girl. iii. Swarg lok (Heaven): Apsara or Damsel of God, Surasundaries or celestial nymphs.

As nagkanya the beauty of divine nature is simply a form of procreation to prove that women has developed as a force from darkness to the eternal conscious and to the concept of Shiva-Shakti or cosmic egg in the tantras<sup>2</sup>. These nagins are shown in hidden recess of the temple. The earthly woman was created for the delight and strength of man and to fill for him the void. The Khajuraho sculptors have been inspired by exuberant fancies which transcend visionary ideals of beauty ever created and express love of like and joys of existence. The concept of union developed in the conception of the opposite to produce bliss and ultimately into beatitude. Khajuraho

woman is only varied in her details but her moods, expressions and posture have been depicted in exquisite detail.

These heavenly nymphs are elegantly beautiful, full of sexual charm and vigor. As apsaras, they are carved as dancing in various postures. As attendant of higher divinities, they are carved with folded hands or carrying lotus flowers, mirror, water jars raiment and ornaments etc. offerings to the deities. But more frequently these surasundaries are depicted as expressing common human moods, emotions and activities. They are thus shown yawning, stretching, scratching their backs, touching their breasts, rinsing water from their wet hair plaits, removing thorns from their feet, fondling babies, playing with pets like parrots and monkeys, writing letters, playing on flutes or the vina, painting designs on walls or bedecking themselves in various ways by painting their feet with henna, applying collyrium to their eyes, applying vermilion in their partings or bindis on the forehead etc. In the first glance, these women may be seen as performing the most conventional action sculpturally associated with them. But at a closer look, the strong curves and movements in the sculpture add to the overall sexuality of the woman. It is quite possible that some of women sculptures are of devadasis and reflect daily activities of these women. Some say that the most beautiful women were brought from Magadha, Malwa and Rajputana to be trained as devadasis in the Khajuraho. In the medieval period, temples themselves had grown as a feudal institution where hierarchical system had developed among the devadasis, musicians, garland makers etc. with in the temple itself<sup>3</sup>. These devadasis were lonely women dedicated to the ceremonies of gods. Some of these devadasis were in relationship with royal patrons and even with the temple priests<sup>4</sup>. There are many sculptures in which these devadasis are depicted to be engaged in coital activities with princely male figures. The Khajuraho women have dignity, elegant, aristocracy, and courtly character.

Ideals of feminine beauty in myriad forms and features are depicted in the temple. Chandella artist turned stone into flesh, as at times the carving of the breast and hips is characterized by the soft flesh-like effect and bulk. Proportions are central to a formally trained artist's view of the body. They serve to standardize, break-up and simplify an image, ultimately reuniting it in the artist's representation what is almost an infinite variety of 'real' body forms. Most of the female figures are delineated in a voluptuous manner with heavy round breasts, narrow waist and broad hips. The Chandella sculptor changed these proportions and made the torso longer, to allow fullness of breasts and generally add to the sensuality befitting amorous posture. They did not prefer the slim proportions as one expects with the feminine beauty. The fleshy effect was the ideal of female beauty. Female figures in Lakshmana temple show fullness of flashy effect but they are also remarkable for the tight volumes of their ample breasts and hips. The Lakshmana temple figure has long legs due to high-waist. Vishvanatha temple takes over from the Lakshmana

temple the collection of the female figures with twisting posture combining view of the back and front view of the breast. The tensely twisted body brings out all the most delicate aspects of the feminine figure. The sculptures on the Chitragupta temple are much better in quality than Vishvanatha temple and maintain good proportions comparable to the Lakshmana temple. Devi Jagadamba temple does not have many complex postures of female, which is a characteristic it shares with Parashvanath Jain temple. The legs of female figures of Kandariya Mahadeva temple are sometimes relatively rickety while as their heads are longer. The eyes are long and tapering as suggested in poetry, like lotus buds- the nose straight or hooked like a parrot's beak, the lips serious or in a smile. The sensuousness of the figure is created by the languid posture specially back-view, the cults of figures and inclination of the head. The beautifully rounded breasts, broad hips, the suggestive pose of two legs, all tend to emphasize the beauty of feminine<sup>5</sup>.

There are certain features common to all the Khajuraho women. The solitary female figures are generally clothed, there is emphasis on the contours of the feminine body; the full and firm breasts are accentuated by the neck jewellery that forms a perfect shape as it falls on them. The legs tapering down from the thighs make the female figures appear taller. While the bare torso exposes the breasts of the women in a frontal pose, those in the back or side profile have arching backs and necks to add sensuality and movement to their frame. The back pose is further emphasized by the hair that is almost always tied up in a bun, with a small ball like jewellery dangling below. Tribhanga brings the torso into focus. These graceful nymphs are shown in wearing finely designed ornaments around their neck, waist, wrist, arms and legs. If we observe carefully we can also find their lining in designed pattern, around their waists and legs.

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 trouser folded above the ankles. The ornaments worn by these figures can be noticed in following categories i) Head ornaments ii) Ear ornaments iii) Neck ornaments iv) Arm ornaments v) Girdles and vi) Anklets and toe-rings.

They wore a stud of gold or silver on the forehead in the middle at the end of the parting of the hair. In some sculptures, women are shown having three pendants hanging on the partings of the hair attached securely with hooks and similar to now call the Benda. Head ornaments worn by ladies are known by the names of kesabandha, dhammila and alaka while the head ornaments of

men are kirita, jata and karanda-mukuta, chuda and patta. The main ear ornaments are called kundalas- large or small rings, star-shaped or flower-shaped rings or rings with pendants. Men are also seen wearing kundalas which are mostly the chakra-kundalas. The sculptures of both men and women are mostly shown wearing necklaces of different types- small necklace or a gulabandha and a big hara. Armlets and bracelets also seem to have formed an inseparable and essential part of jewellery for both men and women. Sculpture of Khajuraho depicts armlets with a single row of beads and heavy cylindrical ones. Bracelets shown are also beaded with round, cylindrical, broad and elaborate ones. Girdles are also shown in sculptures of both men and women of all classes. Girdles are in the form of ornate belt with central clasp on the waist. In a majority of case girdles shown are simple and made of single string of beads without loops or tassels. Anklets are beaded string and a series of square pendants often depicted in pairs. In some cases anklets consists of two or three rows or beaded strings with or without a boss in front. By keen observations of sculptures we can notice plain or beaded toe rings also. No doubt, the women sculptures wearing exquisite jewellery making them look very beautiful by accentuating their lovely forms.

“Women are the gods, women are life, and women are embellishment. The woman of Khajuraho is represented as an eternal woman created by nature to achieve the supreme goal. These carving are very lively and express pride, valor, sorrow, emotions, delight, joy, despair, grace, lust and ecstasy. These women art shaped the ideas of beauty, ideas which constituted an important part of what it was to be female in ancient and medieval India. By all means this Khajuraho is a place where one feels that truth is beauty and beauty is truth.

## Conclusion

Beauty lies in the Eye of the Beholder. Beauty is subjective. The belief is that the perception of beauty underlies all creation. Khajuraho Sculptors are real in their presentation and depicted feminine beauty during that period. There are many other aspects, such as the ornaments they wear, the tied back hair, the girdles and the nudity, that give these figures their sensual quality. Large hips, thin waists, huge breasts size and their globular shape and lotus petal eyes add to women beauty. Here at Khajuraho, Women are depicted in myriad moods and moments: writing a letter, applying kohl to their eyes, drying their hair, playing with a ball, looking into a mirror, painting their feet or pulling out a thorn. Therefore, Khajuraho temples are called a World of Female Beauty.

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