V.

The Visual Splendour

An art object comes up from a given time and space, either through an individual or any collective effort; and it can always has its stylistic ancestors, while also producing some descendants – in the area of its existence, and even beyond that. In this process, quite naturally, it can also come up with its collateral clans and parallel cousins.

The wooden idols of West Bengal, surveyed in the preceding pages, tell us a similar story. Though geographically they belong to various regional pockets, but culturally they represent a compact homogeneous zone (see the map in p xxiii of this book). As a result, in a majority of instances, they are all related among themselves, both thematically and stylistically. This stylistic and thematic affinity has been reflected even in the works executed in different mediums; especially, as the artist – the Sūtradhar of Bengal – was skilled enough in handling various materials. In certain occasions, this kind of interrelation between specimens made of different materials has become so striking that they seem to be executed by the same individual.

In general, these wooden idols have a close relationship with the contemporary or near-contemporary works in terracotta and stucco; while many of them is comparable with the sculptures made in stone – the other carving medium. For example, if we take a close look at the iconographic specifications of Yaśo Mādhav of Dhamrai (Dhaka, Bangladesh) and the Viṣṇu from Krisnapur (now perished), we would well understand that – just like their stone counterparts – they also follow the same iconographic pattern and carving technique. The samabhanga posture, four arms and the attributes, kīraṇa-mukūṭa (the crown), vana-mālā (the garland), and other features of both the wooden effigies, especially the carving-details on the later one, tells us very clearly that sculpture of both stone and wood in Bengal were closely associated, or parallel to each other.

On the other hand, the specimens under review tend to reflect the taste, outlook, manners and customs of the people who created them. Geographically, they belong to an extensive region: from Jalpaiguri (leaving aside Dinajpur and Maldah) to South 24 Parganas, from today’s Bangladesh to West Medinipur. Even iconoclastically, they represent various traditions – both hieratic and folk-tribal. And hence the socio-cultural preference and taste presented by them is likely to be varied. Indeed, there are minute differences between the stylistic accomplishment reflected in the wooden idols from Nadia and Bankura, or from South 24 Parganas and Bardhaman. But, even after all these, there is a fundamental relationship among all the specimens, highlighting a socio-cultural homogeneity of a linguistic group, known as the Bengalis.

: AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE :

‘Citrasūtra’, one of the earliest treatises on Indian art, has prescribed that a divine image should always look like youth of sixteen years and s/he should be having a pleasant face and smiling eyes.¹ This instruction has been followed by all the artisans of pan-Indian, as well as regional traditions, while making the effigy of any god or goddess – be it in clay, wood, stone or metal. The Sūtradhars

of Bengal also followed the same guideline in making the wooden deities, while maintaining their own individuality and style.

However, as a whole, the wooden idols of West Bengal admit two broad stylistic divisions: the hieratic and the folk-tribal. The hieratic tradition is met with the specimens of the Pal-Sen period (c 9-12 cent AD), which pronounces the age-old pan-Indian idiom with natural orientations owing to the impact of time and external inspirations. On the other hand, the folk-tribal style, manifested in a number of specimens dated c 16-20 cent AD, stems from the collective unconscious; and occasionally bears a close relation with the other traditions of the subcontinent as well. The interval of three hundred odd years, in between (c 13-15 cent AD), was mainly a period of transformation – a journey from the pan-Indian to a new school of sculpture, which belongs purely to Bengal.

THE PAN-INDIAN AESTHETICS

In the history of Indian aesthetics, it was Nandikesvar (sometime between c 2 cent BC and 2 cent AD) – the author of Abhinay Darpan – who is generally referred to as the pioneer and patron-god. He seems to be preceded Bharat and some consider him even to be Bharat’s master or teacher. However, the most concrete reference to his teachings have survived in the writings of Bhās (dated to the same epoch), the poet and playwright, who has meticulously executed many theoretical instructions of Nandikesvar in his own stage direction.²

On the other hand, Kāśyapa and Vararuci – both assumed to be indicating a status of the pre-Classical or Classical era rather than any individual – are said to have left several works on aesthetics that, unfortunately, are not available now. And a later text, ‘Kāvya Mimāṃsā’ by Rājaśekhar, written between c 880 and 920 AD, introduces Lord Śiv himself as the founder and teacher of Indian aesthetics.

However, in a more materialist outlook, the earliest treatise on aesthetics ever found in India is the Nāṭya Śāstra by Bharat (also known as Bharatācārya or Bharat Muni). Assignable to a period between 200 BC and 200 AD, this text is arguably the foundation of discourses on fine arts in this country. The most authoritative commentary on this text has been found in Abhinava Bhārat, written by Abhinava Gupta (c 950-1020 AD). These two scholars – in an interval of one thousand odd years – were the most distinguished contributors to the famous theory of Rasa, the aesthetic delight.

Rasa:

Rasa denotes a mental state and is the dominant emotional theme of a work of art or the primary feeling that is evoked in the person while experiencing such a work. Bharat has mentioned about eight variations, and each of them has corresponding Bhāv or mood, a presiding deity and a specific colour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rasa</th>
<th>Bhāv</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Śringār</td>
<td>Rati</td>
<td>Love, attractiveness</td>
<td>Viśṇu</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hāsya</td>
<td>Hāsya</td>
<td>Laughter, mirth, comedy</td>
<td>Pramātā</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raudra</td>
<td>Krodh</td>
<td>Fury</td>
<td>Rudra</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kārunya</td>
<td>Šok</td>
<td>Compassion, mercy</td>
<td>Yama</td>
<td>Grey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Later on, Abhinava Gupta suggested a ninth Rasa, which had to undergo a good deal of struggle between the 6 and 10-cent AD, before the majority of the Alamkāriks (scholars on Aesthetics) could accept it. It was termed as ‘Santam’, featuring peace or tranquility, whose preceding deity was Viṣṇu once again and the colour was – just like Bibhatsa – Blue. And thus, finally, the expression ‘Nava Rasa’ – the nine forms of aesthetic delight – could come into existence.

The concept of Rasa is fundamental to many forms of Indian art including dance, music, musical theatre and literature; whereas the treatment, interpretation, usage and actual performance of a particular variation differs greatly between different styles and schools, and the huge regional differences even within one style.

However, these Rasas are equally evoked in case of Visual Art, but it is difficult to explain – under the aegis of this theory – the technicalities that used to work behind the development of a divine image. For that, we have to take refuge under the umbrella of Śilpa Śāstras, the texts describing manual arts and the standards for religious Hindu iconography. They have also prescribed – along with other things – the proportions of a sculptural figure, as well as rules of an ideal architecture. Among these texts, the most pioneering and significant efforts were the Sukranītisāra by Śukrācārya3, the Mātasya Purāṇ (abruptly dated c late 2 / late 4 / 6 cent AD), the Mānasara Śilpaśāstra (written in c 5 cent AD), Hayaśīrṣa Pancarātram (c 5-11 / 7-8 cent / 800 AD) and Vṛhat Samhitā of Varāhamihir (c early 6 cent AD). In this connection, it was also suggested that one has to follow these guidelines only while making any divine image for worship; otherwise it could be taken as optional.4

---

3 Śukrācārya was said to be the son of Bhṛga and the Guru or spiritual teacher of the Daityas and Asurs.
the specific measurement for the various sculptures—be it human or divine; and this system was followed all over the country, obviously at the hieratic level. Later on it was this classical idiom of the Gupta phenomena that was followed with a local variation in the Pal-Sen school of Bengal sculpture. Hence, it was quite obvious that the wooden idols of this era—just like their stone counterparts—have also been produced under the same guideline.

We have already discussed in detail about the gradual development of individual iconographies, while discussing about the historical chronology of the wooden idols (see ch II of this book); and while doing this, several ancient texts have provided us with a lot of details. However, one of the most convincing sources was ch 58 of *Vṛhat Samhitā*², which gives us reference to the Brahmanic, as well as Buddhist deities. *Sūtra* 44 of that chapter says, "The Buddha ought to be represented seated upon a lotus, and looking as if he were the father of mankind, with hands and feet marked by lotuses, with a placid continence, and very short hair."³ This very description helps us to understand the iconography and aesthetics of *Loknāth* from Tongibari, where—in spite of certain exceptions—we find a somewhat similar rendering.

Such details, mentioned above, have equally been discussed in ch LVI of *Mānasara Śilpaśāstra⁷*. And that’s the reason, why we find such close proximity, along with some significant common features, between the visual appearances of Tārā from Kanheri and Viśnū from Krisnapur, the physicality of the *Lokenath* and the Viśnū-on-Garuḍ from Goda (see fig 1).

**Tāla-Mañā:**

*Tāla-Mañā* is a traditional system of Indian iconometry⁸ for measuring the divine images, as given in the Āgamas—the scriptures in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism—and other authoritative texts with illustrative drawings. Following that classical idiom, there happened to be two different kinds of units measuring the length, namely the absolute and the relative.⁴ However, in both the cases, the units were known as *Tāla* and *Mañā*; while the smallest unit is known as *Aṅgula*. Again, this *Aṅgula* is of two types: *mātrāṅgula* and *deha-labha-aṅgula* or *dehāṅgula*.

**Aṅgula:**

- *mātrāṅgula*: the length of the middle digit of the middle finger, either of the sculptor or the donor
- *deha-labha-aṅgula*: 1/124, 1/120 or 1/116th part of the whole length of the body of an image

The distance of one *aṅgula* is also known as Mūrti, Indu, Viśvambhara, Mokṣa or Ukta; while the distance of 12 *Aṅgulas* are called *Vitasti*, Mukha *Tāla*, Yama, Ark, Raśi or Jāgati

Besides *mātrāṅgula* and *dehāṅgula*, there are other larger relative units of length, which are known as *Pradeśa*, *Tāla*, *Vitasti* and *Gokarna*.

**Pradeśa:**

distance between the thumb and forefinger, when they are mostly stretched

**Tāla:**

distance between the tips of the thumb and middle finger, when stretched

**Vitasti:**

distance between the tips of the stretched out thumb and ring-finger

**Gokarna:**

distance between the stretched out thumb and little finger

---

¹ see Unknown (tr). (1875). *The Brhat-Samhita or Complete system of natural astrology of Varahamihira*. Vol II. London. pp 47-49
² see ibid, p 49
⁴ It’s the art of estimating the distance or size of an object.
Even after these, there are still other larger units of length:

- **Kisku:** 24 Ahgulas or Manāṅgulas
- **Prajāpāṭya:** 25 Manāṅgulas
- **Dhanurgraha:** 26 Manāṅgulas
- **Dhanurmuṣṭi:** 27 Manāṅgulas
- **Dança:** 108 Manāṅgulas or 4 Dhanurmuṣṭis

Now, the measurement of a divine image, described by the ancient Indian scholars, is of six kinds: Māna, Pramāṇa, Unmana, Parimāṇa, Upamāṇa and Lambamāṇa.

- **Māna:** length of a body
- **Pramāṇa:** breadth of a body
- **Unmana:** the measure of thickness
- **Parimāṇa:** measurement of the periphery (round the body) of images
- **Upamāṇa:** measurement of interspaces
- **Lambamāṇa:** measurement taken along plumb-lines (six sūtras or threads are used for this)

Besides these various units of measurements, the Āgams also have prescribed various proportions to the images of divine, semi-divine and other mortal beings, based on Hindu and Buddhist pantheon; and the unit of measurement chosen is known as the Tāla.

- **Eka-tāla:** Kabandha
- **Dvita-tāla:** Kuṣmāṇḍa
- **Tritāla:** Bhūt and Kinnar
- **Catuṣṭāla:** Vāman (dwarf) and children
- **Parīcā-tāla:** Kubjā (deformed person) and Vighneśvar
- **Sāt-tāla:** Pret
- **Sapta-tāla:** Vetaḷ and Pret

---

10 A detailed discussion on this Pralamba-lakṣaṇa-vidhāna has been provided in ch I.XVII of Manasara Series, vcl II. pp 85-86
11 Kabandha was a Gandharva (celestial musician) named Visvavasu or Danu, who was cursed and made into an ugly demon by Indra. Later, in an encounter, Rāma and Lakṣman cut his arms and proceed to cremate his corpse. Upon his death, Kabandha resumes his Gandharva form and helped Rāma in many ways.
12 Bhūt, in Sanskrit, has several meanings: true, matter of fact, existing, present, being or being like anything, consisting of, mixed or joined with; ghost or a bodiless spirit; the lived world; well-being, welfare, prosperity. In Hindu philosophy and Buddhism, Bhūt denotes one of the five classical elements, known as the Paṇca Mahābhūtas.
13 In Buddhist and Hindu mythology, a Kinnar is a divine lover, a celestial musician; executed as half-human and half-horse (India) or half-bird (south-east Asia). Their character is clarified in the Ādi Parva of the Mahābhārata.
14 Pret is a type of supernatural being, described in Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Jaina texts that undergoes more than human suffering, particularly an extreme degree of hunger and thirst. This word is often translated into English as "hungry ghost", from the Chinese, which in turn is derived from later Indian sources generally followed in Mahāyāna Buddhism.
15 A Vetaḷ is a ghost-like being from Hindu mythology. They are defined as spirits inhabiting corpses and burial grounds. These corpses may be used as vehicles for movement (as they no longer decay); but they may also leave the body at will.
Aṣṭa-tāla: men

Nava-tāla: Rākṣas, Asur, Yakṣa, Apsara, Astramūrti and Marudgana

Sa-tryāṅgu-la-nava-tāla: Persons equal to the gods in power, wisdom, sanctity etc

Uttama-nava-tāla: Daitye (Lord of the Daityas), Yakṣe (Lord of the Yakṣas), Urageś, Siddha, Gandharva and Charaṇa, Vidyēś and the Aṣṭamūrti (eight forms) of Śiv (see fig 2)

---

16 A Rākṣas is a race of mythological humanoid beings or unrighteous spirit in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. A female Rākṣas is called a Rākṣati, and she in human form is a Manusya-Rākṣati. Often Asur and Rākṣas are interchangeably used.

17 Yakṣa is the name of a broad class of nature-spirits – appeared in Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist mythology – usually benevolent, who are caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth. Their feminine form is Yakṣī or Yakṣīṇī.

18 An Apsara, also known as Vidyādhari, is a female spirit of the clouds and waters in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. English translations of the word include nymph, celestial nymph, and celestial maiden.

19 Abanindranath Thakur, in his book 'Bhāratśilpe Mūrṭi' (see pp 7-8), has given a vivid description (accompanied by a fine illustration) of this category of images.

20 A Siddha in Sanskrit means one who is accomplished. It also refers to the spiritual masters who have transcended the ahankār (ego), have won over their minds to be submissive to their awareness, and have transformed their earthly bodies into a kind of higher order.

21 Gandharva is the name of some distinct mythological beings in Hinduism and Buddhism; it also denotes a band of skilled Indian classical singers.
Navārddha-tāла: Kuber, Nava Graha (nine planets) and certain other celestial objects

Adhama-dasa-tāła (116 Dehāngulas):
Indra and other Lokpālas, Candra and Surya, twelve Ādiyās, eleven Rudras, eight Vasus, two Aśvin-devatās, Bṛgu and Mārkandeyā, Garur, Śeṣa, Durgā, Guha or Subramanya, seven Rṣis, Guru, Ārya, Candesa and Ksetrapāla.

Madhyama-dasa-tāła (120 Dehāngulas):
Śrī (Lakṣmi), Bhūdevi (Bhūmidevi), Umā, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Sapta-mātrkās, Usā and Jyeṣṭha.

Uttama-dasa-tāła (124 Dehāngulas):
Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva

Dvādas-tāła: Candra, Bhairav, Nrśimha, Hayagrīva, Varāha

Śorośa-tāła:
Hiranyakasipu, Vyātra, Rāvan, Kumbhakarna, Namuci, Niśumbha, Mahiśāsur, Rakta-vīj

Apart from the overall proportions mentioned above, the Tāla-Māṇa was also used to measure each-and-every part of the body. Regarding this, various texts have provided with various calculations though the total measurement has always remained the same. For example, we can have a look at the following chart, describing the further divisions prescribed for an iconography of Uttama-dasa-tāla.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Šiliparatna</th>
<th>Karanāgama</th>
<th>Kamikāgama</th>
<th>Vaikhānasāgama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angula</td>
<td>yava</td>
<td>angula</td>
<td>yava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uṣṇīṣa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uṣṇiṣa to Keśānta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keśānta to Aksīṣūtra</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aksīṣūtra to nose</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose to chin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin to throat</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hikkāsūtra to breast-end</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 Lokpāla, meaning the guardian of the world (both in Sanskrit and Pāli), has different uses depending on different contexts. In Hinduism, it refers to the Guardians of the four Directions. But, in Buddhism, it refers to the four Heavenly Kings, and to other protector spirits, whereas the Guardians of the Directions are referred to as the Dīkṣapāla.

23 According to the Hindu mythology, Kṣetrapāla was originally a deity of the farmland, particularly in south India. Over a period, it became a common name applied to deities associated with a piece or parcel of land, or a particular region (i.e., Kṣetra in Sanskrit). His temples are generally constructed on the northeastern corner of temples devoted to Śiva, and he is worshipped prior to each ritual to ensure the desired favour.

24 see ch LXVI of Manasara Series, vol II, pp 84-85

25 Mātrkās are a group of seven Hindu goddesses who are always depicted together; and hence are called Saptamātrkās (seven mothers): Brāhmaṇī, Vaiṣṇavī, Mahēśvarī, Indrāṇī, Kaumārī, Varāhī and Cāmūndā or Narasīmhit.

26 Jyeṣṭha (The Eldest) is the 18th nakṣatra or lunar mansion in Vedic astrology. Its symbol is a circular amulet, umbrella, or earring, and it is associated with Indra, chief of the gods. However, the lord of Jyeṣṭha is Budh (Mercury).

27 see ch LXV of Manasara Series, vol II, p 84

Apart from all these, there are more intricacies regarding the nose, eyes, ears etc – applicable for each of the Tāla-images. For further details, one may refer to the epical work of T A Gopinatha Rao and the masterly depiction by Abanindranath Thakur.

On the other hand, measuring the plumb lines was another important aspect for depicting the iconographies that we are discussing about; and for this, usually, six sūtras (threads) were used. In case of the seated figures, like the Tārā from Kanheri or the Loknāth from Tongibari, those sūtras were suspended as far as the pātha (pedestal). However, in a figure seated in yogāsan (crossed legs) like the Tārā-image mentioned above (see fig 3), the distance between the two knees becomes equal to half the total Māna of the corresponding standing figure.

**Ākṛti and Prakṛti:**

Ākṛti = shape
Prakṛti = the character of appearance.

We have already come to know that the ancient Indian tradition has always put much emphasis on environmental ethics and hence they have always maintained a close proximity with nature and natural elements. As a result, when they thought about ideal references for the ākṛti and prakṛti of...
A list of such references is given below, though in certain cases other variations are also available.

### Fig 4. The face of Sthircakra Marījuśrī (left) and the left shoulder of Loknāth (right)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body part</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>mukham bartulākāram kukkūlāndakṛtīḥ</td>
<td>Round like an egg (see fig 4a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forehead</td>
<td>lalāṇam dhanuṣākāram</td>
<td>Bent like a bow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye brows</td>
<td>nimvapatrākṛtīḥ dhanuṣākṛtīrva</td>
<td>Like neem-leaf or a bow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>matsyākṛti</td>
<td>Like a fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ears</td>
<td>grantha-lakār-vat</td>
<td>Like the Sāṃskṛt alphabet ‘La’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose and nose-</td>
<td>tulapuspākṛtīnasāputam nispaṇvabija</td>
<td>Nose like Sesame flower (<em>sesamum indicum</em>) and the petals like the seeds of a kidney bean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lips</td>
<td>adharam bimbaphalām</td>
<td>Like Telākuça (<em>ivy gourd</em>) (fruit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin</td>
<td>cibukam āmrabījam</td>
<td>Like a mango seed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
<td>kanṭham sankha samājutam</td>
<td>Like the top part of a conch shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>gomukhākāram</td>
<td>Like the head of a cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulders</td>
<td>gajatundakṛtīḥ</td>
<td>Like the head of an elephant (see fig 4b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-arms</td>
<td>kārtkākṛtīḥ</td>
<td>Like the trunk of an elephant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-arms</td>
<td>bālakadalikāṇḍam</td>
<td>Like a young banana tree (trunk)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 see BM. pp 9-25  
33 *Sesame (Sesamum indicum)* is a flowering plant in the genus *Sesamum*. Numerous wild relatives occur in Africa and a smaller number in India. The flowers are yellow, though they can vary in colour with some being blue or purple.  
34 The *Ivy Gourd (Coccinia grandis)*, also called *toruli* in Bengali and *bimba* or *bimbi* in Sanskrit, is a tropical vine.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body part</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fingers</td>
<td><em>simbipalam</em></td>
<td>Like a kidney bean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thighs</td>
<td><em>kadalikandam</em></td>
<td>Like a banana tree (trunk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>malsyaakrti</em></td>
<td>Like a pregnant fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knees</td>
<td><em>karkaajakrti</em></td>
<td>Like the back of a crab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palms and feet</td>
<td><em>karapallabam</em></td>
<td>Like a lotus or a leaf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these features have been religiously portrayed in the divine images of the Pai-Sen era – both on stone and wood. So, if we take a close look on the few specimens of wooden idols that are available, the similarities could be clearly identified.

**Bhāv and Bhaṅgi:**

Bhāv = gesture  
Bhaṅgi = posture

BHĀV: The classical Indian sculpture has come up with a series of gestures, portrayed through various iconographies – either in a standing, sitting or reclining position – along with several variations in each of them. For example, a deity can sit either with both the legs hanging, or one leg folded or both the legs folded and so on. Similarly, standing figures may keep their balance on both the legs or shift slightly on any one of them. However, reclining figures of Viṣṇu and Buddha are quite typical with one arm beneath their head, whereas other variations are also available.

But, unfortunately, the available specimens of wooden idol are so few in number that one would hardly get much variation in the postures manifested in them:

**Standing**  
- Evenly balanced: Viṣṇu from Krishnapur, Viṣṇu from Dhamrai
- Balanced on one side: Sthūracakra Marjuśri

**Sitting**  
- Evenly balanced: Tārā from Kanheri, Viṣṇu-on-Gurū from Goda (see fig 5b)
- Balanced on one side: Gurū from Raghurampur (see fig 5a)
- Slightly off the balance: Loknāth from Tongibari

However, it could easily be surmised that the actual scenario was not like this. Once, there was no scarcity of wooden sculptures showing all sorts of possible versatility in terms of portraying various postures, just like their stone counterparts. Unfortunately, perishability of the medium – as we all know – didn’t permit us to have a fuller view of those multiple accomplishments.

In most of the cases, these deities carry various attributes like weapons, flowers (especially lotus), musical instruments etc; though occasionally, they also have empty hands showing different mudrās. However, the wooden idols of Bengal – due to the scarcity of specimens – provide us with a very few examples. Most of them do not have their limbs intact and

---

35 A mudrā is a symbolic and spiritual gesture in the iconography, as well as the spiritual practices, of the Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. Some of them involve the entire body, but most are performed with the hands and fingers. 108 mudrās are used in the Tantrik rituals.
hence we would have to depend much on our assumption, based on the stone-sculptures of the same epoch.

![fig 5. Details of sitting posture: Garur from Raghurampur (left) and Viṣṇu-on-Garur from Goda (right)](image)

The most common but significant of them is the gesture of Lord Viṣṇu with four attributes in all his four hands – Saṅkha-Cakra-Gadā-Padma. This was perfectly portrayed in the fragile (now perished) specimen from Krīṣnapur, where only the Gadā and Cakra are distinctly visible in his upper arms. A similar rendering can be seen in the image of Yaśo Mādhav of Dhamrai as well – though the existing version of the icon shows the lower palms in Abhay-mudrā with Saṅkha and Padma painted on them.

The Tārā image from Kanheri shows a meditative gesture with both the hands presumably on her lap and the palms kept one above the other like a yogi. On the other hand, the broken right hand of Loknāth suggests that it was the Abhay-mudrā that was there when intact. A somewhat similar assumption can be made about the broken hands of the Viṣṇu-image from Goda. It seems that originally he was portraying the famous Varābhay-mudrā, a very common gesture of the Hindu deities.

The Sthīrcakra Manjuśrī from Rampal is the only specimen that shows both the hands in a clear and prominent bhāv. Here the lord is holding both the attributes quite delicately with soft bents of his fingers – a sword in the right hand and the end of his dress in the other. The palm of the upraised right hand is bent down towards the back (see fig 6a) while the one of the hanging left hand is a rising upwards (see fig 6b). This typical stylization can be seen in many stone-sculptures of Indian origin, wherever the artist has intended to show a feminine sophistication.

![fig 6. Details of the right and left hand of Sthīrcakra Manjuśrī](image)

In this connection, an unique example of a classic gesture is the probable namaskar-mudrā of the Garur-image from Raghurampur. However, the broken forearms have prevented us to have a look at the actual stylization, but even today, almost each-and-every image of Garur is made by keeping this typical posture in mind. Hence, as a whole, we can infer that the wooden idols of the
Pal-Sen period have followed the same schooling – in terms of Bhāv – similar to their contemporary counterparts in stone.

**Bhāṅgi:** Depending on the number and character of bhaṅga – the bhaṅgi of a body can be of four variations, which have been elaborately manifested in the classical tradition of Indian sculpture: Samabhāṅga or Samapād, Ābhāṅga, Tribhāṅga and Atibhāṅga (see fig 7).

**Samabhāṅga:** It’s the equal distribution of the body limbs on a central plumb-line, whether standing or sitting. In this posture, an image is shown as putting both the feet on the ground (or pedestal) with its weight balanced equally. The Yaśo Mādhav of Dhamrai and the Viṣṇu from Krisnapur, both have been portrayed in this posture.

**Ābhāṅga:** It signifies something like ‘off-center’; an iconographic term for a slightly angular standing or sitting position. In this posture, the weight happens to be more on one foot or hip with a slight movement or deflection away from the centre. The Loknāth from Tongibari, for example, could be found seated in this posture.

![Fig 7. Chronologically from left: Tribhanga, Atibhanga, Samabhanga, Samabhanga and Ābhanga](http://anilmenon.eom/blog/category/culture/page/2)

**Tribhāṅga:** It’s the triple bend with one hip raised, the torso curved to the opposite side and the head tilted at an angle. In this case, there is an extreme deflection away from the center with a strong hip bend. The Sthirakra Manjuśrī is a perfect example of this bhaṅga or bhaṅgi.

**Atibhāṅga:** It’s a great bend with the torso diagonally inclined and the knees bent. Here, the head, torso and limbs move in directions opposed to each other. Though we have not yet found any specimen of wooden idol, portraying this complex posture.

**Painting the sculpture:**

“One has to remember, furthermore, that most Indian reliefs (like the Greek), says Heinrich Zimmer, “originally carried some colouring. The surface of the stone was washed with a thin layer of plaster, to which shades and colors of every kind could be applied. Such coloured reliefs occupied an intermediate position between fresco and freestanding sculpture, and there were all kinds of
transitional forms.36 Hence, it could be surmised that the wooden counterparts of that era also had some paint on them; though their present condition do not have any sign left on their surfaces. But, presumably the details of the eyes, nose etc and other ornamentations would have been illuminated in order to give those sculptures – mostly divine in nature – a super-real appearance.

In all the ancient Indian Silpa Sàstras, every possible detail regarding the iconography, tāla-māna, ākṛti and prakṛti, bhāv and bhāgī etc have been described both extensively and intensively. But, at the same time, it has also been said that all these guidelines are only for the divine images meant for worship;37 whereas an artist is free to make the other images following his independent will. So, in the light of this insight, we can easily recognize and understand the characteristic features of the wooden idols, made in this era.

THE AGE OF TRANSFORMATION

We have already come to know that the period between 13 and 15 cent AD was an age of transformation in the life and culture of the Bengali folk. As a whole, it was a period of political, as well as cultural turmoil.

The state power was transferred and the Royal religion was changed; while the new rulers were against all sorts of image-worship and didn’t encourage any such activity. Hence, the previous patronization of 500 years was stopped suddenly and immediately; and the making of wooden idols was left into a deep trouble. The new royal capital preferred designal motifs and patterns as the subject of carving; and the artists of the royal atelier – who used to carve the divine images earlier – now devoted themselves in making royal furniture and accessories. Their meticulous skill, which has remained as a trademark of the Pal-Sen school, now got employed in carving those intricate designs.

During this time, worshipping of idols became almost a secret activity and there were no more large capitals left elsewhere to commission quality works of a sizable scale. So, making of big effigies on permanent materials like stone and wood became difficult as it cost a lot of money and time. Instead, quick use of clay and natural pigment became the best possible alternative for the Bengali folk. But, it shouldn’t be assumed that there was a complete break in the tradition of making wooden idols in Bengal. Though lack of any high-end patronization affected the volume, scale and degree of production – but nothing could stop the woodcarvers of Bengal from carrying forward this age-old legacy. Obviously, there was still a demand for the divine images – if not in stone, then in clay or wood.

In these renewed circumstances, the royal patrons were replaced by local chieftains and Zamindars; who couldn’t afford stone and hence opted for a semi-permanent material like wood. At the same time, the common people also started to take collective initiatives in order to install images of their gods or goddesses – and that too in wood.

In the mean time, the unavailability of the royal artists – who were skilled and experienced in making the wooden idols – created a much practical problem. Besides this, they were quite expensive and hence unaffordable for the new patrons of Bengal art.

On the other hand – instead of those royal artists – the local chieftains and Zamindars, along with the common folk, were much closer to the rural artisans, who were much easier to approach. Though inexperienced, but it was those local artisans that were preferred this time for the new commissions; and they were invited to try their hands in this art. However, for the first time, those village artisans got an opportunity to work and explore their own aesthetic perception – which they have developed through various collective practices – on a semi-permanent material like wood.

So, here comes a very interesting episode of Bengal art. Because, in making of those divine images, the patrons were still in demand for the iconographies derived from the hieratic pantheon. But, this time, the folk-tribal artisans were commissioned or assigned to manifest them and that also on wood. As a result, there evolved a scope for both the hieratic and the folk-tribal

37 see BM, p 29
tradition to get in touch with each other and begin a dialogue, interaction, exchange and synthesis — that continued for the next few centuries.

The newly appointed artisans didn’t have any idea and experience about the hieratic idioms. They didn’t have any formal training and hence unaware of the pan-Indian aesthetics and its intricacies. Their senses of Tāla-Māna, Ākṛti and Prakṛti or Bhāv and Bhangi were completely different from that of the Pal-Sen tradition. Though theoretical descriptions from the ancient scriptures were offered to them, but they hardly had any clue how to illustrate those textual ideas in any visual form. As a result, there happened to be a mix and match between the hieratic and folk-tribal aesthetics, which opened up the possibility of a third front on the visual culture of Bengal.

The wooden idols made in this era, hence, doesn’t provide with any clear direction of aesthetic character; as it was the age of synthesis and transformation. Both in terms of structural form and ornamental detailing, they seem to be somewhat in a confused state. And inevitably, the results came out in a mixed bag — sometimes soothing and sometimes odd; which we can see in the Balarām of Boro, Kṛṣṇa of Krisnapur/Kestapur or Siṁhabāhīnī of Nijabalia. (Here, unfortunately, we miss the actual appearance of the once-wooden image of Tripurasundari of Boral, installed in c 13 cent AD.) However, in terms of overall appearance, the former is visually raw and inarguably folk-tribal, while the soothing look of the later two is more close to the hieratic idiom.

Sculpturally, the fourteen-armed Balarām (assignable to c 14-15 cent) is far away from the two-armed Kṛṣṇa (c 15 cent) or the six-armed Siṁhabāhīnī (dated c 15-16 cent), as their laws of measurement hardly match with each other. So, through these specimens, it’s quite impossible to infer any common phenomenon or characteristics of a particular school of technique and thought. But, one can at least surmise that there is a hint of gradual development, where the 14-15 cent effort has got matured and resulted into a comparatively sophisticated venture of the 15-16 cent.

In this regard, we must say that the earliest wooden idol of Lord Kṛṣṇa made in Bengal, from Krisnapur/Kestapur, reveals a somewhat pre-ambience of the aesthetic direction that would signify the visual splendour of the forthcoming centuries.

The rural artisans were mainly habituated in doing modeling works on clay (baked or not), with a little knowledge of shallow carving, which they seldom tried on wood and stone. So, they were never skilled enough to carve out the intrinsic and meticulous details of the hieratic iconographies — which were typical to the Pal-Sen era.

As a result, in the new wooden idols, carving became inevitably shallower and flat; apparently close to the contemporary form of a modeled sculpture. Hence, none of the available specimens of this epoch bears the splendorous carving details of the earlier period.

fig 8. Details of the faces: Balarām of Boro (left) and Siṁhabāhīnī of Nijabalia (right)
Apart from this, the rural artisans were always habituated to use paint (natural pigment) on their clay-sculptures (baked or not); and hence, they were more comfortable with the use of paint-brushes rather than chisel and mallet. So, for their own convenience – as they couldn’t match the intricate carvings of the Pal-Sen sculptures – paint was introduced for depicting the facial features and other details on the very surface of simplistic carving. However, it is true that the ornaments, the crown (if not ‘kriṣṭa-mukuta’) and the basic dress-materials were still being carved on the wooden surface; but this time the minute carvings were replaced by the painted designs.

So far, the wooden idols of Pal-Sen period – following the pan-Indian ideology – used to have large half-closed eyes (matsyākṛti), depicting a gesture of self-meditation.

But now, for the first time, the deities started to look up and straight towards the devotee. Though the shape had varied from one deity to the other, but – for the first time – we came to see the full eye-ball of the supreme (see fig 8). Even the Vedic deities like Balarām (Sanākṛṣṇa) and Simhabāhini lifted up their upper eye-lid and looked at their own worshippers.

The phenomenon that we are discussing about was quite familiar in the folk-tribal tradition of making divine images; whereas it was something exclusive in the hieratic form of the same. Thus, what was once private and restricted within and was for some chosen few – now became open and public, both materially and aesthetically. And there is no doubt about the fact that it was a major step towards the democratization of Hindu religious practices in Bengal – based on the Brahmanic hegemony.

It was towards the end of this era, when the iconography of Viṣṇu was gradually replaced by one of his incarnations Kṛṣṇa; and we have already come to know about the specimen of Krisnapur/Kestapur in this regard. The four-armed samabhāṅga iconography was pushed back to offer space for the two-armed tribhāṅga-murārī (see fig 9); Samkha-Cakra-Gadā-Padma was replaced by a single Vamsī or Muraṇī (flute).

Along with the ‘Tribhāṅga-murārī’ posture, the mudrā or gesture of playing flute – known as ‘Vamśīdhar’ or ‘Muralīdhar’ – also became visible in the effigies of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Here, both the hands had to play their role, with various characters and stylizations, in order to hold the flute properly for playing (see fig 10). And hence, these two names of the gesture are often referred to mention about the Lord himself.
In the early 16 cent, as we have already come to know that the ‘Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava’ movement lead by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and carried forward by Nityananda and other associates did bring a renaissance that resulted in multiple perspectives in the life and culture of the Bengali folk. None of the areas of aesthetic excellence was left untouched by the glory of this great movement. Following this, the art of making wooden idols – especially in West Bengal – started to grow in profusion, which has been well-advocated by the Bengali literature of that period as well.

In the mean time, the Śakti-cult was grounded here with a strong root, especially in the ‘Rāṭhi’ region of Birbhum, Bankura, Bardhaman, Hooghly, Howrah and Nadia. And it flourished – in the early 16 cent – with the introduction of Kāli-image by Krisnananda Agambagis. Besides this, Gauḍīya Vaisnavism also came up in an almost equal force and vigour. As a result, a continuous conflict and convergence between the ‘Śākta’s and the ‘Vaiṣṇava’s became a regular occurrence in Bengal, which was extremely useful in producing numerous pieces of wooden idols all over this region. And from this point of departure, the very tradition (the art of woodcarving as a whole) that we are discussing about went on a full swing that continued at least for the next three centuries.
THE NEW SCHOOL OF BENGAL AESTHETICS

We have already seen how the art of making wooden idols - in 16-cent Bengal - was widely influenced by the Chaitanya-phenomena, which took a major role in determining the future course of aesthetic progress as well. Besides the dual images of Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā and Nītai-Gaur, images of Mahāprabhu himself and his other associates like Advaita Prabhu, Srivas Goswami, Gadadhar Goswami, Abhiram Thakur, Uddharan Dutta, Yaban Haridas and Nityananda's son Veerbhadra were started to be installed in different corners. At the same time, Jagannāth-triad also became extremely popular; while, on the other hand, the prevailing traditions of making various folk-tribal and other hieratic wooden idols were still in a full flow.

The ‘Gaṛuṇya Vaishnava’ movement resulted in many specific and significant dynamics, which resulted in a new direction of aesthetic quest and gratification - especially in terms of the divine images in wood. Synthesis between the folk and the hieratic that started in the 13 cent and continued through the next two hundred odd years, finally resulted in something purely Bengali in character, typical to this very soil.

In this connection, breaking through the shackles of pan-Indian aesthetics was the most adventurous step taken by the Bengali folk. They clearly negated the classical hegemony of Indian sculpture in every possible aspect - iconography, material, technique and visual details - and introduced a new aesthetic language. And this very legacy finally resulted in the most important contribution of the Bengali intelligentsia - i.e., introduction of the tenth Rāsa by Roop Goswami, known as ‘Bhakti’ (devotion). Undoubtedly, this Bhakti Rasa was the most important aspect of the newly introduced school of Bengal aesthetics.

Uniqueness in iconography:

The Buddhist deities were stopped being carved long back in the 13-cent AD; at least large-scale images like Loknāth or Sthirakara Marījuṇāś were not being made.

On the other hand, we have also seen how Kṛṣṇa gradually replaced the popular icon of Lord Viṣṇu – Git Govinda replaced the Bhāgavat and Tribhanga replaced Samabhanga.

Besides this, deifying of the mortal humans - like Nītai-Gaur and their associates - was a major step towards the democratization of religious practices in Bengal; though this very process was started long back, in 13 cent, through the opening of eyes of the divine images.

However, in this regard, the most important achievement was the establishment of Rādhā - so far considered merely a human lover of the lord - beside Kṛṣṇa. This was for the first time that the worshipper was placed beside the worshipped. Both as a concept and content, it was really something unique in nature.

According to legends, it was Jahnaba Devi (wife of Nityananda), who took this historic step and sent an image of Rādhā to Vrindavan in order to be installed beside the lord. Form then on, it has almost become a customary that Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā would be worshipped together as a conjugal iconography. This very icon should also be considered as one of the important contributions of Bengal aesthetics.

Apart from the Vaishnava icons, deities from the Sakti-cult and other folk-tribal beliefs also started to be manifested in wood. And in this way, the 16 cent introduced completely a new taste and culture of iconographic excellence, which was far away from the Pal-Sen legacy.

Material perspective:

Popularization of Neem-wood, to be used in making divine-images, was another important step taken by the artists from Bengal. Because, earlier, a list of twenty-nine varieties of wood was considered to be suitable and have been prescribed for this purpose; while Neem was excluded.

38 see Indian Aesthetics: Music and Dance, p 7
from that list for some unknown reason. But, now it has become a rule that wooden idols wood be made of this wood only.

Though other woods like Sandal etc are also used in this regard – especially in the other parts of the country – but in Bengal the story is different. And the use of Neem-wood in making divine images should also be considered as another important offering of Bengal art.

Tāla-Māna – the measurements:

Indian mythology says that the proportion of divine image should vary in different ages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satya Yug</td>
<td>Daśa-tāla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tretā Yug</td>
<td>Nava-tāla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvāpara Yug</td>
<td>Aṣṭa-tāla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kali Yug</td>
<td>Sapta-tāla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the classification above, 16-cent AD falls under the last era, i.e., Kālī Yug; and hence divine images of this period were supposed to be manifested in Sapta-tāla. It means, the length of the entire figure should be seven times of the length of the head – which almost resembles a naturalistic proportion of a human physique.

Presumably, the artisans of Bengal were well aware of this instruction or else their knowledge on this matter – through a synthesis between the hieratic and the folk-tribal idiom – somehow or other, reached here to manifest something similar. Thus, the pan-Indian concept of Tāla-Māna was kept aside by them and a new concept was introduced, where the wooden idols were started to be manifested in a close proximity with the human-proportions.

Here, all the limbs and other features were very close to human character only with a little exception in the form of the head, which used to be kept a little bigger. Even today, artisans like Ksirode Baran Debnath of Nabadvip follow a similar idiom in order to make wooden idols. This very ratio has been well illustrated in the sculpture of Gauranga at Nabadvip and Katwa, Ekla Nitai of Nabadvip (see fig 11), Nitai-Gaur of Śripāṭ Atisara and Ambika-Kalna, Rādhāvallabhjīvo of Jainagar, Citteśvarit of Cossipore and Kāḷī of Sardar-pāṛā.

But, on the other hand, some other images are also found that have a different logic of proportion. As Utpal Das, a contemporary but traditional artisan from Ekchakra has told us that the entire length is divided into four equal blocks. Out of these, the first one goes for the head, the second part ends near the naval, and the rest are for the hips and legs. Some of the 16-cent wooden idols also advocate a somewhat similar kind of proportion: Gaṅgopād of Jashora and Dvipa, Gauranga of Srikhanda and Tamluk, Nitai-Gaur of Madanpur, Madangopāl of Bhaita, Gopināth of Gopaldaspur and the famous Rādhāmādhav of Raṭh Bengal.

39 see Vedantateertha, Girish Chandra. (BS 1329), Prācin Śilpa Paricay. Rajshahi. p 146
40 The Satya Yug, according to Indian Mythology, was the ‘Age of Truth’, when mankind was governed by gods, and every work was close to the purest ideal. The average lifespan of this era was 100,000 years. The Dharmā bull, which symbolizes morality, stood on all four legs during this period. Later in the Tretā Yug, it would become three, and two in Dvāpar. Currently, in the immoral age of Kali, it stands on one leg.
41 Tretā Yug is the second age of mankind that had witnessed famous events such as Lord Viṣṇu’s fifth, sixth and seventh incarnations as Vāman, Parāśurām and Rām Cannā respectively.
42 Dvāpar Yug is the third age, which ended at the moment when Kṛṣṇa returned to his eternal abode of Vaiṣṇava. There are only two pillars of religion left in this era: Kāma and Aṛiha. Lord Viṣṇu assumes the yellow color and the Vedas are categorized into four parts that is Ṛg, Sāma, Yajur and Atharva. During these times, the Brahmins are knowledgeable of two, sometimes three Vedas, but rarely have studied all the four thoroughly.
43 The ‘Kali’ of Kali Yug means strife, discord, quarrel, or contention. During this era – referred to as the ‘Dark Age’ – human civilization degenerates spiritually and people are removed far away from God. This era is associated with the apocalyptic demon Kali, not to be mistaken with the goddess Kālī.

The duration and timing of this ‘age of vice’ is quite controversial. According to one opinion, Kali Yug began at midnight on 18 February 3102 BC in the Julian calendar, or 23 January 3102 BC in the Gregorian calendar. This date is also considered by many Hindus to be the day that Kṛṣṇa returned to Vaiṣṇava. Most of the scholars believe that earth is currently in Kali Yug; while there are others, who believe it to be the beginning of Dvāpar. Many others have stated that Kali Yug is now over. However, this Yug is sometimes thought to last 432,000 years although other durations have also been proposed.
In any case, the 16-cent wooden idols have successfully introduced a new concept of Tāla-Māna in the scenario of Bengal and thus Indian Art. Further research and study on this subject could enlighten us with some added perspectives.

**Bhāv and Bhaṅgi:**

The new school of Bengal sculpture has brought dramatic changes in depicting the Bhāv and Bhaṅgi of the wooden idols. Apart from the Samabhanga, Abhanga, and the extensive use of Tribhanga postures, various features of the contemporary dance form – defined as ‘Gaurīya Nrtya’ by Dr Mahua Majumdar\(^4\) – have often been manifested in those divine images. Especially, the Vaiṣṇava effigies of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and his associates have been depicted in a mood of being engrossed in dancing and chanting Kirtan. And this came up as nothing but another dynamics of the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇav movement.

Chaitanyadev was known to be a good dancer and he has performed many a times in various Pālā-gān – a folk form of rural Bengali theatre – like ‘Rukmini-haran’, ‘Kṛṣṇa-lla’ etc. He was also skilled in Lāthi-dance and Lagur-dance. Moreover, after taking religious mendicancy often he used to dance in trance, while chanting the name of his lord Hari.\(^5\) And hence, it was quite obvious that while imagining the iconography of those Vaiṣṇav images, various accents of the contemporary dance form would be reflected very easily.

---


\(^5\) see *ibid.*, pp 33-34
For example, we can consider the 'Ucchṛta Bāhū' Bhav (see fig 12), a very common gesture of Gaurīya Nṛtya, where we can find both the arms are held up sideways parallel to the shoulder while the forearms are lifted high and straight with outstretched palms. This very form could be found – though in quite an abstract form – in the ageless traditional 'Maṅgala Cihṛā' of Bengal. On the other hand, a terracotta figurine of Lord Viśnū – attributed to the late-Gupta epoch and hailed from Bangladesh – also shows the upper arms of the lord in 'Ucchṛta Bāhū' posture (presently kept in Asutosh Museum, Kolkata). Later on, we come to discover, Gauranga Mahāprabhu being depicted with the same Bhav not only in the wooden idols, but also in contemporary pata-paintings, clay and wooden dolls etc.

Apart from this, several other Bhavas have equally been portrayed in the wooden idols of this era; where the variations are mainly based on different steps and placements of the feet. This style of standing, in Gaurīya Nṛtya is known as Sthānak, which – according to 'Ṣaṅgīt Ṛāmakṛṣṇā' – is of 33 variations. Among those variations, at least six could be identified in the wooden idols of this epoch; like – Samapāḍ, Svastik, Ekaṇjaṅgata, Parābhītta, Vaiṣṇav and Vaitān.

**Samapāḍ:** When both the feet are kept almost parallel and close to each other and the body is balanced equally on both of them, then its called Samapāḍ Sthānak (see fig 13a). The image of Advaita Prabhu of Advaita Sita Devi Temple, PS Nabadvip, Nadia (see pl 37) – for example – is standing in this posture.

**Svastik:** When one of the feet is kept across the back of other and the body is balanced on the front one, then it forms the Svastik Sthānak (see fig 13b). For instance, the image of Nityananda kept at the State Archaeological Museum, Kolkata, is portraying this Bhāv.
Ekajānugata: When the body is balanced on one feet and the other is placed a little back, then it becomes the Ekajānugata Sthānāk (see fig 14a). We could find this gesture in the Rādhikā of Ketoara Banamalipur, PS Jainagar, South 24 Parganas.

Parābṛttā: When the body is balanced once again on one feet and the other is kept aside loosely, with a slight bent forward from the knee, then it forms the Parābṛttā Sthānāk (see fig 14b). For example, the image of Nityananda at Manmohan Thakurbari, Veerchandrapur, PS Mayuresvar/Moudesvar, Birbhum, is depicting this Bhāv.

Vaiśnāv: When both the feet is turned and out-stretched sideways and one of them is placed at the back – while the body is equally balanced on both of them – then it forms the Vaiśnāv Sthānāk (see fig 15a). For instance, the image of Ekla Nitai of Gauranga-pārā, PS Katwa, Bardhaman, portrays this very gesture.

Vaitān: When the body is balanced on one feet and the other is kept loosely on the toe, with a slight bent from the knee, and placed just in front of the other one, then it’s called the Vaitān Sthānāk (see fig 15b). This Sthānāk has been depicted by, for example, the Nitai-Gaur image (the bigger pair) of Jajigram, PS Katwa, Bardhaman.
Now, if we concentrate on the various Bharigis, i.e., the postures, portrayed by the wooden idols of post-Chaitanya era, we would find that as usual, the mudras of holding the attributes – along with the extremely common Vara and Abhay – was a common phenomenon visible in the hands of these wooden idols. The iconography of goddess Kali, for example, has all of them together – her right hands show Vara and Abhay, while the left ones depict firm grip for holding the attributes like sword and head of Asur (see fig 16). However, there are many other deities, who portray any one or two of them.

Usually, Vara and Abhay are portrayed by the deity with both the hands; it could either be a combination of right and left or vice versa. Among many others, for example, mention may be made of the wooden idols of Jaycandi (see pl 39) and Garcandi of Jhikira, PS Amta, Howrah, showing this very mudra. However, usually, the Sakti deities show Vara in the right and Abhay with the left, while the Vaisnava icons do just the reverse (see fig 17).

Besides these, there are many other Bharigis described by Gaurīya Nṛṣya, which were common and well known to the Bengali folk and at the same time whose intricacies have also been described in various Śilpa Śastras. Not only the pan-Indian texts like Nāṭya Śāstra, Mātāṅga Brhaddeśi and Sangīt Ratnākara – various texts written by the Vaisnava scholars of Bengal also bear adequate descriptions about all the possible detailing of this classical dance form, which has become obsolete in the recent past. Therefore, it was obvious that the same mudras would be manifested in the wooden idols of post-Chaitanya era as a natural and spontaneous influence.

---

fig 16. Brahmamayi Kali of Majilpur, PS Jainagar, South 24 Parganas

fig 17. Vara and Abhay mudrā:
(from left) Garcandi of Jhikira, PS Amta, Howrah, and Nitai of Gopalgunj, PS Visnupur, Bankura

46 see ibid, pp 41-42
In ‘Gaunya Nrtya’, Hasta (i.e., hand-gestures) are of three kinds – Samyuta, Asamyuta and Nṛtta. Samyuta Hasta is the acting of one hand, Asamyuta is the use of both the hands and Nṛtta describes various indescribable movements of the hands while dancing. According to ‘Sr̥hasta Muktavatī’ written by Pandit Subhankar, Samyuta Hasta has 30 variations. At least seven of them could easily be identified in the wooden idols that we are discussing about; like Patāk, Padmakoṣ, Tripatāk, Muṣṭi, Saṅgandaś, Hamsapakṣa and Kṛṣṇaśār Mukh.

**fig 18.** Patāk, Padmakoṣ and Tripatāk Hasta

**Patāk:** When all the fingers of a hand are jointly stretched together and the thumb is slightly bent and attached therewith, then it becomes Patāk Hasta (see fig 18a). Apart from others, it also means meditation, joy, boon, prayer, respect etc. The images of Gauraṅga Mahāparbha at Gauraṅga-bāṛī and Kāṅgāl Gauraṅga-bāṛī, both in Katwa, Bardhaman, portray this Hasta-mudrā.

**Padmakoṣ:** When all the fingers are raised vertically towards the palm-top, with almost equal gaps from each other, then it’s called Padmakoṣ Hasta (see fig 18b). Apart from other meanings, it also signifies lotus-bud, Lily-bud, lotus-calyx, umbrella, religious water-pot, worship etc. For example, the Nitai-Gaur image of Mahishadal Rājbāṛī, East Medinipur, and Sitha Devi of Advaita-Sitha Devi Temple of Nabadvip, Nadia, depicts this mudrā.

**Tripatāk:** When the ring finger of a Patāk Hasta bends forward, then it becomes Tripatāk Hasta (see fig 18c). Apart from others, it also means welcome, greeting, entry, applying Tilak on forehead etc. For instance, the Gauranga-image of Nimtala, PS Visnupur, Bankura, depicts this mudrā in both of his hands.

**fig 19.** Muṣṭi, Saṅgandaś Harṁapakṣa and Kṛṣṇaśār Mukh Hasta

**Muṣṭi:** When all the four fingers are rolled in, and fixed on the palm with the thumb, it becomes Muṣṭi (see fig 19a). Apart from other meanings, it also denotes hermit, religious water pot etc. Among others, the left upper hand of Siddheśvarī Kāḍī of Bangalpur, PS Bagnān, Howrah, also portrays this Hasta-mudrā.

**Saṅgandaś:** When the pointer bends down to touch the thumb and the others remain straight, it forms Saṅgandaś Hasta (see fig 19b). Besides other meanings, it also depicts plucking of flowers, holding grass, new leaf, truth etc. The Nityananda image (bigger one) at the Rādhā-Śyam Temple, PS Visnupur, Bankura – for example – manifests this mudrā.

**Harṁapakṣa:** When the little finger remains straight apart, the other three are stuck together and the thumb touches the pointer, it forms the Harṁapakṣa Hasta (see fig 19c). It signifies embracing, coronation, sky, nectar, statement, heart etc. The Gauranga-image of Madanpur, PS Kalyani, Nadia displays this Hasta-bhangī.

**Kṛṣṇaśār Mukh:** When the middle and ring finger together touch the thumb, while the pointer and the little finger moves freely and frequently – it becomes the Kṛṣṇaśār Mukh Hasta (see fig 19d). It

---

47 see Gauriṇa Nrtya: Prācīṇ Bāṅglār Śāstrīya Nṛtyadārā. pp 45-46
depicts garland, playing \textit{Vina}\textsuperscript{48}, meditation etc. Among others, the Gauranga-image (bigger one) at the \textit{Rādha-Śyam} Temple of Visnupur depicts this \textit{mudrā} with his right hand.

**New style of carving:**

We have already come to know why the meticulous technique of the Pal-Sen wooden idols became extinct after the 13 cent; and how the carving became much flat and shallow. Now, for the next two centuries, the folk-tribal artisans kept on striving to manifest the hieratic iconographies with their limited skill and resources. Sometimes, they came up with some unique specimens like the \textit{Balārām} of Boro and \textit{Sinhabāhini} of Nijabalia, but as a whole, it was an era of synthesis for them.

The ultimate outcome of this synthesis became visible in the second quarter of 16 cent, when the artisans of Bengal – the \textit{Sūtradhārs} – finally discovered a technique of their own. From then on, simple and voluminous carving with humane modulus character became their prominent signature. Along with this, the \textit{"Patal-cēra"} eyes (eyes evenly open and extending the ears), straight and high (sometimes pointed) nose and thin small lips were some of the major features of this new school of sculpture (see fig 20), which gradually affected the other modes of visual expression as well.

In this connection, we must remember that – in comparison to the \textit{Matsyākṛtī} eyes of Pal-Sen aesthetics – the \textit{Patal-cēra} character has emerged as something typical to Bengal only. We can find this unique character also in the other forms of visual expression – like the folk-tribal traditions of \textit{Pāta}-painting, \textit{Sarā}-painting, clay-doll etc.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig20.png}
\caption{Specimens, depicting the \textit{Patal-cēra} eyes and other facial features of the 16 cent School of Bengal Sculpture}
\end{figure}

Previously, the wooden idols were used to be carved along with the dress and other ornaments. Though not as intricate as the Pal-Sen era, but even after the Turk invasion the custom remained the same. But, it was only in the 16 cent that the divine figures were started to be carved nude – and then draped with real clothes, ornaments and other accessories (see fig 21). After regular intervals, these accessories were/are changed according to various occasions.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig21.png}
\caption{Details of Gauranga of Katwa: before (left) and after dressing up (right)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Vina} is a kind of classical Indian plucked instruments with several variations.
However, later on, this newly emerged form of carving came to influence the modeling technique of Bengal sculpture as well. For example, if we take a close look at the traditional form of Goddess Durga, we would see the same form of 16-cent wooden idols manifested on clay (see fig 22). The same modulus physical character, eyes and facial features remind us of a unified form of visual expression that evolved together in that particular era.

![Fig 22](image.jpg)

Painting the sculpture:

It has been surmised that the wooden idols of the Pal-Sen era had some paint on the intricate carving details; though their present condition do not have any sign left on their surfaces. And later on, after the Turk invasion in the early 13 cent, the ornamental details on the idols were carved no more with such intricacies; and paint was applied more meticulously than before for the same.

But the 16 cent renaissance took another step further. Since the figures were started to be carved nude, so it became easier and flat to colour the images. Except the facial features and few lines on the palms and feet, apparently no scope remained over there for showing some painterly skills. But, drawing the eyes – along with the Vaisnav Tilaks on the nose and forehead – was something that needed some technical mastery; since these were supposed to be done with one stroke of the brush, without any rectification. So, only the chief artist of a particular guild use/d to do the same; though, now-a-days, erasing of mistakes and repainting are done quite frequently.

However, while painting those divine images – a combination of yellow, red and black became a general visual signature; though the Krsna-images were painted in Black or Blue, Red and White.

Overall aesthetics:

As a whole, the wooden idols of 16 cent have introduced a new school of Bengal sculpture, devoid of any pan-Indian hegemony. Hence, it marked the introduction of a purely Bengali-idiom – uniformly spread over – with its own aesthetic vision and culture.

To be more specific, it was the democratic outlook and easy approach of the Gauriya Vaisnav movement, which resulted in developing such a simplistic visual approach of the Bengali folk. And eventually, it was that very tradition of making divine images in wood that pioneered this aesthetic movement and opened up a new vista for the other forms of expression. Thus, the simplicity of carving and minimalist painted features of those wooden idols set a trend that was followed extensively and intensively in the next few centuries. Later on, this new school of aesthetics was also reflected in the works of other media like stone, metal, clay, paint etc.
Here, in this very point, one might raise a question that how much and how far free were/are the artisans of Bengal to create these divine images. Because, we all know that in most of the cases, it was obligatory for them to follow some detailed prescriptions regarding both the iconography and the form of the deity – either from the scriptures or from the patrons.

Fortunately, the available specimens do not show anything inferior resulted from such restrictions. Hence, it could be surmised that the prescriptions didn’t impose or indulge in any static imagery; as we can also find several deviations and exceptions in this regard. For example, the Rādhākānta of Gauranga-pāra (Katwa, Bardhaman), a c 18-19 cent depiction of Lord Kṛṣṇa – playing the flute while sitting on the ground – is a very prominent example. This iconography – with a sitting posture almost like a child – is a unique of its kind and could hardly be found anywhere else; and thus reflecting the independent free will of the artist or his mentor.

So, we could presume that the detailed instructions provided by the scriptures or the patrons have served as a guide, not a mere restriction. The creative artist could easily give vent to his imagination in the image’s embellishment. And the resulting detail, increasingly evident through the ages, conveys part of the image’s impact with crystal clarity.

**THE LEGACY AND BEYOND**

The Gaurīya Vaiśāvī movement, led by Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, was carried forward well by the successors and the after effect was quite inevitable. The aesthetic standards of the 16 cent school of Bengal sculpture, as a result of that movement, were being followed by the artisans in making the wooden idols all over Bengal.

Thus, the following centuries witnessed a never before overflow of making divine images in wood; and the effigies of Jagannāth-triad, Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā, Nīlāi-Gaur and the other Vaiśāvī associates were being made in a full swing. On the other hand, the 16-cent Sākta-movement also produced some significant result in the form of goddess Kālī. Moreover, the age-old phenomena of various folk-tribal and other hieratic traditions were, as usual, continuing in various degrees.

As a result, both in terms of quantity as well as variety, the available wooden idols assignable between 17 and 19 cent are numerous. Stylistically, they continued the same legacy that was developed during the 16 cent Renaissance; though in certain occasions, the specimens seem to be aesthetically slack and stylistically repetitive. But, in any case, we can never deny this significant body of works advocating in favour of the aesthetic excellence of Bengal sculpture.

Actually, these three centuries were to celebrate the multiple dynamics of the Bengal school – especially in terms of the wooden idols – the paradigms of which were well-set in the 16 cent. The brilliant synthesis that took place between the hieratic and the folk tribal iconographies was extremely successful in influencing the devotees of all the religious sects; be it Vaiśāvī, Śākta, Śaiva or any other folk-tribal idiom.

As a result, almost everywhere, the basic form and structure – along with the carving techniques – remained the same. The only work left for the artisans were to produce as much as they can, in order to meet up with the high demand from the patrons. And this widely spread phenomena became so overwhelming that even the ancient deities like Candrā, Manasā, Śiv, Jagaddhātṛ, Mahāmāyā, Rām Candra triad with Hanumān etc – those who were used to be made in other mediums (even stone, sometimes) – also started to be depicted on wood. And this mass-hysteria for making and installing divine images in wood continued in a full swing at least up to the 2nd – 3rd decade of the 20 cent.

A close study – as a whole – would easily reveal that the wooden idols of West Bengal are very much localized and folk in character, which is typical to this very soil. One can easily recognize them in comparison to the mythical figures of Assam, religious images and ‘Bhūta’ figures of Karnataka, carved figures in the round from Kerala, statues from Nagaland and the ‘Ghāngi’ images of Rajasthan. Even the divine images of Orissa, which have always maintained a close proximity with that of Bengal, can never be mixed up. The difference could be identified either in terms of iconography or style, or even both; but, in any case, Bengal has always maintained its dynamism, as well as distinctiveness.
But, in this regard, we have to keep in mind that these wooden idols were made from a special inspiration, in a special atmosphere and for a special purpose. So – inside any public gallery or museum or any private collection – often it become difficult for us to understand or realize their taste in full. In this connection, we can recollect a significant observation by Frederick M Asher, on Indian sculptures, which could equally be applicable for its Bengal counterpart. He says: “Far removed from its original context, isolated, for example, in a museum, no Indian sculpture can retain its full impact. The artist was well aware of the setting in which his image would be placed and worked to evolve a figure that would most poignantly convey the proper meaning to a devotee.”

So, in order to have a better perception, one needs to visit the places in person, where most of these wooden idols are being worshipped with their full glory and grandeur. Because that is the only way how we can experience the vitality and impact of those sculptures on the mass psyche and lifestyle.

: COMPARISON WITH THE NEAREST TRADITION OF INDIAN ORIGIN – ORISSA :

In the history of making wooden idols in India, the nearest tradition to Bengal with some significant accomplishment could be assigned to Orissa. Undoubtedly, this neighbouring state has succeeded to come up with a very strong and potential language of aesthetic excellence in this regard. And at the same time, their divine images have always maintained a close proximity with Bengal which has already been discussed in ch II, in connection to the iconographic development of Venugopāla Kṛṣṇa and Jagannātha. The same legacy was resurrected in the 16 cent when Chaitanya Mahāprabhu (said to be of Orissan origin) rebuilt the age-old relationship once again in between these two cultural entities.


This long history of cultural exchange has nourished both the traditions of making wooden idols, in various degrees. But, even after that, we must say that the wooden idols of West

Bengal, or Bengal at large, are very much unique in nature. One can easily identify them in comparison to the divine images of Orissa – both in the folk and the hieratic idiom. The difference could be identified either in terms of iconography or style, or even both; but in any case, Bengal has always maintained its dynamism, as well as distinctiveness.

- The earliest reference, as well as specimen of wooden idol of Orissan origin has been assigned to the famous Jagannāth-triad of Puri, installed in c 11 cent AD. Whereas, Bengal has its earliest reference to c 6 cent BC (the sandalwood image of Jivantasvāmī), and its oldest material specimen has been dated to c 9 cent AD (Buddhist Tārā from Kanheri).

- After the installation in c 11 cent AD, the wooden idols of Balarām-Subhadrā-Jagannāth of Puri has been replicated and replaced in a regular interval. Except a brief period of turmoil (c 1568-1575/1590 AD) after the attack by Kalapahar, there has not been any change in this schedule. So, in materialist perspective, the physical age of the present triad is not very old. On the contrary, we have seen that Bengal has a handsome amount of specimens that could be dated around c 9-12 cent AD.

fig 24. A Jagannāth-triad from Orissa with a pillar-like 'Sudarśan' (above) and the specimen from Bahiri, East Medinipur, accompanied by 'Sudarśan' in Jagannāth-form (below)

- Except the tradition of Jagannāth-triad of Puri and its various derivations, Orissa doesn't have much specimens of antiquity to be compared with Bengal. Most of its available specimens could hardly be pushed back to c 18-19 cent AD. On the other hand, it's true that

50 see ch II, Jagannāth Temple of Bahiri
most of the wooden idols of Bengal origin could also be dated around 17-19 cent AD, but there is no dearth of specimens assignable between 9 and 16 cent AD.

- **The Jagannath-triad:**

The Jagannath-triad came to Bengal from Orissa towards the end of 15-cent AD and gained popularity very quickly. But after reaching this soil, the foreign icon has evolved and changed to some extent in a lot of aspects.

The icon of ‘Sudarśan’ (the great Cakra of Lord Viśnu) accompanies the triad in Orissa and is represented by a pillar-like structure kept at the left side of Lord Jagannath. But in Bengal it has not been taken as a compulsion, as we can see several specimens without any such rendering. Occasionally, whenever and whereas it has been used, instead of the pillar-like structure, a smaller size image of Jagannath has been installed, representing the Cakra. For example, we can have a look at the triad-image of Bahiri that carries a unique look of its own.

Usually, Lord Balarām and Jagannath have stump-like limbs, instead of hands, everywhere in Orissa, while Subhadrā does not have any such limb at all. But, in Bengal certain specimens – like the one from Guptipara – are found depicting the palm and fingers of the deities in detail. (see pl 27 of this book)

The Puri specimens of Jagannath-triad have round or oval-shaped eyes painted with a minimalist approach. Sometimes we can also find some floral motifs used to decorate their bodies. But in Bengal, though specimens are available of the Orissan pattern – like the one at Sakhshabazar (Kolkata) – one would also find several other stylizations in this connection. In certain cases, almost human-like features could also be visible. Even today, painting a Jagannath-triad is one of the most adventurous projects – with enormous possibilities – for an artist in Bengal.

*fig 25. Two unique forms of Jagannath: one from Rādhā Śyām Temple of Visnupur (left) and the other from Dhaniakhali Bazar of Hooghly (right)*

Thus, we can find that the wooden images of Balarām-Subhadrā-Jagannath use to vary both stylistically and aesthetically in various corners of West Bengal. And that’s why the specimens at Mahesh and Guptipara of Hooghly, Tamluk and Bahiri of East Medinipur and Sakhshabazar of Kolkata – along with many other places – differ so much in appearance from each other, though they represent the same basic iconography.

- In this connection, we can also consider the extremely popular dual-deities of Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā. We all know that Venugopāl Kṛṣṇa was introduced at Orissa and Rādhikā was an addition from Bengal. So, there remains a historic connection between these two states in this regard.

But, surprisingly, the depictions of these wooden idols in both the traditions differ widely from each other. The ones from Bengal are more simplistic and lively – both in terms of carving and painting. On the other hand, the Orissan specimens are brilliantly
carved and painted — but in a more stylized and ornamental approach, which finally lead towards a physical stiffness to some extent.

fig 26. Two specimens of Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā: One from West Bengal (left) and the other from Orissa (right)

fig 27. Sarabhuj Gauranga: one from West Bengal (left) and the other from Orissa (right)

- The available specimens of wooden idol of Orissa are nowhere at par with the scale and variety of that of Bengal. On the other hand, Bengal has a wide range of iconographies — both hieratic and folk-tribal — manifested on wood and that too in huge quantity. Today we
can find more than 650 odd specimens being worshipped on a regular basis in various corners of West Bengal.

In general, the Orissan icons are highly decorative in approach and are manifested with a super-natural appearance. Their intricate carving technique, depicting meticulous details, is more close to the Pal-Sen approach (though, their sense of visual form was a bit different).
rather than the 16 cent Bengal school. Just like the Pal-Sen sculptors, they also carve the
dress-materials and various ornaments on the wooden surface itself and the main job of the
colouring is to follow the same.

On the contrary, Bengal specimens (except the derivation of the Jagannāth-triad) are much humane in approach and delicate in nature. Even the wooden idols of Pal-Sen era – in spite of their intrinsic ornamentation – also had a close reference to the
common visuals of the surrounding atmosphere.

- In terms of form and colour – the Orissan figures are more voluminous and brightly coloured,
mostly with round bulging eyes and habitual ornamentation. On the other hand, its Bengali
counterparts usually have a simple, soft and tender look, typical to this very soil. And this
soft and tender look has also been manifested equally in the other forms of aesthetic
expression - both of the hieratic and the folk-tribal idiom.

After going through all the similarities and dissimilarities between the two neighbouring traditions, we
can conclude that the wooden idols of Bengal origin are more rich and dynamic in every possible
aspect. Its antiquity goes far beyond the Orissan tradition and it has always maintained a better
chronological order documenting almost each and every step of its rise, development, highest
accomplishment and later downfall. And above all, the aesthetic gratification achieved by the
Bengali tradition is much lively and varied in comparison to the stiff and repetitive depictions of
Orissa.

:Summing Up:

Generally speaking – just like the divine images made of any other material – the wooden idols of
West Bengal were, and still are, kept in the inner sanctum of the temples and shrines; installed on a
high pedestal. Only a few colossal images like the Balarām of Boro, Bhairavī of Dilaakash or the
Mahākālī of Khalor are placed low on the floor; but these are mere exceptions.

However, in common, each of those Gods or the Goddesses is decorated with many
religious accessories of various size, shape, design, colour and smell. All these, together, result in
an atmosphere that seems to be very special; bearing the capacity to overpower common human
psyche quite easily.

In that created ambience, an event of consecration seems to take place inside those
motionless bodies and deliver a powerful vive in the faithful mind of the devotees. Before the eyes of
those emotional onlookers, this entire happening succeeds impromptu in revealing the omnipotence
and absoluteness of that divine personality.

This information, inevitably, was not unknown to the Sūtradhārs of Bengal. So, on the basis of their
natural perception (if not in any conscious effort), they used to cultivate and imagine the most
effective form for these divine personalities. And once the imagination got solidified, they carved out
that intended image, on wood, with great care and skill. Most surprisingly, even after being mostly
unknown to any sort of formal training or so-called art-education, they never had any difficulty in
creating such successful visuals. And that’s where the inference drawn by Niharranjan Ray
becomes extremely relevant: “... objects of Indian art are valid and potent as objects of art itself and
for their meaningful appeal to the human senses and the mind; they are formal articulations of
collectively felt experiences and are intended to generate in perceiving persons, certain moods,
feelings and emotions, certain states of being and thus to help them widen and deepen their human experiences.\textsuperscript{51}

In this connection, we can recall the dual-effigies of Nitai-Gaur, widely manifested on wood all over Bengal since late 16-cent AD. At first Gaur was started to be worshipped by his devotees and followers. However, the popularity of Nityananda on this very soil insisted – rather created a demand – for a conjugal iconography, and gradually, this collective subconscious was transformed into a conscious aesthetic vision.

This inclusion – thematically and politically, as well as aesthetically – worked as a successful balancing factor, which was really something essential for the time and circumstances. Thus, we got the most popular and widely depicted imagery – after Kṛṣṇa-Rādha – conceived and delivered by the Bengali intelligentsia; where a simplistic philosophy was manifested in a minimalist form of expression. At the same time, we also come to discover how a physical emotion, manifested in the wooden idols, has touched (and touches even today) the other – that of the onlookers – so easily. That's the lesson the Bengali folk have perceived from their forefathers; and that's what they have left for us.

\textsuperscript{51} see Ray, Niharranjan. (1974). \textit{An Approach to Indian Art}. Chandigarh: Panjab University