CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE

It is around the immoveable trinity of Egypt, Orient and the Graeco-Roman world, whether we have a clear conscience of it or not, that our well-established habits and customs of today, lead us, to organize our vision of the civilizations of antiquity. The present thesis aims otherwise. The Śaka-Siberian-Scythian art can no longer be termed 'peripheric', nor, at most be regarded as a receptacle of influences of great civilizations. It had its own measure of space and form.

To put it scientifically, the archaeological evidences do not remain silent about the impact on the vast stretches of the Eurasian steppes, of what was the nomadic life’s greatest export, i.e., the ornamenting influence of nomadic art. The homogeneity of the vast stretches of the Eurasian steppes did not for once; lead, to the loss of the nomadic identity. On the other hand, our ‘art’ is a potent distillation of nomadic and sedentary ways of life.
The present thesis has been specially oriented towards understanding the Śaka/Scythian elements in early Indian art. The interpretations proposed here will not be accepted by all, as it depends on individual perspectives in reading them.

The line of investigation pursued by us had thus been divided into two distinct fields of enquiry. One was related to the Śaka/Scythian identification and the other to Saka/Scythian (Śaka/Scythian) elements in early Indian art with possible extensions. Accordingly, Chapter I deals with the scope, sources and method of our study, keeping in mind the available historiography and recent excavation findings. We have seen that the steppe nomads left behind no written testimonies to their beliefs and practices. Scholars, therefore, in their efforts to understand them depend on archaeological evidences, on chronicles kept at royal courts in the Near East and China, and on Greek and Roman authors most of whom wrote about what was interesting to them, not necessarily to art historians and archaeologists today. Often, the archaeological evidence is at odds with the written. Connected with this, is the geographical connotation of Saka/Scythia, which we have dealt with in Chapter II. In Chapter III we have determined the advent and rule of the Śakas and Śaka-Pahlavas in the Indian subcontinent. Before dealing with the Śaka/Scythian elements in early Indian art, we have dealt with Scythian-Siberian-Śaka art of
the Eurasian steppes in Chapter IV. The artifacts have been classified under the western and eastern sections. We have shown that the origin lay in the east, before traversing to the west. Cross currents and individual developments in both the sections finally formed the 'whole' repertoire. The differences in style, technique and character of the nomadic animal style (as discussed in section C of Chapter IV) continued in the Šaka/Scythian elements in early Indian art (Chapter V). We have shown in Chapter V, that the Šaka/Scythian elements in early Indian art were essentially a continuation of the "whole" repertoire, with its accompanying changes. The question of visualizing a new phenomenon or simply seeing older patterns with a new clarity did not arise. We find that the cherished Scytho-Siberian-Šaka saga-motifs continued to evolve, at the same time, not losing their essential animal style. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the very formation of 'statehood' brought an end to the distinctive early nomadic way of life (as archaeological evidences reveal) by the first century B.C., but art forms (the legacy of which can be visualized) obviously continued. We all are acquainted with the opinions of Peter B. Golden and Omeljan Pritsak on 'statehood', but it is startling to find that the nomadic style continued in later periods of oriental and occidental art. Will it be too much to say that even in present Post-Raj India, the furniture we see around us, bear the animal style in all its ornamental appendages? Of course it is a
Victorian legacy. The predecessors of the British had learnt it from their 'barbarian' antecedents.

The discussions in the above chapters are basically preliminary in nature towards understanding the Śaka/Scythian elements in the early art of India. Therefore, it is very difficult to conceive all these elements in a conclusive way, they are rather suggestive. We have also tried to postulate that the Śaka/Scythian traits are still part of the living tradition of Indian art. Surely they are enmeshed in the composite Indian culture.

It is possible that there will be equally sensational finds in the future which would lead to a better understanding of the Śaka/Scythian art. After all, studies of art are buried within a sometimes-bewildering maze of archaeology, and iconographic studies roam widely between theory and fact.

All art originates in the human mind, in our reaction to the world rather than in the visible world itself, and it is precisely because all art is 'conceptual' that all representations are recognizable by their styles.