CHAPTER VII

EROTIC SCENES

As in the Bhāgavatīta, it is said "Kamastu Vasudevan-
shān" — Desire is a portion of him who dwells everywhere vāsudeva. In the world also, the main object of
love, lust or desire is nothing but happiness (nanda) for pleasure itself, the lust is a direct source, while
other things are desired because they are the means of
pleasure. This is why bliss (nanda) along with its form
is superior to everything else. Other things are the
objects of a relative love subject to alterations.

The lust of a man for a woman exists because he believes her to be a source of pleasure and the cause of
pleasure. He believes that pleasure lies in the woman in whom his desire is quenched. Therefore, he desires
her again and, when possessing her, he again experiences
relief from the pain of desire, that is, pleasure. Thus,
he keeps on craving for her.

Attraction can exist only between similar things.
Love or desire is only such an attraction. Lust is the
respective attraction or desire of each of the lovers
for the bliss which is to be found in the other. The
inclination of the total being (kamastī जैनम्) towards
prakrti is the divine eros. Attraction or the supreme
immaterial love of the spirit for its own shape which is in no way distinct from itself is the very nature of the spirit. This is the mutual love, the mutual attraction of the entities — Kāna-Kṛṣṇa, Gaurī-Caṅkara or the hermaphrodite Ardhanārīśvara. This is the pure love, the Absolute Eros.

In this way, love or lust appears, Śiva and Śakti unite, and the passion of love (āhāra-rasa) is born. This is represented by the supreme entities, Eros, Psyche and the hermaphrodite Ardhanārīśvara.

Composition of two separate figures is the 'Mithuna', the couple is union. Its lineage is as ancient as the combination of man and animal, or of woman and tree. A Mithuna is carved on the railing about second century B.C. of the stupa number two at Sāñchi, where a human body with equine force and thread is seen roaming in the forest of toy and trees where, on the other pillar, a woman is shown embracing a tree.

We learn that the Purāṇas are also the evidence of the Mithuna figures on sacred places. The Agni Purāṇa has been quoted to prove that the artists, in drawing the Mithuna figures, were following a tradition prevalent from the very early times in India.

'Mithuna', the state of being a couple, is the
plastic symbol of regained wholeness. According to the *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in the beginning was only the self in the shape of a person. Looking around, he saw nothing else but the self. He was afraid: 'Since there is nothing else than myself, of what am I afraid?' Thereupon, his fear was gone. He had no delight. He desired a second. He became as large as a woman and a man in close embrace. From that arose husband and wife. He united with her.

In this new united form, he is free from carving and fear. As a man, closely embraced by his beloved woman, knows nothing more of a 'without' or a 'within', so does the person, when embraced by Foreseeing knowledge, the self, knows nothing more of a 'without' or 'a within'. This is his true form in which his desire is fulfilled. In the self is his desire, in which he is without desire, free from sorrow.

Thus, desire unites him, the person, with his nature. When visualised in terms of sculpture, the interlace of the limbs of the standing figures is based on difficult postures of sexual *Yoga* which intensify the embrace beyond even the possibilities of the physical act. India's religions know the figures of the *Mithuna* symbol by different names. In Manṣyāṇa Buddhism, the
The principal actors are Gnosis (Prājñā) and means, to the Hindus, they are Śiva and Gaurī.

The several symbols of correspondence and union are themselves interrelated. The young woman clasps and embraces the tree and thereby makes it flower in the Deśāda rite. In its plastic form, the union of the principles is shown by joining or approaching to one another in the shapes of man and woman, woman and plant, animal and man.

The validity of the Mithuna symbol in the Indian art is in the visualisation of the power which effects the union of the principles. Over and above the dramatic emblem of the 'Mithuna Group' the symbol of reunion, there is an inner Mithuna in the figure of man as shown in the Indian sculpture. Gaurī, the female principle, embraces Śiva. Their union is known to be so close that the female principle is spoken of as Ardhanārī, half of the body of Lord. The total image of Śiva is that of the divine hermaphrodite Ardhanārīsvara, the Lord whose half, the right side of his image, is male and the left is female.

The figures of the Indian sculpture are not descriptive of human appearance. They refer the human condition to the abiding concepts of the great mother and of the primordial person in whom there is no division.
of the male and female principles. The mould of the images of the Indian sculpture is made under the command of Cosmic Eros, but not all mithuna groups are its particular symbols. Not all of them reveal the secret of sexual union in divinity.

Though not all the mithuna groups are charged with transcendental meaning, they have their place on the walls of the temples. It also occurs in the Varāhamihira's Brhat Samhitā, a work whose date is accepted by all scholars to be the middle of the sixth century A.D. In chapter 55 on the Prāśādākṣaraṇa it is written — "The remaining (part of the door jambs) should be decorated with auspicious birds, Svastika designs, vessels, Mithunas, leaves, creepers etc." Thus, the carving of Mithunas on the doorways of temples is the tradition of early Indian architecture. Perhaps, their effect is two-fold. By appealing to one of man's primary drives, they hold the attention of the devotee, like the "beautiful women of the cities" Surasaṅkari, who are called 'attractions' Ākariṇī. Their images are stationed on the temple walls for the purpose of attracting the eye, the senses and the mind of the devotee so that he concentrates on them and becomes oblivious of all distraction. The 'attractions' are the messengers (dūṭī) of the Great Goddess.
On the other hand, the erotic scenes can be viewed with detachment. They are a confirmation that the devotee is not enslaved by desire and his path is that of the hero who masters his mind and body, while in the midst of adventures. By this test, the devotee is brought near the ultimate purpose of the erotic scenes on the temple walls. They represent concrete rites in which the human eros is mastered as a means of obtaining supreme bliss of non-duality. In these rites, the body is made to act free from the conditions and purpose imposed by nature on the union of the sexes. But even this understanding does not fulfill the purpose of the mithuna sculptures on the temple walls. Over and above the significance of its theme, a mithuna carving, however, can be enjoyed with a kind of enjoyment different from direct experience. Then this enjoyment "is of the same order as the tasting of the Supreme Brahman".

At Ajanta we find many mithuna couples in different poses. Above one of the cell doors in cave number XVII is a delightful little panel depicting a delicate love scene and another panel with six winsome female heads (life size) most artistically interspaced.

The capital of a pillar in the verandah of cave Number XIV offers on the top a rectangular panel, a representation of a human couple. It is unconventional
in its pose. They belong to the *apsara* group male and female and are represented as sexual couples. On the walls of the verandah of Ajanta are represented, in a long series, real ‘*mithuna*’ with a distinctly sexual flavour. In some of these representations, the woman is represented as offering drink to her companion much in the same manner as of the Indo-Scythian.

We find the best examples of Kanthāśīlesa at Ajanta as described by Kālidāsa in the *Meghadūta*. It is a lovely small panel showing the king with his hand on the neck of his favourite queen.

At cave number XX, the couple is found on the right face of the shrine vestibule. It is a typical Vākāṭaka representation showing a couple seated at ease, half involved in their own concerns and half attentive to the activity within the cave.

Another sculpture is found at Patna. It is almost a panel from the life of the Śuṅga king *Agnimitra* as described in Kālidāsa’s famous drama *Mālavikāgnimitra* where the king fell in love with Mālavikā, his queen’s protege, herself a princess in distress, serving her mistress as a maid. Her embarrassed look with a hesitant hand posed on the king’s neck accentuates the none too forward approach of the king holding a present with one hand and timidly twining the maid with the other.
A jamb of a torana is found in the Lucknow museum. It is richly decorated on its four faces and offers, on one face, three panels, the central one of which pictures the man and the woman motif. It is a mithuna to all intents and purposes. It is believed to have come from some old Jain site at Mathura, which belongs to the third or second century B.C.

The next example of mithuna couple is found on one of the medallion of one of the railings from Bodh Gaya which is dated about Suhga period (185-173 B.C.) PL XXI. At Bodh Gaya, we find that the lover is shown as pulling the garment of his beloved, who tries to escape from him with all the shy reserve of a newly wedded bride, her companion enjoying the scene of the fun from behind the screen shown in between to suggest that the couple is alone.

Another panel on the rail from Bodh Gaya shows a prince with his arm on the neck of one of his ladies and his other hand toying with the chin of another.

At Bodh Gaya, we find some mithuna figures, shown either together with Kainavrksa producing ornaments hanging on the bevelled corners of the pillars, or shown separately on the front and back sides of the posts, mithuna seated on a couch.
Here we also find a mithuna couple worshipping Bodhi tree with a throne and chhatra. It is a very important representation at Bodh Gaya. In Sānchī - western gate - left pillar - front face PI XXII — there is a tree in the middle. To the left, a royal couple is seated on a couch. The male is raising a cup to his lips and the female is holding in her hand a round looking glass. To the right, a second couple is in social dalliance. In the middle below the tree, a couple of servants are standing on a staircase, the male apparently speaking and the female holding her right hand over her mouth as if she is trying to avoid her laughter by closing her mouth.

To the left a loving couple is seated. The arms of the female are thrown around the male figure. To the right, a second couple is seated face to face with water flowing below.

On the northern gate — left pillar - front face we find domestic scenes. To the left, we notice a loving couple seated with their arms thrown around each other, the male with a cup in his hand.

Western gate — left pillar: The top panel shows a cross section of the Uttarakuru land with four seated mithuna couples and one standing couple is engaged in music and drinking under various kālāvṛkṣas producing ornaments.
Right pillar - inner face - Here again we find the motif Uttarakuru in the form of withunas and Kalpalata. Kinnara motif is shown both with kinnari riding with her husbands.

A panel at one of the Kanheri caves dating from the first century A.D. represents a pair of 'couples' in erotic attitude, the man holding a lotus. One thing which attracts our mind is the position of the woman who is standing on the right of the man. In this specimen, it is by no means clear whether the figures are generic couples in a conventional symbol, or are representations of the donors. But one thing which claims our mind is that the woman is represented as encircling the man by her left hand. This attitude is full of passion which suggests a sexual couples.

In Karle caves, the same formula is repeated with some variation. Here the man embraces the woman or both embrace each other. Their poses show that they do not represent donors. We are very sure that these couples are busy in 'love making'. All these couples are engraved on the doorway near the entrance to the shrines. There are some couples, mounted on an elephant which furnish the finals to the capitals of the series of pillars inside the Karle caves. Each pair is an 'embracing couple'.
The next example is a pillar from Dhuṭesara mound, Mathura. It has three panels - the third being an erotic representation. It is as old as first century A.D. There are numerous other examples of fragments of late Kusana period, which offer many 'man and woman' motif in the collection of Mathura Museum - some of which may be as late as the second century A.D.

Paharpur sculpture is a charming and finely execute panel in the eastern wall of the basement. Here we find an amatory couple who has been described by K.N. Dixit as Krishna and Radha. Where the male and the female are standing close to each other. They are standing with legs crossed and clasping each other with one of the hands. The left hand of the male is placed in front of the breast which is probably in abhaya pose, and the right hand of the female is hanging down as in Varada mudra. The male has a wig like arrangement for the hair. The parallel folds of the drapery are also worth noticing. The right leg of the female figure appears distorted. Even then they are standing in a graceful pose. The woman has a shy, but happy, smile on her beautiful oval face. Both have very slender bodies.

There are several other amatory couples. But they lack the restraint and elegance of the so called Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa group. One of these reliefs shows a male
figure, with his right hand round the neck of a female standing to his right and the left engaged in pressing her breast. The female is standing in *triphānga* pose. Her right hand is broken and the left is passing around the neck of her lover. She is wearing a sort of tops in the ear. There is a dwarf to the proper left of the panel with a fly-whisk in right hand.

There is yet another couple where the female steals an affectionate look at her lord, who also feels quite happy in her company. The male is holding an arrow-case at his back. He is, probably, Kāma and the woman is Kāti.

Another pair is in a still closer and intimate pose almost on the point of exchanging kisses. The third couple is in a very close embrace feeding each other. Here, the male is actually feeding the female and male figure, perhaps a servant, is standing to the right of the female.

An important piece is furnished by the door jambs on either side of the entrance to cave number three at Nasik. These pairs of door jambs are divided into a series of rectangular panels, one above the other, and on some of these panels the *mithuna* is pictured.

A couple is typical of a series of similar panels on the fragment of a facade of a Gupta temple dug up at
Sarnath. The beautiful doorway decorated with a series of mithuna panels belongs to the late Gupta period.

To the latter phase of Mahasthan Art, probably belonging to the Gupta era, belongs a remarkable circular plaque illustrating a mithuna depicted against the decorative background of lotus-petals. It is one of the beautiful terracotta discovered so far.

It proves that during the Gupta period, the motif has been accepted as a necessary device on the doorway of shrines.

At Ellora, we have a series of human mithuna more or less of the same type. Here, we find two very fine panels of a love scene representing a pair of lovers in embrace. On the entablature over the pillars of the shrine of the river goddesses at Ellora, we have a very fine series of human mithuna in characteristic conventional poses.

At Amaravati and Nāgārjunakoṭī, there is a series of mithuna couples, some of the finest that have been discovered so far.

A panel from Nāgārjunakoṭī shows that the female is refusing to reply to the courteous queries of the lover who draws her closer to himself and reminds us of Kālidāsa in verse of the Kumudāsambhava.59
In the Ellora cave there is a masterpiece sculpture which is the true representation of Kālidāsa and is the best representation of close union, even the physical transcending the mental.

Again, at Nagarjunkona, a woman is shown with a parrot on her left wrist, looking towards the bird and trying to offer something to it. The lover beside her is looking on almost smiling within himself with glee.

Another mithuna shows a woman holding a lilākamala comparing its lustre with padmarāga ear-jewel with emphasis on the meaning of the word padmarāga and her own rāga or love for the lover beside her.

This is an expressive sculpture of a Naga couple, famed for their intense devotion as lover, most beautifully executed and full of meaning.

Once again at Nagarjunkona sculpture, the damsel is tackled by the lover with great gentleness.

Another instance of the female, almost unconscious with a sensation of joy, born of passion, after the lover's touch is very well depicted in another sculpture from Nagarjunkona, where the lover is shown lifting up the beaming face of his beloved by his hand, toying with her chin, while he decorates her coiffure with a crest-jewel and she holds another string of pearls in her hand to be adjusted by him after this on her neck.
There is a true depiction of Kālidāsa's verse at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, where the lover is shown behind his beloved whom he has approached. Softly, he watches her, as she examines her marks of enjoyment in the shape of nakhakshataś in the mirror she holds in her hand and she gets abashed when she notices the reflection of her lover coming to enjoy this mirth.

We again find here a mithuna couple in the dancing pose. Thus, at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa we often find man and woman engaged in the sport of sex.

At the Bhitā excavation, a fragmentary plaque, four and a quarter inch high, is found. Here, man and woman are standing facing each other. The right arm of the woman is around the neck of the man and the left hangs down by her side. The right hand of the man is on his hip and the left around the woman's neck. Hair of both the figures are falling on their shoulders with coil on top of the head. This plaque belongs to the Gupta period. It is of dark gray clay with admixture of mica.

Now the next group of this subject is madhupāṇa which is named as the Bacchanalian groups. The cup of wine is sometime present in the hand, as it is the fruit of love (ratiphala) having the fulfilment of love alone as its aim and is the product of kalpa-vrksha itself. The great love with which the wine cup is offered to the
beloved or received from her beautifully is expressed by Kālidāsa. 62

They are, no doubt, repetitions of Greek or Graeco-Roman scenes and are not related to the Indian ideas.

At the Mathura museum, there is a 3'-4" x 2'-6" x 1'-2" panel. PL XXI I. On the obverse side, there are four figures with a lovely woman in the middle, half kneeling in a drunken stupor, her left hand resting on a little girl who holds a wine cup and the right held by a standing male figure, perhaps her husband, who is supporting her. The fourth figure is a female attendant, but she has undeveloped breasts and masculine shoulders and hips.

This panel belongs to the Kusāna period. Here, the female figure is depicted kneeling between two male figures. Her left arm is supported by a smaller male attendant holding the thunderbolt.

In another figure of the Kusāna period the charming damsel is offered cups of wine by her girl attendant even when she drops down over-drunk and is supported by a youth. An old Kuttanī, the picture of old age, is standing beside the damsel.

In yet another panel of the Kusāna period, there
is a living picture in stone. Here, the body of the intoxicated woman is carved in sensitive lines. Her left arm is over the shoulders of a servant who holds a cup. Her face is flushed in self-complacent drowsiness. A man (her husband) tries to lift her by the right arm. A companion stands by with the finger of her right hand touching her forehead, which seems throbbing.

The interesting fragment, from Mathura, of a man offering a drink to a woman (in the Berlin Museum) carries a flavour of the Greek Bacchanalian motif.

Of the Bhutesara Yakṣīs, the one with a wine pot in one hand and a bunch of mangoes in the other, is a composition of great charm. Another shows the damsel beaming with pleasure, while conversing with her pet parrot helped on to her shoulder from its cage, or enquiring probably of the parrot in the cage.

This panel was also discovered somewhere at Mathura in 1836. Now it is in the Indian Museum at Calcutta. The stone is 3'-8" x 3' x 1'-4" thick with a circular basin on the top 16" in diameter and 8" in depth, seemingly intended to serve as the socket for a column. It is well carved on both the sides and was evidently designed to be viewed from both directions.

The front group comprises four persons in two pairs, each consisting of a man and a woman, standing
under an *Aśoka* tree in flower. The stout man on the right has his left arm under the waist of his female companion who holds his right hand in hers, thus giving him the support necessary because of his intoxicated condition. The liquor pots stand on the ground. The couple on the left stands facing in attitudes apparently indifferent. Traces of chaplets may be discerned on the heads of all.

The reeling man wears nothing except a pair of short bathing drawers and a scarf hanging behind his back and fastened round his neck by a knot. The slightly sober man on the left is decently dressed in long drawers extending to his ankles, and a close fitting tunic reaching below his knees. Both of the women are clad in a short tunic coming down a little below the waist. Each holds a piece of loose drapery across her legs. The woman on the left has thrown it over her left arm in the fashion adopted by some on the Gandhāra Bodhisattvas. Both women are adorned with heavy jewellery, viz., anklets, armlets and collars.

The reverse group, much mutilated, comprises five figures. The principal figure is a fat elderly man sitting on a stone seat. He is so drunk that he has to be supported on his left side by a man and a boy and on his right by a woman. The principal figure has
a waist-cloth loosely fastened. The style of both reliefs is similar.

Bacchanalian Kuvera — It is also found in the Mathura Museum. It is 1'-2" high. It represents a man, apparently nude and holding, in his right hand, a cup which a female attendant is about to fill from a jar. His left hand grasps a long object, perhaps a money bag, which shows that he is a Kuvera, the god of riches.

Another panel discovered at Palikhera, a suburb of modern Mathura, which was part of the ancient city. At the front, there are five figures under an aśoka tree. The principal figure is a fat man, seemingly nude, seated on a low stool, made of stones, with his leg tucked up. He is drinking from a noggin apparently of wood, which a male attendant is ready to refill. The scene is watched by another man, a woman and a small boy.

Almost every monument shows this aspect of Madhupāna and at Ajanta, there are lovely mithuna paintings showing the same theme. Here a Bactrian king is sipping wine in the company of his wife and two other women, one of whom is holding a flogon of wine. In the foreground, there are two buffoons holding trays of dessert. The features and the dresses of these figures show that they are Iranian or Bactrian. This fresco is supposed to represent the Iranian King Khusru I who sent an embassy to the
Daccaan King Pulakesin II in the seventh century A.D.

This panel is in cave 1. The king is sitting on a well-padded cushion. He is wearing a long coat. His queen is sitting near him and watching his face. Her right hand is on his shoulder and from the left she is suggesting something to her lord. She is wearing white tunic with long sleeves, collar cuffs, and arm-bands which are embroidered and finished with trimmings. The ends of ribbon are flying at her back. Behind the queen, the embroidered ends of the bolster are seen. The dress of the attendant woman is also interesting. She is wearing a round cap of red woolen material. Her upper garment is a long coat with light sleeves, it is embroidered at the collar, shoulders and cuffs. The lower garment is a long white shirt with a frilled border of pale blue colour. The other lady attendant is also wearing the same dress except that the skirt has a double frill near the border. The shape of wine flagon which she is holding is different from the wine flagon which the first attendant woman is holding.

At the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa the female figure is offered the cup of wine, but she turns her face away from it, as if she has nearly forgotten the taste of wine and her newly returned lover should again train her to appreciate
it, as Kālidāsa has described in his verse that Yakṣī has given up wine during her lover's absence and her brows have forgotten their coquettish graces.63

The bas reliefs on the lower parts of a Gandharan lion seat (Sīhāsāna) in the Lohara Museum deserve some consideration. In this piece, the composition is divided into two distinct groups, each representing a couple evidently engaged in a Bacchanalian orgy. They are not conceived in a set pattern. The woman in the left group is offering a cup of wine to her companion. The couples on the legs of the lion seat do not share the same character as the mithunas of the Indian Art.

At Aurangabad cave I, there is a drinking scene which probably belongs to the Chālukya period. This scene is so often described as picture of the Persian embassy received by Pulakesin in 625 or 626 A.D. This is a really Bacchanalian scene of the type that recurs in the Buddhist art from the early Kusāna period, onwards, the personage carousing being Pāncika.

Thus, the Bacchanalian group stands for the sensuous and material side of life symbolizing the pleasure that overflows the bowl of life which these groups invariably depict.

We see that from the very early times, some
architects loved to introduce in the decorations on the pillars or entablature of shrines or temples a representation of 'a man and a woman' in their sexual forms and they are known as "sexual couple". The craftsman has laboriously worked to represent a series of wihuna as if using them as auspicious decorations in respectful obedience to some sacred text.