CLASSICISM COCOONED

This chapter tries to probe into the problem of the inaugural activity at Ellora employing several different methodologies simultaneously, since none of them taken singularly is adequate enough to lead us to a specific conclusion. Together they can fill up the lacunae of each other and project a clearer picture of the art activity in this region and give us a better understanding of the stylistic lineages and their evolution and interactions.

The history of the Deccan gives us an account of the ephemeral rules and domains of several post-Gupta dynasties in this area\(^1\). A student of art is compelled to take note of these developments though it may not be his prime concern. The varied styles seen in the corpus of sculpture in this region cannot be explained irrespective of the political developments. The sculptural lineages pouring in are responsible for the Ellora style of sculpture, to understand which, it is necessary to trace each lineage meticulously and if necessary using a methodology that is apparently extrinsic to this dissertation.
To sense the *zeitgeist* of this era we will have to look into the literal and canonical texts contemporaneous to this art activity since the artistic sensibility and the plastic intentions of that age are discerned through them.

Along with the thirty four numbered caves at the Ellora complex, there are several smaller caves and burrows in the vicinity. Some of them are just a little larger and deeper than a *devakośtha* sometimes having a facade with two thin, small pillars with no sculpture in them, or sometimes a vulgar later version of the Maheśamūrti carved in low relief on the back wall. Most of these caves are not significant architecturally or sculpturally and hence are always overlooked by the scholars working on this baffling site. Two of such caves, if we call them caves, are carved behind the waterfall in the horseshoe scarp between Caves 27 and 29.

One of them is a small cavern housing two *dvārapālas* and four other small images. The outer wall shows some portions of highly mutilated images. A part of a standing Viṣṇu (Fig. 1) and the river Goddesses with *chhatras* (Fig. 2) over their heads are flanking the doorway.

In some of the works on Ellora this small cavern is mentioned as Cave 28. A brief description of this cave can be seen in Soundara Rajan's 'Cave Temples of the Deccan' and also in an article by
M.N. Deshpande. The description given by Soundara Rajan is a little confusing. It mixes up sculptures from two different caves (27 and 28). There is one more cavern between Cave 27 and Cave 28 which also has two standing images of Śiva and Viṣṇu (Fig. 4). The image of Viṣṇu attracts the attention of the viewer for two reasons, namely, the way the deity holds his attributes, and the attributes themselves. The image has four arms, three of them intact, holding a gadā and a chakra in the upper right and left hands respectively and a small fruit-like object (bijapūraka) in the lower right one. The fourth hand, badly mutilated, was probably holding a śankha as commonly seen in the other images, holding a fruit instead of the usual padma. The gadā is held in udbhāku position - the arm is raised above the shoulder and the shape of the gadā is also different from the one found in later images. It is a long slender musala-like mace which is seen in the images of the Kusana or early Gupta phase as also the manner in which it is held. The other hand, holding the chakra also suggests an early date to this image, in which the chakra is actually held between the fingers. A mutilated fragment of one more Viṣṇu image can be seen on the walls of the other cave. Only a part of the image showing the lower left arm resting on the head of a small human figure, perhaps an āyudha puruṣa, is preserved. On iconographical grounds and with due awareness of their provenance, these images can be dated back to 4th-5th century. However, we sometimes find such early iconographical features in
later images too, and an example can be cited at this very site. In Cave 16, a standing Viṣṇu image from the rear corridor behind the shrine proper, shows all the early iconographical features though it is not earlier than the 8th century; need to also examine these sculptures by applying some other criteria before proclaiming them as the earliest from this site. Since this dissertation claims to inquire into the stylistic development of Ellora Brahmanical sculpture, trying to demarcate the possible framework of the stylistic phases should be its prime concern. But at a place like Ellora which was surrounded by the territories of the Vākaṭakas, the Aśmakas, the Ruchikas, the Traikūṭakas and the Āndhras - the dynasties of the post-Gupta Deccan, consistently at war with each other and struggling for supremacy - will it be logical to expect the sculptural tradition to follow the deterministic progression? This is a phase when different cultural lineages were conflicting and unknowingly interacting with each other. In a way, it is a phase of cultural and as a result, aesthetic confusion, and therefore, the problems of patronage and authorship of the monuments does not remain extrinsic to the investigation of stylistic development.

That is why it becomes obligatory to take note of the political developments in this region during the 5th-6th century, and check if the data derived could be of help in confirming the date bracket that has been attributed to these monuments. Fortunately a lot of
inscriptional evidence has been compiled by pioneers like Buhler, Bhagwanlal Indraji, Mirashi and scholars like Shobhana Gokhale, B. Deshpandey and H. Thosar are supplementing it with fresh information and interpretations - in turn giving rise to new controversies. The political picture of the Deccan is getting clearer in the light of this discussion. In the present context, two of the dynasties of this period will have to be scrutinised viz. the Vākṣṭakas and the Traikūṭakas. Both these royal houses seem to be of Vaishnava faith and it seems that this region was under their hegemony during the 5th-6th centuries at least for a few decades.

There is a controversy over the origin and genealogy of the Vākṣṭakas, the distinguished dynasty which had played a great role in the art activity of this period and this region; a super power which had claimed the status of "Samrāṭ" even before the rise of the mighty Gupta emperor Samudragupta. In the present context, the 'mulapuruṣa' of this dynasty - Vindhyakirti I or Vindhyasakti who is also mentioned as Vākṣṭakavamsāketu in the inscription of Cave 16 of Ajanta, seems to be a key figure. Dr. Mirashi outlines on the origin of the founder of the Vākṣṭaka empire, that he was probably an ordinary gṛhapati during the times of the Sātavāhanas, whose name is found in an inscription from Amaravati, as Vākṣṭaka. Mirashi also states further that the origin of this dynasty should not be traced with the help of place names as in the case of Traikūṭakas
from Trikūṭa, since this word is used as a proper name and not a family name in this inscription. He gives a convincing argument to prove the Āndhraite origin of this dynasty and also of the Vallur family which served these emperors for generations. Bhau Daji considered him as one of the Yavana kings or belonging to a lesser caste like the Ābhīras, Gardhabhilas, or Muruṇḍas, who came to power after the fall of the Sātavāhanas. According to Vākāṭaka records, the Vākāṭaka crown-prince Gautamiputra was married to the daughter of the Naga king Bhavanaga of Padmavati (modern Pawaya) in C.300 A.D. This relation with a so-called lesser family strengthens Bhau Daji's speculation. Vindhyakīrti is mentioned as dvija - the adjective for brāhmaṇa and birds who are born twice - is a very interesting fact and it is quite possible that the Vākāṭaka from the Amaravati inscription and Vākāṭakavamśaketi Vindhyaśakti are not two different personalities and after the fall of Sātavāhanas, he must have renamed himself as Vindhyaśakti and hence is called dvija. It is necessary to mention here that his name is not found as an emperor in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions and records. The gotra of this dynasty mentioned in the above said inscription is Viṣṇuviddha.

All these facts together lead us to a speculation that Vākāṭaka, an Abhīra gṛhapati joined the mainstream of Vaiṣṇavism after rising to power. We know about several powerful Abhīra generals serving in Kṣatrapa armies and who rose to power after the fall of the
Sātavāhanas, particularly in Maharashtra. Majumdar and Aiatekar inform that the sources of information are silent about the history of western Kṣatrapas during C.230 to 275 A.D. and the Epigraphical and Puranic evidence shows that the AbhTras rose to power in Maharashtra during the 3rd century. The period mentioned is the approximate period of Vindhyāṣakti's rule i.e. 255 to 275 A.D. This speculation will be supported with some more evidence at a later juncture.

Though it is not possible to attribute the patronage of the sculpture mentioned in the beginning to Vindhyāṣakti, a contention that Brahmanical sculptural activity started at Ellora before the arrival of the Paśuṇata Saivite cult to this region and that the Vaiṣṇavite caves near the scarp could be the beginning of this activity does merit some consideration at this stage. These apparently insignificant caves seem to be inspired by the small Vaiṣṇavite caverns from Ramgarh and Udaigiri. The size of the caves, the Ganga-Yamuna figures on the outer wall with chhatras on their head, and the iconography evince several similarities with the Gupta tradition, though being stylistically distinct.

At this stage, we will have to take a note of the fact that most of the early Brahmanical sculptures found in this region and Vidarbha are Vaiṣṇavite and are starkly different from Gupta Vaiṣṇavite sculpture not only iconographically but stylistically as well.
Nagardhan, Ramtek, Pavnar, Nagara and Nachna are some of the Vakataka sites where Vaisnavite sculpture is found and it is very different from Udaigiri and Mathura sculpture. Since the Ajanta and later Ellora sculpture reveals a Gupta influence, this particular group of sculptures poses a problem in a study of the evolution of Ellora sculpture and in our understanding of its relationship with its predecessors. Most scholars either just ignore these sculptures or consider them as later additions without any specific reason.

As a matter of fact they can be comfortably placed somewhere around A.D. 450 when Vaisnavism was widely popular in this region. They may not be the projects of the Vakataka royal house but they are certainly of that age when the Vakatakas were ruling this area.

We cannot overlook the fact that most Brahmanical sculpture from Vidarbha and Marathwada region that can be attributed to the Vakatakas or their times is Vaisnavite. Ramtek has two temples devoted to the incarnations of Visnu-Narasimha and Trivikrama. The cave at Dharashiv has relief carvings of Krsnalila on the lintel, many of Pavnar sculptures are also identified as Krsnalila panels by Jamkhedkar and Deglurkar and at a site which is even earlier to all these, Nagara from Bhandara district, a number of Visnu images have been discovered which are now in the collection of the Central Museum, Nagpur and are dated to the 5th century A.D. Dr.Mirashi has shown with the help of substantial evidence that the emperors of the
Vākāṭaka dynasty had patronized the Śaivite as well as the Vaiṣṇavite faith. Along with the Śiva temples which were constructed during this phase, we find several Viṣṇu and Rāma temples built by the royal family itself.

The other Vaiṣṇavite dynasty reigning in this region which should also be given a thought in this context, is the Traikūṭaka dynasty. The copper-plates found in Western Maharashtra and Gujarat give us a fairly-clear picture of the Traikūṭaka rule. The well-known inscription from cave 16 at Ajanta claims the sovereignty of the Vākāṭaka ruler over Trikūṭa along with Kuntala, Lāṭa, Āndhra, Kosala etc. Still considering all the evidence furnished by the Traikūṭaka, Vākāṭaka and Kalachuri Inscriptions, it appears that though they withstood the skirmishes with the Vākāṭakas, the Traikūṭakas finally succumbed to the Kalachuris sometime around A.D. 533 (the date of the second Matvan plate).

It is now almost unanimously accepted by most scholars that the Traikūṭakas were the successors of the Abhiras in the Trikūṭa region around Nasik. They honoured the Abhīra era and like Abhīra rulers, their names too end with the suffix 'sena'. Except for Indradatta, who is considered to be the mūlapuruṣa of this dynasty, but even this name is found in a legend on Darhasena's coin and it may only be an epithet. The capital of the Traikūṭakas was Vījñaniruddhapura, a name derived from the name of one of the Viṣṇuvīras, and the
mountain from which they derive their family name is known as Govardhan. It is not clear when and how Darhasena rose to a status of a ruler who could perform an Āvamedha. None of the records of the 3rd-4th centuries from the Deccan evince major usurpations of the existing power and yet almost all the important dynasties of the Deccan trace back their roots to this period. The records or inscriptions are issued by established sovereigns whose mūlapuruṣa is always a mysterious figure. The rise to power of the sovereigns issuing the inscriptions is also vague. In the short span of a few decades, a number of Āvamedha and Vājapeya yajñas were performed in the Deccan proclaiming the yajamāna as 'Samāṭa'. This ambiguity in the origin of these dynasties and their desperate attempts for social status alongwith the factual data regarding the names of the kings, the era they honour and the culture they belong to gravitate towards an assumption that many of these rulers were originally from the Abhīra lineage. They were already in power, and at some juncture they altered their identity. The Traikūṭakas too can be one of the such dynasties of Abhīra origin.

The sculpture from Ellora revealing an affiliation with the Abhīra pantheon could be linked with the Traikūṭaka region too. An obvious affinity between some of the Ellora Buddhist sculpture with the later phase of Nasik sculpture should also be considered in this context.
All this argument is not to put a small group of sculptures - not even very significant aesthetically - to an earlier date, but to understand a very important phase in the sculptural history of the Deccan, a place where linear evolution in art is impossible to trace because of its geographical situation and the political turbulence during that period.

The phasewise study of art is an age-old phenomenon, accepted of course with some reservations, all over. The core of this concept has been formulated by early scholars like Wincklemann and others who had classified Greek sculpture in four phases. A similar development can be observed in Indian sculpture after the Sunga period and Western scholars as well as the Indian scholars emulating them, tried to apply it unchanged to our context. Stella Kramrisch in her long article on Pāla and Sena sculpture in Rupāna warns in the very beginning that 'Indian art in its development essentially differs from the course artistic matters took in Europe'. We know the Western classicistic characteristics made the early generation of Art Historians put Elephanta caves in the 8th century due to inadequate acquaintance with the decorative accent of Indian arts and only the inscribed landmarks of Indian art helped us to place those wrongly dated masterpieces into a proper date bracket. But there are many more works and monuments which have yet to come out of the mist of controversies, only because the given methodology is not used with caution. However, our visual data furnish information which is contrary to linear progression. A study of this development in India
appears to suggest that the transition from Kuśāṇa to Gupta—which are generally considered as the pre-classical and classical phases in Indian sculpture—shows an intermediate phase which lacks the vitality of archaic expression and the accomplishment of classical sophistication. This is not to suggest a conclusion but a tentative hypothesis and a possible direction of research.

This is an effort to understand whether the texts which were contemporaneous to that art-activity which is in focus in the present context, can provide us with some more details that can help us towards a more coherent study of the stylistic progression through these centuries. On one hand the literary texts and their formal and stylistic characteristics can help us to trace the zeitgeist of the age. In the present context, only two Prākrit texts can be cited viz. Gāhāsttasaśi and Setubandha or Rāvaṇavahak which are not adequate enough to make any definite statement. Therefore, the only other possibility is to search for a discussion on this aspect through the canonical texts of that time, in this case, the Chītrasūtra of the Vīṣṇudharmottara. Of course.

It is needless to mention that such canonical texts are derived from the existing works of art and that they naturally reflect the ideals that have been followed by the art manifestations of that era. Considering all the controversies about the date of the Vīṣṇudharmottara it can be safely put in the 5th-6th century and many of the merits of
chitra listed down in different Chapters of the Chitrasūtra can be observed in the paintings of Ajanta as well as the sculpture that is carved until that time. In Adhyāya 41, one of the smallest chapters of this texts - we come across the discussion of the varieties of Chitra. They are Satya, Vainika, Nāgara and miśra. The Adhyāya also gives their definitions. Though there are only five verses devoted to this discussion, they have attracted the attention of all the scholars who have worked on the Visnudharmottara. Shivaramamurti devotes a whole chapter "Classification of Painting" to discuss these four and a half slokas and the others have also interpreted these verses in different ways. The second sloka reads as follows:

याकिचिल्लोकसात्त्वपेक्ष मिश्र ततस्तत्मुच्यते।
दीर्घायं सत्ववृत्त च सुकुमारं सुभृत्तिकम्॥२॥

Coomaraswamy relates satya to sāttvika but Raghavan opines that such interpretation is not possible. Stella Kramrisch, the first to translate this text, explains satya as a realistic picture in an oblong frame. The term satya itself and the further description yatiṣṭhita-llokāsādhīrayam alone can justify this explanation though Shivaramamurti has objected to the oblong frame, pointing out that mounting and framing was never in vogue in India. The elongated dir-ghāṅgam quality applies to the figures in the picture and not to the picture as a whole. So in this context the figures should be elongated and proportionate. The text adds two more adjectives which are not given much attention to by the scholars, Sukumāram, subhumākiṃ.
the figure should be tender, (I prefer this word to "delicate" as suggested by Shivaramamurti) and placed against a proper background. It does not prescribe for a mere imitation like a mirror reflection as some of the later text like Manasollasa or Silparatna do but the naturalism of Chitrasutra - slightly stylized - prescribing elegant, well-built figures of tall stature, also revealing the tenderness of skin, placed against proper background - probably showing details of the locale - is almost a description of Kusana or Amaravati sculpture.

The second variety is Vainika which is

\[\text{चतुरस्त्र चूर्णपूर्ण न दीर्घे चोरब्रजाधि} \]

\[\text{ममाणस्यानलक्षान्त वैणिके तान्तिकाणेहि} \]

Chaturasra again is not a square frame but symmetry of form. Shivaramamurti proves it giving several quotations from different texts. Vainika chitra should be symmetrical, complete in its form (?), with no exaggeration or elongation, nor having heavy volume, proportionate, rich in stances, well balanced and well finished. Motichandra adds a few more qualities to this list but those are not faithful to the verse. Shivaramamurti says that the reason for the vina being brought in here is not quite clear and suggests further that the pleasant and lyrical quality in this chitra and the melody of vina can
the reason of this comparison. To my mind the simile here is formal and not essentially qualitative. The balanced and symmetrical form of the vīna, having two kumbhas of equal size at both the ends could have inspired this term. The word vīna has one more connotation in the Brhat Samhitā of Varāhamihira. It refers to a particular configuration of stars when all the planets are situated in the seven houses. Considering that the Brhat Samhitā and the Viṣṇudharmottara are almost contemporaneous sixth-century texts, it is quite likely that the author of the latter was well-acquainted with the contents of the former. The feature chaturastra could thus have been a derivation from this harmonious placement of planets. The Kāmānātīya Nītisāstra explains the term chaturastra as regular and harmonious. This vairikā variety seems to be a little more sophisticated than the satya chitra gradually acquiring sophistication but also losing vitality of form which is seen in the virile earthbound expressions of the earlier variety, which feature is always seen in the transitional phase where new values are yet to be achieved, and stipulated, and the old ones are being discarded.

The third variety is nāgara. The term itself indicates the perfect sophistication and the description strengthens it further.

**The text in the image is not clearly visible.**
Anand Coomarswamy and Stella Kramrisch consider *nagara* as of the City or 'urban'. Motichandra calls it classical. Shivaramamurti also says that it is a sophisticated and restrained style of execution of pictures where all the limbs, well rounded (modelled) are firmly and powerfully set, not to be exaggerated and with great restraint in jewellery and floral decoration. All these qualities remind us of the classical phase of Indian sculpture.

The fourth variety is *miśra* which shows mixed characteristics and hence is not very important in the present context.

Priyabala Shah, another exponent of this text\textsuperscript{31} tries to interpret these terms as regional variations like the ones used in architectural terminology (*Nāgara*, *Dravida*, *Vesara*) but that leaves *satya chitra* unnoticed and the other explanation also does not sound convincing. Shivaramamurti finds it impossible to read geographical interpretations into it\textsuperscript{32}. To me, they seem to be different phases of Indian art.

If the *Viṣṇudharmottara* is a sixth century text, its author must have been acquainted with all the developments of Indian art and that is precisely what is discernible from this categorisation. *Nāgara* clearly denotes the classical idiom but the other two varieties also reveal some classical features in them and that is why instead of interpreting them as archaic they could be explained as early classical. All the three varieties together speak about the developments of Indian art from the 2nd to 5th-6th century. The period can be extended or
compressed according to different regional variations. If classical sculpture from Mathura and Sarnath is taken as nāgara then Govindnagar, Nachna, Udaigiri, Besnagar, Pawaya and Gaya etc. will be vaishāka and Kuṣāṇa should be taken as satya.

In the Deccan and the South an independent lineage will have to be traced outside the Gupta territory as scholars like Shivaramamurti have always felt and is strongly being advocated by Ratan Parimoo. The distinction between the two morphological types is further supported by Joanna Williams who observed that the "naturally draped and softly modelled Buddha types of this area could have hardly contributed to the harsher early Gupta idiom". The Krishna valley sculpture should be taken as the satya phase of this lineage and the nāgara phase is achieved a little later than Gupta Art at places like Ellora, Badami and Mahabalipuram with some regional variations of style and time at each centre. At some of these places like Mathura, a consistent development from Satya to Nāgara can be seen. The style also gets percolated or diffused to different places at different stages of maturity, but it cannot reach the maturity that has been acquired at a centre having consistent activity e.g. the sculpture reliefs of Rāmāyana from Nachana, though sharing the same admiration with Mathura sculpture just because they belong to the same style and period, are qualitatively far inferior to Mathura sculpture. Shamalaji and the other Gupta sculpture from Gujarat can never equal the magnificence and sensuousness of Mathura Gupta sculpture, which is also
true about Ajanta sculpture. The deliberations are similar but the excellence differs. According to Parimoo it is tentative, hesitant, not fully formed. It is groping...... it is heterogenous...... like different hands and different workshops and several inconsistent styles, which result in diverse individual images and sections...... it is not unified and integrated with the architecture of the rock cut cave. All these observations are true probably because Ajanta sculpture was not germinated in that soil. It was still trying to adapt itself to and grow with the surroundings and before it could develop into the Nāgara sophistication, the sculptural activity at Ajanta came to an end which had reached here at its Vaiṣṇīka phase. When the post-Kuṣāṇa or early Gupta sculpture, leaving behind its libidinous, rustic but fascinating virility, the irresistible earthly, erotic fervour, was inclining towards a parole which in Joanna Williams' words is having an intellectual flavour and abstracting tendencies. The intuition got replaced by deliberations converting the pulsating volume into static forms.

An interesting parallel can be observed in other forms of art like literature. Hála Sātavāhana's Gāhāsattasai and Pravarasena Vākāṭaka's Setubandha or Rāvaṇavahoh represent the two phases in the evolution of Prākrit literature from the Deccan. It is said that quite a few Gāthās have been added to Sattasai in the later period but still the bulk of it is pre-Vākāṭaka. Gāhāsattasai has a strong smell of sweat and semen. The libidinal energy which is at the seed of this expression gets weakened in Setubandha due to the growing verbal articulation.
Gākā is true to life in its own way, like Shudraka's

This literature, on its way to sophistication, in the transitional phase, like a cocooned larva or chrysalis becomes almost lifeless and wooden, in the process of metamorphosis.

Coming back to Ajanta, one of the sculptural manifestations of the Vākāṭaka era, it becomes necessary for us to give a thought to some other Vākāṭaka sites like Mandhal, Mansar, Pavnar and Ramtek (Fig.14) and see whether Ajanta represents the sculptural style of the Vākāṭakas, if there exists any style that can be labelled as the Vākāṭaka style. The Śiva images from Mandhal (Fig. 17) are unique examples of unusual iconography and that is why could attract the attention of scholars. Otherwise, they are of a lesser quality, having no aesthetic significance. They are stocky, heavy and with an inert surface. Mansar Batuk Bhairava (as identified by Shivaramamurti) (Fig. 18) is closer to some of the Nidhi images from Ajanta (Fig. 19) and is one of the examples of grotesque elegance-like in the Gāṇeśa images - a combination only Indian sculpture could successfully achieve.

The sculpture from Ramtek displays a different plastic intention than Mandhal or Pavnar. It reveals an inclination towards monumentality and colossality and has the gusto and pent-up energy that can rival Badami sculpture. The Keval Narasiṁha and the Trivikrama sculptures are temperamentally different from the sculpture from other important centres of the Vākāṭaka empire. Its robust physiognomy and
and monumentality is later continued in Aurangabad. Though most art-historians have consented to the theory of 'Ajanta to Ellora via Aurangabad', today, I strongly feel that except for the group of Dancers from Cave 7 at Aurangabad which shows an affinity towards the Māravijaya panel of Cave 26 at Ajanta, the rest of the sculpture from Aurangabad is too expressionistic to be compared with the calculated delineations at Ajanta.

The Pavnar sculptures are quite different from the rest of the Vākāṭaka sculptures. They are tall, slender and very elegant figures with supple movements and graceful stances. The Pavnar Gaṇgā (Fig. 15) can be classified among the most beautiful female figures that Indian sculptors have ever carved. Her full and fleshy thighs, heavy voluptuous bosom, and a slight bulge in the lower belly make her extremely sensuous—like a Chola bronze. The slender elegance of this figure, and the graceful swift movements of the figures from Pavnar reliefs, most of them based on Krisṇalīla (Figs. 11-14) remind us of Krishna valley sculpture. Not only the figural characteristics but also the manipulation and construction of space that is seen in some of these sculptures e.g. the Kāmaś Vadha relief (Fig. 13) is very similar to Amaravati sculpture (Fig. 12). In Amaravati, the movement of the protagonist is echoed and reinforced by the other accompanying figures being almost in similar postures. Gombrich and Arnheim have also noticed such compositional features. Gombrich calls it 'Chorus effect' and Arnheim traces various principles of similarities. Pavnar reliefs also use this device
to add to the dynamism of the total composition. Scholars have observed a similarity between Amaravati sculpture and Ajanta paintings, but seldom in Ajanta sculpture. It is also felt that the visual language of Ellora sculpture shows an affinity towards Ajanta painting and vice-versa, both of which owe something to the complex grammar of the Veṅgi idiom.

The Pavnar sculptures reveal a pronounced Amaravati influence, which is also observed in Ajanta paintings. At Ellora, it gets diffused and less pronounced probably because Ellora draws inspirations from several sources viz. Western India, Nasik, Kanheri and the Eastern Vākāṭaka school from Vidarbha. At Ellora a group of sculptures, never considered to be very significant by scholars, shows characteristics of the phase groping for accomplishment. It is considered to be late by most of the scholars including Deshpande and Walter Spink who nevertheless dates the Cave (No. 27) in which they are situated as one of the earliest from this complex. He opines that the sculptures must be a later addition. The reason he gives is that they are of the Vaiṣṇavite faith and the Vaiṣṇava emphasis is out of place in this phase of Ellora.

The two panels having three figures in each of them, flank the door of this cave which shows several architectural similarities with Cave 16 of Ajanta and a few other earlier monuments. One of these panels depicts Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva standing in a row (Fig. 20). The other
is identified as Balarama, Kṛṣṇa and Subhadrā (Fig. 21) by Deshpande. Several panels or sculptures depicting a female Goddess flanked by Vasudeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa are found in the Mathura region datable to the Kuśāna or even the pre-Kuśāna era and are identified as Ekanāṁśa, the Śakti or Yogamāya of Viṣṇu who was born as the daughter of Yashoda and Nanda and considered as sister of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, by N.P.Joshi⁴⁶. In his book on Indian iconography, he mentions several images of Ekanāṁśa and barring one or two from Eastern India and one small image from Badami, all of them are from the first five centuries of the Christian era. Surprisingly, this relief from Ellora is not mentioned in that book.

In the present context, the representation of Ekanāṁśa itself suggests an earlier date for this sculpture and demands for a re-examination of the chronology of Ellora sculpture. It will also be relevant to mention here that the iconographic details of this image with two arms, one holding a lotus and the other in Katyāvalāmbita position tally with the description in the Bhāṣṭaṁhitā which is a Gupta period text⁴⁷, and also with the description in the Viṣṇudharmottara⁴⁸.

The other sculptures from this cave mentioned above perhaps suggest the supreme deities to whom these incarnations are related. Vasudeva known as the incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the Pāñcharātra Saṁhitās Saṅkarṣaṇa is often identified with Rudra Śiva and Halāyudha is also one of the epithets of Śiva. The third deity Brahma has a relation with Ekanāṁśa who is considered to be an Aṁśa of Prajāpati according
to *Mahābhārata*. The presence of these supreme deities of the Hindu pantheon can be explained in this manner, which otherwise seems very curious. One more sculpture of Mahiṣamardini also can be related to Ekaṇamāsī as in the later period Ekaṇamāsī either gets eliminated from the Vaiṣṇava pantheon or if she appears in some texts like the *Harivamśa*, she appears either as Vaiṣṇavī Mahāmāyā, Gajalakṣmī or she is identified with the Śaivite Goddess Bhadrakāli which is worshipped by out-laws or thieves.\(^5\) *Viṣṇudharmottara* says, that the girl after being dashed against the stone by Kamsa, escaped and re-appeared in Vindhyaachala in the form of Durga, who is worshipped by her clan - the Vṛṣṇis and the Abhiras who had inherited that culture. The name of the founder of the Vakataka dynasty Vindhyasakti probably speaks of this Abhira faith and not his conquest over the Vindhya region. There is no evidence to prove his victory over Central India.

These sculptural panels were placed in a later date - bracket possibly because of the Southern accent that is apparently in them, but a closer examination discloses several features which are not Pallava. The shoulders are not unusually broad like the Mahabalipuram figures. The torsos are tapering at the waist but show natural width and proportions at the chest unlike the Pallava sculptures in which the torsos are just a little broader than the thighs. The slenderness is closer to Vidarbha sculpture than Pallava sculpture and have a higher degree of naturalism. The limbs are fuller and well-modelled and do not taper regularly at the extremities like chalksticks, as we see in Mahabalipuram sculpture.
Krishnakumar ascribes a very late date to these sculptures which more or less corresponds with the date suggested by Deshpande i.e. C. 9th-10 century. He attributes these panels to the Yadavas of Devgiri but as observed before, by this time the Ekanamsa sculptures are almost extinct from the Brahmanical pantheon. Towards the end of his article he admits that the style of these sculptures suggests a date which in much prior to the one that has been ascribed to them. He observes that the decorative carvings from these sculptures could be placed at the end of 5th century. Yet, he cautiously places the group around 600 A.D.

In Ajanta, one comes across a number of images carved in similar, simple arched niches. The niche, sometimes is also embellished with a decorative torana but only after the image is carved completely. Here at Ellora, the images are carved and finished but the arches are yet to be decorated with toranas. The sculpture itself too, shows a marked similarity with Ajanta and to some extent, Nasik sculpture. The similarity with Nasik sculpture can be substantiated better citing the Ellora Buddhist sculpture. Rather, just because it is seen in isolation, devoid of the reference of the Buddhist sculpture from this site and also the other related movements of this period, these sculptures are placed in a later date-bracket. A comparison with a similar panel with three standing figures in a row from a small cell at the southern end of the corridor of Cave 11 could shed more light on this problem but unfortunately, the photograph I have of it, is
miserably under exposed. This sculpture is almost a later version of the Trideva panel and in certainly not later than 6th century. If juxtaposed with this panel, the sculpture from Cave 27 appears much earlier due to the sophistication of the former. This course of sophistication is a vivid indication of the fact that the lifelessness or the inertness in the sculpture from Cave 27 is not a product of schematism or dogmatism suggesting deterioration, as scholars tend to believe but it is a phase with a potential of a pupa, dormant apparently but latently maturing.

An attribution of these sculptures, to the Vakataka or Traikutaka era, on one hand demarcates the inaugural activity at Ellora and on the other, with the help of the stylistic features of a transitional phase, discernible in the artistic expression of that age and also stipulated, however cursorily by a contemporaneous treatise, configurates the course of developments in Indian sculpture.
REFERENCES

1. The dynasties were the Vākāṭakas, Aśmakas, Ruchikas, Kuntalas, Traikūṭakas, which seemed to be conflicting with each other as is evident from the inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas in Ajanta for e.g. the inscription of Vārāhadeva in Cave 16.

See below Note 14.


5. Ibid - p.11

6. Ibid - p.19


8. V.V. Mirashi op.cit. p.56.


11. The similarities were pointed out by my friends Madhavi Athalye and Jayaram Poduval respectively. Jayaram cited several Gupta temples including Bhumra having Dvarapālikas with Chhatra. I feel that though the idea and iconography is derived from the Gupta
sites, there is no trace of Gupta idiom in the sculpture.

12. A.P. Jamkhedkar and G.B. Deglurkar 'Pavnaś silpapatāchā punarvichār'
    (Marathi) Yugavāṇī, Nagpur, April-May, 1974, pp.24-29.

13. The copper-plate grants which refer to the Traikūṭaka rule are:
   3. The Kanheri plates of K.E. 245.
   4. The Matvan plates of Madhyamasena of K.E. 256.

   The first three of these have been published by V.V. Mirashi, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol.IV Part Nos. 8,9 and 10 and the other two have been published by Shobhana Gokhale (Marathi) Bhāratya Itihasa aṇi Sanskriti. Jan. 1972 and Oct. 1972, respectively.

14. Published by Bhau Daji in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society Vol.VII 1862, p.56. However, Mirashi cautions us from taking the eulogy literally as the composers of such eulogies were prone to exaggeration.


19. The term *zeitgeist* is used here in a specific sense, keeping in mind the limitations of the concept. Although it was generally criticized in the 1950's, for the reason that such generalization may do injustice to individuals, I personally feel, that with all its shortcomings and limitations, such generalizations help us to get a deeper insight into our historical understanding.


21. Ghatge 'Maharashtri Language Literature' Journal of the University of Bombay Vol. IV Part IV. Ghatge feels that the language of
Setubandha goes nearer than the Gāhā to Sanskrit. It is believed to be a composition by Pravarasena the Vākāṭaka ruler.

22. The Viṣṇudharmottara is put at a later date i.e. in the eighth century by Stella Kramrisch (Text and Translation, Calcutta, 1924) and Śivaramamurti (Chitra-sutra of Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter II, New Delhi, 1978) places it in the Kuśāṇa-Gupta transitional phase. However, considering the style of the language and the contents it appears to be a post-Gupta text. Also refer to Priyabala Shah for the discussion on the date of V.D.(Text and Translation, Baroda, 1961).

23. Śivaramamurti - ibid pp.64-68.

24. ibid

25. ibid

26. ibid

27. सादृश्यं लिरित्वते यत्तु दृश्यं भाविरिवृत्तः ।
Mānasollāsa of Somesvara Srigondekar, G.K. Gaekwad Oriental Series, 2 volumes, Baroda, 1925. Verse 900. Śilparatna of Śrikumara 145 repeats the words with minor changes.

28. C.Śivaramamurti op.cit. pp.64.

29. I am thankful to my friend Shri Nishigandh Deshpande, who suggested this possibility to me. The reference is found in the Sanskrit English Dictionary, Monier Williams, Oxford, 1976. p.1005.
30. Kāmandaki was a pupil of Chaṅkya Viśṇugupta whose work is known as Kāmandakiya Nitiśāstra, ibid p.384.


32. Shivaramamurti - op.cit.


34. Parimoo Ratan, Some problems of Ellora from the point of view of Buddhist Caves, Ellora Caves, Sculpture and Architecture, New Delhi, 1988, pp.180-203.


36. Parimoo op.cit., p.185.

37. Mārvijaya and Parinirvāṇa sculpture from Cave 26, I feel should be treated as exceptions. They appear much evolved compared to the rest of Ajanta sculpture. The Mārvijaya can be a later addition to the original programme of the cave. This possibility is discussed in the following chapter.

38. Joanna Williams op.cit.

39. W.Spink suggested the mobility of Ajanta artisans to Ellora via Aurangabad (Marg Vol.XX No.2 March 1967) and Geri Malandra (Ajanta to Ellora - back again. Art of Ajanta New perspectives,
New Delhi, op.440-453) and Gary Tartakov (Ajanta and Early Chalukyans, ibid, pp.453-467), also subscribed to his views.


42. The affinity between the two is noticed by many art-historians namely S.Kramrisch, C.Shivaramamurti, D.Barret and B.Gray. For a comprehensive discussion of these correlations, see Parul Dave 'Correlatives between Ajanta Painting and Amaravati Sculpture,' Art of Ajanta, New Perspectives, New Delhi, 1991).

43. Deshpande op.cit. p.46.


45. Deshpande op.cit. p.46.


47. एमानंबारंधा कार्तिक्या देवी पदकरा जया ।
कार्तिस्थबामहस्ता सा मध्यस्था रामकृष्णयोः। विश्णुधामोतिरः। ८५-७२।

48. एमानंबारंधा कार्तिक्या देवीं बलदेव कृष्णायोऽध्य्ये ।
कार्तिस्थितं वामकरं वरोजरशिरं रे जोहंसाती ॥ वृहस्पंश्यता ५७-२७।
49. Nilkantha, the commentator on Mahābhārata gives the etymology of Ekānamśa in Vanaparva, Ref. P.L. Gupta. See below.


52. The Kīrita Mukuṭa of Māra from Mārvijaya of Cave 26 and also the short Yajñopavīta will hint at the similarities between the sculpture of Ajanta.