CHAPTER V

TOWARDS EARLY CHŌḶA SCULPTURE

The pan Indian culture does not make distinction between sculpture and architecture. It saw both these together as a 'fission' in the monument, which evolved from an original unity of thought, belief and need for expression. The medieval temples single or complex groups specially in South India are biomorphic forms of sculptural monuments. The temples become a plastic intention carved out of hard enduring rock specifically on its outside.

An insatiable urge to create, fuse and adorn both meaningfully or otherwise is perhaps born out of the dissatisfaction trait in human nature to 'the naked'. The naked in this context are the faces and different planes of architecture. The outer side of the temples are its walls. A bare or naked wall naturally poses the problem of vacant space. This over a period of time was overcome by ritual and innovative creativity by a concerted effort of both the priest and the sthapati. A unified conception preserves the sanctity and status of both. As it is rightly said, there is always some degree of calculation in all the arts. No architecture is an art unless it engages our sensibility as plastic expression. This often causes the 'stress-conflict' phenomena between form and decoration between function and aesthetics, however a

choice is made to overcome this by playing upon our attitudes. For every geometric, inorganic form, there is simultaneously a naturalistic organic one to balance it. The architect sculptor draws out of us very naturally the urge to reflect on the abstraction of one and the empathy of the other. The architect sculptor play with their medium, alternating between a dead block and its animation. They substitute an organic life to it. The austere abstraction relieved by functional aspects of architecture, of load, weight and support also work towards animating the stone and organically encouraging our empathy rather than deterring it. This does not mean that sculpture is to humanise or animate featureless architecture. The tectonic in architecture can be skillfully and creatively developed. However, our concern is to probe into the 'dissatisfaction trait'. One of the most overwhelming tendency in human nature is to 'destory the crystalline integrity of geometrical construction' and making space become a significant symbol. The intentions of the whole, architecture and sculpture sharing similar ideals encourages in every architectural feature, a complimentary sculptural one. It is in this that both are united.

Depending on the degree of space, principles are formulated. This may mean more or less of sculpture, more or less of sculpturesqueness. The aesthetic effect somewhere looming large requires the proper effect for that particular monument. Angularity may be softened by sculpture, sparse may be treated by plenty; but

conceived together integrally. Sculpture alleviates the external severity of architecture.

Once the space is apprehended, it is slowly changed into form or sculptural scape. Visual perception shapes forms. Placement, distance, simplification and emphasis are in turn tackled to create the necessary visual impact. The success or failure of these become aesthetic values. Simplicity and emphasis are aesthetic values reflected in quality sculpture and 'the physical limitation is one of the first necessities of good ornament. Do not shut the sculptures in space, but let the work acknowledge itself, submit willingly. a feeling of force must not be felt, no command by gentle willing submission'.

In a nutshell, architecture and sculpture as we specifically see in the Early Chōḷa period were alter egos, in the sense that they were intimately linked. They are like man and woman, incomplete without the other. In their difference lies the compliment. Together they create a totally new character and identity for themselves. How they establish this identity, which in turn we call style is the question before us. Apart from direct inheritance, which can be both the accepted norm or mere limitation, there are influencing factors partially political, sastric, religious and experimental. The most important factors for the emergence of this identity and style by constant visual observation points to, form affecting

form as handled by the sculptor, who has an indefatigable amalgam of memories and culture hidden in his psyche. The sum total of such creativity encapsulates a microcosm. K.V. Soundara Rajan aptly writes, "creative art is an amalgam of conceptual inspiration, bio cultural stamina and the penchant for visual translation .....(the) human urge for refinement and gregariousness do not permit of only a clinical harmetically sealed religious experience of every man, per se, but presents religion as the combined experience of individuals, as social units and with a social purpose ..... The empirical terms in which the relationship between god and his creation were idealised and adumberated clearly gave a social content for religion, and was at the root of much ..... of religious history of communities. To an average Indian religion is not separate from life. The mysteries of life itself form the core of his religion and have been moulded by the combined experiences of countless generation of multiracial and polygot social matrix. Religious art became the commitment of the people"(1). These are ideals rooted in the purusarthas or aim of life, dharma, artha, kama, moksha, the acquisition of intellectual, material biological or social fulfilment and gracious merging into the unknown finally. As pointed out these are not an ethnic monopoly.

Nevertheless, it must not be thought that art and cultural movements are all linear, and conform to successive evolutionary patterns.

Circumstance, creativity and innovation from patronage and guilds help largely in its flourishing. They became the epicentre with ambits of influence, dispersion, suffusion and limitation. A group of such epicentres closely linked by distance and patronage create the milieu and identity to some extent and become sources for emulation for the secondary centres.

Besides keeping in mind the above factors, one must definitely recall the perceptive words of Kramrisch in her preface to Indian Sculpture - "Sculptures will themselves supply interpretations - which are vitally present in them".

Both architecture and sculpture in perishable medium are known through the Saṅgam fragments. From very early times the megalithic nature of the Ḍravidians is well known. This once again is a pan Indian expression of the death cult. Crude forms have been erected or sculpted of stone in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, Amarāvati, etc. They are replete in Sittanavāsal, Tēnimalai Kuṭṭālam, Kūḍagumālai, Tirunelvēli, Koḍumbāḷūr, Kāvēri-p-paṭṭiṇam etc. Venerating the dead is seen in the naḍukal, niraikal or the plain kal. These are also called 'paḍai'. The ancient rite of circumambulation, lighting lamps, frankincense, offerings and commemorative worship of stone is a continuing and continuous tradition. Stone no longer is an ordinary natural material but the 'stone of the funerary rites. Stone thus had a specific function and

does not get used for other religious purpose. Religious worship of hypaethral tree shrines are therefore a common feature.

It is with the Vicitra citta Mahēndravarman Pallava that this inhibition was overcome. Royal patronage sanctioned and encouraged the use of stone, specially when relief sculptures were replete in the Satvāhana and Cālukyan kingdoms, which were visual sources and pages of history.

As stated above Mahēndravarman Pallava was the original user of stone and these were called Kaṟṟali temples.

The earliest cave temples were carved out of living rock. Soft sandstone was the preferred medium with the sculptures carved on the walls itself and imitated pained stucco. Wooden reliefs, bhiṭṭi citra and stuccos were in vogue. If at all any sculptures are to be seen, they are those of the dvārapāla flanking the maṇḍapa facades, or enclosed inside a sthambha tōraṇa or on either side of the shrine entrance. These are seen in Mandagapaṭṭu, Dalavanūr, Siyamaṅgalam, Māmaṇḍūr, Vaḷḷam, Tirucirāppalli, Lalitāṅkūra (fig.100) etc. The Dalavanūr, Siyamaṅgalam cave temples have dvārapāla on both the main facades on the shrine front in the inside. Two armed, they are either frontal or in semi profile, partially resting on a massive club entwined by a serpent or otherwise. They carry horns very similar to ones

in Cālukyan cave temples as at Vijayawāda, Bhairavakoṇḍa and the Pāṇḍyan region or may have makuṭa of different types. They are fierce or benign. They wear different types of kuṇḍala., hāra., vastra-yagnōpavita, kaṭibandha, with a central clasp. The body flexion is usually tribhaṅga and some times in the sama bhaṅga.

The hands either rest, or show a mudra. Some parts of the stone are left uncut. The forms are characteristic broad, rounded and heavily pronounced. A certain massivity and impenetrable form causes a rigidity. Inspite of the sculptured contouring many lack the flexibility. The postural habit makes them unwieldly. Anatomical innaccuracy and laymanship is reflected in the form, where there is a frequent use of cyindrical multiplicity which equals duplicating. The sculptures are deliberately exaggerated to inspire awe which suits the role played by them. This also reflects a conditioned approach of laying down norms for the iconography of the same. Such a curious combination results in a figure that we confront as intimidating, an uneasy mixture of benign, austere and po tentially fierce. Although they succeed in evoking the emotion they are relatively archaic and stylised.

Many times the nature of head gear and the dvārapāla themselves indicate the nature of deity enshrined; but despite slight variations heavy, rounded, broad forms characteristically small, rounded pouting lips etc. show a kinship.

Another example from Tirukkaḷkuṉṟam Orukal maṇḍam (fig.101) shows either celestials or dvārapāla on the end walls of the mukhamaṇḍapa in the vismaya and kaṭihasta. One can see a sculptural symmetry tentatively approaching. The way the vastra yajnōpavita are worn in the nivita fashion, the posture and ornamentation conforming to traditional emphasis are pointers to the variations taking place in the theme. Even the whole sculptural language is toned down. Despite the said characteristics there is a softening of form all over. There are a number of such examples, but it would be appropriate to turn to other sculptural developments we see in the period of these cave temples.

The Tiruciṟāppalli Lalitāṅkūra also shows us in the west wall of its maṇḍapa the famed Śiva Gaṅgādhara bas relief (fig.102). This composition of Śiva as Gaṅgādhara with attendant figures on the sides and top is one of the most complete examples of Early Pallava sculpture and fore runner to those at Māmallapuram. On a shallow carved out background the figural placement are calculated but naive. They stand on the surface over each other imitating their earlier painted stucco works. What is perhaps to be noted is the rubric form following the same pattern we see in the dvārapāla. The broad, round facial and body features, a mannered language of gestures and a lack of dynamism continues to haunt us.

The Singavaram Ranganātha four armed Mahīsamardini (fig.103) flanked by a devotee in adoration and another cutting his wrist would suggest one of the earliest prototypes of the Early Pallava female form. The Koṭikal maṇḍapam shows similar dvārapālika. The form, expression and ethnic trait show a close kinship. Unlike their male counterparts, the females are tall, slender and femininely rounded. Slender tubular limbs, somewhat exaggerated curves are in the offing. The weight of one side of the body tilted slightly in some and more prominently in this example tells us more about the sculptural flow and rhythm than the dvārapāla. For a curved in waist the hips flare out gently and naturally. Poise is achieved in the plastic intention. One notices the still unfamiliar sculpting of the breasts, which appear to be placed with untutored hands, and the ever so slight stiffness of lower limbs. The face is ovoid or elipsoidal prominent nose and small pouting lips and smooth cheeks reflect a calm, meditative and slightly withdrawn face. The overall effect is one of restraint, not overwhelming but soothing. There is grace and poise apart from a relaxed countenance. The male figures cutting off his hand here resembles the typical Pāṇḍyan moustached male. It is very noticable that narrative sculptures are rare not because of any other reason but mere availability of space and the priority given to other factors. The later temples of Mahēndra have a Sōmaskanda group in its rear wall in Śiva shrines and Viṣṇu or Durga in Viṣṇu shrines. The Durga shrines have dvarapalika while the Viṣṇu shrine dvārapāla do not have clubs.

The Māmalla style initiated by Narasiṁhavarman I shows a remarkable advance in architecture and a qualitative change in sculpture, besides increasing the reportoire. The Koṉērimaṇḍapam interior has five pairs of dvārapāla differing from each other in elegant postures approximating human portraits in profile, semiprofile, graceful flexion and total coordination. Unlike the crudely cut niches of the earlier phase, we come across recessed niches flanked by slender pilasters. The space available, the space filled up and the way it is enclosed makes for the first lesson in harmony between the three. These are the earliest attempts at sculptural display of arrangement in space. There was perhaps a conscious awareness of projection, recessions and the frontal profile, all of which could be enhanced by the play of light and shade upon the sculptures within. They look like players emerging and caught up in a spotlight. What the sculptor has introduced here is the closeness to natural human proportion; this is further elaborated by their placement which is conducive to the intermingling of the diety, semi divine and the devotee. It is no longer a cave temple dark and mysterious perhaps gloomy, but one gradually approaching towards a more humanising aspect. The devotee merges with and moves back and forth within it. The aim could be certainly one creating the necessary atmosphere and support between the divine and the mortal. The sculptures are just a head above eye level. As we look up the slight tilt of their heads appear to just as much look downwards to

meet us. There is an accessibility to them in the manner of their position which no longer remote and impersonal. The sculptural language is certainly a flow of undulation at its subtle, of slight curves, of timorous emergence trapped at the threshold.

The Māmallapuram Varāhamaṇḍapa Durga (fig.104) on the hind wall, south of the shrine entrance suddenly shows a stiffness accentuated by the Sama bhaṅga posture, standing on a padmapitha her lower right and hand is in abhaya and the left is kaṭihasta. The upper hand hold the chakra and sankha. Thin transparent drapery, girdle cloth-kaṭivastra and kucca bandha drape her breasts. She wears a kirīṭamakuta and patrakuṇḍalas on her ears. A chattra shades her. Gaṇa, ṛsi and devotees in self immolation and in prayer are present, a deer and siṁha are included too. One is forced to draw a comparison with the other Durga because a sudden stiffening of form is felt here, while the upper limbs lack the proper proportions. The narrow waist is also cut deep and the contrasting flare of the hips fall below the mark of the other examples. However, the gana are rendered with clarity, where line and mass are skillfully handled. Similarly the ṛsi and devotee recall the Amarāvati sculptures and what could have been contemporary paintings. Sharp and fluid outlines match the sculpture.

A refinement occurs in the female form in the Trimūrti cave temple at Māmallapuram in the eight armed Durga standing in a sthambha

tōraṇa (fig.105). First of all there is a much more well organised niche space available; and the deity is placed within the shallow relief just on the surface. Flanking in a narrow recess framed by a pilaster is a dvārapāla in profile. Placed flat against a wall is juxtaposed a figure in a deeper niche looking more rounded than flat. Although she stands on a buffalo head in the samabhaṅga her eight arms balance the composition. The horns, the thrust of hips and variously flexed hands encompass an austere and just relaxed figure. Her feet are firmly rooted, but her arms make up for this stiffness. The rounded contours of the upper torso relieve the rigidity of the lower parts. The face is a tense and self conscious expression.

A 1st example from the Paramēśvara Mahāvarāha Viṣṇu gṛha cave I (Ādivarāha) shows us a portrait sculpture on the southern end wall of the ardhamaṇḍapa of Mahēndra II leading his two queens (fig.106). The king recalls some of the Jain figures seen in the Aihōḷe cave to the back of Mēghuti hill, while the female forms recall ones from the Haccappaiya temple at Aihōḷe in the way their limbs are depicted. It should of course be acknowledged that these slender long tapering limbs and form are encased is semi transparent drapery. It is also seen that unlike the celestial beings the royal bearing of these queens does not permit exaggerated postures or action. The sculptor needless to say has consciously rendered a coyness and dignity that goes with royal breeding.

The monoliths at Māmallapuram are infact sculptures of architectural models. The ratha bear testimony to the advance made in the sculptural quality too. The wall portions possess slit niches still shallow but better defined, which carry large figures of divinities, dvārapāla, adorers etc. A new distinction is made where the central bhadra is now regularly topped with a makara tōraṇa, and carrying a divinity within as in Draupadi ratha.

The Draupadi ratha Durga (fig.18) on the rear, standing on the buffalo head is one of the earliest representations of the type. The other side has two dvārapālika and other Dēvi images on either side in the samabhaṅga, abhaya and kaṭihasta. It is in these images that one can see a high degree of finesse and nearly idealised finish. There is a recognition of an aesthetic possibility in the curved form. A fairly rounded top and narrowed hips, a high makuṭa, supple limbs and the confident thrust of the hips forsees a great future for the female form for a later time.

The same confidence is relfected in the Arjuna ratha (fig.19) in the pratihāra, amra, king consorts siddha and cāmaradhāra. This is like a stage with players. The central and karna niches and the hāra contain figures to a perfect fit placed in intimate postures. The skill of the sculptor is at play here. A simplicity born of elegance and freshness fit in beautifully with the

architecture. There are paired figures half emerging from screens of the gṛhapindi in the dvitala carved upto the dome. The sculptures have visibly loosened as those of the Draupadi ratha. They are on the peripheral zone of confidence and restraint. The manner in which the single figures are placed in part or semi profile, while the central and straight facing figures and couples fit in well with the frame and medium of relief. Their body language and stance are exercises in sculptural flexibility and expression. The males however still have a robust form. In general there is a suppleness balanced by curves of the arm and the tilt of the head. The predeliction for smooth slender rounded forms is visible here.

The Dharmarāja ratha also shows a repeated verticalism of the figures set singly or in pairs in bare rectangular niches. This perhaps is to afford some 'optical support' necessary for the heavy horizontals and verticals of the cornice and other tala. Similarly the vertical accent is also seen in the bhadra śāla of the dvitala. In both these ratha the implication of the figure into an architectonic context is carried out with purity.

The treatment of body, specially slight torso and slim abdominal portion with a sharp incision above the hip in the female is conspicious in Māmallapuram. Movement is shown by a chest thrown forward, drawn back shoulders and an ill shortened forearm

with outward turning raised palm. Benjamin Rowland talks of the 'elongation of form with long tubular limbs the whole conception (of which) is invested with a peculiarly dynamic quality. One can see the suggestion of the emergence of form from the stone ..... achieved here by gradually more salient disengaging of successive planes of relief with the details of the ultimate plane being entirely merged with the background'(2). Similarly it has been observed that Early Tamilian sculpture though contemporary to Early Cālukyan is much simpler. "In the line of its figures, its unconventionalised treatment of eyes and the absence of canopies of foliage or clouds, the latter resemble the sculptures of Amaravati ..... has more rugged strength. It must be presumed to have arisen direct from an early form of art prevalent in South India, which has been greatly influenced by the school of imperial art established in Amarāvati"(3). The tamil figures become more conventional, with median loops in front, and the tribhanga which is more graceful.

The sculptures of this phase have figures in natural postures and moulding. The faces tend to be taller than broad, with slightly flattened noses and slight double chins.

It is at this juncture that a full stop has to be made; because henceforth appears the fully mature and ossified Pallava sculpture seen in from the beginning of the 8th century A.D. A certain dis-

tortion and baroquenes in both architecture and sculpture eclipse the form, in its very basic. A continuous perusal of the formal aspects defies any kinship with the Chōḷa. Overcrowded, gross and turbulent dynamism or some times a total ossification makes it a world apart.

It is only as much as certain features showing semblence that haunt our memory that have been used here. The usual dependency and kinship played a large role. These examples will needless to say show a kinship with what will be discussed as Chōḷa and its extended idiom in the following chapters.

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3. F.H. Gravely and C. Sivaramamurti, Guide to the Archaeological Galleries, Madras Museum 1960, pp.21-22.