

## TEMPLES OF KHAJURAHO

In central India, the temple city of Khajuraho is located in the Chhatarpur District of Madhya Pradesh (Deva 1990:1) [See Munsterberg (1970:258-259) for the location of Khajuraho]. The city of Khajuraho has a large group of medieval temples which depict a perceptible record of one of the most flourishing moments of India's art (Deva 1990:1). These temples are categorized as the North Indian temple or the Nagara style, which are elevated mount type temples [There are mainly three types of temples in India. A Nagara type or the northern Indian style, a Dravida type or the southern Indian style, and a Vesara type or the middle region, mixed type, see Gupta (2002:13-14)]. On the walls of the temples, numerous deities, celestial beauties, dancers, animals and so forth are carved animatedly and vividly. Although these temples are well-known for their erotic sculptures and attract the common tourist, such categories are only a small percentage of the total aesthetic work (Deva 1986:7).

These temples were built during the reign of the Chandella kingdom, which rose during early tenth century as a powerful central Indian region with one of their capitals at Khajuraho (Deva 1990:2). According to a legend, the first king of the Chandella, Chandravarman, was born as a son of the moon-god (Chandra) and Hemavati, a young widowed daughter of a Brahmin minister. This strong half-divine king was told to build eighty-five temples with a tank and a garden attached to each at Khajuraho as a part of ceremonies with his queen (Deva 1986:13).

However, according to the historical epigraphs of Khajuraho, an influential king, Yasovarman (c. 925-950), built a spectacular temple of Visnu, the Lakshmana temple, which was the most adorned and developed temple of its age in Central India [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2*:417-441), Lakshmana Temple]. The son of Yasovarman, Dhanga (c. 950-1002), succeeded the reign and made the Chandella the strongest kingdom in North India (Deva

1986:14). During his sovereignty, the Saiva temple of Visvanatha, the Jaina temple of Parsvanatha, and an unidentified third temple were built (Deva 1986:15) [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2*:442-450) for Parsvanatha Temple, and (451-458) for Visvanatha Temple]. Dhanga's son, Ganda (c. 1002-1017), governed during a peaceful era and built the Vaishnava temple and a Sun temple, now called the Chitragupta [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2*:467-470), Chitragupta Temple]. Vidyadha (c. 1017- 1029), the son of Ganda, became the most powerful ruler in the history of the Chandella Kingdom, and built Kandariya Mahadeva temple, the largest temple of Khajuraho [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2*:471-485), Kandariya Mahadeva Temple]. Following Vidyadha's death, the kingdom lost power by degrees. Vidyadha's son and grandson, Vijayapala (c. 1029-1051) and Devavarman (c. 1051), were both feeble kings. Although the next ruler, Kirttivarman (c. 1070-1098), another strong king, built the Vaishnava temple and the Chaturbhuj temple, the Chandella dynasty began to decline in power [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2*:496-499), Chaturbhuj Temple]. Thereafter, mediocre kings prevailed and the political prestige of Khajuraho waned. However, Khajuraho remained the religious capital until the last days of Chandella's kingdom, and new temples were continually built until the close of the twelfth century (Deva 1986:17). The original of eighty temples, only twenty survived to contemporary day (Craven 188).

By observing each category of sculptures, one can learn much about medieval Indian society and lifestyle. In the numerous sculptures, the architects and sculptors are often portrayed. Groups of them are carrying hammers or chisels and the master, or senior architects are shown drawing a design or supervising (Deva 1986:165) [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2*:518), the image of architectural members]. Distinctive in their appearance, some of the senior architects have beards, which can be considered as the symbol of power as same as today in India.

Hunters are often depicted with men carrying their quarry on a pole. Although professional hunters were probably regarded as belonging to the lower castes or aboriginal class, pig-sticking and deer hunting were popular with princes or wealthy young men as an outdoor activity (Deva 1986:167). As an interesting depiction, deer are hunted by people with the help of tame deer (Deva 1986:165) [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2:518*), the image of deer-hunting].

Various warriors such as wrestlers, acrobats, gladiators and soldiers, are also popular depictions throughout the temples, (Deva 1986:165). While the hunters carry bows and arrows, warriors frequently carry swords and shields, or daggers and lances (Deva 1986:166). Horses and elephants are often depicted as vehicles for those warriors [See Deva (1990 *Temples of Khajuraho volume 2:420*), the image of soldiers]. According to Deva, there are mainly two types of elephants, namely those that serve as vehicles for people and other ferocious ones that trample people. The fierce elephant's brutality was used for sport and punishment in medieval India. For instance, a criminal with handcuffs might be chased by fierce elephants. If he was able to escape the elephant, he was freed from his sentence; however, if he could not escape, there was no way to survive (1986:167).

Musicians and dancers are one of the most commonly portrayed categories in Khajuraho. As a feature of gender distinction, the drummers and musicians are males, and the singers and dancers are females (Deva 1986:166) [See Deva (1986:72-73), the image of dancers and musicians]. Although some of the performers are regarded as amateurs or belonging to the indigenous tribes, most of them would have been in the professional class. As a trait of them, in casual scenes are often depicted. One put on eye make up or set her hair with a mirror, and the other tries to pick a thorn out of her foot [See the picture, Munsterberg (1970:97)]. While a barbers comb one's hair, the girl feeds a birds sitting on her shoulder. Barbers often accompany these women performers or their

peers. Cutting the nails, painting the feet, or doing minor surgery were typical roles for the barbers. According to Chandella records, barbers were revered among the most prestigious professions and the occupation still exists in rustic areas in India (Deva 1986:166).

Parades are also common motifs at Khajuraho and there appear to be mainly two types of marches: the secular and the religious. The former illustrates gaiety and revelry, and often dance and music as well. By contrast, the religious type shows devotees accompanying a religious teacher or a deity with dance and music on a pilgrimage. In the parades, the important person is carried by litter on the back of elephant and an attendant sits outside. Usually, princes ride horses and an umbrella is carried over their head by a vassal to indicate their royalty (Deva 1986:166).

Due to its erotic sculptures, Khajuraho is renowned throughout the world. Their blunt, yet scintillating, erotic expressions attract visitors, but at the same time they also puzzle and confuse (Deva 1986:171) [See Deva (1986:170-201), the image of erotic depictions]. According to Deva, it is hard to find a temple that does not have at least some figures of “couples” (*mithuna*) as adornment, because contemporaries believed these motifs would protect them and bring happiness (1986:205) [Also check Gupta (2002:32), Mithuna and Maithuna scenes in art].

As regard to sexual portraits, there are several interpretations by scholars. According to the Hindu philosophy, sex represents the union of men and women and that is the symbol of non-dualism which designates the goal of Hinduism which is known as liberation or *moksa* (Deva 1867:171). Another explanation takes them as the perceptible text of the Kamasutra which is the doctrine of the second stage, or householder stage, which explores knowing *kama* (the pleasure of love), is considered as one of the goals of that stage. Thus, creating sexual depiction was part of their religious life, and probably there were few restrictions or inhibitions dealing with sex in

medieval India (Deva 1986:171). However, in the erotic sculptures, one can see some women covering their face with their hands. This gesture may be interpreted as illustrating that although sex was not taboo, feelings of shyness or timidity still existed in the society.

Although the temples of Khajuraho are often focused on primarily for their erotic embellishment, the other enormous part of their depictions often represents significant aspects of the medieval India as vividly as the erotic sculptures. The amazing sculptural art of these temples conveys with great vitality, the sensitivity and lifestyle of medieval India to us today.

### **REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING**

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<http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/khajuraho/>

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Culture/Archit/Khajur.html>

<http://www.mptourism.com/dest/khajuraho.html>

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<http://0search.epnet.com.darius.uleth.ca:80/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=9409142174>

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