

## **Realization of Fidelity through Self-Sacrifice: An Examination into the Sculptural Narration of the Fight between Jatayu and Ravana in the Cave no 16 of Ellora Caves.**

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### **Abstract**

*The fulfillment of duties in defense of 'dharma' is considered as one of the important ideals of Hinduism. A society based on 'dharma' can only be able to ensure the welfare of all living beings. The principle of the existence of living organisms is being narrated through various epics in India. The very principles of dharma are being narrated and explained through various forms of art. The art of Ellora provides such examples which are not only related to Hinduism but also provide examples from Buddhism and Jainism. An excellent sculpture that shows the fight between Ravana and Jatayu as given in the Kailasa temple, cave no 16 is nothing but an apt example that attempts to manifest in itself the fulfillment of one's own duties. The composition narrates a 'dharmayudha' in which Jatayu attempts to escape Sita by fighting with the evilest power in the world, Ravana. What is more heroic is the self-sacrifice of Jatayu by blocking the Pushpaka vimana of Ravana even after knowing that it would get perished in the fight. The present study is an attempt to analyze the stylistic, historical, spiritual and the philosophical aspects of the famous artwork Jatayu fighting with Ravana as given in the Kailasa temple at Ellora.*

## **Introduction**

Indian art occupies one of the important positions in the world history of art. The study of the various periods of Indian history of art provides ample examples that reflect some of the exceptional artistic talents. Many religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, etc. have patronized Indian art at various times. Numerous mediums and materials have been used in making these visual manifestations of various religious ideas. Though different religions employ artists for making artworks, a common approach can be seen among them in each period.

In order to find out the meaning in life, numerous great sages have attempted in various ways and times. These deeper thoughts gradually turned into various philosophies and suggested various ways and methods to be practiced so as to have a meaningful life. These kinds of practices may later have turned into different kinds of religious practices. Among the various religions prevailing in the present day, Hinduism is considered as the earliest and the third-largest religion after Christianity and Islam. Among the various specialties, one of the most beautiful aspects of Hinduism is its freedom to believe or not to believe in an absolute power. It provides freedom of worship in one's own desired way and form. It doesn't pose any challenge to other methods of worship. The coexistence of other faiths like Buddhism and Jainism along with Hinduism is a very common scene in Indian art. However, we can also see various interpretations of Hinduism. Though it basically prevails in the Indian subcontinent, we can also see Hinduism in numerous other people who are residing outside India. Often Hinduism is also seen as a way of life. The origin of Hinduism can be traced back to the old Sanathana Dharma i.e the eternal law and eternal way. However, a close examination of Hinduism would give us a feeling that it gives diverse traditions like Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, etc. Different people tried to give different interpretations to it. In this regard, western scholars tried to understand Hinduism as a fusion of diverse Indian traditions. As per their view if anyone attempts to find out the root of this religion, then one would understand that it cannot be attributed to one founder rather the basis could be endorsed to different traditions(wiki). But the Hindus themselves would perceive Hinduism in a different way. They think that spirituality is to be understood as one and in order to achieve that there can be different ways. Hence worships of different deities are understood as diverse routes through which one would attain truth. It is appropriate to mention about sayings of the great sage Swami Vivekananda regarding worshipping of different deities. He compared it as like different rivers start from different sources and after flowing through different ways at last they would reach and submerge into the ocean. Hence the diverse practices of traditions can be integrated through the common thread of spirituality. Even though people attempt to give a different interpretation to Hinduism, the etymological meaning says that the name 'Hindu' is derived from the word 'Sindhu'. As

per Wikipedia, it is a Persian geographical term to indicate to the people who settled down on the bank of the river Indus in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. It was a part of the great pre-divided India and incidentally, it falls in the present Pakistan. The term 'al-Hind' is derived from Persia and later the Arabs adopted the same word into their language. Hence the word indicates to those who live across the River Indus. Not giving any scope for surprise, the term Hindustani has gradually been attributed to those who live across the River Indus. Even though there can be slight variations existed among the historians regarding various periods of Indian history, by analyzing the presently available evidences the dates mentioned by Michel seem to have been widely accepted.

According to Michel, Pre Vedic religion was calculated until 1750. Vedic religion is believed to have taken place possibly from 1750 to 500 BCE (This may be valid till further historical evidence establishes new dates). Period that falls from 500 to 200 BCE was considered as the stage of Ascetic reformism. The period 200BCE to 1100 CE has been categorized as the period of Classical Hinduism. The period 1100CE to 1850 has been considered as a period of Islamic rule and sects of Hinduism, and from the period going on from 1850 was considered as the period of modern Hinduism.

The Hindus believe in the concept of 'moksha'. They think that the purpose of human life for each and everyone is nothing but to attain the 'moksha'. Hindu texts give appropriate methods to attain this state. Hindus believe that each life has to undergo various cycles of births. Moksha can be interpreted as gaining liberation from these numerous cycles of births. The term moksha does not mean achieving freedom from all kinds of pain and captivity. But it has a broader meaning in it. To get moksha means to be one with the supreme power. It means a life becomes one with omniscience (infinite knowledge), omnipotent (unlimited power) and omnipresence (present everywhere). As per Hinduism normal beings are concerned only with material pleasures which are controlled by the 'Maya'. Wise men can logically understand the futility of achieving material pleasures as it cannot give permanent happiness. Hence people generally turn towards spirituality. There are different ways through which people can attain the state of moksha. Therefore various philosophical concepts of Hinduism on life, death, dharma, etc. are visually manifested in different periods and places through interpretation of its rich cultural heritage of India. In this regard, numerous examples of sculptures are available in the Ellora caves.

### **Ellora Caves**

Ellora caves are situated at the northwest of Maharashtra and about 80 km southwest of Ajanta caves. There are 34 caves at Ellora which are spread over 2 km. The rock-cut architecture is made from basaltic cliffs and has big entrances and interior walls. The Ellora caves provide works of different religions like that of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It also provides examples of how the ancient people of India lived harmoniously though

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they all belong to different religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The earliest temples belong to Buddhism. There are a total of 12 caves and they fall between 200BCE to 600 CE. Then comes the caves related to Hinduism and a total of 17 caves can be seen here. The periods of these caves can be seen from 500 CE to 900 CE(13-29 caves). The next phases of caves belong to Jain temples. They can be seen from cave nos 30 to 34 and belong to 800 to 1000CE. If we make a broad categorization of the caves at Ellora, we would find that the caves related to Hinduism seem to have an effect of more dramatic in design. At the same time, the Buddhist caves appear to have the simplest ornamentation. In Ellora, we can see two types of caves: Chaitya and Vihara. Chaitya caves are worship halls but the viharas are monasteries for the monks. In some viharas, there used to have sleeping cells that appear to be meant for the Buddhist travelers.

Since as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD we can see temples belonging to different religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism existed very harmoniously in India. This is the best example of inter-religious harmony that the world needs to look at and draw inspiration from. Hindu and Buddhist caves were constructed by the Rashtrakuta dynasty and many of the Jaina caves were constructed by the Yadava dynasty. It seems many people like the royals, rich and traders have contributed to the construction of these monuments.

It is really amazing to see the Kailash temple in Ellora as it is made from a single stone and made during the reign of Krishna I. There are many other temples that provide numerous sculptures are Ravana-ka-Khai, Dasavataar, Shankeshwara and Rameswara . Dantidurga was considered to be one of the powerful persons associated with the Rashtrakuta dynasty and their periods fall from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to 10 century A.D. The Rashtrakuta dynasty extended their physical space by defeating many including the Chalukyas of Badami in 752 AD. Most of the works done under the Rashtrakuta are related to Shaivism. One of the wonders of this period is the rock-cut architecture Kailasa which is made by converting a single rock into a beautiful artistic monument. It was made during the reign of Krishna I(c.758 A.D.) The first and foremost attraction of the temple is its size as the size of its courtyard is 276 feet deep, 150 feet wide and 120 feet high. As far as Indian sculptures are concerned, the temple Kailasa of the 8<sup>th</sup> century is identified as the highest sculptural achievement in Deccan. The stylistic features of the post-Gupta Rashtrakuta style are in fact, a mixture of the Pallava dynasty and the continuation of the Chalukyan style. Here one can see the powerful and heavy forms of the Deccani tradition and it was highly influenced by the slender grace of southern Indian sculpture. The expression of each composition displays a tendency of dramatic approach in telling the story. Various moods of life like tender affection, annoyance, sudden movements and elegant postures of dance are attempted over here. A close analysis of the compositions shows that the artists of

Ellora have attempted a detailed modeling of individualized figures. One of the specialties of these sculptures is their dramatic effects of light and shade that in fact increase emotional effects. This high contrast between light and shade occurs due to deep cavities. The Rashtrakuta dynasty, under its leadership at the time of Dantidurga, defeated the Chalukyas in 752 AD and became a superpower in Deccan. Gradually they also ruled much of the neighboring areas too. The analysis of the sculptures produced during this period shows that the Rastrakutas were Shaivite by belief and attempted to revive it. One of the wonders of the world is the rock temple at Ellora, the Kailasa temple dedicated to the god Shiva. When one comes to know that this temple was built up from entirely one rock, it would exceed all the boundaries of human excitement. Hence this temple is understood to have been identified as the greatest achievement of the Deccan during the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Jatayu and Ravana**

Among the various stories narrated at Ellora, the story narrating the fight between Jatayu and Ravana occupies an important place. Ramayana describes the abduction of Sita as she was forcefully taken away by Ravana to Lanka. The story says that once Ravana in a disguised form of a beautiful golden deer appeared in front of Sita while she along with Rama were living in a forest. Sita was very much attracted by the golden deer and conveyed to Rama about her desire to get it for her. When Rama attempted to catch the deer, it slowly moved away but within the vicinity of Rama. Gradually Rama was driven out into the deep inside of the forest by the deer. It was a trick played by Ravana to isolate Sita from Rama. Ravana succeeded in his trick to keep Sita away from the protective hands of Rama. Ravana probably imitated the sound of Rama by crying loudly and requesting for help. When Sita heard the cry of Rama, she asked Lakshmana to go in search of Rama and provide him necessary help. When Lakshmana also left the place, Ravana kidnapped Sita and proceeded with her to Lanka in the 'Pushpaka Vimana'. When the king of vultures, Jatayu, happened to see this kidnap, attempted to stop Ravana to rescue Sita. Then a great war took place between Ravana and Jatayu. Knowing that Ravana was very powerful, Jatayu simply fought with Ravana without even minding its life. As expected, in the un-parallel fight, Ravana defeated Jatayu and left for Lanka with Sita. The deep wounds inflicted on the body of Jatayu left him on the verge of death. The sculpture showing the unparalleled fight between Ravana and Jatayu has been set in a niche. The arrangements of the figures are set in a diagonal way. Only three figures are shown in the composition and they are Ravana, Jatayu and Sita on a chariot respectively. The figure of Ravana occupies the majority of space in high relief and is shown in a twisted body by turning back his body so as to attack the Jatayu. Ravana carries a sword in his right hand and shield. Sita has been shown sitting on a chariot drawn by horses. The empty space

enveloped around these figures seems to suggest that the fight is taking place in the sky. Even though the posture of a strong fight is going on, there is a strong feeling of calmness prevailing on the faces of Ravana and Jatayu. The size of Sita has been shown diminutive in comparison to the size of Ravana. The composition, it seems, is dominated by the monumentality of the huge figure of Ravana who has been shown in a dramatic posture as he does a violent twist with his drawn sword in the air to strike at the Jatayu. It is also interesting to look at Jatayu as it is attacking Ravana with its beak on his thighs. Though the composition shows a frightening battle taking place between the two, the facial expression of both the faces is rather calm.

### **Conclusion**

The sculptures of Ellora are considered to be one of the best ever made by mankind. Apart from the aesthetical aspects of Ellora, there is also another aspect that most people need to know about is the religious harmony prevalent in those times among the various religions in India. Buddhist, Hindu and Jain sculptures are made either in the same cave or adjacent caves and remained till now peacefully. The sculptures of those times were intended to make a qualitative change in society. Hence, both the theme attempted to communicate with people and the method of depiction was equally important. The rock-cut Kailasa temple, i.e. caves no 16 of the Ellora caves provides a visual manifestation of a story with high morality. It narrates a story of a king of vultures, Jatayu who risked his life by fighting with Ravana in escaping Sita. But Jatayu had to give a big price for that i.e. its own life. The facial expression of both the figures is looking almost calm. Ravana looks calm because he probably knew about the outcome of the fight. Hence he was shown very calm. But Jatayu was also very calm. It was not worried by the end result of the fight, but it was calm as it was quiet knowing that it is on the right path, it was on the part of 'dharma'. Hence it was not worried about the outcome of the fight with the most powerful king on earth. In Hinduism, the path of dharma was more important than the outcome of the action. The visual manifestation of the fight between Jatayu and Ravana from the Kailasa temple of the Ellora caves enables the spectators to elevate into a higher degree of aesthetic experience as well as inspiring people to lead a high moral life.

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