Locating the Artist in Early Indian Art History

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Indian art studies till recently have conspicuously evaded issues pertaining to ancient Indian artist, taking Indian art as anonymous[1]. The notions about anonymity have perpetually thrived, aided, on one hand, by western scholarship till early twentieth century that judged Indian art in the light of 'Orientalism' or Classical Archaeology; and by brahmanical texts, on the other, that consistently devalued crafts to a lowly status and relegated craftsmen to the rank of *śudra*. Even Coomaraswamy, whose contribution to Indian art studies is substantial, held that traditional artist was not given to self-expression[2]. In a marked contrast to such notions, recent researches have afforded useful information both on artist and social realities governing their status and function.[3] The relevant information, so brought forth, has helped in eroding assertions about anonymity of ancient Indian art tradition adding at the same time significant epigraphic data on artists and their specific work. Information, thus accumulated, comes from different parts of India, including Karnataka[4], Madhya Pradesh[5], Himachal Pradesh[6] and Rajasthan. A document from Orissa besides some field data from Khajuraho and northern Madhya Pradesh in the form of graffiti and masons' marks afford valuable hard evidence on artists and their work. These materials also help in exemplifying their organizational and institutional network and add significantly to whatever little had been written on the subject by Kramarisch (1958)[7] and Sivaramamurti (1934).[8] This paper briefly highlights the relevant material about artists covering the period from Vedic times down to the middle ages. The details follow.

There is little in the Vedic texts to distinguish an artist from craftsmen though works of art besides techniques and skill are often mentioned and have significance in their original context as well as in the perspectives of literature that developed subsequently.[9] Vedic texts mention little about figural representations but *rūpa* in reference to 'form' constituting something tangible is a favourite subject of speculation in them. *Rūpa* in the *Ṛgveda* is a 'universal principle'; its primal source and secondary manifestations stand *in tandem* as for instance, in the *Ṛgveda* (VI.47.18) where 'form' and its "counter form" seem to stand ever in co-relation (*rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva tadasya rūpam praticaksanūya*). *Rūpa* is 'fashioned' in a variety of ways and artifice is often implicit in such descriptions. A work of art and beauty is defined by the term *śilpa.*[10] In Vedic references artificer, whether a divine being or a craftsman, is exalted for his act of creating beauty. Thus Tvastr 'carves' (*pimśatu*) the 'forms' (*Tvastā rūpāni pimśatu, Ṛgveda* 10.184.1) or the beauty of Usas is described as *suśilpa* (*Rgveda* 9.5.6; 10.70.6) or, the works of art and craft like an elephant, a goblet, a garment, an object of gold or a mule chariot are made in 'imitation' (*anukrti*) of 'divine crafts' (*deva śilpa*). In the *Aitareya Brāhmana* (6.27), 'harmony' (*chandas*) characterizes such works, which, in performance, are supposed to 'culture the self' (*ātmānam samskurute*). The Vedic roots like *piś-, han-, kris-, tvaks-* and *mi-,* convey the technique and artifice involved and the consummate product of such acts is supposed to manifest itself in *citra, rūpa* and *śilpa*[11]. Rbhus, who were mortals turned into divine beings, possessed 'good hands' (*Rbhuvah suhastah, Rgveda*, 1.35.3) and they are supposed to have carved the limbs with pointed implements. The action here, in terms of 'fashioning' an object by manual exercise, is conveyed by the root *piś-*.[12] Similarly, a carpenter (*taksan)* embellishes his woodwork with pleasing carvings.[13] Or, a 'form' is "measured" to beings.[14] The process of cutting and shaping is explained by the root *takṣ-* which also implies chiselling and polishing in the *Rgveda* (5.2.11: *ratham na dhïram svapā ataksam)* or in the *Rgveda* (3.38.1: *adhitasteva dïdhayā manīsān*), implying 'brightening up a

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song in the manner a carpenter makes a piece of wood shine.' Viśvakarmā, the divine artificer, creates things out of *dhātu* and the act is known as *sanghamana*.[15] Creation is not necessarily a manual activity in the *Rgveda*. It is often achieved by sheer mental excellence or by mysterious power out of nothing tangible, as it were, for we have in the *Rgveda* (1.51.10) Usanas who fashions (*taksad*) 'power with power'.[16] Or, we have Saraswatī in the *Taittirīya Brāhmana* who creates internal beauty.[17] Skill, in these references, is essentially an attribute that defines someone as an artist and the terms *damśana*, *śacī*, *kratu, māyā* and *dhīra* imply such skills or propensities in producing or fabricating forms, whether material or non-material.[18] Of these different terms, *dhīra*[19] is especially relevant to artisans' skill.

Brief though the details reproduced here are, they yet seem to clarify the early perceptions about skills of early artists and craftsmen, divine or human, and their relevance in concretizing either 'forms' or a phenomenon. The act required mental or manual dexterity or both and elevated the doer in that creative act of doing. The relevant enunciations contain explicit hints of idealizing the skilled artifice in Vedic society and underscore the exalted status of those possessed of it for they were supposed to be endowed with mysterious power.[20] Thus, a 'dear' *vipra* to warriors—a *kāru*—accompanies them to battlefield;[21] or invokes gods' help for peaceful possession of property.[22] In a society that was graduating into sedentary patterns of living, growing with different kinds of human settlements,[23] artisans apparently enjoyed respect of the community. Social relationships then seem to have been based on interdependence within the community and craftsmen fulfilled an important role in producing utility goods for the community even as a *kāru*, a *vardhakī* or a *taksan* occasionally produced a work of art in wood. In any case, the passages quoted above help in explaining the role and status of artists and craftsmen in the early Vedic society. These ideas occur more explicitly in the literature of subsequent times and formally explain aesthetic foundations of Indian art.[24] But even in early texts *śilpa*—the instrument of artists' action—has been idealized as an extraordinary potential that was held as a sanctifying principle or a supportive, sustaining and strengthening force. It was supposed to be a propensity either 'divine' (*daivī*) or anthropocentric (*mānusa*) in character. In being emulated it tuned the performer into its harmony (*chandas*). As an ingenuous generative principle *śilpa* was supposed to be amorphous, existing merely in the idea or notion of it, simply by itself. When resorted to, it turned into a boundless energy which filled the universe with *antariksa* (atmosphere), extended the earth, strengthened the sun and differentiated 'all forms'.[25] Such conceptualizations about *śilpa* presuppose an exalted status of its practitioners: the artists and craftsmen.

Eventually, artists seem to have lost their preeminent status as a result of growing occupational divisions in society. As the class of warriors and priests rose up the powers and privileges of the community declined.[26] This seems to have adversely affected the status of artists and craftsmen and their occupational pursuits. The priestly bias against *śilpin*s is indicated by the disabilities, which texts imposed on *śilpī*s. From the middle of the first millennium B.C. the texts contain hints of tension between different sections of society and they tend to indicate that the practice of crafts was no longer in tune with priestly temper.[27]

The *Maitrī Upanisad* (VII.8), for instance, regards those living on *śilpa* as unworthy of heaven. Apastamba and Gotama ordain that the food offered by those living on *śilpa* must not be accepted. Gautama allows a brùhmana to accept food from a trader who is not an artisan but prohibits him from doing that from those, including a carpenter, who practiced *śilpa* (crafts).[28] Imposition of disabilities on those practicing art and crafts might reflect notions of purity and pollution that applied to different crafts and to the people who practiced them. But that is only one side of the story for the Buddhist texts, on the contrary, indicate a phenomenal rise of *śilpa*s.[29]

From the sixth century BC. onwards, the rise of towns in the wake of second urbanization produced mobility in the ranks of artisans. The *vardhakin* and *taksan* among them seem to have taken advantage of the emerging situation when stone came into use in raising structural or the rock-cut works.[30] They started working on stone and swelled the ranks of artists who were exclusively engaged in artwork. The coming into being of guild (*srenī*) of craftsmen from the Mauryan times onwards and proliferation of Buddhist monuments besides those given to the Ājīvikas must have contributed to this development.[31] Isolation of artisans working within village communities seems to have ended as the process of urbanization got strengthened. Between the fifth century BC. and the second century AD. Works of art found a market and artists found patronage, as demand for their work increased. Panini in a *sūtra* (*ive pratikritau*) makes a distinction between the images made for earning livelihood and those made for (sale in) market.[32] A *Jātaka* refers to a goldsmith who was invited by a prince to make a female figure out of a quantity of gold.[33] The carpenters collecting wood from a forest and constructing dwellings to the satisfaction of their clients figure in the *Alinacitta Jātaka*.[34] The *Milinda Panho* mentions an architect who lays out and raises a city, and when "the city was fully

developed he might go away to another district".[35] A *Jātaka* (IV.207) refers to a brāhmana who plied the trade of a carpenter (*vardhakī*). This indicates that the *sāstric* rules about practice of crafts by śūdras alone were not always adhered to. *śilpī*s often grew up to have an enhanced economic status and that could have made their profession attractive. The *Anguttara Nikāya* (III.363) refers to practice of crafts (*sippāditthāna*), which had earned prosperity to their practitioners, turning them into *gahapati*s.[36]

In these circumstances, composition of the class of artists seems to have become a-symmetrical. We have different kinds of artisans coming up by the Mauryan times, with the affluent and resourceful ones running their own manufactories, offering employment to others while still others functioned independently on their own resources. Of these two kinds—which find mention in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya—the *kāruśāsitr* (master-craftsman) employed a large number of artisans, while the *savittakāru* had his own capital and workshop[37] through which he plied his trade. Other kinds of artists also surfaced, and some among them operated under the direction and control of institutionalized religions like the Buddhism and Bhagavatism. Some artists, under Buddhist *samgha*s, seem to have assumed different roles within the *samgha* as they are mentioned as *bhadanta*, *thera*, *bhatudesaka* (addresses of respect within *samgha*) and *bhānaka* (reciter of text).[38] Artists and craftsmen also started receiving now the patronage of ruling princes. For instance, a Banabasi inscription of the time of Visnukada Chutukulānanda refers to Skandasvāti both as a minister and as a *kammantika* (foreman of a group of artisans). The inscription records gift of a *vihāra* and a tank by a princess, and Skandasvùti was the *kammantika* in both the cases.[39] Thus a hierarchy seems developing among artists now, distinguishing ordinary workers from those who occupied a position of authority under the patronage of rulers or institutionalized religions. The latter performed supervisory roles also, as was the case with Skandasvāti, mentioned above. In these circumstances, it seems that specialization in particular skills also grew among the artists as their tasks diversified. The titles and designations of artists mentioned in epigraphs bring out these distinctions and differentiations within their rank. The titles like ā*veśanin* and *navakarmika* seem to indicate a status of authority, specially a supervisory role of those who had such designation.[40] The term *āvesanin* (chief of artists' workshop) occurs seven times in epigraphs of the early Christian era: once at Sanchi in case of Ānanda, a Sātavāhana artist who carved the south Gate of the main *stūpa*, and six times in the cases of artists in ancient Vengī region in Andhra Pradesh. Other designations like *rūpakāra* (sculptor*), rūpadaksa* (painter-sculptor), *śilālaka* (worker on stone), *mithika (*stone polisher*), kadhicaka (*brick-layer, graduating to working on stone*), śaila-vardhakī* (carpenter-turned stone-worker) *and damtakāra* (ivory-carver)[41] point to the artist who specialized in different skills in their respective domains of work. The *Mahāvastu*[42] mentions many other specialists like *citrakāra* (painter), *vardhakī-rūpakāra (*maker of images in wood*), kārupatrika* (carvers), *pustakāraka* (clay-modellers), *pustakarmakāraka* (plasterer), *lepaka* (decorater), *sthapati* (architect) *and sutrakāra* (expert in measuring by thread). Artists' workshop had come into being already in the times of Panini (4th century BC.).Some of these perhaps represented the places where an *antevāsī*[43] learnt the craft.

It appears that apprentices like an *antevāsī* came to master-craftsmen from distant places to learn the craft and it was the responsibility of the latter to lodge such apprentices in his home or workshop. These apprentices apparently worked for their masters (*ācārya*s) and in accomplishing the prescribed work they had to acknowledge the master-apprentice (*guru-śisya*) relationship perhaps with a sense of pride or otherwise in order to assert their expertise in a fast growing demand of their products. Two stone sculptures and their inscriptions of third century B.C. from Mathura–one representing a Yaksa and another a Yaksinī- refer to Kunika, a master-artist, and to Gomitaka and Naka—who were his apprentices—who respectively carved those sculptures.[44] Emergence of workshops, so also of master-artists and apprentices working under them give reason to suggest the beginnings of what may be termed as the *gharana* system of artists and their style representing the continuities of *guru-śisya* tradition—a tradition which has been so typical in the domain of Indian music and dance. *Gharana*s may have operated through the direct descendants of master-artists and through their apprentices (*antevāsī*s) or disciples who were accepted in the fold though they came from distant places and went back the same way after completion of training. Later texts [45] enjoin that if a master-artist did not impart proper training to his apprentice or if he engaged him in works other than those for which he had joined the *ācārya,* the state could intervene and punish him for ignoring his duty. An *antevāsī,* on his part was required to defray a part of his gains to his *guru* in the form of a *guru-daksinā.* The rules of residence and training were codified to govern the activities of both the master-artist and apprentice. Such regulatory dispensation apparently signifies a valorization of activities concerning arts and crafts.

Master-artists no longer remained confined to their

native places as demand for their work grew considerably. Itinerant artists figure repeatedly in ancient inscriptions. The master-craftsman (āveśanin) Siddhartha of Amaravati and his father were the residents of Nadatura in the district of Kammaka (Andhra Pradesh). But Siddhartha moved to work at Jaggayyapetta.[46] Similarly, an inscription from Amaravati refers to an artist who was a resident of Vīrapura[47] but who had moved to Amaravati for work. The practice of specifying the native place in inscriptions amounts to registering their addresses so that they could be easily approached by patrons for work. Artists who remained localized to particular places of their residence are also known from some inscriptions. For instance, the Chāndaka brothers identify themselves as residents of Mathura. They seem to have operated together with Nandibala who was eldest of them[48]. The ivory carvers who worked on a *torana* (gateway of the main *stupa*) at Sanchi belonged to Vidisha. The evidence about there being a category of itinerant artists allows us to suggest that they represented a class of free labour, free from controls of residence, which afforded them the liberty to move to places at will in search of the kind of specialized work which suited their expertise. The Buddhist *samgha* offered them works in plenty. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya refers to *śilpī*s, *kāru*s and other artisans who performed work and received wages. A *vardhakī* is recommended two hundred *pana*s as wages while a *kāruśilpī* received only one hundred and fifty *panas.* Absence of specific evidence makes it difficult to decide whether rules of forced labour (*visti*) applied on those artists *who* were engaged exclusively in works of art and architecture.[49] It is likely that the rules of *visti* applied on them too. In the Junagarh inscription, the ruling prince Rudradaman takes pride in proclaiming that in renovating the lake Sudarùana he got the jobs done without resorting to *visti.*[50] Such a pride might have stemmed from the fact that this act was more of an exception than the rule. Or, it is possible that rules of forced labour applied to *śilpin*s according to their individual place in hierarchy. Those artists who worked for princes or rulers enjoyed greater authority, freedom and wealth too, than the artists who plied their trade in market. Patanjali has stated that a carpenter engaged to work for a king did not entertain private work. Skandasvùti was a *kammantika* but at the same time, he was also a minister. The rulers' patronage to artists may have favourably altered the income and status of individual artists. Also, those of them, who owned workshops and manufactories and employed others of their profession, must have similarly prospered. In the same way, those artisans who joined Buddhist *samgha* rose to the status of *thera*s or *bhadanta* and freed themselves from the rigours and constraints of the brahmanical *varna-jāti* system that was restrictive. Their *śudra* status however, seems to have remained un-altered in Brahmanical text.

Little is known about artists of the Gupta times. A notable exception however, is the instance of Yaśa Dinna of Mathura who carved the Buddha images[51] that have come down from Mathura and Kushinagara in Uttar Pradesh. The masons' marks occur in plenty on the Dhamekha *stūpa* at Sarnath and afford some evidence of their self-expression if not with names then at least with symbols. These marks may be identified as the coded insignia, graphemes or symbols (*cinha*) of artists' institutional organizations (guilds or *gharana*s?), which found mention in the later texts.[52]

We may now pass on to artists in the Middle Ages. The early Middle Age in the history of art is marked by a phenomenal growth in art activity. Temple building became a broad-based socio-religious movement in which donors representing a cross section of contemporary society participated with great fervour. Emergence of artists' guilds marks an important development in the early Middle ages distinguishing this period from the earlier ones. Early instances of stonemasons' guilds are few in number and are found only from Bandhogarh (159 A.D),[53] where they made the stone-benches (*asanapatta*-s); Siyadoni (eighth century);[54] where the *silakuta*-s together with betel sellers and oil-millers made a gift to a local temple; and in the Lakshmesvara inscription (eighth century,)[55] where they are mentioned among the eighteen *prkrti*-s, 'artisans' (who constituted guilds of different kinds)[56]. But this situation changed later when we do come across some evidence on artists organizing into exclusive *gana*s or *gosthī,* 'guilds'. A *gosthī* of the *śilpīs* of Vārendra (North Bengal) is mentioned in the Deopada Stone Inscription of Vijayasena (c.1096-1159 A.D.). The inscription refers to *rānaka* Śūlapāni, ťhe crest jewel of the guild of artisans of Varendra' (*Vārendraka śilpigosthī cūdāmani),* his father Brihaspati, grandfather Manodůsa and great grandfather Dharma[57]. The title *rānaka* used for him indicates his position of authority. In another instance, a Cālukyan inscription refers to *sarva siddha ācārya*s who were well versed in the sĕcrets of *śrī śile mudde'* [58]. The term perhaps signifies a 'guild' of artists and the inscription refers to the modalities of expulsion or banishment of artists from their organizational fold, and their re-admission back into it. The inscription thus seems to indicate that artists belonging to particular guilds were bound to observe professional discipline of their fold, failing which corrective steps might have become necessary to discipline them. In any case, the instance offers a hint of

both authority and resistance that surfaced in enforcing the professional codes.

Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh is also supposed to contain some evidence on artists' groups. This evidence is based on certain label inscriptions on temples and sculptures inscribed with certain proper names which are suffixed with the Brahmi alphabet *ga.* The letter *ga* has been interpreted as an abbreviation for the term *gana.* Seven such *ganas* are supposed to have functioned at Khajuraho and these are identified as Anurù, Bhaita, Mata, Savara, Sidha, Temana and Thavana, among others.[59] But these designations appear so 'provincial' that the status of a 'guild' may be only tentatively acceptable in their cases. Inscriptions from Karnataka, however, offer firm evidence on the existence of artists' guilds and refer to the artists of Saraswati- *gana.*[60] Scattered references to Dasojja, an artist of Balligame (Shimoga District of Karnataka) who belonged to Saraswatī *gana* affords details of work performed by him—all in the Hoysala kingdom between AD.1117 and 1152) in the different temple in Karnataka. This included an image of Acyuta at Sitihonda; of Kesava at Mattihall; *śālabhanñjikā* figures at Belur, images at the Cannakesvara temple of Belur and Hoyasalesvara temple of Halebidu; relief panels at Sravana Belgola and an inscription at Kalikatte

The titles like *pāthuriyā-paryanga nāyaka, śilpī-nāyaka* and *kulapata sāmanta* designating *śilpī*s and *sūtradhāra* in eastern India[61] similarly indicate existence of confederations of artists whose chiefs carried those titles. It is likely that guilds of artists formed in some fluid modes as a result of their localization in certain particular villages. The records from Karnataka indicate a concentration of artists in the Shimoga district.[62] Eastern Indian inscriptions refer to Poùali, a village in Bengal that produced many famed artists. Among them occur Mahendra, son of Vikramaditya; Śaśidhara ; Pushyāditya, son of Chandrāditya; and Śaśideva, son of Hriddeva.[63] It was usual for rulers to establish artisans on the lands close to a temple. Sometimes, monasteries or those who managed temples, also encouraged artists' settlements in the vicinity of temples. After the completion of the Sun temple at Konark, the ruler is said to have established two hundred and twenty-four *pāthuriyā*s (stone masons) by the side of the temple, granting fifteen *māna*s of land to each of them. Vāsudeva Mahāpātra, a master-artist was similarly settled in a village.[64] The instances of monasteries employing artists are also known from the Malkapuram inscription (Andhra Pradesh). It refers to sculptor, goldsmith and coppersmith, carpenter, stone masons and architect employed by the local śaiva Siddhānta monastery mentioned in the inscription as *Viśveśvara golakī.*[65] The Teli inscription[66] of Korai Ravi mentions about administration and management of a temple in which painters and sculptors have also figured. When not engaged in temple-building the artists remained settled in villages, serving the community by performing various tasks. Some served in army; others worked as tool makers or depended on agriculture or hunting. When occasion arose, the master-artist among them performed work for patrons away from the village. For instance, Someśvara, a skilled *śilpī* from Magadha worked for the Chandra rulers of Assam.[67] An inscription from Baijnath, east of Kangra district, refers to *sūtradhāra* Nùyaka who hailed from Nagarkot but combining with another artist of the same place he 'fashioned with chisel' a ùiva temple at Baijnath. They both are said to have done this work "in accordance with the teachings of the *śāstra*s.[68]

As regards the professional set up of artists in the Middle Ages, changes are evident in their functional categories. A comparison of the contemporary data with that of the earlier phase indicates–(i) disappearance now of certain earlier categories of artists like *rūpadaksa, śailālaka, śaila-vardhakī, kammantika, āveśanin, navakarmika, sūtrakāra* and *sūtragrāhin,* (ii) a continuation of the earlier categories of *sthapati, taksṣaka, vardhakī and śilpī* and (iii) emergence of new categories like *sūtradhāra, aksaśālin, rūpakāra* and *vijnānika* in the north India and of *rūvāri* (*rupakāra*), *ācāri* (*ācārya*) and *voja* (*upadhyaya*) in the Deccan and south . The available evidence shows involvement of women also in artistic work. Now, as before, family was the basis of artists' training and the home was the workshop as well as the training center where father and the other elders of the family assumed the role of a *guru*. Crafts in a family did not remain limited only to the male members; women also learnt skills and sometimes produced excellent sculptures. We know of *citrakāra śrī Sātana* whose daughter-in-law (*vadhu*) made the famous statue of Tara known from Mahoba in Uttara Pradesh.[69] This image is now deposited in the State Museum, Lucknow. An inscription of the Cahamānas of Nadol in Rajasthan similarly seems to refer to another woman artist. It is said in that record that when Pāhinī constructed a temple Jasadevā and others assisted him in this work.[70] In the latter case, the role of Jasadevi seems to have been substantial and significant to merit her mention by name.

Sūtradhāra occupied the highest position in the artists' professional set up. They planned their work as "Prithu planned the earth".[71] They recruited workers and other experts for carrying out the designated work. The *Baya Cakada*, a record from Orissa, refers to the appointment of Sadāśiva *sūmantarai mahāpātra* as a *sūtradhāra* who then recruited seven different contingents of artists including *karmakāra, murtikāra, svānsya* (stone mason), *cūnurā* and

kamarakantaka (iron caster).[72] The term *sutradhara* implies 'one who holds a *sutra*' which implies a 'thread' i.e., 'measure' as well as 'rule', relating to rituals and arts in the latter case.[73] In that sense the term underscores the logic of things by which the underlying reasoning, argument, activity or comprehension in a skilful act would be entwined together in an appropriate pattern.[74] *Sutradhara*, as a 'holder of the *sutra*', in that light, seems well endowed with a pre-eminent status that seems re-enforced when God[75] or *Kala*[76] (Time) are described as *sutradhara*s who regulate the three worlds.

The *Natyasastra* of Bharata[77] defines *sutradhara* as one who could train others in music (*gita* and *vadya*) as also in reciting a text along with the *bhava*-s (moods) implicit in it. The passage in Bharata also suggests that a *sutradhara* was so designated owing to his knowledge of *sutra*s of dramaturgical performance. The different usages of the term tend to indicate that this office was common to the spheres of drama and arts. This identity is best illustrated in the *Harsacarita*[78] which brings out the similarity in the twin realms in relation to *sutradhara* even as it describes the plays of Bhasa and compares their elements with those of a temples. The comparison in the *Harsacarita* is made by punning the terms like *bhumika* ('role' in drama; 'storeys' in temple) and *pataka* ('sub-plot' in drama and 'fluttering flag' on a temple). Thus, with the help of three paronomastic clauses the relevant verse says that Bhasa gained as much splendour by his plays with their introduction spoken by the *sutradhara*s and by furnishing them with several characters and roles in a manner they figure in a temple, adorned with several storeys and decorated with the fluttering banners. One may further add that the role of a *sutradhara* in the realm of art and architecture may even be more ancient than that in the realm of drama, going back in antiquity to the later Vedic period when *vedi*-s (sacrificial alters) were made with the help of a *sutra* (thread or cord) by the *suta*s. The *Mahabharata* (I. 47. 14-15) seems to support this suggestion, as *suta, puranika, sthapati* and *sutradhara* are all mentioned as separate designations qualifying the same personage namely, a *suta*.[79]

The expertise of *sutradhara*s in different areas of art activity is borne out in several historical instances, as in the case of *sutradhara* Chiccha who was an "expert in the *sastra* of Visvakarma"[80]; or in the cases of Madhava, Mahidhara and Namadeva in central India who were known as "crest jewels among the *sutradhara*s"—*sutradhara siromani*.[81] *Sutradhara* Pithe is mentioned in an inscription from Bheraghat near Jabalpur where he is credited with planning and constructing temples and other works in the manner in which "Prithu had planned the earth".[82] The *sutradhara* Sampula who constructed the Bilvapani temple somewhere in Chhattisgarh is described as "*aneka silpa nirmana payodheh paradrsvina*".[83] As a designation, *sutradhara* is not mentioned in early references which however, do refer to *sutragrahin* and *sutrakara*, as in the *Manu samhita* (IV.47-48). It seems likely that these designations derived from the function of measuring the proportions, preparation of the lay out and *hastalekha* etc., in which the use of *sutra* (thread) was essential, requiring an expert handling. *Sutra* was an essential part in the exercise related both to figure work and building activity, at every stage.[84] And whoever was in-charge of such an operation was designated as a *sutradhara* owing to his specific function of measuring out the proportions and building the works accordingly

In inscriptions known almost all over India, *sutradhara*s occur more or less as a universal category of ancient artists who performed different roles and functions in art related activity. They figure as engravers of letters of inscriptions or they are mentioned as planners and executors of buildings; specially, the temples, monasteries and other sundry works that came to be raised whether singly at one site or severally in a larger complex. They are mentioned as serving the monarchs or their dependents who commissioned sculptures and other building works. Private individuals including pontiffs and priests employed them. References indicate their supremacy and skills and also their relative superiority *vis a vis* the other artists in the domain of art. The qualities that *sutradhara*s were supposed to possess are often described in details in the *silpa* texts and in inscriptions.

Eventually, the status and role of the *sūtradhāra*s became so prestigious and lucrative that people of different *varna*s and rank competed for that role as well as that title or designation. An inscription from Rajasthan (966 A.D.) refers to a *ksatriya* who took up the occupation of a *sūtradhāra* along with that designation.[85] An inscription from Kusuma (Rajasthan) similarly refers to a *ksatriya* named Sthavira who engraved this record.[86] The rank of artisans lured many others from different professions. For instance, Nāgapāla, son of *pandita* Uhila and Jayatasimha son of a *bhogika* became engravers, a profession that used to be exclusive to artists; Mallavijaya, son of a *dandanāyaka* took up the work of a *sūtradhāra*.[87] Devagana, a *kāyastha*, is mentioned in a Chhattisgarh epigraph as *rūpakāra śiromani* (crest jewel of sculptors).88 Some of these master-artists rose to the position of *rānaka, thakkura and sūmanta,* [89] which are supposed to be feudal titles. Habib, in a different context, says that some of these the titles may represent 'clan monarchies'. These instances, in any case, indicate incursion of persons of other ranks and social status into the functional set up of artists. The rise of some of them to the rank of chiefs

enjoying feudal titles signifies artists' upward mobility in the social hierarchy. As a result of this, the stigma of *śūdra* status on them might have got mitigated. Their knowledge of *śilpaśāstra* has been praised in the epigraphs and an inscription refers to a *śilpī* who was a *śāstra-japī,* " one who could recite *śāstra*".[90] The *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* has legitimized these developments with a story which gives to craftsmen a more respectable lineage. It explains their descent from Viśvakarmā who was reborn as a brahmana to marry Ghritācī, an Apsarā who was reborn as a milkmaid.

Artists seem to have been compensated for their work in different manners. Sometimes they received land as reward; sometimes payment to them was made in cash. Work used to be done by them on contract also. The Malkapuram inscription of Rudra indicates that artists enjoyed the rights on land. The details in the epigraph indicate that officials and others, including the artists employed by the monastery were assigned some land, with the authorization to enjoy their emoluments with the rights of ownership.[91] In case of the artists employed at the *rūpāsa* camp at Konark-when the Sun temple was under construction- the payments on account of contract or wages were handed out to them both in cash and in kind. The text records that artists and other workmen received gifts when the camp was closed and they were dispersed following completion of the temple. Accordingly, the *sūtradhāra*s received from the ruler three *krośas* of land extending from east to west in the Lankpada *visaya* as an endowment for life with some *daksinā.* Sadānanda *pattanāyaka* received a gift of land in Sadùnandapura. The goldsmiths are said to have received some land for building their homes in Sanālapura where one hundred and eight stonemasons were also granted land. As quoted above, the land measuring fifteen *māna* (one *māna* was equal to one acre or 4820 square yards) was given to each of the two hundred and twenty four stonemasons near the temple site so as to establish a community of stonemasons there.[92] This system of giving land as well as wages or payment according to contract might have been followed in regard to artists elsewhere also. An inscription from Karnataka of the time of the Cālukyas of Kalyānī suggests a land grant to a c*ittārī* (painter-sculptor) named Jakka.[93] In yet another case, the cost of building some parts of a temple has been computed to a total of three hundred and thirty *drammas*, a figure that may either represent the cost of building the parts of the monument or refer to the amount in cash accruing to Pāhinī who made them with the help of some other artists.[94] The accrual of material gains from work appears to have induced rivalry among artists. This is particularly evident from inscriptions from Karnataka, which mention particular sculptors (*rūvāri*) as 'smiters of rival sculptors' in the manner '*bherunda* was to *ùarabha'* or 'śiva was to Kāmadeva' or '*vajra* was to mountains'. These inscriptions bear out artists' glory even as they denigrate the competitors.[95] But perhaps the most eloquent tribute to them is paid in the *Dhvanyāloka* of Anandavardhana which equates artists to Prajùpati, the Creator and implies that while Prajùpati creates according to defined rules, an artist does so by his independent and free will: *apāre kāvyasamsāre kavirekah Prajāpatih / yathāsmai rocate viśvam tathaiva parivartate.* We may also quote from an epigraph of Karka Sovarnavarsa (812-813) at Ellora where the artist who made the celebrated Kailasa temple (no.16) finds himself pleasantly surprised at his creativity after he had so 'nonchalantly' transcended the Space, as it were, in creating a Kailasa away from its heavenly perch in a manner that even the 'immortals' mistook it for the original. The relevant verse is quoted here in full:

> Having seen his wonderful abode (*sannivesa*) situated on the mountains of Elapura, the astonished immortals who travel in celestial cars always take much thought, saying, "This is the abode of Svayambhu-Siva and no artificially made dwellngÖ" Verily, even the *silpin* who built it felt astonishment saying, "The utmost perseverance would fail to accomplish such a work again; aho! How has it been achieved by me (so nonchalantly: *akasmat*)" and by the reason of it, the king was caused to praise his name.[96]

Such eulogies may truly define the imagined status of the ancient artist.

NOTES

1. Cf. R.N.Misra (n d.) "Anonymity of Ancient Artist" *Kalakshetra,* (Madras), Vol.V, no.4, pp.3-9.
2. Such views are no longer tenable and have been considered a-historical in content. Cf. Devangana Desai, (1984) "Reflections on Coomaraswamy's Approach to Indian Art", *Paroksha,* eds. G.M.Sheikh et al (New Delhi) p.61.
3. R.N.Misra (1975) Ancient Artist and Art Activity, (Simla).
4. Cf. S. Settar (1973) "Peregrination of Medieval Artist", *Journal of Indian History* (Trivendrum), 419-435; Srinivas V. Padigar, (1986), "Epigraphy and Some Aspects of the Early Chalukyan Art", *Journal of the Karnataka University* (Soc.Sc.), Vol. XXII, pp.74-88, Srinivas.V.Padigar (1988), "Craftsmen's Inscriptions from Badami and their Significance", eds. Ratan Parimoo et al, *Ellora Caves: Sculpture and Architecture* (New Delhi) pp.398-405
5. A.K.Singh (1993) "Minor Inscriptions from Khajuraho", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Vols.64-66, pp.222-237; R.N.Misra (1984) "Artist in Early Middle Ages", eds. Amita Ray et al, *Indian Studies: Essays Presented in Memory of Prof. Niharranjan Ray* (Delhi) pp.65-72, Fig.1.
6. Cf. Laxman S.Thakur (1986) "Artisans in Himachal Pradesh", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 23,3, pp.303-312.

7. S. Kramarisch (1958) "Tradition of Indian Craftsman", *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol.71, no.281 (Philadelphia), pp.224-230.
8. S. Sivaramamurti (1934) "Artist in Ancient India" *Journal of Oriental Research* (Madras) Vol.7.pp.31-54; 158-199.
9. Cf. R.N.Misra (1990) "Indian Śilpa Tradition, *śilpi* and Aesthetics. . ." eds. S. Zingel Ave Lallemant and A.L.Dallapiccola, *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts,* (Stuttgart) pp. 178-181.
10. Cf. R.N.Misra (1988) "śilpa", ed. Bettina Baumer, *Kalatattvakosa* Vol. I (IGNCA, New Delhi) pp.145-169.
11. Cf., V.S.Pathak and R.N.Misra (1986), "Words and Image in Reference to Technique in Indian Art", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Vols. 56-59, (1981-84 N.S.) pp.280-290.
12. *māmsamekah! pimśati sunayabhṛtaṁ, Ṛgveda*,1.161.10.
13. *priyā vyaktā taṣṭāni,Ṛgveda*, 10.66.5.
14. "*ni māyino māmire rūpa asmin, Ṛgveda,3.87.7;3.87.9.*In these references or even elsewhere the word *māyā* from the root *mi* implies acts relating to an object or things; for instance, C*yavanah! sudair abhinīti vedī,* in the *Ṛgveda* 10.6.1.the Śatapatha *Brāhmaṇa* 6.5.3.3 where brick work is intended; or in the *Atharvaveda* 3.12.5 or 9.3.6 the term *māna* from the root *mi* is used for building. The term *nir-mā* similarly implies 'fashioning', 'making', 'producing' etc. by craftsmen. Cf., J. Gonda (1959) *Four Studies in the Language of the Vedas* (Gravenhage) p.67.
15. R.N.Misra (1975) quoting V.S.Agrawala.
16. *taksad yat Usanā sahasah sahah, Rgveda*,1.51.10.
17. *Saraswatī vayati peśo antarah, Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*,2.6.4.1.
18. Cf. *Rgveda* 1.119.7; 7.69 7 for *damśana; ibid,* 1.117.13; 1.112.8 for *śaci*; *ibid,* 1.39.1 for *kratu*. For *māyā,* cf. J.Gonda (1959) pp.119-193.
19. cf. *Rgveda*, 1.64.1 *apah na dhīrah manasā suhastyah* .According to Sāyana *dhīra* implies someone endowed with intellect (*dhīmān*), and *suhastya* refers to one who has 'good fingers" (*śobhanāguli)*. Attention may be drawn to the *Rgveda* 5.2.11; 5.29.15 and to 1.67.5 (*sadmeva dhīrah samayā cakruh*), in this context.
20. Cf. J. Gonda (1959) pp.187 ff.
21. *Rgveda*, 10.61.23.
22. Ibid.7.82.4.Artisans also make a thunderbolt (*vajra*) for Indra, *ibid*.10.92.7.They figure in the coronation ceremony of a king. By certain special acts, they accord recognition to royalty. For the chariot maker (*rathakāra*), blacksmith (*karmāra*) and woodcarver (*taksan*), cf. R. S. Sharma (1983) *Material Culture and Social Formation* (Delhi). On *rathakùra,* cf. V. Jha (1974) "Status of *Rathakāras* in Early Indian History", *Journal of Indian History,* Vol.42 (1-3) pp.39-47.
23. Sacchidanand Mishra (1985) *Prachin Bharat men grama aur gramya* jivan (Gorakhpur)(In Hindi), pp.73-78, 24-26, 56-60 and 24 ff.: for discussion on different settlements like *vraja, chardi, pastya* and *grāma.*
24. These points have been discussed elsewhere and may not bear repetition here. Cf. R.N.Misra (1990) and (1975).
25. Cf. R.N.Misra (1988) p.155.
26. R.S.Sharma (1983) pp.74 ff.
27. Cf. Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya (1977) *Science and Society in Ancient India* (Calcutta).
28. Āpastamba, 1.6.18; 1.9.14; Gotama, 17.7.17; Cf. R.N.Misra (1975), p. 6.
29. Ibid. pp. 4, 5.
30. The term *śaila-karma* and *śaila rūpa-karma* in the inscriptions of early Christian era apparently distinguish stonework from woodwork and thus indicate changes in techniques and medium employed by artisans. A new class of *śaila vardhakī*s seems to have emerged now with carpenters (*vardhakī*s) turning into workers on stone (*śailavardhakī*s). Svùmin, one such worker on stone, made the facade (*gharamugha*) of the rock-cut cave at Karla. Balaka, another such artist, did similar stone work at Kondane. Inscriptions from Karla and Kondane provide the relevant information. Cf., R.N.Misra (1975) pp.27, 24, 22.
31. Ibid., pp. 9-10. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya directs the state to protect *śilpī*s.The state also exercised control over manufactories (*śilpīśālā*s) and regulated the salaries of artisans.
32. Cf. Rama Nath Misra (1978) *Bharatiya Murtikala* (In Hindi) p.35. In the *sutra* 5. 4. 95, Panini distinguishes between a village artisan (*grama taksan*) and a *taksan* who worked in his own workshop.
33. Cf. R,N,Misra (1975) p.8.
34. Cf. E.B.Cowell, Ed. Tr. (19??) *The Jātakas* Vol.II, p.18. Another *Jātaka* (no.461) refers to a chief of *vardhakī*s.
35. Cf. R.N.Misra (1975) p.9.
36. For a detailed discussion on the status and function of *gahapati*, Cf. Uma Chakravarti (1987) *Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (New Delhi) pp.65-93.
37. Cf. Himanshu P.Ray (1986) *Monastery and Guild: Commerce Under the Sātavahanas* (Delhi) p.111.
38. R.N.Misra (1975) pp. 8, 22-23; R.N. Mehta and S.N. Chaudhary (1966) *Excavations at Deonimori* (Baroda) 121,179
39. R.N.Misra (1975) p. 20. According to Patanjali, an artisan in the employment of a ruler was not entitled to work for people. Cf. Devangana Desai "Terracotta and Urban Culture in Ancient India", a paper presented in Indian History Congress (Calicut 1976). About political patronage to artists and craftsmen, Cf. R.N.Misra (1975) pp. 25-30.
40. Ibid. 10, 16, 17, 20-21, 17-18.
41. R.N.Misra (1982) "Titles and Designations of Artists in Epigraphs" *Sangrahalaya Puratatva Patrika* (State Museum, Lucknow), Vol.29-30 pp.35-38.
42. J. J. Jones, Tr. (1956) Vol. III pp.112, 443.
43. Nārada (5.2.8) includes *antevāsī* also among five different kinds of workers. The other four consisted of *bhrtaka,* the supervisor of the *bhṛitakas*, and *dāsa*. The *antevāsī*s were those apprentices who came from distant places for training and lodged with the master-craftsman.
44. For the inscriptions, Cf. R. C. Sharma (1976) *Mathura Museum and Art* (Mathura) p.29.
45. Yājñavalkya (2.14.8), Nārada (5.16-17) Brihaspati (16.6) and Kùtyùyana (713) ordain that an *antevāsī* could leave the house of his *ācārya* only with the permission of the latter. He was liable to punishment for dereliction from duty. But an *ācārya* was liable to punishment if he showed indifference to apprentice's work. Cf. R.N.Misra (1982) p.28.
46. Cf. R.N.Misra (1975) pp.16, 20-21.
47. *Epigraphia Indica* (1909-10) Vol.X :Luders List , inscription no.85.
48. Cf. R.N.Misra (1975) p.15.
49. Manu imposes 'forced labour' (*viṣṭi*) on *śilpins.* Cf. Devendra Nath Shukla (1984) *Uttara Bharat ki Rajasva Vyavastha* (In Hindi) (Allahabad) p.151-152.

50. Cf. Dines Chandra Sircar (1965) *Select Inscriptions* Vol. I No.67 (Delhi) p.179-80.
51. Cf. Karl J. Khandalavala Ed. (1992) *The Golden Age* (Marg Publications, Bombay)
52. The *Śukranīti* (II.128 ff) describes different types of workers and in a passage (II.148) it prescribes that each one of them should work, maintaining their identity by adhering to their respective marks: *ukta sanjñāna sva sva cinhair lañchitānśca niyojayet.*
53. *Ep, Ind*. XXIV, no. 35, p. 253.
54. *Ep.Ind*., I. pp.162 ff.
55. *Er.Ind*. XIV, pp.188 ff.
56. K. K. Thapliyal 1996: 87,93,167.
57. Cf. Dines Chandra Sircar (1983) *Select Inscriptions* Vol. II No.24 (Delhi) p.121.
58. *Indian Antiquary* Vol. X p.164.
59. Cf. A.K.Singh (1993) pp.226-229.The author also refers to different artists in groups, pairs or alone engaged in sculptural or architectural work. The label inscriptions seem to suggest that there were different sets of artists to carve different sets of images. Thus, one group carved only Apsaras and leogriffs while the other worked exclusively on the figures of the cult gods and goddesses. Sometimes two or more artists worked to produce the same image. In a particular case, the artist seems to have produced an image of a cult god as well as a minor deity. Ibid.
60. Cf. A.V.Narasimhasmurty (1985) " A Study of Lable Inscriptions of Hoyasala Artists" *Indian Epigraphy and its Bearing on Study of Indian Art* Eds.Fredrick M. Asher and G.S.Ghai (New Delhi) p.216.
61. Cf.Alice Boner (1972) 257-272.
62. Cf. S.Settar et al (1982) "Artists of Memorial Stones: Chalukya-Hoyasala" *Memorial Stones* (Dharwad) p.381.The information is related to the artists who made memorial pillars.
63. Cf. R.N.Misra (1984) p.68.
64. Alice Boner (1972) p. 257-272.
65. Cf. R.N.Misra (1984) p.68.
66. *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. XXVII. pp. 210 ff.
67. Ibid. Vol. XIII. p.295.
68. Ibid. I. p.107, Vol. XI. p.463 . Also, Laxman Singh Thakur (1986) p.307.
69. Cf. C. Sivaramamurti (1962) *Indian Sculpture* (Delhi) pp.5-6.
70. Cf. R.N.Misra (1985) "A Note on the Nadlai Inscription of Kelhana", *Indian Epigraphy,* Ed. Fredrick M. Asher and G.S.Ghae, p.68.
71. Cf.R.N.Misra (1984) "Artist in the Middle Ages" *Indian Studies,* eds. Amita Ray et al (Delhi) p.68.
72. A Boner (1972) pp.257-72.
73. Cf., Frits Staal (1992) "Sutra" in *Kalatattvakosa, e*d., Bettina Baumer, New Delhi: " IGNCA. p.302.
74. Ibid. For that reason, 'in early philosophy the terms like *grantha, tantra, prabandha, nibandha* etc., derive from the terminology of textile manufacture' and indicate binding together of ideas in the manner the *sutra*-s are bound together to form a piece of cloth. Stall 1992: 302 quoting Rau.
75. *Samarangana Sutradhara* of Bhojadeva (1966) Baroda: G.O.S.25, Line 1.
76. *Vakpadiyam* of Bhartrhari, ed., K.A. Subramania Iyer (1966) Delhi, III.9.4.
77. XXXV.30.
78. Kane's edition, I.15.
79. Radha Vallabha Tripathi (1992) "Sutradhara" in *Kalatattvakosa*, ed. Bettina Baumer, Vol II New Delhi: IGNCA, p.323
80. *Epigraphia Indica* , Vol. I, p.146: *vijnana visvakarta dharmadharena sutradhararena Chhichchhabhidhena prasadah Pramathanathasya.*
81. Cf., R. N. Misra (1975) p.68.
82. *Ibid.,* p.69.
83. *Ibid*., p. 70.
84. For instance, according to the *Rajatarangin*i (III.348), the town of Srinagara was built after a *sutra* had been laid, marking the place for construction. The *Milinda Panho* (330) similarly refers to a 'city architect' who lays out and raises a city and when "the city was fully developed he might go away to another district". Cf., R.N.Misra (1975: 9). Also, cf., Frits Staal, Bettina Baumer, R. Tripathi (1992) "Sutra" in *Kalatattvakosa,* ed.,. Bettina Baumer, Vol. II, New Delhi: IGNCA, pp. 303-332.
85. *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. XXXVI, pp.47-48.
86. Ibid.Vol. XXXIV, pp. 47-49.
87. Cf. R.N.Misra (1975) p.58.
88. Cf. V.V.Mirashi (1955) *Inscriptions of the Chedi-Kalachuri Era*, CII., Vol. IV Part II, inscription no.93.
89. Cf. R.N.Misra (1975) pp.71, 72; also R.N.Misra (1984) p.68.
90. Cf. V.V.Mirashi (1955) inscription no.104.
91. Cf. R.N.Misra (1984) p.68.
92. Cf. Alice Boner (1974) pp.257-72.
93. Cf. S Settar et al (1982) p.323.
94. Cf. R.N.Misra (1985) eds. Asher and Ghae, p.191.
95. Cf. C. Sivaramamurti (1962) p.4.
96. J.F.Fleet, "Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions", *Indian Antiquary*, 12 (reprint, Delhi 1984), p.159, lines 14-17; translation, p.163.