Aquatic (water) Animal world in Ancient Indian Art – A preliminary study

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Introduction

In Ancient Indian Art from 2500 B.C (Indus Period) to 4th cen. A.D. (Gupta period) along with wild animals, domestic animals and birds, the depiction of aquatic animals is in various aspects. Major aquatic animals that can be seen in Ancient Indian Art are 1. Crab 2. Crocodile 3. Fish 4. Frog 5. Turtle 6. Otter. The depiction comes in different mediums such as stone sculptures, terracotta figurines, terracotta seals, metal figures, semi-precious stone, shell, ivory, painting on pottery, wall painting etc. In art, aquatic animal depiction is found in different periods. The evidence coming from different stratigraphic excavations can be shown chronologically – Indus period (2500 B.C), chalcolithic period (1500 B.C.), Megalithic period (1000 B.C.), early historic period (800 B.C.), Maurya period (3rd cen B.C.), sunga – satvahana period (2nd cen B.C. to 2nd cen A.D.), Shaka – Kushana period (2nd cen A.D. to 1st cen A.D.), Gupta- Vakataka period (4th cen A.D to 5th cen A.D.). In these periods, evidence of aquatic animal depiction can be seen from all the Indian sites.

In Indus period art, aquatic animals can be seen on terracotta seals and terracotta figures. Ahead in chalcolithic & megalithic period in metal figures made from copper. In Maurya-sunga dynasty period, stone sculpture was an important medium for depiction of animals. In Kushana period, the depiction of aquatic animals comes in semi-precious stones such as agate, carnelian, quartz etc. In Gupta-vakataka period, aquatic animal depiction appears very artistically on wall paintings of Ajanta caves.

Evidence

In Indus art, fish, turtle, crocodile depiction is on pottery & on seals. A turtle figure made from shell is found from Mohenjodaro (Marshall, 1973: I: 349). From the Chalcolithic period, turtle figurine made from terracotta & a turtle shape amulet made from shell was recovered from prakash (Maharashtra) excavation (Thapar, 1964-65: 115). Crocodile figure painting on pottery was found at Navdatoli (Madhya Pradesh) (Sankalia, 1971: 217) & terracotta figures of crocodile are discovered at Inamgaon (Maharashtra), (Dhavalikar, 1982: I: 1: 589). From Raipur (Maharashtra), a turtle shape pendant made from copper is recovered. It is used as a horse ornament (Deglurkar, 1992: 147). Frog shape beads made from carnelian, agate found at Taxila (Afganistan) are from Kushana to Gupta (1st cen A.D-4th cen A.D.) period (Beck, 1941:56). Fish shape pendant made from gold is also found at Sirkap (Taxila) which is from Kushana (1st cen A.D.) period (Marshall, 1975:II: 630). In Maurya-Sunga period aquatic animal depiction comes

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mainly on stone sculptures. The Buddhist stupas like Barhut, Sanchi, Amaravati show various types of sculptural depiction which include aquatic animals in context with jataka tales. Aquatic animals such as Crab, Crocodile, Fish, Frog, Otter appear in jataka tale sculptures at Barhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Ajanta in paintings. Crab in Naga jataka, crocodile in Vanara jataka, fish & Otter in Uda jataka & Sasa jataka, frog in Latuva jataka, turtle in Kuranga mruga jataka & Kachhapus jataka (Cowell, 1957) are depicted.

From Kushana-Gupta period, crocodile comes as a vahana of Goddess Ganga and Turtle comes as a vahana of Goddess Yamuna in Indian art. An Ivory figure of Goddess Ganga standing on a Makara (crocodile) was found at Begram (Taxila, Afghanistan) (Pandey, 1984:83). At Devgarh, Sanchi, abhichhatre was found sculptural evidence of Makara as vahana of Goddess Ganga from Kushana-Gupta period. Turtle shaped pendants can be seen on some Yaksha figures. One Yaksha figure was found at Panna (Madhya Pradesh) wearing a necklace with turtle pendant. At Ellora cave no. 21 two gana figures were found wearing a turtle shaped pendant. An amulet or a pendant made from stone or semi-precious stones or metal are not just as ornaments but figures were found wearing a turtle shaped pendant. An amulet or a pendant made from stone or semi-precious stones or metal are not just as ornaments but connection of these animals with water is very important. It shows society has a faith on aquatic animals as a God which brings rain and prosperity. Because of faith aquatic animals receive safety as well as respect. Till today if rain comes late or it drops less people worship Frog & other aquatic animals.

Fish (Matsya) duo is symbol of purity. Fish duo pendant is important in Manghya necklace. Matsya, Kurma are important avatara of God Vishnu. In the episode of samudra manthan Kurma was very useful because of his hard shell to carry a load of mountain mehu. Goddess Vasudhara has a fish duo in her right hand as a symbol. In Jaina art fish is a very important animal. Fish is one of the auspicious symbols in Jaina sect. Kurma or turtle is a symbol of Jaina Tirthankar santinatha.

Atharveda mentions Kurma as a sun. Wearing an amulet or a pendant of Kurma makes the person very strong. As per Brihat samhita Kurma shila (Turtle shape stone) in a hall of temple, make the structure very hard, united & give prosperity to the king who built the temple. (Arole meera, 1986-87: 251). It may be because Kurma has a long life expectancy & his hard shell. Atharveda also mentions that wearing a Frog shape amulet is very effective for fever. (Margbandhu, 1975-76: 86). Frog was a fertility symbol in ancient civilization like Babylon, Egypt, Mesopotamia. Matsya was a symbol of dynasty like Pandya, Saindhav in Saurashtra. In Kushana-Gupta period, some animals were used in the trade between India and China such as elephants, rhinoceroses, horses, peacocks & turtles or turtle shells, which were very important commodities ( Xinru liu, 1988:).

Summary

The above discussion shows that the depiction of Aquatic animals in Ancient Indian Art was under the influence of socio-religious-economic-political reasons. Myths, beliefs, trust, quality of aquatic animals are important aspects in Ancient Indian art. Stone, terracotta, metal, semi-precious stones were mediums used for depiction. Always touch with water means life made aquatic animals very sacred in society. Fish, Frog, Turtle shape amulet, pendants recovered for archaeological excavations show their sacred religious status in society. Aquatic animals play an important role in Buddhist jataka stories. They taught ethics to people. In veda, puranas aquatic animals are mentioned as vahana or carrier of Gods and Goddesses. Society gives importance to aquatic animals because they maintain ecological balance. The qualities of Crab, Crocodile and Turtle can help human beings to be positive or negative and this is mentioned in jataka stories. In fact, very good examples can be seen at Barhut, Nagarjunakonda sculptures.

This is a preliminary survey of Aquatic animals’ depiction in Ancient Indian Art which covers various mediums, different periods, contexts, some literature evidence & their connections with religions.

References

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Morgenjodaro and Indus Civilization , Delhi, Indological Book House.
Pandey, Sudhakar 1984, Ganga and Yamuna in Indian Art and Literature, Chandigarh: Indra prakashan.
This aquatic animal is called a fish but actually belongs to the class *Mollusca* and is more closely related to octopuses and squids than fish. They are remarkable creatures who live in tropical oceans and have three hearts that pump green blood. Their superpower is their ability to change the color of their body and eyes to blend better with their surroundings and hide from predators. This is done using a special pigment on their skin which helps in changing color very fast. This flatworm is a non-parasitic aquatic animal and has a regeneration power higher than that of the sea cucumber. On being cut into pieces, each piece can develop into a new full individual worm and this is one of the ways in which the worm reproduces. List the contributions of India to the world in the field of Mathematics and Science. Discuss the contributions made to knowledge by ancient Indian scientists like Baudhayana, Aryabhatta, Brahmagupta, Bhaskaracharya, Kanad, Varahamihira, Nagarjuna, Susruta, Charak, Patanjali. 15.1 MATHEMATICS & ASTRONOMY.
Science and Mathematics were highly developed during the ancient period in India. Ancient Indians contributed immensely to the knowledge in Mathematics as well as various branches of Science. In this section, we will read about the developments in Mathematics and the scholars who contri..

An aquatic animal is an animal, either vertebrate or invertebrate, which lives in the water for most or all of its lifetime. Many insects such as mosquitoes, mayflies, dragonflies and caddisflies have aquatic larvae, with winged adults. Aquatic animals may breathe air or extract oxygen that dissolved in water through specialised organs called gills, or directly through the skin. Natural environments and the animals that live in them can be categorized as aquatic (water) or terrestrial (land). This