

Living Rocks of Mamallapuram



The magnificent temples of Mamallapuram reflect the fully developed styles of South Indian temples. On the shores of Tamil Nadu, on the eastern coast of peninsular India, is a marvellous town of temples, carved out of rock. Mamallapuram was one of the greatest sea-faring ports of ancient times. In early times, this bustling town would have had a great cosmopolitan culture. In its markets, people from Southeast Asia would have rubbed shoulders with Romans. Coins found here testify to extensive trade with Rome and other places, since at least the 1st century. Colonies of Romans are also known to have been present in this part of Tamil Nadu at that time.

This port town was called Mamalai, or 'great hill'. Narasimhavarman Pallava, known as Mamalla or the 'Great Warrior', expanded the facilities of the port in the 7th century. Ships sailed constantly from here to Sri Lanka and South East Asia. Narasimhavarman changed the name of the port to Mamallapuram or 'city of Mamalla'.

Here, over perhaps a hundred years, from about 630 to 728 AD, marvellous monuments were cut out of outcrops of hard grey granite. Cliff faces were transformed into a teeming world of animals and people. Boulders were carved into fine temples. Rocks were chiseled into the shapes of animals.

The magnificent temples of Mamallapuram reflect fully developed styles of South Indian temples. Obviously, such temples must have been made for a long time prior to this period. The earlier ones must have been made out of ephemeral materials and have not survived. Facing the ancient port and not very far from it is one of the marvels of the sculptural art of India. The face of a vast granite rock, almost 100 feet by 50 feet, has been transformed into a world of divine and earthly beings. This giant relief is believed to be of the early or middle 7th century. This tableau presents the auspicious moment of the descent of the river Ganga, to bestow her blessings and her treasure of fertility to the world. Some scholars have also interpreted this scene to be of the penance of Arjuna, the hero of the epic Mahabharata. A deep cleft in the rock has been artfully used to represent the great river, as she descends. In fact, there is a storage tank made above. On ceremonial occasions, water must have been let out to rush down the cleft, giving a sense of reality to the sacred scene.



A teeming world in a forest has been created around the river. About a hundred figures of animals, men, women and divine beings, all turn in reverence towards the life-giving river. These are all made approximately life-sized and with great sensitivity and naturalism.

The many beings, which populate the world created around the river, are made with a great sense of liveliness. In these there is a sense of freedom and the joy of creation expressed by the artists.

The realism and life-like softness of the elephants is remarkable. The details of the baby elephants show the artists' deep concern for all the beings of the world. Another detail of a deer scratching his nose shows great sensitivity and observation of the natural world.

Close by is another relief depicting the same subject. However, it is unfinished. A little to the left of the great 'Descent of the Ganga', a Krishna Govardhan scene is carved out of a boulder. Lord Krishna holds up the Govardhan mountain to protect the village from the fury of the storm. It is a charming scene. With peace restored and the storm forgotten, a cowherd plays the flute, milks a cow. This is one of the finest depictions of rustic life in Indian art.

In Pallava times, when this relief was made, there was no mandapa made in front of it. Therefore, we saw clearly the whole mountain above Krishna as he lifted it. In later times, with the coming of more formalized norms, a mandapa was made in front of the scene, to accord the due status to the deity. Of course, in this the effectiveness of the theme was largely lost.

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for August 2010

August 9

Film: Mahabharat – India's greatest epic
(In Hindi) Volume I
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration: 3 hrs

August 11

Film: History Deconstructed
Through A Lens Clearly Raghu Rai's INDIA
(Documentaries with English subtitles)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 56 mins

August 15

To celebrate the 63rd anniversary of India's Independence Day, performance by a Odissi troupe led by Sharmila Biswas. Sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi.
Venue & Time: Kularathne hall, Ananda College, Colombo 10 at 6.30 p.m.
(Admission by invitation. Contact on tel # 250014 or on e-mail iccrcolombo@gmail.com)

August 18

Film: Cinema with A Purpose
Partners in Progress (Documentaries with English subtitles)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 55 mins

August 19

Odissi Lecture cum demonstration by Sharmila Biswas and her troupe
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

August 20

Film: Kashmir Votes – Assembly Elections 2008
In Search of the Rajah (Documentaries with English subtitles)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 55 mins

August 25

Carnatic Vocal Music Recital
by Ms. Chishanthi Selvaratnam, Bachelor of Arts in Carnatic Music, Queen Mary's College, Chennai affiliated to University of Madras
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

August 27

Tabla Recital by Shasthrapathi Peshala Manoj
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free and on first come first served basis except 15th August 2010 programme)



The soft rendering and slender forms of the Pallava idiom are again seen in the Varaha Mandapa of around the middle of the 7th century. Here we also see the developments of Pallava iconography and architectural styles. Seated lions made on the bases of pillars are characteristic.

There are four major sculptural panels in the cave. Vishnu is seen in the Varaha avatara, saving the earth goddess Bhu Devi from being submerged in the ocean. All Indian myths operate at many levels and this also signifies the saving of mankind from the ocean of ignorance. Vishnu is also presented in the form of Trivikrama, the conqueror of the three worlds.

The rear wall of the cave has Gajalakshmi made on it. Lakshmi, who represents prosperity, is lustrated by elephants here. Also on the rear wall is a relief of Durga, who represents victory over ignorance.

In Pallava art, the figures are slender and delicately made. The scale is naturalistic. A depth is given to the relief by figures that turn inwards and others that are seen from the back. Such arrangements of figures were also seen in the paintings of Ajanta of the 5th century and in the art of the Krishna Valley in Andhra Pradesh.

One of the most magnificent depictions in Mamallapuram is that of Mahishasuramardini, made in a 7th century cave. It is entirely different from earlier representations of this subject. Durga, battles the demon buffalo or Mahisha, who represents the evil of ignorance. It is a most animated scene and, unlike before, the scale is naturalistic. Here the demon has a human body and the head of a buffalo. The natural poses of the figures, advancing from one side and pulling back upon the other, enhances the drama and realism of the subject. The

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SANDEESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo



Indian Cultural Centre

133, Baudhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 4, Sri Lanka
Telephone: 2500014, Fax: 2598674
E-mail: icc@sltnet.lk
ICCR Website: www.iccrindia.org

August 2010

Hindu woman performing a religious ceremony around the 'Tusi' plant by D.V. Dhurandhar, c. 1890, India Perspectives

Past Events

8th June

Hindustani Vocal Music recital by Sangeeth Nipun Manjula Seneviratne



A vocal recital in North Indian Classical music by Sangeeth Nipun Manjula Seneviratne, held at the Centre, on 8th June was well attended by music lovers and students of classical music.

Manjula commenced the recital with a khyal in Vilamba laya and Madhya laya based on raga Shuddha Kalyan. This was followed by a Ram bhajan and a Thumri based on raga Khamaj. Manjula ended the show with a Dadra that was well received by the audience. Manjula was accompanied by Shastrapathi Sujeeva Ranasinghe on esraj, Shastrapathi Asith Atapattu on sura mandal, Visharad Bandula de Silva on tabla and Visharad Nalin Alwis on harmonium. Around 100 - 125 guests participated.

22nd June

Violin Recital by Dr. Thushara Ratnayake



Dr. Thushara Ratnayake, renowned violinist, presented a brilliant violin recital at the Centre on 22nd June which kept the audience spell bound. He played raga Vasant Mukhari and raga Misha Maand a dhun. He was accompanied on tabla by Shastrapathi Peshala Manoj and on sura mandal by Shastrapathi Asith Atapattu. Around 75 - 100 guests participated.

24th June

A Hindustani Vocal Music workshop and an evening of Hindustani Vocal Music Recital by Gauri Guha



Renowned vocalist Smt. Gauri Guha from India presented a Hindustani Vocal Music workshop and an evening of Hindustani Vocal Music Recital at the Centre on 24th June. She explained various aspects of Hindustani Vocal music at the workshop which was attended by several students and music enthusiasts. The programme was organised in association with the Sri Lanka-India Society. She was accompanied on tabla by Shastrapathi Chandralal Amarakoon, on Violin by Visharada Somasiri Illesinghe and on harmonium by Visharada Kelum Sanjeeva. The evening concluded with a small reception. Around 80 - 100 guests attended the event.

28th June

Bharatha Natyam Recital by Ms. Lakshmi Sharma, Ms. Sakitha Kugamoorthy & Ms. Josita Peter



Graduates of Kalakshetra Ms. Lakshmi Sharma, Ms. Sakitha Kugamoorthy & Ms. Josita Peter presented a Bharata Natyam recital at the Centre. They commenced their performance with Gajendra Shosthran and continued with Alarippu, Shivogam, Kavadi Sinthu and concluded with Thillana. Around 80 - 100 guests attended the event.

Films in August

Mahabharat – India's greatest epic (Volume I)



Mahabharat is a powerful and amazing text that inspires awe and wonder. It presents sweeping visions of the cosmos and humanity and intriguing and frightening glimpses of divinity in an ancient narrative that is accessible, interesting and compelling for anyone willing to learn the basic themes of India's culture. The Mahabharat

definitely is one of those creations that has travelled far beyond the place of its original creation and will eventually take its rightful place on the highest shelf of world literature. Produced and directed by B.R.Chopra & Ravi Chopra.

History Deconstructed



The opportunities that economic integrations with its neighbours could open up for Northeast India are enormous. The region's difficulties as a result of the loss of connectivity and market access following the partition of 1947 are well known. The

disruption of old trade routes remains colonialism's most enduring negative legacy. After a century and half, the opportunity has now arisen to undo the effects of colonial geopolitics. In recent times, India has opened its economy to international trade and has launched initiative to forge closed trade and economic ties with immediate neighbours. The Look East policy (LEP) is a step in this direction. The films look at a thriving and integrated economic space linking two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmission lines crisscrossing the region. The ability of LEP to transform northeast depends largely on its people and how they perceive these policy initiatives. The Filmmaker: Archana Kapoor has to her credit over 300 films on the themes ranging from burning social and development issues to cultural diversity.

Through A Lens Clearly Raghu Rai's INDIA

India has a unique character. The experience of India is constant as well as evolving, black and white as well as colour. A multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural society where several countries seem to exist at the same time, making the place a unique experience.

This film is an attempt to explore the unity and diversity of India through the eyes of a photographer Raghu Rai. It not only incorporates his best work during the past for decades but also tries to capture him as he stands amidst a human deluge, try to untangle the merging and emerging of various colours, the myriad hues of every emotion, set in motion by each charge and recharge. The filmmaker: Suresh Kohli is a multi-faceted personality – a poet, writer, translator, literary critic, film historian, editor and filmmaker – whose oeuvre lies in creative expression. An author of 19 books, he has made nearly a hundred television programmes including mini-series, short and documentary films as well as current affair features and sports for various agencies.

Cinema With A Purpose

For the layman, Indian cinema is limited to the Hindi language film industry popularly known as Bollywood. There is, however, a vibrant film industry that thrives in several major regional languages of India. Between them, regional cinema accounts for 70 percent of all films made in India. They not only provide entertainment but also cover a wide spectrum of local and global issues.



“Cinema With A Purpose” is a documentary that reflects the changing ethos and social-political milieu of regional cinema. It also brings out the role played by regional cinema in drawing the spotlight on some of the most compelling stories of our times.. The filmmaker: Anu Radha is a film enthusiast and writer who has produced and directed a large number of documentaries for India T.V. channels and for Government of India.

Partners in Progress

Partners in Progress, is a journey spread across centuries across social, cultural, economic and spiritual frontiers; a journey of ongoing people-to-people, culture-to-culture, business-to-business contacts between the two greatest democracies of the world, a relationship that has weathered many a political storm and dodges countless diplomatic promises a closer partnership between the worlds largest democracy and one of its oldest. The filmmaker: Dr. Chandan Mitra, Managing director, The Pioneer, is a senior



journalist of India. A former Member of Parliament, Raja Sabha, he is a known writer on travel, tourism, popular culture, films and film music.

Kashmir Votes – Assembly Elections 2008



Kashmir Votes 2008 is a documentary that shows the enthusiastic participation of the people of Jammu & Kashmir in the elections to the State Assembly held in November-December 2008. The documentary covers campaigning and voting in the elections while capturing the mood of the people.

The documentary presents a cross-section of people explaining in their own words why, after almost two decades of militant violence, they defy a call by secessionists to boycott these elections and voted for democracy. The filmmaker: David Devdas is a senior Fellow of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library who has covered Kashmir for over two decades as a journalist and as a writer.

In Search of the Rajah



In 1772, more than a century and half ago, a man was born whose pragmatism and philosophy completely altered the path of the religious and thought and the social mores of the time. Raja Rammohun Roy, founder of Brahmo Samaj, was one of the foremost social reformers of his time and the father of Bengal Renaissance. Well versed in many world languages, his belief in education as an instrument of social reform saw the induction of western learning into Indian education. His influence in the fields of politics, public administration, education, education and religion was remarkable.

In search of the Rajah is a documentary film that captures the story of Rammohun Roy through the voyage of a young girl, Sreya, in her attempt to re-discover the ideas of the Rajah. The documentary scripts the relevance of Rammohun Roy as transcending time and space and to highlight his work and philosophy which is essential wisdom in today's intolerant world. The filmmaker: Goutam Ghose has directed a large number of documentaries and feature films and has won national as well as international awards.

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self-assured ganas of Durga's army of Righteousness are unforgettable. The Adivaraha cave is notable for having the portraits of King Narasimhavarman, with his queens. There is also a representation of his son with his wives. After the period of the Kushanas, who hailed from southern China and had portraits made of themselves in royal shrines in the 1st century, these are the earliest surviving portraits of Indian kings.

In early India, the purpose of art was always to take our thoughts away from the passing reality of the world, to that which was eternal. Therefore, art did not traditionally depict ephemeral personalities. From here onwards, we see a shift take place and emphasis begins to come upon the personality of the monarch.

There are nine monolithic freestanding temples, cut out of boulders. Five of them are in one group. These are the earliest such edifices in India to be carved both on the outside and the inside, out of rock. They are popularly called rathas, or temple chariots. This is a misnomer as they are meant to be temples. They are a marvellous record in stone of the many forms of temple architecture in South India at that time.

The monoliths are named after the five Pandava brothers of the epic Mahabharata and their common wife Draupadi. They form a coherent group and were probably made in the middle of the 7th century.

Built right next to the lapping waves of the sea, one of the glories of Mamallapuram, isa temple with two towers, known as the Shore Temple. The finely worked slender towers are among the most beautiful of any structure in the Indian subcontinent. The temple was probably made by Narasimhavarman II or Rajasimha, in the early 8th century. He is believed to have established the tradition of building structural stone temples in Tamil Nadu.

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of the art of Mamallapuram is the depiction of the many beings, which inhabit the world, the deer, the cows, the elephants and others. Man is seen amidst the world of nature, as one of its many manifestations. The Indian sculptor manages to communicate the living, breathing quality and emotions of animals with a rare empathy. What gives the art of ancient India a special place is its vision of the world: a vision which sees the same in each of us, men and women, in animals, plants, trees, even the breeze which moves the leaves. It sees a unity in the whole of creation, which imparts a great harmony and compassion to this vision.

The author is a film-maker, art-historian and photograph

Source: Text and photographs Benoy K Behl, India Perspectives,