

**TITLE: MAHANATA – Dancing Shiva of Badami**

(Story unravelled using the Angika (the major and minor limbs of the body) of Natyashastra).

Duration of Stay in India: 29<sup>th</sup> July 2023 to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Timescale of Project: 10/09/2022 to 20/09/2023

Dates of field trip visit: 4<sup>th</sup> August to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2023

Places visited: Badami Cave temples (North Karnataka, India) including Ravalphadi, Pattadakal and Aihole

The main purpose of my visit to Badami was to explore the 18-armed dancing sculpture of Shiva (Mahanata) which is seen in the 6<sup>th</sup> century cave temples of Badami and to correlate the dance elements as seen in the sculpture with the Sanskrit dramaturgical text Natyashastra. To explore the movements mentioned in the Natyashastra (Sanskrit dramaturgical text) with the sculpture and to incorporate the “Karanas” (a movement system recreated from the examination of sculptures and a study of dramaturgical text Natyashastra) in my current production.

Badami Cave temple, nestled in the heart of Karnataka, India is a jewel among the nation’s historical and cultural treasures. The Badami cave temples also known as the Badami caves is a complex rock-cut temples back from 6<sup>th</sup> cent. These caves carved into the sandstone cliffs of the rugged hills represent the zenith of the Chalukyan architecture. The four main caves dedicated to different deities provide a unique window into the ancient Indian art, religion, and culture. A new era was started in cultural history of Karnataka during the reign of Badami Chalukyas ( 500A.D).In the field of architecture and sculpture, series of experimentation was carried out. Badami Chalukyas adopted the aesthetic qualities of Guptas art, Mauryan art and the richness of classical Sanskrit literature. Executing all these with new experimentations they developed a distinct identity not affecting the aesthetic appeal.

It is a place where spirituality, art and history converge offering a mesmerizing glimpse into the rich tapestry of India’s past. My visit to the Badami holds a special purpose as I embark on a journey to witness the iconic depiction of Lord Shiva’s cosmic dance, known as “Nataraja”, as a part of my project ‘Mahanata’. In my project, I delve deep into the significance of the temple, its architectural marvels, and the profound symbolism behind the Dancing Shiva sculpture. The name “Mahanata” is given for the grandeur of the dancing Shiva with 18arms. Among the treasures hidden within these caves, the depiction of Lord Shiva in his cosmic dance form is undoubtedly the most captivating. It felt as though the sculptor has brought out the beauty of Shilpashatra (represent the ancient Indian science of creative arts such as sculpture and the elements of the Natyashastra coming alive together through this Mahanata sculpture.

Beyond the religious and artistic significance, the Badami cave temples is a marvel of ancient architecture. The intricate carvings, detailed bas-reliefs, the precision with which the caves were excavated showcase the craftsmanship of the Chalukyan artisans. The temple interiors are adorned with stunning frescos and sculptures that depict scenes from Hindu mythology providing a visual feast for art enthusiasts and historians alike. The inscriptions at the Badami cave temples are primarily in Bramhi/Sanskrit language. Sanskrit was the classical language of ancient India and was commonly used for religious and administrative purposes during the time

when these inscriptions were created. These inscriptions provide valuable historical and epigraphic information about the temples, the Chalukyan dynasty that patronised them and various aspects of life and society during that period. Visitors to the Badami cave temples can often find these inscriptions etched on to the cave walls or temple pillars offering a glimpse into the past and the cultural, religious, and historical context of the site.

This field trip was very much in relation to the theoretical and practical work that is being carried out in my project. Digging deep into the history and significance of the place, the temple heritage, nature of temple culture and architecture, patronage by the Chalukyan kings and their timeline, significance of language used at that time. Connecting the story of creation of dance through this sculpture & texts and describing the attributes in each of the 18 arms and its philosophical significance.

The other highlights were my visit to the Ravalphadi caves in Aihole and the ASI museums.

Ravalphadi cave temple dated back to 500 to 550 A.D is a much earlier development than Badami caves. These caves are much smaller than Badami. The sculptures in this cave being so simple and the arrangement being so little developed.

One can witness the Mahanata with 10 arms and with 7 goddesses (Saptamatrikas) creates an illusion of a dance opera. A connoisseur can feel the free flow and rustic movement in the sculpture. The dance suggestions are much higher here compared to that of Badami. The detailing in aesthetics and sculpting is much detailed here. The sculptures in this cave being so simple and the arrangement being so little developed. The Ravalphadi experimentation was on dance movements and representation of forms. Within half century this was crystallised, and marvellous sculpture based on the cannons of Natyashastra particularly the “Karanas” were manifested to show the dance of the lord who is the lord for the art of dance. One can witness the male and feminine energies are seen as two separate entities where the male energy ( Uddhata) in the form of Mahanata ( Shiva ) is more prominent than the Parvathi standing next to him as the feminine form ( Sukumara) of energy. From my observation, the Mahanata of Badami has a development of thought while compared to the earlier Mahanata at Ravalphadi.

The Archaeological survey of India (ASI) museum in Badami serves as an invaluable resource for the visitors to better understand and appreciate the historical and cultural significance of the Badami cave temples and the broader region. The museum houses a collection of artefacts, sculptures, and archaeological findings from the region. Through the displays, exhibits and informative signage, the museum offers historical context. Visitors can learn about the dynasties that ruled the region, the religious and cultural practices of the time and different architectural structures. Hiring a ASI guide can be a worthwhile investment to make the most of your visit. They can decode the symbolism in the sculptures, explain the historical context and bring the art to life with their narratives. Having a knowledgeable guide can significantly enhance your understanding and appreciation at the cave temples. They often encourage interaction so feel free to ask questions about any aspect of the site that intrigues you.

Visiting the Badami cave temples offers more than just an aesthetic experience. It is a spiritual journey that connects us to the roots of Indian culture and spirituality.

My visit to the Badami cave temples to witness the dancing Shiva sculpture is not merely a part of my project Mahanata: it is a soulful pilgrimage that allows me to immerse myself in the

essence of India's spiritual and artistic heritage. The temple is a testament to the enduring legacy of the ancient Indian civilization and its ability to inspire awe and reverence in the hearts of all who visit. The Mahanata, frozen in his cosmic dance is a reminder of the eternal rhythms that govern our existence, a timeless masterpiece that continues to inspire and captivate all those who have the privilege to behold it.

This field trip has been extremely helpful in visualising my entire concept on Mahanata and concretising my production which I will share with the wider community in Britain and abroad.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the invaluable support provided by the funders such as Arts Council England for my DYCP (Developing your Creative project) and Lisa Ullman Travel Scholarship fund supporting my travel . Your generosity has played a pivotal role in making this project possible and I cannot thank you enough for your belief in my work.

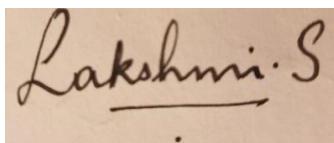
The scholarship has not only eased the financial burden of travel and research but has also served as a source of motivation and inspiration. It has enabled me to pursue my academic and professional goals with a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm. Throughout the journey, I have encountered new experiences, gained profound insights, and met remarkable individuals who have enriched my understanding of my field of study. The scholarship has been instrumental in facilitating these opportunities and fostering personal and academic growth.

I am committed to making the most of this opportunity and ensuring that the results of my project contribute positively to my chosen field of study and to the society at large. Your support has not only impacted my present but will undoubtedly influence my future endeavours as well.

Once again, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Lisa Ullman Travel Scholarship Fund for their unwavering support. I look forward to sharing the outcomes of my project with you and the broader community.

Sincerely,

Lakshmi Srinivasan  
(22/09/2023)

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light brown background. The signature reads "Lakshmi S" with a horizontal line under the "S".