

Khajuraho Temples

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Khajuraho Temples

- ▶ Built between AD 950 and 1150 by the Chandela dynasty
- ▶ Total of 85 temples were built of which around 20 have survived over time
- ▶ Located in Chhatarpur district, Madhya Pradesh about 620km from Delhi
- ▶ The largest group of Hindu and Jain temples, famous for their erotic sculpture
- ▶ Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and also considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world



Chandelas

- ▶ Descendants of ChandraVarman, born of Moon God
- ▶ Ruled over Central India from 10th to 13th century
- ▶ Were great patrons of art and culture



Architectural Features

- ▶ The stone used throughout is either granite or sandstone in shades of buff, pink and pale yellow
- ▶ Each temple is built on high platforms several meters above the ground
- ▶ The roofs are a series of graded peaks that look like a mountain range
- ▶ The exterior walls of the temples are adorned with sculptures
- ▶ It is estimated that it would have taken hundreds of highly skilled laborers to build these structures in the given time







Khajuraho Sculptures

- ▶ The walls of the temples are almost filled with sculptures
- ▶ Themes and subjects include
 - ▶ Animals – elephants , horses etc
 - ▶ Cult Icons – with halo and several attendees
 - ▶ Geometric and floral designs
 - ▶ *Apsaras or surasundaris* – the celestial women are shown in back and front views
 - ▶ The king at court, marching armies, royal hunt, domestic scenes
 - ▶ Erotic Sculptures



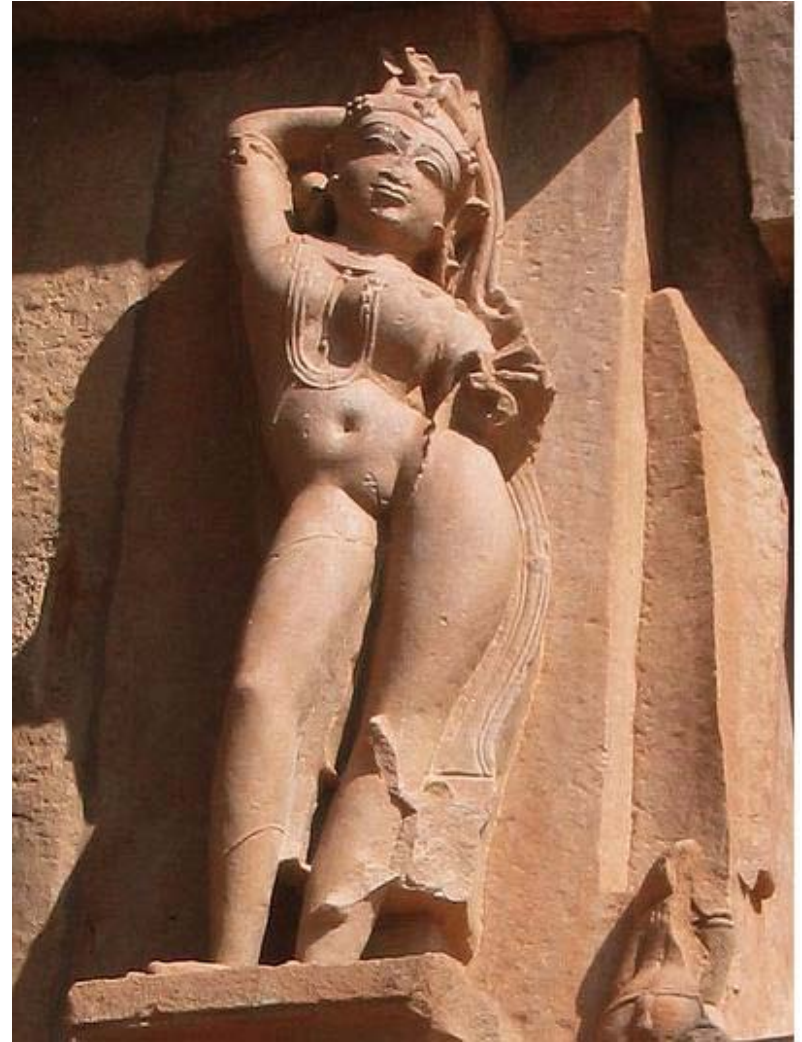
Marching Army



Cult icons are sculpted in accordance with prescribed conventions of the Shilpashatra. They have a halo and a host of attending figures



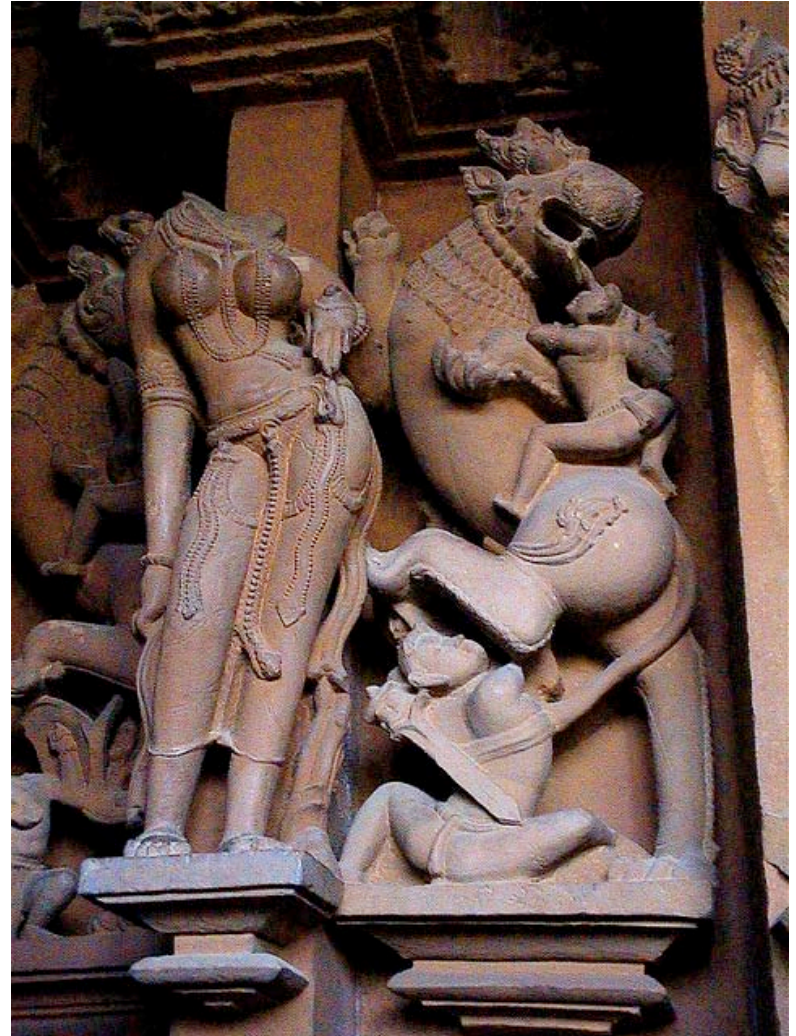
Apsaras



Geometric Patterns on the outer walls



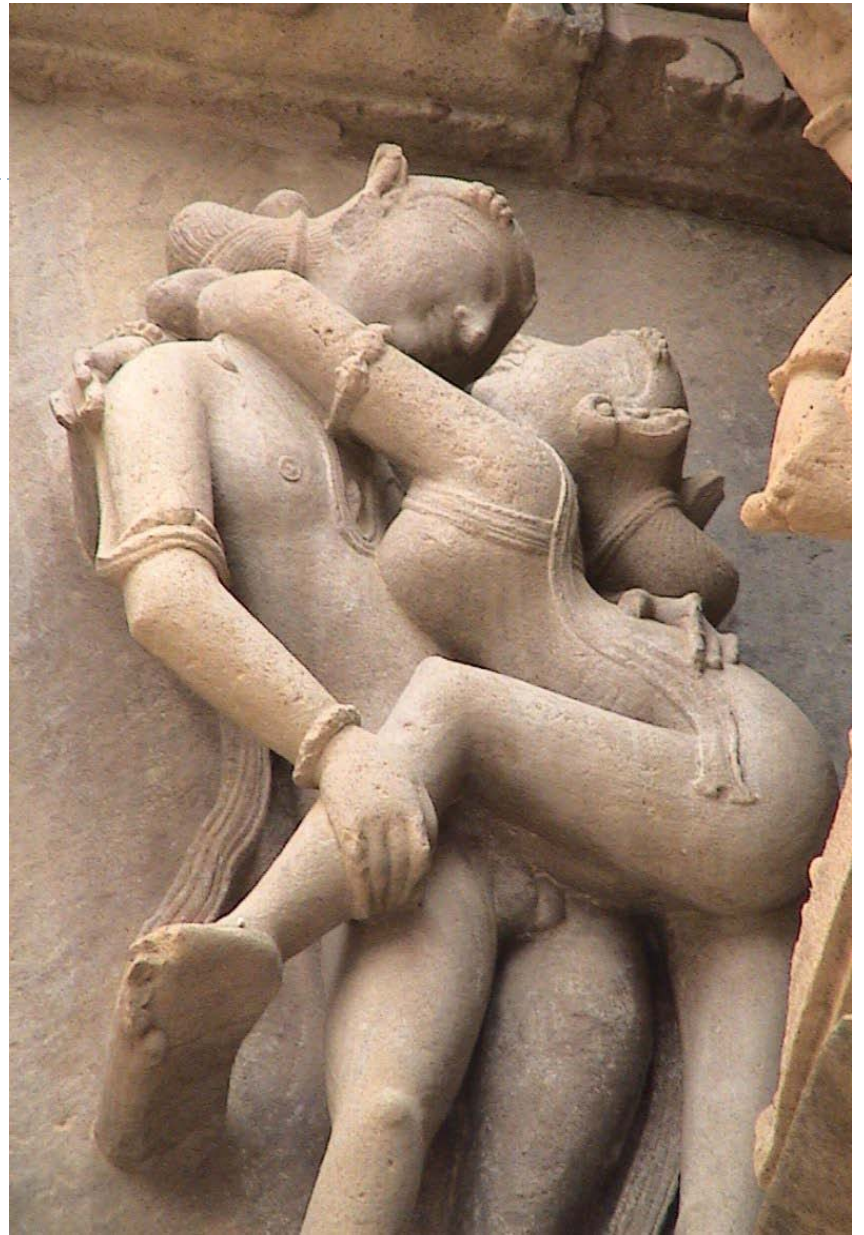
Horses



Erotic Sculptures

- ▶ The erotic sculptures make up less than 10 percent of the carved figures
- ▶ There are *no* erotic sculptures inside the temples
- ▶ Celestial maidens in sensuous positions
- ▶ Nudity is depicted in both men and women
- ▶ Couples embracing in erotic sexual positions
- ▶ Group Sex is depicted: twosomes, threesomes, foursomes on to orgies with more than ten participants
- ▶ Bestiality is portrayed occasionally







Some natural questions

- ▶ How did these sites survive muslim invaders??
- ▶ Why only temples were found and not forts and palaces??
- ▶ Why were the temples used as art galleries??
- ▶ Why erotic carvings at a religious place??



Why erotic carvings at a religious place??

- ▶ Chandelas were believers in the powers of Tantrism; the cult which believes that the gratification of earthly desires is a step closer to the attainment of the infinite
- ▶ Erotic sculptures are present only on the outer walls, which means one should leave all his/her worldly desires outside before entering the place of worship
- ▶ As a means of sexual instruction for young boys who after being '*brahmcharis*' had attained manhood



Why erotic carvings at a religious place??(contd)

- ▶ To test the spiritual strength of yogis
- ▶ To prevent the rain god Indra from striking the place with lightning as Indra would not have destroyed such a place
- ▶ Some scholars also believe that these depictions are from the book *Kama Sutra*



Interpretation by Osho

- ▶ Osho in his book *Sambhog Se Samadhi Tak* gives a very beautiful description of this. He says that a person is always engaged in pleasure but a time comes when he is tired of all these things going round and round as depicted around the temple of Khajuraho and then he enters the temple to see God. That is first you have to deal with very natural things like *Kaam* and only after crossing this, you can attain *Gyan* or knowledge of God. You cannot ignore it.



Contrast in Social Environment

- ▶ Little difference between dress of men and women – upper parts were mostly uncovered
- ▶ Human body was not seen as just as an erotic thing, as now. They saw it as an art of God, the most beautiful creation of God, and thus adorned the temple walls with them.
- ▶ India at that time enjoying 3 centuries long immunity from foreign invasions. It was at its peak of sovereignty and its independent status. There was not undue stress on economy due to foreign invasions. Hence most of the population was well fed, and hence available for some higher degree of thinking.



How??



Changes in Context of History

▶ Ancient times:

- ▶ India pioneered the use of sexual education through art and literature
- ▶ *Kama Sutra* was written somewhere between 1st to 6th century

▶ Delhi Sultanate or Muslim Rule Era:

- ▶ Islamic customs of covering the whole body (*purdah* system) and *ghunghats* of marwaris of Rajputana



Changes in Context of History (contd.)

▶ Colonial Era:

- ▶ Victorian values stigmatized Indian sexual liberanism. This led some Indians wanting to conform their religious practices and moral values to Victorian ideas of "high" civilization

▶ Modern Times:

- ▶ Conservative views are the norm
- ▶ Going through western style sexual revolution of its own





Questions and Comments

