



INTACH

MAURYAN PERIOD

(322 BCE-185 BCE and later)



DIDARGANJ YAKSHI SCULPTURE

The Didarganj Yakshi (or Didarganj Chauri Bearer) is 6'4" tall sculpture, carved out of a single piece of stone. The Didarganj Yakshi is estimated to date from ca. 3rd century BCE. It was excavated from Didarganj.

It is currently located in the Patna Museum in Patna, India.

Mauryan art is one of the most remarkable of the arts produced during the period of the Mauryan Empire (4th to 2nd century BCE), which was the first empire to rule over most of the Indian subcontinent. It represented an important transition in Indian art from use of wood to stone. It is also notable for a refinement in pottery.

The statue of Didarganj yakshi is a good example of the marvellous sculpting during the Maurya period in India. *This 5'4" tall statue is carved out of a single piece of stone.* It has been dated with certainty to the Asokan period.

The prominent breasts, the narrow waist, the creases on the lower abdomen, and broad hips, are classic features of feminine beauty of all ages. They show the painstaking attention to details by the artisan(s).



The **iron pillar** (also known as the Ashokan pillar) of Delhi, India, is a 7 m (23 ft) high pillar in the Qutb complex, notable for the composition of the metals used in its construction.



Buddhist **stupa** at Sanchi was made by Ashoka.

Equally striking is the depiction of clothes with which her body is draped. Elegantly folded and pleated in the front, held in place by exquisite waist ornaments (*kamar-bund*). Noteworthy also is the beauty of the ornaments that adorn this female figure from her head to toe. Interestingly, *this style of ornaments remains unchanged to this day.* The fly whisk (*the chauri*) seen in her right hand can still be found at wedding ceremonies all over Bihar. The slight bend in the left leg endows the statue with a subtle impression of graceful motion, which some observers have described as the "gait of a swan" or *maralagimini*. Such were the talents of the artists in ancient Bihar in the Mauryan period.



The Yaksha from Didarganj, presently located at Patna museum.

Yaksha

The yaksha sandstone figure of Patna, the chauri-bearer of Didarganj now in the Patna museum, the nude headless torso of a Jain tirthakara from Lohanpur near Patna, all bear the fine Mauryan polish.

What is a yaksha?

Yakshas are spirits associated with nature. They take care of all the treasures associated with nature. They are portrayed as warriors with stout figures and may be dwarf like too. They played a very strong role in Grama shilpa, and did not get much attention from the ruling kings. Their female counter parts are *yakshis associated with the fertility cult and mother goddess worship*. In Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist mythology, the yaksha has a dual personality. On the one hand, *a yaksha may be an inoffensive nature-fairy, associated with woods and mountains*; but there is also a darker version of the yaksha, which is a kind of ghost that haunts the wilderness and waylays and devours travellers, similar to the rakshasas.

Did you know?

- There are 3 types of art that are related to the Mauryan empire:
 1. Gandhara school of art,
 2. Mathura school of art and
 3. Amravati school of art.
- The Mauryan Empire shows the first traces of minted coins in the history of India.
- The Mauryan currency was called pana.

With an area of 5,000,000 km², Mauryan Empire was one of the world's largest empires in its time and the largest ever in the Indian subcontinent. At its greatest extent, the empire stretched to the north along the natural boundaries of the Himalayas, and to the east stretching into what is now Assam. To the west, it conquered beyond modern Pakistan, annexing Balochistan, south eastern parts of Iran and much of what is now Afghanistan, including the modern Herat and Kandahar provinces. The Empire was expanded into India's central and southern regions by the emperors Chandragupta and Bindusara, but it excluded a small portion of unexplored tribal and forested regions near Kalinga (modern Orissa), till it was conquered by Ashoka. *Its decline began 60 years after Ashoka's rule ended, and it dissolved in 185 BC with the foundation of the Sunga Dynasty in Magadha.*

The Empire was founded in 322 BC by Chandragupta, who had overthrown the Nanda Dynasty and rapidly expanded his power westwards across central and western India taking advantage of the disruptions of local powers in the wake of the withdrawal westward by Alexander the Great's Greek and Persian armies. By 320 BC the empire had fully occupied North-western India, defeating and conquering the satraps left by Alexander.

Chandragupta's grandson i.e., Bindusara's son was Ashokavardhan Maurya, also known as Ashoka or Ashoka the Great (ruled 273- 232 BC). As a young prince, Ashoka was a brilliant commander who crushed revolts in Ujjain and Taxila. As monarch he was ambitious and

aggressive, re-asserting the Empire's superiority in southern and western India. But it was his conquest of Kalinga which proved to be the pivotal event of his life. Although Ashoka's army succeeded in overwhelming Kalinga forces of royal soldiers and civilian units, an estimated 100,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in the furious warfare, including over 10,000 of Ashoka's own men. Hundreds of thousands of people were adversely affected by the destruction and fallout of war. When he personally witnessed the devastation, Ashoka began feeling remorse.

Although the annexation of Kalinga was completed, Ashoka embraced the teachings of Buddhism, and renounced war and violence.

After the Kalinga War, the Empire experienced half a century of peace and security under Ashoka.

India in Mauryan rule also enjoyed an era of social harmony, religious transformation, and expansion of the sciences and of knowledge.

Chandragupta Maurya's embrace of Jainism increased social and religious renewal and reforms across his society, while Ashoka's embrace of Buddhism has been said to have been the foundation of the reign of social and political peace and non-violence across all of India. *Ashoka spread Buddhist ideals in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, West Asia and Mediterranean Europe.*

Ashoka publicized this program by inscribing edicts on great rocks and polished pillars of sandstone scattered around his vast empire. The tradition holds that Kautilya helped Chandragupta Maurya in all his conquests. *Kautilya is said to have written a surviving text on how to run a government called Arthashastra.*

The Mauryan capital was Patliputra (modern Patna) where 5 tributaries joined River Ganga. Busy and crowded, it was governed by 6 committees with the responsibility for manufacturing, trade, sales, the welfare of foreigners, and the registration of births and deaths.

Did you know?

- *The inscriptions that have survived contain the earliest decipherable Indian texts!*
- *Most of the palaces and other important architectural structures of the Mauryan period have gone extinct because they were mainly made of wooden material.*
- *Four types of religions were followed by the people in the empire. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Ajivika.*

Activity:

Make your own favourite sculpture that you see at home or anywhere around you. Or try to redraw the figure of Yakshi from the first page.

Sources:

A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century by
Upinder Singh

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurya_Empire , http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didarganj_Yakshi