

FINE
NC
760
.T12
1914a

SOME NOTES ON INDIAN ARTISTIC ANATOMY

by Abanindranath Tagor

FOREWORD



The following notes were prepared by Mr. A. N. Tagore and illustrated by his pupils Mr. Nanda Lal Bose & Mr. Venkatappa for the purpose of answering certain criticisms against the many unreal forms and conventions which have been adopted by Indian masters in sculpture and painting and which now constitute the basis of Indian artistic anatomy. Much that is offered in these notes are tentative and scrappy and await confirmation by actual texts of the Silpa Shastras the interpretation of which still remains difficult a task.

For various reasons Indian sculpture demands a treatment of the figure more directly removed from nature than ancient Greek sculpture. The conscious aim of Indian art has been the suggestion and portrayal of the Divine and the Transcendental. In its greatest manifestations, Indian Art carries with it a sense of "Being beyond appearances," of a super-sensuous world of mystery and exaltation. Such a world could hardly be represented in terms of a physically perfect healthy human body. It could only be symbolised in ideal types and by forms not strictly in accordance with known physiological laws but by forms which transcend the limits of the ordinary human body. The Indian Artist was thus called upon to devise certain artistic conventions and a special system of anatomy suggestive of a higher and superior ethnical type for the purpose of intimating something beyond the form of things. It was by means of these departures and variations from "natural poses" that the non-human form could possibly be rendered in terms of the human shape. The conventions adopted by these

artists undoubtedly offer certain new values of space and movement which suggest a peculiar form-language eminently suitable for rendering the visible suggestion for spiritual forms; at the same time they constitute a rich store of *motifs* of vital aesthetic quality. It is hoped that these notes would assist towards a better appreciation of the master-pieces of Indian Art, ancient and modern, the unreal forms of which still continue to offer difficulty to many European students.

Indian Society of Oriental Art,
7 Old Post Office Street, Calcutta.
March 1914.

}

O. C. G.

Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy *

By Abanindranath Tagore, C.I.E.

:*:

Before opening this discourse, let me acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend Mr. Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly and to Shri Guru Swami, a hereditary Sculptor from Kumbhokonam whom he has brought over from Madras, as well as to my pupils, K. Venkatappa and Nanda Lall Bose,—and let me also make this little request of my readers, and especially of my friends and pupils, my fellow-pilgrims in the quest for that realization which is the fulfilment of all art, that they may not take these æsthetic canons and form-analyses of our art treatises, with all the rigours of their standards and their demonstrations, as representing absolute and inviolable laws, nor deprive their art-endeavours of the sustaining breath of freedom, by confining themselves and their works within the limits of Shastric demonstrations. Till we find the strength to fly we cling to our nest and its confines. But even while within our bounds, we have to struggle for the strength to outstep them; and then to soar away, breaking through all bondage and limitations, realizing the full significance of our struggles. For, let us not forget that it is the artist and his creations that come first and then the lawgiver and his codes

* This paper originally appeared in Bengali in the *Prabasi* (Pous and Magh 1320) and has now been translated by Mr. Sukumar Ray and is reprinted from *The Modern Review*.



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

of art. Art is not for the justification of the Shilpa Shastra, but the Shastra is for the elucidation of Art. It is the concrete form which is evolved first, and then come its analyses and its commentaries, its standards and its proportions—codified in the form of Shastras. The restraints of childhood are to keep us from going astray before we have learnt to walk, to give us the chance of learning to stand upright; and not to keep us cramped and helpless for ever within the narrowness of limitations. He who realizes Dharma (the Law of Righteousness) attains freedom, but the seeker after Dharma has at first to feel the grappling bonds of scriptures and religious laws. Even so, the novice in Art submits to the restraint of shastric injunctions, while the master finds himself emancipated from the tyranny of standards, proportions and measures, of light, shade, perspective and anatomy.

As no amount of familiarity with the laws of religion can make a man religious, so no man can become an artist by mere servile adherence to his codes of art, however glibly he may be able to talk about them. What foolishness is it to imagine that a figure modelled after the most approved recommendations of the Shastras, would gain us a passport, through the portals of art, into the realms beyond where art holds commerce with eternal joy.

When the inexperienced pilgrim goes to the temple of Jagannath, he has to submit to be led on step by step by his guide, who directs him at every turn to the right or to the left, up and down, till the path becomes familiar to him, and the guide ceases to be a necessity. And when at last the deity chooses to reveal himself, all else ceases to exist for the devotee,—temples and shrines, eastern and western gates and doorways, their symbols and their decorations, up and down, sacerdotal guidance and the mathematical preciseness of all calculating steps. The river strikes down its banks to build anew, and a similar

impulse leads the artist to break down the bonds of shastric authority. Let us not imagine that our art-preceptors were in any way blind to this or that they were slow to appreciate the fact that an art hampered on all sides by the rigid bonds of shastric requisitions would never weigh anchor and set sail for those realms of joy which are the final goal of all art.

If we approach our sacred art-treatises in the spirit of scholarly criticism, we find them bristling all over with unyielding restrictions, and we are only too apt to overlook the abundant, though less obvious, relaxations which our sages have provided for, in order to safeguard the continuity and perpetuation of our art "Sevaya-sevaka-bhabeshu pratima-lakshanam smritam." Images should conform to prescribed types when they are to be contemplated in the spirit of worship. Does that not imply that the artist is to adhere to shastric formulæ only when producing images intended for worship and that he is free, in all other cases, to follow his own art instinct? In figs. 3 accompanying this article, I have chosen two examples of the Tribhanga figure (Tri, three, bhanga, flexion, a symmetry). One is a literal rendering of the approved formulæ of the Shastras and the other a figure chosen at random from amongst the countless Tribhngas evolved by Indian artists. These serve to show the triflex idea as we see it in the Shastras as the artist chooses to render it.

When the sage Shukracharyya was tackling the mystery of beauty with his scales and measures, perhaps Beauty herself, in the form of an image violating all the rules of the Shilpa Shastras—strange creation of some rebellious spirit—appeared before him and demanded his attention. The great teacher must have seen and understood and it is this understanding that prompts him to say—"Sevya-sevaka-bhabeshu pratima-lakshanam smritam."—These, Lakshmi, are not for thee ; these laws

that I lay down, these fine analyses of what an image should be, are for those images that are made to order for people who would worship them. Endless are thy forms! No Shastra can define thee, nothing can appraise thee.

“Sarvangai sarva-ranyo hi, kashchillakshe prajayate Shastra-manena yo ranyo sa ranyo nanya eba hi. Ekesham eba tat ranyam lagnam yatra cha yasya, hrit Shastra-mana bibhinam yata ranyam tat vipashchitam.” [Sukranti IV. 4 104-105]

“Perchance one in a million has perfect form, perfect beauty!

“So only that image is perfect which conforms to the standard of beauty laid down in the Shatras. Nothing can be called perfect which has not the sanction of the Shastras, this the learned would say.

“Others would insist, that to which your heart cling becomes perfect, becomes beautiful.”

SCALES AND PROPORTIONS.

Our art traditions recognize five different classes of images:— Nara (human), Krura (terrible), Asura (demoniac), Bala (infantile) and Kumara (juvenile). Five different scales and proportions have been prescribed for these:—

Nara murti = ten talas.

Krura murti = twelve talas.

Asura murti = sixteen talas.

Bala murti = five talas.

Kumara murti = six talas.*

* The talas given here do not exhaust the various measures current in Indian sculpture. In the 4th chapter of the *Sukraniti Sara* as also in the chapter on *Pratima lakshana* of the *Brihat Sanhita* measurements are given for the average human body according to which the average male figure is stated to be eight times the face which is represented by one *tala*. The law of ‘eight heads’ or *asta talam* is therefore the same as laid down by Vitruvius. Any height for a human male less than the eighth measure is conceived in the *Sukraniti* as dwarfish or below the average. The average human female figure is given as of the seventh measure (*Sapta tala*). The average infant figure is laid down as of the fifth measure

The tala has been defined as follows:—A quarter of the width of the artist's own fist is called an angula or finger's width. Twelve such finger-widths is the measure of a tala.

The Nara or ten tala measure is recommended for such heroic figures as, Nara narayan, Rama, Nrisinba, Vana, Vali, Indra, Bhargava, Arjuna, etc. The Krura or twelve tala measure is for destructive conceptions such as Chandi, Bhairava, Narasinha, Hayagriva, Varaha etc. The sixteen tala measure is to be used for demoniacal figures like Hiranyakasipu, Vritra, Hiranyakasha, Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Namuchi, Shumbha, Nishumbha, Mahisha, Raktabija, etc. The Bala or infant type, for all representations of infancy such as Gopal, Balakrishna, etc. And the Kumara, or six talas, for the period of childhood, past infancy, before the approach of youth, such as Uma, Vamana, Krishnasaksh, &c.

Besides these given measures there is another measure current in Indian iconography which is known as the Uttama Navatala. In this type of images, the whole figure is divided into nine equal parts which are called talas. A quarter of a tala is called an Amsa or Unit. Thus, there being four amsas to each tala, the length of the whole figure from tip to toe is 9 talas or 36 amsas. Fig. 5 is a representation of the Uttama

(*Panchatala*). The measures higher than the *asta talam* are reserved for the images of gods, demons, *Rakshas* and other super-human beings. Thus the image of the goddess according to the *Sukraniti* is always in the ninth measure "*(Naba tala surita devi)*," that of the *Rakshasi* is the tenth measure. The South Indian and Ceylonese manuscripts however differ a little from the *Sukraniti* and other works in respect of the rules for the measure of the deities. But except in the case of the image of *Ganesha* and *Krishna* all the measures given for the images of deities are higher than the *asta tala*, the average human measure, the higher measurements suggesting a relatively 'heroic' type. In the South Indian manuscripts each measure is again divided into three different classes e.g. the *Uttama* (best) *Madhama* [medium] and the *adhama* (lowest). Thus the *Uttamadastala* is represented by 124 *angulas* or parts, the *madhama dastala* by 120 parts, and the *Adhamas Tala* by 116 parts. Special injunctions are laid down for constructing particular images in a measure specially reserved for them. O.C.G.

Navatala. The heights or vertical lengths of the various parts of a figure made according to this tala are—middle of forehead to chin 1 tala, collar-bone to chest 1 tala, chest to navel 1 tala, navel to hips 1 tala, hips to knees 2 talas, knees to insteps 2 talas, forehead to crown of the head 1 amsa, neck 1 amsa, knee-caps 1 amsa, feet 1 amsa. The widths or horizontal measures are as follows,—Head 1 tala, neck $2\frac{1}{2}$ ansas shoulder to shoulder 3 talas, chest 6 ansas, waist 5 ansas, hips 2 talas, knees 2 ansas, ankles 1 amsa, feet 5 ansas. The hands and their parts are as follows.—Lengths: shoulders to elbows 2 talas, elbows to wrists 6 ansas, palms 1 tala; widths near armpits 2 ansas, elbows $1\frac{1}{2}$ ansas, wrists 1 amsa.

The face of the figure is divided into three equal portions,—middle of forehead to middle of pupils, pupils to tip of the nose, tip of the nose to chin.

According to Shukracharyya the proportions of a Navatala figure should be as follows:—From the crown of the head to the lower fringe of hair 3 *angulis* in width; Forehead 4 *angulis*, nose 4 *angulis* from tip of nose to chin 4 *angulis*, and neck 4 *angulis* in height; eye-brows 4 *angulis* long and half an *anguli* in width, eyes 3 *angulis* in length and two in width; pupils one-third the size of the eyes; Ears 4 *angulis* in height and 3 in width. Thus, the height of the ears is made equal to the length of the eye-brows. Palms 7 *angulis* long, the middle finger 6 *angulis*, the thumb $3\frac{1}{2}$ *angulis*, extending to the first phalanx of the index finger. The thumb has two joints or sections only, while the other fingers have three each. The ring finger is smaller than the middle finger by half a section and the little finger smaller than the ring finger by one section, while the index finger is one section short of the middle. The feet should be 14 *angulis* long, the big toe 2 *angulis*, the first toe $2\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 *angulis*, the middle toe $1\frac{1}{2}$ *anguli* the third toe $1\frac{1}{2}$ *anguli* and the little toe $1\frac{1}{2}$ *anguli*.

Female figures are usually made about one *amsa* shorter than males.

The proportions of child-figures should be as follows :—The trunk, from the collar-bones below, should be $4\frac{1}{2}$ times the size of the head. Thus the portion of the body between the neck and the thighs is twice and the rest $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the size of the head. The length of the hands should be twice that of the face or the feet. Children have short necks and comparatively big heads,—for the growth of the head, with increase of age, is much slower than that of the rest of the body.

FORM AND CHARACTER.

A perfectly built figure, faultless in its details, is one of the rarest things in the world ; and in spite of general resemblances of features and form, between man and man, it is impossible to take any particular figure as a standard or ideal for all. Features, like hands, feet, eyes or ears, are given to all men in pairs, and, roughly speaking, these are structurally the same in one man as in another. But, our intimate acquaintance with the human race, and our habit of paying close attention to the details of a man's features, make us so acutely conscious of minute differences of physiognomy that the choice of the æsthetically ideal figure becomes a matter of serious difficulty for the artist. But in the case of the lower animals and plant organisms the resemblances are apparently much closer and there seems to be a certain well defined fixity of form in the different specimens of the same object. Thus, there is apparently not much difference in form between, say, two birds or animals of the same species or between two leaves or flowers of the same variety of trees. The eggs laid by one hen have the same smoothness and regularity of contour as the eggs of any other hen, and any leaf taken from one peepul (*ficus religiosa*) tree

has the same triangular form and pointed tip that we find on any other. It is for this reason probably, that our great teachers have described the shapes of human limbs and organs not by comparison with those of other men but always in terms of flowers or birds or some other plant or animal features. Thus the face is described as "rounded like a hen's egg." In Fig. 6 are shown two faces, one having the form of a hen's egg and the other suggesting a *pan* (betel leaf). The type of face that is popularly described as *pan*-like is more commonly seen in Nepal and in the images of gods and goddesses current in Bengal. Now when we describe a face as round, we mean simply that the prevailing character of the face is roundness and not angularity or linearity. But in spite of this tendency to roundness, there is something in its form that cannot be adequately expressed by comparison with a globe. So it has been described as egg-like; which implies that it shows the same general elongation, and lessening of width towards the chin, that is typical of the hen's egg; and whether the face be thin and long or square-built, it has nevertheless to keep within the limits of this ovoid shape. It is by manipulating and elaborating this egg-shape and introducing local variations to modify the simplicity of its contours, that the artist has to depict the whole range of facial variations, due to different ages and characters. Just as a copper water-pot retains its roundness, in spite of extensive dents and damages, so the face retains its basic egg-shape through all its widely various types. As the roundish shape is the permanent character of the water-pot, the egg-shape is the most fundamental characteristic of the human hero. The *pan*-face, the moon-face and even the owl-shape are but variations of the egg-face.

Fig. 7. THE FOREHEAD, is described as having the form of a bow. The space between the eye-brows and the fringe of hair in front shows the arched crescent form of a slightly drawn bow.



शिवलिंग

१

Fig. 1.

Fig. 1.

२ वा ५५

Fig 2

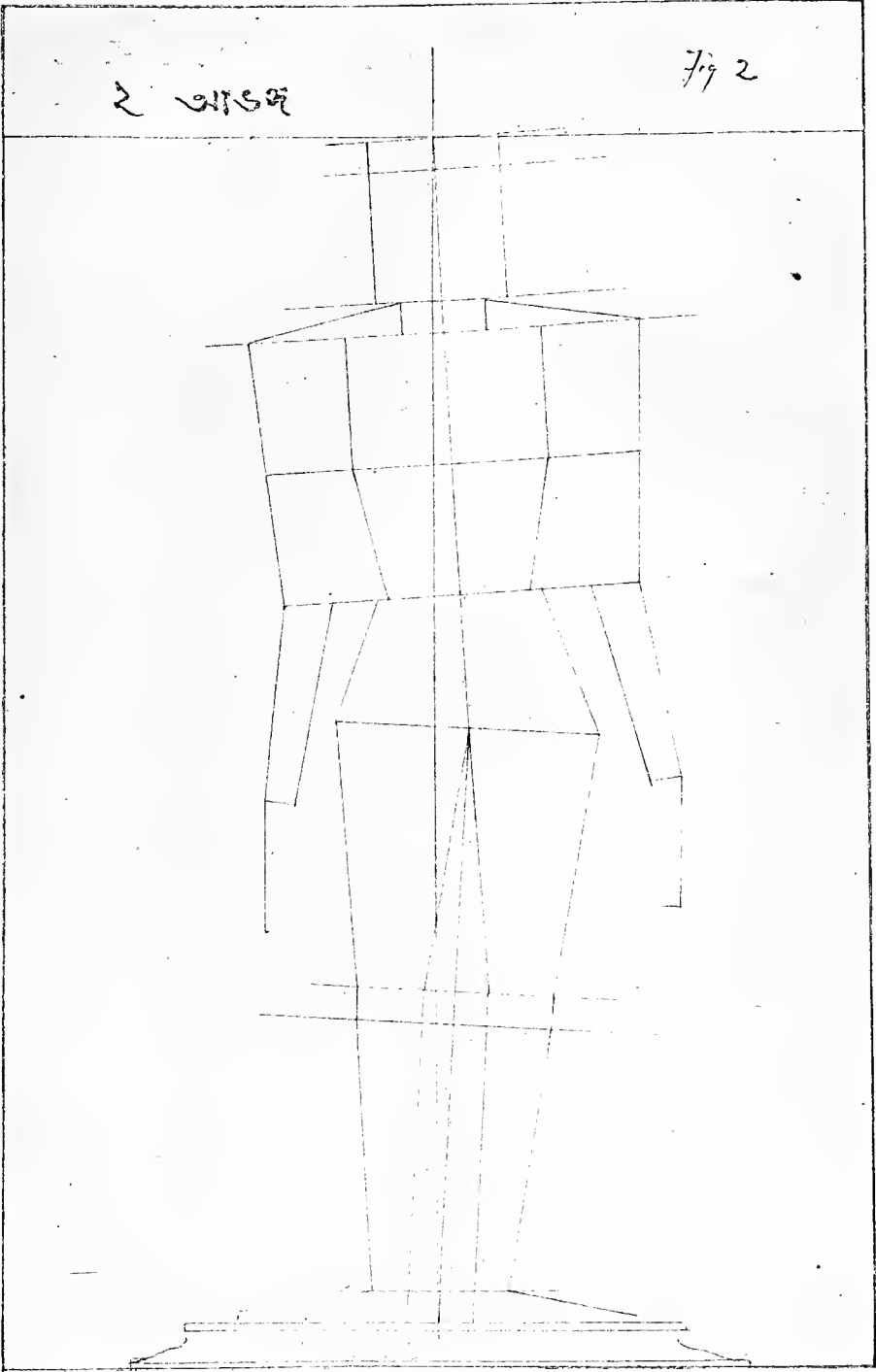


Fig. 2.



ଆଦ୍ୟ

୨

୭୨

Fig. 2.

প্রিত্ত
৩

Fig 3

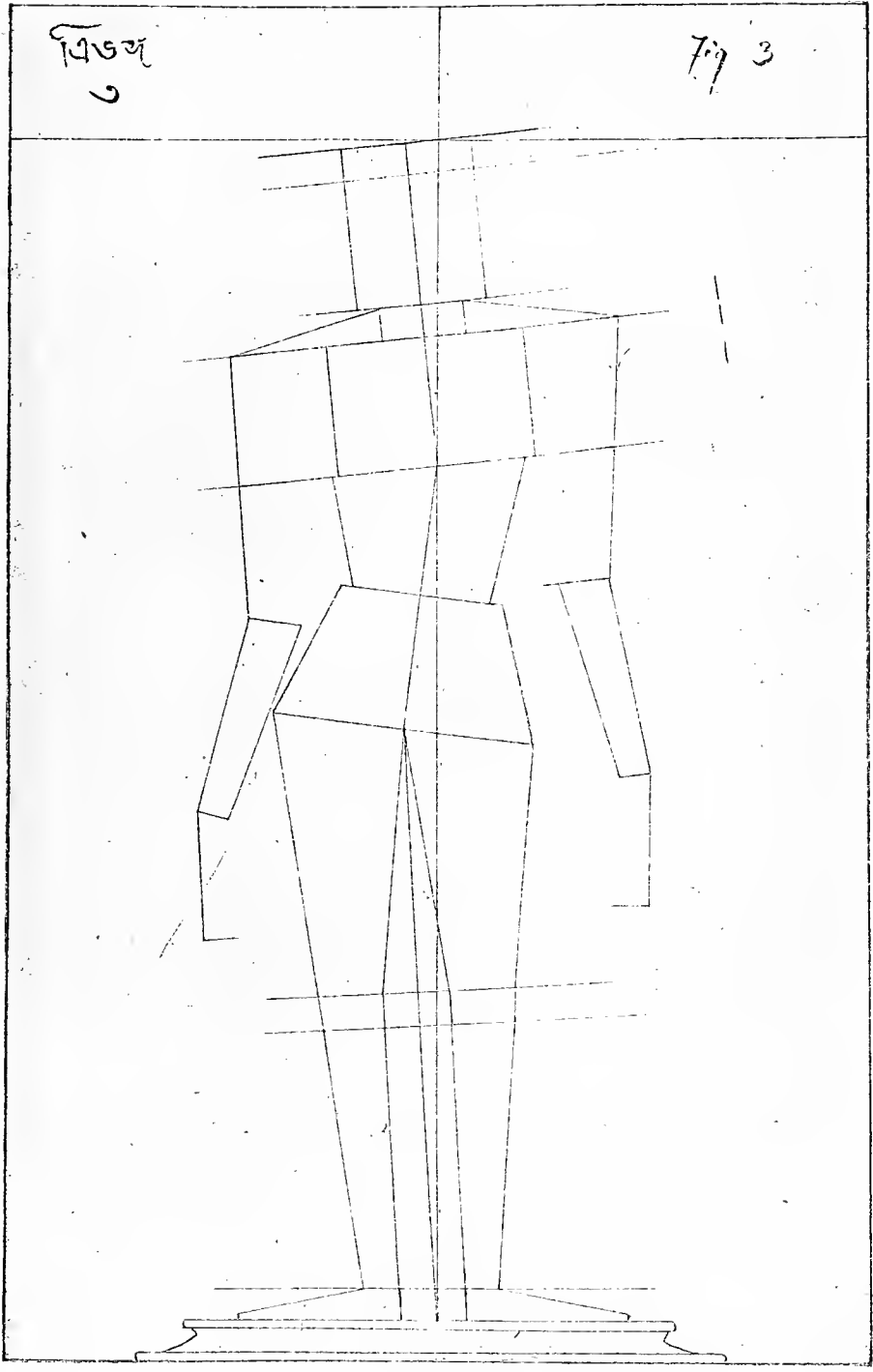


Fig. 3.



Fig. 3.



गौरी-डुर्गा

8

१११

Fig. 4.

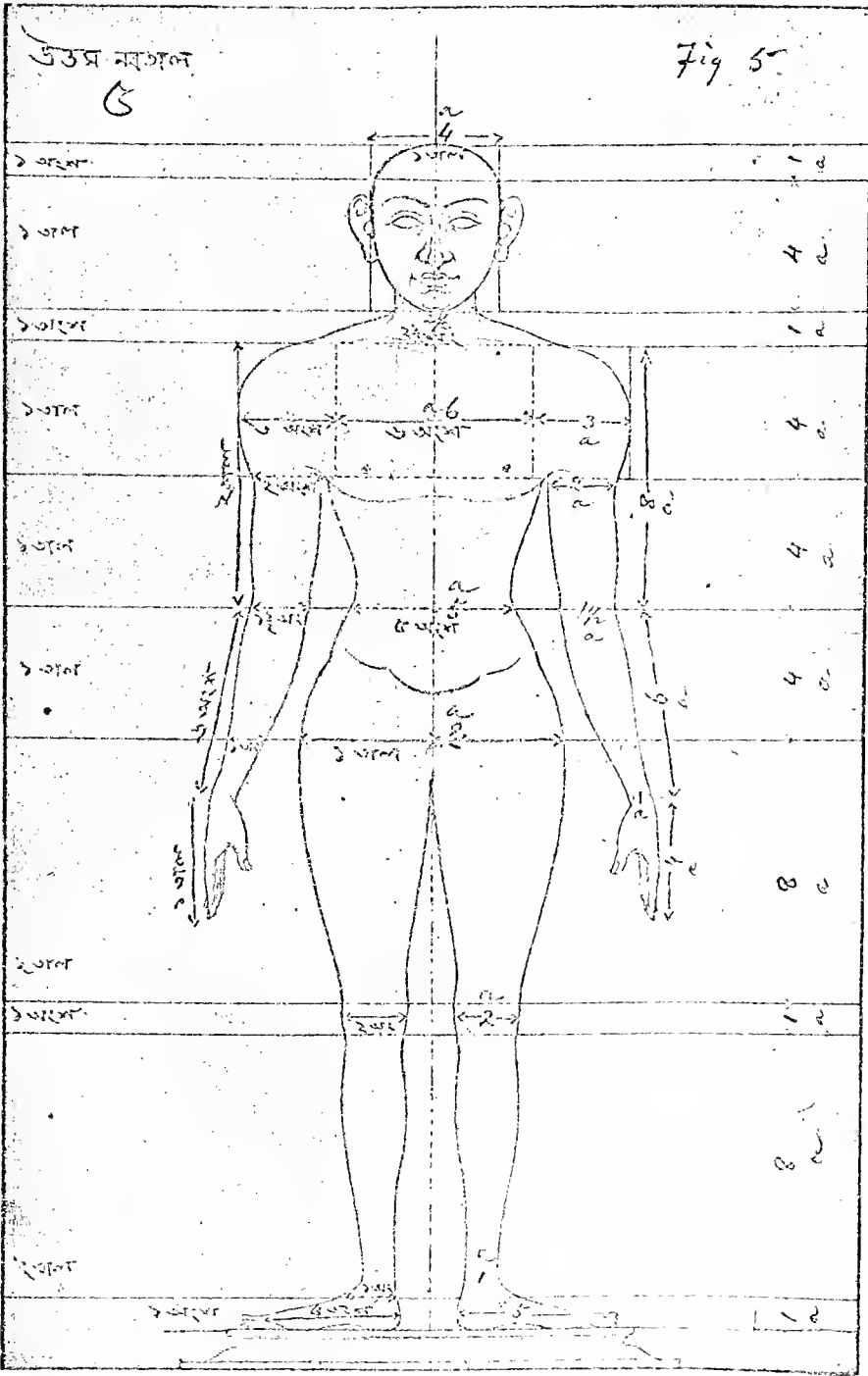


Fig. 5.

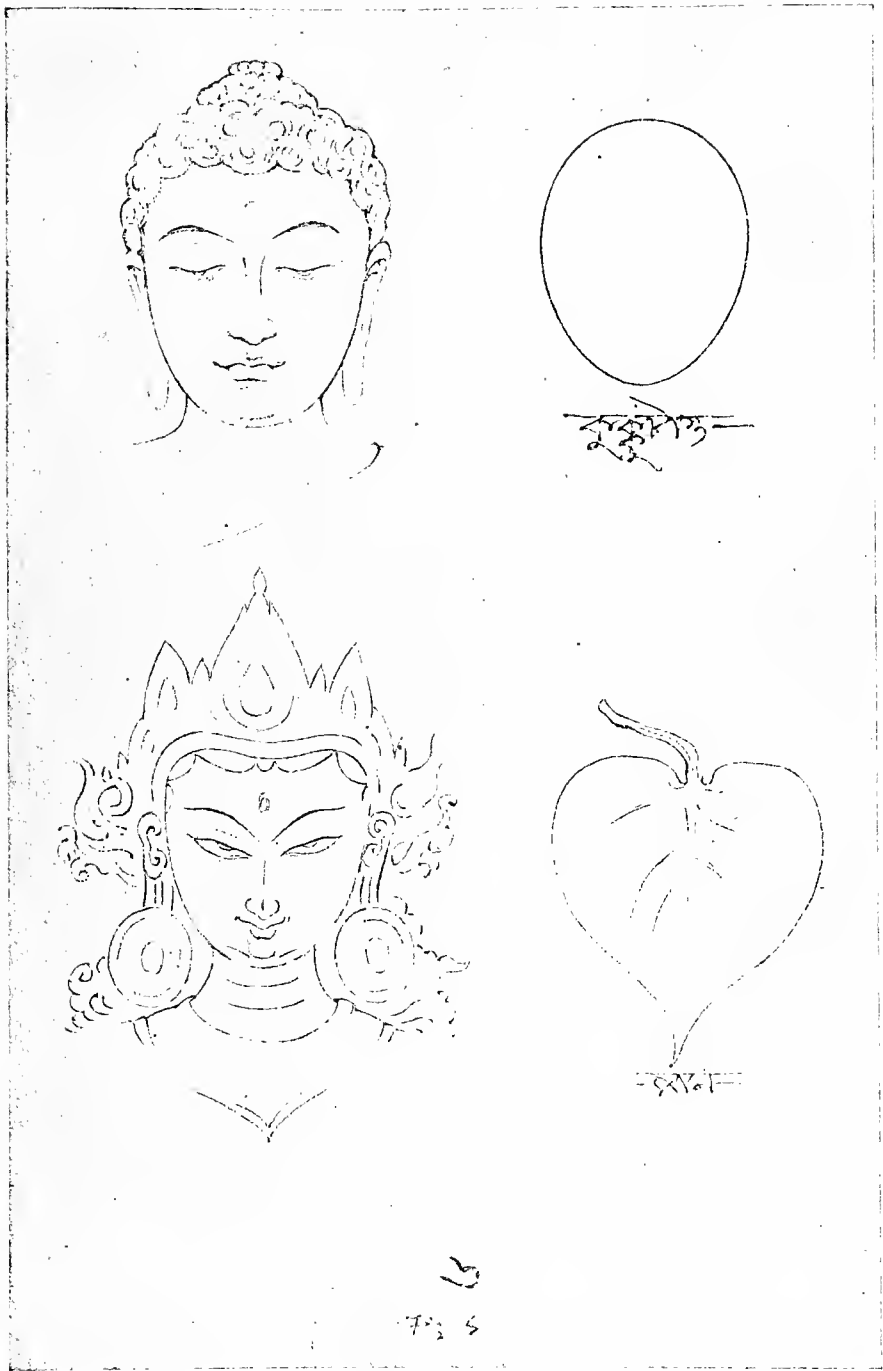
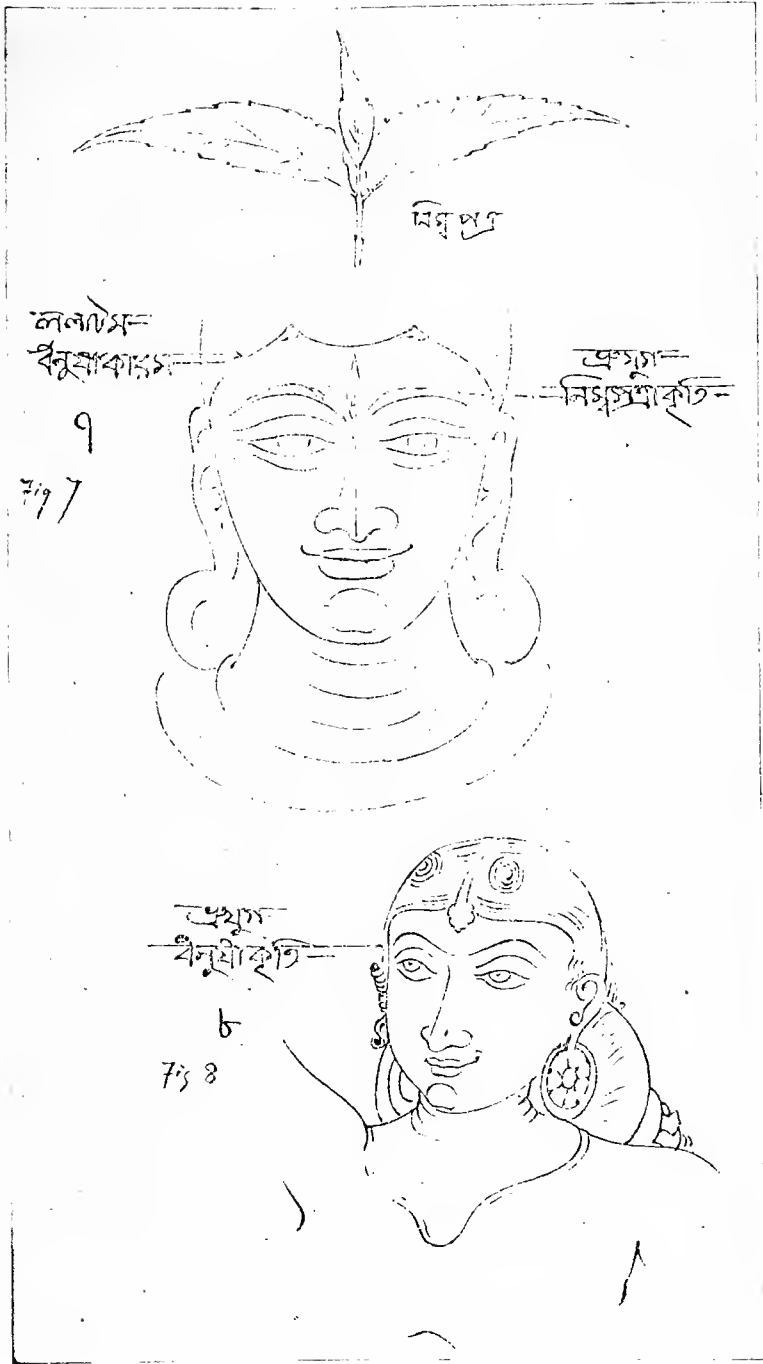


Fig. 6.



Figs. 7 and 8.

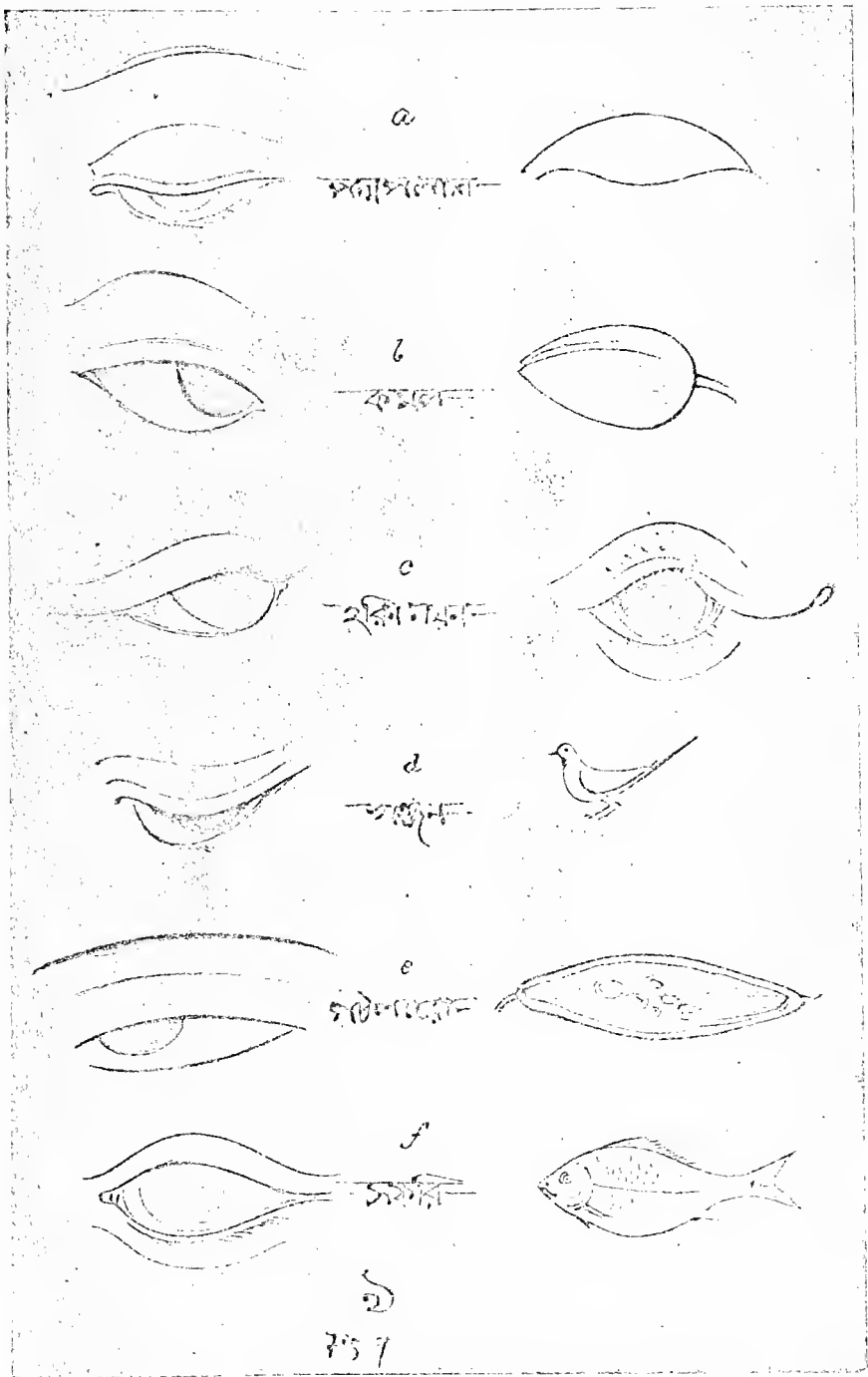


Fig. 9.

Fig. 8. THE EYEBROWS are described as being "like the leaves of a Neem (*meliaazadirachta*) tree or like a bow." Both these forms have found favour with our artists, the first being used chiefly for figures of men and the latter for female figures. The various emotions, of pleasure or fear or anger, &c., are to be shown by raising, lowering, contracting or otherwise modifying the eye-brow like a leaf disturbed by the wind or a bow under different degrees of tension.

Fig. 9. THE EYES have been described as "fish-shaped." But the similes used to describe the eyes are as endless as the range of emotions and thoughts that can be expressed through them. If we are to confine our similes to the *safari* fish, we have to ignore the round eyes, the wide open eyes, and a host of other varieties of eyes. Fresh additions have therefore constantly been made to our stock of similes. Thus, the eyes have been compared among other things to the *khanjana*, the common wagtail, a small bird with a lively dancing gait; the eyes of the deer; the water-lily; the lotus leaf and the little *safari* fish. Of these the first two are used chiefly in painted figures of women, while the other three are to be seen in the stone or metal images of gods as well as goddesses. Besides these there is another type of eyes known in Bengal as *patol chera* (like a sliced *patol*)* (*trichosanthes*) which is not mentioned anywhere in our sacred texts or our ancient literature; but it is nevertheless to be found extensively employed in the female figures painted on the walls of the Ajanta caves. The eyes of women are by their very nature restless; but it must not be supposed that it is this characteristic alone that our art preceptors have tried to convey in choosing three such restless animals as the deer, the *khanjana* and the *safari* for their similes. The forms and expressions peculiar to different types

* *Patol* is a common vegetable called *parwar* in Hindi.

of eyes are very well suggested by these similes. It will be found that these different types represent well marked differences of character, and each has its own appropriate application in the expression of different emotions and temperaments. Thus the *khanjana* eyes are characterized by their playful gaiety, the *Safari* eyes for their restless mobility, the deer eyes for their innocent simplicity lotus-leaf-eyes for their serene peacefulness and the 'waterlily eyes' for the calm repose of their drooping lids.

Fig. 10. THE EARS are directed to be made "like the letter न". Some resemblance can no doubt be traced between the ear and the letter न but our great teachers do not seem to have taken much pains to indicate the structure of the ears. The sole reason for this seems to be that the ears are so much obscured by ornaments and decorations in the images of goddesses and by elaborate head-gear in the case of gods, that our writers have satisfied themselves by roughly indicating the general character of the eyes. In our province, ears have often been compared to vultures, and that is no doubt a far more appropriate and suggestive analogy than the letter न।

Fig. 11. THE NOSE and THE NOSTRILS. The nose has the shape of the sesame flower and the nostrils are like the seed of *barbati* or the long bean. Noses shaped like the sesame flower are to be seen chiefly in the images of goddesses and in paintings of women. In this form, the nose extends in one simple line from between the eyebrows downwards, while the nostrils are slightly inflated and convexed like a flower petal. Parrot-noses are found chiefly in the images of gods and in male figures. In this type the nose, starting from between the eyebrows rapidly gains in height and extends in one sweeping curve towards the tip, which is pointed, while the nostrils are drawn up towards the corners of the eyes. Parrot-noses are invariably associated with heroes and great men, while, amongst female figures, they are to be seen only in the images of *Sakti*.

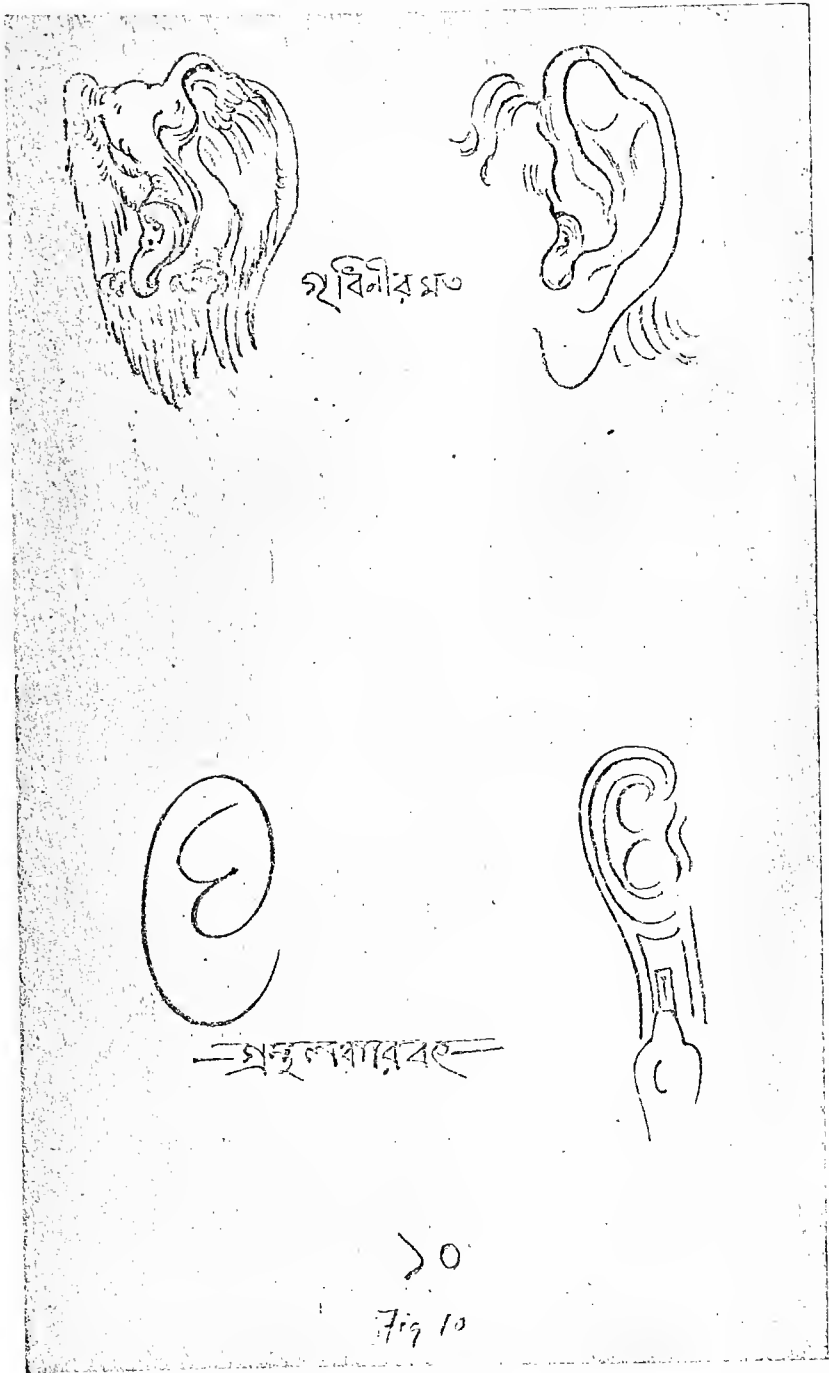


Fig. 10.

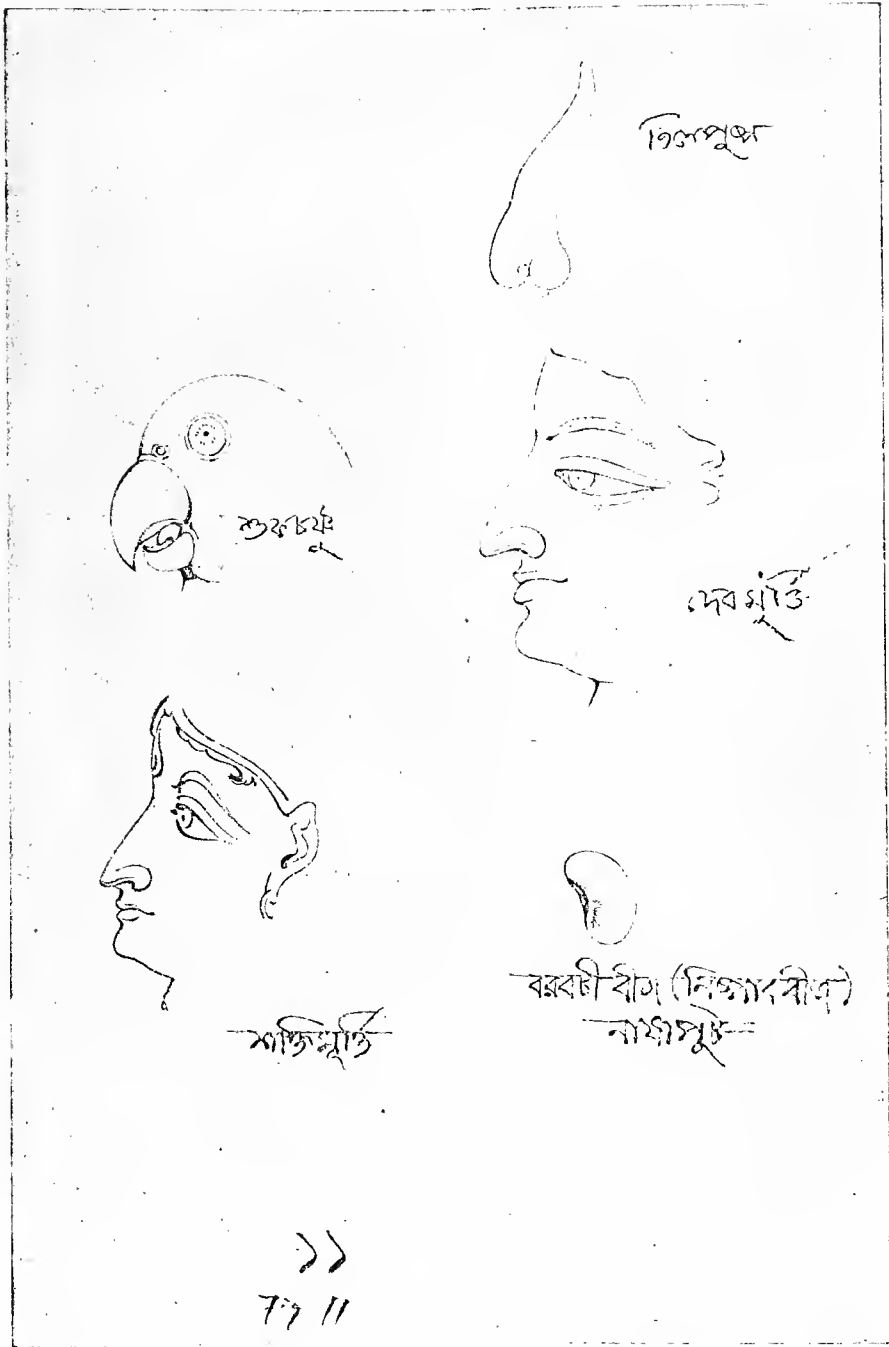


Fig. 11.

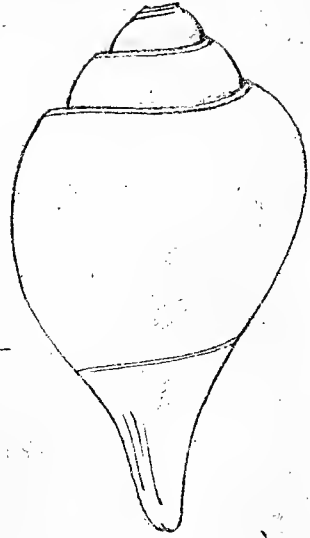


অধিব

বান্ধুলী বা হলেদিবজন্তু খুন্স

১২
৭৭ ১৮

Fig. 12.



कर्म-साक्षात्समाप्तम्

२४

Fig 14



चिक्कम्-अस्र-विक्रमम्

२७

Fig 13

Figs. 13 and 14.

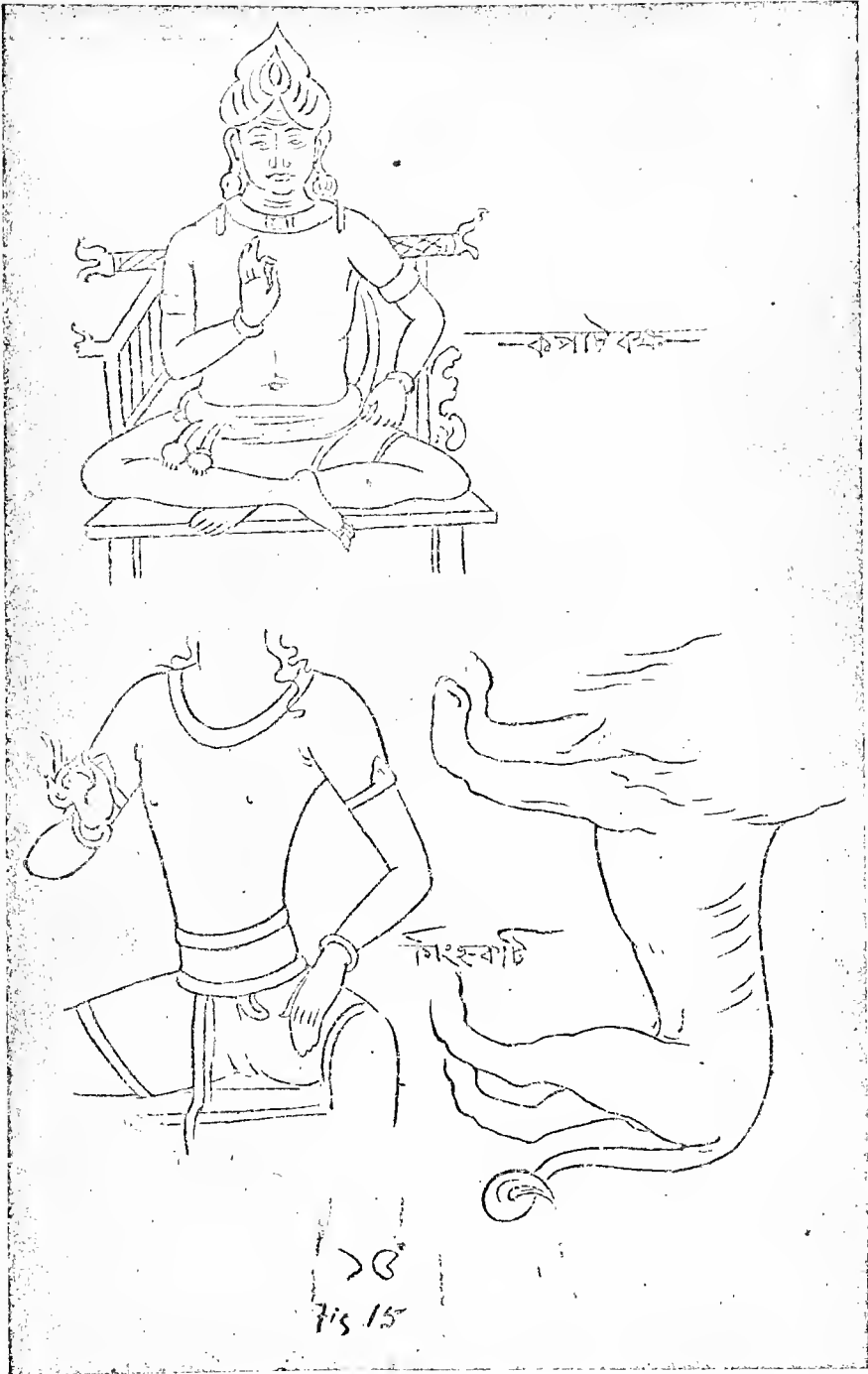


Fig. 15.

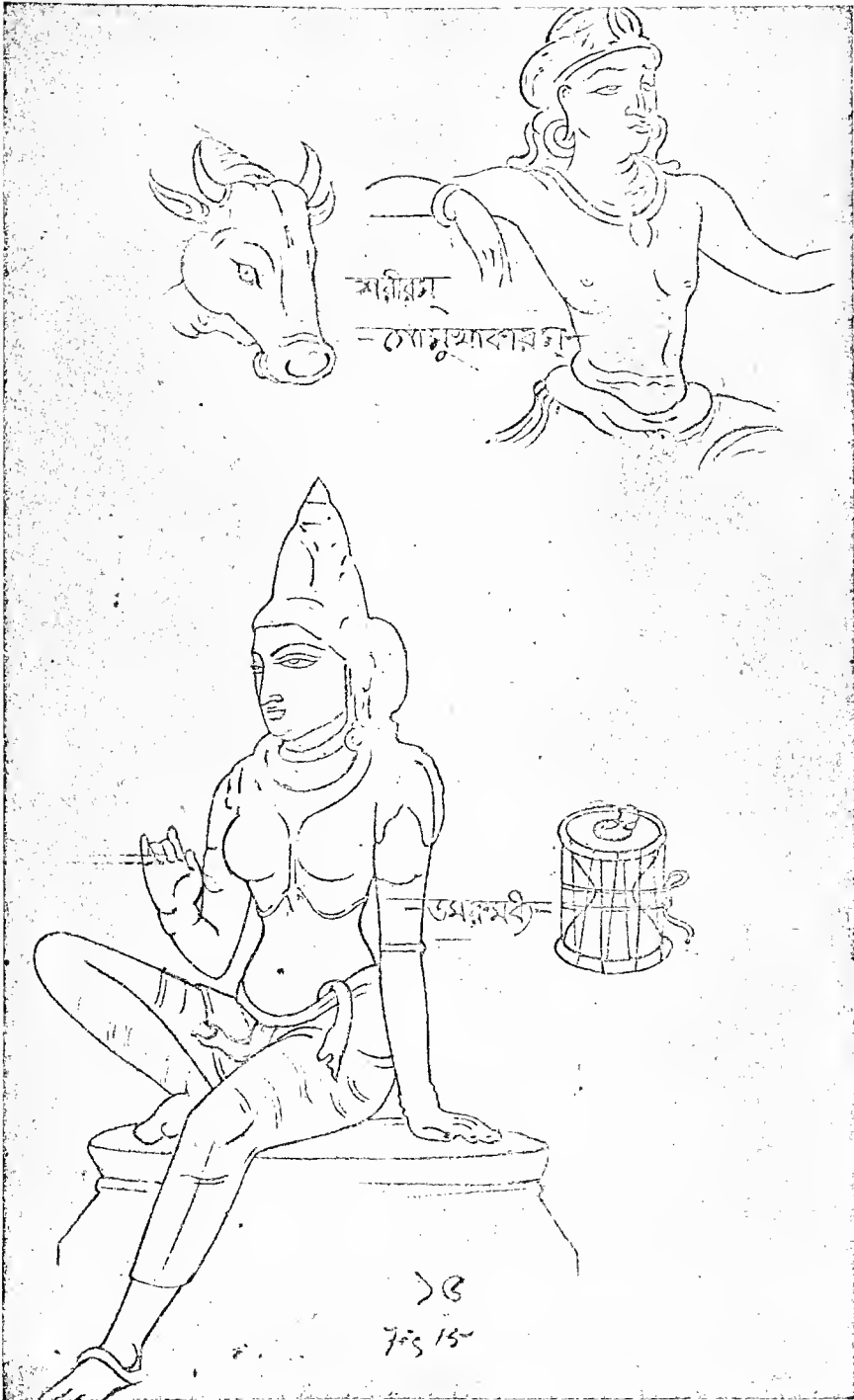


Fig. 15.

Fig. 12. LIPS. Being smooth and moist, and red in colour, lips have been appropriately compared to the *Bimba* (*momordica coccinia*) fruit. The *Bandhuli* or *Bandhujiba* (*leucas linifolia*) flower is admirably adapted to express the formation of the lower and upper lips.

Fig. 13. THE CHIN has the form of the mango-stone. This analogy has not been suggested merely to indicate the similarity of shape. It is readily seen that in comparison with the eyebrows, the nostrils, the eyes or the lips, the chin is more or less inert—being scarcely affected by the various changes of emotion which are so vividly reflected in the other features. It has therefore been purposely compared to the inert stone of a fruit, while the others have had living objects—like flowers, leaves, fish, &c., for similes. The ear is also a comparatively inert portion of our face, and there is therefore a certain fitness in comparing it to the letter ॐ

Fig. 14. THE NECK is supposed to exhibit the form of a conch, the spiral turns at the top of a conch being often well simulated by the folds of the neck. Besides, as the throat is the seat of the voice the analogy of the conch is well suited to express the function, as well as the form of the neck.

Fig. 15. THE TRUNK, from just below the neck to the abdomen, is directed to be formed like the head of the cow. This is certainly an excellent way of suggesting the strength of the chest and the comparative slimmess of the waist as well as the loose and folded character of the skinfoldings near the abdomen. The middle of the body has also been compared to the *damaru* (cf. 'hour-glass' formation) and the lion's body; while the rigid strength of a heroic chest has been well described by comparison with a fastened door, but none of these can approach the first of these similes, in the beautiful completeness with which it conveys an idea of the form as well as the character of the trunk.

Fig. 16. THE SHOULDERS have the form of an elephant's head, the arms corresponding to the trunk. "Elephant-shouldered" has become a term of ridicule to us, but the resemblance of our shoulders to the head of the elephant is undeniable. Our artists have long been modelling the human shoulder and arms on the lines of the head and trunk of an elephant. Kalidasa has no doubt described his hero as having the shoulders of a bull but the elephant's head is a far more appropriate analogy for expressing the true character of the shoulders. Not only is there a similarity of form between our hands and the elephant's trunk, but the functional resemblance between the two is also pretty evident. Comparisons with snakes or creepers, given by our poets, serve merely to express the pliant, clinging or clasping character of the hands as well as that constant seeking of a support which characterizes the creeper and the snake. But the elephant's trunk suggests all these as well as the form and the various characteristic movements of the hands.

Fig. 17. THE FOREARMS from the elbows to the base of the palms, are to be modelled like the trunk of a young plantain tree. This emphasizes the supple symmetry as well as the firmness of the arms.

Fig. 18. THE FINGERS. Comparisons of the fingers with beans (*phaseolus vulgaris*) or pea-pods may not find much favour with the poets, but they certainly seem to give more useful indication of the formation of the fingers than the proverbial चामर कञ्जि (young champaka flower-buds).

Fig. 19. THE THIGHS,—The human thigh, in male as well as in female figures, has long been fashioned after the trunk of the plantain tree by our artists. The trunk of the young elephant is also, occasionally, a favourite model—specially for images of goddesses. But in strength and firmness of build, the plantain tree seems a more expressive simile than

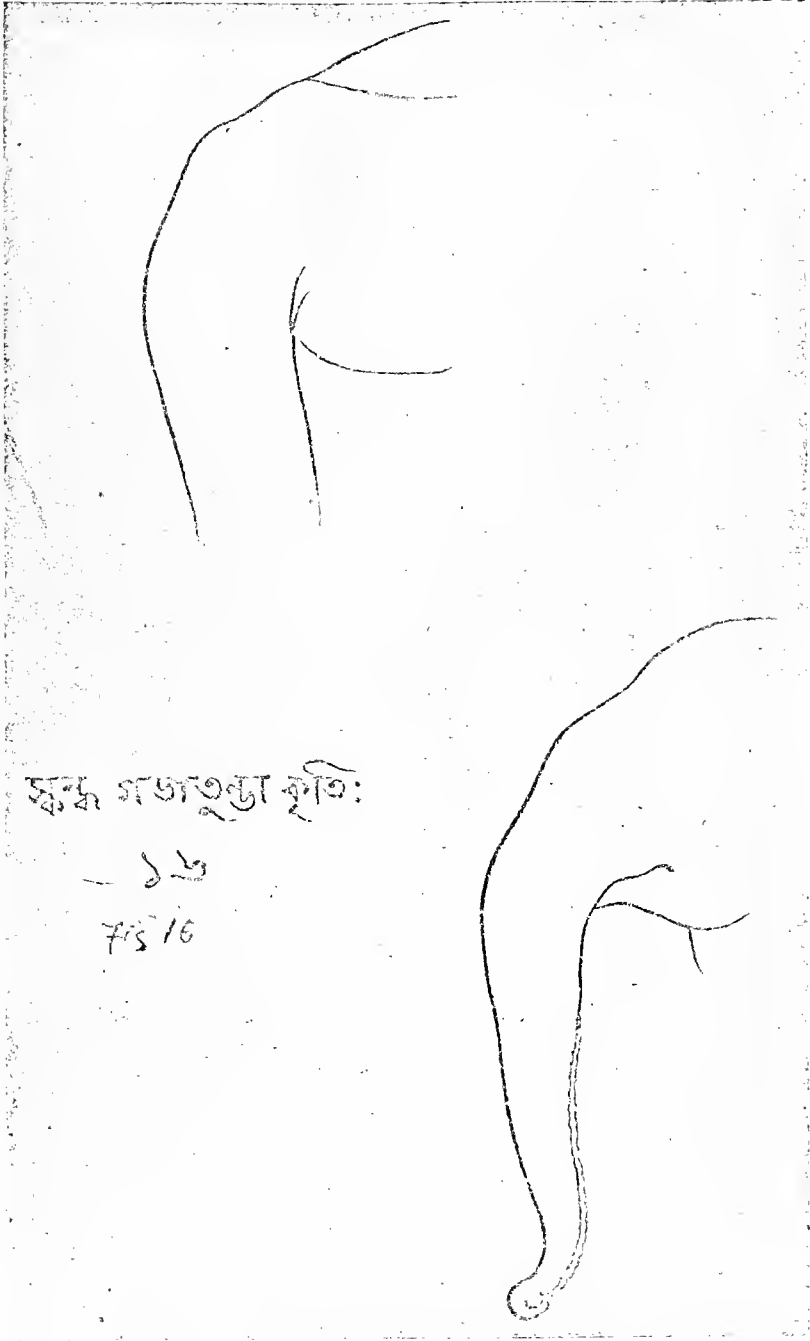
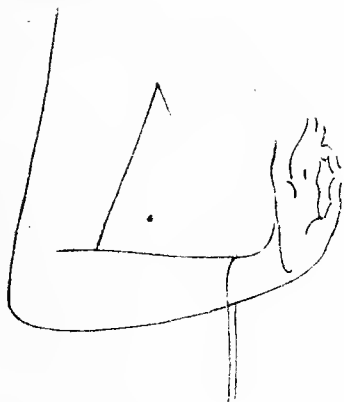
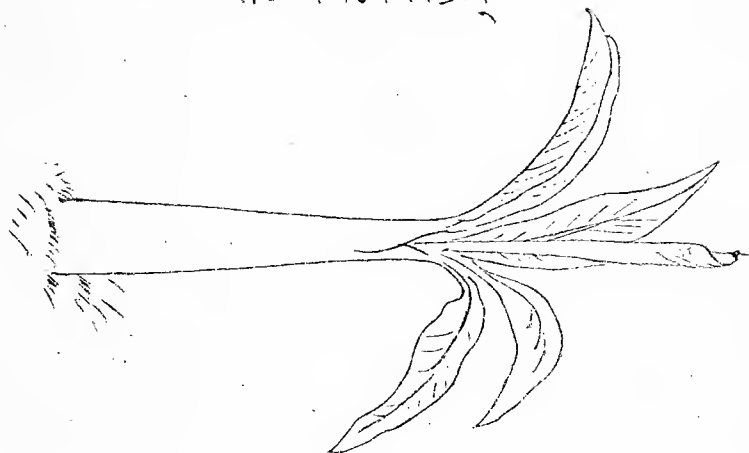


Fig. 16.



— बालफलिकाग्रम् —



७९

Fig. 17

Fig. 17.

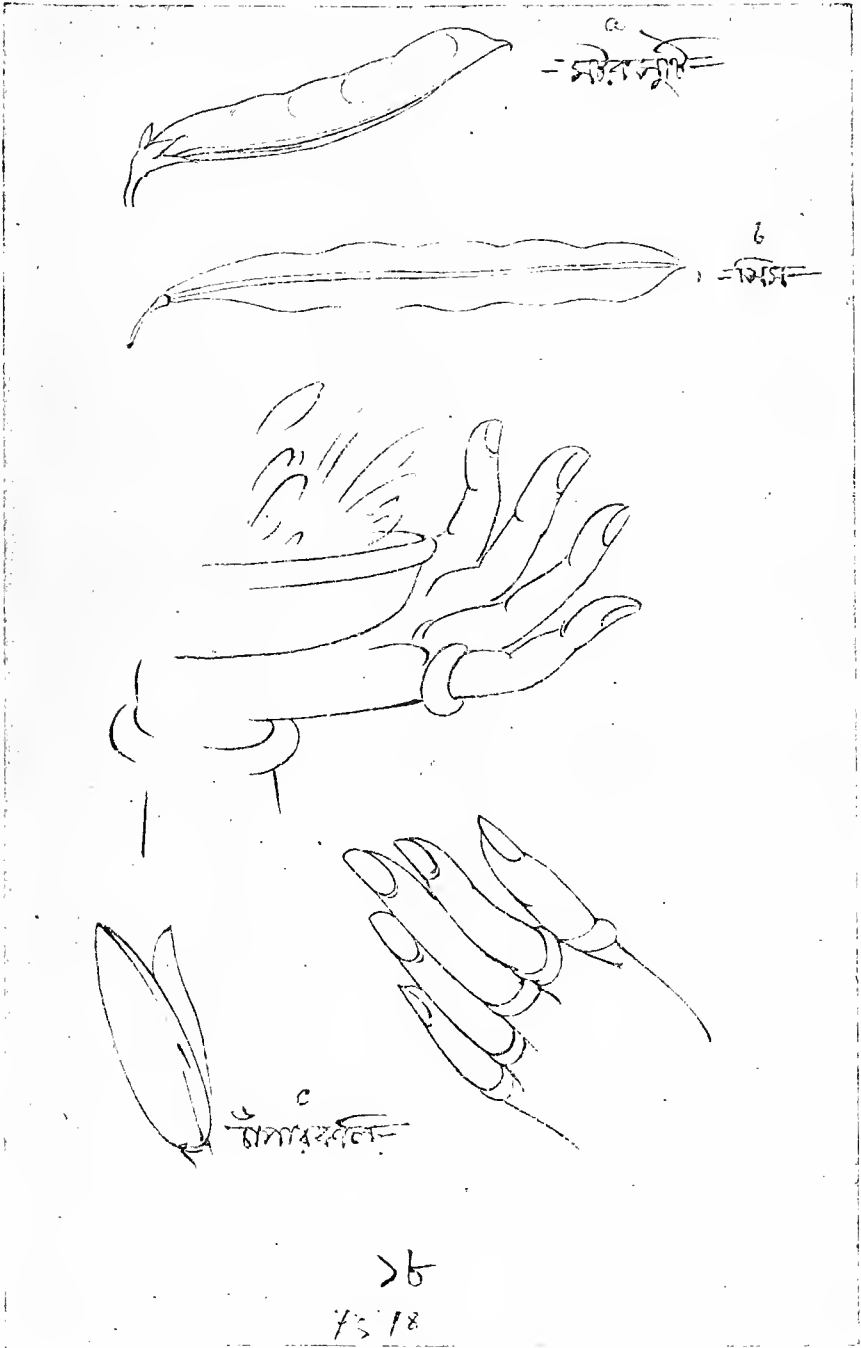
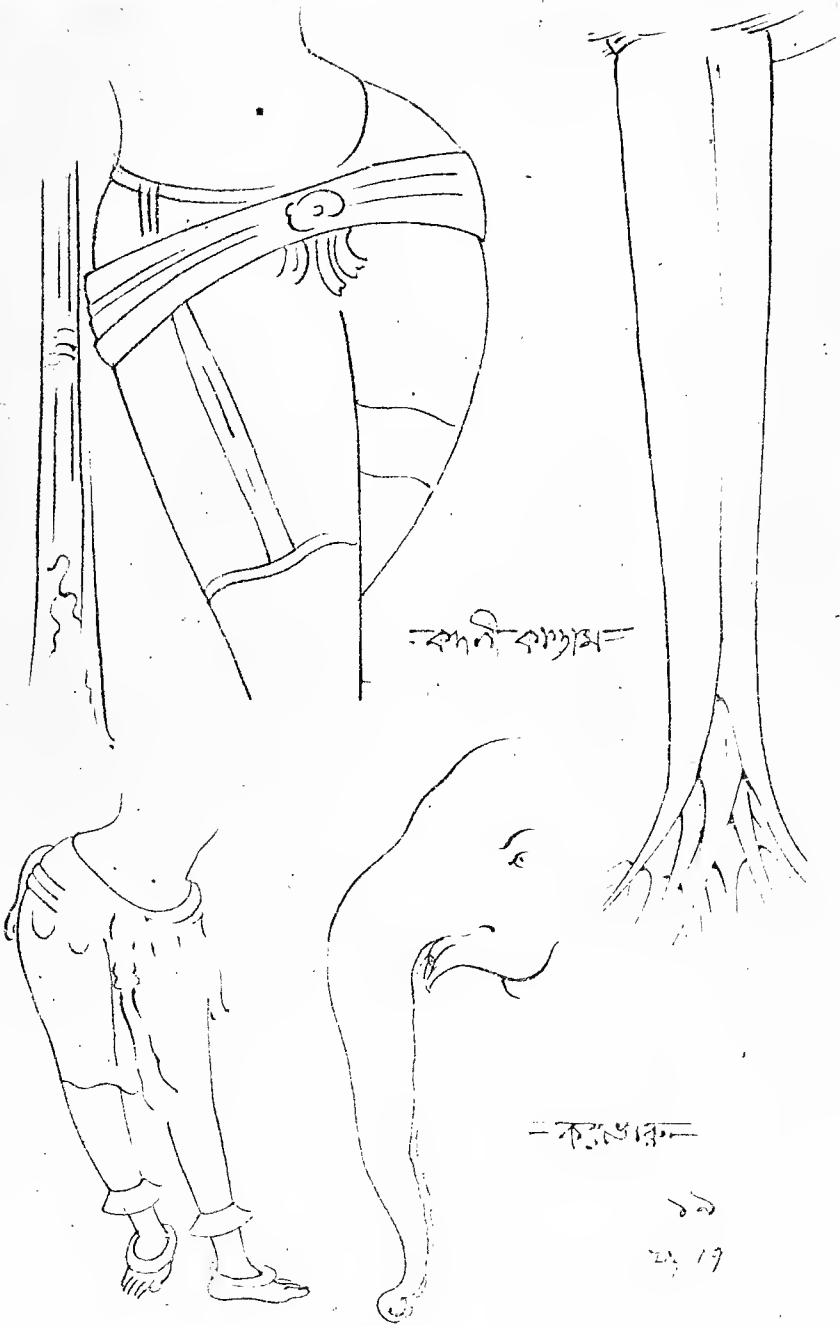


Fig. 18.



कपडो

कपडो

१२

२५/१७

Fig. 19.



Figs. 20 and 21.

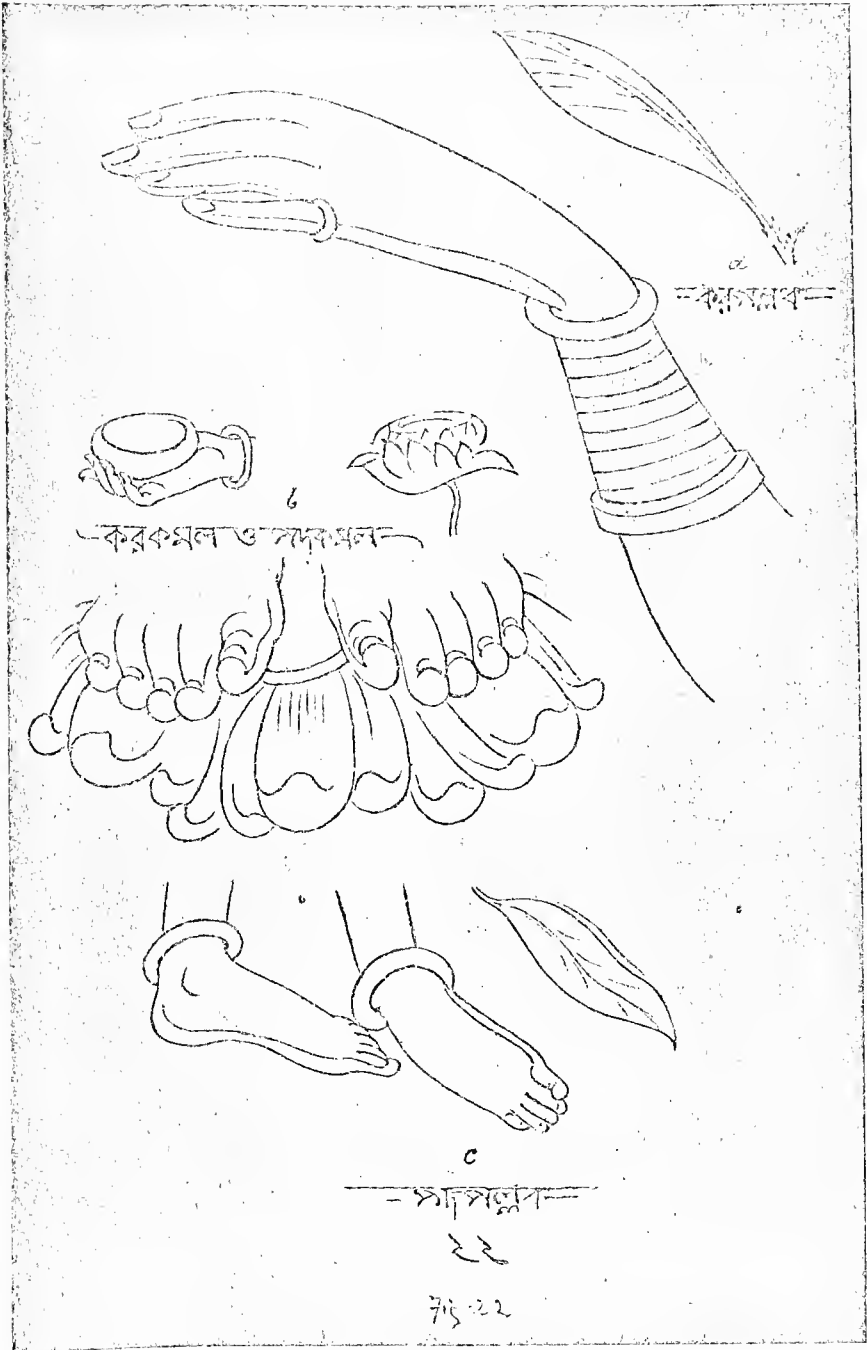


Fig. 22.

the elephant's trunk. The swinging appendage is quite an appropriate simile for the hands with their wide range of movements, but the thighs, having to withstand the weight of the body, seem to be more effectively suggested by the firm and upright trunk of the plantain.

Fig. 20. THE KNEES—The knee-cap is usually compared to the shell of a crab.

Fig. 21. THE SHINS have been described as shaped like fish full of roe.

Fig. 22. THE HANDS AND FEET have a traditional resemblance to the lotus or the young leaves of plants and nowhere has the striking appropriateness of this been better demonstrated than in the cave-paintings of Ajanta.

POSES AND ATTITUDES.

Indian images are given the following four different Bhangas that is flexions or attitudes:—Samabhanga or Samapada (or equipoised); Abhanga (A slight, Bhanga, flexion); Tribhanga (Tri, thrice) and extreme. Atibhanga (Ati, extreme).

Fig. 1. Samabhanga or Samapada. In this type the right and left of the figure are disposed symmetrically, the sutra or plumb line passing, through the navel, from the crown of the head to a point midway between the heels. In other words, the figure whether seated or standing, is poised firmly on both legs without inclining in any way to right or to left. Images of Buddha, Surya (Sun) and Vishnu are generally made to follow this scheme of rigid vertical symmetry. The disposition or attitudes of the limbs and organs on either side are made exactly similar, except that the Mudra, or symbolical posing of the fingers are different.

Fig. 2. Abhanga.—In such a figure the plumb line or the center line, from the crown of the head to a point midway

between the heels, passes slightly to the right of the navel. In other words, the upper half of the figure is made to incline slightly towards its right side, that is, to the left side of the artist or the reverse. The figures of Bodhisattvas and most of the images of sages or holy men are given this slight inclination. The hips of an abhanga figure are displaced from their normal position about one ansa towards the right side of the image, the left side of the artist, or the reverse.

Fig. 3. Tribhanga. In these figures, the center line passes through the left (or right) pupil, the middle of the chest, the left (or right) of the navel, down to the heels. Thus the figure is inclined in a zig-zag or curve like the stems of a lotus or like an ascending flame. The lower limbs, from the hips to the feet, are displaced to the right (or left) of the figure, the trunk between the hips and neck, to the left (or right), while the head leans towards the right (or left). Images of goddesses belonging to this Tri-bhanga type have their heads inclined to the right (the left of the artist), while gods always lean theirs to the left (the right of the artist), so that when placed together the god and the goddess appear leaning towards each other. In other words, when the male and female images are properly placed in pairs,—the female to the left of the male,—they appear like two full-blown lotuses bending to kiss, one seeking the other. This is the usual attitude of all yugal figures, or of divine couples. This bending attitude, or the seeking poise of the male and female figure may however be occasionally reversed, so that the figures lean away from each other, the male assuming the female bhanga and the female assuming the pose of a male figure thus suggesting lovers' quarrels, and mutual disagreements, &c. Figures like Vishnu or Suryya which are flanked by two attendant figures or Saktis, are usually made a compound of the samabhanga and tribhanga types, the figure of the deity being placed rigidly upright in

the middle in a stiff attitude without inclining in any way towards either of the attendant deities. The Saktis or attendant deities are two male and female tribhargas placed on either side with their heads inclined inwards towards the principal figure. The figures on either side are exactly similar in poise except that one is a reverse or reflex of the other. This is a necessary condition as otherwise one of the figures would lean away from the central figure, and spoil the balance and harmony of the whole group. A tribhanga figure has its head and hips displaced about one amsa to the right or left of the centre line.

Fig. 4. Atibhanga.—This is really an emphasised form of the tribhanga, the sweep of the tribhanga curve being considerably enhanced. The upper portion of the body above the hips or the limbs below are thrown to right or left, backwards or forwards, like a tree caught in a storm. This type usually seen in such representations as Siva's dance of destruction and fighting gods and demons, and is specially adapted to the portrayal of violent action, of the impetus of the tandava dancing, &c.

The Sukranitisara, the Vrihat-samlita, and other ancient texts have dealt exhaustively with the measurements, proportions, forms and characters of all types of images. The following are the general advices given by our Acharyas.

“Sevya-sevaka-bhavesupratima-lakshanam smritam.”

Where it is intended that the image should be approached in the spirit of a devotee before his deity, or of a servant before his master, the image must be made to adhere scrupulously to the forms and character prescribed by the shastras. All other images, which are not meant for worship are to be made according to the artist's own individual preferences.

“Lekhya lepya saikati cha mrinmayi paishtiki tatha, Etesham lakshanabhava na kaischit dosha iritah.”

Images that are drawn or painted, or made of sand clay or paste—it is no offence if such images fail to conform to the prescribed types. For these are intended only for temporary use and are usually thrown away, afterwards, and as they are generally made by the women themselves for worship, or recreation, or for the amusement of the children, it would be too much to expect that they would adhere strictly to the conventions demanded by the shastras. So our texts here definitely concede absolute liberty to the artists in the cases considered above.

“Tishthatim sukhopabishtam ba swasane vahanasthitam, Pratimam ishtadevasya karayed yukta-lakshnam. Hina-smasrunimesham cha sada shorasa-varshikin. Divyabharana-vastradhyan divyavarnakriyam sada, Vastrair-apada-gudha cha divyalankarabhushitam.”

Standing, or seated comfortably, on their appropriate seats or mounts, eyes fixed without blinking, beardless and youthful as a boy of sixteen, gloriously dressed and arrayed, glorious in complexion and in action (granting blessings or benedictions) enveloped in clothes down to the feet, and decked with glorious ornaments—this is how the artist should conceive his deity.

“Krisa durbhikshada nityam sthularogaprada sada, Gudha-sandhy-asthi-dhamani sarvada saukhyavardhini.”

An emaciated image always brings famine, a stout image spells sickness for all, while one that is well proportioned, without displaying any bones, muscles or veins, will ever enhance one's prosperity.

“Mukhanam yatra vahulyam tatra panktya nivesanam, Tat-prithak grivamukutam sumukham sakshikarnayuk.”

Where an image has many faces (three or more), the heads should be arranged in rows, and each head should be provided with a separate neck and crown and its own ears, eyes, etc. Thus, a five-headed figure is usually made with four heads forming a

Cornell University Library
NC 760.T12 1914a

Some notes on Indian artistic anatomy.



3 1924 020 549 725

fine

