

Seminar Project: 'VYALA'

by manali pai
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guide: Prof. Kirti Trivedi

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CENTRE

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BOMBAY-76



'VYĀLAS'

Visual Communication Seminar Project

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the Master of Design degree in Industrial Design Centre.

by

Manali Pai

Guide: Prof. Kirti Trivedi

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APPROVAL SHEET

The Visual Communication Seminar Project entitled,
'Vyālas'

undertaken by

Manali Pai

is approved in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the Master of Design degree in Industrial Design Centre.

Signature

Date

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Guide: Prof. Kirti Trivedi.

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CERTIFICATE

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that MANALI PAI has

carried out a Seminar Project in

Visual Communication discipline Special Project

on the topic of Composite animals in temple iconography,

as 'Vyālas'

during the period 1st Dec '92 to 15th Mar '93.

She sought my advice during

the process and completed the project.

Date:

25/6/93

Guidance from :



Prof. Kirti Trivedi.

Place: INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CENTRE,

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POWAI, BOMBAY - 400 076

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I express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Prof. Kirti Trivedi for his continued and able guidance, critical analysis and constant encouragement which have greatly contributed towards the conception and motivation for the study.

I shall also take this opportunity to thank the eminent ground staff of Photo studio for their continued co-operation
My sincere thanks to: Mr. Patkar

Mr. Divekar

My sincere thanks to all those who have been directly and indirectly associated in making the project a success.

Mr. M B Joshi

Ms. Somya Kumar

Manali Pai

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VYĀLA, : INTRODUCTION

Vyāla is a composite animal; a combination of the facial parts of a number of beasts. They are creatures of fancy regarded as powerful presences of nature, composite marks symbolising the very existence in varying individual animals and self preserving the powers of the natural world in the so created creature of imagination.

As an adjective vyāla means wicked or vicious in the sense they may be seen as forms that ultimately ward off the evil eye from the auspicious buildings. The interest in them is more than their symbolic or functional meaning. They stand out as finely realized forms complete in themselves.

The nature of fantasy in vyālas is they are playful and inventive shown in their appearances and motifs.

Vyāla is also the name of the animal shape
'made by art'.

(Kṛttima-grāsa.,
ref:- Samarāṅgāṇasūtradhāra)

It is known as Virāla in Orissa or vyāla particularly in South India. The protean animal made by art, always has the body of a lion and its more prominent versions, also its face. It is a symbolic shape and corresponds within the manifestations, to the face of the glory, the mask of Asura.

The vyāla could mean a tiger, leopard, a panther, a demon, a kind of a bird or animal which is stronger than the lion of the natural world, could be having more than four legs and of which there is no likeness on earth.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

The aim is to communicate to a larger mass of people the terminology of a vyāla seen in the Indian medieval temples by making a precise information booklet on the wide range of the origin and distribution of 'the concept of vyālas in Indian art'. It shall be pleasing and informative to have a booklet with visuals showing the Great Being, Vyāla of Indian Art.

This book shows eleven different kinds of vyālas:

- identified by the facial features,
- combined and composed in complex forms in their poses,
- condensed with different animal forms.

The material of vyāla in Indian art is extensive and worth an elaborate study. This book initiates a thought on the subject of vyālas to give a full justification to this unnoticed sculpture of Indian art.

SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

In the process of making this book it shall enable me to have an experience of book design, layout, organising of text contextual to the visuals and also otherwise.

DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected from books on Indian temple architecture, sculpture, Vyālas etc...

The information varied from

- Explaining what a vyāla is,
- Tracing its origin,
- Location,
- Visual identification,
- Classifying chart,
- Identifying different types,

In the process of explaining about vyālas my scope shall be to explain morphing and metamorphosis thereby tell what it symbolically means.

ORIGIN

The vyālas belonged to the distant past and the nature of its existence as a vyāla is based on the deformity of the normal human beings and animal forms. The indigenous composite animal from diverse sources was presumed to be the dragon, given many titles -- the wise, the terrible, the overseer, the lord of the World. Of the remarkable heritage of the of composite animals, the vyāla makes the greatest impression when seen on medieval temples.

The creatures of fancy are visualized to be of two types: Both originated in the vedic age.

The divine composers: Gandharvas, Vidyadharas are partly Indian and partly Greek.

The heavenly damsels: apsaras, surasundaris, devāṅgas are creations of Indian origin, with parallels relating to mermaids, nymphs.

THE MAKARA

The fascination of strange mythical animals held by the Indian artists shows its connections from early times.

The makara, the mount of the goddess Ganga occupies the ends of elaborate friezes or sits curled up on lintols with wide open jaws, powerful tongues and scaly bodies, long tendril like antennae in spirals and convolutions coming out of its powerful nostrils. The whole form is compacted and elongated depending upon the space available and are treated with remarkable flair.

An element of mystery inexplicably about the figure, often one cannot make out if the figures and objects that extend from it are emerging from its mouth or are being swallowed. It constitutes the left part of the bottom lintol of a gate which evidently served an aspidal temple.

THE MAKARA GARGOYLE

The makara serving as aspout ending is made up of an upper and lower half joined horizontally. From its open mouth springs a pot-bellied male carved bilaterally with the physiognomy of Bhairava or of the Hayagriva as he hangs on to one nostril of the fantastic creature and pushes his chignoned head against his trunk. The hind part of the piece is rough and uncarved. Its front part is greatly embellished also appear on its head, cheeks and trunk, with floral scrollwork and other devices. The bulging eye is repeated several times and more decorated than before. The decorative patterns around the ears and on the neck assume the character of flowing water, of foliage tendrils, flames that leap spiral and turn upon themselves.

LOCATION OF VYĀLAS

They were located in the coping stones of the stupas. In the west they were found in the basement of some of the Karṇāṭaka temples of the Hoysala period. During the pallava period they were located in the adisthāna (basement) of temples. In the early times of the Chola period the vyālas occupied positions of pādastambas (extension wall pilasters). During the Vijaynagara dynasty the vyālas received maximum importance when they occupied the surcapitals and the bracket struts of the pillars. In Eastern India, in Kalinga style, the vyālas were seen in the recessed piers of the temples.

Vyālas are located not only at the bottom on the vedikā (balustrated dado of the mandapas) but also on the vedi of the shikhara, where they support the amalaka. They are also carved below the section of the shikhara where the lion springs on a corbel from its body.

The vyāpāda pillars retain the vividness and vigour of pillars from the earlier temples.

Occupying in the walls, the vyālas throw into relief the alluring beauty of the Surasundaris, beautiful women of the gods, who adorn countless temples; drawing attention to themselves. The manner in which the two co-exists, those beauties and these beasts; between them they make a strange kind of harmony.

Conceived as part of the grand plan of a temple, it soars upwards, the vyalas shown as rampant leonines, more tigers than lions, accentuates the strength of the structure and its erectness. They are energetic and angry.

The decorative iconographs of medieval temples are rich, imaginative and varied, the figural motifs are pleasing, meaningful and exclusive. The vyālas signify the 'Grotesque in Indian Art' more appropriately described as absurd, strange and incongruous.

These creatures dwarf the men who are shown either opposing them or riding them. The composite creatures of imagination represent the force of nature like the mighty attacking spring of the tiger, respected and feared by all does not need any supernatural symbolism. The reason is its size is exaggerated to convey the

gigantic power of the natural world which is clear by the size of the man who sees himself small and alone before it. Moreover it is his increasing multiplying natural environment combined with the uncontrolled wild passions and appetites rampant in every man.

As regards the architectural temple symbolism warrior of spirit fights the vyāla with the 'Sword of knowledge' and the shield of dispassion at close pace on the platform, before the entrance is depicted triumphantly riding the creature of his own nature. They represent figures of strength and formed part of the decorative features of entrance doorways or sculptured brackets to support the roof.

VISUAL IDENTIFICATION

Vyālas stood facing each other as an entrance or doorway. The human figures are represented as a full face in contrast to the animal forms which are in profile. The motifs of a composite animal appear endowed with an inner strength that they can let loose at a moment's notice. The heroic poses of human figures are echoed in the stance of the creatures of fancy. They together represent figures of strength. On the walls of the temple and the pillars of the halls the man rides the composite animal. The noble creature or the so-called supernatural animal embodies at the same time the lordly power in general. i.e. The man who rides it copes with it, particularly the Kshatriya, the warrior, the royal Knight.

ANALYSIS OF A COMPOSITE VYĀLA

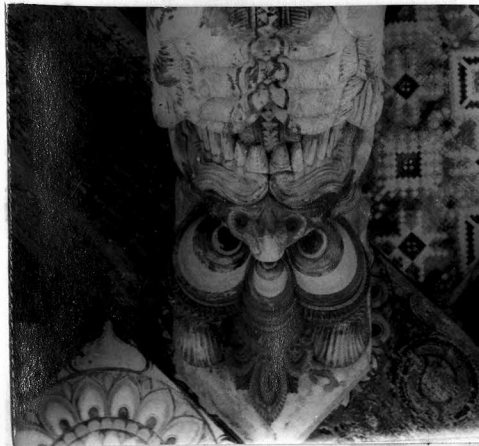
The vyāla appearing to be calm, unruffled, tranquil now take on a stature to be powerful, precatious, depraved, evil, mischievous, betray their valour with a reptile-like swiftness. They can gallop, swirl, whirl, prance in sharp and most animate forms out of normal shape with protruding tongue, tusks, short cunning ears, bulging eyes giving a phantasmagorical creations of human imagination. Through a gradual transformation and integration the vyalas assumed forms that were more complex and varied be it of any origin. The supreme majestic zest and propelling forcefulness are of alien influences. As time passed they cherished possessions amongst the decorative iconographic treasures of indian temples.

These whimsical types were clearly from three different types of śilpashastras, each showing sixteen types of vyālas.

No.	Śamarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra	Aparājitaprichchhā	Rūpamālā	
1	Śimha	Śimha	Śimhakesari	Lion
2	Śārdūla	---		Tiger
3	---	---	Vyāghrī	Tigress
4	Vṛika	---	Bhalluka	Bear
5	Svāna	---	---	Wolf
6	---	---	---	Dog
7	Gaṇḍakī	---	Marjāra	Cat
8	Kroḍa	Sūkara	Tuṅga	Rhino
9	---			Boar
10	Mahisha	Vṛisha	Vārāhī	She-boar
11	Gaja	Mahisha	---	Bull
12	Aśva	Gaja	---	Buffalo
13	Khara			Elephant
14	Hariṇa	Aśva	Mataṅgī	She-elephant
15	Aja	---	---	Horse
16	---	---	---	Donkey
17	---	---	---	Deer
18	Markaṭa	---	Hariṇī	She-deer
19	---	Mesha	---	Ibex
20	---	Nara	---	Ram
21	---			Man
22	Gridhraka	Vānarā	Kinnarī	Cherub
23	Śuka	Mūshaka	Śakhāmṛiga	Monkey
24	Kukkuṭa		---	Rat
25	---	Tripallī-sarpa	Bhogī	Snake
26	---			Tricephalous
27	---	---	---	Snake
28	---	---	Śiśumārīṇī	Porpoise
29	---	---	---	Vulture
30	---	---	---	Parakeet
31	---	---	---	Cock
32	---	---	---	Gander
33	---	---	---	Peacock
34	---	---	---	Eagle
35	---	---	---	Worm
36	---	---	---	?

SIMHAVYĀLA: Lion

When the vyāla shares the features of a lion, the simha is more body than head with powerful curved chest and sinuous thighs it rears. The simha is an animal of perfervid ingenuity, composed of rhythm represents the lordly power or Shakti. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back with an angry snarl as if reacting to poke in the ribs



receives attention like the celestial maidens, is about to devour, but its overpowering presence protects man; defiant, supplicating, small and part of the group in the closeness of the contact of the two figures and the continuity in the presence of their themes. The rearing

vyāla safely carries its rider with another warrior and with the sword of knowledge drawn, crouches below and seizes the tail of the creature. This is no ordinary creature, the manner in which all the parts are brought together from the fine jewelry that adorns its body. The bells round the neck and the hind portion struck on silvery chains tinkle and make a noise as the vyāla turns back with a jerk of its massive head.



The Simhavyāla has the head of a lion.

Similarly it is also represented rampant with other identifications also. Naravyāla is with the head of a man, Gajavyāla is with the head of an elephant.

There is a strong element of stylization in its renderings for the purpose they are carved is to communicate the essence of the royal majesty. The highly stylized mane, the sharp and commanding angles of the eyebrows, the emphasis on the wide open mouth and the tongue, the powerful rectangular paws suggest that the form was abstracted intentionally.

When they are not shown in a natural setting like a forests, they serve as vehicles, mounts of Durga, then they take on curious and fabulous aspects- sprouting wings combining the features of the tiger looking far more sleek and nimble than in lifelike presentations.



When this vyāla is seen to be placed on the head of an elephant. From the storehouse of darkness the lion behaves frolicsome after having overcome the darkness, scatters the brilliant pearls. but being no ordinary creature. rhythms itself, the pearls are collected in strings and festoons in many rhythms, taken from the storehouse of darkness they now belong to the creature. He gathers their strings in the mouth and holds them, sending them forth as his own or he wears them as his necklace and his limbs edged with similar pearly chains of curling fur, hence is a remark of glory.

VRĪKAVYĀLA: Wolf

The hungry look of the wolf is quite apparent. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back with an angry snarl as if reacting to poke in the



ribs receives attention like the celestial maidens, is about to devour, but its overpowering presence protects man; defiant, supplicating, small and part of the group in the closeness of the contact of the two figures and the continuity in the presence of their themes. The rearing vyāla safely carries its rider with another warrior and with the sword of knowledge drawn, crouches below and seizes the tail of the creature. This is no ordinary creature, the manner in which all the parts are brought together from the fine jewelry

that adorns its body. The bells round the neck and the hind portion struck on silvery chains tinkle and make a noise as the vyāla turns back with a jerk of its massive head.

GANḌAKĪVYĀLA: Rhino

This vyāla is swollen with energy. It has a flared nostril and a raised paw. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back with an angry snarl as if



reacting to poke in the ribs receives attention like the celestial maidens, is about to devour, but its overpowering presence protects man; defiant, supplicating, small and part of the group in the closeness of the contact of the two figures and the continuity in the presence of their themes. The rearing vyāla safely carries its rider with another warrior and with the sword of knowledge drawn, crouches below and seizes the tail of the creature. This is no ordinary creature, the manner in which all the parts are brought together from the fine jewelry that adorns its body.

The bells round the neck and the hind portion struck on silvery chains tinkle and make a noise as the vyāla turns back with a jerk of its massive head.

VRISHVYĀLA: Bull

This vyāla is not easy to identify in actual examples. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back with an angry snarl as if reacting to poke in the

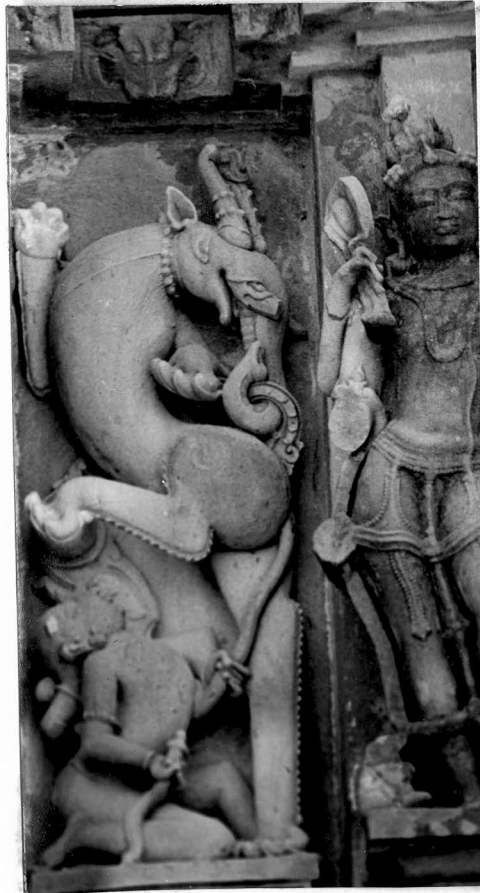


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that adorns its body. The bells round the neck and the hind portion struck on silvery chains tinkle and make a noise as the vyāla turns back with a jerk of its massive head.

GAJAVYĀLA: Elephant.

The elephant look is not stated in force, though not in total volume this has been forcefully delineated. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back



with an angry snarl as if reacting to poke in the ribs receives attention like the celestial maidens, is about to devour, but its overpowering presence protects man; defiant, supplicating, small and part of the group in the closeness of the contact of the two figures and the continuity in the presence of their themes. The rearing vyāla safely carries its rider with another warrior and with the sword of knowledge drawn, crouches below and seizes the tail of the creature. The ornamental manner in which the mane is treated, those ringlets and curlicues and cloud-like formations of

hair, the delight with which the nostrils are flared up and the angry bulge of the eyeballs also has a row of uneven fangs projecting out.



MESHAVYĀLA: Ram

The meshavyāla is equally rare to encounter. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back with an angry snarl as if reacting to poke in the ribs receives attention like the celestial maidens, is about to devour, but its overpowering presence protects man; defiant, supplicating, small and part of the group in the closeness of the contact of the two figures and the continuity in the presence of their themes. The rearing vyāla safely carries its rider with another warrior and with the sword of knowledge drawn, crouches below and seizes the tail of the creature.

ŚISUMĀRAVYĀLA: Porpoise

The face is mythical and shows some affinity to the marine animals. The ornamental manner in which the mane is treated, those ringlets and curlicues and cloud-like formations of hair, the delight with which the nostrils are flared up and the angry bulge of the eyeballs also has a row of uneven fangs which is all worked with enormous care and precision.

[/]SUKAVYĀLA: Parrakeet

It has a beak shaped mouth and is seen in the lower register of the Pārśvanatha temple, Khajuraho. In the group of the animal and the man, the animal with open mouth, raised paw and turned back with an angry snarl as if reacting to poke in the ribs receives attention like the celestial maidens, is about to devour, but its overpowering



presence protects man; defiant, supplicating, small and part of the group in the closeness of the contact of the two figures and the continuity in the presence of their themes. The rearing vyāla safely carries its rider with another warrior and with the sword of knowledge drawn,

crouches below and seizes the tail of the creature. This is no ordinary creature, the manner in which all the parts are brought together from the fine jewelry that adorns its body. The bells round the neck and the hind portion struck on silvery chains tinkle and make a noise as the vyāla turns back with a jerk of its head.



THE INDETERMINABLE VYĀLA

The vyāla is indeterminable because the facial features show characteristics of Simha and Gaja combined with the most determining features. They have been shown too ambiguous and indeterminable forms of vyālas. The artificial grafting of the elephants trunk places it in a category outside the textual forms of known vyālas. The ornamental manner in which the mane has been treated intricately, the tier like formation of hair, the angry bulge of the eyeballs, the rows of uneven fangs of elephant and lion teeth placed adjacent to each other.

MORPHOLOGY AND METAMORPHOSIS

The gradual transformation and transgression to create a composite creature is morphing and the change of form or character is metamorphosis. Such a transgressed creature can also be understood and identified because of its visible peculiar features and characteristics. Such a creature is also imaginable and believable after seeing the natural world in symbolic as well as exaggerated way to show a vision of the unrealistic world.

These hyper-hybrid beasts shows the subtle and specific likeness of a particular animal form diagonalised by facial features like the ferocity of a tiger, stupidity of a goat, swagger of a cock, surreptious gait of a snake, all are deftly blended with the morphic built of the vyāla of particular form and yet it is found difficult to distinguish between a horse and a donkey, a wolf and a dog, a lion and a tiger due to overlapping and coinciding features and also a high degree of stylization.

Hence the fundamental form is a conjuring up of a number of animal parts to form a hypostatic beasts, with special emphasis on a diagnostic facial features of a chosen animal type. These whimsical types were not arbitrary or chiselled unconsciously but these spirited architectural reliefs formed part of the sculptural scheme.

SYMBOLOLOGY

VYĀLĀS: CREATURES OF IMAGINATION

The creatures of imagination have been generated by the very complexity of nature. They have been created as Sea-river dwelling animals combined with land animals such as tiger with vegetal growths to produce anomalous beings.

Through these invented creatures the artists sought to combine and transgress and gradually transform the individual categories of nature as they observed and analysed them as composite symbols of the aquatic and serpentine mix or the warm-blooded and the cold-blooded mixed, the four-footed and the earth-rooted.

Looking at the natural world in symbolic and realistic terms, any and every form of creature became possible, thinkable and believable. These creatures of imagination were not cult images for worship but were strange representations of the natural world in the form of multiple images as attempted condensations and combinations of the living world.

CONCLUSION

There is a long tradition of composite creatures made up of innumerable figures that come together and dovetail to form another well-defined figure.

They are mysterious, illusive, visible one moment and invisible the next moment and beyond the realm of reality. Its a mythical creature that belongs to the realm of imagination.

The so-called curiosities of nature are reflected herein. The intent clearly is to invoke a sense of wonder and disbelief of the kind invoked by many impossible creatures.

This booklet on vyalas shall be valuable information record in the pictorial and text combination for a full understanding of these complex forms.

It shall be a perennial source for works of this rare category of visual innovation.

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