TEMPLES OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA- ANGKOR WAT

Abstract
Cambodia, 2000 years ago was a mass of flat land very heavy rainfall poured every year rendering the country in to a marshy land; where hundreds of herds of huge wild elephants roamed around in the dense rain forests; where the inhabitants were still in such a savage state of civilization; they had yet to know the use of clothes.

In the first century A.D. a fleet of ships sailed from a port in south India. The commander of this fleet was a young Brahmin named Kaundinya. He went to the present Indonesia first and then to explore new world he set his sails northward. He was the first alien to land on the shores of Cambodia.

He saw a large gathering of naked natives with poison tipped arrows mounted on their bows to welcome him. He alighted from his ship in a smaller boat with a few chosen men. He was carrying all his weapons, much advanced than those of the savages. As his boat came within the range of their arrows, one by one he started dumping his weapons in the sea. Much to the astonishment of the crowd he landed on the shore unarmed and stood facing the hostile crowd with his arms on his waist. The savages uncivilized to be nude, were civilized enough to restrain themselves from attacking an unarmed person.

Kaundinya asked by gestures as to who their leader was. A young girl in her early twenties came forward, of course; totally nude. With the female instinct she blushed. Kaundinya then beckoned his minister who immediately took off his shawl, folded it in half and tore it to a little length in the centre. Then he threw the shawl on the lady’s head, her head passed through the torn opening and her body got covered. Kaundinya thus made peace with her tribe and later married that girl and named her as Soma Devi. This was the beginning of civilization in Cambodia, a revolution of enlightenment, a pilgrimage from savagery to culture.

This humble beginning soon turned the country in to a powerful empire and in the centuries to come it became one of the most prosperous kingdoms in the world. Numerous Hindu kings ruled till the fifteenth century and created some of the most magnificent structures on Earth. The largest Hindu temple, Angkor Wat, dedicated to God Vishnu, and the other many such marvelous architectural compositions stand as the biggest testimony of the wealth, skill, pride and splendor of ancient Cambodia.

Suryavarman II
Till the end of the twelfth century A.D. Cambodia was ruled by kings who came from Khorat Plateau, which is in present day Thailand. The next king crowned himself as Jayavarman VI and ruled from 1080 A. D. till 1107 A. D. He built the temple at Phimai which is in present day Thailand. He was succeeded by his brother Dharanindraravarman I who ruled from 1007 till 1113 A. D. In a surprise attack he was ambushed by a youth in early teens and the battle which lasted only a day he was killed. As per the inscriptions the young boy jumped on the king’s elephant and killed him. This youth, who was only 15 years old crowned himself as the new king and took the name Suryavarman.

This shift in power was a welcome change and more so because of the ambitious plans of Suryavarman II. He immediately started securing the existing boundaries and expansion of the kingdom to ward of the threats from other rulers. By the end of his rule he had an army of over 150000 and he reined over 285000 sq km territory. The second most ambitious thing he did
was the commencement of the Vishnu temple of unprecedented dimensions. It is very remarkable to note that he planned this temple within couple of years of coming to power that is around 1116 A.D. and when he was still in his teens. The credit also must be given to the master architect Divakarpandit (1050-1134 A.D.).

Khmer architecture

The temple building activity in India and Cambodia were contemporary. The construction of large temples began in India after the eighth century A.D. the activity spread to all the Indian colonies covering the entire south-east Asia, right up to Japan and some parts of South America. The early temples built in Cambodia show a distinct mode of civil engineering applied to overcome the challenges faced in constructions on red soil. This was especially difficult because huge structures require a solid base or hard rock at the bottom, which was non-existent here.

The abundant rainfall in this region was converted into an asset by the Khmer architects. The method of construction adopted was very ingenious. A trench meant for harvesting the rain water was dug outside the desired temple site. The area on which the temple was to be built was then dug to the depth where the harvested water would seep and keep the base of the pit wet. A huge pit was then dug and excavated sand and pieces of stone were then used to fill this pit which was lined with the laterite stone which was available abundantly. For short temples, this sand pit used to be covered with laterite on the top and then sandstone was used for the construction of walls and the towers. This kind of stone masonry, in which no mortar or binding material was used was very common in the contemporary Indian architecture. In some early temples like Prasat Kravan, burnt bricks were also used. The plan for such temples is of a concentric square type, as seen in the temples of Preah Khan, TaProhm, Banteay Srei, Banteay Kdei or for that matter most of the temples in Cambodia.

For making larger and taller temples, the same technique was extended. The top surface of the sand pit was lined with laterite and the central rising structure was again filled with sand and stones while the supporting walls were lined with laterite from inside and covered with sandstone from outside. One tier over the other was thus raised and a stepped square pyramidal structure was evolved. The harvested rain water from the trench or the moat would seep to the base of the temple and due to capillary action the sand and stones inside the pit would remain wet. Wet sand being incompressible, it would act as a stable base for supporting the huge sandstone super structure of the temple built over and around it. The problem of the wet sand pushing horizontally against the walls was solved by making slanted staircases all around the raised platforms. These acted as steps for climbing toward the temple and also as buttress walls for resisting the thrust of wet sand from inside. This can be seen in the structures of Pre Rup, Bakong, Ta Keo, Bapuon and similar other temples of this type.

The Temple of Angkor Wat

Suryavarman II ascended the throne in 1113 A.D. and started the construction of Angkor Wat around 1115 CE, which was completed in 1148 A.D. This is not only the largest Hindu Temple
but also the largest religious monument in the world. The experience of the earlier generations was very astutely used by the master architect of Angkor Wat.

This temple is surrounded by a huge man-made moat with the outer dimensions being 1215 meters north-south and 1025 meters east-west with a width of 190 meters all-around. The encircling wall inside the moat and encircling the main temple is almost 4000 meters long. The main temple is inside this wall and has three enclosures. The first enclosure houses the main temple which is located on a 15 meters-high raised platform with its each side admeasuring 67 meters in length. The central tower of the main temple rises to a height of 65 meters above the ground level. The second enclosure is a covered corridor on a 5 meter-high raised platform admeasuring 90 meters in length and breadth encircling the first enclosure. The third enclosure is a covered gallery on a raised platform about 2 meters-high 228 meters long (east-west) and 202 meters wide (north-south) running round the second enclosure. (Mannikka: 1996: 17) The base of all the three enclosures is of sand dug out of the exterior moat; it is lined with laterite stone-blocks along the floor and the walls of the temple are built around the sand pile, lined with laterite and finally layered in sandstone. The total periphery of the external wall is 3976 meters. In other words, almost 250 football fields can be accommodated inside this enclosure. It is noteworthy that to build structures of similar size in the later centuries in Europe, it took 200 to 300 years for its completion.

Sculptures in Angkor Wat

The sculptures in the temples of Cambodia are not mounted on the exterior walls of the temple unlike as in India. The sculptures are mounted on the pediments above the lintels of various entrances of the temple. In the temple of Angkor Wat, an addition was made to this type of placement of sculptures. This was in the form of eight large sculpture-panels on the exterior
walls of the third enclosure and twenty four smaller sculpture panels in the pavilions situated in the south-west and north-west corners of this enclosure. Apart from these there are several sculptures on the pediments in the temple right from the ones one the outermost peripheral wall to the ones on the main shrine and the secondary temples in the innermost first enclosure. However, the sculptures in the third enclosure are one of the rarest displays of episodes described in the Indian mythology and epics represented through iconography.

It is therefore, imperative to describe these in details.

**Sculptures in the south-west corner pavilion**

1. **Rama killing Maricha**
   This is the incident described in Ramayana, when the demon Marich was used as decoy by Ravana to lure Rama and Lakshamana away from Sita. Marich came in disguise of a golden fleeced deer and Sita overwhelmed by its glitter wanted to have her bodice made out of it. Succumbing to her pleas Rama chases the dear and shoots an arrow on which the demon reveals his true self and starts calling Lakshamana imitating Rama’s voice. The panel depicts Rama having shot the arrow piercing the deer’s back.

2. **Churning of the Ocean of Milk**
   A great event had occurred in which the gods and the demons had joined hands to churn the ocean to obtain Amruta the elixir of immortality. This is a smaller version of the incident which has been depicted on the eastern wall of the enclosure. This story is explained in the details in the description of that panel later part of this text.

3. **Shiva in the Pine Forest**
   This sculpture depicts a very rare form of iconography in the Khmer art. This is the story which appears in Yamana Purana. Some Brahmins performed a penance accompanied by their wives. This was done so in order to propitiate Shiva. Shiva to test the devotion of his worshippers appeared in a very savage form. Still the wives of the Brahmins get attracted toward him. Then the Brahmins, enraged by such outrageous appearance of an intruder complained to Brahma, he told them it was Shiva who, intended to test their devotion, had made such an appearance. In the sculpture-panel, Shiva is shown standing on a high pedestal and has adorned himself with ornaments and even his third eye can be seen. The wives of the Brahmins who have come pay their obeisance to Shiva are doing so by bowing to him while others shown in the lower level are talking animatedly and gesticulating. Another very peculiar feature is the presence of a crocodile above Shiva’s head. The association of Shiva and crocodile is not known in Indian iconography.

4. **Krishna pulling mortar**
   This is a Krishna Leela or a legendary act performed by Krishna in his childhood. He used to steal butter from other maiden’s home in Gokul. Yashoda his mother, being tired of the incessant complaints of his mischief by the neighbors, one day ties him to a heavy wooden mortar as punishment. However, Krishna, treating it like a toy, casually drags it around and finally crashes it in two trees. The impact is so large that the trees come crashing down with a thundering noise.
The trees are in fact, two sons of Kubera who bore a curse that had turned them into trees. Krishna thus releases them from their bondage. In the sculpture panel Krishna is depicted crawling as a toddler between two trees while two women (one of them probably being Yashoda) standing behind him and two men sitting next to them watch in astonishment.

5. **Ravana shaking Mt Kailas**

This episode is described in Ramayana, Shiva Purana and also in Shiva Mahimnastrotam. Ravana having defeated his step brother Kubera, stole and rode his chariot Pushpak, which could travel through the air when he spotted Mount Kailasa. As he was a great devotee of Shiva, he decided to pay him a visit. The door guardians of Shiva obstructed and refused to let him in. Enraged by this insult, Ravana decided to lift the entire mountain and take it to Lanka, so that he would be able to visit Shiva as and whenever he wished. He got down from the chariot and started uprooting the mountain using the strength of all his twenty hands to lift it. The mountain shook causing an earthquake on the top. Shiva realized as to what was happening. He immediately applied pressure with his right toe and pushed the mountain downward. This seemingly innocuous gesture had a tremendous effect. Ravana, who was about to lift the mountain suddenly felt a huge crushing pressure on him. He realized his mistake, but it was too late by then. One by one his arms started weakening and soon he would get crushed under it. In such a panic moment also, Ravana remembered that if he praised Shiva he would grant him mercy. He composed and at the same time started reciting a hymn in the praise of Shiva. This hymn is known as Ravavanavirachit Shivatandav stotra. It contains fifteen stanzas and is one of the best hymns ever composed in Shiva’s praise. Shiva then not only forgave him but also gave him a sword and granted a boon on his request that no gods, anti-gods or monsters would be able to kill him. Ravana did not include humans in this list since he considered them as too insignificant.

In this panel, Ravana is shown most prominently in the sculpture. His ten heads are shown in three tiers. Four heads in the lowest, four in the tier above that and two on the top of the second row. (Only three heads are visible, the fourth one being on the back side is to be assumed since it is not visible). The animals and other human beings in the forest also have panicked. Terrified by the sudden developments, Parvati is clinging to Shiva while the other ascetics around them are shown praying to Shiva.

6. **Shiva reducing Kama to ashes**

This episode appears in the Shiva Purana (II, 16-19) and other texts. The demon Taraka owing to his penance is able to please god Brahma. Brahma grants him a boon that he could not be killed by any of the gods but only by someone born of Shiva and Parvati. This was a very mischievous boon asked by the asura, because he knew that Shiva had vowed to celibacy and was known as Mahayogi, an ascetic of the highest order. Tarakasura, then started creating a havoc in the universe. The terrified gods then went to Brhama and pleaded him to convince Shiva to marry Parvati, who also had vowed that if at all she marries then it will be to Shiva only. Finally, convinced about Parvati’s devotion, Shiva agrees to marry. The marriage takes place and all gods celebrate it with great hue and cry. However, it fails to consummate as
Shiva’s ascetic tendencies inhibit him from breaking his vow of celibacy and so he continues meditation even after marriage. Indra then asks Kama, the god of love to go to and fire his arrows of mango blossoms at Shiva to arouse him. Kama approaches the place where Shiva is sitting in meditation. He sees Shiva’s door guardian Nandi or Sailadi. In order to bypass him he transforms himself into fragrant wind and raises his bow to fire. Shiva sees him and shoots a flame from his third eye immediately reducing him to ashes. Kama’s wife Rati weeps violently and pleads to Parvati to revive him. Parvati then tells Shiva that by killing Kama he has not only killed Rati’s husband but the entire desire of love which would end the propagation of all life forms in the universe. Shiva then resurrects him from the ashes and tells him that henceforth he will not have any shape just like the wind, but would be present anywhere, anytime.

The panel depicts Shiva with Parvati sitting to his right looking at Kama angrily; this means he has opened his third eye and fired the flame. In the lower section wailing Rati is shown with her dead husband’s head in her lap.

7. **Killing of Pralamba**

The episode is found in Bhagavata Purana (X, 18-19) and Brahma Purana (II,78). The demon Pralamba comes in the disguise of a shepherd while Krishna and Balarama are grazing cows in Vindavana. He is trapped by Krishna’s gimmicks and being irritated with Balarama he assumes his original demonic form described as ‘cloud illuminated with flashing lights’ and takes Balarama with him in the sky. Balarama strikes the demon’s head so hard that he is shattered to pieces while vomiting blood. He falls to the ground emitting a terrible roar before falling dead. As a result of Pralamba’s form of flashing lights crash to the ground, the forest catches fire, which is doused by Krishna who simply swallows it with his yogic powers.

In the panel Balarama are shown in duel with Pralamba and Krishna is shown dousing the fire in the forest depicted by flame burning amongst the trees.

8. **Death of Vali**

This episode has been described in the Ramayana. (Kishkindhakand, XVI, 21-39). Rama makes an alliance with Sugriva who is brother of Vali. Both of these are monkeys. Vali had banished Sugriva and also snatched his wife. Rama asks Sugriva to challenge Vali for a duel and assures him of killing Vali and restoring his kingdom and his wife to him. During the fierce fight Rama shoots and arrow in Vali’s chest and kills him. The upper part of the panel shows the two brothers Vali and Sugriva in combat while Rama fires the arrow from his hiding place. In the lower section Vali’s grieving wife Tara is holding dying Vali’s head in her lap. This is known as Tara vilap or lamenting of Tara, described in Ramayana (Kishkindhakand, XX, 1-26).

9. **Shiva receiving homage or the Betrothal of Shiva and Parvati**

Brahma having convinced Shiva to break his celibacy to save gods from demon Tarakasura, Shiva, after having convinced himself by testing Parvati in the guise of an ascetic Brahmin, calls all the kings of mountains to convey them his decision of marrying Parvati.
The panel depicts twenty three such invitees that include Parvati’s father Himavdana shown sitting left of Shiva, Mount Kailasa, Mount Mandara and Mount Manipavata (Mahendra).

10. Krishna receiving gifts meant for Indra
The episode is described in the Bhagavata Purana (X, Chpater24). It had been a custom amongst the cowherds of Gokul to give their offerings to Indra every year. On one such occasion Krishna tells them to give the offerings to Mount Gowardhan instead. He then also convinces them that he is a form of the mountain himself. Thus the gop and gopis stop their worship of Indra and give their presents to Kirshna. This sculpture panel shows Indra being offended by the seeing that the gifts meant for him being offered to Mount Govardhana. The cowherds instead of offering the gifts to the mountain offer the same to Krishna because Krishna has told them that he in fact represents the great mountain.

11. Dvaravati water festival
The story appears in Harivamsha (II, 45-46). Krishna and Balarama used to set out for a samudrayatra, an ocean tour. They used to take with them residents of Dwaraka, beautiful maidens and dancers and were also accompanied by Arjuna and his wife Subhadra. The Khmers celebrated their new year similarly. Even today the New Year celebration is a three-day festival after the spring equinox, the first day of the month of Chaitra. The sculpture panel actually depicts the New Year festival in the form of a river cruise. The nobles are shown playing chess while others are celebrating in their own ways. A half-drunk lover is trying to fondle his beloved who is half-invitingly trying to resist his attempts. The most popular form of gambling, a cock fight can be seen on the right. The fight is so engaging that even the oarsmen are involved in it. One person who has probably not put a bet on either of the fighting cock is engaged in spearing a fish from the river. A general atmosphere of merriment is seen all over. The river is shown with fish and crocodiles swimming around the dragon-faced ship.

12. Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana
This story appears in Harivansha (II, 17, 18). Krishna who was the king of Dwarka and a close associate of the Pandavas, is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Before going to Dwarka he was residing in Gokul. He is known to have performed many deeds known as Krishna Leelas in his childhood right from his birth. The residents of Gokul used to give offerings to Indra every year. Krishna told the people to give the offerings to Mount Govardhan instead. When people gathered near the mountain, Indra was enraged on seeing that the gifts meant for him were being offered to the mountain. He started the rains and intended to flood Gokul. Krishna, it is said lifted the mountain with small finger of his right hand and gave shelter not only to the people but cattle and other beings as well. Indra surrendered after eight days and he realized the greatness of Krishna.
In this sculpture panel, Krishna is holding the mountain with his right hand and is flanked on his left by his brother Balarama holding a shepherd’s crook on his shoulder. Balarama is usually shown with a ploughshare on his shoulders. This is a very popular sculpture in India as well as Cambodia. Krishna protecting the people from disaster is reflective of the contemporary Khmer king as the benefactor and the protector of the people.
Sculptures in the north-west corner pavilion

1. Rama’s alliance with Sugriva

This episode is described in the fifth chapter of the Kishkindha Kand in Ramayana. The entire thirty one cantos are dedicated to the meeting of Rama and Lakshamana with Sugriva which was arranged by Hanumana. In this meeting Rama agrees to kill Vali with a poison arrow and return Sugriva his kingdom and his wife taken away by Vali. In return of this favor Sugriva agrees to help Rama in the search for Sita who was abducted by Ravana.

In the sculpture panel Rama, holding his bow and arrows, is shown sitting in the centre and is flanked by Lakshamana on the right and Sugriva on the left while the other monkeys watch the proceedings.

2. Invitation for Vishnu to descend

In the Bhagvadageta (IV. 7 and 8) Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that when the earth will be burdened by sinners and Dharma will be under a threat, I will come in the form of human incarnation in every Yuga. I will destroy evil and protect the good and reestablish Dharma.

The episode in the panel appears in Vishnu Purana (V, part 1, chapters5-36 and 56-86), Vishnu Purana (V, part 2, chapters 1-6) and Bhagavata Purana (X, chapter 1, 17-23). Kamsa was ruling evil king and people were tired of his atrocities. To kill Kamsa it was now necessary that Lord Vishnu take birth on earth. Brahma and thirty other gods gather on shore of Ocean of Milk and pray to Vishnu. Vishnu agrees and tells that he will be born as the eighth child of Vasudev and Devaki and kill Kamsa.

On the top of the sculpture-panel Lord Vishnu is shown reclining on the serpent bed. The various gods are shown on their respective vehicles. On the left of the panel Sun and Moon are shown riding on their chariots.

At the bottom from left to right the gods depicted are: Nirriti, Varuna, Skanda, Kubera, Indra, Yama, Agni and Vayu,

3. Akrura’s vision

The episode appears in the Brahma Purana (X, 39). Akrura, who was the brother of Kamsa, was given the duty of accompanying Krishna and Balarama to Mathura; where they were to meet Kamsa. On the way they come across the sacred river Yamuna, the two brothers first took a holy dip and performed ablutions. Later Akrura also did likewise. When he immersed himself in water he was amazed to see Krishna and Balarama lying in water. On coming out of water he saw them sitting on the bank. He dipped again and the same scene repeated, however, this time Lord Vishnu presented himself and told Akrura that these two brothers were not ordinary men but were indeed incarnations. Akrura on knowing this comes out of water and bows to both of them and praises them with hymns of devotion.

The sculpture-panel is slightly intriguing as Krishna and Balarama instead of sitting on the bank of the river are shown sitting under decorated parasols. This might have been done to impose their divinity. The two figures lying in water could be the vision which Akrura, saw of Krishna and Balarama lying in water with their hair flowing with the current. There is another opinion that these could be the two dips which Akrura took. The former version appears to be closer to the text.
4. Viradha’s attempt to abduct Sita
The episode which occurred in the third book of Ramayana, Aranyakanda (Chapters 2-4) is depicted in this panel. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita enter a dense forest called Dandakaranya. One day the demon Viradha, who was living in the forest tries to abduct Sita. Rama calls Lakhshmana for help and together they kill him.
In the sculpture panel situated on the lintel above the eastern entrance of the pavilion, Viradha is shown as a very large figure holding a relatively small Sita in his arm. He is trying to throw spear at Rama, while the two brothers are aiming their arrows to shoot him.

5. Sita’s ordeal by fire
As described in Ramayana, Yuddhakanda (chapters 117-119) Sita enters fire on being doubted by Rama on her chastity. The panel is damaged and the figure of Sita is totally mutilated.

6. Rama on the Pushpak chariot
After the battle of Lanka was over and Ravana killed, Rama handed over the kingdom to Bibhishana and crowned him as the king of Lanka. Bibhishana gave Rama the Pushpak chariot to return to Lanka. (Book IV, Yuddhakanda, chapters 123-125).
In the sculpture-panel, Rama along with Sita and Lakshamana, is shown sitting in a highly decorated pavilion. The Hamsas, or the mythical geese are shown propelling the chariot in the sky. The rejoicing monkeys can be seen at the bottom.

7. Rama’s alliance with Bibhishana
The episode is in the in Yuddhakanda in the fourth book of Ramayana (chapters 17-19). Ravana banishes Bibhishana from Lanka. Bibhishan decides to help Rama and forms an alliance with him.
In the sculpture-panel Bibhishana is shown sitting next to Rama while Hanuman and Sugriva are sitting with other monkeys. The four rakshasas who also came with Bibhishana are not depicted in the sculpture.

8. Sita’s meeting with Hanuman
This episode occurs in the Ramayana (Book V. Kishkindha Kand, ch. 13-40). Hanuman, on sighting Sita, presents himself in front of her and shows her Rama’s ring as a sign his identity.
In the sculpture-panel, the figures are mutilated. One of the female guards of Ravana called as Trijata, is shown sitting close to Sita. Trijata, is in fact, the wife of Bibhishana, who has a very benevolent approach toward Sita. The features of the other female monsters, rakshasiniis can be identified easily, as they are far from being human.

9. Krishna and the gopis
The story appears in the Bhagavata Purana (X. Ch. 29-33). The gopis plead to Krishna to come and dance with them. One day when the moon is full Krishna obliges. He starts playing his flute which sends the passions surging high. The gopis rush from their houses abandoning all their duties and start frolicking with Krishna first in the forest and later when he enters the river.
Yamuna, they all follow him there. In the water some remove their clothes and start showing off their bodily beauty to each other. Krishna watching this suddenly disappears from the crowd. They soon realize that it was for Him they had gathered and without Him their beauty and their existence was useless. They repent and pray to Krishna to come back. He comes back and tells them to behave and makes them aware of their duties, finally engages in the dance of Rasalila with them. He dances in such a way that each of the gopis feels he is dancing with her, leaving all of them in such a state of trance, he quietly vanishes in the night.

In the sculpture-panel Krishna is shown on the top tier, in a sitting posture and meditating. He is approached by a group of gopis who are depicted around him. In the lower tier Krishna is depicted dancing with the gopis.

10. Rama killing Kabandha
This episode is described in the third book of Ramayana Aranya Kanda (Ch.69-71).
Rama and Lakshaman, during their stay in forest killed many demons. They met this demon when they were searching for Sita. This ogre has a single eye and his arms emerge from his face because he has no body. His arms are exceptionally large and his overall appearance is extremely hideous. He grabbed both of them with all his strength. Rama and Lakshaman drew their swords and chopped his hands. The ogre then asks them their names, when they tell he falls at Rama’s feet and tells him to kill and cremate him. He is actually a celestial being but having been cursed by Brahma has been suffering thus and was waiting for Rama to free him from it. Rama killed him and performed the rites, Kabandha freed from the body rose to the sky to return to heaven. While going he told Rama that it would be Sugriva who would help him to find Sita.

The sculpture-panel shows the ogre with two eyes and a horrid face. Both Rama and Lakshaman are severing his long arms with swords, Rama cutting his right and Lakshaman his left.

11. Svayamvara of Sita
The marriage of Sita and Rama as described in Ramayana (Book I, Bala Kanda, Ch. 66-67). This marriage was a Svayamvara, grooms had to gather and the bride had a freedom of choosing anyone of her liking. (This custom was practiced in India during the Vedic times. If the father of any girls was unable to get her married within three years after her attaining puberty, then the girl could declare her Svayamvara, and the family had to abide by her decision). In certain cases the Svayamvara had a condition to be fulfilled or a contest was held amongst the aspiring grooms. The one, who fulfilled the condition or winner of the contest as the case may be, would then marry the girl.

In Ramayana, Janaka had declared Sita’s Svayamvara. The condition put was that the contestant had to lift and string the great ancestral bow Janaka had. Till then no minister or man had been able to wield this bow. During this ceremony arranged by Janaka, many tried to do so, all of them failed in their attempts, because they were unable even to lift it; stringing the bow remained a far cry.

Rama not only lifted it but also strung it successfully. As he was about to wield it and put an arrow on it the bow broke with a thundering noise. Rama thus won the contest and married Sita.
The sculpture panel depicts Rama in a posture when he has lifted the bow and put an arrow on it to and is ready to fire it at the bird set as the target on a revolving wheel on the top of a pole. This depiction of showing the target is an addition done in the actual episode by the Khmer artists. Sita sitting on the left is not watching Rama’s feat as she is sure of him accomplishing it. She is instead pitifully looking at the scores of other contestants shown sitting below. Rama’s pose is a classical pose of an archer aiming at a high target. The lower most part of the panel depicts Janaka’s soldiers harnessing horses for the chariot to fetch Rama’s parents for marriage.

12. Krishna bringing Mount Maniparvata
As described in the story of Narakasura, Krishna attacks and kills him and releases the 16001 maidens from his clutches, brings Aditi’s ring also brings Maniparvata, the top of the great Mount Mandara. The episode is also described in Harivamsha (II, 121), Vishnu Purana (V, 29) and Bhagavata Purana (VIII, ch.). In the sculpture panel Krishna is depicted riding Garuda and is carrying the remains of Narakasura in his hands. He is also accompanied by his wife Satyabhama, who is depicted in the form of a female figure standing on the raised right palm of Garuda.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LARGE SCULPTURE PANELS IN THE THIRD ENCLOSURE

The most unusual feature of the temple of Angkor Wat is the carving of huge sculptural panels on the exterior walls of the third enclosure. The most intriguing aspect of this panel is that they had been carved after the walls were built. The masons had done such a perfect job in joining the stones that these joints were almost invisible to the sculptors. This type of carving has one distinct disadvantage, the depth of the sculptures have to be restricted and hence there are limitations in showing the expressions on the faces of the figures. However, this also has an advantage; the size of the sculpture-panel is unrestricted as in the rock-cut caves. The Khmer artists used this advantage to its full limit and produced an array of the large sculptural panels, in fact, the largest ones in the world. There are eight such panels, two on each side of the third enclosure walls. The panels instead of facing inward toward the temple (as seen in most of the temples in India, especially South India) are facing outward and protected by a covered pavilion all around.

Panel no 1. Battle of Kurukshtetra:
Ramayana and Mahabharata are the two greatest epics in India. This sculpture-panel situated on the southern end of the wall facing east, depicts the battle fought in Kurukshtetra.

This is one of the bloodiest battles fought in ancient India. The army of five Pandavas aided by Lord Krishna fought against the army of their hundred cousins. Pandavas finally won by killing all the Kauravas and their entire army. The total number of people killed in this gory battle was so large that it is said finally there was no one left even to cremate the dead.

The sculpture-panel depicting this battle which was fought at Kurukshtetra has been depicted on many panels in the various ancient temples in India. The description of the battle begins in the 6th
chapter called as Bhishmaparva and continues till the 13th chapter called as Anushasanikparva in which death of Bhishma is described.

However, in the sculpture-panel in the temple of Angkor Wat which is 48.35 meters long and is the largest panel depicting this battle, in which an attempt seems to have been made to include the description of the battle from 6th to 13th parvas. Beginning from the left of the panel we see the Kaurava army marching into the battle. Little further on the top Bhishma is depicted lying on the bed of arrows. Further to the right Dronacharya, the teacher of archery of Kauravas and Pandavas is depicted as the only warrior fighting without a helmet. Little ahead of him depicted is Karna, the illegitimate son of Kunti, born before her marriage, trying to pull out the wheel of his chariot stuck in the mud while his driver lies slain. Krishna who is driving Arjuna’s chariot is depicted in the central portion of the panel; as an incarnation of Vishnu with four arms, and Arjuna is standing on the chariot and firing multiple arrows simultaneously. Further ahead Bhima is depicted riding an elephant with a queer shield in his hand, a face of a demon is depicted on his shield. On the extreme right of the panel the Pandava army is depicted marching into the battlefield. In general, it can be observed that the Maharathis, or the commanders or the lead characters are depicted on the topmost row of the sculpture-panel. The middle portion is occupied by the lower ranking generals, and the bottom is the foot soldiers. The depiction of the fiercely fought battle seems to be reflective of the contemporary battles fought by the Khmers, specifically so of the ones fought by Suryavaman II.

**Panel no. 2. Suryavarman’s Royal Procession :**

This panel is on the western side of the south-facing wall of the third enclosure. The length of this panel is 93.60 meters. This is one of the most unusual sculptural panels depicted on the temple wall in Angkor Wat. This is because here the king is not only depicted with his queens and concubines but with all his senior ministers and commanders as well. The names of 21 ministers and the commanders have been inscribed in the sculpture panel.

**Panel no. 3. Heavens and Hells**

In this sculpture panel are depicted the kind of punishments given to the sinners in Hell as per 32 different kinds of sins they have committed in their lives.

The 66.05 meters long panel is in 3 tiers. The upper tier depicts the royal family ascending and reaching heaven.

In the central tier in the middle Yama the god of death is depicted sitting on his vehicle, male buffalo. He is depicted with eighteen arms. Chitragupta, the record-keeper of sins of all individuals is depicted sitting and pointing with his stick while proclaiming punishments for
The sinners. The sinners are depicted dragged, whipped, pushed and even pulled by the threads stuck in their noses for judgment. Those cowing away from punishment are depicted being physically lifted by the assistants of Chitrargupta and forcefully pushed in hell. The lowermost tier depicts the various punishments given with all the gory details. Some are depicted being drowned in water, some put in the boiling oil, some made to sleep on bed of nails and so on. In the last part, the punishment of driving a thousand nails in the body is depicted by standing figures of men and women chained in standing position with nails protruding all over their bodies.

Panel no. 4. The Churning of Ocean of Milk:

The episode is vividly described in the Bhagavata Purana (Shrimadbhagavata, VI-VIII). The gods wanted to get the elixir of life known as Amrita which was believed to at the bottom of the cosmic ocean. They request the demons to assist them in churning the ocean. However, finally on getting it the gods deceive the demons and keep it for themselves.

The sculpture panel is situated on the northern side of the wall facing east of the third enclosure. The central portion of the 48.45 meters long panel depicts this story. In the beginning of the panel the Asuras are shown invited for the churning while at the last portion of the panel the Gods are marching to join the churning. The central portion has 90 Gods and 90 Demons (sculpting of two gods and one demon remained unfinished) totaling to 180. The Vishnu in the centre has to be counted for both, the Gods as well as the Demons thus add up to 182 and depict the days in a half year. These are the days of the one Ayan or six months of the Hindu calendar. Two Ayans make a year or 364 days. The 365th day of the year is depicted in the form of a god hovering over the top of Mt. Mandar at the centre.

The oscillation of the Sun as seen in northern hemisphere takes place from north to south. On the longest day (21st June) it rises on the extreme north or the last god depicted in the act of churning and on the shortest day (22nd December) it rises from extreme south edge of the oscillation that is on the last demon depicted in the act of churning the ocean. There are two equinoxes in the year, spring equinox (21st /22nd March) and the vernal equinox (23rd September). This path of Sun can be traced on this sculptural panel rendering it to be one of the most unique panels in the world. (Mannikka: 1996)

Panel no. 5. The Victory of Vishnu over Narakasura

The episode is described in Harivamsha (CXXII). The Samudramanthananan or the Churning of Ocean produced many jewels. Pair of earrings was also one of them. These were taken by Indra, the king of gods gifted these to his mother Aditi. The asura king Naraka stole Aditi’s earrings and hid in the city of Pragjyotisha. Krishna marched with his army to retrieve the earrings. That city was protected by nooses with razor sharp edges by a demon named Mura. Mura tries to obstruct Krishna’s entry whom Krishna kills and then one by one he kills the aides of Naraka. Finally, Naraka is killed by Krishna’s sudarshan chakra. Krishna then retrieved the earrings and marched into his city and released 16001 women held captive by the asura. These maidens were kept on a mountain called Maniparvata. Krishna,
uproots the mountain with the maidens, places it on the wings of Garuda, and brings it to his capital Dvārakā. The society refused to accept the women. In order to give them dignity, Krishna married all of them. Krishna then went to heaven and returned the earrings to Indra.

The 51.45 meters long sculpture-panel is situated on the northern wing of the east wall of the third enclosure. In this panel multi-armed Krishna is depicted in form of Vishnu riding his vehicle Garuda. Krishna is depicted six times and the fierce battle raging is well depicted.

Panel no. 6. The Victory of Krishna over Asura Bana

The episode is realted in many texts. Harivamsha (CLXXV), Vishnu Purāna (V, 33), Bhagavata Purana (X, 63) to name a few. Usha the daughter of asura Bana falls in love with Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna. By using magic arts she brings him to her palace. Aniruddha on seeing Usha falls in love with her and they decide to elope. Bali, Usha’s father was the demon king with thousand arms. He catches them and ties up Aniruddha. Krishna marches with his army to free his grandson. After a fierce battle Krishna kills Bana and returns to Dvārakā with Aniruddha and Usha.

The 51.45 meters long sculpture-panel is situated on the eastern half of the north wall of the third enclosure. Krishna riding Garuda (eagle vehicle of Vishnu) is depicted seven times in the sculpture-panel. In the beginning of the panel Garuda is depicted putting out the flames of fire created by Agni, who is depicted riding a chariot driven by a rhinoceros. There onward the battle is depicted progressively as described in the text. Krishna is depicted four-armed or eight armed but always riding on Garuda’s shoulders. The last depiction of Krishna when he draws his disc to cut Bana’s hands is worth noticing.

Panel no. 7. The Victory of Gods (Devas) over Demons (Asuras).

This is the episode described in the Bhagavata Purāna (Skandha VIII, Ch.10, 40-57) known as devasursangram, the battle between the gods and demons. The demons, being deprived of Amrūta by gods gather under the leadership of Bali and fight the gods.

The sculpture-panel is situated on the western half of the northern wall of the third enclosure and it depicts twenty-one gods fighting with demons. The names in the bracket are the names of the creatures driving the chariots of each god.

1. Nīrūti (?) (Horse) (serial no. 1 and 6), 2. Kubera (Elephant) (serial no. 2), 3. Chandra (Horse) (serial no.3) fighting with demon Rahu. 4. Vayu (Running man) (serial no. 8) against Puloma, 5. Agni (Rhinoceros) (serial no.9) with Mahīshasura, 6. Kārttikeya (Peacock)(serial no.10) with Tarakasura, 7. Indra (ElephantAiravata) (serial no.11) with Bali, 8. Viśnu (Garuda) (serial no. 12) with Banasura, 9. Yama (Bull) (serial no.13) against Kalanabha, 10. Mahadeva (Śiva) (Ox) (serial no.14) with Jambhasura, 11. Varuna (Goose) (no.15) with Heti, 12. Surya (Horse) (no.16) with Praheti, 13. Shani (Snake) (serial no. 18) against Narakasura, 14. Āśvinikumāra(Horse) (1) (serial no. 19) and 15. Āśvinikumāra (Lion-faced horse) (2) (serial no. 20) both fighting with demon Vṛuṣaparva
The length of this sculpture panel is 93.60 meters which is equivalent to the length of the Panel no. 2 of Suryavarman described above. These two sculpture-panels therefore, are the largest ones in the world.

**Panel no. 8. Battle of Lanka:**
The second most popular epic in India is the Ramayana. This is believed to have taken place before Mahabharata.
The story begins with India a king named Dasharatha who was ruling the area called Koshal in north India which had Ayodhya as its capital. He had three wives but no children. He performed a Putrakameshthi yajna (a sacrificial ritual performed in ancient times) and as a result his wives became pregnant. His eldest wife bore him a son named Rama; the second delivered twins who were named Lakshamana and Shatrughna and the third wife’s son was named Bharata.
However, just before the day of crowning Rama as the heir prince, Dharatha’s third wife Kaikayi demanded that her son Bharata, who had gone to visit his maternal family, be made the heir to the throne and Rama be banished into forest for fourteen years. When Dasharatha told this to Rama, to his utter surprise instead of denying or resisting, Rama immediately took of all his ornaments and prepared to leave for the forest. Lakshamana and Sita also decide to go with him. Dasharatha died with a broken heart.

During their stay in forest, Ravana the demon king of Lanka abducts Sita and holds her in captivity in Lanka. Rama in her search meets the monkey king Sugriva and his aide Hanuman. Rama makes an alliance with Sugriva and restores him his kingdom and in return Sugriva with the help of his army of monkeys agree to fight the mighty army of Ravana. They build a bridge across the sea and attack Lanka.
The battle lasts for many days and finally Rama kills Ravana and his entire clan and routs his army too. He crowns Ravana’s brother Bibhishana as the king of Lanka, frees his wife and returns to Ayodhya after fourteen years of banishment.

The details of the battle are exclusively described in the one of the books (section) of Ramayana named as Yuddhakanda. The description of the sanguinary battle fought by the army of monkeys of Rama with the army of rakshasas of Ravana begins from the 42nd chapter to the 108th chapter of this book.

The sculpture panel is situated on the northern half of the west wall of the third enclosure. The battle is depicted from edge to edge of this 51.25 meters long panel. As per the text the monkeys fought with their hands, nails and teeth. The weapons they had were sticks, stones, uprooted trees, boulders and severed mountain tops; while Ravana’s army was well equipped with spears, maces, swords, bows and arrows. The most glaring aspect of the panel is that the fight is depicted exactly as per the text. All the monkeys are depicted fighting bare handed or with sticks and stones or are using their nails, fists and teeth to kill their opponents, whereas the Ravana’s well-
armed army is mercilessly attacking the hapless monkeys. Rama is depicted being carried on the shoulder of Hanuman and shooting his arrows. Ravana is depicted with ten heads and twenty hands riding on his chariot and shooting arrows from his bow. The commanders of Rama namely, Nala, Neela, Sugriva, Angad and others are depicted killing the commanders of Ravana like Kumbha, Nikumbha, Vajradamshtra and his sons individually. The most spectacular depiction is of Angad killing Mahodar, one of the commanders of Ravana. Mahodara is depicted riding an elephant and Angad using all his four paws in the act of throwing Mahodar with his elephant. (Roveda:2003, 79).

The depiction of the elephant in battle is again an additional feature of the Khmer iconography. In Ramayana, all the commanders of Ravavna including himself have been described as riding on chariots. Use of elephants in the battle was prevalent in Cambodia right from the times of grandson of Kaundinya. (Wai-chuen:2000, 11). Therefore, depiction of elephant riding commanders in the sculpture-panels of Ramayana is a direct influence of the contemporary warfare on Khmer art.

**Conclusion**

The temple of Angkor Wat is visited by over four million people every year. However, most of them fail to notice the details of these large sculptural panels. The main reason being that they are in a hurry to go to the top enclosure and secondly, there are very few guides who actually know these panels in such details.

The aim of the paper is to create awareness about the sculpture-panels especially the ones situated in the third enclosure and also bring forth the genius of the unknown Khmer artists who have created such wonderful masterpieces.

**References:**