

2014

***Aarhat Multidisciplinary
International Education
Research Journal (AMIERJ)***

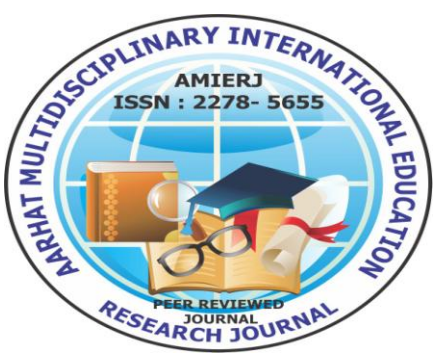
***(Bi-Monthly)
Peer-Reviewed Journal
Impact factor: 0.948***

VOL - III Issues: V

***Chief-Editor:
Ubale Amol Baban***

30/11/2014





ZOOMORPHISM IN ARMS

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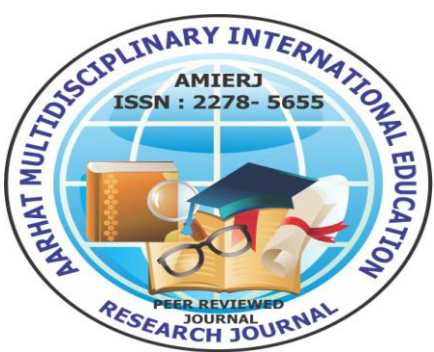
Abstract:

Human being has always kept himself engaged in one chore or the other. He hates to sit idle. His curiosity has always kept him employed and his curiosity combined with his skills has transformed him from being a mere hunter-gatherer to being one of the most advanced species created on earth. The earliest humans kept themselves busy in finding their prey to feed themselves and their family. With the things he invented, such as, the weapons for hunting, fire, the cart and the wheel, irrigation, agriculture, pottery, cultivation of the land, the domestication of animals etc. he did not spend his day just wandering and eating. As a matter of fact, these inventions saved a lot of his time and it was then when he thought of beautifying his surroundings: the caves where he lived, the utensils that he used, the clothes that he wore, the weapons that he used and himself too. This 'beautifying everything' instinct in him has contributed a lot for art which begins with the primitive man's cave paintings and continues till date and will prosper furthermore.

Keywords: *Beautification; Zoomorphism; Arms.*

Objective:

The objective of my paper is to trace back a brief history of the development of weapons of attack as well as defense, the changes which came about with time, assimilations of foreign influences and consequently culminating as pieces of art while referring to the zoomorphic forms



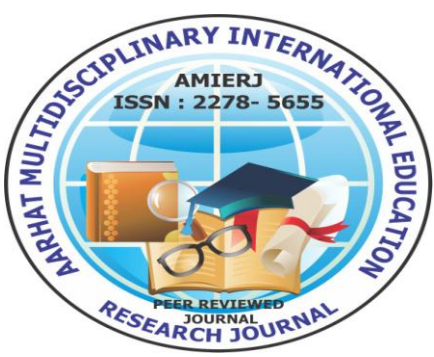
that have been either used for simply beautifying the objects or their association with the magico-religious beliefs.

BODY:

Weapons have been an integral part of man's life since time immemorial. From the time when the human being was only a hunter-gatherer, man has come a long way from the thought of protecting himself and his family from animals and enemies. There was a time when man just hunted for animals, killed them, savored them and began the next day with the same routine. When the sources around him decanted, he would move ahead to find another place to be called his abode. This is how he lived his life until he came to know about farming and agriculture. It is now that he starts living a settled life, irrigates, ploughs and waters his land. Along with living a settled life came a sense of insecurity and he begins to invent weapons and arms that are meant not only to hunt on animals but also to kill his enemies who could pose a threat to him or his possessions.

Furthermore, with the greed for more, man began to organize himself in groups to attack on the belongings of others. For this purpose, he now needed something which could shield him in case of counter-attack. So, along with the weapons and arms which could be used to attack he now began creating means for defense too. With the passage of time these mediums of attack and counter-attack started to turn into masterpieces of art. Just as he decorated his surroundings to beautify them, he also started prettifying weapons which always accompanied him. The weapons and arms were now meant to serve two purposes; primarily they were manufactured to be used in wars and battlefields and secondarily they were fashioned for the sake of visual delight along with the utilitarian purpose it served. The warfare had now turned spectacular even though the efficiency in performance remained the fundamental requisite.

The earliest weapons were in the form of wooden sticks or spears, the effectiveness of which was increased later by hardening the tips by holding them over flames, one of the earliest technologies in weapon development. Later on they began to attach flint stones to the tip of the



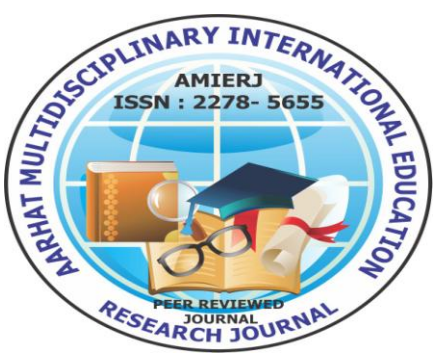
sticks after polishing and adding grooves to it. Further these stones began to be attached at the apex of the arrows and spears and later came to be used as axes which were more of a tool rather than a weapon. With the advent of copper in around 4000 B.C., swords and dagger blades began to be casted but copper as a reliable metal for wars was not as strong. Then, in about 3000 B.C. Bronze was invented by creating an alloy of copper and tin or lead which proved to be a more useful and durable metal than copper. By around 1500 B.C. iron was found which changed the scene of warfare. The development of these weapons from being mere sticks to bows and arrows, from clubs to catapults, from javelins to bows and arrows, from knives to swords and daggers can be seen from the very beginning of the civilizations in the form of cave paintings, reliefs, sculptures, mural paintings, miniature paintings and so on. In India which is a country of many religions and diverse cultures one can see weapons and arms been shown in all forms of visual arts. India is a country in which art is partially away from realism as far as the depiction of deities (Gods and Goddesses) is concerned. These deities have been shown with multiple arms holding weapons in each one of them which is an “Indianized way” to depict the power of the deity. For example, the *Mahishasuramardini* panel from the Mahishasuramardini cave at Mahabalipuram (fig. 1), the goddess is shown with multiple arms and each of her arms holding an attribute. Similarly, in the *Vishnuanantsyana* panel from the Dasavatara temple from Deogarh, all the attributes of God Vishnu have been shown in a personified form, the mace, the sword, the chakra and the bow respectively. Lord Shiva has been shown with his attribute, the Trident or the *Trishula* numerous times in Indian Art. Not only have the gods and goddesses shown with weapons but also there are many Kings and warriors that have been shown holding their weapons. For instance, the statue of Vima Kad Phises from Mathura shows the king in a standing form holding ha mace in his right hand. It emphasizes on his muscularity and masculine power. Likewise a Greek warrior from the railing of the Bharut Stupa shows a foreigner holding his sword and standing in an erect position. In addition to the development of arms and armor that can be traced through various forms of art, one can also see the changes and assimilations

that begin to come and be a part of the particular civilization with invasions and various other foreign influences.



**Fig.1. Mahisasuramardini panel from the Mahisasura Cave,
Mahabalipuram, Pallava Dynasty, mid-seventh century.**

The power of weapons has been felt by human being ever since it was first made. In the primal society, anything that a man thought was powerful than him, he began to associate with the supernatural or the divine power. For this reason, they had an imaginative deity for every natural phenomenon on which he had no control. His fears made him believe in that supernatural and when he realized that the supernatural power could not be overcome, he started worshipping it as God. The animals those were more powerful than them and inflicted a sense of fear in them were viewed as deities' worth of worship. This can be attested with the evidences of the presence of animal figures on the weapons of the Paleolithic hunter. The primitive man believed that specific animals had supernatural powers can be testified with the fact that he wore animal skin on his body because he thought that the power of the particular animal would transfer into his body due to its divine affiliation and this would further invoke a sense of fear on the enemy.



Hence the crests with horsetails, helmets with horns, the masks with terrifying face were followed on the same lines of belief which infused aggressive force in them. Lingering with this belief for a long time made them worship their arms and armor and gave it a religious and devotional character. There are also similar depictions in paintings also. Goddess Kali, who has been shown with multiple arms and each of her arms holding a weapon, is slaying Shiva, several times in Indian paintings. The paintings of many Rajput Kings have been shown holding well decorated swords and Mughal and Pahari kings mounted on horsebacks holding their swords covered with decorative sheaths. In addition to all these themes there are many battle scenes depicted in Indian painting which throw considerable light into the kinds of arms and weapons being used during that particular period.

Zoomorphism is a term which can be used in various contexts: It can be defined as shaping something in an animal form; creating deities in animal forms or creating creative patterns using animal imagery. Here, I am concerned with the third aspect of zoomorphism, i.e., using animal imagery to create beautiful decorative visuals. Zoomorphic forms have been a part of Indian art for a long time. The reliefs from the caves of Elephanta, Ellora, Sun Temple from Konark, Laxman and Kandariya Mahadev Temple from Khajuraho display a wide range of Zoomorphic forms for the sake of visual pleasure. Many winged animals have been depicted ranging from bulls, rhinoceros, horse, lions etc.. Along with these, there are also zoomorphic elements that can be seen in the inlay work such as *Pietra Dura* and mosaic work done in the world famous architectural marvel Taj Mahal and other mausoleums and pieces of architecture built by the Mughals where these zoomorphic forms other than just being a decorative element becomes a part of the architecture as a whole.

Auxiliary to the sculptures, reliefs, and paintings these animal forms have been used to embellish arms and armor. The most exquisite form of such adornments can be seen in the dagger hilts of the Mughals. These dagger hilts have been made of precious and semi-precious stone in the first place, such as Jades, popularly known as *yashm* in Persian and then inlaid with

precious metals and gems such as gold, rubies, diamonds and emeralds etc.. The primary reason for Jades being used for such purpose was that it was considered as a “Victory stone” and secondarily jades if worn in the form of a pendent or worn around the arm could cure digestive ailments. The jades were found from Yarkand, Khotan and Kashkem valley in Central Asia. The earliest surviving jades trace their lineage to Timur’s grandson, Ulugh Beg son of Shah Rukh. The jade carving continued in the time of Shah Ismail (1501-24), the founder of Safavid dynasty. It was also during his period that the inlaying of the incised decoration with gold was innovated. The gold inlay work continued under the Ottomans and they went one step ahead in gold inlay work where the final inlay was flushed with the jade surface. The craftsmen from the Timurid and the Safavid dynasty further migrated to the Mughal courts. It was during the reign of Akbar that for the first time such jade weapons and utensils could be seen. Various animal forms have been chiseled out of jade, for example, the horse head, the Nilgai (fig. 2.), the lion head and so on. However there have been differences in the tastes of rulers. For instance, the emperor Akbar (1556-1605) got stylistic lion head in dark green jade chiseled as the dagger heads, where as Jahangir (1605-1627) his son and successor favored light green jade over the dark ones and Shah Jahan (1628-1658) preferred white jade over the other two. Shah Jahan also liked to get the dagger hilts inlaid further with gold, diamonds and rubies (fig. 3).



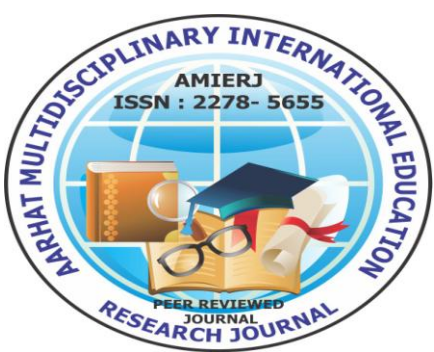
**Fig. 2. Nephrite Dagger hilt in the form of a blue bull (Nilgai), Mughal Period
(1526-1858), ca. 1640.**

This tradition was further taken down by the Sikhs, although ardent enemies with the Mughals, during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh many weapons were made on the same lines as the Maharaja was a keen collector of the artifacts of the Mughals. Susan Stronge, a noted Art Historian notes that “On 18 March 1837 Fane was invited to see Ranjit Singh’s entire collection of treasures”. Fane says “ The swords many of them of great value, their blades alone being on some instances valued at 1000 pounds and the gold and jewels upon their hilts and scabbards at five times the sum. Many of them had been squeezed out of Shah Shuja, the ex-king of Caboul.”



Fig. . Dagger hilt of Shah Jahan, 1675-1700, white Nephrite jade.

To conclude with, I can say that the animal forms have been used as motifs since the very beginning of art, be it in the cave paintings where they have been depicted in the hunting scenes or on the pillar base of various rock cut and free-standing architecture and in the relief and sculptures. Animal representations have come a long way until it came to be used as a decorative form and various examples from art history showcase these animal forms underlying its importance.



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