

Metrolife on the move

HISTORICALLY RELEVANT



SUBJECTIVE A visitor at the gallery themed on 'rapture' (L); sculpture of a Yaksha emerging from a crocodile's mouth in gallery focussing on 'supernatural' (R).

The cycle of life comes full circle

An ancient-looking sculpture carved out of stone would be appreciated for its aesthetic beauty rather than its representational ability to explore the notions of 'birth' and 'death'. Curator Naman P Ahuja, however, focuses on the concepts of 'death' and 'rapture' and presents their contours in Indian civilisation through insights of artists (both old and modern) to infuse life into the exhibition 'The Body in Indian Art'.

Spanning over 15,000 sq ft and marked as the largest exhibition mounted in the National Museum till date, it spreads over eight galleries which are designed to blend with the eight themes in which the exhibits are segregated. Walking from one to the other gallery, one can notice a stark change in the colour of walls and even the addition of decorative elements such as wall lamps in the third gallery named 'The place of Astrology and cosmology in determining the fortunes of the body'.

It would be a tad confusing to go out of way and observe the artifacts on display without following the order laid down in the brochure. A 'Naga' memorial for a warrior carved in wood marks the beginning of the exhibition. It be-

longs to the Nagaland Crafts Museum and one is reminded of the list of 44 museums which have lent their exhibits for this exhibition.

Going by the printed map, one discovers that the curator initiates the journey from the gallery 'Death: The Body Is But Temporary'. Undeterred by the vast expanse that lay ahead to be conquered, one treads the carpeted floor in of the second gallery themed on 'The Body Beyond Form' where the grey tones with the 'Tree of life in backdrop construct a perfect set-up for a row of



CAPTIVATING Sculptures of a Naga warrior (L) and apsara 'Mohini' (R).

footprints that are worshipped in various religions and the exhibit 'Gravestone of a Mughal Lady' in marble. Along with these are displayed the copper plates 'Akroosha-tukha', which have 99 names of Allah inscribed on them.

The connecting passage between this gallery and the next is made interactive with the help of a documentary on quaint worshipping traditions of our country. A few steps further and the lamps hanging from the ceiling with mud-coloured carpets on floor define the gallery of '(Re) Birth: Miraculous Children'. While sculptures of women giving birth capture attention, the gallery also talks about the graceful creators and dangerous protectors.

Gallery four and five named 'The Body in the Cosmos' and 'The Body Ideal: Supernatural' are intriguing. The former is more of a black room with a giant statue of 'Shiva with Cosmic Symbols', sculptures of gods such as Sun, Yama, Kubera and even Navagraha. The latter is comparatively more lit up and has a design that is visually appealing.

Out of this room, the exhibits placed in corridor form gallery six 'The Body Ideal: Heroic' and then the labyrinth leads to gallery seven and eight - 'The Body Ideal: Ascetic' and 'Rapture: The Body of Art'. While the former is themed around the ascetics of the world who always seek to conquer desire, and has paintings representing their ideologies, the latter has walls which are decked up like paintings!

Sculptures of 'Dancing Ascetics', 'Surasundaris', 'apsara 'Mohini' and 'Nataraj' adorn this space and would have made a visitor surrender to their beauty even if they were sans any thematic display. Henna Rakheja