

Development of the Figurative Representation of the Yakṣa Image in the Buddhist Sculpture of India through Archaeological Evidence

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ABSTRACT: This paper broadly explores the analysis of Yakṣa in Buddhist art. In Buddhist art, images and symbols are performed in such a way that it conveys certain religious ideas of bhakti, and capable of representing the philosophy of Buddha and showing also interconnection with supernatural world through images, which at the same time gives a spiritual quality. The primary Buddhist symbols throughout all Buddhist countries are depending on biographical scenes preceding the Buddha Enlightenment and his entry into nirvana. In the early phase the image of the Yakṣa and Yakṣini was understood in a universal cosmological sense. The development of religious thought gave an additional dimension of meaning to the images and symbols used in the scenes of the Buddha biography. Yakṣa and yakṣhi fill the early Buddhist monuments of Sānchi and Bharhūt and the former serve as prototype for the first iconic representation of the Buddha and associated with cosmological effect.

KEYWORDS: *Biographical Scenes, Mahayana, Cosmological, Symbols,*

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I INTRODUCTION

The overall focus of this paper is specifically or exclusively on the Yakṣa images the iconography of the Buddha's image. The beginnings of Buddhist art appear to be associated with the memorial monuments (chaityā), erected on the sites of the Four Great Events of the Buddha's life, and in other places. Funeral mounds(stupas) were, indeed, already erected over the divided remains immediately after the cremation of the Buddha's body. Each of the Great Events and sites was represented by a symbol; and these symbols, taken collectively, relate in a kind of pictorial shorthand, the whole story of the Buddha's life. Most of them occur abundantly on the punch-marked coins of the 4th and 5th centuries B.C., a few appear for the first time at Barhūt and Sānchi. At Barhūt the most important Buddhist sculptures are the numerous medallions illustrating Jataka stories, each with an identifying inscription; reliefs illustrating historical episodes of the Buddha's life and pillars bearing in relief the figures guardian yakṣas and yakṣis, nāga kings and devatas. The Jataka reliefs are excellent pieces of condensed story telling, the representation of trees and landscape full of interest and decorative beauty, the animals and human figures well understood and placed, whether singly or in groups.

II HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL SCENARIO

The most important local gods, of which images were already being made seem to have been the Yakṣas and yakṣini. Their cult must have been widespread throughout the Ganga-Yamuna Valley and whole of the central India. Their popularity is certainly indicated by their ubiquitous presence on the reliefs of the stupās of Bharhūt and Sānchi, as well as by their frequent appearance in stories preserved in the Buddhist canon itself. Such divinities were regarded as beings of superhuman size and power, sometimes benevolent, sometimes malevolent, but often willing to act as protectors of individuals or communities. A number of free-standing and seated images of these local divinities has been found around Mathura, Gwalior, Pratapgarh, Besnagar (ancient Vidisa). An inscription on the pedestal of an image of the yakṣa Manibhadra from Gwalior confirms that these divinities were specifically named and their devotees were referred to as Bhaktas (devoted ones). They are shown frontally with heavy roundness of form.

Yakṣas (Pali, Yakkhas) appear frequently in Buddha legend and iconography, being usually enumerated as in the third rank of the secondary gods. Their king Kubera, Vaisravana or Alakesvara, is guardian of the north, and his capital is Alaka or Alakamanda. But the other three guardians were also styled Yakṣas; and we find various individual Yakṣas named, as Alawaka, Satagera, Bemawata, Purnaka, Viriudaka, Gangita, Suchiloma, Supavasa (Supavrisha), Nandaka, &c. They are always represented in human form. At Barahut they appear as guardians or dwarapalas at the gateways; at Nasik also, one at the entrance of the Chaitya-cave is indicated in an inscription as a Yaka, and the two figures by the door of Cave III bear the same character. At Barahūt, Yakshinis also are figured on the pillars at the entrances, as Chada (Chanda) and Sudasava Yakkhini.

The Dulva gives us a sort of key to the frequent representation of Yakshas as dwarfpalas : Anathapindaka asks the Buddha how the vihara must be ornamented with paintings (or sculptures). The Buddha answers "On the outside door you must have figured a Yakṣa holding a club in his hand ; in the vestibule, you must have represented a great miracle, the five divisions (of beings) the circle of transmigration ; in the courtyard, the series of births [jātakas] ; on the door of the Buddha's special apartment (gandhakuti, ' hall of perfumes'), a Yakṣa holding a wreath in his hand; in the house of the attendants (or, of honour: rim-gro), bhikshus and sthaviras arranging the dharma ; on the kitchen must be represented a Yakṣa holding food in his hand ; on the door of the storehouse, a Yaksha with an iron hook in his hand ; on the water-house , Nagās with various ornamented vases_ Jin their hands ; on the washhouse (or, steaming-house : bsro-khang), foul sprites or different hells (narakas); on the medicine-house, the Tathagata tending the sick ; on the privy, all that is dreadful in a cemetery ; on the door of the lodging-house, skeleton, bones, and a skull."

The most striking of all the representations of the demigods are the almost life-size figures of no less than six Yakṣas and Yakṣnis, which stand out boldly from the faces of the corner pillars at the different entrances to the Courtyard of the Stūpa. According to the Buddhist cosmogony the palace of Dhritarashtra and the Gandharvas occupies the East side of the Yugandhara rocks, that of Virudha and the Kumbhandas the South, that of Virupaksha and the Nāgas the West, and that of Vaisravan and his Yakṣas the North. Two of these guardian demigods Cunningham identified with two of the Yakṣas figured on the entrance pillars of the Bharhut Stupa. The Pali name of Waisrwana, in Sanskrit Vaisravana, is a patronymic of Kuvera, the king of all the Yaksas, whose father was Visravas. the figures sculptured on the corner pillar of the Northern Gate at Bharhut is duly inscribed Kupiro Yakho, or Kuvera Yaksha.

To Virudhaka was entrusted the guardianship of the South quarter, and accordingly the image of Virudako Yakho is duly sculptured on the corner pillar of the South Gate. With Kupiro on the North are associated Ajakalako Yakho and chada Yakhi, or Chanda Yaksini; and with Virudaka on the South are associated Gangito Yakho and chakaviko Naga raja. The West side was assigned to virupaksha;

Cunningham found that the corner pillar of the Buddhist Railing which once surrounded the Great Temple at Baudha Gaya bears a tall figure of a Yaksini on one of the outward faces as at Bhārhut.

The *Lalitavistāra* speaks of the 28 chiefs of the Yakṣas, apparently exclusive of Kuvera who must be included amongst the four great kings that are mentioned.. Six names are found in the Bharhut Sculptures, In the Vishnu Purana Vaisravana is called king over kings ; but in other Puranas he is simply styled Kuvera, king of the Yakṣas. His capital was called Alaka ; and so the banished Yakṣa of Kalidasa thus addresses the cloud who is to be his messenger. Yakṣa images as a being that incorporated with cosmic and metaphysical concept, certain elements of Buddhist and Yakṣa-related iconography come to be linked in sculptural representations. The Yakṣa is expressed in terms of images drawn from nature. The first comprehensive analysis on the Yakṣas was done by Ananda Coomaraswamy, who traced the development of the cult of the Yakṣas. A.Coomaraswamy concluded that elements of the later anthropomorphic iconography already exist in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. He gives an account on the basis of archaeological remains and literary evidence which prove that images of divinities and human beings both were depicted in relief and existed already in 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.. He pointed, in Buddhist art the representation of Bodhisattvas in human form which is illustrate in Jātaka with the symbolic indications of Gautama as Bodhisattva(Siddhartha) or as Buddha(Tathagatā). According to him "craftsmen capable of producing the Parkham and Patna images, and the reliefs at Bharhūt and Sānci would have had no difficulty in representing Gautama in human form had they been required to do so." A.Coomaraswamy points out to the antiquity of the imagery of Yakṣa, and sees them as origin of Buddha images that were later modelled on the same pattern as those of the Yakṣa images, the artists were inspired by this art. He discusses the Aryan as well as the non-Aryan elements in the evolution of the iconography and religious history of the cult. The images of Yakṣa, Yakṣinis, Nagas, Kubera have been found in different parts of India belonging to the 3rd to 2nd century BCE, or perhaps even earlier if one takes into account the various terracotta figurines that occur as early as 400 B.C. They not only coexist and flourish in Mathura, but also other parts of India along with the many other religious sects. Yakṣas and Nāgas, along with the worship of and offerings made to domestic household deities. Yakṣas and yakshi all the early Buddhist monuments of Sānci and Bharhūt, and the former serve as prototypes for the first iconic representations of the Buddha. It shows the popularity of yakṣa worship and how it became part of figure representation in Buddhist and Jaina religious monuments. Large statue of yaksha and yakshinis are found at many places like Patna, Mathura. Yakṣas prototype, the Bodhisattvas seem to have developed and observed into two broad categories, either represented as free standing or seated figures carved in round, or relief, that would have served as independent cult images, and that of the figures associated with the Buddha. the second are the Yakṣas that occurred either as guardian deities or attended some worshippers in early Buddhist art are represented with a flower, cauri-bearers, or folded hands. Early depiction of the yakṣa, such as the freestanding sculptures from Parkham (figure-1) , is a massive body, with turban and umbrella as a royal prince or hero. Among the earliest sculptures of this type are two yakṣas from Patna (figure-2), a Yakṣi from Besnagar, and the Didarganj (figure-3) . Because of the characteristic use of highly polished Chunar sandstone in the Patna and Didarganj sculptures, they are thought to have been

carved during the Mauryan period(322-183 B.C). The other categories of female Yakṣa is, depicted on the architectural sculpture, occur in various poses. The Mathura artists seemed depicting the shalabhanjika figures on the railing pillars and reliefs. In most of these specimens, the female figure is depicted in a graceful attitude, standing on a prostrate dwarf under a tree, with one hand clasping a branch, while the other resting on the hip. Most of these figures are depicted with heavy girdle and the usual ornaments like an elaborate headdress and necklaces and anklets. Both the Nagas and the Yakshas were worshipped under similar conditions in the early historical Period, and both were depicted by the main religious movements. A.Coomaraswamy pointed that “Buddha-like heads with an usnisa-like protuberance, and many short curls, are represented on several of the Bodhgaya railing medallions. There is, indeed, a prominence very suggestive of an usnisa to be seen on the head of the Naga figure on the Patliputra railing. I cannot recall any pre-kusana sculpture in which an urna is represented, nor any earlier example of even a Buddha with webbed fingers than the Mankuwar image. In the representation of the hair in many curls, which does not appear until after the middle of the second centuryA.D., it is evident that literary tradition has been followed.

Coomaraswamy therefore concludes, that this being the case, it is not unlikely that Mathura would have produced the first Buddha images and not Gandhāra and every element essential to the iconography of Buddha and Bodhisattva figures appears in early Indian art before the Buddha figure of Gandhāra or Mathura is known.

Certain elements of Buddhist and Yakṣa-related iconography come to be linked in sculptural representations. For instance, on top of the north torana at Sanchi, one can see a triad consisting of the central symbol of the Dharmācakra flanked by two Yakṣas carrying cauris. Both flowers and cauris are iconographic emblems associated with the Yakṣa. The flower links the Yakṣa with the domain of nature and fertility; the cauri is a symbol drawn from a vocabulary of social referents and has meaning particularly within the context of a political, courtly setting, in which king is being attended by his servants. By implication, the use of these cauri bearing Yakṣa casts the Buddha in the role of a worldly monarch.

Buddhist and Jaina texts contain many references to the cult or shrines of Yakṣas or Nāgas. The earliest stone sculptures of Mathura available in the form of the colossal Yakṣa images may be dated in the fourth-third century B.C. as examples of an archaic folk-art which existed side by side with the court art. The most famous of these is the huge image from Parkham village. Yakṣa worship was a wide-spread ancient cult and gigantic images, both male and female, were installed in honour of these divinities. The Parkham Yakṣa (figure-1) gives from proof of the early use of stone for plastic art and its iconographic formula sets it fourth as the grand ancestor of subsequent Indian statuary. The free- standing pose carved in the round, colossal size, attitude of the two hands, the right one near the shoulder and the left akimbo, the drapery as an upper scarf and dhoti, the ornaments as torque, triangular necklace, armlets, bangles, bold and gracious expression, majestic stance and impressive volume have been skilfully integrated in a frontal frame which mark the Parkham Yakṣa as an exemplar in the whole range of historic Indian art. As hinted by the surviving Epigraph, it is represented the Yakṣa king Manibhadra whose worship was very popular amongst merchants and householders .

The sculpture under discussion was acquired by Gen. Cunningham from the village Parkham (23 Km. South of Mathura), here known as the Parkham Yakṣa. Heaviness, corpulence, extreme frontality, a girdle fastened round the waist and the two fillets hanging from the knot of the gridle between the thighs are some of the common features to be noticed in early *yakṣa* figures. The torque, necklace with four knots behind, flat waist and chest-bands are conspicuous. The inscription on the pedestal in early *Brahmi* letters records indicates the name of ancient Indian sculptors, that the statue was made by Bhadapugarin, Gomitaka, a pupil of Kunika. It is read as:

Proper right side: *Nibhadapuga rana*

Front side: *atha.....pi*

Proper left side: *Kunikantevasina Gomitakena kata*

In the guild of *Nibhada* (in the reign of) the king..made by Gomitaka, the pupil of Kunika.

The importance of the *yakṣa* figures lies in the fact that they served as prototype for the evolution of early Indian iconography of different sects. While Indian Buddhist inscriptions from Mathura reflect the role of merchants, traders, their wives, and their relatives as significant patrons, it is important to note that Jain monasteries in Mathura also received gifts of images and other items from similar groups of commercial donors.

On the basis of the epigraph the *yakṣi* figures should be contemporary of the Parkham Yakṣa. Fortunately, the name Kunika is also identical. This master craftsman had two disciples i.e., Gomitaka sculptor of *yakṣa* from Parkham and Naka who carved out *Yaksi* Layava. Thus there was long tradition of plastic art at Mathura, which goes back at least to the Mauryan period. In front of *Yaksi* stands a recently acquired *yakṣa* (legs missing) in buff stone with red layer from Nanakpura(Mathura city). It has a peculiar turban fastened through a big projecting ribbon and on back side suspend two scarfs. Torque, necklace and heavy ear rings are his ornaments. While right hand was placed on the waist the traces on the left side suggest a shaft. The Dharmachakra supported on the heads of four lions was known even in Maurya art as a specific symbol of Buddhism and its adaptation on the pedestal of the new image was quite in keeping with the eloquent formula of the Buddha image. A factual analysis of the

religious atmosphere at Mathurā reveals that all the plastic elements of Buddha's iconography had been severally present there and also that they were being applied to the making of Jaina and Brahmanical images.

III CONCLUSION

There is close connection between signs, symbols, and methodological creatures in Buddhist art and events in the life of the Buddha. During 2nd century B.C. lot of mythological creatures such as Yakṣa, Yaḥṣini, makara, etc are depicted on the stupa railings. Yakṣas and Yakṣinis are associated with fertility and prosperity and also important as guardians and gatekeeper(dvarapala). Yakṣas were originally regarded as a kind of local deities that lived in the forest and mountains and acted as guardian spirits of treasures. Yakṣinis are the female deity which are closely related to the tree-goddess. These female figures are nearly nude but adorned with necklaces, anklets. According to both Buddhist and Jain text, there are several different kinds of Yakṣas which are protective and fulfil the wishes of those who worship them.



Figure-1, Yaksha -Parkham (sandstone)- Circa 3rd-2nd Century BCE Government Museum – Mathura



Figure-2 Yaksha Figure from Patna 2nd century B.C.



Figure-3 Didarganj Yakshi (or Didarganj Chauri Bearer) from Patna museum

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