Representation and Spectatorship: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Visual Narratives at Sāñcī Stupas

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ABSTRACT

The art ofSāñcīas a whole is Buddhist in theme; the storytelling relieves successfully fulfil an edifying purpose. It is equally clear that their content is not entirely religious. The intrinsic quality of early art is realistic and sensuous. In the early centuries of its development, the Indian Buddhist visual narrative tradition is rich and extensive. To what extent these narrative sculptures were able to communicate their intentions are a matter of pure guess. The very nature of visual narratives opened possibilities of a misreading of text as incidents from the texts were selected and presented in such a manner so to make it difficult for the viewer to identify the story. The visual texts gave direction to but could not always control the communicative situation. One had to decode these visual narratives.

Keywords

Introduction:

Works of Art have often been used for an understanding of the past. A lot of our understanding of the ancient civilisations derives from their artworks. Although the primary purpose of creating the objects of art was to show the religious affiliation of the people to a particular sect and thus, the structures that came into existence were mainly religious. Nevertheless, the agencies involved in this process of the creation of monumental structures were part of society. Various components of society got themselves associated in some or the other forms with these kinds of activities. In this way, there seems a kind of interrelatedness of social and religious factors in the process of production of art objects.

Stories are a common practice and timeless appeal; in villages and people all over the world, they have gathered to hear myths and epics told and staged. In early India, Buddhists used the power of storytelling to popularise their faith through visual storytelling. Vibrant, daily narrative reliefs presented Buddha's life story to visitors and thus provided easy access for the visitors to a new belief. Through the visual biographies, which are a text in every corner of the pictures, but portrayed differently, the significant events in his legendary life – birth, departure, humanism, first sermon and death – have been given a historical dimension[1].

Sāñcî provides plenty of visual proof used by many scholars for understanding the region's socio-political composition. It was the mammothworks[2] of Sir John Marshall (1940) which examined all visual depictions systematically, found in the Sāñcī Stupas. The two volumes of Marshall tried to compile and find visual evidence in the Jātaka. Many writers used such visual images to offer an idea of that period'sadvancement[3].

Narrative Sculptures

It is challenging to distinguish sculptural art from architecture, as a framework such as the Stupa or a *Caitya* is made up of sculptures. They are mainly portrayed in Buddhist portraits and relief sculptures cut out on the gates and pillars, and *Vihāras*and *Caityas* façades and walls. The Sạñci sculptures of about two hundred B.C to two hundred A.D. provide an interface between archaeology and written evidence. Analysis of the remains of these Buddhist monuments may give us an insight into people and sites in that era. In order to re-create an image of society, the proof in the *Sāñcî* monuments should be used. Any other form of relic or text may provide such clear witnesses to the world that the people of that time surrounded. The accessible literary sources cannot be dated to a certain degree. The *Sāñcī* bas reliefs or friezes and photographs are more reliable and successful than literature in this respect. Therefore, *Sāñcī*proof gives aninimitable and insightful view of society.

Representation and Spectatorship:

In its complex systems, many Buddha legends were reflected in precious sculpture, the glory that *Sāncī*, an ancient pilgrimage spot, was still to be experienced. The donor inscriptions in

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[1]Dehejia,Vidya Looking Again at Indian Art; Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 1978, p.51

[2] Marshall, John (ed.): The Monuments of Sāñcī; 3 Vols. Calcutta, ASI, 1940

[3]Dhavalikar, M. K. Sāñcī: A Cultural Study; Deccan College and Post-Graduate & ResearchInstitute, Poona, 1965

Sāñcī suggest that pilgrims represented a wide variety of social groups[4]. This proof is also backed by images showing rulers, merchants and familiar people at the *Stupa.* There must not be Buddhist tourists to the site. Anyone may have come to the shrine to the spectacle. Examples are the patronage of different religious sects within the same family. The creators of the lower reliefs also seemed to have in mind a broad, non-Buddhist audience. While monoscenic presentations involve an understanding of budgetary mythology, narrative ones can be understood more widely. The many fantastic animals and supernatural beings can be interpreted to seek to integrate different traditions into Buddhism. The future audience who saw any of his gods revered in the Buddhist pantheon would be drawn. In some inscriptions, monk guides are also mentioned[5].

In *Sāncī,* it was mainly a religious, artistic aim to introduce the Buddha parable, the seven former Buddhas' ideas and virtues revered by the Bodhisattvas to many of their narrative sculptures in the Buddhist monuments. The miracles he performed and the episodes related to his preaching and conversion into the faith were significant in the portrayal of the Buddha myth. In the process, Buddha became over-humanised and extraordinarilydominant. In *Sāñcī,*the artists did not need public narratives to spread the Buddhist faith but rather could explicitly launch an image of legends boasting of the ideals of the Buddhist faith.

Another concern of the *Sâñcî*bas-reliefs was the representation of the significant events in the history of the spread of Buddhism. The *Sāñcî* artists thus depicted a variety of legends linked with the MauryanKing Aśokato the site, *Ramagrāma* Stupa legends and war of reliquaries. It is barelyappalling that *Sāñcî*which played a significant role in the imperial Mauryan system was situated along the route linking the valley of *Ganga* to the *Deccan* plateau, and the far south. The cultural and religious value increased the economic and political significance of the site and its representation in the art was a rationalproduct.

Furthermore, at*Sāñcī,* the artist did not portray as much the bare essentials of the tale as in other contemporary locations such as *Bhārhut* but instead added some background information that alludes to the location of the events or the subordinate events of the account. This allusion approach is a central element of *Sāñcī's* visual practice and allows the artist/narrator to put a variety of elements into the visual context. *Sangha*may also take up the religious message by emphasising the specifics of the Buddha's miracles and the various incidents of the Buddha myth.

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[4]Singh, Upinder: "*Sāñcī:The History of the Patronage of an Ancient Indian Buddhist Establishment*"; IESHR, 33, 1, (1996); pp 1-35
[5]DehejiaVidya, Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art; Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1997,p.33

As Buddhism in the early centuries already had a wide range of tales, we must understand why specific tales were portrayed not others. An excellent characteristic of Great *Stupa's* narratives is its enthusiastic engagement in all the events of life. The sculptures are beautiful and have a straightforward and earthy conception of happiness. It is not considered the Buddhist solution to all worldly pleasures.

The artisans did not allude to the sermons in stone, but the vibrant everyday world of the first century B.C. When these narrative sculptures are created with ease, and which offer their description of otherwise distant activities[6] a sense of immediacy. We see gatherings on balconies, festive music scenes and dances, villages in which women pound grain and fetch water, and forests in which elephants swim in lotus ponds while apes and geeseromp on shorelines.The Buddha is present in all of these everyday situations. We can see processionsand dance to celebrate his relics; he performed one of his miracles in the village; the forest is the backdrop for history from his former life. When unveiling Buddha's story, or Buddhism's truths, artists invariably placed them within the familiar world. Captured by the beauty and energy of the address, the audience fell into a mood in which the Buddhist doctrine was quickly absorbed. While the Buddhist message undoubtedly had consequences, it was not possible to shade imagination with religious or philosophical aspects. This creative imagination is an incredible visual experience when one encounters the iconic with daily activities.

One aspect that should be noted carefully in these representations, however, is that only positive things are appropriate for representations. Here are the people who smile and lark. Despair and dejection are entirely missing. How are we going to explain it? One explanation could be that the *Sāñcī*sculptures are images of the ideal world: the supernatural world with its array of gods and the world of the past inhabited by ideal kings and godly believers. They had no reason to suffer, of course. Presentation of the past as an ideal and present as decadent and degenerate is a standard method for the enforcement of religious norms in many societies.

Agrawal believes that the reason for the depiction of celebration and cheerfulness on the panels is that the Stupas symbolised the incarnation and release of the Buddha[7].The most probable theory, however, is that early Buddhism appropriatedpreviousapproaches of cult worship, such as the worship of *Yaksha.*This can be evidenced by the presence of *Yaksha*and

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[6]Dehejia,Vidya Looking Again at Indian Art; Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 1978, p.58
[7]Agrawal, V.S: Bharatiya Kala (in Hindi); PrithviPrakashan, Varanasi, 1987,p.137

Yakshini figures atthe ancient monument sites. People of different classes or castes used to meet for *Yaksha* cults. *Yakshas* were worshipped by music, dance, lights, flowers and food[8].

The *Nāgas, Kinnarās, Devās, Suparnās, Lokpālās* and the trees of *Sāñcī*and *Bhārhut*testify that several previous practices are assimilated[9]. Some of these local rituals have festive worship processes. It was probably the overwhelming influence of these elements, explaining *Sāñcī's*mood of joy and celebration.

The expression'popularart' was used by Niharranjan Ray[10] (1975) in *Sāñcī's* sculptures. He contrasted it with Aśoka's imperial sculpture. This idea must be looked at. The culture and tradition of non-learned, unlettered and non-elite[11]are known as popular culture. The *Sāñcī*gathering was not imperial, but it was a respected gathering. Unless one can believe the proof of the inscriptions, the *Sāñcī*donors were members of a highly stratified society. Monks and nuns, traders, *yavanas / Greeks* and *Dakshinapatha* people, imperial officers and constructors came here. The art of *Sāñcī*is intricate and has been produced by a highly-skilled group of artisans. The greater unity of subject and presentation with other distant Buddhist sites also needs Ray's interpretation to be reshaped.

Politics of Selection of Themes to be depicted:

Therefore, the art of *Sāñcī*cannot be seen with the stated intentions of the artists who created the reliefs of *Sāñcī.* We need to research such portrayals in the context of cultural practices to understand the symbolic significance of these reliefs and to establish the limits of what can be portrayed and stated. It is the cultural world that helps artists to interact with the patrons and the audience. We must ponder the behaviours of the writers of the message and the recipients of the message so that we can comprehend*Sâñcī.* In short, we have to try to understand the context of the times that bind both donors and clienteles. An analysis of behaviours embedded in daily life will make it possible. Local food, drink, walk, chat or even fall ill conventions may be the gateway to an appreciation of a particular society's cultural universe. Today, cultural historians use a linguistic model to explain the ancient. This approach starts with the premise that a community is a communication medium. Therefore the study approach seeks to clarify who is speaking to whom, in which circumstances and by which networks and code they are communicative in a wide variety of events.

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[8] Ibid; 127-29.
[9]Ibid; p.63.
[10]Ray, Niharranjan): Mauryan and Post- Mauryan Art*; ICHR, 1975
[11]Burke Peter: Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, Temple Smith, 1978, p.24

In our research purposes, this means that we need to differentiate between various types of senders and recipients of messages or in other words between representation and spectatorship. The source of the message was the Buddhist Sangha, and his collection included images of kings, priests and the beautifulpeopleand animals. The beneficiaries are Buddhist laity. The various aims of the contact, such as compliance, should also be taken into account to spread the truth. The model of communication often explores the understanding or interpretation of messages by the spectators. It allows us to research both the form and the substance of the message. We know that forms are as unique to culture as material and that they are both inherent in culture as communication.

The themes on the panels were not random selections but deliberately chosen, representing the narrator's intentions. The distinct narrator was the Buddhist *Sangha,* who managed the whole operation. However, the patron may select the subjects and may exercise his right to decide the subject in a restricted degree under the supervision of the *Sangha* in the specific parameter defined by the *Sangha.* Modern examples from studies in Sri Lanka indicate that the monks of themonastery choose images to be presented[12]. *Bhārhut* inscriptions identify the monk as a sculptor and the other as a building superintendent[13]. Dehejia claims the donors have chosen the scenes. According to her, this is shown by the lack of any trend in the story presentation. Likewise, the repetition of some of the stories in other architraves indicates that what was to be depicted was determined by donors. The donors had granted liquid capital which is an integral characteristic of urban society[14].

*Sāñcī*is amanifestation of growing urbanism.We may presume that these sculptures are the creations of monks, artists and donors' joint efforts. The absence of preparation can be related to the fact that resources were not available in unison for making such artworks. The predominance of religious issues is thought to be the static interpretation of events[15]. These considerations should warn works of art, over which monks have a more considerable influence than artists or patrons. The *Sāñcī* Gateways are various examples of monoscenic and static friezes that suggest that the monks choose several stories. That artists have played an essential role in the development of these friezes is evident from the fact that in *Sāñcī*, the nature of the treatment of subjects changes considerably. Artists had to determine how to

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[12]Margret, C &Gombrich, R: The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara, Oxford, 1977,p.26
[13]Lamottee: A History of Indian Buddhism (translated), University Publishers; Louvain, 1988,p.94
[14]Dehejia, op. cit. p.12].
[15]Ibid; p.12

represent the actors, how to depict the environment in which the story takes place, and how to space the time during which the story takes place[16].

Alterations in the handling of the same story demonstrate that artists had significant flexibility to choose a storytelling style.

A pillar at Stupa No.2 in *Sāñcī* depicts a cluster of lotuses"spring fromthe mouth of a tortoise". This illustration is called "*Kacchapanidhi*"[17] [Chakravarti, 1976:75]. Foucherwas the first to establish such a representation on Pillar No.23a of Stupa No.2 of Sāñcī[18].The combination of the lotus bunches with tortoise evoked Foucher's interest, but he could not offer an adequate description of it. D.K.Chakravarti merged these designs with their symbolic connection with *Lakshmi*, the goddess of beauty and abundance. The writer discusses in depth the literary evidence of *Kurma's* relationship with *Lakshmi* and confirms literary evidence with archaeological evidence from various ages. He follows the close association of Sri Lakshmi and Rigveda's lotus in which she has been granted epithets such as, *Padmanana, Padmavarna, Padmini, Padmasambhava, Padmahasta, Padmapriya, etc*[19]. Often in a straightforward way, and at times with vibrant and intricate devices reflecting the naturalistic nature of the artists, the treatment of the lotus designs on the balustrades of Sāñcīperhaps implies their symbolic connection with Sri Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and abundance. Thus, the presence of tortoise associated with the lotus bunches found on the Stupa 2 railings in *Sāncī* can now be clarified that the tortoise represents the *"Kacchapanidhi,"*which was considered as one of the *ādhāras* of the *PadminiVidyā,* of which the presiding deity, according to the *MarkandeyaPurāna,*was recorded as *Lakshmi*. It has now more or less been widely acknowledged that the outset of *Sri Lakshmi*as expressed in *Sāñcî*or other contemporary Indian monuments is not limited to a single religious group. Nevertheless, scholars such as A.L. Srivastava had tried to prove that "Sri Lakshmi's cults already existed before the *Sāñcî* Gateways were created and artists did not overlook this intention"[20]. There are also some folk stimulations behind the artistic expressions that are communicated in these railings.

Theground balustrade of Stupa no.2at*Sāñcī*, there is astriking image of the goddess *Padmā* or *Lakshmi* standing on a lotus with palms clutched in reverence and also fenced by lotuses. Two elephants immediately spill water over her from above. A Yaksha couple holds a lotus

[16]Ibid;p.10

[17]Chakravarti, D.K: "*Kacchapanidhi- Its Association with Lakshmi*"; PrachyaPratibha, Vol.4, No1, Jan, 1976; p.75

[18]Foucher, A: "*On Iconography of the Buddha's Nativity*" in Memoir of the Archaeological Survey of India, No.46; 1934

[19]Zimmer, Heinrich: The Art of Indian Asia, Vol.1; Newyork, 1955; p.159

[20]Srivastava, A.L: "*The Identification of Female Motif in* Sāñcī *Sculptures*"; Journal of Indian History, Vol 1, Part 1, (April 1972); p.131

below this depiction. There are also two wild lions, two gazelles and a little noticeable tortoise upward can be seen on the bottom. The appearance of lions and gazelles on the *Sāñcî* Pillar along with Sri Lakshmi and a tortoise in the same row is fascinating and has some enigmaticconnotation. In his writing, D. K. Chakravartihas tried to establish that "the Lakshmi here may be considered as an emanation of the mother goddess and appears to be the earliest Indian representation of the Devi associated by the lion and the deer as *vāhanas*while the appearance of the tortoise may be explained as a symbolic representation of the *'Kacchapanidhi'*[21].

Techniques of Narration:

An artist who depicts a story in stone used specific representation techniques. Such representation methods varied in time and space. There are three main ways of telling the story by the artists who represent the themes at*Sāñcī* Buddhist monuments. First, there was the continuous narrative methodwhere various events of a tale were represented either in spaces or where the various episodes of a tale blend into each other without a clear distinction, the main characters often appearing over and over again. The former is branded as the Episodic Narration byVidyaDehejia's (1997) and is used for describing the VessāntaraJātaka in Sāñcī.There the various episodes of the story are substantially isolated from each other in space visually, and the plot unfolds interestingly.

Dehejia[22] has called the second form of continuous narration as Continuous Narrative Network, which is used in depicting the*ŚyāmaJåtaka* or *MahākāpiJātaka*at *Sāñcī*. Here the different episodes of the story are moved into one frame, and the eyes see simultaneously events that occur in different locations and times. The Bodhisattva born as King of the monkeys is seen on a mango tree near the river in the depiction of the *MahākāpiJātaka*. The King enters with the followers in search ofthe mangoes and encounters the monkey king who seeks to save his people by posing himself as a bridge to cross the other side of the river. The river forms the central position of the pictorial pitch, on which the Bodhisattva, born as a monkey King, forms a bridge, by hanging from two trees on either side of the river as the fellow monkeys escape the King and his retinue, the latter attempts to trap the monkey king in a net held underneath him. The very next scene displays the monkeyking preachingto the King about the royal virtues.

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[21]Chakravarti, Op. cit, 1972; p. 141
[22][ibid]

Therefore, the continuous episodicnarratives and the continuous narrative network are identicalto the sequential narratives. They vary only in that all episodes in one region are separated in the field of vision and the other they are combined in one frame.

Ultimately, there is the mono-scenic approach, in which one scene evokes a plot. In *Sâñcī*, we have the case of the mono-scenic depiction of the *RsiSringaJātaka*, in which only the key events or the acme of the story is depicted to suggest the whole design.

Such modes of the visual narrative noticeable in *Sāñcī*expresses of the sophistication of early sculptors who used several sculptural conventions deliberately. *Dehejia* clarifies this by stating that, in order to express information about a plot legibly, artists depicted objects in the 'background' of relief as significant and bright as those in the 'foreground'[23]. The lower portion of a panel was far closer to the eyes of the audience because they were farther away from the top part of the screen. The main goal tends to be the consistency of visual perception and not perspective. The concern for reading also led sculptors to pose objects with their most easily recognisable dimension, which allowed the use of multiple viewpoints in a single narrative[24]. The tale of 'Miracle of Walking on the Waters' depicts some things as if seen at the level of the eye (trees, geese, semi-open lotuses, crocodiles, a boat, *Kaśyapas*); others from above (the Buddha's walking line, the surface of his seat, full-blown lotuses). Therefore, the focus on readability led to trees with expanded leaves and fruit that could be easily recognised. Such deliberate and considered visual conferences were used in Buddhist art even after many centuries.

Symbolism:

The examination of the narrative techniques employed by the early artists would also involve the elaboration of the art's visual codes. The early Indian artists used these visual codes either to express deep religious and philosophical thoughts or to show where popular events took place. There were thus symbols or emblems used, mainly when depicting events from the Buddha's life. As it is common knowledge, the anthropomorphic depiction of the Buddha was discouraged during the early stage of its propagation and the artists thus used metaphors such as a wheel on the throne, an empty Horse, a *Stupa* or a Tree or the *Triratna* to show the existence of the Buddha and religious ideals. At this point, it is essential to remember that some of these symbols are part of a standard set of symbols available to different religious traditions. The various religious practices assign unique connotations to these symbols. The

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[23]Dehejia, Op. cit, 1978;p.63
[24]ibid.: 63

Wheel thus depicted the sun's movement, the *Sudarśancakra ofVisnu,* a solar god, and the *dharmacakrapravartana*, or the Buddha's first movement of the Wheel of Law in the various traditions.

Similarly, the riderless horse represents the *abhiniskramana,* the tree that brings Bodhi or illumination, and both the *Parinirvāna* and the Buddha's *Dharma-kāyā*, i.e. the Buddha's fundamental teachings. Again, the footprints on the empty ladder suggest the descent from the *Tushita*heaven in the miracle of Sankasya at*Sāñcī*. Nevertheless, most of the ancient Buddhist sites understood these methods of contact with complex doctrines. Such symbolic meanings were gradually made traditional, and so any representation of the elephant moving over a sleeping woman meant the divine vision of Queen Maya or the empty throne under the tree that was the seat of the meditating Buddha. Besides, historical markers like twin *Sāl*trees suggesting *Kuśināgara* where *Parinirvāna*happened. Such an emblematic or symbolic image may easily be used as a guide for understanding the significance of the bas-reliefs.

Earlynarratives are therefore not always easily comprehensible to the modern man unless the correct resources and the necessary knowledge are made available to decipher the symbolic message.

Table

Symbols and Their Meanings Associated With Buddhism

Place	Event	Symbol
Kapilavastu	Conception Nativity Going Forth	Elephant Lotus, Bull Gate, Horse
Bodh Gayā	Great Enlightenment	*Bodhi* Tree with rail
Sārnāth	First Preaching	Wheel, Often with Deer
KuśiNāgar	Final Nirvana (Death)	*Stupa*

The Hierarchical Conception of Society:

The whole universe seems to be divided into hierarchical lines for the pilgrims who visited *Sāñcī.* On top of this hierarchy was the Buddha, followed by monks, rulers, traders and men of all beliefs. Not only was humanity part of this ladder-like structure, the natural and spiritual worlds too relied on this organisational theory. The seven heavens overlaid the seven wise trees that protected the seven Buddha, and several other things appeared to have followed this arrangement. The viewers of *Sāñcî* sculptures had *Devās, Lokpālās, Yakshas,*

Suparnās and *Kubhandās*in the entire universe, who could be ranked on a vertical gauge. They were citizens of various types of beings. Such concepts of hierarchy permeated and influenced the vision of the makers of these sculptures to such an extent that it displayed some unique qualities or characteristics when they portrayed the Bodhisattva as an elephant or a monkey. Every event was given a solemn form to any practice. Thousands of formalities and rituals witnessed events such as journeys or visits. Kings marched about with magnificent arms and music. Processions and music proclaimed them. Religion was primarily a matter of rituals, movements and formulas in a mostly non-literate culture. Birth, death and war all assumed the spectacle's character. Life had the colours of auniversal fairy tale with *Yakshas, Gandharvas* and *Rasha*. The representation of processions in rank one after another with their organised participants served to convey differences of status.[25] The processions of powerfulkinsmen and allies are the effect of a person on the rest of society. How people prayed, how they bent, moved and spoke was connected with the exercise of symbolic strength.

Many of the depictions in sculptures of *Sāñcī* are of males. Females are not very much apparent. However, in the village scenes of *UruvilāGāma* and *VessāntaraJātaka* clearly describe women's role. They reveal themselves to be interested in jobs such as the husking and winnowing of grain and fetching water. In brief, women primarily engaged in household practices, which are still the domain of Indian women. If women are depicted alongside men, however, they are not seen in subordinate roles. The *Brāhmanic*conventions in northern Indian will identify women following men while walking. While performing the rituals,they wouldbe seated on the left side of their husbands[26]. In *Sāñcī*no such pattern is apparent while walking or sitting. This will demonstrate that the artists did not internalise the northern Indian culture.

Additionally, this may suggest women's comparatively better condition in these regions. Men are seen to sacrifice and preach, to asceticism, to hunt and to fight. The worlds of men and women were, therefore, clearly defined. This fork was connected to the creation of the state society. The *Sāñcī*sculptures thus depicted a hierarchical universe. The political structure was located in this world of contrasts.

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[25]Trainor, Kevin: "*Constructing a Buddhist Ritual Site: Stupa and Monastery architecture*"; Marg XLII, 3, (1996)

[26]Kane, P.V: History of Dharmaśastras (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Laws); Poona Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941; p.302 [Kane, 1963:302].

Our Heritage

Depiction of Royalty at Sāñcī:

Gods and goddesses appear to be higher in number than human beings in *Sāñcī*.While analysing the positions and lives depicted on the *Sāñcī*panels, Buddha images would top the list. Then comes gods with various asymmetries falling between visual evidence and inscription evidence. While there is no royal patronage in the inscriptional proof of this period, sculptures are full of royal representations. It shows that monarchy was accepted in Buddhist philosophy in this period. The *Chhadhānta-Jātaka* depicts *Chhadhānta*, the elephant king, with royal insignia as *chauri* and an umbrella-bearer. A *chauri*bearer and an individual with arms often appear to be serving kings.

To understand the character and role of the kingshipat*Sāñcī*, we must discuss the instances in which the artist chose to represent the monarchy. Our deductions are based on Marshall's identifications[27]. He identified the *Sāñcî* panels based on parallels found in *Bhārhut*, where the inscriptions clarified and complemented the panels in conjunction with the Buddhist story. One negative thing we find here is that the kings and gods are represented in the same way. Their cap, turbans, parasols and fly whisks are the same.This reveals, on the other hand, how much essential monarchy was in the Buddhist scheme of things. At the same time, the size of the panel is essential for making some observations. Although it causes identification problems in the smaller panels, where the figure may be a supernatural entity, the larger panels do not pose any such identification problems. Therefore, we relied on the larger panels for those generalisations.

There are some bas-reliefs on gateways that deliberate on topics relating to kings and deities. An analysis of these sculptures in which royalty figures were found gives us an idea of how the artists visualised kingdom. Indeed, the artist was constrained by the contents and space of the plot. The real constraint of space, however, would force him to choose motifs which could easily convey to the spectators the concept of the kingship. The motifs mentioned may, therefore, be believed to have been those considered to be the essence of royalty. It is interesting from our point of view that there are seven wide panels out of around twenty-three royalty depictions, which means they cover the architrave and even extend often to the other side. For all seven, the King is supported by an army. While some represent all four components of the army, namely elephants, cavalry, carts and infantry, other components represent few. One may argue that the theme of the story needs some of the pictures. In the

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[27]Marshall, John (ed.): The Monuments of Sāñcī; 3 Vols. Calcutta, ASI, 1940

'War of Relics,' for example, the artist is likely to display the army. We note, however, that the portrayal of the "War of Relics" differs in the depiction.

The differences in the performance are very much linked to artistic consistency. It also suggests, however, that artists have made significant variations consciously. Rather than showing war in motion, they decided to show kings going to or returning from the city of *Kuśinagara*. Significantly every scene had its armed retainer complement. Armed stores can also be seen in the photos of Aśoka's visit to *Rāmagrāma* or the *Bodhi* tree (themes without the presence of an army). King *ŠuddhoDāna*, accompanied by four army hands, also reveals the story of the Buddha's return to *Kapilavastu*. The *VessāntaraJātaka* does not show horses, chariots and elephants when the King arrives at the forest.

The smaller panels are too small for stories to tell. The artists, therefore, tend to display charitable works, including prayer figures. Also, in the shorter pieces depicting royalty, soldiers, horses or elephants are seen in the association in most instances. Elephants or horses have been symbols of rank, but we know that they have also been used in battle. For us, this evidence shows that instruments of violence and hostility as an integral part of the kingship was embedded in the minds of *Sāñcī* sculptors. War scenes and conflicts are frequent themesin the reliefs.

The ceremonial markings of the kingdom like a turban, *chauri*, umbrella and ewer are many standards. Nevertheless, these are complemented almost uniformly by the army symbolising the oppressive apparatus of government control. It is interesting to note that the 'War of relics', in a religion propagating non-violence, was one of the most important symbols. The 'War of relics' is not part of the teachings of the Buddha or his former life. This is the story of an incident after the Buddha's death. Numerous kings fought for the Buddha's corporeal remains. The intention was to inspire the laity by emphasising the importance of Buddha's remains also for the kings. It is critical that these kings were unable to settle their differences by peaceful negotiation, as committed Buddhists would expect. Seizure and warfare became the core purpose behind the relics of the person who was the symbol against the war. This contrast needs to be explained. The hijacking of the peaceful monastic ideal by the centre of the high ideal seems to have been at work. The sculptor had to depict it for political purposes in the restricted area of the architraves available to him. It was intended to be witnessed by a wide range of laity. Furthermore, when the artist had to portray royalty, he chose motifs such as he felt the audience would readily understand.

If the understanding of the political power of the *Sāñcī*artist is something to be achieved, coercion and violence appear to be the nature of monarchy. In the case of the *MahākāpiJātaka*, the King is also portrayed as the protector. There are various examples of royal figures who pray to the Stupa. It is not clear to us whether he is praying for himself or serving as the mediator between the holy world and human society. However, the image of the King as protector and religious benefactor of his people needs to be understood as a strategy of power. Such depictions represent the most economicalmeans of coercion in a society in which the direct application of overt physical aggression was costly. The portrayal of the 'War of relics' shows us the strength of the Buddha's unseen presence. The kings are mounted on elephants and chariots, holding caps that hold Buddha's relics. The imperial umbrella insignia was used for the casket rather than for the kings. Some of the kings are shown carrying the caskets on their heads. It is shown that not even a single of the seven kings was willing to sacrifice anything for Buddha's sake. The adoring personality of the powerful and wealthyKing was expected to irritate the spectators. The performance of prayer was as much a representation of the ancient times when saints were given outstanding value as a warning to the laity about the direction of faith. After all, there are corporal remains of Buddhist saints in *Sāñcī*as well.

Depiction of Cities, Villages and the Forests in the Bas- reliefs:

The study of narrative sculptures offers an insight into contemporary life in cities, towns and forests. While they are a vital part of the Buddha life story, the individual descriptions of villages, towns and forests could be studied as secular themes. The pictures of storeyed towers and bastions, plastered gateways, covered roofs, pillared balconies, walls made of big bricks and stones, ramparts, town gates, multi-storey buildings, palace, fortification, aristocratic-looking spectators seem to represent an urban society. The villages are characterised by rounded huts, women filling water jars and other things relevant to daily life. The scene depicting the village of *Uruvela* shows different kinds of domestic activities. The *VessantaraJātaka* scene depicts people coming back to villages with hunted deer. According to Marshall,[28] the proximity to the forest should be suggested. The people who brought deer, however, were dressed like peasants.

An extraordinary characteristic of these narratives is their enthusiastic engagement in all aspects of life. The sculptors provided audiences not with a sermon in stones but with the

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[28]Marshall, John (ed.): The Monuments of Sāñcī; 3 Vols. Calcutta, ASI, 1940

lively everyday world that they could easily relate. Processions are watched on balconies by villagers, joyful dance and music scenes, villages with women pounding grain and fetching water, and forests with elephants swimming in lotus ponds and the monkeys and geese frolic in the rivers. The Buddha is present in all these everyday environments. Processions and dances to celebrate his relics; Buddha performed one of his miracles in the village; the forest was the setting for a story about his past life. When unfolding the Buddha tale or Buddhism realities, artists always framed them in the familiar world.

Thus, the sculptures are delicately executed with low relief and provide us with a remarkable account of Indian life, its suitable setting, manner and cult with evident realism and abundance of minute detail. Nevertheless, these reliefs are often mostly examples of building anecdotes and reflect the early *Buddhist* view of life and society to a limited degree. The Buddhist message certainly had implications, but the religious or the philosophical dimension rarely allowed imagination to be obscured. This creative naivety and the interaction of daily events create an incredible visual experience to reach the gateways of *Sāñcī*.

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