



Some Observations on Buddha's Image

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Abstract:

The inner feelings of the artist are expressed via their work. Additionally, the original characteristics of Indian art were greatly influenced by royal patronage and artists' religious sentiments. Very few and questionable examples of religious deities from the Harappan era have been discovered. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that any of the Vedic deities were metaphorically depicted throughout the Vedic era. But the progressive evolution of the Buddha's image can only be seen in Buddhist art. Buddha is prominently depicted on the *toranas* and *vedikas* of Sanchi and Bharhut as symbols to the well-established and widely-accepted image as an icon in Mathura, Gandhara and Andhra sculptures from ancient India. This article shares some important observations on the genesis and development of the Buddha's image.

Keywords: Buddha, Buddhism, Buddhist art, Sanchi, Bharhut

Aniconic Form of Buddha

Buddha is first depicted in Buddhist art in the form of material symbols. The major themes in the story-telling reliefs of Bharhut and Sanchi, as well as earlier in the Lomas Rishi cave, reflected the significant events in his life. The popular symbols are:

1. The Birth of Buddha: Elephant and Lotus.
2. His Sojourn in the wilderness: Footprints (*Paduka*)
3. Enlightenment: Bodhi tree

4. First Sermon: Wheel and Empty Throne

5. *Parinirvana*: Stupa

The Jataka stories—stories from Buddha's earlier lives—were a key source of inspiration for the Bharhut and Sanchi sculptors in addition to scenes from his life. Similar to how Buddha is portrayed as a generous prince in the Visvanyra Jataka and as a monkey in the Mahakapi Jataka.

Iconic Form of Buddha

When dealing with the iconography of Buddha images, one comes across two different types of depictions: standing and sitting.

Sitting Buddha

India has a long history of austere teaching and disciplined meditation as a means of achieving the ultimate truths. Therefore, when an image of the Sitting Buddha was requested, he would unavoidably be shown as either a yoga practitioner or a teacher. He is depicted sitting cross-legged in *Padmasana* on a throne like a contemplative ascetic, his hands resting in his lap and his eyes focussing to the tip of his nose. He appears in the same sense as the teacher, though in a more active capacity. While his left hand is at rest, his right hand is elevated.

Between the decorative designs, where Buddha is depicted in a meditative position, the wheel and elephant are carved on two distinct pillars on its sides. On it is an inscription and an umbrella or an upside-down halo covers Buddha.

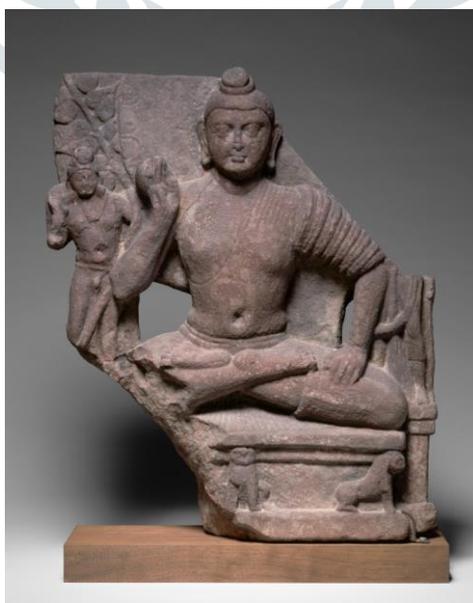


Fig. 1. **Seated Shakyamuni Buddha**, c. AD 120. Northern India, Uttar Pradesh, Mathura, Kushan Period. Red mottled sandstone; overall: 51.4 cm (20 1/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1970.63

Standing Buddha

The Standing Buddha has a symmetrical stance with well-separated feet, a right hand raised in the Abhaya mudra, and the other hand is holding the robe folds or clenched on the thigh. Later, the drapery is still held by the left hand, which is slightly raised. These features are depicted in reliefs at Pataliputra, which depict a Naga sitting next to a tree, and later in Yaksas, Nagas, and Goddesses in Pre-Kushana and Kushana sculptures. The left hand of Bacchanalian Yaksas and Nagas holds a flask, presumably Maitreya's Amrita flask.



Fig. 2. **Standing Buddha**, AD 150–200. Pakistan, Gandhara, Kushan Period. Schist; overall: 119.7 cm (47 1/8 in.); head: 1.5 x 3.2 cm (9/16 x 1 1/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Morris and Eleanor Everett in memory of Flora Morris Everett 1972.43

Mahapurush Lakssnas

The Buddha Figure is considered to have some Mahapurusha Lakssnas. Some of them are as Follows:

1. Urna
2. Elongated ear lobes
3. Certain marks in the palms and under the foot
4. Lines on the neck
5. Ushnisha of hair
6. Halo (Prabhavmandala)
7. Web like hands
8. Eyelids becoming prominent
9. Chakra in the center.

Boddhisatva

Bodhisattvas (Buddha-to-be) are depicted with open hair, a crown, and jewelry as if he were a prince, but with an ascetic expression on his face. The Bodhisattvas have developed in two directions since they began as Yaksha prototypes. The independent figures come first, followed by the triad of Buddha-associated figures. In early Buddhist art, yaksas—guardians, attendants, and worshippers—are depicted with a flower, cauri bearers, or folded hands. These types appear as the triad members. A Bodhi tree and a Yaksha holding rose lotuses, which later develops into Bodhisattva Padmapani, can be found on the outer face of the Sanchi north torana, which is located between the lowest and second architraves in the center.

Bodhisattva (Gandhara sculptures, 2-3 CAD, N.M.)

Sitting with the right leg folded on the other lap Buddha is shown wearing Kundals, Tiara, and Jewellery and adorned with a Halo. The face has an ascetic face with moustaches.

Fasting Siddhartha (Sakyamuni Buddha, Kushana Period, Schist, Lahore Museum)

Bodhisattva is shown in intense asceticism. He is shown with face and abdomen and every minute detail of the anatomy is visible. The presence of the beard suggests the deep amalgamation of the Buddha in his fasting and constant disregard for his body.

Representation from the Life of Buddha

The happenings in Buddha's life were a significant source of inspiration for both iconic and iconic schools. The five major events are depicted in many different ways. Some of them are explicated below:

1. The Birth

In the Dream of Queen Maya from Bharuhut (II Cen. B.C., Red sand stone, Calcutta Indian Museum) Maya is shown sleeping on her bed beautifully adorned with jewellery. Her attendants are sitting beside her. An elephant is shown flying above her who is the Buddha. She will conceive Buddha in her womb. The scene has multiple perspective. The elephant is also wearing jewellery on his head and limbs. The main purpose of the sculptor is to show or convey a religious message, not to add realism or aesthetic

quality to the composition.

Birth of Siddhartha (Mardan Pakistan, Kushana period, Schist, N.M. Karachi). In the rectangular composition, Queen Maya, is shown holding the branch of a tree with the child emerging from her right. Indra is shown in princely garb, receiving the child as it is born, while other attendants witness the scene. A secondary event, the taking of the seven steps by the new born child with halo, standing just next to in Indra's knees. There is realism in the composition and especially the drapery clearly shows the Hellenistic influence.

Buddha in preaching attitude (Satvahana, 1-2nd Cen. A.D., Amravati, Andhra Pradesh). Aniconically the Renunciation of Buddha is shown in the lower medallion where a riderless horse is carved, covered by an umbrella and surrounded by followers. On the upper medallion Buddha's paduka and above it the bodhi tree on both the sides are shown. In the central medallion Buddha is shown iconically, in Vaikhyaya mudra.

Conclusion

During the Mauryan era, sculptures of humans were not used in court art. But during the Shunga period, sculptures of people were included in reliefs at Bharuhut and Sanchi. However, Buddha is still shown in a symbolic form. This is because Buddha himself wanted people to avoid depicting his likeness. And also from the sculptors' perspective, Buddhists consider themselves to be above the common person, not belonging to this world. Despite this, Shunga art was popular among the wealthy, with deities like Yaksas, Nagas and Kinners appearing prominently.

The symbols used to represent the Buddha remained in use at Amravati and Mathura, for a while after he was introduced as an anthropomorphic image. However, in the years following the public's need to pursue devotional practice truthfully towards a higher cult, skilled sculptors at Sanchi and Bharuhut had the images of Buddha and tribal deities readily available. Buddha is shown as the icon, and the tribal deities are shown as worshipers or guardians of him. These can be explored in the images at Parkham and Patna, and the reliefs at Sanchi and Bharuhut.

The appearance of the Buddha may be partly explained by the conditions in the Gandhara region. A region, far away from the central India, where sculptors were not restricted by the strict Buddhist influence, and were instead influenced by Hellenistic art. This allowed for more freedom in creating icons, which may have contributed to the Buddha's spontaneous appearance.

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