

CHAPTER: I

INTRODUCTION

The present study of “Comparative study of Buddhist art and iconography of western India with special reference to Gujarat” is confined to the Buddhist art, of western India that is of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Buddhist art of India is referred to those sculptures, paintings, monuments and other pieces of art which were mainly used for the purpose of propagation of Buddhism. Western Indian art consists of a major portion of Buddhist culture and art what might be called as the “Buddhist element”.

Western India can be divided into two major political states – Gujarat and Maharashtra. The present state of Gujarat was formed on 1st of May 1960 on the basis of languages from the bilingual state of Bombay. Gujarat can be divided as two natural divisions –

- i) The plane of Gujarat from the south of the Aravalis up to Daman and
- ii) The Peninsula of Saurashtra.

The area of Gujarat is 1,84,035 sq. kilometres. Gujarat is irrigated by the rivers Narmada, Sabarmati, Mahi and Tapi and several small seasonal rivers.

Maharashtra, the another state of western India is neighbour state of Gujarat. The Sahyadri ranges divide the present state of Maharashtra into two distinct parts :

- (i) The coastal region which is known as Konkan and
- (ii) The Deccan plateau.

The Konkan region consists of a long coastal strip whose eastern boundary is marked by the ranges of Sahyadri. Deccan Plateau consists of the Western Ghats of Maharashtra and the Bhamragad-Chiroli-Gaikhuri ranges on the eastern border, Satpura Mountain Range shapes the northern boundary of the Deccan Plateau. Tapi, Krishna and Godavari are the major rivers of Maharashtra with their tributaries, Godavari and Krishna flow in west- to- east directions rising from the mountains of

Maharashtra. Most of early human settlements have been found along the banks of these rivers.

Research on Buddhism in Western India is not new, it goes back to 1822 CE when it was first noticed by Major James Tod on his visit to Girinar in Gujarat. To begin with the Buddhist remains the Rock -Inscription of JunagardhGirnar is without exception, the most interesting antiquity in the province. Further excavation at Sopara (Maharashtra) has been carried out in 1882 by BhagvanlalIndraji. The ruins of a Buddhist Stupa was found. Inside a brick built chamber of the stupa, a large stone coffer was excavated which contained eight bronze images of Maitreya Buddha which belong to the c. 8th-9th century CE. This coffer also enclosed relic caskets of copper, silver, stone, crystal and gold, along with numerous gold flowers and fragments of a begging bowl. A large number of *Stupas*, *viharas*, inscriptions, *chatyagrihas* and sculptures have been found in Gujarat. Excavations mainly at Devni-Mori and Vadnagar region revealed the presence of Buddhism in Gujarat. Hinayana and Mahayana both streams of Buddhism have flourished here and influenced the culture of Gujarat. Some literary sources and accounts of foreign pilgrims also throw light on contemporary religions specially Buddhism in western India.

The rock-cut caves around Bombay caught the imagination of early European travellers. They found these monuments fascinating and enigmatic. Some artists/painters made sketches and drawings, which became important not only as historical documents but also as a helpful source for the restoration and preservation of cave monuments in the 20th century. Among the early travellers who specifically mentioned these caves were Castro, Orington and Fryer.¹

H.D. Sankaliya carried out excavations in Maharashtra and threw light on the existence of human settlements and activities beginning with the late Stone Age, the Neolithic, chalcolithic, bronze and iron age. The Arabian Sea is very much responsible for the commercial development of the region because of its coastal land and the thriving ports like Sopara and Bharukachch of Gujarat. The inscription of Sopara referred to attract trade from the far western countries about 2nd century BC. Other inscriptions give us information about the growth and existence of villages, towns and cities in several parts of Maharashtra from about eighth century CE. At

Karle there is one reference to two regional designations such as Dakshinapath and Aparanta to modern Deccan and north Konkan². Nasik has been a prominent business center because it was situated on the route between central India and Western Indian coast. Western India had many trade centres such as Bharukachchha, Nasik, etc. therefore, Buddhism became popular in this region. Many Buddhist monasteries were excavated there by the rulers and with the donations of merchants. A.K. Majumdar (1972) notes that if there was a secular literature in ancient India, art and architecture were the handmaidens of religion. The kings were more intent on establishing permanent abodes for their deities than for themselves.

Thus, Indian art is in a true sense religious art. If we observe the art pieces, we find them inspired by any of the religions. Buddhism also influenced the art of India according to the changing needs of religions. The Buddhist community of Hinayana phase did not need temples or monasteries, since they did not worship images and it was only during rainy season that these mendicant friars sought temporary shelter. The earliest Buddhist monuments were erected by Ashoka, the great ruler of the Mauryan dynasty. The huge columns which were erected in many places through his great empire. Some of them feature monumental figures of animals –bulls, lions, elephant, horses and stylized lotus ornaments as well as a huge ‘a wheel of the Doctrine’ the wheel and which symbolizes the preaching of the truth. It was also symbolic of the sun, the cycle of birth and rebirth, and of sovereignty.

Buddhism, had been an important religious element for affecting Western Indian art and architecture. It has had a History of approximately 1000 years in Western India. Inscriptional references from Bharhut, Bedsa and Kanheri give information about the donors from Nasik. Nearly 51 legible inscriptions and 26 epigraphs are found at Kanheri, which include the inscriptions in Brahmi, Devanagari and 3 Pahlavi epigraphs found in Cave 90. One of the significant inscriptions mentions about the marriage of Satavahana ruler Vashishtiputra Satakarni with the daughter of Rudradaman I. Cave number 34 has unfinished paintings of Buddha on the ceiling of the cave.

Various dimensions of the studies of Buddhist cave monuments have been presented right from 18th century onwards. The beginning was made in the form of travel accounts, followed by reports and surveys of the caves during colonial rule. Gradually more systematic studies of cave monuments appeared from the late 19th century

onwards. Fergusson, while dealing with the Buddhist rock cut caves of western India, divided them into two groups according to the current understanding, viz., Hinayana and Mahayana. He accepted the caves with the image/images of Buddha as the main object of worship as Mahayana caves. Since then a lot of research has been done in this field by many scholars. S.Nagaraju, VidyaDahejia, S.V. Jadhav, M.G.Dixit, A.S. Gadre, H.D. Sankalia, U.P.Shah etc. are those scholars whose work is a guide for the student of India art.

The first voluminous and pioneering work on the rock-cut caves of India appeared in 1880, co-authored by James Fergusson and Jas Burgess.³For the first time, western Indian caves were described in terms of the overall development of the cave architecture in India. Fergusson described the caves of eastern India including Bihar and Orissa. A lot of significance is attached to this book as for the first time an extensive documentation was done. The work is *magnum opus* on the rock-cut cave temples of India. This was a very scientific survey not only giving architectural details and their religious significance but also set forth accurate chronological framework for these caves which have been grouped together in different sections from a geographical locational point of view. The credit should be given to these two scholars for their minute observations regarding architectural details, their forms and subsequent development sometimes covering a span of thousand years. This distinction of a very compact and accurate chronology was not a coincidence.

Fergusson in his introduction of the Cave Temples of India gives a clear idea of his methodology which took into consideration while studying this topic the basic factors like; the ethnography, the history, the religions, the chronology and the architecture of India.

The major concentration of the scholars have been on the caves of Ajanta, Ellora, Karla and other such caves because these caves have sculptural and mural embellishments. But the caves of no significance of the artistic point of view are also important part of the evolution of rock-cut architecture of Western India and need attention for their study. The minor cave temples of Gujarat and Maharashtra belonging to Hinayana phase of Buddhism also have been studied here. Suresh Vasant Jadhav's unpublished thesis is a good documentation of Junnar caves. He discovered a few settlements near the cave groups of Junnar and also the important cave group of

Ganesh Pahar, which is known as an isolated cave group. He has described Junnar caves in detail and analysed the rock-cut excavation method in order to establish a chronological sequence of Junnar cave monuments.

In this research, western Indian Buddhist art has been defined on the basis of their salient features. The development of rock-cut cave architecture and the provenance, iconometry of Buddhist images in relation to the Buddhist art of Western India has been identified. I have made an attempt to recognize the similarities / differences between Gujarat and western Indian Buddhist art and iconography, and accordingly identified particular Buddhist art traits in Gujarat. Comparative study of the results with major studied sites of Western India to appreciate the level of standardization on Buddhist art traditions has been done. This research is a model for understanding specialization on Buddhist art and iconography especially in Gujarat.

The fire altars of the Vedic period, with their astronomical and mathematical significance play an important role in the evolution of the later temples. It was followed by a period in the history of Indian art that is important for rock-cut caves and temple architecture. The Buddhists initiated the rock-cut caves, Hindus and Jains started to imitate them at Badami, Aihole, Ellora, Salsette, Elephanta, Aurangabad and Mahabalipuram. The rock-cut art has continuously evolved, from the first rock cut caves, to suit different purposes- social and religious contexts- regional differences. Fairs, festivals and local deities play a vital role in the development of these arts forms. The discussion in the present chapter is limited to various aspects of studying the rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments, brick monasteries and art and iconography.

The tradition of rock-cut architecture in India developed during the Mauryan period. The rock-cut art spread all over India in succeeding centuries. We can observe that it spread mainly in three directions; at first towards east, covering the area of modern Bihar and Orissa, secondly towards southern part of India and thirdly towards western region throughout Deccan and Saurashtra.⁶

The Buddhist caves of western India have always impressed not only scholars but also the general public because of their monumentality and impressive visual language. It is interesting to note that the evolution of rock-cut cave art in Western India as the

early Hinayana caves were small in dimension, having no pillars to support the ceilings. I would like to emphasize that late Hinayana caves of western India, though not embroidered with the sculptural and architectural beauty, some of them have inscriptions which are valuable for the epigraphic records to help in dating them. These late Hinayana caves are located at Kanheri, Junnar, Karad, Kuda, Mahad, Shelarwadi and Nasik in Maharashtra and Jhinjhurijhar near Siddhasar in Saurashtra and KadiyaDungar in Rajpipala District.

In Gujarat many caves belong to late Hinayana period. Kadeshvaricaves at Bhuj, Jhinjhurijhar, KadiaDungar, Ranapur caves (converted into Hindu Temples), Sana, BawaPyaraMatha, Khaprakodia, Dhank and Talaja caves are considered as late Hinayana caves according to their layout plan and simplicity in ornamentation. This group of 66 caves includes an assembly hall and is located southwest of the town of Karad (Maharashtra), near the Koyan River. They date from the first century BC, occupied perhaps through the first century CE and were not occupied in the later Mahayana revival. The caves are small so the number of monks was probably not more than 50. Many caves have also been converted into shrines for the Linga, Ganapati, Bhavanimata, Hinglajmata, Vitthal-Rukmai, Taranmata and Dharanmata, even mazars for Mohammadans.

It seems that caves had been preferred as the shelter during the rainy season by the Buddhist community of monks in western India. It was not because of that there were *noviharas* built like the one in Shravasti, the Jetavana Vihara patronized by Anathapindaka. Infact there is a reference to a *vihara* built in the neighbourhood of Junnanagara, the ancient Junnar. There were reported profuse remains which were built in brick and are identified as the remains of a monastery near the stupa discovered at Pauni (Dist. Bhandara) in Maharashtra, Devnimori and Vadnagar (Dist. Mehsana) in Gujarat. It is also possible that these temporary shelters were made in such a permanent form because of the continued merit that they assured to have accrued for the patron. It is a common Indian belief that as long as the pious deed survives the creator enjoys happiness till that time in the heaven. Normally such rock-cut caves appeared as individual sporadic constructions as seen from the sites like Haal Budruk, near Khopoli or the Jivdani Caves near Virar that have been presently converted into a Hindu temple.

There were already 18 *nikayas* or schools of Buddhism by the time of Ashoka (c 269-234 BC) And therefore, though in principle, such temporary shelters were meant for all the Bhikshus coming from the four quarters, there is a possibility that a given cluster of caves were usually occupied by the monks of the same *nikaya*. In this way we can understand how in big cave like Karad, Junnar, Nashik, and Ajanta there are groups which seem to have been separated from each other in some way. This observation however is to be understood in the light of observations of It-Tsing and Hieun-Tsiang that monks of all the different Nikayas lived peacefully together.

Dr.Nagaraju who has made a detailed study of the residential Buddhist rock- cut caves has classified them as per the layout of the individual caves or their clusters. It seems during the course of time these temporary shelters came to be occupied throughout the year. So the peripatetic (Parivrajaka) monks started living permanently in *pakka* monastic complexes. As noticed at sites like Nalanda, Vikramashila, Nagarjunakonda, and Takshashila. It was surmised that this transition from temporary to permanent residences of the Buddhist *Viharas* happened sometime in 1st- 2nd Centuries CE. Recent researches at Kanheri have shown that whereas the early settlements were located near the natural water bodies like streams and ponds those located on the higher slopes of the hills were deliberately provided with cisterns of water meant for drinking and bathing (Panapodhis and Nhanapodhis). It is also not a coincidence that around this time many cave sites turned into centres of learning, a phenomenon suggestive of continued residence of learned monks at one place. The antiquity however of this process of a site turning into a learning centre has a higher antiquity, which is attested by the group of stupas dedicated to *acharyas* or teachers at Bhaja. Similarly now attempts are being made to trace the affiliation of residential cells or their clusters to different *Nikayas* on the basis of distinct architectural features.

Broadly, the Buddhist caves in western India are divided into two categories based on the two major religious sects - *Hinayana* and *Mahayana*. The *Hinayana* caves are identified on the basis of absence of the Buddha image whereas the *Mahayana* caves are identified due to the presence of the Buddha image. In the present analysis, review of studies on the *Hinayana* and the *Mahayana* caves has been dealt with separately. As far as the *Mahayana* caves are concerned, they are discussed in the context of Ajanta, Ellora, Karla and Khambalida (Gujarat) caves.

In the late phase of so called Hinayana rock- cut residential caves, certain new characteristics are seemed to be introduced. Initially it is a stupa in the corner of a residential complex i.e. in Pale Caves, Manmodi Cave at Junnar, Talaja caves in Bhavnagar, and Khambalida caves, in a veranda common to residential cells (Kondhane) a niche in individual cells or in the back wall of a *vihara* with 20 cells (Cave no. 3 & 10 at Nashik) of Buddhist residential complex.

Slowly a stupa or an image is introduced as an object of worship in a residential cell or a complex (caves at Khed, Kuda and Pale). This way the residential cave becomes a *chaityagriha* also. A full expression of which is seen at Kanheri, Ajanta and Nashik. This can be interpreted to be the transition from Hinayana to Mahayana Buddhism. In this process, some of the *chaityagrihas* which had the traditional plan of a narrow veranda in front and two side entrances are seem to be devoid of the wagon vaulted roof replaced by a flat roof commonly observed in the individual residential cells or complexes thereof.

Fergusson while separating the Mahayana phase of Buddhist art and architecture had used the presence of the Buddha image as an object of worship, instead of Stupa as the main criterion of this phase. In Hinayana phase many of the early residential cave complexes were without a prayer hall (*chaityagriha*). Whereas Mahayana *vihara* was a combination of shrine and residence. The introduction of the prayer hall and the subsequent development of its members, the replacement of certain wooden members by rock- cut stone members as the criteria of development in Buddhist architecture. In a way, the *chaityagrihas* in the Hinayana Buddhist architecture provided a good tool of study of art historian.

As mentioned just earlier in the Mahayana phase the residential *viharas* themselves were provided with image shrines at the back. This does not mean that the traditional prayer halls completely vanished in the Mahayana phase. There are some very good examples of the developed chaitya halls in some of the prominent Mahayana cave complexes like Ajanta, Kanheri, and Ellora. Here we won't make only a simple observation that the developed traditional prayer hall now is conceived as a palace. The facades themselves of such Mahayana prayer halls now very clearly emphasize that these constructions are meant to be palaces of the emperor Buddha.

In early Hinayana phase, image worship of Buddha was not prevailing. But during the 2nd to 1st century BC, in late Hinayana phase sculptures became more explicit, in the form of votive tablets or friezes, usually in relation to the decoration of stupas representing episodes of the Buddha's life and teachings. The Buddha was never represented in anthropomorphic form, but only through Buddhist symbolism. Artists developed sophisticated aniconic symbols to avoid Buddha's human form even in narrative scenes where other human figures would appear. This tendency remained as late as the 2nd century CE in the southern parts of India, in the art of the Amaravati School i.e. the depiction of the scene of Mara's assault on the Buddha. In this connection, the earliest works of Buddhist art in India date back to the 1st century BC. The Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya.

In the Mahayana phase, the worship of the anthropomorphic form of Buddha started from 1st century BC in the northern India. This iconic art was characterized from the start by a realistic idealism, combining realistic human features, proportions, attitudes and attributes, together with a sense of perfection and serenity reaching to the divine. This expression of the Buddha as both man and God became the iconographic canon for subsequent Buddhist art. The origin of the Buddha image was subject well contested debate among the scholars of last century as no archaeological evidence has been found to support the theory of Buddhist legends that refer to the sandalwood image of Buddha. The image worship can be better understood from the legend of Upagupta, a famous monk of the Mauryan times. In other words, Mahayanists accepted fervent devotion i.e., *bhakti* as a tool for emancipation.

It is true that worship of Buddha in human form with the images of the bodhisattvas and the Taras which are embodiments of their spiritual energy is an important characteristics of Buddhism. The worship of Buddha and other deities of Buddhism is recommended by Asanga in his *Mahayanasutralankara*. Recent researches in the Himalayan areas have revealed that the practice of worshipping the Buddha in a human form first of all manifested itself among the Sarvastivadin monks in the Trans-Himalayan areas. Similarly earliest images of Shakyamuni Siddhartha in a form of a standing Bodhisattva under a royal parasol were caused to be carved under the patronage of Sarvastivadin monks especially bhikshu Bala. Such images found at Mathura, Sarnath and Prayag, specifically mention that these are of the bodhisattva

Shakyamuni. This is in tune with the earlier belief that the Buddha after he had attained nirvana reached a stage indescribable in words. And as such he could not be depicted in an iconic form. This explains the convention of depicting Buddha through symbols like the tree of enlightenment, the wheel of law, the stupa that carried his mortal remains, his footprints and more abstract symbol like the three jewels '(Triratna)'. If the early Buddha images has found in Mathura and in the Gandhara region depict him as a monk whose proto types were the image of Apollo, a Greek god and a monk teacher, the images of Bodhisattvas depicted them as royal princes with ornaments and wearing a crown. And the Taras who were their counterparts and *Prajnyaparamita* who was the very embodiment of the spiritual wisdom were depicted as Princess.

Thus, the Buddhist art of western India is a perfect representative of both the two phases of Buddhism i.e., the Hinayana phase and Mahayana phase. The reflection of Mathura and Gandhar schools of art can be seen in the sculptures of the Buddhist caves of Maharashtra and Gujarat. But it seems that the Vajrayana (Tantricism) was also prevailing in Gujarat as some fine sculptures of Avalokiteshvara and other Buddhist deities such as Ekjata, Mahamayuri with Tara though these were not so popular have been found. These sculptures belong to 9th to 11th century CE.

References

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