



Journal of History, Art and Archaeology

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2022, pp. 99-101
© ARF India. All Right Reserved

URL: www.arfjournals.com
<https://doi.org/10.47509/JHAA.2022.v02i01.08>

A NEW INTERPRETATION OF A BUDDHIST IMAGE FROM AMARKUNDU, MURSHIDABAD

SOMREETA MAJUMDAR

51/1, Satkari Chatterjee Lane, Howrah 711101, West Bengal, India.
E-mail: somreetamajumdar186@gmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to identify a sculptural specimen of Khasarpana Avalokitesvara which has been incorrectly identified as Buddha by Sudhir Ranjan Das and the specimen is popularly known as Raghunath or Vishnu. While assigning a date to this specimen on stylistic ground, this Khasarpana Avalokitesvara appears to be similar with the Mahakali specimen of Khasarpana Avalokitesvara kept in the National Museum of Bangladesh in Dhaka. Claudine Bautze Picron compared the stylistic features of various images and enabled grouping them within a specific chronological bracket through which the direction of the movement of stone carvers from Bihar to Bengal can be assumed between ninth to twelfth century CE. The Khasarpana Avalokitesvara of Amarkundu helps us bridge the temporal and spatial gap of transmission of stylistic features and understand their variations.

Keywords: Khasarpana Avalokitesvara, Iconography, Ritual context, Appropriation, Regional variations

Received : 14 May 2022

Revised : 30 May 2022

Accepted : 19 June 2022

Published : 25 June 2022

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Majumdar, S. (2022). A New Interpretation of a Buddhist Image from Amarkundu, Murshidabad. *Journal of History, Art and Archaeology*, 2: 1, pp. 99-101. <https://doi.org/10.47509/JHAA.2022.v02i01.08>

At Amarkundu (24°08'08"N; 88°08'28"E) under Navagram Police Station of Murshidabad district in West Bengal, two specimens of Buddhist sculptures were found with sculptural specimens of Vishnu and Surya in the temple locally known as Gangadityer Mandir. Fragmented architectural specimens and potteries were found from mud walls of huts, exposed surface section of the pond.

S. R. Das discovered the images and identified it as a Buddhist sculpture (Das: 1971: 21). The specimen is locally worshipped as Raghunatha or Vishnu. The image of Avalokitesvara has been appropriated to the ritual context of Hinduism in the sanctum sanctorum of Gangadityer Mandir. The image identified as Khasarpana Avalokitesvara measures 57cm x 29cm x 12 cm

(Figure 8.1). It is worshipped as Raghunatha or Visnu along with the other sculptures of Visnu, Surya, Ganesa, and a small seated Buddha (11.5cm x 9cm x 3 cm). The Avalokitesvara is seated in *ardhaparyankasana* pose on the full bloomed double petalled lotus upon a *triratha* pedestal. Five Dhyani Buddhas - Aksobhya, Vairochana, Amitabha, Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi are carved at the apex of the conical stele. The Avalokitesvara is flanked by Bhṛkūti, Ekajata on the left and Tara and Sudhanakumara on the right. Instead of Hayagriva there is Ekajata beside Bhṛkūti. Suchimukha on the pedestal appears larger than the human devotees. The flying canopy of the crown of Avalokitesvara indicates influence of the Bodhgaya scheme. The upper part of the drapery is indicated by incised lines. There is a seated Buddha in the crown. The right hand of the Avalokitesvara is in *Varada mudra* while the left hand holds the lotus stalk. The *urna* is in the middle of the wavy eyebrows which meet on the top of the nose. The deity's eyes are downcast in compassion and the oval face is lit up with an evanescent smile. The sculpture receives the treatment of solemnity from inside out. This specimen is comparable with the Mahakali specimen of Bangladesh (Saraswati: 2003:29). The specimen is dated to mid eleventh century CE.

The Jamui specimen of Avalokitesvara found near Lakhi Sarai, Bihar shows affinity with the sculptural features of the images found in the Bengal region (Bautze-Picron 1991-92 : 249). The shared compositional characteristics of the iconography can be found in Jamui and Vikrampur images. Claudine Bautze-Picron dated the Vikrampur specimen of Avalokitesvara earlier than the Jamui specimen not only because of stylistic similarities in the structure and compositional motifs in the stele but also for iconographic reason (Bautze-Picron: 1991- 92: 250). In the Jamui specimen, Hayagriva and Sudhanakumara are found in front of Bhṛkūti and the Tara, heralding the phasing out of the female attendant deities. The Vikrampur specimen has

the motif of three musicians and dancers on the central part of the pedestal which is found in the images of the later period in Bengal and Bihar (Bautze-Picron: 1991 - 92: 250).

The Mahakali specimen of the Avalokitesvara in *ardhaparyankasana* is found seated on the Mount Potalaka. Claudine Bautze-Picron dated the Mahakali specimen earlier than the Jamui image of Avalokitesvara which can be dated back to the end of the 11th century - 12th century CE. The depiction of the landscape of Mount Potalaka on which the deity is seated appears to be a favourite in eastern India (Bautze-Picron: 2016: 88-89).

The Khasarpana Avalokitesvara of Amarkundu, Murshidabad shares stylistic similarities and iconographic variation with the



Figure 8.1: Khasarpana Avalokitesvara of Amarkundu, Murshidabad

Jamui and Mahakali images discussed above. We have considered the find spots of the images which are subject to the movement or intervention of the human agencies. The comparison of the Jamui image near Lakhisarai, Bihar, Amarkundu, West Bengal and Mahakali, Bangladesh specimens of the Avalokitesvara images suggests that they are temporally and stylistically close to each other but include regional variations in iconographic features. The dynastic appellation “Pala-Sena” to the atelier(s) of the production of Buddhist art of eastern India seems to be inadequate and inconclusive to understand the regional variation of iconography and style in undivided Bengal and Bihar. Moreover, the broad chronological bracket seems to be insufficient to understand sub-regional variations in a huge spatial zone of entire eastern India. More extensive work is desideratum to understand the route of movement of not only the images but also raw materials and the group of artists or guilds with whom the style spread from eighth – ninth century to eleventh –

twelfth century to meet the local demand of the devotees of eastern India.

Bibliography

- Bautze-Picron, Claudine. (1991-92). *Lakhi Sarai, An Indian Site of Late Buddhist Iconography and Its Position within the Asian Buddhist World, Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 2: 239-84.
- Bautze-Picron, Claudine. (2016). Moving Images between Bihar and Bengal in the ninth and tenth centuries, *Pratnatattva*, Vol. 22: 85-96.
- Das, Sudhir Ranjan. (1971). *Archaeological Discoveries from Murshidabad District (West Bengal), The Asiatic Society Monograph Series* Vol. XIX, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.
- Huntington, S. L. (1984). *The Pala - Sena Schools of Sculpture*. Leiden: Brill.
- Majumdar, Somreeta. (2019). Locating the Monastery in Landscape Context: A Preliminary Study of Raktamrittika Mahavihara of Karnasuvarna, *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology*, Vol. 7: 622-41.
- Saraswati, S. K. (2003). (reprinted). *Tantrayana Art an Album*. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, Kolkata.