

Sculptural art of Bihar

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Introducton

Stone sculptures occupy an important place in the history of plastic arts of India. Bihar is one of the most important Indian states, which has yielded various types of Stone Sculptures beginning at least as far back as 3rd Century B.C down to end of the Pâla period around 11th – 12th century A.D. and the study of these Stone sculptures is essential to complete the history of plastic art in India. In fact Bihar's role in making Stone art is very important.

It may be stated here that from various places of Bihar, we have quite a good number of fine specimens of the works of art in stone which belong to the Maurya, Çunga, Kushana, Gupta and Pâla periods and all of them within the category of fine specimens are worth to be taken note of. But in the present topic, however, due to the paucity of time and space, the only such work of art in stone of the Maurya, Çunga, Kushana, Gupta and Pâla periods are discussed here which are top ranking and outstanding works of art, i.e. art par excellence and which depict the high water mark of the artistic skill and excellence in stone of our forefather's belongings to the Maurya, Çunga, Gupta and Pâla periods.

Now before we go to examine such works of art in stone, it is essential that we should first know the salient features of the work of art in stone of the Maurya, Çunga, Gupta and Pâla periods and then cast a glance at the top ranking works of art of the periods under review.

Mauryan Art:-

With the rise of the Mauryan empire (321 BC-185 BC), Patna, then called Pâtaliputra became the seat of power and the nerve center of the Indian subcontinent. From Pâtaliputra, the famed emperor Chandragupta ruled a vast empire, stretching from the Bay of Bengal to Afghanistan. Chandragupta established a strong centralized state with a complex administration under the tutelage of Kautilya.

Early Mauryan Pâtaliputra¹ was mostly built with wooden structures. The wooden buildings and palaces rose to several stories and were surrounded by parks and ponds. Another distinctive feature of the city was the drainage system. Water course from every street drained into a moat which functioned both as defense as well as sewage disposal. According to Megasthenes, Pâtaliputra of the period of Chandragupta, was "surrounded by a wooden wall pierced by 64 gates and 570 towers— (and) rivaled the splendors of contemporaneous Persian sites such as Susa and Ecbatana".

Chandragupta's son Bindusara deepened the empire towards central and southern India. Patna under the rule of Açoka, the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, emerged as an effective capital of the Indian subcontinent.

Emperor Açoka transformed the wooden capital into a stone construction around 273 BC. Chinese scholar Fa-Hein, who visited India sometime around A.D. 399-414, has given a vivid description of the stone structures in his travelogue.

The rise of Maurya's marks a new epoch not only in Indian political history, but also in the field of art history. Pâtaliputra was the centre of all these activities. The artist of Pâtaliputra used clay in abundance and we get a large number of terracotta of Mauryan age from excavation of various sites of Pâtaliputra. According to Saraswati, Mauryan terracotta's are characterized by remarkable individual traits in respect of physiognomy as well as expression. He says that their ascription to the Mauryan age may be doubtful, but their very individuality marks them as forming a distinct class by themselves, as significant as the sculptural art in this epoch.

Coming first to the art in stone of the Mauryan period, it may be pointed out at the outset that the glaring feature of the art in stone of Mauryan Period is the shining lustrous mirror like polish which we notice on the surface of the stone from which the artist took great pains to produce fine works of art. It is a stone sculpture of a female; the artist with his great faulty and acumen in his artistic skill has molded the female sculpture of stone with full grace and charm, life and vigour – all which is characteristic of a living human being. The shining lustrous polish produced by the artist over the surface of the stone sculpture, no doubt, adds further pomp and grandeur to the image.

Although the Mauryan Sculpture in general presents a voluminous look with a broader face and a tall body, but at the same time in a female sculpture, it maintains the life like appearance with beauty, grace and charm gushing forth from within the sculpture which is adorned with elaborate ornaments all over the body of the female sculpture. The elaborate ornaments provided by the artist all over the body of the female sculpture to beautify her physical charm in an attractive manner are yet another striking feature of art in stone of the Mauryan period. At this stage it may be referred further that although the elaborate display of ornaments is there on her body, but this depiction does not restrict the natural flow of rhythm of internal movements of her body. Lastly, it is also observed in a Mauryan image that the image gives a frontal look and not the sideways.

And where the sculpture² is that of an animal such as the Lauriya Nandangarh lion pillar or Rampurvâ bull, the anatomical features of the lion or the bull is very prominent, efficient and it was meticulously chiseled out by the artist, which, gives a magnificent look of the lion or the bull and both the animals are represented in their robust and vigorous physique so much so that it appears to be a living creature. All these effects are what the artist had intended to bring forth from his skilled hand and the artist has achieved full success in his attempted to produce such effects.

¹ Altekar, A.S. and Mishra V.K., *Report on Kumrahâr Excavations*, Patna 1959.

² Strong, J.S., *The Legends of King Açoka*, Delhi, 1948.

³ Patna Museum, Arch. N. 134.

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Now with regard to other minute details of an artistic nature in the image of the Mauryan period, it may be gleaned from reviewing closely the image of the Mauryan period itself. In the above background, let us now cast a glance at the “Yakshî”³ image commonly known as “Chauri-bearer Yakshî” – image of the Mauryan period discovered from Didârganj in Patna City, and then evaluate and assess the artistic achievements of the artist of the Mauryan period.

So at the outset, it may be stated that among the stone sculptures of the Mauryan period, special reference may be made to the outstanding and the top ranking famous “Chauri-bearer Yakshî” from Didârganj in Patna City which definitely needs special attention and as such it is summarized and discussed here in details as follow:-

Among the stone sculpture of the outstanding nature of Mauryan period, the famous “Yakshî” from Didârganj in Patna City occupies the first place. It is a life size statue and is chiseled out of splendid monolith Chunar sand stone. It bears very a remarkable mirror like lustrous polish. It was discovered on the 19th October, 1917 on the banks of the holy Ganga near Didârganj in Patna City, about 7 miles or 10 kilometers (approx) east from the present Patna Township.

This statue is one of the finest masterpieces of the Indian art of the Mauryan period so far known to us. It is about 5’ and 3” in height and is standing on a pedestal on a pedestal of 1’ and 3” square and generally appears to lean slightly forward. The figure as a whole is very charming, delightful, enchanting and bewitching. The anatomical treatment of her body is superb. The proportion between the neck and the face, the bust and the hip, the thigh and the leg has a high standard of accuracy and fitness which greatly enhances the physical charm of her body. Her physical form is indeed eye catching. Her face is broader but is oval in shape and her eyes, nose, chin and the depression around her lips are the natural representations of female beauty, she has well combed hair which is tied together in the shape of the bunch at the back of her head. The bunch of her *saree* (lower garment) is tied, suspended with five strands of beaded girdle round her lions, the chains of which are kept widely apart with one another on the sides and are clasped together in front by two bell shaped buckles. Her forehead portion is decorated with a beaded ornament commonly known as “Mangatîkâ” hanging in the centre of her forehead. Three cup shaped ornaments fitted together are affixed to beautify her ears. The neck portion is decorated with a beautiful torque i.e. necklace – one row of which is closely fitted to the neck and the other double rows are hanging low over the naval proportion passing through the space between the two deep seated blossoming breasts which exemplify the beauty of the figure all the more.

Her fully developed breasts and the torque falling in between, her slender and thin waist and inclined posture with her dimple contours prominently shown at her back and the wavy lines near her abdomen, all these exemplify her beauty all the more which pleases the eyes and quickens the sense. Her uncovered vigorous breasts and full grown broad hips definitely produce a vivid picture of her sound and robust health and which makes a sensuous appeal while depicting the high level of feminine beauty.

Her right forearm decorated with close fitted bangles is raised upwards and is shown holding a “fly whisk” i.e. a *Chauri* in her hand and as such she is also commonly known as a “*chauri bearer*”. Her left hand is broken. Her ankle portion is decorated with heavy ankle

ornaments-commonly known as in Hindi as “pâzeb”. At the end it may be seated that this monolith and stone statue of the “Yakshî” figure also commonly known as the “Chauri-bearer” from Didârganj in Patna City is a fine specimen or rather is a masterpiece of the superb plastic art having a lustrous mirror like superb shining polish of the Mauryan period i.e. 3rd century B.C. The figure as a whole is quite majestic and imposing, magnificent and bewitching and is definitely an outstanding and rare piece of art in stone of the Mauryan period and as such it is a pride to have such a pieces of artistic imagery.

Sunga Art:-

The successors of Aœoka were weak, licentious and lacked the qualities to rule over a large empire. The weakness in the administration led to discontentment among the public. The empire was passing through such political unrest, Pucyamitra Œunga, the General of the Army, killed B[ihadartha, the last of the imperial Mauryas. With the fall of the imperial Maurya, the political unity of India collapsed. In south, the Ândhras or Sâtavâhanas established a powerful sovereign empire; KaliGga asserted its independence under the Chetas; the Gandhâra and the local princes of the North-West declared themselves independent and in Magadha, the Sungas supplanted the Mauryas. Beside the internal disintegration, India was threatened by foreign invaders. The king of the Sunga family ruled for hundred and twelve years. Their dominion extended in the south as far as the Narmadâ and included the Cities of Pâtaliputra and Ayodhyâ in the North and Vidishâ in Eastern Mâlwa. The Ūnga Empire was, thus, much smaller than that of Aœoka, but in the field of art, it crossed its political boundaries. Pucyamitra was succeeded by Agnimitra, Vasumitra, Bhâgabhadra and others. The last king of this line was Devabhûti. The Sunga were followers of BrâhmaGism⁴. This had led some scholars to think that the dismemberment of the Maurya Empire was brought about by a reaction promoted by the BrâhmaGas and the assassination of the last Mauryan King by Pucyamitra was, but the successful culmination of a revolution hatched and engineered by the BrâhmaGas. Some scholars have pointed Pucyamitra as an orthodox Hindu and a cruel persecutor of Buddhists responsible for reducing Sanghârâmas and Vihâras to dust. There is nothing to show that royal tyranny and official oppression were directed against the BrâhmaGas, there is evidence to indicate that the people had hardly any love for the Maurya dynasty and its administration.

Pucyamitra might not have been very friendly towards Buddhism, but, the charge that he brought about the destruction and insult to that creed is not substantiated. During his own lifetime, many Buddhist monuments were created and renovated at Bhârhut⁵, Bodhgaya⁶ and Sanchi⁷. They ruled for a considerable period with strength and ability. They repulsed many foreign attacks, maintained their territories intact and preserved harmony and order in the kingdom. This was enough for art to flourish. The art of Bhârhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya is the living testimony of

⁴ Ray, N.R., *Maurya and Œunga Art*, p. 66.

⁵ Sahay, S.N., *The Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol I, Part II, p. 64.

⁶ Patna Museum, Arch. No. 9586.

⁷ Marshal, J., *A Guide to Sanchi*, 1955, p. 83.

⁸ Patna Museum, Arch. No. 11309.

the advancement in the field of art, social prosperity and religious activities.

Now I pass on enumerate the characteristic features of the art in stone of the Sunga Period. The notable feature of the art of the Sunga Period is the absence of the shining lustrous mirror like polish on the surface of the stone which we notice on the stone sculptures of the Mauryan Period. Besides this, a Āunga image gives a side look also which we call a profile representation which is not present in a Mauryan image. For assessing the artistic display in the stone image of Sunga period, we may refer to the stone image of “Ālabhanjikā”⁸ discovered from a park at Rājendra Nagar in Patna Town. We may also refer to the image of a “Yakshī” figure discovered from Bodh-Gaya where we see the voluminous look of the image, but it does not lose the grace and charm and liveliness which is expected of a female and this is present in the image of Sunga period.

Now we may examine the aforesaid stone figure of “Ālabhanjikā” from a closer view. This figure, made of monolith sandstone, is depicted on both sides and presents somewhat standing view of her face. She is depicted in her full youthful posture in quite a graceful manner. On the side, “Ālabhanjikā” holds the branch of the Āla tree with her right hand and the left hand hangs low near her abdomen and is entwined with the branch of a tree, and on the other side this depiction is just on the reverse order with all its perfection i.e. to say that she holds the branch of a Āla tree with her left hand and the right hand is hanging low in a graceful way entwined with the branch of the Āla tree. The feminine beauty in this image is very charmingly and gracefully depicted which is quite attractive and captivating and is no less attractive in making a sensuous appeal than the “Dīdārganj Yakshī” image of the Mauryan period. The “Ālabhanjikā” figure as a whole is a fine specimen of the works of art in stone of the Sunga period and as such; it also deserves our special attention, no doubt.

Kusana Art

Then comes the Kusana age. Though there is no evidence to suggest that Kusanas ruled Bihar, artistic activity continued during this period. However, we have very few sculptures of this period. In the Kushana period, the *panchayatana* form of worship was developed, which, as the name suggests, included the worship of five divinities – Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Durga and Ganesha. The religious background had its due effect on the art of the period and consequently images of Brahmanical divinities, not only of five deities mentioned above, but also of a few others, came to be prepared by the artists. It was mainly due to this reason that images of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses were prepared not only in the art centre of Mathura, but also as far flung places in Bihar.

The most interesting of the Kusana sculptures depicting Ekanamsa⁹ trio is preserved in the Patna Museum, Patna. Here all the three deities, Vasudeva, Balram & Ekanamsa are depicted separately. These sculptures were discovered at Devanagarh in Nawada District of Bihar. These sculptures are carved in buff sand stone and thereby indicate that these have originated only in Bihar and are not imported from Mathura or any other place outside Bihar. The sculptures depicting Balram are about 150 cm in height. His right hand is in *abhaya-mudrā* while the left hand placed near his waist carries a simhalangala (plough with lion faced share). Traces of a canopy of seven-hooded snake in the back of his head is also noticed. The sculpture, depicting

goddess Ekanamsa is about 127 cm high. Her right hand is in *abhaya-mudrā* and the left hand is resting on her waist holding an indistinct object. The third sculpture depicting Vasudeva Krishna is about 140 cm high. He is shown her four handed. His two back raised hands carry square gadā and chakra respectively, and the front right hands are in *abhayamudra* and the front left hand resting on his waist carries a sankha. All these three figures are massive in appearance. However, these figures are in somewhat worn out condition.

These sculptures have their own individuality and represent the Kusana art of Bihar. They are massive in appearance, but static in representation. However, these are all well ornamented. The turban and the style of wearing the under-garments are typically Kushana. Such features are hallmarks which are seen in the most of the figurines found on the railings of the Kushana period in Mathura. The oval face with fleshy cheek is another characteristic feature of the Kushana sculptures, which can vividly be seen in the image of Balarama referred to above. Another characteristic feature which is found in the majority of the Kusana sculpture is that the figures are carved out in bold relief and the stale remains blank. These features have prominently displayed in the Devangarh figures.

It would also be worthwhile instituting a comparison between the images under study and the other known images of Ekanamsa belong to the Kusana period have been recently noticed by N. P. Joshi. They are housed in the in the Mathura museum¹⁰. R. C. Agrawala¹¹ has also publishes a relief of Kushana period from Mathura now in Karachi museum. All these sculptures, the three divinities, constituting the triad, are represented as one composite unit, carved in a single piece of stone. But the Devangarh Ekanamsa trio, though worshipped together is separately sculptures and as such they had their independent identities. All these images are massive in build. Among other Kusana images recovered so far from Bihar none of them are as gigantic as the Devangarh figures.

Gupta Art

Under Chandragupta I (320-335), the empire was revived in the north. Like Chandragupta Maurya, he first conquered Magadha, set up his capital, where the Mauryan capital had stood (Patna), and from this base consolidated a kingdom over the eastern portion of northern India. In addition, Chandragupta revived many of Asoka’s principles of government. However, it was his son, Samudragupta (335-376), and later his grandson, Chandragupta II (376-415), who extended the kingdom into an empire over the whole of the north and the western Deccan. Chandragupta II was the greatest of the Gupta kings; called Vikramaditya (“The Sun of Power”), who presided over the greatest cultural age in India.

In early Indian history, there are very few periods when a major part of the country was politically united. For about a hundred years, after the downfall of the KucāGas, there was no paramount power in the country and small principalities were engaged in wars forcing north

¹⁰ Accession nos. 15. 912, V. 45.

¹¹ Indian History Quarterly, XXXVIII, pp. 86-87; Vardā, October, 1967, p. 79.

¹² Agrawal, V.S., Gupta Art, p. 1.

⁹ Journal of Bihar Research Society, Vol. LIII, pp. 157-59, Pl. XXX and Vol. LIV, pp 229-44, Pl. XXVIII.

India to witness political chaos and confusion. At this juncture, the Gupta rulers emerged on the scene to unify the scattered political strength and to free the country from foreign subjugation. They provided a strong administration and created an extensive empire which lasted for about three centuries. They extended their imperial hegemony over a greater part to Northern Indian. One of the Gupta emperors, Samudragupta, uprooted the king of the Âryāvarta and conducted expeditions to the South of the Vindhyas. The states outside the imperial domain, including island like SiAhala were forced to seek his friendly alliance. His son, Candragupta-II, Vikramāditya, extended the boundaries of the empire to Saurâcmra in the west.

Under the mighty and illustrious emperors of the Gupta dynasty, Samudragupta, Chandragupta Vikramāditya, Kumârugupta and Skandagupta, the country witnessed a transition from darkness to light, from an unsettled, anarchical state of things to well-ordered progress and civilisation. Under their able administration, art, literature, religion and culture attained high glory and spread to every nook and corner of India and also outside in the north across the Himalayas to central Asia, in the southeast across the ocean to the islands of Indonesia or what was then known as Dvîpântara.¹² Their patronage to art, literature, music and culture provided impetus to the artist to magnify and manifest the great movement for rhythm and rhyme, beauty and melody and refinement and taste.

It was an age of economic prosperity, all-round development in social life, in administration, in literature, in artistic creations and in religion and philosophy. The *Divyavadâna* describes the continent of Jambûdvîpa as the land of populous and peaceful cities teeming with happy millions, of vast and numerous capital towns and villages separated by intervals of space hardly greater than a cock's flight. This statement proves that the economic condition of the society was sound and people were living in contentment. This was sufficient for art to flourish and achieve new standards of success.

Following a period of strenuous effort art now attained a higher status and form and a tremendous outburst of creative activity that gave birth to a national style of art.¹³ The artists in the Gupta age had assimilated the old art-traditions and culture; their main aim was to develop and portray the art heritage in beautiful forms. Art was now defined as fine art, Lalitkalâ.¹⁴ For the first time, Kâlidâsa coined this term and used it in his *Raghuvamsham*; its objective, perhaps, was to manifest the ideal beauty as conceived in the highest form of art, expressed through various art-mediums.¹⁵

The main characteristic of Gupta art is found in its beauty and beautiful forms. Men and women in that age were conscious of the art and had an intense desire to worship beauty through the medium of art with all its sanctity; their aim was to create a spiritual and aesthetic

joy. Kâlidâsa termed this beauty of form as *Rûpam*. At one place in the *Kumârasambhavam* he makes Pârvatî observe that *Cârutâ* or *rûpa* is that which bring happiness and welfare to the dear ones.¹⁶ The ideal of beauty was not to become stale by the passage of time, but to remain a fresh day to day;¹⁷ by its very nature, it was opposed to sin.¹⁸

The "Gupta Art" in stone reflects a marked refinement in the grace and charm and liveliness of a female image. The most remarkable features of the art of Gupta period is the depiction of the lower garment (or even upper garment) in an attractive manner which is diaphanous or transparent character, but at the same it maintains the decency of the body represents. The depiction of transparency of cloth has been achieved by the artist in such a refined manner, which is indeed worth to be appreciated. Secondly, the ornamentation of the image is also quite simple but very attractive ornaments are there and it is not elaborate, nevertheless it adds charm and grace to the image. The face is not broader but is oval in shape with delicate touch imparting greater charm and grace of the figure. The adornment of hair on the head in a most attractive manner and with a clear representation of hair arranges nicely further adds beauty to the image. The entire body presentation is quite captivating and attractive. It presents a deliberate look. The rhythm of the body is quite perceptible in a delicate and refined manner by providing a lifelike appearance to the image. The depiction of eyes is quite captivating which is in keeping with the life like representation and this further adds grace and charm to the image. It may also be pointed out here that the nose of the figure is quite sharp and the upper lip generally is thin, but the lower lip is depicted thicker but it maintains the beauty of the face of the images. Further, it is to be mentioned here that the stele of the image where ever it exists is quite simple and is never decorative – generally a cable molding type incision of lines or lines showing floral petals around the border of the steel is depicted. Secondly, the stele in shape is almost oval which is simple without having any decorative motif, miniature figure or designs over it, but at the same time it maintains the charm and grace of the image. The female image from Sakarigali Rajmahal is the best example of this period.

Now let us examine closely the display of art in an image of the Gupta period. For this purpose, we may refer to the image of "Râjmahal female attendant"¹⁹ which is an outstanding art piece of the Gupta period. It is depicted inside a door jamb and is made of sandstone from Sakrigali Ghât, Râjmahal (old Santhâlaparganâ, but now known as dust. Sâhebganj).

The female figure inside the door jamb is shown feeding a parrot in a most delicate charming and artistic manner. The figure as a whole is very beautiful, artistically and delicately designed and chiseled inside the door jamb and is standing in a most artistic manner which is very graceful and quite charming and attractive. Its every feature, especially her coiffure is very beautiful and charming delineated with braids of her hair arranged at back side in an attractive and artistic manner in a bunch space maintaining the utmost charm and grace. One is sure to be dazed at the majestic expression of her delicate movement which comes out spontaneously from within the figure which is like and full of vigour and which are so true and enchanting that captivate our attention forthwith. The figure wears a necklace (i.e. matarmâlâ which is ekâwalî) ear-rings, bangles, armlets and a charming waist – chain which beautifies it all the more and produce a sensuous appeal. She is also wearing a transparent lower garment (i.e. *saree*) which

¹⁹ Patna Museum, Arch no. 10346.

¹³ Divyavadâna, p. 316; also see, Agrawal, V.S., Gupta Art, p. 2.

¹⁴ Kâlidâsa, Raghuvansham, Sarga VIII, 67.

¹⁵ Srivastava, S. K., *Chhavi: Golden Jubilee Volume*, p.374.

¹⁶ Kâlidâsa, *Kumârasambhavam*, Sarga V.1.

¹⁷ Mâgha, diśupâlavadha, Sarga IV. 17.

¹⁸ Kâlidâsa, *Kumârasambhavam*, Sarga V. 36.

is finally executed and beautifully delineated adding further grace, charm and delicacy in the depiction of the figure. It is indeed a top ranking and an outstanding piece of art in stone of the Gupta period (5th century A.D.).

Pâla Art

The Pâla Empire is named after its ruling dynasty, all of whose rulers bore names ending with the suffix *-Pâla* (meaning “protector” in Prakrit). The kingdom was centered in present-day Bangladesh and Eastern India. The Pâlas had ushered in a period of stability and prosperity in the Bengal-Bihar region. GoPâla, the first ruler of the dynasty, came to power during the 750s in a landmark election by regional chieftains. The empire reached its peak under his successors DharmaPâla and DevaPâla, who fought with the Rashtrakutas and the Gurjara-Pratiharas for the control of Kannauj. The death of DevaPâla ended the period of the ascendancy of the Pâla Empire, and several independent dynasties and kingdoms emerged during this time. The Pâla rule was temporarily rejuvenated, first by MahiPâla and then by RamaPâla. Subsequently, the Pâla power declined, and they were dethroned by the Senas in the second half of the 12th century. According to the Khalimpur copper plate inscription, the first Pâla king GoPâla was the son of a warrior named Vapyata.

Dr. B. P. Sinha suggested that Pâtaliputra continued to be the capital of the early Pâlas. The description of Pâtaliputra in the same record as a place where the brightness of the daylight was darkened by the packed arrays of rutting elephants, where the firmament is rendered green by the dust dug up the hoofs of innumerable horses belonging to many kings of the north, and where the earth bent under the limitless foot-soldiers of all the king of Jambudvîpa assembled to render homage to Dharamapâladeva, would no doubt suggest that Pâtaliputra was the capital of Dharampâla, since his feudatories had assembled there to pay him homage. But the copper plate’s expressly describes Pâtaliputra as a *skandhâvâra* or camp and, it is well known to the student of Ancient Indian History how the feudatories could meet their overlord at any place where he might be camping during his campaigns. The Khalimpur Cooper plate²⁰ would thus only show that Pâtaliputra was recovering rapidly from its calamities and the Pâlas were often encamping there during their campaigns or tours. We have so far recovered no inscriptions, and terracottas from the Pâla period from Patna proper and excavations shows that the Kumrahar site was not in occupation during the Pâla period.

This trend continued in the Pâla period. The stone art of the Pâla period, has elaborate decorations with motifs, designs and miniature figures in higher relief appear on the stele around. The stele in shape gradually becomes conical and the oval shape of stele of the Gupta period disappears. In some of the images, the steel is even bored in places to carve designs over it such as “siraœchakra” or a decorative hole on the back of the head of the main image. The legs of the image become slender and long and elaborate ornaments of the body of the images once again appear. The diaphanous character of the cloth (i.e. garments) disappears and in its place

the existence of cloth is shown by undulating lines quite prominently. But in effect, the image does not lose its charm and grace. Rather the image presents a magnificent look. The image of Bodhisattava presents a prince like appearance with ornaments appearing on his body and the look and appearance of the image is quite beautiful and graceful. In sitting posture, the image is made to sit in an artistic manner. The image of Buddha presents a massive look and he is depicted with half open eyes i.e. in his concentrating posture and he is shown with long hands and legs. Later on he is also provided a crown.

The composition, quality and nature of stone, of which the image is made of, also get a change. This time the image is made of grey basalt stone or greenish or black basalt stone while the sandstone of the Maurya, Çunga or Gupta periods paves the way for the above type of stone which is harder than the sandstone, but the artist has been able to produce good works of art on this hared stone as well.

Now let us examine closely some of the top ranking and outstanding images of the Pâla period and see the artistic display there on by the artist.

We have a few specimens of art in stone of the Pâla period, which are not doubt top ranking and outstanding pieces. Among them a group of three Buddhist stone sculpture from village Vishnupur in Gaya Distt. deserves special mention . These images are of (1) Lord Buddha²¹ (2) Bodhisattva Avalokitesvra²² and of (3) Materiya²³ – the future Buddha. These images are full of life and vigour and produce a sense of feeling and sentiment all that is the characteristics of a human being.

(1) The image of Buddha is seated in bhûmisparûamudrâ with right hand depicted as a touching the earth and his posture of sitting in vajrâsana with half open eyes , dropping in mediation and his face reflecting prefect calm and repose in a very graceful manner which is the characteristic feature of the Pâla art . His fine curly hair, elongated ears and long hands and the general massiveness appeal of the figure as a whole, all these give a divine touch to the image of the Buddha and the artist has very ably and successfully brought out this effect in the execution of this image and it has almost all the quantities of the Pâla art. It is made of basalt stone and belongs to the Pâla Period. (9th – 10th cent A.D.)

(2) The image of Bodhisattva Avolkitesavara is seated in mahârâjalîlâsana with his right hand displayed in abhayamudrâ and the left hand hold the stalk of a lotus flower and on the crest of his head sees an image of miniature Dhayâni Buddha. Further, the image of profusely decorated almost all over his body with finely executed and magnificently chiseled ornaments which are suggestive of his prince like appearance and which is expected of a Bodhisattava image. The entire image is very gracious, delicately and magnificently executed, which impart a perfect charm and grace to the image. It embodies in itself all the characteristic feature of the Pâla art and makes bluish schist stone and belongs to the 9th – 10th cent. A.D. It reflects a high water mark of art of the Pâla period.

(3) The image of Maitreya i.e. Future Buddha also has the same charm and grace and has the same delicacy and refinement of art which we notice in the image of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara . The image of Maitreya holds the stalk of a nâga- kesara flower in his left hand and his right hand

²⁴.Patna Museum, Arch. No. 6361.

²⁰.Majumdar, N.G., *Epigraphia Indica*, XXIV, p. 43.

²¹ Patna Museum, Arch. No. 1681.

²².Ibid, Arch. No. 1680.

²³.Ibid. Arch. No. 1682.

is displayed in the abhaya mudrâ and a votive stûpa is depicted on the crest of his head. In effect these images has the same exquisite and imposing in disposition and are full of life and vigour and produce a sense of feeling and sentiment, all that is the characteristics of the human being.

All the three images from Vishnupur, Gaya mentioned above are definitely fine reproductions of art of the Pâla period.

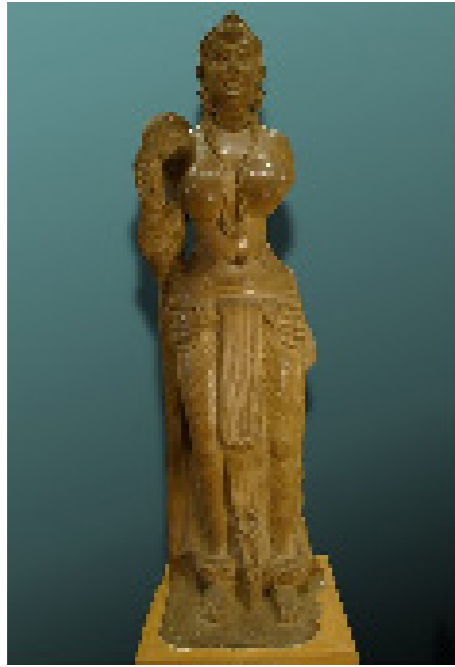


fig.1 Patna Museum Arch no. – 134, (Maurya)

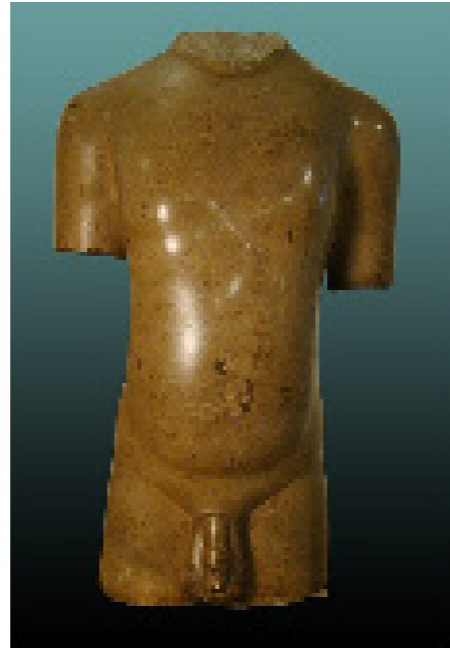


fig. 2 Patna Museum Arch no. – 8038

Beside the above image which presents the Pâla art in perfection, there is also an image of lord

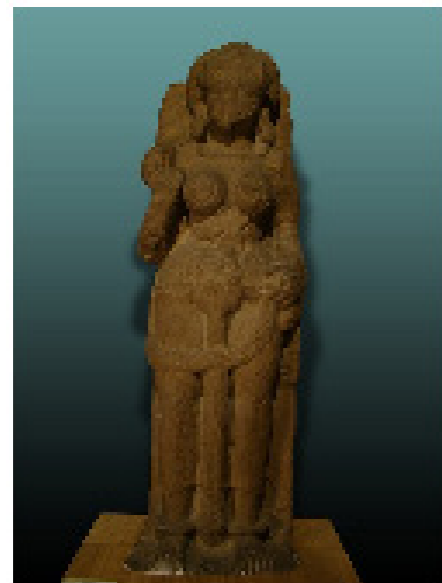


fig.3 Patna Museum Arch no. – 11269, (Kusana)

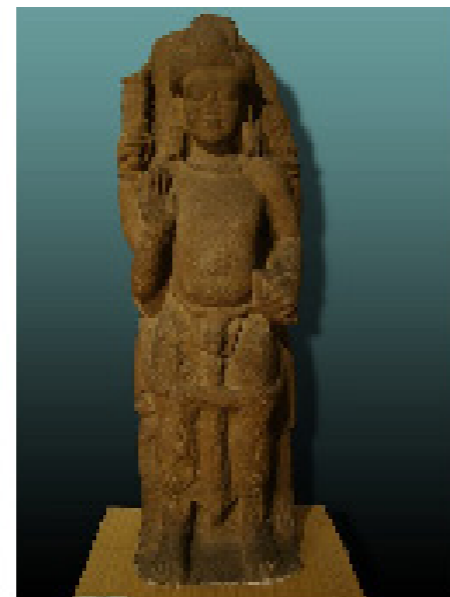


fig. 4 Patna Museum Arch no. – 11299, (Kusana)

Vishnu from Sillaur, Dist. Saran, belonging to the late Pâla period (11 cent. A.D), It is very aptly fulfills the parameters of the characteristic feature of the Pâla art.

The stele of the above image is a conical shape and is adorned all round with elaborate decorations with a variety of motifs, designs and miniature Figures. Among the animal motifs on the steel, the figure of kirttimukha, emanating jvâlâ from the mouth at the top part and just

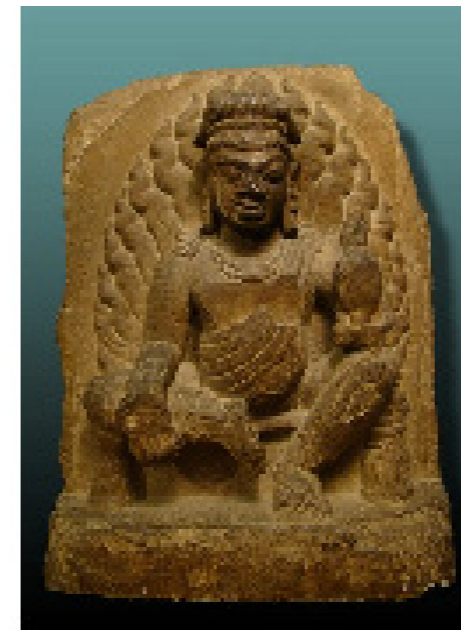


fig.5 Patna Museum Arch no. –6011, (Gupta)

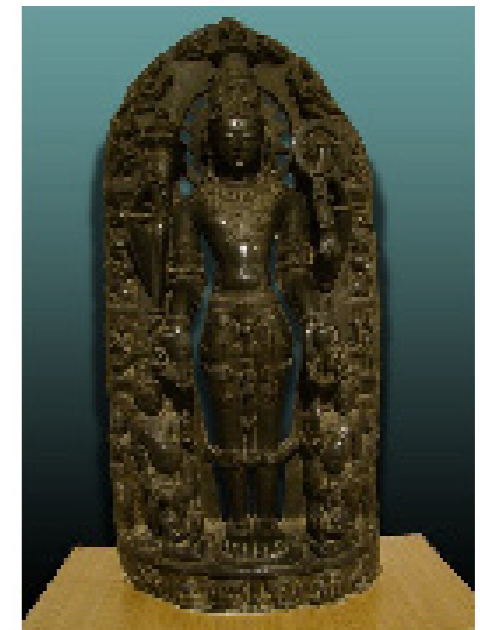


fig.6 Patna Museum Arch no. – 6361, (Pâla)



fig. 7 Patna Museum Arch no. – 11336, (Pâla)



fig.8 Patna Museum Arch no. – 11269, (Pâla)

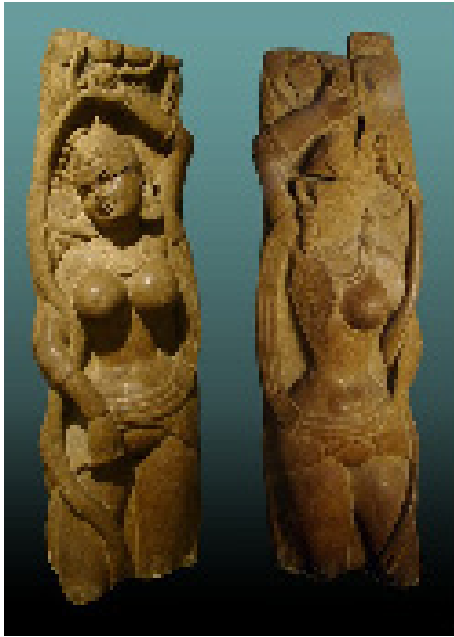


fig.9 Patna Museum Arch no. – 11309, (unga)

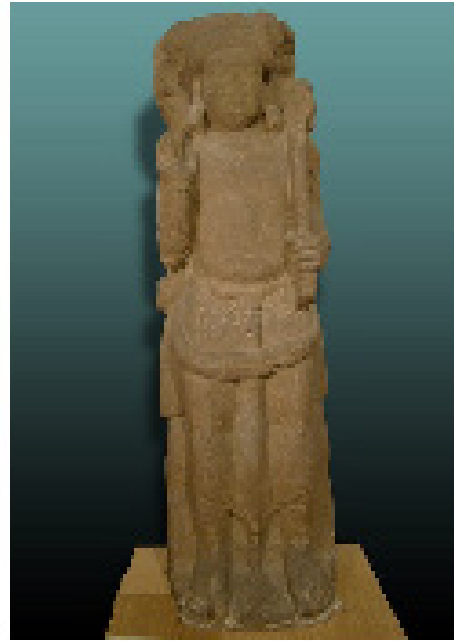


fig.10 Patna Museum Arch no. – 11300, (Kusana)

below in descending order, the figure of flying Gandharvas on the left and right side of the stele, kinnaras elephantine crocodile and the figure of Leogryph (Gaja Saradula) i.e. Lion placed over an elephant and crocodile are depicted. Among the decorative designs, the noteworthy is the “Siracchakra” which is formed after the stele is bored and is made perforated at the center showing, exhibiting the “Siracchakra” design which serves as a halo backside of the head of the image. And among the miniature figure on the stele, the various incarnations of lord Vishnu such as the Matsya and Kûrma avtâra, Varâha and Nrsimha avatâra, Ram and Prasurama avatâra are depicted . Beside these depictions the representations of the Gadâdevî and Chackrapurasa in human forms as âyudha pursues are also depicted on the pedestal.

Besides the above decorations on stele the pedestal of the image is also decorated with the other miniature figures of the incarnations of Lord Visnu²⁴ – such as Vâmana or Trivikrama, Buddha, and the Kalkî avatâra of Lord Visnu are depicted on the pedestal. Besides these depictions two devotees – one bearded male and the other a female are also depicted on the pedestal.

Such an elaborate decoration on the stele and on the pedestal of an image are among the characteristic features of the art of the Pâla period. Besides these artistic features of the Pâla art also noticed in the depiction of the main image itself. The image has long slender legs, has thin waist and has somewhat elongated drooping eyes. The Quality of stone also gets a change. It is not the sandstone of the Maurya, Œunga, Kushana or the Gupta periods from which the artist has carved out the image, it is much harder stone, namely the black basalt stone on which the artist has carved out the image, the stele and the pedestal, has displayed his artistic excellence there on and has achieved complete proficiency in his attempt to produce the above works of art on harder stone.