

Though direct correlation is not found between the environmental degradation and the major diseases in Nepal, it can not be ignored that some of the diseases like diarrhea, meningitis, kala-azar, viral hepatitis, parasitic infection, ulcer, respiratory infection, etc., affecting public health and killing so many people in different parts of the country are caused by environmental degradation. As a result of these problems, the public health is affected predominantly. It demands rational and effective measures from the planners and policy makers to control and minimize the situation.

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RESEARCH NOTE

BUDDHA'S LIFE DEPICTED IN THE SCULPTURES OF KAKREBIHAR

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The Context

For quite some time Kakrebihar has been an archaeological enigma for the students of cultural history of Nepal, more precisely of west Nepal hills. The site of Kakrebihar (28°34' north 81°38' east) lies in the southern fringe of the Surkhet Valley, almost three kilometers from Birendranagar, the headquarters of Surkhet district in the mid-western development region of Nepal. The ruined site of Kakrebihar is known for the conglomeration of its superb art and architectural remains associated with Hinduism and Buddhism.

This article is intended to identify some of the notable sculptures whose descriptions have not been published yet. More specifically, the rich art of Kakrebihar shows the distinct knowledge about the advancement of Buddhist religion and art skill that had long been fostered in the region.

The Valley of Surkhet was popularly known as the central point, an entrepot of trade in the medieval period. This valley links the northern Himalayas to southern plains of Nepalgunj bordering India. From Tarai the route enters the Surkhet Valley and then passing through the mountainous regions, embracing the towns of Dullu and Sinja, capitals of the Khasa Malla rulers of the medieval period, proceeds further north towards the Tibetan border. During the medieval period this area was important not only for trade and commerce but also for peculiar forms of culture and art.

The site of Kakrebihar, well known as the centre of Buddhist art and culture of medieval times, yields many masterpiece sculptures as well as designs carved on independent stone slabs of the frieze which must have been the part of old shrine. The temple, which might have been plunged by the attack most probably from outsiders, indicates the northern Indian *sikhara* styled (i.e. curvilinear) temple fully decorated with Buddhist sculptural art and several other designs. The remains of carved doorjambs confirm the entrance of the temple was beautifully delineated with several figures of minor Buddhist deities in the niches and decorative scroll motifs around. In the year 2003 the Department of Archaeology of Nepal excavated the Kakrebihar site and successfully unearthed the debris of ruined structure of a stone temple. Hence, many sculptures of the Buddha and Buddhist subsidiary deities are recordable. This made us possible to assess the popularity of the developed form of sculptural art in this region.

Early attempts to identify Kakrebihar

Interestingly, the famous Italian Orientologist Prof. Giuseppe Tucci has not mentioned Kakrebihar in his book. He must have missed to visit the site during his historical survey of western Nepal. Yogi Naraharinath reported briefly about the site during the time of his exploration in 2012 VS (1956 A. D.). According to Yogi, the site could be linked to Asokachalla, a ruler of Malla dynasty during 12th century A.D. (Yogi I ii 2013 VS: 170-172). Before excavation only a handful of sculptures and limited number of carved stones were recorded on the surface of the mound.

Although the name, Kakrebihar, implies a *vihara* or monastery but, in fact, the site is nothing more than a *sikhara* styled temple that consist of several miniature *sikharas* in successive layers of the superstructure. We can easily discern skillfully carved images of the Buddha, Bodhisattva and other minor Buddhist deities. Many such images are now preserved in the Birendranagar Regional Museum of the Government of Nepal. The rest of the sculptures and other artistic carvings can be seen still lying on the site. Thus, the art activity of Kakrebihar features the beautifully carved images indicating the spread of the Buddhist art belonging to the Mahayana school of Buddhism in that part of western Nepal. The interesting part of the images can be ascertained exclusively carving the life history of the Buddha. No such other sites of the region have done so.

The tradition of the depiction life scenes of the Buddha in stone art can be traced out from the inspiration of Gandhara and Mathura School at the beginning of Christian era. Bharhut art illustrated the narrative scenes related to the story of previous birth of the Buddha symbolizing Chaitya, Bodhi tree, disc, etc. during 2nd century B.C. The Gandhara school, on the other, laid the landmark history of Buddhist sculptural art, and started to make the images of the Buddha that denote different scenes based on his life activities only after 1st century A.D. (Choudhary 1956: 48).

Buddhist sculptures at Kakrebihar

Many Buddhist sculptures found around the ruins of Kakrebihar suggest that the site was a developed Mahayana centre of art in this region. Most of the carved images display the theme of *dhyani* Buddha, sitting independently on the pedestal whilst other sculptures narrate several themes relating the incidences of the life history of the Buddha. Interestingly, many Buddhist sculptures of historical sites represent the scenes based on the life history of the Buddha, such as birth, death, Sravasti miracle, monkey's offering of honey, taming of the mad elephant, enlightenment at Bodhgaya, the first sermon of Saranath, and Buddha's descend from *Traystrimsa* heaven, are noteworthy from the point of view of the development of Buddhist sculptural art equally in India, Nepal and Tibet. Among these, Kakrebihar promoted some life incidences of the Buddha through the sculptural art of the region. In

this sense, as in other Buddhist sites, Kakrebihar played a prominent role for inspiring on carving the beautiful and expressive images during the 12th century A.D. The followings are the newly recovered important images of the site.

Birth scene of the Buddha (Figure 1)

A single stone slab with the scene of birth story of Lord Buddha is no doubt a significant art specimen of Kakrebihar. In this relief, Mayadevi is seen standing on the pedestal together with her newlyborn baby prince Siddhartha in *samabhanga* pose. Mayadevi's head is decorated with *usnisha* and she has a lower garment around her waist, which is delineated in beautiful textile pattern. Although her left hand is missing, the remaining raised right hand can be identified in the *abhaya* pose. Beside Mayadevi, her son Siddhartha is also standing on the back of the lion clinging on to his mother. Although the head of the child is damaged, ascribed designs clearly show the beautiful figure in representation.

Both the upper corners of the stone slab have the design of half circle wheels while the lower corner depicts the design of tendrils. The representation of a lion here, no doubt, symbolizes the clan-name *sakyasimha* to which the Buddha belonged. Next to the lion there is a projected band with decorative niche which contains the figure of an elephant. The elephant must have been a white elephant Mayadevi, as literary tradition narrates, dreamed before giving birth to Siddhartha. This relief, thus, indicates the birth-story of the Buddha. Below the pedestal, one can see the design of rolling scrolls with the bud in the centre.

Buddha in the scene of Enlightenment (Figure 2)

The seated image, depicting the scene of the Buddha's Enlightenment at Buddhagaya after a rigorous practice of *dhyana*, has been a widely accepted theme in Buddhism. Normally, in this scene the Buddha is seated in *dhyana* touching the earth (*bhusparsha mudra*) with his right hand showing the gesture of evoking the earth goddess for the witness of his long awaited success. It is said that when he was sitting on penance Mara, the demon, sent his three daughters including Tanha with an army to create disturbance in his final attainment. But despite the attempt he made, the Buddha succeeded to defeat him and achieved Enlightenment. This was at this historical and critical juncture when the determined Buddha invoked the earth goddess to be the witness of his entering Buddhahood. This scene is nicely portrayed in this relief. The figure of the Buddha is carved seated in *dhyana*. He is flanked by two other unidentified figures in separate niches. Since the image is badly abraded so one cannot describe its artistic features in details. However, the niche is embellished with trefoil *torana* overarching the figure and an additional small *chhatra* can be seen above the head of the Buddha. The side

figures must be Mara and his assistants in the act of disturbing the Buddha. Thus, the scene very interestingly represents one of the illustrable themes on the stone.

Buddha in Dharmachakra Mudra (Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma (Figure 3))

Many Buddha images portray the important event of the first sermon the Buddha gave in Saranath. This incident of the Buddha is known as *Dharmachakraparvartana* or first turning of the Wheel in Buddhist literature. The beautifully carved image has broken hands. The mark made by the broken right hand on the chest no doubt indicates the gesture of *dharmachakraparvartana*. Normally, the depiction of hand gesture should meaningfully be raised up to chest and the forefinger and thumb of the right hand form a circle in the gesture like *vitarka*. According to Ghose (1998: 24), the gesture of the left hand raised slightly at low level suggests the Tibetan character. The Buddha, in this popular scene, should be flanked by two deities i.e. Padmapani and Vajrapani on left and right respectively (Snellgrove 1978:251). In Kakrebihar the figure of Padmapani, on the left, has worn a wisdom cap while the figure on the right shows the character of a Brahmin ascetic with shaved head and wearing *dhoti* as a lower garment. The seat of the Buddha reveals square shape of which the frontal part bears the figure of two lions facing and butting each other. Below the seat, there are two tendrils similarly winding in circular motif on both sides of the lower section of the niche. The design of the *chhatra* above the head and arching trefoil *torana* is noticeable and exhibit higher art skill. The flanking pilasters are decorated in cage-motif at the top with embellishing lozenges around. Here, the carved design of the trefoil *torana* and pilasters suggest the meticulous decorative skill. The half-exposed bodies of the side deities are given special consideration in this relief. The robe worn by the Buddha, which cling tightly, is falling from the left shoulder and passing under the right shoulder. The swelling chest and thinner waist, no doubt, represent the notable physical character of the Buddha. Similarly, the half-closed eyes considerably supports the fact of ascetic nature of the deity.

Buddha in the Sravasti Miracle (Figure 4)

This particular image based on the story of the Sravasti miracle is believed to have performed by the Buddha. It is stated that the Buddha performed a miracle before King Prasenjit at a specially built pavilion in Sravasti. In many of these types of scenes, the Buddha is seen sitting on the lotus with special hand gesture for performing the miracle. This piece is considered a very well created art form in term of expression and modeling.

The sculpture is carved in a decorative niche on the single stone slab. The image is flanked by two beautifully carved pilasters on both sides of the

niche. The figure of the Buddha is seated in *padmasana* pose on a double-petalled lotus. The lotus itself rests on a square base decorated with the design of lozenges. Below this, there is the symbol of two tendrils that have full-blown tiny flowers in the centre. This design associates with the wheels probably giving the shape of a *ratha*. In addition, two half *chakra* symbol can be seen on the upper section of the niche. The carved image indicates the Buddha's serene expression. The figure of the deity shows his right hand raising up to the chest with the gesture of forming the circle with the thumb and the index finger. The gesture of the left hand is not clear as it is broken off. The Buddha in this relief is decorated with *usnisha* (wisdom cap) on the head while the *chivara* (robe) can be seen with very thinner line on the body. This is marked by the folded lines on his left arm, indicating the robe spreading down between the legs.

The figure of the Buddha exhibits an anatomical perfection. The physiognomy is visible in a round shape and the body of the image is modeled with soft and energetic movement. The half-closed eyes portray the serene attitude which is common in the sculptures of the Buddha. Similarly, the eyelids are delineated in arching lines that emerge from the root of the nose. The lips are gently closed while the chin is modeled in round shape. Thus, the sculptor very ably presents the divine perfection in this figure. On both the sides of the deity are carved small, seated figures in *anjali* posture. Several other figures can also be seen carved on both corners of the niche. They might be the figures of disciples who are gazing at the Buddha's miracle. Above the head of the Buddha's image has the decoration of the branch of a tree and further above is overshadowed by a trefoil arched-band resting on two pilasters. The arched-band is stamped with scroll designs and groove pattern. Similarly, cylindrical pilasters show the design of circular bands in a vertical arrangement. The finial of the pilasters is embellished with small cage-motif with lozenges. This makes the niche of the figure beautiful and elegant.

Buddha in Abhaya Mudra (Figure 5)

Buddha images in *abhaya mudra* (the gesture of assurance or fearlessness) are also popular in the Kakrebihar site. In this particular scene the Buddha is depicted in seated posture on a simple square pedestal with his right hand raised up to the level of chest showing open palm and the left palm is resting on the lap. This posture of Buddha is considerably associated with the theme of religious sermon. It is also notable that Buddha's *abhaya mudra* can be interpreted as his assurance to the world of his ability to withstand all temptations and find out the cause and remedy of sorrow and suffering (Sitaramamma 2004: 150). The dress and other attributes of the image are similar to other images mentioned in the text. The Buddha in *abhaya mudra*

is, as has been said, based on the expression of Amoghasiddhi, one of the *dhyani buddhas*, sitting on the northern direction of the Chaityas.

In the Kakrebihar relief the Buddha is seated in *dhyana* on a seat made of double-petalled flower. The right hand of the figure is however broken off. The mark on the abdomen level suggests *abhaya* posture. The remaining right hand is resting on the lap. Although the head of the image is partly damaged, the other feature can, no doubt, be ascertained a beautiful representation of the body. The half-closed eyes signify the gesture of deep meditation. The robe worn by the deity is marked in various pleated lines across the chest leaving the right shoulder bare. Here, it clearly indicates the fringe of the robe swinging out of the left elbow. The image shows a carving in the niche flanked by beautiful design of pilasters. The decoration of the remaining pilasters suggest cylindrical in shape including the cage-motif design and a trefoil arch *torana* above.

Buddha in Dana Mudra (Figure 6)

This figure portrays the feature of Ratnasambhava, one of the five *dhyani buddhas* who is normally seen facing to the southern direction. The Buddha is touching the earth with his upturned palm of the right hand while his left hand rests on the lap, represents the theme of life activity of the Buddha particularly giving *dana* in this relief. The Buddha is seated on a decorated seat which is embellished in the foliage designs. Although the head of the Buddha is missing the other features suggest its notable hand gesture. As with other Buddha images, the robe worn by the Buddha displays several pleats at the edge that emerges from the left shoulder and is hidden behind his lower right chest. This may slightly be considered dissimilar with the above images so far. The edge of the robe is clinging out of the left elbow of the deity, which could be the common features of images. One of the distinct characters of this image is the representation of solid and columnar limbs of the deity.

The Buddha holding honey offered by the monkeys (Figure 7)

This is a unique image and can be identified as the first sculptural example of Nepalese Buddhism so far recovered in the country. In this context, the image places a prominent role not only for Kakrebihar but also for the whole country from the point of view of the developed Buddhist sculptural art. The image, no doubt, portrays the life story of the Buddha based on honey offering to him by the monkey. The legend tells us that in course of the offering the honey to the Buddha, a group of monkeys danced in extreme ecstasy but while doing so one monkey fell down into the well and immediately died. This story is described in Dhammapada Commentary and also narrated by Xuan Zang (Huen Tsang) (Pal 1984: 48).

In this relief, the Buddha's figure is beautifully carved in a seated posture on a three-tier seat with both legs pendent. Another remarkable feature of the image is the representation of aureole around the head of the Buddha indicating a divine status. This is embellished with sun-rays around. He also wears the usual *usnisha* on his head and a thin robe can be seen on his body across the chest. The left arm of this image is broken off while his right hand carries the bowl type object. This might have been the bowl of honey as it is dripping down from the palm of the deity. In front of the deity there is a tiny figure of a monkey carved in the lower corner of the niche in an acrobatic posture. This, no doubt, is the expression based on the literary tradition of Buddhism.

The expression of the deity is cheerful and is seen with opening his mouth and eyes slightly. The physical appearance of the Buddha reveals younger in both modeling and expression. It is noteworthy that one Thangka painting from Tibet which has 16 various life incidences of Buddha. One of them shows the scene offering honey to the Buddha by monkey. Here, the Buddha is seated on the pedestal as the one in the figure of Kakrebihar. In the Tibetan Thangka the monkey is touching the knees of the Buddha (Pal 1984: 63), but this feature is not found in the Kakrebihar figure.

Above the central image, the tree indicates the beautiful scenery of a forest. Similarly, the niche is carved in trefoil arch and side pilasters are decorated with cage-motifs. Below the seat is the design of two tendrils culminating in a tiny bud carved on both sides, while the central section depicts *kirtimukha* design. Thus, the image carries skillfully the idea of narrative scene of the Buddha on stone.

Narrative Scenes in a single stone-slab (Figure 8)

It is interesting to note yet another illustrative scene based on Buddha's life history in a single stone slab. There are three different narrative scenes representing the distinct postures of the Buddha seated in the separate niches, while additional two niches that are carved in alternate row contain the standing figures of the demon-like creature. These figures might have been associated with the story of Mara and his daughters that are giving a trouble to the Buddha during his *dhyana*.

Almost three scenes of the life of Buddha can be identified in this single slab. The first scene, from the right, displays *dhyana*, the second exhibits the first sermon while the third reveals the miracle performed by the Buddha in Sravasti. The rest of the figures, depicted in two alternate niches, can be identified with Mara and his assistant, represent in their unique posture.

Finally, the historic site of Kakrebihar offers the marvelous collection of monumental art comparable in the whole region, which confirms the fact that the region has a higher advancement of the Buddhist Mahayana tradition that might have been under the inspiration of western part of India

particularly of Gujarat during the medieval period. The Mahayana knowledge in practice might have been blended with Hindu ideology and popularized it as a social harmony of the region. The site, therefore, unfolds the history of Buddhism in the framework of higher degree of art skill developed in the region. In conclusion, it can be asserted that Kakrebihar now faces a serious conservation problem despite its historic and artistic/ archaeological significance. The Government of Nepal has carried out preliminary excavation and the conservation to salvage the shrine and the remains. But proper care of the whole site and further conservation and research are warranted in order to save the legacy of art asset of the region as a whole.

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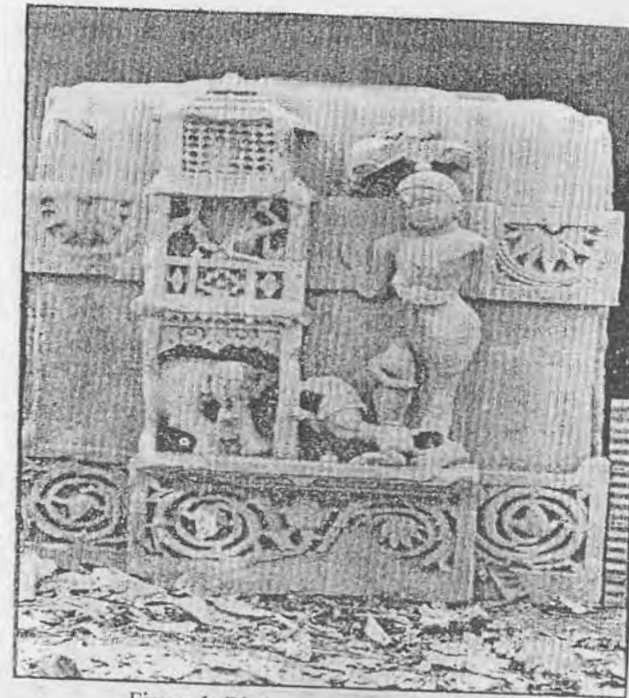


Figure 1: Birth scene of the Buddha

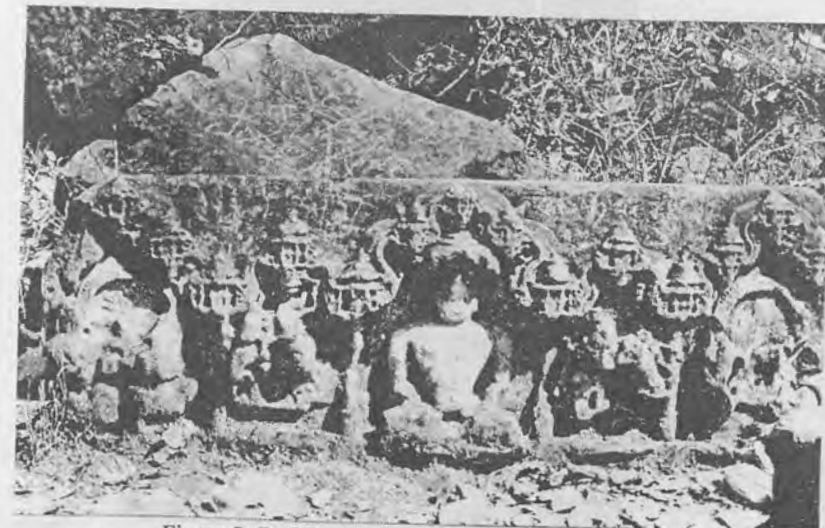


Figure 2: Buddha in the scene of Enlightenment



Figure 3: Buddha in Dharmachakra Mudra



Figure 4: Buddha in the Sravasti Miracle



Figure 5: Buddha in Abhaya Mudra



Figure 6: Buddha in Dana Mudra



Figure 7: The Buddha holding honey offered by the monkeys



Figure 8: Narrative Scenes in a single stone-slab

राजवैद्य दण्डपाणिको घर र वैद्य आगमका कलाकृति

पुरुषोत्तमलोचन श्रेष्ठ

भक्तपुरको मूलनगरबस्तीको मुटु-सुकुलढोका <<सुखुध्वाखा<सुगलढाखा) को व्यस्त बजारमा, मूलवाटोको पश्चिम किनारस्थित दक्षिण-पूर्व मोहडा भएको परम्परागत शैलीमा बनेको एउटा चारतले घर (चित्र संख्या १) छ । राणा प्रधानमन्त्री जङ्गबहादुरको समयतिर सो घरसँग सम्बद्ध वर्तमान वैद्यहरूका पूर्वज दण्डपाणिले बनाउन लगाएको भनिन्छ ।^१ त्यसपछि त्यो घर एवं त्यस परिसरमा रहेका नारायण, श्रीकृष्ण आदि देवताका नित्य नैमित्तिक पूजाआजा, नित्य भजन, आरति आदि धार्मिक कृत्यलाई निरन्तरता दिनका निमित्त निजी गुठीकै रूपमा दण्डपाणिकी पत्नी विद्यालक्ष्मीले त्यस घरको भुईँतलामा सम्बद्ध अमात्य र श्रेष्ठहरूलाई विशेषगरी उनीहरूले कृष्णजन्माष्टमी पर्व/गुठी अनवरतरूपले चलाइरह्नेजेल तिनका सन्तान दरसन्तान वा अनन्तकालसम्मन् पनि उनीहरूलाई उठाउन नपाउने गरी ने. सं. १०१३ (वि.सं.१९५०) मा स्वहस्ते- कबुलियत-कागज गरी पसल बहालमा अर्पित गरेकी थिइन् । यो कुरा यस विषयका सम्बद्ध प्रमाणका आधारमा ज्ञात हुन्छ ।^२

त्यसैगरी घरका नारायण र श्रीकृष्ण आदि देवताका नित्य नैमित्तिक पूजाआजा चलाउने पूजारीका रूपमा सम्बद्ध राजोपाध्याय ब्राह्मणलाई पनि त्यस घरको भुईँतलामाथिका भागमा बसोबास गराइयो ।^३ यसप्रकार दण्डपाणिले सो घर बनाइसकेपछि त्यस घरमा पूजारीका रूपमा बसोबास गर्दै आएका राजोपाध्याय ब्राह्मण एवं पसल चलाउँदै आएका अमात्य, श्रेष्ठहरूका माध्यमबाट एउटा नयाँ संस्कृति विकसित हुँदै वर्तमानमा पनि जीवन्त रहँदै आएको देखिन्छ ।

घर र सो परिसरमा रहेका कलाकृति^४

दण्डपाणिहरूको सालिगसहितको आरति (चित्र संख्या २, क)

सालिगसहितको यस ढलौटको आरतिमा लहरै छवटा सालिगहरू भक्तिभाव-मुद्रामा बसेका छन् । ती सालिगहरू माथि कलात्मक तोरणाकृति (कदम) सजाइएको छ र त्यसको शीर्षभागमा लहरै पाँचवटा आरति देखापर्छन् (चित्र संख्या २, ख) सालिगहरूको आसनमा निम्न अभिलेख कुँदिएको छ -

संख्या १

मूलपाठ

१. ॐस्वन्त १९३३ मिति मार्गसिल शुदि १४ रोज४स राजवैद्य दन्दपानि १ स्त्रि विद्याल-

२. क्ष्मी १ पुत्र देवानन्द १ रामदास १ कृष्णानन्द १ निलकंथ सकलसेन श्री३ नारायन प्रति याना थो आरति थव क्षस नित्ये भजन यायगुलि च्यायमाल सुभ