LIFE IN SANCHI
SCULPTURE
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sāñchi monuments are 'the most imposing and best preserved of all monuments that early Buddhism has bequeathed to India'. The importance of these monuments lies as much in their rich and varied carvings as in the fact that they have served singularly to preserve the Hinayāna art. The Great Stūpa at Sāñchi is the only stūpa which belongs to the earlier Buddhist art and retains all its original features, both sculptural and architectural. Through sculptural representations, Sāñchi art depicts a comprehensive and fascinating picture of varied aspects of life in contemporary society.

ANCIENT NAMES

The modern name Sāñchi has not been mentioned in any inscription or writing. But from different sources, scholars have identified Sāñchi with different ancient names such as Chetiya-giri, Kākaṇḍya, Kākanāva, Kākanāda, Boṭa-Śrī-Mahāvihāra, and Boṭa-Śrī-pañcavatā occurring in different inscriptions found on the railings and gateways of the Great Stūpa itself.

Chetiya-giri

According to the Mahāvamsa, a Śrī Laṅkā chronicle, Mahendra, son of Aśoka, on a missionary trip to Śrī Laṅkā, halted at Vidiśā and visited his mother Devi, who lodged him at Chetiya-giri or Vidiśāgiri monastery. The parallel passages in Mahānāmo and Buddhaghosā mentioning Chetiya-giri and Vidiśāgiri, respectively, make no difference in identification. Vidiśā was the city and the Chetiya-giri was the hill of the chaityas at Sāñchi which was a suburb of Vidiśā, and thus both the terms Chetiya-giri and Vidiśāgiri refer to one and the same place. Leaving Sāñchi alone, none of the neighbouring hills of Vidiśā contains any remains belonging to the Mauryan age. The brick stūpa and the Edict Pillar were found on the hill of Sāñchi and therefore scholars have correctly identified Chetiya-giri with the hill of Sāñchi which was not far off from the ancient city of Vidiśā.

The word Chetiya-giri in Pāli (Skt. Chaityagiri) literally means a hill with a chaitya or a relic mound. And in the light of this linguistic explanation too the hill of Sāñchi appears to be the lone spot in the vicinity of Vidiśā where the stūpas contain the relics of great saints.

One thing is to be noted here that Chetiya-giri is a general term. It has also been given to a hill in Śrī Laṅkā. When the relics of the Buddha were kept on the Misraṅga parvata in Śrī Laṅkā, it was renamed as Chaitya parvata. Therefore Chetiya-giri should not be taken as a name of Sāñchi. It only refers to the famous chaitya there.

Kākanāda

The words Kākanāya, Kākanāva and Kākanāda are one and
the same. The Sanskrit word is Kākanāda which has been mentioned in two Gupta inscriptions dated G.E. 93 and 131.6 Fleet has taken the word Kākanāda to mean 'the noise of the crow'.7 But actually the meaning of the word is not clear. It may denote the habitation of crows on the hill or the recitation of prayers in chorus by the monks and nuns, as elsewhere the recitation of hymns by the Brāhmaṇas has been termed as the noise of frogs (dādura dhuni).8

Kākaṇāya and Kākanāva

Kākaṇāya and Kākanāva are the Prākrit renderings of the Sanskrit word Kākanāda. Here the consonant 'd' has been dropped and the word remains 'Kākanā a'. Since the double vowel 'āa' is not easy to pronounce, the last vowel is converted into 'ya' or 'va' and the nasal 'na' is converted into 'na'. Thus the Sanskrit word Kākanāda becomes Kākaṇāya or Kākanāva in Prākrit (Kākanāda → Kākaṇāa → Kākaṇāa → Kākaṇāya or Kākaṇāva). For example, the Sanskrit word 'gata' becomes 'gayā' or 'gava' (gata → gava → gaya or gava → gaya or gava).

Kākaṇāya and Kākanāva occur in inscriptions generally recording the gifts of donors who were Buddhists speaking their own dialect, i.e., Prākrit. Since these inscriptions pertain to the Śunga period, they are earlier than those in Sanskrit of the Gupta period. This has misled Sir John Marshall in ascertaining the earlier name of Sāñchi as Kākanāya or Kākaṇāva and the later one as Kākanāda.10

Kākaṇāya occurs in an inscription on a ground railing cross-bar of the Great Stūpa which reads——"Kākaṇāye Bhagavato pamāna lāṭṭhi", 'the (height) measuring staff of the Bhagavat, i.e., Buddha at Kākaṇāya'.11 This measuring rod (pamāna yashti) has been identified by Foucher with a motif carved out on the whole space of a pillar of the Northern Gateway.12 Hence the identification of Kākaṇāya with the Great Stūpa is quite clear.

Other inscriptions mentioning Kākaṇāva certainly refer to the Great Stūpa by this term. An inscription on a pillar of the Eastern Gateway says—"He, who dismantles or causes to be dismantled, an arch or a rail of this Kākaṇāva, or causes it to be transferred to another church (Achāryakula), (shall incur the sin) of the murderers of mothers, murderers of fathers, murderers of Arhats, of those who create schism in the Community, and of those who cause bloodshed—all such sinners (shall live in dirt)."13 Similarly, another inscription covering both the pillars of the Western Gateway, just below the capitals, also prescribes the punishment of the same five sins for those "who dismantle or cause to be dismantled the stonework from this Kākaṇāva, or cause it to be transferred to another Church."14

In both these inscriptions, the arch, rail and the stonework of this Kākaṇāva are quite indicative of it being the name of the Great Stūpa and not the name of Sāñchi, as stated by Sir John Marshall.15

A third inscription mentioning Kākaṇāva was found on a stelate casket (No. II) which reads——"Kākanāva Pabhāsa Śihaṇa Dāna".16 Its Skt. rendering is Kākanādasya Pabhāsasya Śishyāṇaṃ Dānam. The word 'Pabhāsa' has different meanings, viz., 'light', 'enlightened', name of a person or place, etc. Therefore, the inscription can be translated differently. Majumdar has translated it as 'the gift of the pupils of the Light of Kākaṇāva'. He has taken Pabhāsa to mean 'light'. But 'Light of Kākaṇāva' does not convey any clear meaning. Taking this word as an adjective, meaning 'enlightened', the translation may be rendered as 'the gift of the enlightened pupils of Kākaṇāva'. If we take the word Pabhāsa as the name of a person, the inscription may be translated as 'the gift of the pupils of (Achārya) Pabhāsa of Kākaṇāva'. As a place name, Pabhāsa (tīrtha) also called Soma (tīrtha) of Saurashtra is well-known. But, here that meaning cannot be derived. Because Kākaṇāva was the name of the Great Stūpa or the local place, i.e., Sāñchi, and therefore, Pabhāsa (in Saurashtra) of Kākaṇāva (Sāñchi) has no meaning. In case we take Pabhāsa to mean an āsrama or
mathā (a centre of learning), we shall have to translate the inscription as ‘the gift of the pupils of the dārāma or college of Kākaṇāva’. But we know that in ancient times, pupils were known by their teachers and not by their colleges. So, ‘the pupils of (āchārya) Prabhāsa of Kākaṇāva’ seems to be more probable than ‘the pupils of the college of Kākaṇāva’. It is confirmed when we take another inscription, No. 396, already mentioned, wherein a punishment of five sins has been prescribed for one who dismantles or causes to be dismantled an arch or a rail of this Kākaṇāva, or causes it to be transferred to another āchārya-kula or church. It clearly indicates that Sānci itself had an āchārya-kula one of whose āchāryas might have been a person named Prabhāsa. Another word of the inscription ‘Sīhanā’ from Skt. Šishyānām may be explained as Šishyānām > Sikkhānām > Sikkanām > Sikanām > Sihanā.  

The inscriptions dated G.E. 93 and 131, both on the cross-bars of the ground railing of the Great Stūpa, refer to the Great Monastery (Śrī mahāvihāra) at Kākaṇāda. Here the name Kākaṇāya or Kākaṇāva of the inscriptions of the Śunga period becomes Kākaṇāda in Sāṃskrit, which is quite clear. Anyway, during the period from the second quarter of the second century B.C. to the middle of the fifth century A.D., the Great Stūpa was well-known by the name Kākaṇāda.

Boṭa-Śrī-Parwvata and Boṭa-Śrī-Mahāvihāra

In another inscription which belongs to the end of the seventh century A.D., the hill has been referred to by the name Boṭa-Śrī-parvvata. Here the term Kākaṇāda is totally absent. The honorific term Śrī has been attached to the hill (Śrī-parvwa) which was previously attached to the monastery (Śrī-mahāvihāra). But the word boṭa, which previously preceded Śrī-mahāvihāra, here precedes Śrī-parvwa. Since these inscriptions referring to Śrī-mahāvihāra and Śrī-parvwa have been inscribed on the Great Stūpa, their identification with the monastery and the hill of the Great Stūpa itself, i.e., Sānci, cannot be ruled out. But what meaning is to be attached to the word boṭa in all these inscriptions is not quite certain. Fleet has taken it as another form of poṭa, which means ‘the foundation of a house’.  

But this meaning does not serve any purpose. The term boṭa (Prākrit boḍa) is an adjective having another meaning—‘religious’ (dhārmika or dharmśiha) and ‘shaven head’ (muddhita māstaka). It is still in use in Gujarati. A monk with a shaven head is called boḍa. Both these meanings are quite suitable when the word is attached either to Śrī-mahāvihāra or Śrī-parvwa. Scholars have taken this word to be a suffix of the ancient name Kākaṇāda, but this too does not elucidate the point. To us, it appears that since in the inscriptions of the seventh century A.D. the word boṭa comes as a prefix to Śrī-parvwa, it should therefore also be taken as a prefix to Śrī-mahāvihāra in the inscriptions of the Gupta period mentioned above and not as a suffix to Kākaṇāda, i.e., Boṭa-Śrī-mahāvihāra and Boṭa-Śrī-parvwa. And it is quite befitting the above meanings.

Sānci

When and how the place came to be known by its modern name Sānci is quite obscure. According to Cunningham, Sānci is a derivation of the word Śanti. He refers to the Aśokan Pillar Edict found at Sānci, in which the Buddhist Church of the place has been read by him as Śanti Sangha. But how the word Śanti came to be converted into the word Sānci is still open to question. That the Chinese transcript of the word Śanti into Shā-che was responsible for the origin of the present name of Sānci, as Cunningham suggests, can in no way be accepted. Travelling from Kānyakūpha to Śravasti, Fa-hien came to the great kingdom of Shā-che (Legge, James, The Travels of Fa-hien, p. 54). According to James Legge, Shā-che should probably be shā-khe, making Cunningham’s identification of the name with the present Saket still more likely (ibid., footnote No. 4). Shā-che, in this context, can, in
no way, be identified with the present Sāñchi, in M.P. which does not come between Kānyakūṭa and Śrāvasti, both in U.P. And therefore only Marshall describes the identification of Sāñchi with Shā-čhe of Fa-hien as false. The Chinese form Shā-čhi for the Indian word Śanti could have been popular among the Chinese-speaking peoples. But how was it popularised among the Indian masses having their own dialect and particularly when the place has been totally bypassed by the Chinese travellers? Both Fa-hien and Hiuen Tsang have in their travel accounts not even a word to say about Sāñchi. Sāñchi or Sāčhi, according to Fleet, is probably a vernacular name connected in no way with the Sanskrit, as Kāčhi-Kānākheḍā (quite similar to Sāñchit-Kānākheḍā) and Māñchi are similar names of other villages in the neighbourhood of Sāñchi.

The modern name Sāñchi appears to have been derived either from the word ‘Sanchita’, i.e., collected (Sāñchita > Sāñchi > Sāčhi) or ‘Satya’, i.e., truth (Satya > Sachit > Sāñchi). Since the pious relics of the Buddha and other saints were collected and kept there, the place might have been called ‘Sāñchita-sthāna’ (the place where something is collected) which with the passage of time might have first remained only ‘Sāñchita’ and subsequently might have been converted into the modern term ‘Sāñchi’, as shown above.

It may be considered possible that in the time of Aśoka, the Buddhist Church at the hill was known by the name of the locality as Sāñchita-sthāna or Satya-sthāna. But, subsequently from the time of the Śungas, the Stūpa itself was given its own name as Kākanāda, which was quite different from the name of the place, and since then onwards, the Stūpa, and not the place, was referred to in the inscriptions by its own name, i.e., Kākanāda. We may presume that when the site of the Great Stūpa was left desolate and deserted, its name also got lost in oblivion. But the name of the locality Sāñchita-sthāna was there, and when after 600 or 700 years the site was again discovered, it was renamed by its locality, which, by that time, had already adopted the modern nomenclature, as indicated above. It means the present form of the name, i.e., Sāñchi, must have taken its origin some time between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries A.D.

**HISTORY OF SĀÑCHI**

Hitherto, on the basis of archaeological evidence, scholars had come to believe that the history of Sāñchi begins with the reign of Aśoka in the third century B.C. But recently, an archaeological piece of evidence has revealed that the antiquity of Sāñchi goes back to a very remote age. In April, 1973, the author discovered certain rock-shelters in the hills of Nāgaurī and Sāñchi-Kānākheḍā. These rock-shelters contain a number of prehistoric paintings on the walls and ceilings depicting various forms of human and animal life including hunting, fighting, playing, dancing, riding, etc. A variety of domestic and wild animals, weapons, trees and symbols indicating some forms of rituals have also been depicted there. This goes to show that like other places of Madhya Pradesha in India, Sāñchi was also inhabited by man in prehistoric times. Thus, the human history of Sāñchi starts as early as the prehistoric times.

The Mauryan age constitutes the second phase of the history of Sāñchi which started with Buddhist Church activities. How Sāñchi came to be a holy place is not known for certain. Perhaps, the hill of Sāñchi was selected by the Buddhists for their monastic activities due to its excellent position; firstly, the hill commanded an ideal situation which was far enough removed from the turmoil and distraction of the city, and sufficiently close to it to attract worshippers from its crowded thoroughfares like Veḷuvana and Mrgadāya which were situated on the outskirts of the cities, Rājagha and Vārānasi; and secondly, it was quite near the populous and prosperous city of Vidiśā, which was situated at the meeting point of the routes from Kausāmbi and Śrāvasti in the north and leading to Ujjayinī and Śrāparaka in the south.

Since when Sāñchi turned into a Buddhist monastic centre
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is also not very clear. However, it may be certainly traced as far back as the third century B.C. Aśoka, while going to Ujjaini as a viceroy to his father king Bindusāra, halted at Vidiśā and fell in love with Devī or Vidiśādevī, the daughter of a local banker, who later gave birth to Mahendra and Samghamitrā. On the demise of his father when Aśoka went to the capital and ascended the throne, Devī did not follow him, because Āsandhimitrā was already there as the chief queen (agg-mahātī). Perhaps, she preferred the life of a nun to that of a junior queen. This is quite sufficient to suggest that Buddhist activities in Vidiśā area were already established before the advent of Aśoka. It is not totally improbable that the site was originally sanctified by a branch of the Śākyas who might have built a stūpa at the same spot enshrining the relics of the Buddha prior to the Mauryan emperor Aśoka. But the surmise still requires an archaeological support.

Devī is described as having caused the construction of the Great Vihāra of Vidiśāgiri which seems to have been the first of the architectural monuments of Sāñchi. We may identify this monastery either with Temple No. 40 which in its original plan was an apsidal structure and was reconstructed during the period of the Śuṅgas, as is evidenced from some Brāhmī inscriptions on the pillars, or with Temple No. 18, the excavations of which by Marshall have revealed the traces of many floors, the lowest being the work of the Maurya or Śuṅga epoch. And in order to please and satisfy his spouse, Aśoka might have brought Sāñchi into the limelight by constructing a brick stūpa and erecting a monolithic pillar with a royal decree against schism in the Buddhist community. The lower part of this pillar is still in situ near the Southern Gateway, other broken pieces with inscription are lying under a shade on the hill and the capital is kept in the Museum.

That the stūpa was constructed by Aśoka is still open to question in the absence of any concrete evidence. Marshall examined the position critically and maintained that the brick stūpa at Sāñchi was constructed by Aśoka. But the possibility of its construction by his spouse Devī cannot certainly be ruled out. It might have been included in the construction of the Great Vihāra by her.

The setting of the Pillar at the Sāñchi hill by Aśoka with an Edict on it warning the monks and nuns against their destructive activities marks out the degenerating trends in the Buddhist monastic establishment there, and this fact also indicates that a period of peace and unity in the Sangha had preceded the royal efforts there.

At Sāñchi the art activities of the Śuṅga age are both numerous and various. These include the construction of the two stūpas now known as Stūpa No. 2 and Stūpa No. 3. The ground railing of the former stūpa was also erected during this period. And the Mauryan brick-built stūpa was enlarged by stone-casing and encircled by two stone railings, one massive on the ground and the other smaller on the plinth (medhi) to provide and secure the path for circumambulation (pradaksinā). That both of these balustrades are contemporaneous is proved by the inscriptions mentioning a nun Aชาla, Idadata (Indradatta) and Isidattā (Rsidattā), the wife of Sakadinā on both of them.

The next period of Sāñchi deals with the most magnificent work of Indian workmanship. It was during the reign of the Sātavāhanas or Āndras that the Great Gateways of Sāñchi stūpas (four around the Great Stūpa and one around Stūpa No. 3), profusely decorated with carvings, were erected over the entrances on the cardinal points. It is clear from an inscription on the Southern Gateway which records the donation of one of its architraves by a person named Ānanda who was an alderman of the artisans of the Āndhra king Śrī Sātākarṇī. The ground railing was also attached to Stūpa No. 3 during this period.

The period between the Āndras and the Imperial Guptas appears to have been dull and uneventful. The only remains which we find pertaining to this period are some coins of the Kshatrapa kings and a few sculptures in the Kushāna style, one
of which bears an inscription of Vāsishka dated the year 28.47 The history of Sāñchī contains in its next phase several fine works of the classical age. Temple Nos. 17 and 18 and four large images of the Buddha in dhyāna posture placed along the wall of the plinth facing the Gateway are indicative of building activities in the period of the Imperial Guptas. Many detached images have also been found. One statue of a nāgī in front of Temple No. 31 is still in situ. Besides this architectural and sculptural evidence, some epigraphic records of the period are also available. Two inscriptions of the g.e. 93 and 131 were recorded on the cross-bars of the ground railing of the Great Stūpa.48

The remains of the mediaeval period surviving at the hill of Sāñchī are many structures on the Eastern terrace, numbering 43 to 50, including Building No. 44, Temple No. 45, and ground plans of Monastery Nos. 46-47, several detached carvings, images and small votive stūpas.

Thus, right from prehistoric times to the eleventh or twelfth century A.D. Sāñchī remained a centre of human habitation with artistic and religious activities. Later on, Sāñchī hill appears to have been deserted.

**Discovery and Destruction**

It is rather surprising that during the Muslim onslaught these charming monuments of Sāñchī were left untouched even when the new city of Bhilsā (Bhailasvāmin), which grew on the site of the ancient Vidiśā, suffered many a time from the attacks of the Muslim conquerors. All the three stūpas (Great Stūpa or Stūpa No. 1, Stūpa No. 2 and Stūpa No. 3), which still survived, were entire and in good condition when seen for the first time in 1818 by Colonel Taylor and then by Captain E. Fell and Dr. Yeld.49 Burgess and Marshall have given a detailed account of the discovery and destruction of these stūpas, caused by some amateur archaeologists and treasure-hunters.50 Captain Johnson, the Asstt. Political Agent in Bhopal, was responsible for opening and demolishing all the three stūpas and causing irreparable damage to all of them. Then Captain F.C. Maisey prepared for the government an illustrated report upon these monuments, their sculptures and inscriptions after working from 1849-50 to 1850-51. In January 1851 he was joined by Major A. Cunningham.51 Their joint efforts led to the discovery of the original Mauryan stūpa built of brick (16" × 10" × 3") beneath the Great Stūpa and the relic caskets of Stūpa Nos. 2 and 3. The exploration of Stūpa No. 2 by Cunningham in 1851 also resulted in the complete destruction of the dome which had been partly damaged already by Captain Johnson in 1822.52

An Interesting Anecdote Regarding the Removal of the Gateway to England

Some documents preserved in the National Archives narrate how efforts were made to shift the marvellous Gateways of the Great Stūpa to England and how an English gentleman intervened and succeeded in securing their restoration to their original places.53 The sketches copied out from Sāñchī reliefs by William Murray in 1837 were so highly rated that the Government of India decided in 1848-49 to remove these Gateways to the British Museum. But the Directors of the East India Company suggested that only their replicas and not the original Gateways might be sent to England.

When Major Cunningham visited the site in 1851, he recommended that the two fallen gateways of the Sāñchī Töpe should be removed to the British Museum, where they would form the most striking objects in a Hall of Indian Antiquities.54 He is also stated to have suggested to the Begam of Bhopal to present these Gateways to the Queen of England.55 The former gladly agreed to it, and in 1853 she requested the Queen through the Government of India to accept her present of these tārāyas. The Begam was ready to bear the expenses of the transportation up to Bombay port.56 The request was
ultimately accepted in 1854 by the Court of Directors and orders were passed on to the Political Agent in Bhopal to carry out the work of dismantling. The Political Agent Mr. Hamilton had since been transferred and the new Agent, Captain Eden, was not in favour of the transfer of these valuable specimens of Indian art. In the meantime (1856), a difference of opinion cropped up on questions of expenditure and means of transportation. Captain Eden took advantage of the situation and the government at his request ordered the stoppage of the dismantling of the Gateways. The next year 1857 was the year of the first War of Independence. In 1861, the department of the Archaeological Survey of India was established.

In 1868, Napoleon III requested the Begam of Bhopal to send one of these Gateways to France. But Sir John Lawrence, the then Viceroy, expressed deep dissatisfaction over the prospect of these art motifs being shifted from their original place. At his suggestion in 1869, casts of the Eastern Gateway were prepared and presented to the principal national museums of Europe, and thereafter the Archaeological Department of India took these monuments of Sāñchī under its own charge.

Preservation of the Monuments

The monuments, in the meantime, suffered damage at the hands of the neighbouring people who took away the bricks and stones for their own purposes until 1881, when the jungle at the hill-top was cleared by Major R.E. Cole, then the Curator of Ancient Monuments. He also filled the breach in the Great Stūpa caused by Captain Johnson in 1822 and re-erected the fallen Gateways (Southern and Western Gateways of the Great Stūpa and the only Gateway of Stūpa No. 3). This work of repairs was directly supervised by Major Keith working under Captain Cole. However, his work of repairs and preservation was limited to the stūpas at the hill-top. Clearance of the debris, repairs to other buildings and the preservation of hundreds of loose sculptures and inscriptions lying about entailed extensive operations carried out by a zealous archaeologist, Sir John Marshall, between 1912 and 1919.

Repairs and Restoration by Marshall

Marshall first cleared the jungle over the entire hill-top which has since again grown at a fast pace. He got the Southern and Eastern sides of the Great Stūpa cleared of the debris and through extensive excavations brought to light many structures including monastic buildings. Marshall also took up the work of repairs. He reconstructed the south-west portion of the Great Stūpa and restored the stairway, berm and harmika balustrades. His other works of repair include the reconstruction of the dome, balustrades and crowning umbrella of Stūpa No. 3, preservation of Temple No. 18 and repairs to Temple Nos. 17, 31, 32 and 45. He also built a museum building at the foot of the hill, where sculptures, inscriptions and other architectural fragments were arranged and catalogued. And in this way the glory of these monuments of Sāñchī was again restored.

Literature on Sāñchī Art and Architecture

Sāñchī monuments have attracted the attention of scholars throughout the world on account of their immense wealth of sculpture both in round and reliefs. As early as 1819, Captain E. Fell wrote a description of the buildings and sculptures at Sāñchī. J.D. Cunningham, the Political Agent in Bhopal, also published his notes in 1847. And afterwards there appeared a number of essays, monographs and illustrations of these stūpas, their architecture and sculpture. The most notable of these are Cunningham's Bhilasa Topes (1854) covering the archaeological remains of the Buddhist edifices around Vidiṣā in which he spared a considerable space for the description of the Sāñchī stūpas, Fergusson's Tree And Serpent
Worship (1868) mainly based on the sculptures of Sāñchi and Amarāvatī stūpas, Maisey's Sāñchi And Its Remains (1892) in which he also reproduced the bas-reliefs on the stūpas in his own line drawings and The Monuments of Sāñchi (1940) edited by Marshall.

The last work is a voluminous one. It was published in three folio volumes, the first with the text and the second and third with plates representing the architectural and sculptural grandeur of the Sāñchi stūpas and other monuments. In this monumental work, Marshall has described the monuments and their sculptures, Foucher has given the religious interpretation of these reliefs and N.G. Majumdar has edited and translated the inscriptions found on the buildings at Sāñchi. This costly publication was brought out with financial help received from the Begam of Bhopal. Through this publication, Marshall has done pioneer work in the field of the study of Indian art and archaeology.

SCULPTURES ON STŪPAS

Of all the monuments enumerated above, Stūpa Nos. 1 to 3 provide the most splendid specimens of an elaborate carving in bas-relief. It is well known that the carving of the Southern Gateway of the Great Stūpa at Sāñchi was done by the ivory carvers of Vidiśā. The fact is known from an inscription found on a pillar of the same gateway: ‘Vedesikehi dantakārehi rūpakammān katam’. This epigraphical evidence not only identifies the city of Vidiśā as a centre of ivory carvers but also reveals their master craftsmanship. Scholars observe that with all their diversity of style and inequality of technique, the sculptures on the Sāñchi toranas are essentially homogeneously recognisable as the products of one and the same school of art.

The architectural and sculptural techniques of the Sāñchi gateways are evidently those applied in a softer material like wood or ivory which was quite in vogue before the advent of the Mauryas who replaced wood by stone for building purposes. The ivory carvers of Sāñchi must have been the master craftsmen and have earned great fame. It is very clear from the fact that they were entrusted with the responsibility of such huge and tremendous work like the carving in stone, a harder material than wood and ivory. In the beginning, it must have posed a real difficulty to the artisans who had to cut material harder than wood or ivory. But soon they became experts and were engraving on stone as easily and excellently as wood or ivory. The skill and the refinement of the sculptures which the artists produced at Sāñchi, no doubt, mark out their art as of first rank which must have been more advanced and refined on a comparatively softer material like ivory. Through a close examination of the ivory pieces of Indian origin found so far, the influence of the Sāñchi style of sculptures on most of them is quite evident.

Low and High Relief

Stone carving at Sāñchi starts with the execution and erection of the ground balustrade of Stūpa No. 2, the art of which comes first of all the artistic remains of the early classical phase in the history of stylistic development. Technically speaking, the sculptural carvings on the ground rail pillars of Stūpa No. 2 are executed in very low and flat relief almost on linear patterns and the artist was following the law of ‘fron- tality’ and ‘memory picture’. Human figures are stiff and primitive. But a great advance is evident in case of the decorative designs. Flora and fauna are sculptured with remarkable success.

The artist achieved great perfection not long after when he produced the most splendid and wonderful gateways (toranas) during the period of the Sātavāhanas. Now free from primitive techniques, he exhibited a fine sense of composition and modelling in high relief following nature faithfully and directly with easy postures and harmonious forms from shoulders to
ankles. The human body now appears well-defined and beautiful. And not only this, the artist also attained mastery in the technique of expressing the subtle, violent or serene moods of men and women, not merely in figure and face, but also in symbolic movements expressed through the shaded curves of stone.19

Panorama of Life

Sāñchī art depicts a panorama of contemporary life. The ground rail pillars of Stūpa No. 2 and the five gateways, four of the Great Stūpa and one of Stūpa No. 3, preserve an encyclopaedia of sights and scenes depicting the culture and civilization of the time. The present cultural study, therefore, draws heavily upon the art of these stūpas for its material.

Religious Facet

The depiction is numerous as well as various. The primary facet of Sāñchī art is religious. Within a Buddhist frame, it includes the Jātaka stories or the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha, important events of his life31 and subsequent history of the Buddhist creed. Since the art is democratic in nature, it provides sufficient representation of the popular cults of Śrī-Lakshmi, Brahmā, Śakra or Indra and many other semi-gods and goddesses including yaksha-yakshis, nāga-nāgis, gandharvas, kinnaras and dikpālas.

Real and Mundane Picture of Life

The primary aim of the art of these Buddhist stūpas might have been to promote the new faith among the masses but the artists who were men of the world obviously portrayed the world as they saw it in real life in the expressive language of Buddhism. With the representation of the Buddhist motifs, the sculptors have actually drawn a real and mundane picture of the time. Moreover, it was not only the artist but the donor also who had a say in the choice of the subject and the style of representation on the panels. With the variety of outlook and feeling in the artists as well as the donors, the sculptures of the Sāñchī stūpas express various shades and forms of life and labour in ancient India.

Life in its Entirety

Śuṅga art in general and Sāñchī art in particular are the earliest to represent contemporary life in its entirety. The reliefs on the gateways and the railing pillars of these stūpas give a panoramic view of ancient Indian life. They represent human, animal and floral exuberance. Men and women, the rich and the poor, princes and commoners, hunters and hermits, soldiers and servants, art and architecture, arms and armour, dress and ornaments, conveyances and means of recreation, dance and music—life in a thousand aspects both rural and urban has been depicted on the panels of these stūpas at Sāñchī.

This art of Sāñchī belongs to the Śuṅga-Sātavāhana period, i.e., from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. A great deal of information regarding the life of the people of that period is available through contemporary literature. Sāñchī art provides us with plastic evidence. The art panels on the Sāñchī stūpas are like films screening living society. Depicted on them are advancing and fleeing armies, war in operation, fortifications, royal processions, kings at court and people enjoying waters-ports, joy-rides, drinking, dancing, music and picnics. Nothing is forgotten—neither life at court nor existence in town, in the country or in the jungles. In the following pages, different aspects of life as represented in Sāñchī sculptures will be described in separate chapters.
REFERENCES

1. Mahāvaiṣṇava, XIII.6-7.
5. Mahāvaiṣṇava, XVII.22-23.
8. Tulasiśāsā, Ramcharitmanaśa, IV.15.
14. Ibid., Inscription No. 404, p. 342—
17. I am greatly indebted to Dr. H.D. Bahr of the Allahabad University and Prof. Syamanārāyana, ex-Head of the Sāñkrit Department of C.M.P. College, Allahabad for explaining the words ‘Pabhāsā’ and ‘Sīhāta’, respectively.
19. Ibid., Inscription No. 842, pp. 395-96.
22. Ibid.
23. Cf. the word war which is still used in Thailand for a temple or monastery (‘Buddhist Names and Terms’, Hindustan Times, Buddha Jayanti Number, 24 May, 1956, p. 58).
31. In local dialect the word Sāñchi (truth) is still spoken in place of satya or sahi.
33. A short study of these cave-paintings has been done by the author in one of his articles, ‘Prehistoric Cave-paintings in the Hills of Sāñchi-Kānākherā and Nāgaūr, Prāchya Pratibhā, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Jan. 1970), pp. 107-09, pls. I-III.
36. Mahāvaiṣṇava, XIII.12.
37. Mahābodhiśāla, ‘tayā kāroṭi-tan vedasāgiri mahāvīhāram’ (see Mookerjee, R.K., Aśoka, p. 8).
38. Cf. Buddhaghosa’s commentary on Mahāvaiṣṇava, XIII.
40. A brick-stūpa constructed of the Maurya brick 16"×10"×3" was found buried below the present Great Stūpa of the Śākya period. See Marshall’s A Guide to Sāñchi, p. 33.
42. Majumdar, N.G., Monuments of Sāñchi, Inscription Nos. 170 and 455.
43. Ibid., Inscription Nos. 131 and 472.
44. Ibid., Inscription Nos. 142 and 500.
45. Ibid., Inscription No. 398, p. 342.
46. Colins of Vijayasena, Rudrasena II, Viśvasītha, Bharadāman, Vijayasena, Rudrasīthi, and Rudrasena III have been found at Sāñchi (A Guide to Sāñchi, p. 16, f.a. 1).
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49. Burgess, J.A.S., Buddhist Art in India, p. 25. Cf. Sir Lepel Griffin, Famous Monuments of Central India, p. 2. According to him it was Captain Fell who discovered these monuments for the first time in 1819.
54. Dr. Jagdish Raj, ‘Purāṇatattva Vībhāga Aūra Sāñchi kā Stūpa’ (Trans. in Hindi by Dinesh Chandra Pant), Saṃśārika Hindustāna, New Delhi, Feb. 4, 1962, pp. 22 and 35.
56. Dr. Jagdish Raj, ‘Purāṇatattva Vībhāga Aūra Sāñchi kā Stūpa’ (Trans. in Hindi by Dinesh Chandra Pant), Saṃśārika Hindustāna, New Delhi, Feb. 4, 1962, p. 28.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
64. JASB, Aug 1847, pp. 5-6.
70. Munshi, K.M., Saga of Indian Sculpture, p. 11.
71. Marshall (A Guide to Sāñchi, p. 44) has enumerated the important events of Buddha's life as four—the Birth, the Enlightenment, the First Sermon and the Death. But, the Great Departure or Mahābhūtānukrama has also been regarded as an important event of his life and befitting its importance, the whole space of the middle architrave of the Eastern Gateway has been occupied by its illustration.