

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF KURKIHAR

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ABSTRACT

Bihar and Bengal of the eighth to twelfth century C.E. was host to prolific production of religious sculptures. During this period the region was politically and culturally unified under Pala- Sena rulers. Other dynasties which held political power in this region during the span of these four centuries were Khadgas, Chandras, and Varmans. The Pala-Sena kings were patron of art, especially Buddhist, this is verified on the basis of inscriptional evidence, and patronage to the monastic establishments by the Pala rulers. Various monasteries such as Nālanda, Odantapura (located near Nālanda), Vikramshila (Antichak in Bhagalpur, Bihar) and Somapuri (Paharpur, Bangladesh) flourished in their kingdom. Many monasteries survived the wrath of time and some did not, one such monastery was situated near Gaya in a village which is now known as Kurkihar. My paper will inquire the history of this monastic site based on the sculptural, epigraphic, and architectural findings.

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Introduction

Kurkihar is an archaeological site that has been innumerable cited by scholars for its set of bronze images, discovered accidentally in the year 1930. Kurkihar lies in the Wazirganj town of Gaya district, Bihar. It is situated between the juncture of two prominent Buddhist centers of Bihar: Bodh Gaya and Nālanda. The site has unexcavated mounds, pillared ruins and, ancient sculptures which frequently show up in the art market.¹ In the nineteenth century, the site was twice visited by Major Kittoe. Kittoe was a British officer who in his 1847 visit to Kurkihar.² He also provided a sketch of some of the artefacts that he found on the site. In 1865, Peppe, a British engineer in India took photographs of the sculptures found on the site. Alexander Cunningham, a passionate antiquarian and archaeologist, visited the site twice in 1861-62 and again in 1879-80. He noticed numerous Buddhist images and innumerable votive stupas around the village and even provided a sketch plan of the site.³

Alexander Cunningham in 1861 reported three main mounds during his survey of Kurkihar. The main mound according to him lies in the south of the village where a modern temple is erected called the *Thakurbadi* temple. The second and third mound lies to the southwest and north of the village. Except for the *Thakurbadi* mound, other mounds are now hard to locate. The ancient ruins of Kurkihar are rapidly fading away because of the increasing population settlement.

Kurkihar lies to the south of Rajgir hills, and the area around the village has a large expanse of agricultural fields. Towards the north of the village three small hills lies with the remains of fragmentary bricks, pillars, and two śiva līṅga at top of the hill. This three- peak hill of Kurkihar was identified by Cunningham as Kukuta-pādagiri, “Hill of the Cock’s Foot” based on the account of Fa-Hian and Huiyen Tsang.⁴ According to the Chinese traveler, Xuanzang a three-peak hill mountain called Kukuta-pāda, was the abode and place of the nirvāṇa of Kāśyapa, a disciple of Buddha. On this mountain, Kāśyapa took up Buddha’s *chivara* (dress) and later passed the same *chivara* to the future Buddha Maitreya who visited this mountain. According to

¹Like the recent resurfacing of stolen Avalokiteśvara from Kurkihar on the Italian art market. See: Zachary Small, *Stolen Buddha Statue That Resurfaced in Italy Will Return to India*, *New York Times*, February 11th, 2022. Also, a crowned Buddha from Kurkihar was in the collection of Jean-Louis Sonnerly de Fromental, a French art collector, who sold the crowned Buddha from Kurkihar to a Private French collection in the 1980’s. There are many bronze images from Kurkihar like the ‘Sonnerly Buddha’ which lies in a private collection and cannot be tracked.

²D.R Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar, Historical Research Series Vol IV* (Patna: K.P Jayaswal Research Institute, 1963), 222. Kittoe also mentioned, “ten carts load of idols, all Buddhist and affiliated to the Tantrika Period.”

³Alexander Cunningham, *Four reports made during the years 1862-63-64-65, Archaeological Survey of India Vol I* (Simla: ASI, 1871), 15.

⁴Alexander Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879-80 from Patna to Sunargaon Archaeological Survey of India Vol.XV* (New Delhi:ASI, 2000), 4. The three- peak hill is referred by Cunningham as Murali Hills on his map of the site. (See map 1)

Xuanzang, the monastery was built by Asóka and it was located southeast of Pāṭaliputra.⁵ Scholars have been in disagreement over the identification of the Kukkuṭa-pāda giri mentioned by Xuanzang. Cunningham identified the Murali hill of Kurkihar as the Kukkuṭa-pāda giri of Xuanzang while M.A Stein identified the abode of Kāśyapa with the Sobhnath hill, north-east to Bodhgaya and R.D Banerjee identified Gurpa hill in Gaya as Kukkuṭa-pāda giri.

In the Buddhist account of Tārnātha, Kukkuṭa-pāda is mentioned as a place where a monastery was built for the *arhat* Uttara who lived in eastern India. According to the account, “the monastery in Kukkuṭa-pāda was built by the people of Bengal under the rule of King Mahendra, one of the successors of Ajātsātru in eastern India.” The monastery became famous as *Kukkuṭaārāma*.⁶ Here at *Kukkuṭaārāma*, *arhat* Uttara preached a sermon to his followers, all of whom attained awakening.⁷ Thus, in the account of Tārnātha, Kukkuṭa-pāda is a region in eastern India where the Kukkuṭaārāma monastery was built. In this text, the three-peaked hill ‘Kukkuṭa-pāda giri’ is not associated with the Kāśyapa and Maitreya as found in the account of Xuanzang.

In 1879 Cunningham’s second visit to the three-peaked mountain of Kurkihar made him observe a few fragmentary stupa bases and bricks on the top of the hill. A figure of 1’ 11” of Māya Devi was reported by Cunningham in 1879 on top of the hill. During my survey of the hill the sculpture of Māya Devi was not to be found, only two lingās (these lingās are not recorded by Cunningham, these lingās could be recent surfacing), and one pillar along with brick rubbles were found on the top of the Murali hill. Even if identification of Kukkuṭa-pāda giri remains contested, the three- peaked hills at Kurkihar is of significance because of their material remains. (Fig 1.1 a, b, c, d)

Kurkihar is located on the route of two important Buddhist establishments; to the northeast is Nālanda mahāvihāra, a seat of learning for the Buddhist monks and to the southwest is Bodh Gaya, the enlightenment seat of Buddha. The connectivity of Kurkihar with these two prominent Buddhist sites is envisaged through their sculptural similarities. The bronze images found from Kurkihar make it closer to Nālanda, site, already known for its set of gilded bronze. Bodhgaya became a place where monks from different parts of the Buddhist world gathered. The influx of monks to this holy site allowed for its periphery to expand. This expansion led to the building of monastic establishments. One such active monastic site was Kurkihar. The influence of Bodh Gaya on this site can be traced through the sculptures of Buddha, who in large number are depicted in *bhūmiśparsmudra*, a gesture linked to Buddha’s enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. There are also a few sculptures of Buddha from Kurkihar that has the symbol of *Vajra* on the seat of

⁵Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Taranatha’s History of Buddhism in India* (Delh: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1990), 39.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, footnote 26. The footnote mentions a *Kukkuṭaārāma* near Kauśāmbī existed during the time of Buddha. Groves were resting place for Buddha; similarly, monks also used groves and gardens for their retreat. The bird groves ‘*Kukkuṭaārāma*’ in Gaya and Kauśāmbī suggest that a grove full of birds might have been a preferred place for the monk’s shelter. Or it could also mean that ‘bird grove’ found at Gaya might have been named after Kauśāmbī’s bird grove.

Buddha. This *vajra* symbolises *vajrāsana* ‘the diamond seat’, a characteristic marker of Buddha’s seat at Bodh Gaya. (See fig 1.2 a&b). These two sites had permeable boundaries especially, artistic boundaries. There are large numbers of sculptures from Bodh Gaya that are stylistically similar to Kurkihar and the same could be said for sculptures from Kurkihar that has stylistic features of Bodh Gaya.

In between the two active religious centers, Nālanda and Bodh Gaya, Kurkihar was surrounded by other minor monastic centers like Hasra-kol, it is 6km south of Wazirganj and it is located in the valley of Shobhanatha hills. The site has been reported to have 13 mounds that have yielded small bricks and stone slabs representing ruins of temples or monasteries.⁸ Punawan, a Buddhist temple site is situated 4.82 km southwest of Kurkihar. Buddhist temple ruins are found at this site. At Punawan, one of the mounds had doorframe of a temple with the engaving of Dhayāni Buddhas. This doorframe has now been removed from the site and is placed at the Indian Museum, Kolkata. On the lintel of the doorframe, a three-pointed crown motif appears. This crown adorns the head of the Buddha in the centre. A strikingly similar iconography of Buddha seated in a niche topped by the motif of a pointed crown is found on a votive stūpa from Kurkihar. This votive stūpa from has been discussed in chapter 4.

Other Buddhist sites neighbouring Kurkihar are Harahi-sthan (Orel), two kilometers northwest of Kurkihar, Amethi also two kilometers northwest of Kurkihar and Jethian a valley 26 km from Kurkihar. (Map 1)

Chronology of the site

Kurkihar fits in the chronological time frame of the eighth - twelfth century C.E., a period when Magadha was under the political rule of the Pālas. The inscriptions with the regnal year of the king found from Kurkihar have helped to date the site. Kurkihar bears dated inscriptions on stones, cast metals, and a manuscript. Based on the inscriptional evidences one can ascertain the time period in which this center was active. A continuous successive chronological date for the site is largely provided by the cast images, only one stone pedestal, and one manuscript add on to the chronology of the site.⁹

The earliest dated sculpture from this site is a bronze cast of Balrāma. It is dated in the 9th year of king Devapāla. According to D.C Sircar, Devapāla ruled in the year 812-850 C.E.¹⁰ A stone image of four armed- Avlokitesvara now at the National Museum, is dated to the 25th regnal year

⁸Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, 165.

⁹Picron in her study of the artistic production at Kurkihar has included dated images recovered from the neighboring region of Kurkihar that follows the artistic style of Kurkihar. On the basis of these dated images, she argues that the eight-ninth century C.E. was the peak for art production at Kurkihar. I would like to point out, based on the set of bronze icons found from the site, Kurkihar remained artistically active upto the tenth century C.E.

¹⁰Susan Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena school of sculpture* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1984), 37. Picron has argued on the basis of the Javanese source of Bālaputradeva that the reign of Devapāla should be extended up to 856 C.E. I have referred to the dates given in the genealogy table by D.C Sircar.

of king Devapāla and a sculpture of Tāra is dated to the 31st regnal year of king Devapāla. The provenance of both the sculpture, Avlokitesvara and Tāra, is not known, but stylistically they belong to the atelier of Kurkihar.

The next Pāla ruler mentioned in the inscriptions found from Kurkihar is Mahendrapāla. The identity of Mahendrapāla was initially confused with the Gujara-Pratihāra king named Mahendrapāla (c 885-908 C.E). This misidentification led scholars to argue that the Gurjara-Pratihāra Mahendrapāla ruled over Bihar and Bengal. Later discovery of a copper plate inscription attested that Mahendrapāla was the son of Pāla king Devapāla. The date assigned to his reign is c. 847-862 C.E.¹¹ A broken stone pedestal from Kurkihar now preserved at the British Museum has inscription in three lines recording that it was a gift by a monk named Kusuma-sricandreṇa, a Mahayana follower, in the 9th regnal year of king Mahendrapāla¹²

Next in the line of succession was Śūrapāla I (c. 862-875 C.E). A cast image of Viṣṇu from Kurkihar revealed that it was dedicated in the 12th regnal year of king Śūrapāla.¹³ The inscriptions from the ninth century C.E. show that Kurkihar was actively involved in the stone and bronze production activities, the impetus of which must have started at the end of the eight century C.E.

There are three inscribed sculptures and one pedestal, all in bronze, dated to the reign of Rājyapāla (c.917-952 C.E). The sculptures are dated to the 32nd regnal year of the ruler while the pedestal is dated to the 28th regnal year. There are two sculptures of Vāsudhara/Yasodā and one of Umā-Mahesvara dated in the 32nd regnal year.

An inscribed bronze image from Kurkihar of Prajñāpāramitā dates to the reign of Mahipala I (c.977-1027 C.E). After an interim rule by Pratihāras in Bengal and Bihar, Mahipāla I was credited with reviving the Pāla Empire. But the political change did not affect the production activity in the region. Instead, the tenth century saw a rise in bronze production, not only at Kurkihar but also in the eastern India at large.

There are three inscriptions from Kurkihar that mentions the regnal year of the king Vighrahapala. Two crowned images of Buddha date to the 19th regnal year and one crowned image of Buddha date to the 3rd regnal year of king Vighrahapala III (1043-1070 C.E). R.C Majumdar had assigned

¹¹Rajat Sanyal, "Dedicatory Inscriptions of the Time of Mahendrapāla: A Fresh Appraisal," in *Prajñādhara: Essays on Asian Art History Epigraphy and Culture in honour of Gouriswar Bhattacharya*, ed. Gerd J.R Mevissen and Arundhati Banerji (New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2009), 302.

¹²Claudine Picron, *The Forgotten Place, Some stone Images from Kurkihar* (Bihar: ASI, 2015), 61. Stone sculptures of Buddha from Guneri and Tāra from Itkhori has inscription of the eighth and ninth regnal year of king Mahendrapāla. These sculptures were made at Kurkihar and then transported to Guneri and Ithori.

¹³Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena school of sculpture*, 47. There are two Śūrpāla in the Pāla dynasty. On the paleographic grounds this image was assigned to the Śūrpāla I; the Śūrpāla II reigned only for one or two years between 1071 -1072 C.E.

these crowned images to the king Vighrahapala II but Susan Huntington on the basis of stylistic study assigned these to king Vighrahapāla III.¹⁴

The last known inscriptional finding from Kurkihar is of a Prajñāpāramitā manuscript. It belongs to the reign of the Pāla ruler, Rāmapāla (c.1072-1126 C.E). In the same century one finds evidence of manuscript production at Kurkihar. A two leaf manuscript has been recovered from Kurkihar.

None of the sculptures are dated to the twelfth century C.E. but some of the bronze found from Kurkihar, on the stylistic grounds, can be dated to this period. In the twelfth century C.E. the artistic production decreased due to the decline of Buddhism in the region and this might have led to migration of atelier from Kurkihar to the other regions.

Historiography

In the nineteenth century, Kurkihar was mentioned by many excavators, like Francis Buchanan Hamilton in 1811, Markham Kittoe in 1847 and 1848, Alexander Cunningham in 1861-62 and 1871-72, Thomas Fraser Peppe in 1865, and M.A Stein in 1899.¹⁵ These scholars documented the site before the discovery of bronze icons in the 1930's. The discovery of bronze images in the 1930's led to a number of speculations about the nature of the site. Since then, scholars have documented and studied sculptures and inscriptions found at the site.

K.P Jayaswal visited Kurkihar in 1930 after the discovery of bronze by the landlord of the village. Like Cunningham he also noticed three mounds at Kurkihar. He reports that 230 pieces of metal images were moved to Patna Museum.¹⁶ According to him, there were a few images of solid silver that never reached the Museum. Jayaswal informs that the villagers and landlords had been using the mounds for constructing buildings for many generations. The bronze hoard was found "at the corner of a room, 15 feet below the top of the mound".¹⁷ The smaller metal icons were found packed in the earthen jars and larger ones were stacked up on the ground, the heaviest one placed at the bottom.¹⁸

S.K Saraswati and K.C Sarkar visited the site in 1931. They provided a detailed description of the sculptures found at the site. Apart from the sculptural findings, they pointed out some of the inscriptions on the sculptures. An image of Avalokitesvara at *Devistahn mandir* has an inscription from a donor from South, *Pandya desh*.¹⁹ Another inscription detail given by them is

¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵ S.K Saraswati and K.C Sarkar, *Kurkihar, Gaya And Bodh Gaya* (Rajshahi, 1936), 2-3.

¹⁶ The Patna Museum Catalogue only has 208 metal pieces. The rest might have been distributed to other museums.

¹⁷ K.P Jayaswal, "Metal Images of Kurkihar Monastery," *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol II, No.2, (1934): 70.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁹ S.K Saraswati and K.C Sarkar, *Kurkihar, Gaya And Bodh Gaya*, 29.

an image of Buddha found near the Zamindar's bungalow. Apart from the Buddhist creed, the incomplete inscription reads "*deya dharmmoyam--upasika sthavira*"²⁰

Kurkihar known for its set of bronze was first illuminated as a center of stone production by Susan Huntington in her major work "*The Pala-Sena schools of Sculptures*", 1984. Based on the numerous stone sculptures found at Kurkihar, she highlighted the importance of Kurkihar as a major artistic production center during the Pāla period. She points out that Kurkihar develops a coherent style that shows greater symmetry and standardization of motifs in its execution of sculptures. Huntington has pointed out that the depictions of Kurkihar-style sculptures are found in sites like Bodh Gaya, Amethi, Aurel, and Guneri. The stylistic similarity between sculptures from different sites from a region could be gauged by the existence of local ateliers and according to her one such local atelier was present at Kurkihar.

Further expanding on the idea of a local atelier present at Kurkihar, Claudine Picron in her meticulous work, "*The Forgotten Place: Stone Images from Kurkihar*" has identified artistic idioms associated with the site. She analyzed that the 'Kurkihar idiom' spread to Gaya and south of Gaya to sites like Guneri and Itkhorī. These two villages south and southwest of Kurkihar respectively have sculptures that can be related to the 'Kurkihar idiom'. A stone sculpture of Buddha from Guneri in *Bhūmisparsāṃudrā* with attending figures, Bodhisattva Maitreya and Avalokitesvara, is similar to the iconographic program found at Kurkihar. A sculpture of Maitreya also from Guneri includes motifs seen at Kurkihar. Picron argues that these sculptures at Guneri were made at Bodh Gaya as Bodh Gaya is closer to Guneri. But because these sculptures directly relate to the iconography of Kurkihar, they could have been made by the atelier group from Kurkihar who migrated to Bodh Gaya in the tenth century C.E. The image of Tāra from Itkhorī is also related to the Kurkihar Idiom but it also includes elements characteristic of the Bodh Gaya. Thus, suggesting that some sites were dependent on the local atelier for their sculptural need and the atelier from Kurkihar must have catered to these local demands of sculptures. According to Picron, sites north of Bodh Gaya like Konch, Mandaur, Kauwadol, Kispā, Dharawat, Dapthu, and Telhara do not reflect the Kurkihar idiom. These sites were closer to Nālanda and thus show trends that influenced local production at Nālanda. According to Picron, the expansion of the Kurkihar style started to take place in the ninth century C.E. and it ended by the second half of the ninth century.²¹

Prior to the study of stone sculptures from Kurkihar, art historians focused on the stylistic depiction of the bronzes found at the site. The group of metal images from Kurkihar was first stylistically studied by Stella Kramrisch. Kramrisch mentions that the group of metal images from Kurkihar was stylistically similar to the bronze images found from Nālanda. She points out that the style and composition of the metal images from Kurkihar were similar to the stone images produced from Kurkihar and other sites. She highlighted the stylistic features of Kurkihar

²⁰ *ibid.*, 6

²¹ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 155.

bronze found during the pre- Devapāla and Devapāla period. She has highlighted the treatment of the body and the modeling of these metal images. The metal images of Kurkihar are also been discussed in the volume on “*Eastern Indian Bronzes*” by historians Nihar Ranjan Ray, Karl Khandalavala, and Sadashiv Gorakshkar. They brought into notice the stylistic changes found in the eastern Indian bronzes from the seventh century to the twelfth century C.E. The compendium includes a discussion on physiognomical changes found in the Kurkihar bronze over the period of four centuries. This work has also glimpsed into the workshop production of metal images. Ray has argued that for five hundred years (7th -12th century C.E) eastern India had a uniform form and style that had its identity of its own. Eastern India according to him also contributed to a rich Buddhist iconography of Bodhisattvas and their female Śāktis. The Kurkihar bronze collection proves these arguments are correct. For four centuries the bronze atelier at Kurkihar produced icons that were formally and stylistically the same and the Buddhist pantheon it represents is wide.

The metal images found from Kurkihar are mostly inscribed with the Buddhist creed formulas. B.N Prasad in his work on Kurkihar, “*The Socio-religious Dimensions of Dedicatory Inscriptions on Sculptures Donated to a Buddhist Establishment in Early Medieval Magadha: Kurkihar, c 800-1200 C.E.*” has studied the dedicatory inscriptions found on the metal images from the site. To understand the donation pattern at Kurkihar, Prasad has done a century -wise breakdown (9th to 12th century C.E) and has analyzed the different social groups that donated metal images in each century. Based on the statistical survey of the donors, Prasad concluded that there was no royal donation given to the site. The patronage basis included monastic followers, laymen, and laywomen.

In his PhD dissertation, ‘*Contextualising the Navel of the Earth: The Emergence, Sustenance and Religious Transformation of Buddhism in the Bodhgaya Region*’ Abhishek Amar has argued that the monastery such as Kurkihar was “Satellite Monastic centre” that benefited and emerged due to its closer proximity to Bodh Gaya.²² These regional or ‘Satellite monastic centres’, according to him developed due to the increased agricultural output and continuous grant by the local communities.

As a Buddhist archeological site, Kurkihar, offers plenty of sculptural and inscriptional remains that can be studied. In my work, I have tried to include both the sculptural and the inscriptional findings from the site. The dissertation has four chapters. The first chapter elucidates the sculptural findings from the site. It discusses in detail the image of Revanta, Cūnda, Vanjrapāni, and ekmukha lingas. The second chapter deals with metal images and their methods of production. It looks at the composition of the Buddhist and the Brahmanical pantheon, along

²²Abhishek Amar, PhD Thesis, *Contextualising the Navel of the Earth: The Emergence, Sustenance and Religious Transformation of Buddhism in the Bodhgaya Region Circa 300 BCE - 1200 CE* (University of London: ProQuest LLC, 2017), 192.

with a new iconographical element of ‘crowned Buddha’. The third chapter discusses patronage and iconography of donors and the fourth chapter studies the architectural remains found on the site.

Sources

My approach to studying Kurkihar was to visit the site and look for further evidence of archaeological remains. The site has been visited and recorded since 1847. Some antiquities mentioned in the reports of 1800’s are still to be found on the site. Like the chaityas and the temple where the stone sculptures are kept. Fieldwork was carried out to understand the landscape of the site. In course of fieldwork I visited the recently excavated hill monastic site at Lal Pahari in Lakhisarai, Bihar. Kurkihar lies southwest of Lakhisarai; the distance between the two sites is 125 km. I also visited Nālanda and Bodh Gaya, two Buddhist sites closer to Kurkihar. Comparing in situ sculptures from all these sites gave historical context of ‘seeing’ of an image.

Usually, the historical context is lost when a sculpture is show-cased within the museum walls. But those walls are also necessary for the preservation and conservation of antiquities. My next approach was to carry out documentation of sculptural materials from Kurkihar that are kept at different museums. For this, I visited Patna Museum where approximately 20 metal images of Kurkihar are secured in storage, out of these, 16 were stolen in 2006. After the CBI investigation, 15 were recovered and one was lost. The conditions of some of these images were delicate and fragile. The other 200 bronze from Kurkihar is kept at Bihar Museum. I accessed the gallery and storage of the Bihar Museum to document bronze images from Kurkihar. For the documentation of stone images from Kurkihar, I visited Nawada Museum, Bihar, and Indian Museum, Kolkata. For comparing the sculptures from Kurkihar to other sites I documented sculptures from the Nalanda museum, Gaya Museum, and Bodh Gaya Museum. This approach helped me understand that within Bihar each monastic site had its distinct artistic feature which was because of different atelier groups present at these monasteries. But the limitation of my fieldwork was, not visiting sites or temples that have sculptural remains in closer proximity of Kurkihar, sites like Punawan, Amethi, and Orel.

The data collections of sculptures were supported by the Museums Catalogues. I have referred to the *Patna Museum catalogue: Terracottas and Metal Images, 2001* for the data on bronze icons from Kurkihar and for the stone sculptures, *Catalogue of Pala Sena Sculptures in the Archaeology Section, Indian museum* and *The Former Broadley Collection, Bihar Sharif, F.M Asher, 1972* was referred.

For the inscriptions apart from *The Patna Museum Catalogue* i have also referred to *The Ninety-Three Inscriptions on the Kurkihar Bronzes, 1940* by A.Banerji Shastri. In addition, I have referred to the Catalogue provided by Picron in her book *The Forgotten Place, Stone Images from Kurkihar, 2015*.

Textual sources used are, *Tārṇātha's history of Buddhism in India*, translated by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, 1990. For iconography, I have referred to the book on Buddhist iconography by Benoytosh Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 1958. The book is based on the manuscripts of *Sādhanaṃālā* and, *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, iconographic work of Abhayakāra Gupta of the eleventh twelfth century C.E. As most of the inscriptions found at Kurkihar are donative in nature I have referred to the translation of text *Dānapāramitā-sūtra* by Jason Matthew McCombs, 2014.

I have also used online database like the Internet Archive, J Store, the digital collection of Susan Huntington Archive, the Himalayan Art Resources and the Wisdom Library.

The Kurkihar Idiom

The typical Pāla-style stone sculptures were carved of a greyish to grey-black densely grained stone, schist or phyllite which was found in the region of Magadha.²³ The flat back of the stone stele suggests that the stone sculptures were placed in the niches of the brick temples or monasteries. The artistic style that emerged out of the Pāla period was not uniform throughout the chronological and geographical boundary. The Pāla sculptures found in Bengal and Bihar are different. Within Bihar, the style that had emerged out of Nālanda was different from Kurkihar and the style found at Kurkihar was different from the style prevalent at Lakhi Sarai. This points to the different ateliers that were working in the region of Bihar and most of these ateliers worked near a monastic site.

One such monastic site with its own artistic atelier was Kurkihar. Claudine Picron, who has done extensive study on the atelier of Kurkihar, illuminates the distinctiveness of the sculptures from Kurkihar. According to her, artists at Kurkihar used 'decorative vocabulary' from the active ateliers at Bodhgaya and Nālanda. The rules of composition at Kurkihar were clearly indicated by each zone exhibiting a certain group of motifs. For analyzing the sculptural style, Picron has divided the sculptures from Kurkihar into four zones A, B, C, and D. I will discuss these zones briefly to highlight what constitutes 'Kurkihar idiom'. Although there are combinations of styles in each zone discussed by the author, for the sake of brevity and minimum reiteration, I will discuss features that are typical of Kurkihar in each zone.

Zone A constitutes mainly of the nimbus, the tree, *vidyādhara*s, and pair of chaityas, scrolls, hamsas, makras, umbrella, and kirtimukha.²⁴ The nimbus at Kurkihar is big; the lower part of the

²³ Susan Huntington and Jhon C Huntington, *Leaves from Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India (8 th -12 th centuries) and Its International Legacy*, Exhibition Catalogue (London: Washington Press, Nov 1989- Jan 1990) p.5.

²⁴ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 37. The kirtimukha symbolises the sun, i.e fire. The flames in the nimbus also represent that. The makrās symbolises water and the pearls are symbolic of treasures hidden in the deep ocean. Thus, Picron argues that in a sculpture a constant play of elements of fire and water is marked.

circle remains hidden behind the back of the deity. The shape of the nimbus ranges from fully round to oval. At Nālanda, the nimbus is made smaller; most of it is hidden by the head of the deity. At Bodh Gaya the nimbus becomes larger, hiding the lower part of the nimbus. In the early period at Kurkihar, the head occupied the center of the nimbus and later it covered the lower part. The motifs used for the decoration of nimbus are rows of petals, twisted garlands, and flames (probable influence from Nālanda). The other important feature of zone A is the chaitya. The chaitya in the zone has flat moulding of various depths. The middle part (*janghavedi*) is narrower and higher, the dome is rarely hemispherical, it rather low and flat. There are multiple mouldings made on the chaitya with a row of double-petal lotus and sometimes *gavākṣa*.

Zone B constitutes of architectural structure, the throne. The throne has two columns that support a lintel and the lintel has a complex capital. On either side of the column, two leogryphs holds a string of pearls, sometimes it is also has elephants with riders. Sometimes the two columns are replaced by leogryphs but when leogryphs are absent two attending deities stand next to the central image, acting as a post to the throne. The throne does not appear as a decorative element at the beginning of the Pāla period; earlier a plain rectangular frame occupied the space behind the deity. Later, within the rectangular frame, the throne was integrated. The columns are usually flat, and the lentil ends with fluted knobs reminiscent of *āmalaka*, with rows of beads hanging from the knob. In some sculptures, the fluted knob disappears completely and is replaced by *makarās*.

Zone C on the back slab is characterized by the positioning of the central deity. In front of this zone, the deity stands or sits. In this zone, the characteristic style of the robe, the drapery, the headdresses, the jewelry, and treatment of the attributes are noted. At Kurkihar, *Avlokiteśvara padma* (lotus) is depicted as a deeply carved round flower whereas at Bodh Gaya and Nālanda it's shown as full-blown. The attribute of Tārā and Mañjuśrī is *utpala* (blue lotus), at Kurkihar, the shape of *utpala* is elongated and thin, one petal falls and rest stay erect. At other sites all the petals are depicted erect. (Fig 1.3 a, b)

Zone D is the last zone and has important feature that is noteworthy to the atelier of Kurkihar. This zone constitutes the pedestal. A common element of a pedestal is a lotus seat, a base on which a deity sits or stands. Below this, an architectural base is made separated by pillared columns. In the niche of the pedestal and between the columns elephants and lions are positioned frontally or in profile. The pedestal has a succession of flat horizontal recesses topped by a series of *kūḍus* or half *kūḍus*. The pedestal is taken as an architectural base where animals are introduced within the niches separated by pillars and topped by *gavākṣas*. The pillared compartments where elephants and lions are distributed are not peculiar to this site; this feature is found at Bodh Gaya and at the caves of Ajanta and Ellora. Picron has suggested that this ornamentation of the base in the eastern region has been inspired by the western caves of Maharashtra. What is particular to the atelier of Kurkihar is the treatment of these motifs together. She observes “*The innovation of the local atelier (Kurkihar) is to combine both animals (lion and elephant) in a single composition. At the beginning, the elephants are not*

*directly seen since they are carved on both sides whereas lion face the viewers. The inclusion of the elephants on the front is thus purely local development....*²⁵ (Fig 1.4)

²⁵ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 55.

Chapter 1: Sculptural Remains at Kurkihar

Introduction

Stone sculptures from Kurkihar have been reportedly found from the mound called the *Gadh*. This mound is declared important under the Ancient and Archaeological sites by ASI. The sculptures unearthed from the *Gadh* are repositied inside a Devi temple at Kurkihar. The temple is locally known as *Devisthan Mandir*, it is dedicated to the Goddess *Mahisāsūramardhini*. This temple houses about thirty Buddhist images. (Map 2) The sculptures kept at the temple are part of daily worship. The priest of the temple washes these images every morning and makes them ready for the ritualistic offerings. Partaking in the daily worship are images of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhist goddesses. There are hardly any Hindu deities in the niche of the temple walls except the goddess *Pārvati*, *Mahisāsūrmardini*, and a *Mukha-Liṅga*. The sculptural findings from this temple include, Buddha in *Bhūmiśparsāmudra*, Buddha in *Dharmacakraparvartanamudrā*, Descent of Buddha from the *Trayastrimsha* Heaven, and Buddha in *Abhayamudrā*. In the group of Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara, Mañjuśrī, Maitreya and Buddhist Goddess like Tāra and Cūṇḍa. (Fig 2.1- 2.13)

Choti-Devisthan Temple

A temple, *Choti-devisthan mandir*, also called *Ram mandir* is situated 500 m from the main *Devisthan mandir*. A few medieval sculptures from the mound are installed in this temple. Inside the temple, a six- armed Avlokitesvara is kept. He holds a rosary and a fruit in the proper right hand and the third hand is in the *varadamudra*. The proper left hand has a lotus and a water vessel; the third hand is broken. He is accompanied by two attendants; Tāra on his proper right and Bhṛīkūti on his proper left. They are seated in the *ardhaparyāṅka āsana*. On the top of the stela, two miniature figures of Buddha are placed. One is seated on a lotus pedestal on the left in *Bhūmiśparsāmudra* (probably Dhyāni Buddha Akṣobhya). The other miniature Buddha is seated on top of the head of Avlokitesvara, the head of this Buddha is broken and the mudra is unclear, he could be Amitābha; Dhyāni Buddha responsible for the creation of Avalokitesvara. This six - armed Avlokitesvara could be identified as Amoghaśā Lokeshvara. Another noticeable feature of this sculpture is the chain hanging from the belt, touching the left thigh. It seems an unusual ornamental motif. A small fragmentary image of Avlokitesvara is fixed to the temple wall; only the upper part with four hands is visible. (Fig 2.14, 2.15 a, b, c)

Another Buddhist deity that marks its presence in this temple is a beautiful image of Jambhala, kept inside the niche of the temple. An image of Jambhala is also found at the main *Devisthan mandir*. The sculpture of Jambhala at the *Devisthan* is seated next to the sculpture of Buddha in *Trayastrimsha* Heaven. Based on the locks of hair and ornaments of this sculpture of Jambhala, it can be dated to the sixth-seventh century C.E. He holds a mongoose in the proper left hand and the proper right hand has a fruit. He is wearing a double *Upavītā* made of flowers and beads. He wears armlets on both hands and sits in *ardhaparyāṅka*. Jambhala is connected with wealth and

is said to distribute gems, jewels, and riches to his devotees. In the *Sāadhanāmālā*, Jambhala may either emanate from Akṣobhya or Ratnasambhava. The characteristic feature of Jambhala emanating from Ratnasambhava is that he carries the mongoose in his right hand and the citron in the left. And therefore the present Jambhala at the *Devistan mandir* is an emanation of Ratnasambhava. (Fig 2.16)

The sculpture of Jambhala at *Ram Mandir* can be dated to a later period, the tenth-eleventh century C.E. Stylistically the flying ribbons from the crown and the round lobbed earrings are elements of a later period. He sits in *ardhaparyāṅka* holding the mongoose in one hand and the fruit in another. He sits on a lotus seat unlike the Jambhala from the Devasthan mandir. An image of a devotee to the right of the pedestal holding some kind of offering can be seen. An excellent preserved craftsmanship of Jambhala is housed at the Indian Museum. This sculpture is headless; the highlight of this sculpture is the mongoose and the five pots of wealth. The Jambhala at the Indian Museum sits in *Pralambapādāsana*. The mongoose is supposed to be the holder of all gems and jewels, and when Jambhala presses the two sides of the mongoose it expels the treasures it contains. It is the mongoose which makes it easy to identify Jambhala images and sets it apart from the Hindu god of wealth Kubera. (Fig 2.17, 2.18 a&b)

Fragmentary sculptures during the field Survey

The village of Kurkihar has been settled on the rubble of ancient brick structures. Its ancient roots can be found through the fragmentary sculptures found either inside the residents' houses or they lie in the agricultural fields. Some sculptures are stolen and are not to be found in their find spots. Some are secretly covered by the house owners inside a stack of hay or chopped wood. In this section, I will discuss sculptural remains found during my fieldwork to Kurkihar. Some of the broken sculptures are repaired by their owner. In a few cases I observed that the headless Buddha has been implanted with new heads at a few places which convey a sense of restoration towards the ancient objects in the local inhabitants.

The Trayastrimsha Heaven Episode

This black basalt sculpture of Buddha (60cm) with a new head and hands shows the episode of Buddha's descent from the *Trayastrimsha* Heaven. This presumption is based on the evidence of two figures that are attending Buddha on either side. To the left is three-headed Brahma and to the right is Indra holding the staff of the umbrella. The descent of Buddha was witnessed by a number of celestial beings in heaven and by the human worshippers too. Buddha's left hand is correctly renovated in *abhaya mudra*, while the right-hand still remains broken. A symbol of a modern lotus motif on the palm is placed, accurately depicting the original details of the hand. Behind the sculpture, a stele of another image is attached to the wall. The stele depicts the scenes of eight important events of Buddha's life. The top of this stele is broken. The paint and damaged figures do not allow reading what specific scenes are on the back.

The robe of Buddha with symmetric lines reminds the bronze equivalent of this episode from the Kurkihar hoard. In comparison to the descent image from the Devasthan mandir, this image can be dated possibly around the tenth century C.E. The one at the temple still retains the roundness of the image as prevalent during the Gupta period. Brahma on the left, with three heads, is shown as an ascetic figure with long tresses. Generally, the iconographic trend of this episode shows Brahma holding a fly whisk. Here, Brahma must have held a fly whisk in the left hand and the water vessel in the right. To the right is Indra, king of the Trayastrimsha Heaven. Even being a king of gods and celestial beings he holds a staff for Buddha. These deities are given the status of attendants, implying the subordinate position of Hindu deities in the Buddhist pantheon.

Another headless and fragmented image of Buddha's descent from the *Trayastrimsha* Heaven is placed on a tank platform. Here, Buddha is accompanied by a figure wearing a conical cap and holding a staff, identifiable as Indra. The left part of the sculpture which is now damaged probably had the figure of Brahma. Looking at the developed stele with the motif of the throne and lion, this image can be dated to tenth eleventh century C.E. (Fig 2.19 a&b, Fig 2.20)

A Goddess

In a small niche of a resident's house, a figure of a goddess is installed (30cm). She is a four-armed goddess, only the upper portion remains intact. The lower part of the sculpture which was broken is now restored. Looking closely at this sculpture it appears that the goddess is seated on a lion in *ardhaparyāṅkāśana*. The attributes that she holds in her hands are indistinct. The proper right hand is in the *vardamudrā*, similar to the Pārvati image holding a child at the Devistan mandir. Based on the attributes i.e a shield, a sword and a lion this image can be identified as Pārvati. (Fig 2.21)

Buddha in the *Bhūmisparśamudrā*

A small miniature figure of Buddha, approximately, 6-7 cm in height, is fixed to the Tulsi podium on the terrace of the same house. Buddha is seated in the *Bhumisparśamudrā* on a lotus pedestal. The head has been attached by the owner. The black stone has been painted with golden paint. Buddha's image is seated and touches the ground memorializing the victory of Buddha over the Mara demon. The back of the image is broken; beaded lines covering the border of the stele can be noticed. A small incised line, with five-six letters, is visible on the right side of the stele. This must be the Buddhist creed formula, usually inscribed behind the main image on the the back of stele. There are a few other miniature fragmentary sculptures of Buddha in the *Bhumisparśa mudrā* in the village. (Fig 2.22- 2.25)

Buddha in Dharmachakramudrā

This image of Buddha in *Dharmachakramudrā* is one of the few sculptures of Buddha in this gesture from Kurkihar. The sculpture is small in size and ranges 27 cm in height. The pedestal has lion and elephant motifs. Buddha is flanked by a bodhisattva on the left, standing on the

stemmed lotus pedestal. Floral marks on the throne at the back of the sculpture are noticeable. The gesture denotes the setting into motion the wheel of the teaching of Dharma. In this mudra, the thumb and index finger of both hands touch at their tips to form a circle. This circle represents the Wheel of Dharma. (Fig 2.26)

Fragmented sculpture of Tāra

The sculptures of Tāra from Kurkihar are numerous in number. Most of the images of Tāra from Kurkihar are two- armed, like the one shown here. Tāra stands holding an Utpala in the proper left hand and the proper right hand would have been in the *Varadamudrā*. The mother Goddess Tāra has as many as twenty-one forms but at Kurkihar she is represented as Khadiravaṇī Tara flanked by two companions Mārīcī and Ekajaṭā with two arms, peaceful and granting boon. She is the consort of Amoghasiddhi, the lord of the action family, who like her is green in colour. This sculpture of Tāra could be dated to the tenth century C.E. The conception of Tāra with her two companions was not to be found before the nine century C.E. and this form of Tāra became popular in eastern India only in the eleventh century C.E.¹ (Fig 2.27)

Ekajaṭā

At Kurkihar, a fragmentary sculpture of Ekajaṭā fixed to the ground in one of the fields. This piece must have belonged to a larger sculpture of Tāra. Ekajaṭā is usually positioned to the proper right of Tārā. She may have two, four, and eight arms as per *sādhnamālā*. She is a wrathful deity, but a powerful one; if one listens to her *sādhana* they are freed from all the obstacles. All the forms of Ekajaṭā are blue in colour; this is because she is an emanation of Akṣobhya. Her attributes constitute of *Kapāla* (skull cap), *karṭṭ* (a sword), an arrow, sometimes *utpala*, and rosary. But the main distinguishing marker of her iconography in the eastern Indian sculpture is the elephant skin that she carries around above her head. This sculpture of Ekajaṭā is four- armed; she holds a sword in her proper right hand and a skull cup in her proper left hand. The other two hands at the back hold the elephant's hide. *Sādhanamālā* does not associate elephant skin with the iconography of Ekajaṭā. Only the Tibetan source refers to this attribute of Ekajaṭā. Scholars have suggested that the elephant motif is introduced in Buddhist iconography via Shiva's representation as *Gajāśura*.² (Fig 2.28, 2.29)

¹Martin Wilson. *In Praise of Tārā Songs to the Saviouress: Source texts from India and Tibet on Buddhism's Great Goddess* (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publication, 1996), 280-281.

²Stella Kramrisch, *Manifestation of Śiva* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1981), 46. "The demon Nīla, 'the dark' assumed the shape of an elephant to kill Śiva, was destroyed by Śiva. After he had flayed the elephant, Śiva took up its skin and danced frantically, flinging the skin high before it came to rest upon the shoulders as his upper garment." Ekajaṭā is not the only one in the Buddhist pantheon who is associated with elephant skin; the others are Saṃvara and Mahākāla.

Other fragmentary pieces found from Kurkihar include a torso of Avlokiteśvara, a torso of Jambhala, a pedestal of Mañjuśrī, and a fragmentary stele with a flying *vidyādhara* holding garland. (Fig 2.30-2.33)

Apart from the findings of these Bodhisattvas in situ, there are sculptures of deities such as the wrathful god Heruka and goddess Mārici from Kurkihar. The Aṣṭabhuja- Mārici is now kept at Lucknow Museum. The sculpture of Aṣṭabhuja- Mārici has her iconographic traits, she stands in *ālīḍha* attitude, has three faces, eight hands, four female attendants, the female charioteer with Rāhu, and seven boars. She is an emanation of Dhyāni Buddha Vairocana. Her attributes are needle, string, noose, *aṅkuśa*, bow, arrow, Vajra, and Asoka flower. Her *sādhna* describes that she sews up the eyes and the mouth of the wicked with needle and string.³ Heruka is emanation of Dhyāni Buddha Akṣobhya. Akṣobhya is associated with wrathful deities. A sculpture of Heruka from Kurkihar is kept at the Berlin Museum.⁴ This sculpture of Heruka has two hands, he wears a skull garland and he is surrounded by eight females dancing on a corpse, Heruka himself is in *Ardhaparyāṅka* on a corpse. His role as a deity is to protect the world from *Māras* (wicked beings).⁵

Section II – Analysis of Unpublished Sculptures

In this section detail analysis of four unpublished sculptures from Kurkihar is done. These include a sculpture of Cūṇḍa, Vajrapāṇi, Revanta, and Ek-mukha linga. The sculptural diversity from Kurkihar does show that the monastic site was visited by different religious cults.

Cundā

The Buddhist goddess Cundā is a bodhisattva deity. She is most familiar with the region of India, Bangladesh, Java, Tibet, China, and Japan. Cundā gained independent status in the Buddhist pantheon and had a cult of worshippers in medieval times. Her independent cult can be supported by a story given in the Tāranātha's account.⁶ In the Tāranātha account the story is about the founder of the Pāla Empire, Gopāla. "When Gopāla was a boy he found a self-radiating gem while digging at the foot of a deified tree. Because the gem was very auspicious he received *abhiṣeka* from an *ācārya* who instructed Gopālā to appease the goddess Cundā. Gopālā, as demanded, propitiated the goddess".⁷ (Fig 2.34, 2.35)

³Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 211. "She sews up the eyes and the mouths of the wicked with the needle and secures them with the string. She strikes their hearts with the Aṅkuśa, draws them by the neck with the noose, pierces them with the bow and the arrow, and shatters their hearts to pieces with the Vajra, and then sprinkles water with the leaves of Asoka... She tramples under her feet Prajñā and Upaya."

⁴Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, Catalogue, Fig 181.

⁵Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 156.

⁶Pushpa Niyogi, "Cundā - a Popular Buddhist Goddess" *East and West* 27, no. 1/4 (1977): 300.

⁷Lama Chimpa and Alka Chattopadhyaya, *Tārnātha's History of Buddhism In India*, 33-34. The story recounts the foundation of the Pāla Empire in eastern India. It also shows worship of Cundā as a tutelary deity

Cundā at Bodhagayā

Cunda has many forms; she can be found as four, eight, sixteen, and eighteen armed. A stone sculpture of Cundā is found at the Mahant compound at Bodh Gaya. She has eighteen hands and she sits on a double- petalled lotus supported by two *Nāgarājas*. This is a massive image of Cundā, measuring up to 226X122 cm (more than 7. ft). It is made from black basalt stone. The deity exudes tranquility. Her headgear has flying ribbons from the back of her crown, and layers of swirly *jatā* fall on her shoulder. She is wearing a beaded thick *upavīta* that flows from her shoulder to her lap. The first pair of hands was broken; ideally, they should be in the *dharmachakra- mudra* , now the repaired version holds an indistinct object⁸. The sculpture is partially destroyed and because of this few arms of the goddess are missing. Attributes visible on the proper right are, sword, jewel, club, and *vajra*, and on the proper left are noose, discus, and staff. On top of the stela, garland bearing *gandharvas* are made on each side, similar to the Niyamatpur stone sculpture of Cundā found in Bangladesh. The pedestal beautifully shows two *nāgās*, ornamented and wearing *upavīta* similar to the goddess. They hold the stalk of the lotus. At the bottom of the pedestal, two lay worshippers are depicted. On the right, a female in *añjalīmudra*, and on the left a male with a flower garland are seated. Next to these figures in the lower part of the pedestal, a two-line inscription is engraved. The inscription reads:

*‘This is a religious gift of Śrī Śubhaṅkara, who is a prominent follower of Mahāyāna and a high officer designated as Mahākṣapaṭālādhyakṣa (superintendent of records and account) and Karaṇika (scribe, writer of legal document). Whatever religious merit is accrued from this let it be for the attainment of supreme fruition by all with ācārya, upādhyāya and parents placed before them’.*⁹

It is clear from the inscription that this resplendent work was commissioned by a top -ranking nobleman, Śrī Śubhaṅkara. This inscription marks a very important aspect of Cundā worship in eastern India. She was indeed an important Mahāyāna deity during this period as it is clear from her rich patron.

This sculpture is part of the Mahant’s compound at Bodh Gaya and it is installed near the eastern gate. The sculpture was originally not installed in the Mahant’s compound. Whatever the original

during the beginning of the Pāla period. This suggests that Cundā was known and worshipped before the establishment of Pāla Empire in the eighth century C.E. Gopāla would have promoted the worship of his patron deity in his kingdom. There are sculptural evidences of Cundā worship in the eastern India during this period.

⁸As of present, the hands are mended with an unappealing aesthetics. She is holding a round object a ball? or Moon?

⁹ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, Catalogue, 229.

positioning of the sculpture was the current placement of this sculpture has a favorable aura. The sculpture directly faces the bank of the river Phalgu. Currently, worshippers pray to her as goddess Durgā and she is covered in all kinds of modern religious paraphernalia and is housed in a compact tiled temple. (Fig 2.36 a,b,c)

Cundā at Kurkihar

A small figure of Cundā (30 cm) made from black basalt stone is kept inside the inner sanctum of the *Devistan Mandir* of Kurkihar. It sits next to the big sculpture of goddess *Mahisasurmardhini*. Cundā sits in *vajrāsana* with the primary hands in *dharmachakramudrā*. She has eighteen hands, the proper right hands have been corroded and the attributes in those eight hands are non-identifiable, except a few; a vase, a sword, a *vajra*? and a rosary. The attributes in the proper left are more clear and visible, from bottom to up, a bell, a fruit, a *dhavaja*, an indistinct object, a discus, a conch shell and a club, a pot, lotus and a manuscript. She is ornamented; her lock of hair falls on her shoulder. A broad belt at the hips appears distinctively in the sculpture. She is seated on a single- petalled lotus held by two *nāgās*, only the head is visible of the two *nāgās*. Their heads have snake hoods and they wear *ekāvali*. Cundā is accompanied by two female deities, installed on either side of the pedestal; the left one is holding a sword and has two hands; on the right, the goddess stands in *Pratyālīḍha*. The upper lotus petals have incision marks on them and the letters are worn. One can detect that it was an inscription, at least on the three front petals. The inscriptions on the petals are very similar to another Cundā image from Bodh Gaya, which reads, “This is the meritorious gift of the elderly monk, Aniruddha.”¹⁰ (Fig 2.37- 2.39)

The new addition that can be observed in the Cundā image of Kurkihar is the image of Buddha on both side of the carved nimbus. The Buddha on the left is fully damaged while the right one is still intact. The Buddha on the right is in *dhyanamudrā* on the lotus petals. The image of Buddha on the stele shows some kind of association between Cundā and Buddha. It is mentioned in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, under the *Mañjuvajra Maṇḍala* that Cundā is affiliated with the Dhyāni Buddha Vairocana.¹¹ Like Vairocana, she has been described as white in colour. They both share the gesture of *dharmachakramudrā*. In the *Garbhadhātumaṇḍala*, Cundā is located in the mansion of Buddha along with other female deities.¹² Moreover, in this *maṇḍala*, Mahāvairocana at the center appears in the *dhyanamudrā*, similar to the gesture of Buddha depicted in the sculpture of Cundā. Thus, claiming an affinity to the Dhyāni Buddha Vairocana.

¹⁰ Gouriswar Bhattacharya, “Buddhist Deity Vajrapāṇi”, *Journal of the Institute of Silk Road Studies*, no. 4 (1995/96): .331.

¹¹ Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 220.

¹² Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 135. She places Cundā in the mansion from where the *Padma* and the *Vajra* originates. She argues that the image of Cundā with Buddha lies within the frame of esoteric Buddhism.

Cundā is considered as “*Koṭī-srī* or *Sapta- Koṭī-Buddha-mātrī-Cuntī-devī*” in her *dhāraṇī*: meaning “Cundā is mother of 700,000 Buddhas”.¹³

There are reported images of four armed goddesses from Amaravati bearing two small images of Buddha displaying the *dhyānamudra* and a sculpture of a goddess from Sanchi also showing Buddha in the gesture of meditation.¹⁴ I would also like to point out that the miniature painting of the eighteen armed Cundā in the Cambridge *Prajñāpāramitā* has a depiction of Buddha at the top left corner. The Buddha in this painting is standing in a red robe in *abhyāmudrā*. (Fig 2.40-2.41)

So far, only two images of Cundā has been reported from Kurkihar. One is kept at Devasthan mandir while the other one is engraved on a rectangular slab; here she is two-armed. I came across a third sculpture of Cundā from the village, it is placed in one of the chambers of the Surya temple. The sculpture is headless, fragmented, and covered with articles of oblation. The right side of the image has nine arms. Out of the nine arms one is damaged, while the left side has only two arms intact. It is an eighteen- armed cundā, based on the counting of right hands. The right side has almost all the palms broken, thus attributes cannot be counted. The proper right hand is the *varadamudrā*; the proper left hand has an indistinct object and a vase. The symbol that gives away the identity of the goddess is the two main pairs of hands in the *dharmachakramudrā*. This gesture is usually found in the eighteen arms cundā, as seen in the images so far. The other important marker of this fragmented piece of Cundā is its pedestal.

The goddess sits in *vajrāsana* on a lotus pedestal supported by two *nāgās*. These figures of *nāgās* are of full size unlike, the previous Kurkihar sculpture where only the head of the *nāgās* was visible. Here, the full bodies of *nāgarajās* are visible, similar to the sculpture of Cundā from Gaya and Niyamatpur. The *nāgarajās* have snake hoods. The *nāga* on the left uplifts the seat with his left hand. Both the *nāgas* are wearing *ekāvali* like in the previous sculpture. Two female deities are sitting on the sides of the pedestal. The female figure on the left is seated in *lalītāsana* on a lotus seat, she holds a sword her left hand and her another hand is relaxed on the thigh. The figure on the left is corroded; only one hand can be marked out. (Fig 2.42 a&b, 2.43)

The *nāgas* supporting the lotus pedestal, the female goddess on both sides, and the *dharmachakramudrā*, are the identification markers of this sculpture as Cundā. The motif of *nāgas*, Nanda and Upananda holding the lotus seat was more popular in the iconography of Cundā in Japan and Java.¹⁵

The goddess Cundā with different forms became a popular deity in early medieval times. Based on the literary and archaeological evidence one can identify development in her iconography.

¹³ Pushpa Niyogi, “Cundā - a Popular Buddhist Goddess,” 299.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 134.

The origin of the goddess is unknown; some scholars identify her with Caṇḍī, a form of Durgā¹⁶ while others mention her as a fusion of Prajñāpāramitā and Mārīcī. Her attributes like lotus, vase, bowl, fruit (*beṇḍa*), and manuscript associate her with the goddess of wisdom Prajñāpāramitā whereas her armaments like the sword, the goad, the vajra, the noose, the bow, and the trident models her closer to the goddess warrior goddess Mārīcī. The *mudrā* in which she appears, the *mūlamudrā* is closely related to goddess Prajñāpāramitā and Buddha Vairocana.¹⁷ This gesture suggests teaching and exposition of Buddhist doctrine. In her eighteen-hand forms, Cundā shows *varadamudrā*, a gesture of generosity, and *abhyamudrā*, a gesture of protection and fearlessness. The four-armed Cundā is typically depicted in *dhyānamudrā*, a gesture for concentration and enlightenment. Her face in most of the sculpture conveys the *sattvik guṇa* (balance and pure).¹⁸ like Prajñāpāramitā instead of *Rajas* (passion, activity) and *Tamas* (chaos, disorder) like Mārīcī. Based on her appearance, the gestures she shows, and the attributes she holds, she can be compared to the pantheon of wisdom and compassion in Buddhism.¹⁹ But she also evolved as a Tantric deity, meditated upon in the Womb Realm (Garbhadhātu) maṇḍala.

In the eastern part, one comes across more evidence of eighteen-armed Cundā with *nāga* figures than in the other parts of India. At Ellora, Orissa, and Amravati the four or six armed Cundā were more popular. The images of multiple hands Cundā from Nālanda, Bodh Gaya, and Kurkihar suggest the presence of Vajrayāna Buddhism in these regions. The two images of Cundā at Kurkihar specific to the iconographic style (eighteen arms supported by *nāgās*) do suggest that the site witnessed a transition from Mahayāna to Vajrayāna.

Vajrapāṇi

Vajrapāṇi, a notable figure in the Buddhist pantheon was an attendant of Buddha. He escorted Buddha Sākyamuni in his journey of ascetic life and stayed with him till the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. He was also entrusted with safeguarding the *Dhamma*. In the Vajrayāna Buddhism he considered safeguarding the Tantric literatures. In the early period, Vajrapāṇi was a minor attending deity, sporadically referred to in the canonical literature but later he acquired an independent Bodhisattva status.

¹⁶Conze mentions "... the Tibetan equivalents Tchouen-t'i (T'siuen-d'ie) or Tchouen-tche, and Tsundahi or Tsundehi, may go back to a Sanskrit Cundī, Caṇḍī (= Durgā!)..."

¹⁷Mūla-Mudrā has been referred in her Sādhna. Bhattacharyya has argued this mudrā was similar to the dharmachakramudrā.

¹⁸Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*, 255. The Japanese Shingon sect is in doubt as to whether the name of Jundeī Butisumo, or Jundeī Kwannon, is derived from the Sanskrit śundhi (purity), suṇḍa (bright and beautiful), cuṇṭi (a well), or cuṇḍī (to become smaller).

¹⁹ Like Tarā, Prajñāpāramitā, Avlokiteshvara.

Vajrapāṇi guards and protects the gods of the *Trayastrīṃśā* heaven, because of this he was referred to as a *Yakṣa*.²⁰ He was addressed as *Yakṣeśa*, lord of the *Yakṣas*, by Sākyamuni. Vajrapāṇi was also identified with the Hindu God Indra who was the king of the *Trayastrīṃśā*. In the Pāli literature and Sanskrit *Tripitka*, Vajrapāṇi appears as a metamorphosed form of Śakra (Indra) while the non-canonical texts like Mahāvastu, Lalitavistara, and Buddhacarita, separates him from the god of rain and thunder, Indra.

In the early text Vajrapāṇi, was referred to by the title of *Yakṣa Vajrapāṇi*, *Guhyakādhipati*, and *Malla*. A text entitled ‘*Sūtra of the sorrow and love of Guhyaka Vajrapāṇi, the Malla, when the Buddha entered Nirvāṇa*’ was translated in Chinese by an anonymous scholar under the name Western Chin (385-431).²¹ The text describes how the Guhyaka Vajrapāṇi lamented the death of Buddha and how Buddha comforted him with the discourse on impermanence. In the Vaipulya sūtra²² Vajrapāṇi is declared as a Bodhisattva who was an eternal escort of Buddha, (*satatasamitam anubaddha*).²³ In Buddhist art, Vajrapāṇi was incorporated as a Dhyāni Bodhisattva.²⁴

Sculptural evidence

It is only in the second century C.E. that Vajrapāṇi appears in the art of Gandhara, Mathura, and Amaravati. The earliest depiction of Vajrapāṇi as the attendant of Buddha is represented in the Gandharan Buddhist relief. The physical appearance of Vajrapāṇi at Gandhara shows an adaptation of Herakles (Hercules) in Buddhism. Scholars have agreed that the physical attributes of Vajrapāṇi are exactly of Herakles but instead of his customary club, he is shown holding a vajra; this in a way shows a synthesis of Greek and Indic iconography.²⁵ (Fig 2.53, 2.54)

²⁰ Etienne Lamotte, “Vajrapani in India (I)”, *Buddhist Studies Review*, Vol.20 (2003): 3.

²¹ Ibid., p.19

²² This is a classification of Buddhist literature. The term refers to the longer Mahāyāna sūtras. They have wide-ranging themes of Buddhist teachings. Sūtras under the vaipūlya category include the Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra, the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, the Ratnakūṭa collection of sūtras, and the Chinese Nirvāṇa Sūtra. (<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803115037917>)

²³ Etienne Lamotte, “Vajrapāṇi in India (II)”, *Buddhist Studies Review*, Vol.20, 2 (2003) 119.

²⁴ In Mahāyana Buddhism, Bodhisattvas are mortal (manifested on earth as human, *mānushi*) and celestial beings (the Dhyāni Bodhisattva). The Dhyāni-Bodhisattvas are believed to dwell in the *Rūpadhātu* heaven in the *Sambhogakaya* form. In Buddhist art, the Dhyāni-Bodhisattva has two groups of five and eight. The groups of five are: Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, Ratnapāṇi, Avlokiteśvara, and Viśvapāṇi. Each of them is an emanation of a Dhyāni Buddha. The first Dhyāni-Bodhisattva is Samantabhadra, he is the emanation of the Adi-Buddha Vairocana. Similarly, Avlokiteśvara is Dhyāni-Bodhisattva of Amitābha, Ratnapāṇi of Ratnasambhava, and Viśvapāṇi of Maitreya. The groups of Dhyāni-Bodhisattva are; on the right to the main deity, Avlokiteśvara, Ākāśagarbha, Vajrapāṇi and Kṣitigarbha and on the left, Sarva-nīrvaraṇa-viśkambhin, Maitreya, Samantabhadra, and Mañjuśrī.

²⁵ Karl Galinsky, *Chapter 14 Herakles Vajrapani, the Companion of Buddha*, Herakles Inside and Outside the Church: studies in the reception of classical antiquity (Leiden: Brill, 2019) 329. She has argued that Herakles was renowned for his strength and his travel to foreign lands. Gandhara during this time (1st -2nd century C.E.) was under the

During the Gupta period the, Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, make their appearance as a Mahāyānist bodhisattvas. At Bhārhut, Bodh Gayā, or Sāñcī, there are no representations of Vajrapāṇi as a Bodhisattva. Vajrapāṇi as an attending Bodhisattva appeared first in the Buddhist caves of Western India; Kanheri, Nasik, Ellora, Ajanta, and Aurangabad.²⁶ His presence was also carved on the monuments of Amarāvātī, and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, depicting scenes of conversion of Nāga Apāla and Yakṣa Āṭavika. Vajrapāṇi normally is not an independent deity, he is often accompanied by bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Padmapāṇi.²⁷ Apart from this, and he accompanies Buddha on his left and Tāra to her right.

Vajrapāṇi at Kurkihar

Vajrapāṇi is often confused with the deities such as Vajrasattva and Vajradhara. Vajradhara also referred to as *Ādibuddha*, the progenitor of all the five Dhyāni Buddha, is conceived bedecked with jewels, and ornaments. He sits in *Vajrāparyāṅka* attitude like the other two. He carries the *Vajra* in his right hand and the *Ghaṇṭa* in the left; the two hands are crossed against the chest in a

Kushan kings who patronized Buddhism in the region. Kushan kings, especially Kanishka (c. 127–140) and one of his successors, Huviska (c. 160–190) was a follower of Mahayana Buddhism. Herakles was introduced in the region of Gandhara during Alexander’s attempt to expand in the Hindu Kush and Kushan who had continued contact with the west and Rome created a synthesis of Hercules and Vajrapāṇi. Another explanation for adopting Hercules with Buddha in the Gandhara art has been given by Katsumi Tanabe in “Why Is the Buddha Śākyamuni Accompanied by Hercules/Vajrapāṇi? Farewell to Yakṣa-Theory.” *East and West* 55, no. 1/4 (2005), p.379. Tanabe has argued that Gandhara Hercules took the place of Indra (the actual thunderbolt-bearer), as guide and protector of Sakyamuni because Indra was a less reliable deity and hence was replaced by someone who was well known as the protector of traveler in the Greek world.

²⁶ Gouriswar Bhattacharya, “Buddhist Deity Vajrapāṇi,” 333.

²⁷ In Tibet, Avlokiteshvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi played an essential role in establishing the divine kingship within the Tibetan monarchs. From the late 7th to early 9th century C.E Tibetan kings claimed to be the emanation of these three bodhisattvas; *King Khri-srong-lde-btsan* (755-797) was emanation of Mañjuśrī ; *King Srong-bstan-sgam-po* (629-650) was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara and King *Khri gtsung lde brtsan Ral pacan* (815-836) was an emanation of Vajrapāṇi. They together are called “Lord of Three Worlds” in Tibet. Numerous sculptures and a 14th-century manuscript cover from Tibet show all three together. By the 17th-century the lord of the three worlds across Tibet came to be represented with a set of three stupas. These groups of bodhisattvas and their Stupas also became popular in the region of northern India, the region of Ladakh. The first stupa represents Mañjuśrī, so the stupa was painted yellow, the second has white paint for Avalokiteśvara and the third was painted blue for Vajrapāṇi. A coloured clay moulded sculptural plaque from Tsaparang monastery of the tenth century C.E. shows Vajrapāṇi on the proper left of Buddha, painted in blue. The Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi is the spiritual son of *Dhyāni* Buddha Akṣobhya who embodies the colour blue so consequently, Vajrapāṇi has been painted blue in the plaque. See : Kurt Behrendt, *Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani: Lords of the Three Worlds*, p.95. (Fig 2.55)

gesture known as the *Vajrahñkāra Mudra*.²⁸ There was a sectarian divide between Buddhists as Vajradhara was not universally accepted as the first creative principle. Benoytosh Bhattacharya cogently explains the split within the Buddhist community regarding the primordial Buddha, that when the doctrine of *Ādibuddha* was completely developed, each Buddhist sect had a distinct perspective on the form of fully *Ādibuddha*. While some recognized Vajrasattva as the *Ādibuddha*. Many others were willing to view the Bodhisattva such as Samantabhadra or Vajrapāṇi as the *Ādibuddha*.²⁹ Unlike bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, Vajrasattva is the Sixth Dhyāni Buddha. He is depicted heavily ornamented, and encrusted with a crown, like the other Dhyāni Buddhas. Vajrasattva is not assigned a specific *mudra* but he has specific attributes. He carries the *Vajra* in his right hand with palm upwards against the chest and the *Ghaṇṭa* (Bell) in the left hand resting against his left thigh.³⁰ (Fig 2.46-2.48)

The attributes of Vajradhara and Vajrasattva are similar; they both hold a vajra in the right and a bell in the left. Ācārya-Vajrapāṇi, one of the forms of Vajrapāṇi, has been prescribed the same attributes as these two. He holds a Vajra, *ghaṇṭā* (bell), and a *pāśa* (lasso).³¹ Because these three deities are similar they must have originated and evolved from each other. I assume the iconography of Vajradhara and Vajrasattva was shaped by the iconography of Vajrapāṇi, based on the earlier sculptural findings of Vajrapāṇi in the Buddhist art. Vajrapāṇi when represented as a Bodhisattva is distinctively recognized with his two main attributes, *Vajra* in the right hand and *Nilotpala* in the left hand. On basis on these attributes I have identified a sculpture found at the Sun temple in Kurkihar as: Vajrapāṇi.

A sculpture of Vajrapāṇi was found during the field exploration at Kurkihar. The sculpture is kept in one of the niches of the Sūrya temple. The sculpture is made out of black basalt stone, the face is damaged and the lower part is broken. What remains intact is the torso with two limbs attached to an oval beaded *prabhamandala*, very similar to the Nālanda style. The forehead is damaged, hence the crown of the image is obscure, but what remains visible are the bunch of corkscrew hair leaning to the right of the shoulder. The headdress is identical to the image discussed above from the Nālanda museum. (Fig 2.49)

The sculpture is ornamented; Vajrapāṇi wears the circular-disc earring, a broad necklace, armlets, and beaded upavita (*muktāhāra upavita*). He can be seen holding the *Vajra* close to his chest in the proper right hand. The left hand is half broken but shows *Nilotpala* creeping out from his hand. It is difficult to tell whether the image was standing or seated.³² The image could be dated between eighth century to ninth century C.E based on the style of *prabhamandala* and headdress. This might have been an independent image of bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi.

²⁸ Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 43.

²⁹ Ibid., 44.

³⁰ Ibid., 75.

³¹ Alice Getty, *The gods of Northern Buddhism*, 47.

³² Based on the posture of the hip visible in the figure and comparing it with the other seated image of Vajrapāṇi, I assume this image was seated in the *ardhaparyāṅkāsa*.

Another image of Vajrapāṇi from Kurkihar appears accompanying Buddha. A sculpture of Buddha seated in the *Bhumisparsāṃudra* is kept at the *Devasthan mandir* of Kurkihar. The four feet sculpture of Buddha is a masterpiece of its own kind. Buddha sits touching the earth on a double petalled lotus. The pedestal supports an ornamented throne with the motifs of flowers and geometric designs. The throne is flanked by lions on each side. Behind the head of the Buddha a big oval halo with three layers is carved in a stylistic manner. In the inner plain halo, a Buddhist creed is inscribed. On each side *gandharvas* are shown holding a garland. The intermediary space above the pillars of the throne, on either side, has figures of seated bodhisattvas. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is placed on the proper left and Vajrapāṇi to the proper right. Focusing on the figure of Vajrapāṇi, he holds his quintessential attributes. On the middle of his chest he holds a *vajra* in his proper right hand and the other hand rests relaxed behind the left thigh from where the stalk of *nilotpala* emerges. (Fig 2.50 a,b)

In Bihar and Bengal, so as at Kurkihar, the usual retinue of bodhisattva accompanying Buddha is Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Maitreya. There are few instances of Buddha with Vajrapāṇi and Avlokiteśvara from the region of Magadha, one such sculpture apart from Kurkihar is kept at Patna Museum (Sohoni collection). The representation of duo Vajrapāṇi and Avlokiteśvara with Buddha was more popular in the caves of Ellora where there are plenty of images of this kind.

The presence of Vajrapāṇi at Kurkihar shows that one of the minor deities of Buddhist pantheon was worshipped at this site. Not only the site has stone images of Vajrapāṇi but it has also produced a metal image of Vajrapāṇi. In the metal hoard collection of Kurkihar, an image of Vajrapāṇi has been found. His proper left hand is in the *abhyamudrā* while the proper right hand holds the *nilotpala* topped by the *vajra*. This *saumya* figure of Vajrapāṇi stands in *abhanga* position on a lotus pedestal. The figure is ornamented, his *jaṭa* flows down his shoulder and he is wearing a crown. The edge of the oval *prabhāmandla* has the typical flames surrounding the edges. (Fig 2.51 a&b)

The figures of Vajrapāṇi from Kurkihar point out to the independent status achieved by this bodhisattva in the eastern region of India. From the eastern region the independent iconography of Vajrapāṇi travelled to Nepal, Tibet and China where his forms multiplied. His portrayal as single Dhyāni bodhisattvas is pervasive in the eastern region whereas the *yab-yub* form or the ferocious aspect is more popular in the northern part of Bihar (Nepal and Tibet). Eastern region perhaps made him attain an independent status by disassociating him with Buddha and maybe this is the reason Vajrapāṇi is not necessarily seen as an attendant of Buddha in Bihar when compared to the caves of western India.

Revanta

The equestrian God, Revanta, is introduced as son of Sūrya and his consort, Sañjñā. His birth by the sun god, Sūrya, and Viśvakarma's daughter Sañjñā is mentioned in number of Purāṇic texts. The section of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* not only gives reference to the origin story of Revanta but

also gives the iconographic details associated with Revanta, “*Revanta was born, bearing sword, shield and armour, mounted on horse- back, furnished with arrows and quiver.*”³³ The iconographic remarks are also made in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* where it is stated that Revanta should be depicted on the back of a horse like his father, Sūrya.³⁴ The *Bṛihatsaṃhita*, a 6th century text by Varāhamihira, stated that Revanta should be shown engaged in the sport of hunting, riding his horse along with his attendants.³⁵ (Fig 2.53)

Revanta was appointed king of *Guhyakas* (super-natural beings like *Yakshas*) by Sūrya in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. In the hunting scenes, Revanta can be seen accompanied by the *Guhyakas*. In the same *Purāṇa* Revanta was blessed by Sūrya to be worshiped by the people. Those who face danger in the forest, who are stuck in the wild, lost in the deserted places, attacked by robbers or are caught up in the wildfire, Revanta would rescue them and bestows upon his worshippers “*comfort, intelligence, happiness, kingship, perfect health, fame, and exalted position*”³⁶ Revanta is also known as the divine master of the horses who protect horses from evil spirits. In Nakula’s *Asvasāstram*, twenty eight names of Revanta are listed; some of the names are Raivata, Sūryaputra, Vaidya, Bhūtesā and Asvapuruṣa. He is also known as ‘Raivata’ in *Sāmba Purāṇa*. This text declares that chanting 28 names of Revanta would keep the horses safe from the unwanted dangers.

Sculptures of Revanta

There are two types of Revanta sculptures found. The first type shows Revanta as a solo rider, in the profile riding either towards left or right. He is accompanied by several attendants; one of them holds shaft of his umbrella while others depict hunting scenes with musicians, warriors and robbers. Animals such as dogs and boars accompany the hunting scenes. Sometimes the kill, a deer or a boar is made on the pedestal of the image.³⁷ The second type has three equestrian figures. Revanta is accompanied by two horse riding attendants, Piṅgala and Daṇḍin. These types of images are elaborate, apart from the usual retinue of hunting scenes, auspicious figures of Gods and goddess like Gaṇeśa, Lakṣmī, Sūrya and group of Navagrahas and Aṣṭamātrikās are placed at the top of the panel.³⁸ (Fig 2.55)

The two attendants Piṅgala and Daṇḍin are principally the attendants (*gaṇas*) of Sūrya. Daṇḍin stands on the right of the sun god with inkpot and pen in his hand and Piṅgala on his left with a stick in his hand. These two characters, as argued by some scholars has traces to the Iranian

³³ F.E Partgiter, “Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, translated in English,” *Bibliotheca Indica: A Collection of Oriental Works, The Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1904): Canto LXXVIII, lines (21-26).Canto LXXVIII, lines (21-26), p.460.

³⁴ Brijendra Nath Sharma. “Revanta in Literature, Art and Epigraphs.” *East and West* 23, no. 1/2 (1973): 155.

³⁵ G. Bhattacharya, “A Unique Narrative Stone Panel Illustrating Revanta”, *South Asian Archeology*, (2003):.452.

³⁶ Partgiter, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, line 23, 576.

³⁷ G.R Mevissen, “Revant images from Bihar and Bengal”, *Journal of Bengal Art*.Vol.18 (2013):68.

³⁸ Ibid.

deities Sraoṣa (Srauṣa) and Raṣnu (Rājña) who came to northern India together with the sun-god Mihira.³⁹

The earliest stone sculpture of Revanta has been found at Pachar, Gaya, possibly dated to the seventh century C.E. The date of the Pachar Revanta is contested.⁴⁰ (Fig 2.54) In this section I will discuss two sculptures of Revanta from Bihar, one found at Rajona, Lakhisarai (Bihar) and another at Kurkihar.

Revanta from Rajaona- A large stone panel depicting Revanta with his retinue has been discovered from Ashokdham-Rajaona, Lakhisarai district of Bihar. The main part of the panel is neatly arranged in three horizontals. Three equestrian figures are carved, all moving towards to the right. The heads of these three figures are mutilated, but are recognizable through their attributes. The central figure is Revanta, holding a cup in his right hand and reins of the horse in the left. To the right of Revanta is Daṇḍin holding a broken sword, and on the left of Revanta is Piṅgala. The panel is dispersed with the figures of *Guhyakas* in each layer, rightly describing Revanta as the king of these supernatural beings. (Fig 2.56)

The top row has ten *Guhyakas*; they all hold different kinds of weapons like swords, staffs, maces and shields. Two deities are shown at the top layer, Gaja-Lakṣmī on the left corner and Ganesha on the right. Gaja- Lakṣmī is seated on a platform; she holds a *padma* in her right hand and has two elephants on top of her head. Ganesha on the right has a decorated niche, he also sits on a raised platform, and he has four hands, each holding different attributes. A single figure stands on the left of Ganesha, holding the kill from the hunt. These deities suggest auspiciousness and a safe venture during hunting. (Fig 2.57 b &c)

The second row has five *Guhyakas*. Figures to the proper left of Revanta is a fly whisker, next to him is a bigger figure holding a big vase pouring possibly wine, next to this figure is a water/food carrier? holding a pot on a wooden beam. On the proper right of Revanta is a man carrying a big bag?, next to him is the umbrella bearer. An unidentified male holds an unknown object in his proper right hand. The third row has two attendants at each end and has dogs beneath each deity. The saddle and rein of horses are decorated. Revanta can be seen wearing a belt which carries a small dagger. All the attendants have *Ekāvali* (one beaded string) on their neck.

Next row is the pedestal where a large group of miniature figures are present. Hunters are shown carrying the prey; musicians appear carrying different musical instruments. At the right corner a man with bow and arrow appears ready to chase and kill a running deer. The upper relief of the pedestal is decorated with scrolled floral motifs. The whole panel is organized and clearly depicts each scene.

³⁹ G.R Mevissen, "Gods on Horseback: Images of Revanta and Kalkin, Predominantly from Bengal" *The Glorious Heritage of India (In memory of Prof. R. C. Sharma)* Vol. I (2010): 31.

⁴⁰ Sharma suggests 5th century, Gupta suggests 6th and Bhattacharya 7th century C.E.

Revanta from Kurkihar

During my field trip to Kurkihar I noticed a sculptural panel of Revanta kept inside the house located west of the *Thakurbadi mandir*. According to my knowledge the last reported image of a three equestrian type of Revanta in Bihar was from Lakhisarai, Rajona. This sculpture from Kurkihar could be a new addition to the study of sculptural remains of Revanta in eastern India.

The sculptural panel is made out of black basalt stone. The niche of the panel is framed by two posts of decorated pillars and a trefoil arch. Above the trefoil arch, scrolls of clouds are formed on which two garlands bearing *Vidyādhara*s appear. The equestrian figures and their horses are defaced. They are riding towards the right, seated on an embellished saddle, holding the reins of the horse with their left hands, and the right hands are partly damaged to understand the object they were holding. The central figure seems to be Revanta, he holds a *caṣaka* (partly broken) and he is the largest figure amongst the three riding men. Typically, Revanta is recognized by an umbrella over his head but here we find all the three figures have an attendant holding the staff of the umbrella to cover their head. The *chattra* over Revanta head is more decorative than the other two; there are straps of ribbon flying from the corner of the umbrella and the ferrule at the top has a flame motif. The flying ribbon also appears in the *chattra* of Revanta at Pachar, Gaya. (Fig 2.58)

To describe the sculpture I have divided the sculpture in three sections vertically. Starting from the left, a man with a triangular structure over his head is seen holding the staff of an umbrella for the riding deity. The deity *en face*, is bejeweled, wears beaded *upavīta*, and holds a triangular object, possibly an inkpot, this figure is Piṅgala. Next to him is a female attendant holding a fly whisk in the left hand and in the right she holds some indistinct offering. Above her a heavy fleshy figure holds the kill. On the top is a strange figure, with an animal face and two horns he holds a vase. He could be *aṣṭavasū*. The *aṣṭavasū*s are animal headed figures, these are group of divine beings connected with the atmospheric powers. (Fig 2.59 a)

To the right of Piṅgala is the image of Revanta holding what can be assumed a wine cup in his right hand, the left hand holds the rein along with an object which looks like conch shell or garlic? as suggested in the iconography of *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya*? The image must have been ornamented but only armlets and *upavīta* are visible. On the left of Revanta is the umbrella bearer; on top of him is an image which is fully defaced, holding a rectangular object in her right hand that looks like a manuscript? Near the right shoulder of Revanta a female attendant appears offering but without fly whisk. On top of the attendant, again a fleshy heavy figure holding the prey over the shoulder is seen. (Fig 2.59 b)

Coming to the last figure on the right, next to Revanta is a man heading the troop. If the figure to end left was Piṅgala then this must be Daṇḍin. The face and body of Daṇḍin is broken. To the left of Daṇḍin is an attendant with the staff of the flag, above him is the fleshy figure holding the kill. At the top a man holds two suspended pots on either side of a wooden beam. On the left

most corner, near the horse an attendant holds the horse's rein, an ostler perhaps. On top of him are two figures, one with a hand inside a pot and another making an offering from a container. Above them is a figure holding the prey, a boar. (Fig 2.59 c)

In this panel all the figures, especially the attendants and warriors carrying the booty are depicted gesticulating. The positions of legs, body, hands have more motion unlike the static figures at Lakhisarai. Certain elements remain unclear, but the main three figures can be identified on the basis of 'three equestrian' type of Revant's sculptures.

There are other noticeable figures in this panel on top of the pillars on either side. The one on the right is pot bellied and holds a staff, and on the left the figure is damaged beyond recognition.⁴¹ The one on the left is a seated female figure, possibly Lakshmi. Animals like dogs and boars can be found near the feet of the three figures. Boar is depicted on the trotting left front foot of the horse and dogs below the boots of the deities. On the *triratha* pedestal, different scenes are depicted. The central part of the pedestal has musicians and hunters, hunting an eloping deer on the right. On the left corner of the pedestal two figures of devotee appear, a man offering garland and a female offering food. (2.60 a&b, 2.61)

The whole panel of Revanta has a scene of a successful hunt. Objects of offerings made by the worshippers, show that Revanta was incorporated in the larger pantheon of deities who could protect people from danger in the early medieval period. At Kurkihar, the presence of Revanta can be explained by addressing two points. One, there is evidence of Sūrya worship from this site, a bronze icon and a stone sculpture of Sūrya was found from Kurkihar.⁴² The bronze icon has Sūrya with seven horses. His charioteer, Aruṇa is accompanied by Piṅgala who holds an ink pot in his left hand and his right hand is broken. Daṇḍin stands in *abhayamudrā* and has a staff. Sūrya is carrying a lotus stalk in both his hands. An image of devotee knelling is placed on the proper right of the throne. An inscription in two lines at the back reads:

“*Bhaṭa-putra Paḍakasa - Ādityas'araṇam*”

“The gift of Padaka, the son of Bhaṭa”⁴³

Presently, a temple dedicated to Sūrya is built near the village. This bronze and stone image of Sūrya perhaps could have belonged to this temple. The current sculpture of Sūrya in this temple date to later centuries, possibly eighteen- nineteen century C.E. but the temple has few fragmented medieval sculptures inside, both Hindu and Buddhist in nature. (Fig 2.62, 2.63)

⁴¹Usually Yama is depicted with a pot belly and a staff but it could be also Maṅgala from the navgraha panel usually found on the sculpture of Revanta.

⁴²According to the Susan Huntington archive, a stone sculpture of Sūrya from Kurkihar is kept at Indian Museum Kolkata. See: Scan no-5023. The skills used in both the bronze and stone sculptures are very crude, possibly made by an apprentice.

⁴³ Patna Museum Catalogue, 205.

The worship of Sūrya and of Revanta can also be linked to an inscription found from Kurkihar where donor is from Sakala (erstwhile Punjab), which was influenced by the Greek had been under the Greek and Buddhist influence.

By the eleventh- twelfth century C.E, Revanta was worshipped as an independent deity. The cult of Revanta had expanded all over northern and eastern India. It seems likely that he was separately venerated from his father, Sūrya. Therefore, the second reason of the association of Revanta to Kurkihar could be his increasing cultic popularity. The panel of Revanta found at Kurkihar seems to be an architectural fragment which could have been a part of a monastic structure. This panel would have been fixed on the wall of the monastery for the devotees to pay their veneration. The *Skanda Purāṇa* mentions that after performing *pūja* one should have a *darsāna* of Revanta seated on the horseback and by doing so one will be free from all the evils and attain religious merit.⁴⁴ A ceremony of *Nīranjanā* was performed by the kings in the month of *Āśvina*, where horse (*asva*) was the central object of worship. The ceremony included worship of Revanta on the seventh day of the *Nīranjanā* and the place where he was worshipped was near the gateway (*torāṇa*).⁴⁵

Revanta is also called, *rājyabhaṭṭāraka*, “the great lord of the realms”.⁴⁶ He was worshipped to scare away dangerous animals and robbers in the forest and provide safety to the troops or folks traveling through a deserted place. But his association with horses could have a deeper connection. Maybe there was a need to incorporate a deity who would take care of the animal that played a key role in maintaining the power of a kingdom. Horses were used in warfare, they were the fastest way to deliver and communicate messages, and they were also part of sacrificial rituals. The crucial role of horses in a kingdom can be understood from the ceremony of *Nīranjanā*. In the context of association of horses with Revanta, I would like to reiterate here the point made by Sharma. Revanta was considered an honoured title and was affixed to the names of the nobles as an attribute. An inscription of the Kalacurya Bhīllama dated 1189 C.E. Mutgi, Madhya Pradesh, declares a person as “*Revanta of noble rank riding on most forward steeds*”, another Telugu inscription from Mūlasthāneśvara temple in Andhra describes quality of a subject as “*Revanta in the management of horses*”.⁴⁷ Phrases like “very Revanta with horses” can be found in other inscriptions as well. This suggests that “Revanta” was regarded as an important rank and was given as a title only to the best horse riders.

Many mythologies and deities are associated with horses, clearly suggesting the importance of this animal in ancient and medieval society. And what one can see in the early medieval period is that the deities like horse-headed Aśvins, horse- headed Vishnu- Hayagrīva or the horse riding deities like Kalkin and Revanta became prominent in their worship. The cult of Revanta was active between eighth to twelfth centuries C.E. Revanta was housed in various temples and also

⁴⁴ Sharma, “Revanta in Literature, Art and Epigraphs,” 156

⁴⁵ Bhattacharya, “A Unique Narrative Stone Panel Illustrating Revanta”, 452.

⁴⁶ Vinay Kumar Gupta, ‘*Revanta Images from Mathura Region*’ Gupta.,p.56

⁴⁷ Sharma, “Revanta in Literature, Art and Epigraphs.” 165-166.

temples were dedicated to him during this period.⁴⁸ What happened to the worship of Revanta in the coming centuries? Why did he lose his prominence?

Ek mukha Liṅga

Centuries of development has given rise to arrays of variations to the iconographic forms of Śiva. When one comes to the forms of Śiva and its iconographic, one usually finds Śiva in the avatar of: *Gangādhara* (when he receives Ganga in his Jaṭa); *Ardhanārishvara* (the androgynous form); the famous *Nrittamurtis* (dancing Shiva) like the Naṭrāja sculptures; *Mahayogi* (as Yogi); the *Kalyansundar Murti* with Pārvati (marriage of Shiva and Parvati); or the *liṅga* worship (the Ithy-phallic form of Śiva).

These forms of Śiva can be witnessed in various ancient temples or caves. The best example which elucidates sculptural forms of Śiva is the Elephanta caves. It represents Śiva as Nataraja, Yogishvara, Ardhanarishwara, Andhakarsuravadha, Kalyansundar Murti, Gangādhara murti, and Ravanaanugrahamurti, along with the main masterpiece, the *Panchmukha liṅga*. The Elephanta rock cut caves thus serves as a treasure to study the Śaiva and its form. In this section I will focus on the Ithy-phallic form of Śiva. This is because at Kurkihar Liṅga is the dominant form of Śiva worship.

Liṅga is described as *svāyambhuva* (self-existent); it has existed since time immemorial and it is not man-made.⁴⁹ There are few mythical stories related to the form of Liṅga as a mode of worship, these stories are mentioned in various *Purāṇas* with slightly different narration of events.⁵⁰

There are different kinds of *liṅga* for different kinds of temple, and an elaborate typology of this is offered in the *Rauravottarāgama*.⁵¹ The *liṅga* has a square base, usually not visible because it

⁴⁸ Like at the Surya temple at Chittor, or in the Osian temple at Jodhpur

⁴⁹ Stella Kramrisch, "Liṅga", in *The Presence of Śiva*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) 164.

⁵⁰ Stella Kramrisch, *Manifestation of Śiva, Philadelphia Museum Of Art, 1981, p. xv*. Once, Śiva was charged by his father (Brahmā) to create the mortals. Śiva, refused to follow his father's instruction and he discredited the idea of making imperfect beings. He responded to Brahma's command by castrating himself, he tore off his phallus (liṅga). The liṅga then sunk into the ground. According to another tradition, when commanded by Brahma to create mortals, Śiva turned into a post (sthānu), a pillar and then the severed Liṅga of Śiva, fell on to the ground, it penetrated the netherworld and shot up into the heaven like a burning pillar. In the Vāmana Purāṇa, the legend of *liṅga* worship is mentioned in the context of Rudra. In the Sāṃnihatya lake, Rudra was absorbed in the yogic trance, when he emerged from water, he tore off his liṅga in fury. After this, he stood erect in the lake. And, hence *liṅga* acquired its name as Sthānu (like a pillar).⁵⁰ In the Skanda Purāṇa, the story goes that Śiva was reluctant to take back his severed liṅga. He agreed to take back his severed phallus only if gods and men would worship it. Thereby, the gods established the liṅga and the worshipped of liṅga started. (Stella Kramrisch, chapter VII- *Liṅga, "The Presence of Śiva", Princeton University Press, 1981, New Jersey, 1981.*)

⁵¹ Gavin Flood, "The Śaiva Traditions," in *Major Historical Developments*, (Blackwell:2003), 220.

is immersed in the ground. The top is cylindrical, typically plain but sometimes with the body or heads of Śiva. *Liṅgas* with heads are called *mukhaliṅgas*. There are a few evidence of full body Śiva engraved on the *liṅga* like in the Guḍimallam temple at Andhra Pradesh. Mostly there are one, four or five heads on a *liṅga*. A twelve headed *liṅga* is found from Mandhal (Nagpur, Maharashtra) dated to the second century C.E.

The cylindrical part of the *liṅga* is where the head of the deity is fixed. The base has an octagonal or square shape. These parts of *liṅga* have their own assigned meaning. The square base, *Brahmabhāga*, is assigned to Brahmā the creator, the octagonal part is assigned to Viṣṇu, it is called the *Viṣṇubhāga* and the visible cylindrical part which is worshipped by the devotee is *Rudrabhāga*.⁵² The structure of *liṅga* thus incorporates the three triads of Hinduism: Brahma, Viṣṇu and Mahesh (Śiva).

Ekmukha Liṅga at Kurkihar

Kurkihar has yielded three ekmukha *liṅgas*. One is kept at the *Devistan mandir*; it is near the entrance of the sanctum on the left side. This *liṅga* seems to have been supplanted from elsewhere in the village. Possibly, it has been unearthed from the nearby mound and later placed in the temple. The sign of displacement of *liṅga* can be deduced from the visible octagonal base. The base of a *liṅga* is ought to be inside the ground and it should not be visible outside to the preacher. The octagonal *Viṣṇubhāga* germinates a globular cylindrical shaft with the face of Śiva. The *liṅga* has face that is immersed in meditation. The wide *jaṭamukuta* at the top of the head covers the upper part of the shaft and almost reaches the top of *liṅga*; typically the crown of the Śiva is marked by a crescent moon. Here, due to congealed vermillion in the crevasses of the head, it is difficult to discern the details marked on the hair. The third eye in the middle of the forehead is also inconspicuous. (2.64 a, b,c)

The ears are large and elongated; he is wearing a round large earring. What needs to be noticed in this sculpture is a snake coiled up near the ear to the proper left of the face. On the proper right of the ear, the snake is absent. The snake with its hood covers the entire left ear of Śiva; it looks like an ornamental piece for the ear. The iconography of snake on the ears is associated with the Aghora form of Śiva, as observed in the *pañcamukha liṅga* of Elephanta and Nacchna. In the Elephanta caves of Mumbai, a massive structure of *pañcamukha liṅga* of Sadaśiva has Aghora with motif of serpents near him, one visible near his left ear. Similarly, in the Nacchna temple of Madhya Pradesh the Sadaśiva *liṅga* has image of Aghora with a serpent earring. The *ekmukha liṅga* at the *Devisthan mandir* of Kurkihar can therefore possibly emphasize the Aghora aspect of

⁵² Stella Kramrisch, *Manifestation of Śiva*, 3.

Śiva. The Aghora aspect of Śiva in a *mukha liṅga* is symbol of *mahat* and *buddhi* i.e. cosmic intellect.⁵³ (Fig 2.65 a&b)

Within the temple premises of *Devasthan*, a big Yoni with comparatively smaller *liṅga* is kept on the left side of the pillared hall. The *liṅga* is plain but not proportionate with the size of the Yoni. Ideally, the *ekmukha liṅga* should have been fixed with this Yoni. There are few other examples of *liṅga* with Yoni from Kurkihar. These *liṅgas* are plain and scattered around the village. In the *Śiva Purāṇa*, the mythology of Yoni is introduced by making it part of the severed phallus episode.⁵⁴ The *liṅga* after being castrated/ cursed fell on the ground and burnt everything on its path until it found the *yonī* or the lap of goddess.⁵⁵ (Fig 2.66, 2.67)

Apart from the *ekmukha liṅga* preserved at the *Devasthan mandir*, there are two more *ekmukha liṅgas* located within the premises of the village. The face of Śiva on these *liṅgas* displays, ‘*Anugraha*’, pacified disposition. The *jatāmukuta* on these, have large chignon almost covering the upper part of the *liṅga*. The *jatāmukuta* has a distinct style, thick systematic lines parts the hair from the middle and the rest combs upwards from the sides forming a thick *jatā* at the top. A similar style of the chignon can be seen in the other *mukha liṅgas* from Bihar. (Fig 2.681 a&b-2.70)

One can consider the adorning of hair in this style (a distinct middle part and the rest of the hair combed upwards from both the sides) particular to the region of Bihar or maybe this particular style was distinct to Kurkihar atelier. This speculation is based on comparing headgears of *liṅgas* from other regions of Bihar like Gaya and Bihar Sharif. A definitive statement can only be given when a stylistic comparison of *mukha liṅgas* are made with the other archeological sites of Bihar. If we compare the *jatā* of *ekmukha liṅga* at Viṣṇupatha temple, the stylization is completely different from the *jatā* at Kurkihar. Similarly, a *Chaturmukha liṅga* from Bihar Sharif has

⁵³ Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, 184. These five forms of Śiva also have metaphysical meaning mentioned in *Liṅga Purāṇa*. The transcendent, *Īśāna*, he is the knower of all ‘*kṣetrājña*’, *Vāmadeva* is the symbol of *ahaṁkāra* (ego), Aghora symbol of *mahat*, *buddhi*, cosmic intellect, *Tatpuruṣa* is symbol of *prakṛti* (creation) and *Sadyojāta* is symbol of mind, *manas*

⁵⁴ *Bhikṣāṭana*, Śiva as a mendicant, came to the Deodar forest, wandering and longing for his dead wife *Satī*. This forest was recluses for sages for their religious practices. Śiva entered the forest as a naked yogi, smeared with ashes holding his begging bowl for alms. The daughter and wives of ṛṣis seeing *Bhikṣāṭana*, were driven mad with passion for the young yogi. *Śhiv Purana* mentions that the women held his hand and embraced him. The *ṛṣis* seeing the naked yogi with their wives and daughters cursed that phallus of the Yogi would fall. Other *Purāṇas* like *Vāmana* and *Skānda Purāṇa* say that the sages pulled out Śiva’s phallus or ordered him to castrate himself. The *liṅga* fell on the earth and Śiva vanished from the sight of sages. As it touched the earth everything was destroyed, it penetrated into the netherworlds and expanded to the sky. (Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, p.155)

⁵⁵ Stella Kramrisch, chapter VII- *Liṅga*, “The Presence of Śiva”, Princeton University Press, 1981, New Jersey, 1981. p.177-178.

completely different headgear. The *chaturmukha liṅga* of Bihar Sharif has contrasting headgear on each face. (Fig 2.71-2.74)

On the Murli hill at Kurkihar, approximately two kilometers from the main mound, two stone *liṅgas* on its peak are found. One is a bigger cylindrical *liṅga* while the other one is relatively smaller. The bigger *liṅga* has octagonal base exposed and the smaller one is encompassed with a Yoni, this one seems fixed to the ground. These *liṅgas* might have surfaced from the mound on the hill recently as there was no mention of *liṅga* remains on top of this hill when he visited the site in 1860's. (Fig 2.75 a&b, 2.76, 2.77)

Other Śaiva pantheon at Kurkihar

Aside from the *liṅga* images, we have other aspect of Śiva worship present at Kurkihar. These are the images of Umā and Mahesvara. These Umā -Mahesvara images are largely found in the bronze collection of Kurkihar and hence it will be discussed in the next chapter. The “family” of Śiva with Pārvati, Kārtikeya and Ganesha are also present at Kurkihar. A sculpture of Pārvati with a child on her lap is placed on the wall of the *Devistan mandir*. There is a similar image of a goddess with a child on her lap from Lakhisarai. A mythical story suggests that the child on the lap of Pārvati is Śiva himself. The story is mentioned in the Mahabharata and *Liṅga Purāṇa*. These versions are different, the former connects the story with burning the city of Tripura by Mahadeva and the latter is connected to Kāli killing the demon Dārūka. The story in the Mahabharata is, “*While the triple city began to burn, Pārvatī came to see the spectacle. She had then on her lap a child with few tuft of hair or otherwise bald. She asked the gods who that child was. Indra did not like it and was about to strike the child with the thunderbolt. Smiling, the Child paralyzed Indra's arm, Indra and the Gods went to Brahmā and told him about the strange happening. Brahmā knew that the child was Śiva. Brahmā asked the great God to be gracious to Indra. The gods then praised Śiva in a magnificent hymn.*”⁵⁶

The sculpture of Pārvati with child at Kurkihar is slightly eroded. The child is in her proper left lap and he is headless. She is four- armed, the proper left hands holds the shield, and the child. The one hand in the proper right rests on her knee and the fourth one is broken and usually holds a sword. She is seated on a padded cushion with floral designs on it and her seat is supported by a lion. The eyes are sealed with silver leaf, a local traditional way of worshipping the goddess. The sculpture of Pārvatī with the child at Lakhisarai is more elaborate and ornate. The goddess is four armed, she holds her attributes, shield in the proper left hand and sword and a fruit in the proper right. Here, she is seated on a double petalled lotus supported by a lion. There are two female attendants by her sides and two flying *Gandharvas* on the top of the triangular stele. Compared to the sculpture at Kurkihar this sculpture has a flat frame. The sculpture at Kurkihar is more deep and rounded, suggesting an older date of production, likely the eighth century C.E,

⁵⁶ Stella Kramrich, 1981, Princeton University Press, p.410.

whereas the flat frame and sharp angular cuts of Lakhisarai would be a later production, around the twelve century C.E. (Fig 2.78, 2.79)

The other form of Goddess present at Kurkihar is Mahishasurmardini .The inner sanctum of *Devistan mandir* is dedicated to this goddess, a form of Dūrga, also a consort of Śiva. She is eight armed and is depicted killing the demon Mahisāśura. The Devi also has her eyes covered with silver leaves and she adorns sacred red saree.

Sculptures of Ganesha and Skanda

I have encountered three images of Ganesha and one of Skanda from Kurkihar. The sculptures of Ganesh are four armed, with his attributes i.e noose, conch shell, bowl of sweet, axe and the mouse. An unidentified object is placed on the proper top right hand of the deity. One of the sculptures of Ganesha from Kurkihar is kept at Nawada Museum, the other two sculptures Ganesha are found in the village premises. The sculpture of Skanda seated on a peacock from Kurkihar is housed at Indian Museum. (Fig 2.80, 2.94, 2.82)

There are number of inscriptional evidences to prove presence of Śaivism in the region of South Bihar. Like the Buddhist monks, the Shiva cult also received royal patronage from the Maukharis, the Vardhanas and the Pāla dynasty. The evidence of *muka līngas* at Kurkihar supports the presence of pāsúpata Śaivism in the region of Gaya.

Chapter 2: The Crowned Buddha

Introduction

The iconographic tradition of crowned Buddha started in the seventh-eighth century C.E. The earliest finding of this iconography can be traced to the region of Afghanistan and Kashmir. Western India has sculptural elements from Ajanta, Kuda and Karla caves that show how the element of crown was introduced in the early period. (Fig 3.1, 3.2) In eastern India, Bihar, many crowned images of Buddha are dated between ninth to twelfth century C.E. The influx of monks from different regions to the pilgrimage sites of Bihar, particularly to Bodh Gaya, from northern and western India brought in the new artistic style associated with the representation of Buddha. From eastern India, this style spread to Southeast Asia through the coastal region of Rakhine in Myanmar. Scholars have debated the significance of the adorned Buddhas known either as ‘Crowned Buddha’ or ‘Bejeweled Buddha’

Kurkihar Crown Buddha

This section will specifically deal with the visual record of images of crowned Buddha from Kurkihar. In the group of Kurkihar bronze there are large collections of crowned Buddha. The aggregate is thirty out of the fifty seven images of Buddha. All the thirty images are either standing in *Abhayamudrā* or seated in the *bhumisparsāmudrā*. Buddha in *Abhayamudrā* indicates protection, peace, and eliminating fear while Buddha in *bhumisparsāmudra* shows Buddha’s enlightenment.

The standing group of crowned Buddha shows the right hand in *abhayamudrā* placed below the shoulder, palm facing outwards with the motif of chakra or lotus in the middle of the palm, the fingers are upright and webbed.¹ The left hand holds the hem of the robe with the chakra/lotus in the middle of the palm. The robe covers both the shoulders and ends on the ankle with frills, and waves, suggesting movement of the robe. The ankles of these Buddha are cuffed with a cloth which seems to be part of the long robe but most likely it is part of the garment worn underneath the robe. The prominent line on the waist shows a long sheath worn under the robe to cover the lower part. (Fig 3.3 a ,b,c)

The *Kāṣāya*, set of three robes worn by Buddha, includes a lower garment called *Antarāvāsaka* which was tied to the waist by a girdle, an *uttarāsaṅga*, robe worn to cover the upper body, it was use to wrap the left shoulder and leave the right shoulder and arm open, and a *saṅghātī*, a long cloak worn outside which covered the other two garments. The cuffed decorated cloth found on these crowned images could be a part of *Antarāvāsaka*. In some bronze pieces, the cuffed ankle cloth is decorated and gilded and in some it is marked with plain lines while most of them lie undecorated and plain. This is a peculiar piece of decoration I noticed in the set of crowned Kurkihar bronzes. (Fig 3.4 a&b)

¹Ckara in the middle of the palm and webbed fingers and feet are marks of super-human, mahāpurusha.

The seated crowned Buddha in *bhumisparsāmudrā* symbolizes Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. During this, the right hand of Buddha with his three fingers pointed downwards touches the earth, and the left hand is on his lap in the *dhayanmudrā* or meditation. All the seated image of crown Buddha show him in an *uttarāsāṅga* robe, with a bare right shoulder. This is a usual robe draping practiced amongst the monks. This would also mean Buddha attained enlightenment as a monk in the earthly realms. (Fig 3.5)

Description of the Crown Buddha from Kurkihar

The Crowned Buddha from Kurkihar is represented either standing or seated on a double or single lotus seat, with a *pañcharatha* pedestal, or on a *triratha* pedestal. The *Prabhāmaṇḍala* in these sculptures are embellished with curly flames or foliage scrolls. Sometimes they are also decoated with gem cut flames. The lotus aureole in the middle of the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* is present in most of the crowned images. There are hollow holes on the crown, pedestals, *ūrṇā*, eyeballs, and earrings. These holes were fixed with precious or semi precious gems. There are a few icons from Kurkihar where gems were found intact in these holes. Two such sculptures are of a Buddha and a Lokanātha. On the pedestal of the Buddha three red gems (ruby) are encrusted and on the crown of Avlokiteśvara, one turquoise gem remains intact.

Decoration and ornamentation was important to the iconography of crowned Buddha. Ornamentation includes embellished pendants, earrings with flower and diamond motifs, and elaborate hallow surrounding the crowned Buddha. Silver inlay was applied to the eyes, *ūrṇā*, and sometimes on the pendants and the crown. In some icons the lips have copper inlay which makes the lips look naturally red and make it appear fleshy and realistic. (Fig 3.6, 3.7)

The crown on the icons of Buddha has stylized patterns. The crown is triangular in shape, like a pointed leaf. The design on the crown is similar to the motif found above the throne pillars where the Buddha sits. This motif resembles the acanthus leaves and it has a round bead in the middle. This specific design can be seen on the top of the throne and on the crown. The origin, the adaptation, and the use of this particular motif for the “logo” of crown can be explored. Why was this particular “logo” chosen over the other designs and patterns for the decoration of the crown?

There are three main sections of the crown alternately filled with a methodical pattern. The main peak is slightly pointed higher than the two on the sides. The base of the crown has three horizontal layers. The first layer starts above the beaded hair of Buddha, it is usually plain at Kurkihar, but decorated in the crowned sculptures of Buddha at Bodh Gaya. The second layer of the crown at Gaya has rows of small triangles, at Kurkihar this layer is sometimes absent or if present it is left plain. The third layer is like the first one, horizontal band mostly plain at Kurkihar and decorated at Gaya. If one compares the images of the crowns from Gaya, Kurkihar, and Nālanda one can see the stylistic similarity and standard pattern of the decoration between the crowns. (Fig 3.8 a, b, 3.9 a, b, c, 3.10, 3.11)

Flower motifs are present to the extreme left and right of the crown. When viewed from the front the flower appears like the earring worn at the top of the ear, but when the viewer moves their position sideways, a clear distinction is visible between the ear and the crown. Change in perspective gives a better understanding of a three dimensional image. When looked from the back, the crown on the Buddha's head gives the impression of being installed separately. A thick bar adjoins the two sides of the crown. This could mean that the crown was made separately and then fixed on the top of the head. (Fig 3.12 a&b)

From the back of the image one can see the ribbons emerging out from the sides of the crown. The flying ribbons on the crown form an elegant loop on the shoulders of Buddha. The silk ribbons were likely derived from the royal crowns of the historical kings; it became a symbol of royalty and so was used by the Buddhist artists.² The flowing ribbons around the *chattra* (parasol) also confer to the symbolism of royalty. These features of ribbons on the crown, and the jeweled ornaments of crowned Buddha at Kurkihar, matches with the *Sambhogakāya* list mentioned by Twist, implying crowned Buddha at Kurkihar embodies *Sambhogakāya* form of Buddha (the enjoyment body).³

Table 5. Inscriptions of Crowned Buddha at Kurkihar

Crowned Buddha	Inscription
Three crowned Buddha, Miracle at Srāvsatī	Unidentified inscription (Fig 3.13)
Buddha standing in Abhayamudrā, 11 th century C.E.	Records the gift of the image in the 3 rd year of king Vighrahapāla by Tīkūka, the son of the Mahāyāna lay worshipper Dūlapa.
Buddha standing in Abhayamudrā, dated 1074 C.E	Records the gift of the image in the 19 th year of king Vighrahapala by Yekhokā, the wife of the mahattama Dūlpa. (Fig 3.14)

²Rebecca L. Twist. "Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road: Iconography and Ideology" *MDPI Humanities* (2018): 6.

³ The list is discussed later in the chapter.

Buddha standing in Abhayamudrā, dated 1074 C.E	Records the gift of the image in the 19 th year of king Vighrahapāla by one Utīmarāka, the son of mahattamaDūlpa.
Buddha standing in Abhayamudrā, 10 th century C.E	Records the gift of Jayat.
Buddha seated in Bhūmisparśamudrā, 10 th century C.E	Buddhist creed followed by, the gift of Rāhulavarman of Kāñchī. (Fig 3.15)
Buddha seated, Bhūmisparśamudrā, 10 th century C.E.	Donor named Prabhākarasimha of Kāñchī
Buddha seated with a bowl and a fruit, 12 th century C.E	Gopālīñcharo, each letter enclosed in a lotus petal of the pedestal. (Fig 3.18)

The inscriptions mentioned above give information about the donors and their social background. Three inscriptions mention the name ‘Dūlpa’. He is referred to as ‘mahattama’ in two inscriptions thus he can be identified as a monk. There is one female donor, Yekhokā, who is the wife of the monk Dūlpa. The inscriptions also mention the name of the ruler, Vighrahapāla, along with the year, 1074. The cult of crown Buddha seems to have gained popularity in the 11th century C.E. There are two inscriptions from Kāñchī (present day Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu) suggesting Kurkihar had a wider pilgrimage network that extended to the south of India. The donor ‘Jayat’ seems like a Pāli name, so it can be a local donor. The images are marked as ‘gift’ ‘*deyadharmmo*’. The *Mahāvamsa* and *Chulavamsa* are filled with mentions of gifts like diadems, clothes and jewels to Buddha images.⁴ These jeweled images might have been gifted to the monastery or a stūpa at Kurkihar to gain merit in present and afterlife.

The Significance

The royal insignia ‘crown’ is associated with the monarchical power. Yuvraj Krishan has argued that these new images of Buddha with crown were not associated with the Mahāyāna or the Theravada Buddhist tradition but it was ‘a natural product of Buddhist art’. He related its emergence to the idea of Buddha being a sovereign. Claudine Picron has argued that the mythic coronation of Buddha happened at the sacred Mount Meru.⁵ Buddha proclaimed his sovereignty

⁴Rowland Benjamin. “The Bejewelled Buddha in Afghanistan.” *Artibus Asiae* 24, no. 1 (1961): 23.

⁵Picron, *The Bejewelled Buddha*, 63. A mythic context where Buddha is given a crown is on Mount Meru, where the king Indra resides. On Mount Meru Buddha takes over the *Paṇḍukambala* (throne) of Indra who is the king of Gods, there he is enthroned and returns on earth as a king.

after his spiritual *abhiṣekha* i.e his coronation as a king.⁶ The description of the royal ceremony of treating Buddha as a king can be found in the account of Chinese scholar Xuanzang, who visited the King of Kanauj, Harṣavardhana in 636 A.D in the post Gupta period.⁷ The rite of Royal *abhiṣekha* of Buddha is also discussed by Śubhakarsimha (637-735) a master from Nālanda who travelled to Tibet and China.⁸ A ritualistic ceremony called the *Pañcavārṣika* was reported by Buddhist monks Faxien and Xuan Zhang in numerous Buddhist kingdoms. During the *Pañcavārṣika* ritual, the king gives his crown and cape to the adorned Buddha and this transfer of power from the king to Buddha makes Buddha a Universal monarch, *Chakravartin*.⁹ The coronation of Buddha was introduced in the mythic context first but later it was adopted as a ritualistic ceremony in the initiation of Buddhahood in the Saṅgha.¹⁰

The iconography of the crown is explained through the theory of kingship, *Cakravartin*, the universal monarch. There is another explanation provided by scholars for the iconography of the crowned Buddha. It is explained through the concept of '*Trikaya*' (three bodies) in Buddhism.¹¹ The *Trikāya* doctrine in Buddhism was a Mahāyāna development.¹² The second body, the *Sambhogakāya* or the enjoyment body of a Buddha was seen 'as meditational form' which served as a way to experience or visualize the highest or non-representational form of a Buddha called the *dharmakāya*.¹³ *Sambhogakāya* body was indestructible and eternal, similar to *dharmakāya*, but it was also capable of communicating with sentient beings like the *nirmāṇakāya*. A *sambhogakāya* Buddha is a 'meditational construct' because it manifests in the minds of the advanced practitioners. Rebecca L. Twist studied the crowned images of Buddha on the Silk Road and made a very specific case about the representation of Crowned Buddha through the tradition of Vajrayāna. According to her, the Crowned Buddha was a result of 'an early esoteric meditational construct' and they represented the primordial Buddha, the *Ādi Buddha*. Ādi Buddha or primordial Buddha in Mahāyana and Vajrayāna Buddhism is the

⁶Krishan, Y. "The Origin of the Crowned Buddha Image." *East and West* 21, no. 1/2 (1971): 92.

⁷Picron, *The Bejewelled Buddha* (Kolkata: Sanctum Book, 2010), Appendix c (1) 147. Xuanzang writes "...The king Harṣavardhana of Kanauj....made them bring forth on an elephant a golden statue of Buddha about three feet high. On the left went the king, Śīlāditya (king Harṣavardhana) dressed as Śakra, holding a precious canopy, whilst Kumārarāja, dressed as Brahmārāja, holding a white chāmara, went on the right." This passage of Xuanzang reveals the subordinate position of king to Buddha and gives a glimpse of ritually placing Buddha above the ruler of the land, making Buddha a universal monarch.

⁸Ibid., 59. Śubhakarsimha along with a Chinese monk translated a text, *Mahāvairochanasūtra*, from Sanskrit to Chinese, where information about the royal *abhiṣeka* of a king and of a Buddha is provided.

⁹Twist, *Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road*, 2.

¹⁰Picron, *The Bejewelled Buddha*, 63. In the stages of Bodhisattva's spiritual path, the ninth stage is named *Yauvaṛāja*, implying that he is a crown prince and tenth stage is called *Abhiṣeka*, implying his final coronation as Buddha.

¹¹In Buddhism, the body and mind of a Buddha is broken down in three: Dharmakāya (non-perceivable body, Adi-Buddha, Vairochana), Sambhogakāya (the enjoyment body, Avlokiteśvara, Mañjūshri) and Nirmāṇakāya (body of emanation, the physical manifestation, eg. Śākyamuni Gautam Buddha).

¹²Ruben L. F. Habito. "The Trikāya Doctrine in Buddhism." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 6 (1986): 55.

¹³Twist. "Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road," 13.

embodiment of Dharma. *Dharmakāya* is a non-representational body; it is a form of Buddha's mind which is impalpable and ethereal. This form could only be perceived by the other Buddhas. In order to visually depict Ādi Buddha, the Sambhogakāya (enjoyment body) of Vairocana is borrowed. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, Vairocana "the Intensely Luminescent One" symbolizes the embodiment of all the Dhayāni Buddhas thus he is referred as Ādi Buddha (The Primordial one).¹⁴ Vairocana in his *sambhogakāya* form can be discerned by his elaborate silk items and jeweled ornaments. In early esoteric artworks of Tibet, the iconography of the cape was used as a means to distinguish a Ādi Buddha from other Buddhas.¹⁵

Ādi Buddha, Mahāvairocana, can be distinguished from other Buddha by performing the *bodhyāgrī mudrā* (fist of wisdom) that symbolizes supreme wisdom and immediate enlightenment. This mudrā is also called the *bodhāgrī* and *jñānamuṣṭimudrā*. The *bodhyāgrī mudrā* is formed by the index finger of the right hand pointing upwards, while the thumb and remaining fingers of the right hand make a fist.¹⁶ Another mudrā that acts as an iconographic signifier to identify Vairocana is the *dharmacakrapravartanmudrā* (the wheel of Dharma). Along the Silk Road, including Bamiyan, Foundukistan, Haḍḍa, Gandhara, Swat, Kashmir, Tibet, Gilgit, and Baltistan crown Buddha is featured with decorative cape encrusted with symbols of sun and moon. Buddha wears a four pointed cape, with triangle corners draped on each shoulder. Twist points out that the elaborate cape was adopted from the royal attire, perhaps from Gandhara, Central Asia, or even the Himalayas, in order to denote a *cakravartin* Buddha. The images of Buddha with the crown and the cape have showed up in the bronze collection of Gilgit and Kashmiri. Based on the inscriptional evidence these images were patronized by the Paṭola Sāhi rulers of Gilgit during the seventh-eighth centuries. Two centuries later in the tenth-eleventh centuries, Kurkihar excels in the production of bronze images of the crown Buddha.

There was a constant influx of monks from the northern region to Magadha; one reason for this influx was Magadha being the seat of Buddha's enlightenment. The iconography of the Crowned Buddha in the region of Magadha would have been the result of the monk's arrival from north India. Contact between Kashmir and Magadha has been established by Kalhaṇa in *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. He mentions, Lalitāditya Muktāpiḍa, the ruler of Karkoka dynasty of Kashmir took away Buddhist images from Magadha.¹⁷

The list of thirteen specific characteristics for the fully developed iconography of a *Sambhogakāya* Buddha is listed by Twist. They are five Silk Items: (1) Ribbons (ties on the crown) (2) Upper garment (3) Silk scarf (billowing behind) (4) Sash at the waist (often hidden) (5) Lower garment. Eight Jeweled Ornaments: (1) Crown (2) Right and left earrings (3) Necklace (4) Two armlets (5) Long and short necklaces (6) Two bracelets (7) Finger rings (8)

¹⁴ There are two other Ādi Buddhas, they are Vajrasattva, and Vajradhatu. These are different forms of Vairocana.

¹⁵ Twist, "Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road," 21.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Karl Khandalavala and Sadashiv Gorakshkar, *Eastern Indian Bronzes* (Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1986) 97.

Two anklets . Except the finger rings, armlets and bracelets other items are found in the iconography of Kurkihar crowned Buddha. Thus, the bronze collection at Kurkihar shows the *sambhogakāya* form of Buddha. There are nineteen images of crowned from Kurkihar Buddha in *abhyamudrā*, all wearing plain *saṅghāṭī* that covers both the shoulders and eleven in *bhumisparsāṃudrā*, all wearing *uttarāsaṅga*, leaving the left shoulder bare. What was the reason for this specific choice?¹⁸

The iconography of *Sambhogakāya* Buddha flourished at Kurkihar because of its close proximity to Bodh Gaya. At Bodh Gaya, there are numerous crowned images of Buddha in stone but none in metal. The idea of *Sambhogakāya* with iconography of crown Buddha develops with the Vajrayāna esoteric practices. Texts like Avatamsaka Sūtra, the Mañjusrīmūlakalpa, Guhyasamāja Tantra and Mahāvairocana abhisambodhi Tantra sets up the imagery that Mahāvairocana is the *sambhogakāya* Buddha.¹⁹ The visualization of Mahāvairocana through esoteric practice revealed Buddha in a new avatar and this new avatar of transcendental Buddha was in vogue in Magadha, especially in Bodh Gaya and Kurkihar in the tenth and eleventh century C.E. In the eleventh century, from Bihar and Bengal, the iconography of crowned Buddha started moving to the region of Southeast Asia; from Burma to Angkor and Thailand.²⁰

II

The *Prabhāmaṇḍala* and the seven life scene

There are two stone sculptures of Crown Buddha from Kurkihar that has life scenes of Buddha (Fig 3.19- 3.22). There is another extraordinary bronze piece of crown Buddha which depicts seven important events of Sākyaminuni's life. The uniqueness of this piece is that all the Buddha featured are crowned and the events are beautifully depicted on a large *Prabhāmaṇḍala*. This peculiar feature of crown Buddha on the stele is also shared by stone sculptures of crowned Buddha found from Bodh Gaya. Although the *Prabhāmaṇḍala*, has complete seven scenes of Buddha's life what remains missing is the central image that was suppose to surround the seven events.

The *Prabhāmaṇḍala* is oval at the top with the typical flames around the edges. The small figurines of Buddha are fixed systematically around the mandorla. The rectangular empty space in the middle of *Prabhāmaṇḍala* was the seat of Buddha which is now missing. His head would

¹⁸Picron, *The Bejewelled Buddha*, 92. Picron has pointed out that the Buddha standing in *abhyamudrā* is not a depiction of a historical Buddha, and the recurrence of the crowned Buddha in *bhumisparsāṃudrā* was because of the development of the concept of Primordial Buddha. She writes, "Most of the images of the bejewelled Buddha in eastern India either illustrate him at the moment of enlightenment or standing and showing the gesture of protection, their function is not basically to be anecdotal, to refer to an event but rather to express the concept of Bodhi" But the concept of Bodhi does not explain the reason for the specific choice of garment.

¹⁹Rebecca L. Twist. "Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road: Iconography and Ideology" *MDPI Humanities* (2018).

²⁰ Picron, *The Bejewelled Buddha*, 5.

have covered the decorated corolla of petals surrounded by the jewel pattern as a nimbus. The figures on the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* are proportioned to one other. It has uniformity, structure, and symmetry. The harmonious composition of *Prabhāmaṇḍala* deserves a laud for producing a remarkable craftsmanship.

The metal *Prabhāmaṇḍala* hosts the seven life scenes of Sākyamuni. Starting from the bottom left, the birth of Buddha is portrayed. The first figure is of Queen Māya, mother of Buddha, who gave birth to Siddhartha Gautam under a Sāl tree. Queen Māya holds the branch of a sāl tree full of fruits and leaves which are signs of fertility. She is dressed like a Queen, with a crown on her head; she is shown giving birth to Buddha in the grove of Lumbini. Here, a tiny Buddha can be seen coming out from her waist. Above her, is the second event, subjugation of the elephant Nālāgiri at Vaisāli. Buddha's evil cousin, Devdatta, sent a mad elephant to attack Buddha. Buddha looked at the elephant and placed his hand on the head of the elephant in *abhayamudrā*, the elephant pacified and knelt before him. Here, the elephant is absent, but the gesture of placing a hand over the head is accurately portrayed. The third event is the first sermon at Sārnāth. Buddha after attaining enlightenment set on to the deer park of Benaras where five of his disciples lived. He went there to teach the others the doctrine of Dhamma. His first teaching is symbolized by the *dharmachakraparivartanmudrā*. The next event at the middle of the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* is the *mahāparinirvāṇa* (death) of Buddha at Kushinagra. The Buddha can be seen lying down in a monk's robe on a bed. Three figures are shown lamenting his death, and these three were probably the disciple of Buddha, one being Ānanda who was with him during the last years of his life. The *parinirvāṇa* is followed by the incident of Miracle at *Srāvastī*, where Buddha under a mango tree, performed miracles such as manifesting multiple guise of him and preaching the doctrine to the people. In the next event, Buddha is in *Varādamudrā*, suggesting his descent from the *Trāyastriṃśa* heaven, an abode of thirty-three Gods. Buddha reached *Trāyastriṃśa* heaven to teach *Abhidham* to his mother and other inhabitants, when Buddha completed his teaching he decided to descend from the *Trāyastriṃśa* heaven. The sixth event is followed by the seventh and that event is offering of *madhū* by a monkey to Buddha. Here, Buddha is standing carrying a bowl in his hand. At *Rājgir*, a monkey decided to give an offering to Buddha, a honeycomb. Buddha ate his offering and in immense delight the monkey jumped around falling off the branch and dying. Because of the good faith he showed to Buddha the monkey was reborn in the celestial paradise. The eighth scene, the central figure, which is now missing, would have been probably of Buddha's victory over *Māra* in *bhūmisparshamudrā*. This is the one episode and *mūdra* is missing from the entire panel, also this *mudrā* dominates the representation of Buddha at Kurkihar. (Fig 3.24 a&b)

There are few details that need to be noticed in the *Prabhāmaṇḍala*. Buddha in the *dharmachakra mudrā* is seated in *pralambapada* asana (European position like sitting on a chair). There is one stone image of Buddha of this kind from Kurkihar at the Gaya Museum. He is not crowned but he sits in *pralambapada* and his hands are in *dharmachakra mudrā* (Fig 3.25 a, b, c). All the other Buddha on the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* is standing on the lotus seat. They all wear crown and they

are ornamented, except the Buddha in the *mahāparinirvāṇa* episode (Fig 3.26). All the others have silver inlay in their eyes, in the *ūrṇā*, and at the end of the *antarvāsa* robe. Every crown has a small hole in the middle for the jewel to be fixed, which now lay hollow. Above the horizontal line of the nimbus, on each corner, are two triangle fleurons. The umbrella is missing from the top of the *Prabhāmaṇḍala*. The apex of the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* has an image of a *stūpa*. The *stūpa* has two flowing ribbons and three encrusted jewel marks at three corners. The *stūpa* is made directly above the *mahāparinirvāṇa* episode symbolizing enshrined relics of the deceased Buddha in the *stūpa*.

Talking about the relics, at the back of the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* there is a seventeen line inscription. I have identified the inscription on this *Prabhāmaṇḍala* as ***Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī***. This *sūtra* is one of the sacred relic mantras, they are considered as relics of *dharmakāya*, the unmanifested Buddha. The word *Dhāraṇī* is a mnemonic device, spells and incantations. It can be written on a *stūpa*, a sculpture, a cloth, a wood or a paper. Any object inscribed with *Dhāraṇī* works as a talisman. These *mantras* were engraved for erasing negative *karmā* and in return earning good *karmā*. It works as a protective charm against calamities. (Fig 3.27)

The Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī

The mantrā, the *Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī*, has an origin story. In this section I have mentioned the story of origin followed by comparing the *Dhāraṇī* from three different sources. The first reference of the *Dhāraṇī* comes from a paper published in the Huntington archive, titled, “*Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī The Heart Secret of All Tathāgatas*”, the paper mentions that originally this *sūtra* was translated from Sanskrit to Chinese by master Amoghavajra during the Tang dynasty in the sixth century C.E. The English translation was done from the Chinese Canon, Vol. 19. Text no. 1022B. The second paper I have referred to is “*The Four Dharmakaya Relic Mantras and Their Benefits*” by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It has been transliterated from Tibetan to English. The third document referred is the Patna Museum Catalogue, where transliteration of the inscription from Siddhamātrkā script to English is given. The Catalogue provides the seventeen line transliteration but it does not mention what kind of inscription this is. I have tried to identify the inscription on the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* as the *Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī*. Below, I have compared the three sources that mention the *Sūtra* and I have highlighted the slight variance in each source. In the inscription few words are missing, some words are spelled incorrectly. These discrepancies in the inscription are filled through the two translated *Sūtra* from the Chinese and the Tibetan sources.

Origin story of the Great Relic Mantra: *Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī*

Once, Buddha was in the Jewel Garden of Magadha, he was surrounded by all the Gods, demi-gods, ghosts, *yakhas*, humans, and non-humans. In the garden, a Brahmin, who was a follower of the three jewels (Buddhism), went to revere Buddha. He circumambulated Buddha seven times and first offered him incense, and flowers and then the priceless garments, necklaces, and garland of jewels. The Brahmin requested Buddha to come to his house to accept his offering. Buddha accepted his invitation in silence. The next day Brahmin along with his retinue went to receive Buddha at his place. Buddha greeted the Brahmin and announced in the assembly that everyone should come to the Brahmin's house to accept his offerings and let the Brahmin receive great merit by doing so. Buddha stood up, illuminating colorful lights in all ten directions; led the retinue of Brahma, Indra, kings, Dharmapālas, gods, and dragons to the Brahmin's house.²¹

While walking with his retinue he came to a garden called 'Abundant wealth', there he saw an ancient pagoda desolated and in ruins. He paid respect to the pagoda by circumambulating around the ruins three times.²² He took out his upper garment and placed it over the pagoda and started weeping. The ten other Buddha shed their tears too while also emitting light to illuminated the dilapidated pagoda. This left all the others: kings, Brahmins, and Bodhisattvas in bewilderment. One of the Bodhisattvas, Vajrapāṇi, asked Buddha, "Why did the Tathāgata shed these tears from His eyes and why do the Buddhas in the ten directions manifest the sign of vast, auspicious light?" Buddha then explained that the pagoda has the whole body relics of thousands of *Tathāgatas* and is the storehouse of *Dharma*. Listening to Buddha talk about the whole body relic pagoda, the retinue of Buddha experienced spiritual achievement.

Vajrapāṇi witnessing the rarity of such incidence, asked Buddha, how much virtue can a devotee gain by sincerely invoking the whole body relic? **Buddha answers to Vajrapāṇi, if a male or a female follower or my four disciples are inclined to copy this *sūtra*, it will be equivalent to copy all the thousand *sūtras* pronounced by thousands of Tathāgatas and if a person chants this one *sūtra*, it will be like chanting all the *sūtra* ever spoken by Buddha of past, present and future.** All the Buddha-Tathāgata, innumerable like the sand of Ganges will come to the worshipper. Buddha also mentioned that if a devotee makes an offering of incense, garland, and wonderful objects to this *sūtra*, it will be to offer all the thousands of Thathāgats seven treasures on Mount Meru.

Furthermore, Buddha said to Vajrapāṇi, "If people build a pagoda using earth, stone, wood, gold, silver, bronze, and lead, and if they copy this spiritual *mantra* and enshrine the copy in the pagoda, as soon as it is enshrined, the pagoda will be made of the seven treasures". The place will be remembered and supported by all the Tathāgatas. Such will be the pagoda because it contains this *Sūtra*. He later adds, which is important in the context of the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* **"If**

²¹Mention of dragon in the text is because the *sūtra* has been translated from Chinese.

²² Pagoda is a Chinese architectural reference to a Stūpa, a reliquary shrine.

you enshrine this *Sūtra* inside a Buddha's statue in a *stūpa*, the statue will be made of the seven treasures. This statue will be so efficacious and responsive that all wishes will be fulfilled without exception.”²³

Before pronouncing the *dhāraṇī mantra* to Vajrapāṇi and those who were present there the Buddha reminded that the *mantrā* should not be forgotten and the whole-body relics of all the Buddha of the past, present and future along with the ‘three bodies’ of every Tathāgata were present in the *mantrā*. Here, the reference is made to the *trikāyā* doctrine in Buddhism. After the *sūtra* was pronounced by Buddha, he explained to Vajrapāṇi the spiritual power and boundless benefits of the *Dhāraṇī*. Paying obeisance and giving offerings to this pagoda would reduce sins, save from catastrophes, and reduce suffering of all kinds. The *sūtra* would also keep the pagoda safe from natural disasters, wild animals, and poisonous insects. It would free worshippers from all diseases and fever; it will bring good fortune, good dharma, and also bring devotees closer to attaining *nirvāṇa*.

After teaching the benefits of relic *mantrā* Buddha asked Vajrapāṇi to revere, protect, uphold, and propagate it in the world. Vajrapāṇi replied “If there are sentient beings that copy, uphold, and remember them unceasingly, we will command the Brahma-kings, the god-king Śakra, the four great god-kings, and the eight classes of Dharma protectors to protect them day and night without even leaving temporarily.”²⁴ After this Buddha went to the Brahmin’s house, accepted the offering and the assembly of gods, kings, humans, ghosts, and ascetics carried out his teaching of the *sūtra*.

The *sūtra*: The Chinese translation

namastryadhvikānām | sarvatathāgatānām | oṃbhuvī-bhavana-varevacana-vacati| surusuru |
dharadhara | sarvatathāgatadhātudharepadmambhavati | jayavare mudresmaratathāgata dharma-
cakra pravartana| vajrebodhimaṇḍa-alaṅkāra-alaṅkṛte | sarvatathāgata-adhiṣṭhite | bodhayabodhaya
| bodhi bodhi | budhyabudhya | sambodhanisambodhaya | cala calacalantu |sarva- āvaraṇāni |
sarvapāpavigate | huruhuru | sarvaśokavigate | sarvatathāgatahṛdayavajriṇi| sambhārasambhāra |
sarvatathāgataguhyadhāraṇīmudre|bhūtesubhūte|sarvatathāgata-adhiṣṭhitadhātugarbhesvāhā|
samaya-adhṣṭhitesvāhā|sarvatathāgatahṛdayadhātumudresvāhā|supraṭiṣṭhitastūpetathāgata-
adhiṣṭhitehuruhuruḥmūḥmūḥsvāhā|oṃsarvatathāgatoṣṇīṣadhātumudrāṇi |
sarvatathāgatasadhātuvibhūṣita-adhiṣṭhitehūṃhūṃsvāhā ||²⁵

Tibetan translation of the *mantrā* tilted: Root Mantra of Secret Relic

NAMAS TRAIYA DHĪKĀNĀM / SARVA TATHĀGATĀ NĀM / OM BHUVIBHAVĀN VARE VACHAṬAU /
CHULU CHULU / DHARA DHARA / SARVA TATHĀGATĀ / DHĀTU DHARE / PADMA GARBHE / JAYA VARE

²³ *Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī* Translated from the Chinese Canon, Vol. 19, Text no. 1022B, Huntington Archive, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5

/ ACHALE / SMARA TATHĀGATĀ / DHARMMA CHAKRA / PRAVARTTANA / VAJRA BODHI MAṆḌHA
 ALAṆKĀRA / ALAṆKṚITE / SARVA TATHĀGATĀ / ADHIṢṬHITE / BODHAYA BODHAYA / BODHANI
 BODHANI / BUDDHAYA BUDDHAYA / SAṀBODHANI SAṀBODHAYA / CHALA CHALA / CHALAṆTU
 SARVA ĀVARAṆĀNA / SARVA PĀPAṆ VIGATE / HURU HURU / SARVA ŚHOKAVIKATE / SARVA
 TATHĀGATĀ HṚIDAYA / VAJRINI / SAṀBHAVA SAṀBHAVA / SARVA TATHĀGATĀ GUHYE / DHĀRAṆI
 MUDRE / BUDDHE / SUBUDDHE/ SARVA TATHĀGATĀ ADHIṢṬHITE / DHĀTU GARBHE SVĀHĀ /
 SAMAYA ADHIṢṬHITE SVĀHĀ / SARVA TATHĀGATĀ HṚIDAYA / DHĀTU MUDRE SVĀHĀ /
 SUPRATIṢṬHITA / STUPE TATHĀGATĀ ADHIṢṬHITE / HŪṆ HŪṆ SVĀHĀ.²⁶

The Prabhāmaṇḍala inscription:

The inscription starts with the Buddhist creed, it ends in the third line, thereafter starting with the relic *sūtra*. I have highlighted the words or the lines that are common to the inscription and to the translated *Sūtra* (both Chinese and Tibetan). Because of some variance in the inscription and textual *sūtras* the non-highlighted words or lines are discussed in the footnote. Some words or letters which are missing or are presented with a question mark in the inscription can be corrected with the textual sample present above. Originally in the museum catalogue the inscription is divided in seventeen lines, I have taken the liberty to divide the inscription in a format given in the *Sūtra*. It is easier to compare and makes reading cohesive. (C) and (T) in the footnote refers to the Chinese translation and the Tibetan translation.

Line 1, 2, and 3: *Siddhām-ye-dharmāhetu-prasabhavāmvāhetūmteshān-tathāgatohyavadat-teshām cha yonirodhaevamvādimahāśramaṇḥ*.²⁷

Continue from 3rd line.....

omisavstibhuvanavare²⁸ | chuluchulu²⁹ | dharadhara | sarva-Tathāgata-dhātunadha(?)
 vayara(jra)pramukha³⁰ | jayavaremuchule³¹ | smaratahāgatadharmachakra-pravartana
 | vaj[r*]abodhi-maṇḍal-ākār-³²ālaṅkṛite- | sarva-tathāgat
 adhishṭhite | bodhayabodhaya | bodhibudhaya | budhyabudhyas | ³³ | chalachalachalatu |

²⁶Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *The Four Dharmakaya Relic Mantras and Their Benefits*, FPMT, (Portland, U.S.A, 2013, 2020), p.8-9.

²⁷Meaning “Of those things that arise from a cause, the Tathāgata has told the cause, And also what their cessation is: This is the doctrine of the Great Recluse.”

²⁸The word ‘savasti’ after Om is missing from the textual relic composition. ‘Bhuvana’ should be ‘bhuvi-bhavana-vare’ according to the texts. The word ‘vachati/au’ is missing from the inscription.

²⁹ Words like chuluchulu and dharadhara are simple magical words without any literal meaning.

³⁰The word ‘dhātunadha’ should be ‘dhātu-dhare’ as per the textual references. This word should be followed by padmaṁbhavati(C) / padmagarbhe (T), but instead ‘vayarajrapramukha’ is used.

³¹The word ‘muchule’ should be ‘Achale’ as mentioned in the tibetain translation, in the Chinese translation the word is *mudra*.

³²The word ‘maṇḍal-ākār’ should be read ‘maṇḍa alaṅkāra’ as found in both the translation, thus the sentence is *vajra bodhimanḍa alaṅkāra ālaṅkṛite*.

³³The sentence ‘saṁbodhanisaṁbodhaya’ (C) or ‘SAMBODHANI SAMBODHAYA’ (T) is missing from the inscription. In the texts it appears after *budhyabudhya* and before *chala-chala*.

sarva-sat[t*]vānāma (nam)-ma chasa[r*] va-varaṇāni (varṇāni)³⁴ | sarvapāpādhishṭhite |
hrim̐| ṅga-bhaṇḡana³⁵ | sarvasyeka-vigave³⁶ |³⁷ | sarva-dhapa (?)³⁸hṛidaya-
vajriṇi | samtarasamtara³⁹ | sarva-Tathāgata-guhya-dhāraṇi-mudrā | buddhesubuddhe⁴⁰ |
sarva-Tathāgatadhātuomīsvāhā⁴¹ | samaya-adhṣṭhitesvāhā |
sarvatathāgatahṛdayadhātumudresvāhā | prati...(about 20ish letters are obliterated here) ends
with the word svāhā⁴² | omīsarvatathāgata-oṣṇīśadhātumudrāṇesvāhā | sarvatathāgata -
dhātuvisupitādhiṣṭhite⁴³hrim̐hrim̐svāhā | nama[h*] Sveyadhika | nāmsarva-Tathāgatānām |⁴⁴

³⁴ The first half of the line of the inscription ‘*sarva-satvāñāma nāmma cha*’ is not mentioned in either of the copy of *sūtra*, the second half ‘*sa[r*] va-vaṇāni (vaṇāni)*’ should be read *sarva avaranāṇi*. SARVA ĀVARAṆĀNA (T) Sarva-āvaranāṇi(C).

namastryadhvikānām |sarvatathāgatānām. This is the last line in the inscription but the textual sūtra starts with these lines. Thus, the last line of the inscription is the first line of the sūtra. According to the textual reference, the inscription should have started with this line.

To conclude, the inscriptional evidence on the *Prabhāmaṇḍala* confirms that it is the **Great Relic Mantrā: Sūtra of the Whole-Body Relic Treasure Chest Seal Dhāraṇī**. The *Prabhāmaṇḍala* affirms to the fact that *trikaya* doctrine along with its *Dhāraṇī* was present at Kurkihar. This crowned image with an elaborate *Prabhāmaṇḍala* might have been donated to a *stūpa* at Kurkihar. This great *sūtra* not only protects the donors but it also keeps safe those who pay offering to the sūtra. For the monks paying obeisance to the sculpture would have brought them closer to the experience of enlightenment. The donor would have been someone with affluent economic resources to be in a position to have commissioned such a high craftsmanship. Most of the crowned images were donated in return for merit and protection. Apart from transactional exchange of merit in return of offerings what does the writing of the Great Relic Mantrā on a Crowned Buddha suggest? The Dhāraṇī embodies the *dharmakāya* Buddha and the sculpture tries to represent Buddha as mentioned in the story of Dhāraṇī, “In priceless garments, necklaces and garland of jewels.”

Chapter 3: Patronage and Image of Devotees

Introduction

This chapter has two sections; the first section discusses the patronage of the site through the reading of the inscriptions. These inscriptions are grouped in four parts: monks, women, occupational groups and regions. The second section discusses visual representation of devotees on the sculptures and objects of offerings made by them. The chapter aims to show that the patron had left their presence either through the *Mahāyāna* formula or through visual representation.

I

Patronage at Kurkihar

The patronage basis of Kurkihar consists of lay men and women, monks, nuns, merchants, and artisanal class. The donative inscription at Kurkihar starts appearing from the ninth century C.E. and continues till the twelfth century C.E. The tenth century C.E. is the peak period of receiving patronage. Maximum numbers of donative bronze sculptures show up during this period. The donative inscriptions from Kurkihar are mostly found on sculptures, both stones and metals. Some inscriptions are found on the broken pedestals, *prabhāmaṇḍalas*, rectangular slabs, and bells. The inscriptions are inscribed in *Siddhamātrkā* script and contain the ‘Dharmma relic’ and the ‘filial piety’ formula.¹ The Dharmma relic is also known as *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā* or Buddhist creed. The ‘filial piety’ formula is related to the transfer of merit in the Mahāyāna inscription. The Buddhist monks and nuns had to renounce their family and social ties, still in their donative inscriptions given to the Buddhist *Samgha* they refer to prayers for the well being of their parents and teachers whether living or dead. The formula becomes very common in the fourth-fifth century C.E. and can be found on the inscriptions from Ajanta, Sārnatha, Bodh Gaya and, Nāgarjunaṇḍa.

The inscription formula of filial piety is found in the given form “*deyadharmo yam... (of, title + name)..., yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bhavatu upādhyāyācāryapūrvamaṃgamaṃ kṛtvā sakalasatvarāśer anuttarajñānaprāptaye*” meaning “This is the religious gift of (name of the monk/nun) what here is the merit, may that, having placed my teacher and preceptor and my parents first, be for the obtaining supreme knowledge by all the multitude of beings.”² There can be little variation in

¹Claudine Bautze-Picron. *Images of donors in the Buddhist art of Eastern India*. 2014. HAL Id: hal-01096358. p.2. Dharmma relic formula is a sacred formula conceived by Buddha as he became enlightened at Bodh Gaya: *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca ya nirodha evāṃ vādī mahāśamaṇaḥ*. “All the things arise from a cause; the Tathāgata has explained the cause. This cause of things has finally been destroyed. Such is the teaching of the great Śramaṇa.” This formula gained prominence after the sixth century C.E. when Bodh Gaya rose to prominence as a pilgrimage centre.

²Gregory Schopen, “Mahayana in Indian Inscription”, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21, (1979): 5.

this formula sometimes. The term *deyadharma*, which means “religious” or “pious” gift, appears in the beginning of all the inscriptions from Kurkihar.

The title used by nuns in these donative inscriptions are *Sākya-bhikṣuṇī* or *bhikṣuṇī* and the monk uses the title *Sthavira*, *Sākya bhikṣhu* or just *bhikṣhu*. The title *Sākya bhikṣhu* or *Sākya-bhikṣuṇī* starts appearing in the donative inscriptions from around the fourth-fifth century C.E. from the Buddhist sites like Ajaṇṭā, Sārnāth, and Bodh Gaya. Scholars have so far agreed that the title *Sākya bhikṣhu* was specifically chosen by the followers of Mahāyāna as a marker of distinction with the other existing Buddhist groups. The laymen and women at Kurkihar choose the title *Paramopāsaka/ Paramopāsaki*, a title also associated with followers of Mahāyāna laymen and women.³ There are a few inscriptions from Kurkihar in which the donors identify themselves as the followers of Mahāyāna. There are inscriptional evidence of *sthaviras* (elder monks), *Sākya bhikṣhus*, *bhikṣhus* and *paramopāsakas*, who record themselves as *pravara-mahāyāna anuyāyinaḥ* (follower of excellent Mahāyāna).⁴ I have not come across any female donor, nun or laywomen from Kurkihar, explicitly claiming to be a Mahāyāna follower.

On a pedestal from Kurkihar an inscription reads, “This meritorious gift is caused to be made by the elderly Buddhist monk (*sthavira*), Kusumaśīcandra, a *Sākyabhikṣhu*, a Buddhist monk follower of the excellent Mahāyāna (*pravara-mahāyāna-yāyina*) (and) a disciple of the elderly monk Sāriputra, who hailed from the Cālika district. Whatever merit (there be) in it, let it be for the supreme knowledge of all the living beings, having (his) parents, teacher and preceptor in the front rank. On day of the bright half of the month of *Jyēṣṭha*, in the ruling year of Śrī Mahendrapāla-deva.”⁵

The inscription on a stone pedestal is an example of a complete Mahāyāna inscription. Not only does it have the donor claiming to be the follower of Mahāyāna but also he uses the title *Sākyabhikṣhu*. The inscription ends with ‘*yad –atra-puṇyaṃ tad bhavtu*’ formula which Schopen

³Jason Mc Combs, *Mahāyāna and the Gift: Theories and Practices*, 347. He has enquired whether *paramopāsaka/-opāsikā* ‘supreme lay follower’ was just an epithet used by the donors to glorify themselves? He comments on the assumption of the titles related to Mahāyāna, “The best argument against causally linking *sākyabhikṣus/-bhikṣuṇīs* and *paramopāsakas/- opāsikās* with Mahāyāna, I am afraid, comes from silence. As far as I am aware, nowhere in Mahāyāna texts, nor in Mainstream Buddhist texts for that matter, are these terms used as formal titles, much less to mark exclusive groups within the Saṃgha. It strikes me as more than a little odd that a formal distinction marking a certain kind of monk or lay person would never find its way as such into a Buddhist text....Indeed, this is not the case for terms like *sthavira*, *vihārasvāmin*, *parivrājaka*, *bhikṣu*, *upāsaka*, and even *prahāṇika* and *arhat*, all of which appear in Buddhist inscriptions and seem to carry the same meaning there as they do in Buddhist texts”. (p.347)

⁴ For this I have looked at both the metal and stone inscriptions from Kurkihar and those that follow the ‘Kurkihar idiom’.

⁵ Rajat Sanyal, *Dedicatory Inscriptions of the Time of Mahendrapāla: A Fresh Appraisal*, Inscription # 8 Text (Plate 31.8) p.308.

has argued almost being exclusive to the Mahāyāna group.⁶ Moreover this pedestal is dated to the reign of Pāla king Mahendrapāla (c 885-908 C.E) 9th century C.E.

Another complete Mahāyān inscription from Kurkihar comes from a pedestal. The inscription reads “This is the meritorious gift of Buddhajñāna, (*Sākyabhikṣu pravara-mahāyāna-yāyinā*), a Buddhist monk follower of the excellent Mahāyāna. The rest of the inscription has the ‘*yad yad – atra-puṇyaṃ tad bhavtu*’ formula.⁷

Table 6: Monastic titles of Donors at Kurkihar (9th-12th C.E)

Monks (<i>Bhikṣu</i>)	<i>Bhikṣu</i> Viryavarman from Kāñchī, <i>Bhikṣu</i> Vīryavarman from Kāñchī (both dated to 9 th century), <i>Bhikṣu</i> Amṛtavarma, Kanakaśītibhadra a disciple of <i>bikṣu</i> Vijayabhadra	BMS*, DCPM*, AM*, Rectangular slab/s*
Mahāyāna <i>Bhikṣu</i>	Mahāyāna <i>Bhikṣoḥ</i> Candraprabhasya from Vengi Viṣaya, Mahayana <i>Bhikṣoḥ</i> (incomplete inscription)	DCPM/s, Descent of Buddha.
<i>Sākyabhikṣoḥ</i>	<i>Sākyabhikṣoḥ sthavira</i> Lokeshvara,	BMS/s
Mahāyāna <i>Sākyabhikṣoḥ</i>	Kusumaśīcandra , Buddhajñāna	Broken Pedestal/s, broken Pedestal
<i>Sthavira</i> (Elderly monk)	<i>Sthavira</i> Narendra from Kanchi, <i>Sthavira</i> Buddhavarman from Kāñchī, <i>Sthavira</i> Avalokitasīmha of Kāñchī from Kerala Deśa, <i>Sthavira</i> Mañjuśrivarman from Kāñchī, <i>Sthavira</i> Budhavarman and Dharmavarman from Kāñchī, <i>Sthavira</i> Buddhapriya from Kāñchī, <i>Sthavira</i> Prajñāprabhasya, Sarvvāstivādina sthavira Maradevasya?	BMS, Bells, broken Pedestal, Loknātha, BMS, Rectangular slab/s, BMS/s, VM/s
<i>Paramopāsaka</i>	<i>Paramopāsaka</i> Gopāla-Hinoka, Javadhikasya son of	VM*,

⁶ Gregory Schopen, *Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions*, 11.

⁷ Patna Museum Catalogue, 208.

(Lay followers) *Paramopāsaka* Daṇḍibharta,

Avlokiteśvara /s

Mahāyāna Tīkūka son of Mahāyāna lay-worshiper Dūlapa, Crowned Buddha,
Paramopāsaka Dālakasya son of Mahāyāna-*paramopāsaka*. BSM/s

[*BMS- Bhumisparśa mudra, *DCPM- Dharmachakraparivartan mudra, *AM-Abhya mudra, VM-Varāda mudra
[*s) stone sculptures otherwise metal,]

The largest groups of monks at Kurkihar were monastic elders (*Sthavira*); they mostly donated sculptures of Buddha with other objects like bells and architectural slabs. Interestingly, these groups of monastic elders were from *Kāñchī* (Tamil Nadu). These groups of monks came over to Kurkihar in the period of three centuries, some in the ninth, while the most in the tenth century and very few in the eleventh century.⁸ The other group of monks present at Kurkihar is *Bhikshus* (mainstream monks) who largely donated images of Buddha. *Bhikshu Viryavarmman* from *Kāñchī* appears twice in the ninth century C.E. He gave two metal images of Buddha, one, exhibiting Buddha's enlightenment and another showing Buddha preaching his first sermon. Bhikshu Viryavarmman would have had the economic resources to commission two bronze images of Buddha at Kurkihar. B.N Prasad has mistaken the title of '*Bhikshu*' Viryavarmman as '*Sthavira*' Viryavarmman.⁹

In the table of inscriptions there is one monk who has directly declared himself as a Mahāyāna follower; he is Mahāyāna *Bhikṣoh* Candraprabhasya from Vengi Viṣaya (Andhra Pradesh).¹⁰ He donated a stone image of Buddha in the *Dharmachakraparvartana mudrā*. Attention to this inscription is required because the donor, Candraprabhasya, has also mentioned that he is believer/follower of the *Mahāsāṃghika Pūrva-sāila vada*. Pūrva-sāila vada was a sub- set of the Buddhist Mahāsāṃghika School of the Krishna valley.¹¹ Another inscription which shares the

⁸B.N Prasad, "The Socio-religious Dimensions of Dedicatory Inscriptions on Sculptures Donated to a Buddhist Establishment in Early Medieval Magadha: Kurkihar, c 800-1200 C.E" Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, 7, (2014). Compared the Table 1, 2 and 3.

⁹Ibid.,123. Prasad writes, "Viryavarmana, who donated an image of Buddha in Bhumisparshamudrā appears as the donor of an image of the Buddha in Dharmachakraparvartanamudrā, with the categorical references to Kāñchī as the place of his origin and *Sthavira* as his title."

¹⁰Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, Catalogue, 201. Deya-dharmmoyam pravara-mahāyāna-ya// **hā-sāṃghika-pūrva-śaila-vādina**-śrīmānd-vengi-viṣaya-vinirgata-bhikṣohcandra-prabhasya///ṇyaṃtad-bhavatvā-cāry-opādhyāya-mātā-pitr-punvaṅgamam..tara-jñān-āvāptayeti. (**hā-sāṃghika**) should be read as (Ma+hā- sāṃghika).The word should be 'Mahāsāṃghika', 'Ma' is missing from the inscription. Thus, the inscription translates as "This is the pious gift by monk Chandraprabhasya, who is the follower of excellent Mahāyāna, is also a believer in the Mahāsāṃghika Pūrva-śaila vada, hailing from the VengiViṣaya. What here is the merit, may that, having placed my teacher and parents first, be for the obtaining of supreme knowledge by all beings.

¹¹Barth Dessein, "Of Tempted Arhats and Supermundane Buddhas Abhidharma in the Krishna Region" in *Buddhism in the Krishna River Valley of Andhra*, ed by Sree Padma A. W. Barber (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 65.Dessein has provided a textual and epigraphical study of the Mahāsāṃghika sect in Krishna valley (region

same title of *Mahayana Bhikṣoḥ* has partial information regarding the donation, the name, and the place of the donor is missing, but the word *Mahāsāṃghika* appears.¹² Was this another donation made from a follower of the Mahāsāṃghika School, from the region of Vengi? One more, incomplete inscription which has the name of the donor as *Sthavira* Maradeva, has an adjunct word ‘Sarvvāstivādina’ in the beginning of the inscription.¹³ Could this imply that the donor Maradeva was trying to be identified with the Sarvvāstivādina school of Buddhism?

At Kurkihar, the Mahāyāna lay followers are fewer in numbers when compared to the monastic monks, *Bhikṣu*. In the inscription, the lay followers have used the title ‘*Paramopāsaka*’ ‘supreme lay follower’; some lay followers also declare their association with Mahāyāna explicitly like in the case of Tīkūka and Dālakasya, who were sons of Mahāyāna lay-worshiper. The lay-followers too have donated images of Buddha, whereas Javadhikasya son of *paramopāsaka* Daṇḍibharta has donated a stone image of Avlokiteśvara.

Two things need to be addressed here, one, the maximum number of images donated by the monastic and lay followers are the icons of Buddha, followed by two icons of Avlokiteśvara. For the monastic and lay followers Buddha was considered the best receipt for *dāna*. Giving to him meant getting the most reward and more closer to the journey of enlightenment that these followers were aiming for. The other point to be noted is that the monastic donors identify themselves through these donations, hence the title, the name, the sect, and the place they come from is mentioned in a formulaic manner. In a way they were cautious that the merit incurs to the right person.

Apart from the male monastic and lay followers, there were other groups of donors at Kurkihar and they are the female donors. The distinction of Buddhist social order into nuns (*bhikkunī-s*) and monks (*bhikkhu-s*) and laymen (*upāsaka*) laywomen (*upāsikā*) has been established since the time of Asoka, third century B.C.E.¹⁴ The Theravādin Vinaya texts (texts related to monastic discipline) has also generated ‘gender paired texts’ like *Bhikkhu Vibhaṅga* - *Bhikkhuni Vibhaṅga*,

of Andhra). He explains, although the earliest reference of Mahāsāṃghika sect comes from Mathura, in the Andhra region the different schools of Mahāsāṃghika philosophy starts appearing in 3rd century, in texts as well as inscriptions. The name “Puvasel[i]ya” is mentioned on a pillar in Dharanikota, (a village in Guntur), probably dating to the second century A.D. “Puvaseliya” is further mentioned on a pillar in Alluru (village in Andhra).

¹²Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, Catalouge, 203, Deya-dharmmoyam pravara-mahāyāna-yāyina/// Mahāsāṃghika-stha...vinirgata-bhikṣoḥ..deyāya-māṭa-piṭṭ-pūrvā///

¹³Ibid.,p.204.[Siddham](symbol)...Sarvvāstivādina deyadharmmoyam sthavira-maradevasya.

¹⁴ Peter Skilling, “Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses: Female Roles in Early Indian Buddhism”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 24, Number 2, (2001): 243. Skilling cites the ‘Calcutta Bairāt Edict’ of Ashoka in this regard.

Theragāthā and Therīgāthā (Verses of Elder Monks and Nuns).¹⁵ The Mahāyāna texts give mixed reactions to female devotees. In some they are completely absent while in others they are included.¹⁶ But if one looks at the inscriptional evidence one can find nuns and laywomen as active donors in the early Buddhist establishments from first -third century C.E. At Sāñcī there were 125 nuns and 129 monks as donors, at Bhārhut, 16 nuns and 25 monks, at Amarāvātī 12 nuns and 12 monks.¹⁷ Gregory Schopen marks that after the third century during the Gupta period, fourth-fifth C.E, the number of nun donors at Buddhist sites such as Mathurā, Sārnātha, and Ajañtā declines drastically. The number of donations by nun reduces to one or two and is almost negligible by the medieval period. In consideration to the view of decline of inscriptional evidence by nuns, Peter Skilling points out that there are inscriptions from Nepal, belonging to the Licchavi period (5th to 9th centuries) which records a number of donations made by nuns in the medieval early medieval period.¹⁸

Ronald M. Davidson has argued that women in early medieval India were made to leave the Buddhist religious life. He based his argument on the lack of epigraphic or textual data. Regarding the role of women in esoteric Buddhism, Davidson disregards the sexual rituals ascribed to females in the Tantrā texts. He states that the yogic and sexual practice that relates to women during this time did not affirm the female body but the female body was controlled by the yogi to achieve his own goal.¹⁹ There are scholarships like Miranda Shaw's '*Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*' that has underlined the active role played by women in the development of Buddhist Tantrā.

In regard to the women and nuns in medieval eastern India, Jinah Kim has tried to expand her sources and has looked at manuscripts and visual sculptural evidence to understand the socio-economic background of the women donors. Kim points out two manuscripts from eastern India whose donors were women. The *Pañcarakṣā* manuscript was donated by a queen, Uddākā and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses) was donated by a *bhikṣuṇī* named Mahāsīrībhadrā. Not only Mahāsīrībhadrā was the donor of this important manuscript, she was also a disciple of an elder nun Vijayasīrībhadrā. The name Vijayasīrībhadrā appears on the image of Siṃhanāda Lokesvara from Lakhi sarai, where her identity has been ascribed to an elderly Buddhist nun (*sthavirā*). Also, this inscription from Lakhi sarai suggests that Buddhist nun Vijayasīrībhadrā was an elder to a nunnery whose patron

¹⁵ Skilling, p.247. He has cited ample of textual evidence from different Buddhist sects, where references to nuns and laywomen are made.

¹⁶ Skilling points that in the abode of Buddha Amitābha there are no women, devotees are reborn as men while in the abode of Akṣobhya both genders are present.

¹⁷ Gregory Schopen, "On Monks, Nun, and "Vulgar" Practices" in *Bones, Stones and Buddhist monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (U.S.A: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997): 249.

¹⁸ Skilling, "Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses," 258.

¹⁹ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 92.

was again a female, Mallikādevi.²⁰ Although these instances of *bhikṣuṇīs* (nuns) as donors are few in number it gives a slight hint towards the socio-economic status of these nuns. One commissioned a manuscript and another donated a massive stone sculpture of Siṃhanāda Lokesvara. These indeed required access to economic means.

This brings us to Kurkihar which stands as a site with maximum numbers of female donors in the early medieval region of Magadh. We find evidence of Buddhist nuns, laywomen, and lay women donors from the site.

Table 7: Female donors at Kurkihar

Female Donor	Identity	Object/Medium	Place
Guṇamati	<i>Sakya bhikṣuṇī</i>	Tāra/S	Kurkihar
Not given	<i>Sakya bhikṣuṇī</i> ²¹	Stone Relief of a goddess	Kurkihar
Maṇju	<i>Paramopāsaki</i>	Buddha BMS/M	Kurkihar
Duvajha	<i>Upāsaki</i> , 10 th century	Tāra/M	Kurkihar
Duvajha	<i>Upāsaki</i> , 11 th century	Four-armed Avlokitesvara/M	Kurkihar
Gopāli- Sāuka	<i>Upāsaki</i>	Tāra/M	Kurkihar
Vāṭukā	Wife of Gopala-Hino	Vasudhārā/M	Kurkihar
Gāuka	Wife of Gopala-Hino	Vasudhārā/M	Kurkihar
Sīdekayā	Wife of <i>Karaniḱa</i> (scribe/clerk)	Tāra/S	Unknown origin
Puṣṭikā	Wife of Oil miller	Tāra/S	Unknown origin
Umadūkā	Wife of Eddākā	Tāra/S	Unknown origin
Yekhoḱā	Wife of mahattama Dūlapa	St. Crown Buddha AM/M	Kurkihar
Ajhuka	Wife of Siṅgeka, a village chief, from Madhugrāma in Vāhiravana (rural	Balarāma/M	Kurkihar

²⁰Jinah Kim, "Unheard Voices: Women's Roles in Medieval Buddhist Artistic Production and Religious Practices in South Asia," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 80, (2012) 207.

²¹Mc Collens, *Mahāyāna and the Gift*, 330-331.

	aristocracy)		
Mulūka	Wife of Gopāla- Mahiaru, resident of Āpanaka Mahāvihāra.	Uma-Mahesvara/M	Kurkihar
Hāruka	Daughter of kāyashta (scribe/clerk)	Rectangular slab/S	Unknown origin
Bhadevi	None	St. Avlokitesvara/M	Kurkihar
Gari	None	St. Avlokitesvara/M	Kurkihar
Māgo	None	Tāra/M	Kurkihar
Rāno	None	Vasudhārā/M	Kurkihar
Subālamati	None	Viṣṇu	Kurkihar
Jākhya	None	Mañjusri/M	Kurkihar

[S- Stone, M-Metal, St-Standing, AM-Abhya Mudrā]

Looking at the table above we find that there is evidence of two Buddhist nuns with the title ‘*Sākya bhikṣuṇī*’ from Kurkihar. *Sākya bhikṣuṇī* Guṇamati is most often cited as an example of epigraphical evidence of nuns in the region of Magadha. The other epigraphical evidence from Kurkihar of a Buddhist nun is found on the base of a small stone relief that records the gift of an ‘*Sākya bhikṣuṇī*’. The inscription ends with a word ‘*śraṇamataḥ*’? it can be a mistake for *śramaṇī*, a female ascetic.²² There is one inscription from *Paramopāsaki* Mañju (supreme lay follower) who had donated a metal image of Buddha in *Bhumisparsmudrā*. There are three other female laywomen. *Upāsaki Dhuvjha* appears twice in the tenth and the eleventh century C.E. she donated icons of Tāra and Avlokitesvara. None of the female donors have explicitly called herself a follower of *pravara-mahāyāna-yāyinā*, excellent Mahāyāna follower. But if one follows the theory of linking *śākyabhikṣus/-bhikṣuṇīs* and *paramopāsakas/- opāsikās* with Mahāyāna then we have two Mahāyāna nuns and four Mahāyāna lay followers. There are greater numbers of Tāra images (six in total) in the female monastic group, followed by three images of Avlokitesvara, and Vasudhārā, followed by two of Buddha and one of Mañjusri.

Coming to the next group of females who are identified as ‘wives’, seem to be active in the donative process at Kurkihar. There are only three inscriptions that tell about the socio-economic

²²Ibid.,331. Collens has cited M.A Stein on this particular inscription, M.A Stein “Notes on an Archaeological Tour in South Bihār and Hazāribāgh,” Indian Antiquary 30 (1901). He clarifies about the whereabouts of this inscription “The image comes from Kurkihar and is identified as a goddess. Although there is no plate of the image or rubbing of the inscription provided, the inscription is compared to another record from the late 7th century, which may be slightly early based on other finds from Kurkihar.”

background of these females. Sīdekayā is identified as a wife of a scribe, she donated a stone image of goddess Tāra, Puṣṭikā is the wife of an oil miller who donated a stone image of Tāra, Yekhokā wife of mahattama Dūlapa (mahattama was used as an honorary title, it could mean a noble man, a man with intellect or a saint or enlightened soul) whatever be the usage it was a respected title that would earn a man honor in the society, thus suggesting Yekhokā came from a respectable background and she donated an image of standing Crowned Buddha. There are also donations made to Brahmanical gods by the wives. Ajhuka, wife of a village chief and hence related to rural aristocracy, donated a metal image of Balrāma. Mulūka who was wife of Gopāla-Mahiaru and resident of Āpanaka Mahāvihāra donated a metal image of Uma-Mahesvara. Not only Kurkihar had wives making donations, unmarried women made donations too. Like Hārūka who is referred to as a daughter of a scribe donated a stone slab panel at Kurkihar.

Looking at the socio-economic background of these women one can come to a conclusion that these women had economic means to give donations. Some women come from the family of scribes, one from the family of an oil miller and another from the family of a village chief. There are few donations where the socio-economic background of women is not stated; only the name of the husband is marked. Vāṭukā and Gāuka who were both wives of a man called Gopala-Hino had donated the metal images of goddess Vasudhārā each, in the 32nd regnal year of the king Rājyapāla (925 -950 C.E). This Gopalahino can be identified as a Mahāyāna lay follower as we find an inscription with him claiming to be a '*Paramopāsaka Gopāla-Hinoka*'. He donated a metal image of a seated Buddha in *Varadamudrā*. Another woman called Umadūkā, wife of Eddākā donated a metal image of Tāra.

There is another group of women who do not identify with any monastic or social titles. Just the name is inscribed on the image. These names are Bhadevi, Gari, Māgo, Rāno, Jākhyā. These women could either be independent donors, or as suggested by B.N Prasad could be unmarried women, hence no mention of their marital ties. They have given the metal image of Avlokiteśvara, Tāra, Vasudhārā and Mañjusrī. A brahmanical image of Viṣṇu has been donated by women named Subālmāti. Hence, we find that women donated to a diverse range of cultic images. The image of Tāra leads, followed by the Buddhist goddess of wealth, Vasudhārā, followed by the god of compassion Avlokiteśvara. Presence of sculpture of crowned Buddha, Mañjusrī and other Brahmanical gods-goddess show that the female patronage at Kukihar had large religious blanket.

The standard names of women in these inscriptions are in Prākṛt.²³ The names mentioned above like Vāṭukā, Hārūka, Gari, Māgo, Jākhyā are non-Sanskrit names thus suggesting they were definitely not from the upper strata of the hierarchical society. It is interesting to note that the female donors at Kurkihar largely donated metal images which would have incurred some

²³Sayantani Pal, Donors of Kurkihar Images: An Investigation into their Socio-economic Background, Art and History: Texts, Contexts and Visual Representations in Ancient and Early Medieval India, ed R.Mahalakshmi (Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2020) 215.

economic expenses. Metal was used in the making of religious icons but also at Kurkihar we have the metal images decorated with silver inlay, usually in the eyes and ūrnā. Not only metal was used in these images but precious stones were also fixed in the hollow crevices made at the back of the prabhāmaṇḍala, on the pedestal or on the diadem of the deity. Female donors did need to have some economic freedom or economic dependence so that they could carry out these donations. Either they could have been supported by their families, husband, spouse or son or they could have used their *stridhana* (usually women's personal property in the form of jewels and ornaments made out of silver, gold and other metals).²⁴

Table 8: Occupational group at Kurkihar

Name	Identify	Gender	Object/Medium	Place
Tihukasya	Son of oil miller Māhu	Male	Buddha BMS/S	Unknown origin
Not given	Son of Oil miller Mūsekadāmūka	Male	Avlokitesvara/S	Unknown origin
Puṣṭikā	Wife of Oil miller	Female	Tāra/S	Unknown origin
Vijayachandrasya	<i>Karaniḥa</i> (scribe/clerk)	Male	Buddha DCPM/S	Unknown origin
Valanchandra/Bala cakra	Son of <i>Karaniḥa</i> Jayacandra	Male	Rectangular slab/M	Bodh Gaya
Hāruka	Daughter of <i>kāyashta</i>	Female	Rectangular slab/S	Unknown Origin
Sīdekayā	Wife of <i>Karaniḥa</i>	Female	Tāra/M	Unknown Origin
Sri- Sūbhaṅkara	<i>Karaniḥa</i>	Male	Cūnda/M	Bodh Gaya
Not given	<i>Carmmakāra</i>	Male	Rectangular slab/S	Unknown Origin
Thisavi ²⁵	<i>Carmmakāra</i>	Male	Viṣṇu/M	Kurkihar
Maṅgane	<i>Karmakāra</i> ,	Male	Viṣṇu/M	Kurkihar

²⁴ Metals had to be acquired to make these bronze images, from where were these metals acquired? Was it the donor who provided it? Or was it provided by the monastery or the craftsman? During the Pāla period as pointed out by N.R Ray, metal currency was not prevalent. Mostly cowry shells were in circulation, so melting of currency was not an option to make these images. Were metal hoards of the past used to make these images? Who owned these hoards? How much control did a monastic site have on these metal workshops?

²⁵ This image and the inscription is not mentioned in the Patna Museum Catalogue or the inscriptional data provided by Shastri. This image and its inscription are highlighted by Pratapaditya Pal in *A Forgotten Monastery of Ancient Bihar*, South Asian Studies (1988).

	blacksmith			
Not Given	Son of Male <i>Suvarṇṇakāra</i> (goldsmith) Kesava		Prajñāpāramita/M	Kurkihar
Māṇeka	<i>Vaṇika</i> , merchant, Male son of Jānu		Mañjusri/M	Kurkihar

[M- Metal, S-Stone]

Based on the inscriptional evidence presented above, *Karaniṇa* (scribe) appears to be the largest artisanal group at Kurkihar (*Karaniṇa* appears five times in the inscriptions). But the limitation of this conclusion is that two inscriptions belong to Bodh Gaya and the origin of the other three sculptures is unknown. Picron in her work ‘*Stone Images from Kurkihar*’ has proposed that these sculptures from Bodh Gaya and the other three are stylistically similar to the stone sculptures produced by the Kurkihar atelier. Therefore, on stylistic grounds these sculptures can be assigned to Kurkihar. Vijayachandrasya and Sri- Subhaṅkara identified themselves as a scribe; they donated a stone image of Buddha in *Dharmachakra-mudrā* and a stone image of Cūṇḍa, respectively. The rest of the donors are identified as the wife, son and daughter of the scribe. The other largest occupational groups at Kurkihar are oil millers (*Tailika*). None of the oil miller independently identify as *Tailika*. Donated images from this occupational group are wives and son of a *Tailika*. Scribes and oil millers were an important service class community around the monastery. Scribes were required to work on manuscripts and inscriptions; oil was one of the essential commodities for the rituals and perhaps even used for cooking.

There are instances of donors belonging to the goldsmith and blacksmith community. Blacksmith Maṅgane (*Karmakāra*) donated a metal image of Viṣṇu. Son of goldsmith (*Suvarṇṇakāra*) donated a metal image of Prajñāpāramita. One donation comes from the merchant community. Māṇeka, who was the son of the merchant Jānu donated a metal image of Mañjusri. Valachandra son of scribe Jayacandra donated a rectangular slab and Tihukasya son of oil miller Mahu donated a stone image of Buddha in Bhumisparsha mudrā. Like the female donors who had to identify herself as a wife or a daughter, the sons too had to identify themselves with his father.

Two donations are also reported from the *Carmmakāra*, a tanner, untouchable community according to the Brahmanical social structure. Pratapaditya Pal suggests that the *Carmmakāra* Thisavi must be the head of a tannery to have been able to donate a metal image of Viṣṇu. In relation to this donation B.N Prasad has argued that entry to a Buddhist *saṃgha* was not based on the social structure created by Brahmanical establishments. The word ‘*Carmmakāra*’ also appears on a stone slab, but the inscription is incomplete to make full sense of the donation.

Table 4: Regions in the inscription

Name of the Place	Donors name	Object given	No
Kāñchī (Metal)	1 <i>Bhikshu</i> Amṛitavarman, 3 <i>Bhikshu</i> Vīryavarman , Nāgendravarmmana, <i>Sthaviras</i> Budhavarman and Dharmavarman, not given, Chandravarman, Rāhulavarman, Prabhākarsimha, <i>Sthavira</i> Mañjusfvarmma, Dūtasimgha, Prabhākarasimha, <i>Sthavira</i> Prājñasimha, <i>Sthavira</i> Buddhajāna , Buddhavarman,	Standing Buddha, 2 BMS and 1 Avlokitesvara, BMS, BMS, BMS, BMS, Crowned Buddha, Crowned Buddha, Avlokitesvara, Tāra, Tāra, Pedestal, Pedestal, 4bells	16
Kāñchī (Stone)	<i>Sthavira</i> Buddhapriya, not given	Rectangular slab, Avlokitesvara	2
Veṅgi-Viṣaya	<i>Bhikshu</i> Chandraprabha	DCPM	1
Malaya	Āryacandrasya, <i>Sthavira</i> Pūrṇachandra	Buddha in Abhaya mudra	2
Colika visaye	Buddhacandra, <i>Sthavir</i> Kusumsrichandra	Tāra, Pedestal	2
Andhra-visya	Kanakasribhadra	Rectangular slab	1
Kalinga	Not known	Rectangular slab	1
Kāśī	Vinitabuddhi	Buddha in BMS	1
Kerela-desā	<i>Sthavira</i> Avalokitasimha, Abhyachandramaṇi	Pedestal, stone architrave	2
Pandya desā ²⁶	Not known	Avlokitesvara	1
Sākala ²⁷	Not Known	Not known	-
Maddhu-grāma in Vāhiravana	Siṅgeka	Balrāma	1

The chart above shows that the donors from south of the sub-continent preferred donating at Kurkihar. There are 18 inscriptions which testify to donors from Kāñchī. There are two inscriptions from the western coastal region of Konkan (Malaya), two inscriptions from Kerala, two from Colika (a corruption of word ‘Chola’; ‘Coliya’ was a term used by Buddhist monks

²⁶S .K Sarasvati and K.C Sarkar, *Kurkihar, Gaya And Bodh Gaya*, 29.

²⁷Cunningham, *Four reports made during the years 1862-63-64-65*, 15. He mentions that the name *Sākala* and Kerala in *Dakshinadesā* appears in several of the inscriptions found at Kurkihar.

from Tamil region.²⁸) one from Veṅgi (Godavari delta) and one from Andhra. Two inscriptions from the neighboring regions of the Magadha are also found; one is from Kāśī in Varanasi and another is from Kalinga in Orissa. There are references to inscriptions from *Sākala* (Sialkote in Punjab) and *Pandya desh*, Pāṇḍya (Madhurai, Tamil Nadu).²⁹ The expanse of area referred to in these inscriptions indicates that Kurkihar had emerged as one of the important monastic centers in the region of Magadha. We have textual and epigraphical evidence of pilgrims within the subcontinent and outside the subcontinent (Java, Sumatra, Burma, Tibet, and China) visiting monastic sites closer to Kurkihar: Nālanda and Bodh Gaya. Kurkihar which falls in between these two prominent Buddhist centers would have got the leverage of itinerant Buddhist pilgrims.

We don't find any inscription of nuns traveling to Kurkihar from distant regions. All the women donors and lay worshippers might have been from the nearby places. But why did Kurkihar specifically attract monks from the south and that too from the region of Tamil Nadu? There is no doubt that these traveling ascetics (*Sthaviras* and *Bhikshus*) visited the region of Magadha because it had prolific construction of monasteries in the early medieval times. Not only big monasteries like Odāntapuri, Vikramshilā, Nālanda and Bodh Gaya flourished during this period but at this time other smaller monastic sites were also thriving. Some of the lesser known monastic sites in the region of Magadha are: Gunāmati *vihāra* (identified at Dharawat), Sīlabhadra *vihara* (identified at Kauwa-dol), Yasthivana (identified as Jethian), Kukuttapada-giri shrine (identified at Gurupa), Gayāsīrṣa, Dungeshwari, Bakror stupa, and Tapoban.³⁰ Two new *viharas* that have been recently excavated in the region of Magadha are: Lal Pahari (Lakhisarai) and Telhara (Nalanda).

Likewise, Kurkihar might have been a monastic site. In the early medieval period this site thrived and it attracted monks from the South. The presence of Buddhist monks at Kāñchi can be traced through the Sangam text *Manimekalai*, written around 550 A.D.³¹ Vidya Dehejia has connected the rise of Hindu saints in the region of Kāñchi during the 7-9th century to the movement of Buddhist monks to the northern part of India. She comments "Perhaps it was during the period of persecution that several Kanchi Buddhists moved to Bihar monastery of Kurkihar".³² But we find that the maximum donative inscriptions from Kāñchī belong to the

²⁸ Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Nagapattinam Bronzes in Context: Cultural Routes and Transnational Maritime Heritage* mentions that during the Chola period Buddhist monks writing in Pali increasingly identify themselves or are identified by others as 'Coliya' or 'Damila'. p.30.

²⁹ Pal Pratapaditya has mentioned that the inscriptions from *Sākala* and *Pandya desh* from Kurkihar was discussed by Debala Mirta in her book *Buddhist Monuments*. But he also notifies that these two inscriptions cannot be traced. The one which has *Pandya desh* can be traced to an image of Avlokiteśvara kept at Devasthan madir while the *Sākala* has been mentioned by Cunningham in his report.

³⁰ Abhishek Amar, *Contextualising the Navel of the Earth*, 201.

³¹ Vidya Dehejia, "The Persistence of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu" In *A Pot Pourri of Indian Art*, edited by Pratapaditya Pal (Bombay: Marg Publication, 1988), 53.

³² Ibid., 54.

period of 10th century, although the donation starts from the ninth century C.E.³³ Migration to the north from Kāñchī because of the persecution of Hindu saints doesn't seem a plausible explanation. If that was so, we should have found more inscriptions from other Buddhist sites referring to monks from Kāñchī, but that is not the case, it is only at Kurkihar we have these references in abundance.

Kāñchī was a place for great Buddhist masters and philosophers. Buddhist logician Dignaga and his disciple Dharmakīrti are from Kāñchī. Dharmapala, head of Nālanda mahāvihāra and a great master of Yogacara Buddhism was also from Kanchi.³⁴ In the account of Tarnatha, *ācārya* Aryadeva stayed at Nālanda for a long time and went to the south and worked for the welfare of beings there. In Raṅganātha near Kāñchī *ācārya* Aryadeva entrusted the responsibility of Dhamma to Rāhulabhadra and passed away.³⁵ Dhammapala, the commentator of Pali Suttas and Anuruddha Thera, the author of Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha was from Kanchi; Buddhaghosha, the author of Visuddhimagga, an acclaimed practice manual of Theravada tradition was from Kāñchi; in the Vajrayana tradition, Siddha Nagarjuna, one of the 84 Mahasiddhas was also from Kāñchi.³⁶ Kāñchi being a nucleus of Buddhist teachers and Mahayana followers is also supported by the account of Chinese monk Hiuen Tsang. Tsang writes “This country is about 6000 li in circuit; the capital of the country is called Kāñchipura (Kin-chi-pu-lo) and is about 30 li round.....There are some hundreds of saṅghārāmas and 10,000 priests. They all study the teaching of Sthavira school belonging to Great Vehicle...the city of Kāñchipura is native place of Bōdhi-sattva Dharmapāla.”³⁷

It was a common practice for the monks to move around the country to preach Buddhist Dhamma. The relationship between monks of Kāñchi and Magadh was based on the exchange and the propagation of the Buddhist knowledge system. A constant movement of monks from Nalanda mahāvihāra to Kāñchi and from Kāñchi to mahāvihāra has been reported in Tāranatha's account. An inscription from Kurkihar supports the influx of monks from Kāñchi to Magadha.

On a metal pedestal the inscription reads “It records the gift of the metal image by one who was born in a village in Kāñchi bearing name Narasimha Chaturvedi-maṅgala in a family of Brāhmaṇas versed in the Veda and Vedāṅgas and who later on became a disciple of the sthavira Vairochanasimha and came to be known as Prājñāsimha.”³⁸ The third and fourth line has the transfer of merit formula of Mahāyāna, followed by dating of the image in the 28th regnal year of king Rājyapāla (917-952), on the 8th day of the bright half of Vaisākha (month of May). This

³³ B.N Prasad, The Socio-religious Dimensions of Dedicatory Inscriptions on Sculptures Donated to a Buddhist Establishment in Early Medieval Magadha, Table no.2, 127.

³⁴ Yogi Prabodha Jnana & Yogini Abhaya Devi, “Kanchi - An Ancient City of Learning in Tamil Nadu where Buddhism Flourished”. <http://www.wayofbodhi.org/buddhism-in-kanchi-tamilnadu>. Accessed March 10th 2021. p 1.

³⁵ Lama Chimpa and Alka Chattopadhyaya, *Tārānātha's History of Buddhism In India*, 126.

³⁶ Yogi Prabodha Jnana & Yogini Abhaya Devi, p.1.

³⁷ Gouriswar Bhattacharya, “Kāñchi Monks at Kukkuṭapāda-giri-Vihāra” in *Essays on Buddhist Hindu Jain Iconography & Epigraphy* (Bangladesh: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 1995): 91-92.

³⁸ Patna Museum Catalogue, 207-208.

inscription supports the view that even in 10th century C.E, Kāñchipuram had a strong Buddhist population and Brahmins from this region converted to Buddhism and went to Magadha (the birthplace of Buddhism) to teach or study at monasteries. The new converted monk Prāññasimha visited Kurkihar thus the inscription also alludes to the fact that Kurkihar had become an important center for the monks. Why do we find so many inscriptions on monks from Kāñchi at Kurkihar?

The monks from Kāñchi at Kurkihar can be related to the residential aspect of monasteries. Monasteries were not only a place of religious activities and religious training but it was also a place of residence for the monks and Buddhist practitioners from national and trans-national regions. The monastery at Vikramsīla housed Tibetan monks. Bodh Gaya and Nalanda had monks from Java, China, Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Burma and many other regions. A Sanskrit inscription engraved on a large copper plate found at Nalanda records that the King Devapala (r. c. 810-847), allocated five villages to support a monastery established there by king of Sumatra, Maharaja Balaputradeva, lord of Suvarnadvipa.³⁹ The Leiden grant of Rājārāja (the Chola ruler of the tenth century) mentions Chudamani vihara at Nagapattinam was built by the kings of Śrīvijaya (a kingdom based in Sumatra between 7th and 13th century C.E.).⁴⁰ The copper grant also mentions resources and land provided by the Chola kings for the upkeep of the Buddhist monastery. The Buddhist preachers from Sumatra around the Tamil region could stay at Negapattinam and could carry out the pilgrimage activities to the south and north of India. Building a monastery for monks in Magadha is also mentioned by Yi Jing (653-713 C.E) in his account. He mentions “to the northeast of the monastery of Great Enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), there was another monastery at an interval of two Yojanas known as Ch’u-lu-ke’ (Chalukya). This monastery had been built by the King of Chalukya Dynasty of South India. Though the monastery was poor and simple, yet it was famous for a highly disciplined and religious life of inmates. Recently the king Jin-chun, Adityasena built again by the side of the monastery, a new one which was completed. The monk from South generally stayed there.”⁴¹

At Kurkihar we have two inscriptions from the region of eastern Chalukaya, one from Veñgi and another from Andhra. Kurkihar was also a rich monastery, indicated by the plethora of metal and sculptural images it has produced. Yi Jing was writing this account in the seventh-eighth century and the monastery at Kurkihar came into prominence in the ninth century. Therefore it cannot be the above-mentioned monastery built by the Chalukya king. Could the monastery built by Adityasena for the residence of South Indian monks refer to the monastery at Kurkihar? But none of the inscriptions mentions the name Adityasena. Kurkihar seems to be a place where South Indian monks preferred staying. The exact reason is yet to be known. One possibility is that a Chola king, like the Chalukaya king, could have made a monastery near Bodh Gaya for the

³⁹ Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Nagapattinam Bronzes in Context: Cultural Routes and Transnational Maritime Heritage*.p.29. , Accessed 20th October 2021.

⁴⁰ Ibid.,28.

⁴¹ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 17.

monks from the Kāñchi. Unlike the Chalukayas, the Cholas had great resources and building capacity in the early medieval period. We have already mentioned that Chola king Rajaraja I provided economic support to the Buddhist monastery at Sellur (Nagapattinam). Another possibility is that a Pāla ruler might have granted the land to the monks from Kāñchi to build a mahavihara at Kurkihar.

As Kurkihar remains an unexcavated site, nothing can be said with certainty, but looking at the inscriptional data tabulated above, it can be concluded that monks, women, lay followers and local artisanal community were active patrons at Kurkihar. No royal grant or support from aristocratic background has surfaced so far. The patronage data at Kurkihar also points to the trans-regional movement of Buddhist monks.

II

Images of Devotees from Kurkihar

When we view an icon, the image of deity dominates the structural frame of the sculpture. When it comes to studying the art history of ancient India, focus on iconography, identity of the deity and the stylistic development of a god or a goddess seems to be a general trend. The focus on religious iconography and the vast research work that has been accomplished on this topic over a century has benefited the scholars of the present time, working in the field of religious art. Now art historians have a chance to think beyond the iconography of an image and some have started to look into the aspect of production of the images in ancient or medieval India. In this chapter, I would like to deal with one aspect of production of images and i.e the donors, the one who is a benefactor in production of religious icons. The question that will be discussed here is '*how can one see the presence of a donor or artist in religious sculptures*'?

The inscriptions found on a sculpture can answer about the donor and their socio-economic background as we have seen in the first section. The dated inscription on an image also becomes immensely helpful as it provides chronological sequence to the sculpture which helps historians to study evolution of artistic styles. But the part which is often overlooked while studying a sculpture is the 'periphery.'⁴² The periphery of the sculpture is where not only subsidiary deities and motifs are present but it also has images of the donors. These donors are carved on the pedestal and are often shown carrying out devotional activities and making offerings. Recently, scholars like Jinah Kim and Claudine Bautze-Picron have made insightful observations on the 'periphery' of the sculptures. Kim in '*Faceless Gases silent texts, images of devotees and practice*' inquires into a broader field of vision of sculptural study; she shifts from the divine figures to the humans. Bautze-Picron in '*Small motifs in the Buddhist art of eastern India, an interpretation*' shows how the motifs on the pedestal connect human word to the divine world.

⁴²Jinah Kim uses the word 'periphery of the composition' in *Faceless Gases silent texts, images of devotees and practice*, 2016. She suggests a shift of focus from the main deity on the stele to the donors on the pedestal.

The presence of devotees can not only be gauged through the dedicatory inscriptions. If looked closely, icons of devotees on the pedestal ascertain their presence. The devotees' physical presences were marked through their portrayal on the pedestal or the back slab. They sometimes would endorse their name through inscriptions while having themselves visibly inserted in whole sculptural composition. At Kurkihar, we find *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā* (Buddhist creed formula) and *deyadharmma* (Mahayana donative formula) inscribed at the top of the back slab and on the front and back of the pedestal. These are the spaces where the donor declares their presence through inscribed words. The pedestal inscriptions are sometimes also accompanied by icons of donors, corroborating their religious donations. If donors are monks, then they sit to the left of the pedestal and if the donor is a lay worshipper then they sit to the right of the pedestal, although there are exceptions to these rules.⁴³

Devotees in stone sculptures

Donors or lay worshippers depicted venerating Buddha was not a sudden phenomenon that one notices in the ninth century eastern India. The practice of showing human figures venerating Buddha can be traced from Sanchi and Bharhut panels. In these panels they are shown worshipping the anionic form of Buddha (Fig 4.1 a&b). In the fig 1a, men and women surround and pray an empty seat under a tree. In the fig 1b, one can see a man offering a garland to the stupa and a woman holding a fly whisk next to it. These are representations of the lay followers praying to an-iconic form of Buddha. At Ajanta, human figures were introduced around Buddha and at Kanheri the panels show Buddha sitting on a lotus supported by *nagās* being venerated by monks or lay folks, who are all depicted in the lower part of the composition.⁴⁴

According to the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, a medieval Indian Buddhist practice manual, the practitioner (*sādhaka*) should be represented at the bottom of a *paṭa* (cotton scroll painting) paying homage to the divine assembly above. The text also recommends that the practitioner be drawn, expressing a concern for representing individuality.⁴⁵

In eastern India, lay worshippers are introduced along with the main deity in the eighth century C.E.⁴⁶ Regions such as Bodh Gaya in Bihar, Ratnagiri in Orissa, and Vikramapura in Bangladesh

⁴³ Claudine Bautze-Picron, *Images of donors in the Buddhist art of Eastern India*, 4. The spatial distribution in Buddhism is such that the left coincides with the direction of west and right coincides with the east. The sun rises in the east (right) and sets in the west (left). Thus, according to Picron, proper right is for worldly matters so the lay worshippers are placed on the right while the proper left is associated with mysticism and spirituality, thus monks are placed on the left. Exception to this rule occurs when there are two devotees. Both for the sake of symmetry are given left and right position. Also in the Avlokitesvara images, when Avlokitesvara is shown with his attendant Suchimukha, the devotee (monk or lay) is placed on the proper left or beneath him.

⁴⁴ Picron, *Small motif's in the Buddhist art of eastern India, an interpretation, in Functions and Meaning in Buddhist Art*, Proceedings of a seminar held at Leiden University, 21st-24 October, eds KR. Van Kooij and H. Van Derneve, (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), .60.

⁴⁵ Jinah Kim, "Unheard Voices".224.

⁴⁶ Picron, *Small motif's in the Buddhist art of eastern India*, 61.

show more sculpture of this kind in the ninth-tenth century C.E. Picron argues that the development of the donor's image in eastern India originated from Nalanda (See fig 4.2 a&b). This is an image of a bejeweled Buddha, standing in *Varāda mudra* from Nālanda. On the proper left a monk in *saṅghāṭī* can be seen with folded hands in *añjalimudrā*. Both the deity and the donor stand in a slight *abhanga* posture, a typical characteristic of Nālanda style. What one can observe further is the gesture of the monk. He is shown with his neck slightly tilted, eyes gazing at Buddha's feet, a sign of adoration and devotion. His size is proportionately larger and he is not on the pedestal. His positioning seems to be the same as that of bodhisattvas. Here, the Buddha and the monk share the same stele. There is another image from Nālanda, in the bronze collection, where the devotee is proportionally larger in size. This is an image of Kubera/Jambhala? The proper left hand of the deity is broken, thus the identification is difficult. The deity sits in *lalitāsana* and near his leg pendant a large size devotee is seated holding an object in the hand and looking towards the deity. The image is corroded so it is difficult to identify the devotee as male or female (Fig 4.3). The inscription at the back of the image provides the information that the devotee belongs to the Kramila Vishaya.⁴⁷

Another example is of Shayam Tāra from Sirpur, Chhattisgarh. It is an exquisite bronze image. Here, Tāra is attended by Bhikruti, white Tāra, and Buddha. Below, near the pedestal two *nāgas* in human form bestow Shayam Tara with the offerings. On a separate decorated seat, a man sits with long hair and beard, folding his hands in *añjalimudrā*. (Fig 4.4 a&b)

Images of Monks from Kurkihar

Various kinds of motifs are carved on the pedestals of Kurkihar. One can notice motifs like the lotus seat, a pair of *nāga* supporting the *padma*, lions, elephants, the *vāhana* of the deity, and sometimes the *yaksha* and *yakshinis* holds the pedestal on their hands and heads. At the edge of the pedestal, mostly on the proper left, a small figure appears sitting in *añjalimudrā*. These are the images of monks, the donor of the sculpture.

At Kurkihar, monks appear wearing a robe with shaved head, sometimes kneeling and sometimes sitting in *padmāsana*, folding their hands in *añjalimudrā*. It becomes difficult to identify whether an image is of a monk or a nun because these figures are mostly tiny, crude, corroded, and broken. What helps to identify these kinds of images is the treatment of garments. Usually parallel incised lines on the body covering one shoulder, suggests *saṅghāṭī* (robe) worn by monks. Monks or nuns are also identified by the absence of jewelry.

A stone sculpture of Buddha in *abhayamudra* has a figure on the bottom of the stele. The figure is in *añjalimudrā*, kneeling on a seat on one knee; face completely distorted. He wears a diaphanous plain monastic robe covering both the shoulders (see fig 4.5). A separate plain stele

⁴⁷ Patna Museum Catalogue, 175. Kramila is Comilla, a site in south-eastern Bangladesh.

is carved out for this figure, a feature which is usually executed for bodhisattvas. A separate stele for the monk points towards a conscious attempt by the artist to highlight the image of the monk. Based on the iconography of the figure I would like to argue that this is an image of a devotee, a monk. An inscription is found on the bottom of the lotus pedestal. More can be said about the identity of this figure only if the inscription is read and translated. Another sculpture of Buddha, stylistically similar to the one mentioned above, has a figure kneeling on the proper right of the Buddha; the figure is wearing a robe covering both the shoulders and has snail hair like Buddha. The inscription at the bottom reads ‘*sarvvāstivādina-deyadharmmoyam -sthavira-maradevasya*’ meaning it is a gift of a senior monk called *maradevasya*.⁴⁸ It is most likely that the figure kneeling is of the monk *maradevasya*. (Fig 4.6)

There are two identical stone images from Kurkihar; they show Buddha in *Bumispārsha mudra* under a Bodhi tree, a scene of Sākyamuni’s enlightenment. Both have an inscription on the central projection (*bhadra*) of the pedestal and a kneeling figure beside it. The inscription on the first one reads “*deya-dharmmoyaḥ stha-prajñāprabhasya*.”⁴⁹ This is the religious gift of elderly monk *Prajñāprabhasya*. On the right where the inscription ends, a figure sits in *añjalimudrā*, his head is broken but he is wearing a monastic robe. The figure is of the donor *sthavira-prajñāprabhasya*, an elderly monk (see fig 4.7). On the other sculpture the inscription on the pedestal reads “*deyadharmā-ya-vimalaprabhasyaḥ*” meaning, this is the religious gift of *Vimalaprabhasya*.⁵⁰ To the right of the inscription a figure is seated in *añjalimudrā*, looking up, wearing a monastic robe and has snail-like curly hair. Although this monk does not have a monastic title attached to him, like *sthavira* (senior monk) or *sākyabhikṣu*, his attire approves his monastic identity (see fig 4.8). According to Jinah Kim, given that both the names end with ‘*prabha*’, *prajñāprabha* and *vimalaprabha*, one can connect them to the same lineage or even suspect a teacher-disciple relationship.⁵¹ These sculptures are so similar that there can be no doubt that they belong to the same workshop possibly made by the same artist.

A stone sculpture of Buddha from the *Devasthan mandir* of Kukihar has a sculpture of Buddha, depicting the enlightenment; stylistically this sculpture is different from the above two. Here, the pedestal has rows of lions and elephants separated by flat pillars. In one of the pillared niches on the proper right a monk sits with his hands folded in *añjalimudrā* wearing a *saṃghāṭī* and the head of the monk is shaven.⁵² No inscription is carved to suggest the name of the monk (Fig 4.9). There is another stone sculpture from Kurkihar kept at the Indian museum. It is a sculpture of

⁴⁸Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 204.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 199. The Avery Brundage Collection, Asian art museum San Francisco.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jinah Kim, *Faceless Gazes*, “Silent Texts: Images of Devotees and Practices of Vision in Medieval South Asia,” *Ars Orientalis*, No 46. (2016): 210.

⁵²The figure of the monk is partially visible to comment whether he is standing or sitting. The general trend is that the monks sit on one knee or in *padmāsana*.

Buddha in the *Bhūmisparśamudrā*, he is flanked by Maitreya on the left and Mañjuśrī on the right. An image of a monk offering an object (garland?) is seen at the far end on the proper left of the pedestal. The monk sits on one knee holding the object of devotion and wearing the monastic robe which has clear incised lines to show the folds of the *saṃghāṭī*. (Fig 4.10)

The visual representations of monks are more explicit in the metal images. At Kurkihar, the metal images of monks are integrated within the sculptural composition of the icon. A separate cast on the pedestal is made for the donor (Fig 4.11). The images of devotees are not proportionally larger in the bronze icon of Kurkihar, like spotted in a few of the bronze sculptures from Nālanda and Sirpur. There are few examples from Kurkihar where the monks are shown proportionally larger but they are found in the stone sculptures, one such sculpture is of Maitreya from Kurkihar.⁵³ On the proper right of the image a monk sits folding his hand and with his eyes closed. This is one of the best preserved portrayals of monks from Kurkihar (Fig 4.12).

Coming back to the metal images, I have selected one metal image from Kurkihar to describe the visible portrayal of monks as the donor of the image. This metal image of Buddha show Buddha seated in *Bhūmisparśamudra* on a *mahāmbujapīṭha* (double lotus seat) beaded with the pearl motifs on the upper rim. Below the lotus seat, frilled fabric falls on both the sides of the pedestal. The pedestal has three pillared niches with lions in profile. Each lion has a *gavākṣa* with a precious stone, dark red in colour, installed at the centre, perhaps ruby. At the end foot of the pedestal, on the right and on the left, two separate cast images are fixed. These figures kneel on a projected seat on one knee, folding hands in *añjalimudrā*. Heads are straight, eyes are open, lips are round and apart, seems like in a motion of chanting some mantra. They are wearing *saṃghāṭī* across the shoulder. The *saṃghāṭī* falls plain without any incised lines as seen in few other images. The top of the head looks plain and shaved. These markers are enough to concur that these two images are of a monk. To future justify that these two images are of monks I shall take help of the inscription inscribed at the back of the pedestal. The inscription reads “*Svasti Stha-Kāñchi-Vu (Bu) dha-Varmma-stha-Dharmmavarmmaṇah*”, records the gift of the image by *sthaviras* (senior monks) Buddhavarman and Dharmavarman hailing from Kāñchī.⁵⁴ The inscription declares that the image was donated by the senior monks Buddhavarman and Dharmavarman from Kāñchī and therefore it would be adequate to comment that these are ‘portrait’ of the donors.⁵⁵ (Fig 4.13 a, b, c)

⁵³ The image is of unknown origin but based on the stylistic grounds, Picron has argued that it is from Kurkihar.

⁵⁴ A. Banerji-Sastri, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol.XXVI. 1940, 241. The title and name ‘*sthavira* Buddhavarman’ from Kāñchī is also found on the bells from Kurkihar. To me it seems he is the same Buddhavarman.

⁵⁵ Portrait not in the sense of western art, where a person is distinguished from the features of their faces, but in terms of artists considering other features like the garment, the position, the body gesture which contributes in identification of the character. The art of portraiture was also well known practice in Tibet, where Buddhist monks were painted or cast, this was also practiced in Nepal. As Picron, has pointed out we have evidence of paintings of

Images of Layfolks from Kurkihar

Hierarchical scaling and rules of composition separates the human world from the divine in the sculpture, thus, we find the small human figurines are placed at the bottom of the pedestal and that too far at the corner of the sculptural composition. Not every Buddhist image bears a donor's trace, in some sculptures there are neither evidences of inscriptions nor figures of the donors. Luckily, in Magadha there are relatively higher numbers of sculptures with donative inscriptions and many of them have images of donors. Male and female devotees are seen on the edges of the pedestal, worshipping the deity with folded hands or offering garland. Several indicators were introduced for differentiating the layfolk from the monks. The monk is usually identified with his robe and shaven head while the layfolk man wears a shawl, dhoti, has long hair knotted at the back, sometimes has beard, and they can have ornaments on their body; women on the other hand, apart from her biological feature, can be identified with her clothing, headdress, and ornaments. The lay devotees are sometimes represented in groups, as a couple; sometimes with children or simply as a single male or a single female. The images of devotees are also found in the sculptures of Hindu and Jain gods and goddesses. Picron has suspected that it could be a Buddhist influence on Hindu and Jain art.

There are two sculptures of Buddha in *Bhūmisparsha mudra* from Kurkihar, stylistically very similar to each other. One has its stele intact while the other one has the upper part of the stele broken. These sculptures are now kept at the Nawada Museum, Bihar. The first sculpture has *gavākṣa* made below the lotus seat, five niches are carved out with two kinds of pillars, one is bulbous and round, and the other is plain and flat. Lions and elephants are at the center of the pillar frame. A large figure on the left appears of Bhudevi, holding her jar of wealth. At the bottom, on a lower projection of the base, two devotees, a male and a female, are carved inside a niche on either side. The figure on the right is distorted to say anything with certainty. (Fig 4.14)

The second sculpture has a relatively heavier architectural base than the first one, the niches are pillared with two lions in every alternate compartment, and the alternate compartments have elephants in profile. The upper part of the pedestal is decorated with *gavākṣa*. In the lowest projection of the pedestal, at the centre a minute image of Bhudevi with her vase appears along with the images of two devotees? They have distinct large earrings with conical round chignons

sādhakas on the walls of the monastery of Vikramśīla in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Hence, the idea to be identified through paintings and images were getting familiar in the Buddhist landscape of Bihar and other places.

at top of the head, perhaps indicating later development in the iconography of monks (Fig 4.15 a, b, c).⁵⁶

There are two sculptures of Tāra which on stylistic similarity has been affirmed by Picron is from Kurkihar. In the first one Tāra is flanked by Ekjaṭā and Hayagriva. At the bottom relief of the sculpture, an inscription is marked on the centre, with two devotees carved on each side of the relief. One is holding a garland on the left and another one is holding an indistinct object, perhaps they are lay male and female devotees. The inscription reads “*siddham deya-dharmmoyam karaṇikaśrīdharacandrapātnyā sīdekayā*”⁵⁷ i.e this is the meritorious gift of Sīdekayā, wife of karaṇika śrīdharacandra. Sīdekayā, the donor sits on the proper left while her husband is shown with a beard on the proper right, holding a garland (Fig 4.16).⁵⁸ In the other sculpture of Tāra from the Russek collection, is flanked by Ekjaṭā and Mārīcī. On the pedestal a female devotee sits folding her legs and her hands are in *añjalimudrā*. Next to the image on a high relief, an inscription reads, “*deya-dharmmo=yam eddāka-patny-umadūkāyāṇ*”, i.e, this is the meritorious gift of Umadūkā, wife of Eddāka.⁵⁹ Therefore, this figure can be identified as Umadūkā.

There are few sculptures where the donors identify themselves as followers of the Mahayana. One such image of a donor from Kurkihar is found at the Indian Museum. It is an image of Buddha in *Bhūmisparsha mudra* flanked by Avlokitesvara on the proper right and Maitreya on the proper left. He is seated on Vajrāṇsa; the symbol of Vajra is marked in front of his seat. The pedestal has five niches and they are separated by bulbous pillars. On the extreme left a female devotee is carved, holding her hands in *añjalimudrā* and on the extreme right a male devotee is positioned, folding his hands. Below this pedestal, on the lower projection, an inscription is carved in two lines, the inscription is incomplete yet it reads “*deya-dharmmoyam pravara-mahāyāna-yāyinarī- arma-opāsaka..sūta-dālakasya yad atra puṇyam...dānapati...*”.⁶⁰ What can be inferred from this is that this image was a religious gift of son Dālakasya whose father (name not given) was a lay follower (*paramopāsaka*) of Mahāyāna. Son Dālakasya, could be the male devotee carved on the proper left of the pedestal accompanied by his wife on the viewer’s left. These two devotees are en faced and are larger in size compared to the other images.⁶¹ (Fig 4.17)

⁵⁶It is very hard to identify these figures. It could be a later development in the iconography of monks where their caps are replaced by pointed jaṭā. Monks with the pointed caps are more noticeable in the rectangular slabs from Bodh Gaya. (See fig 16 a&b)

⁵⁷Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 226.

⁵⁸ An unusual position, generally the trend is for the female to sits on the proper right.

⁵⁹ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 227.

⁶⁰ Ibid.,195.

⁶¹ The position of devotee has changed in this sculpture, instead of being made in the lowest part of the pedestal they are here given separate niches on the pedestal. Generally we find Goddess Bhudevi and Mara in this niche. A sculpture from Kurkihar of Buddha in Bhūmisparśa mudra has a male donor on the centre of the pedestal, sharing the same space with Bhudevi. It looks like an image of Mahayana lay followers. There is an inscription at the bottom of the pedestal. If the inscription is read, it could ascertain the identity of the figure. (See fig). In these sculptures thus an effort is made to decrease the spatial distinction between the God and the human devotee.

For comparison of size and positioning of the donor image, let me introduce here a sculpture from Nālanda of Buddha in *Dharmachakraparivṛtan mudra* (Buddha's first sermon). The devotee is carved on the far end of the pedestal on the proper right, hardly visible if not noticed otherwise. She holds a garland in her hand and has few ornaments; she is relatively smaller than the motifs carved in the niche. Through the inscription inscribed on the top of the upper projection of the pedestal, it is evident that she is a *paramopāsikāyāḥ gaṅgākāyāḥ*, a lay female Gaṅgākā.⁶² (Fig 4.18)

On the metal images, the worshippers are carved proportionally smaller to the stone. But in the metal images devotees gain some prominence as they are casted separately on the pedestal. This separate cast for the devotee on the metal images shows that these donors wanted their visual identity to be stressed.

There are few metal images of donors from artisanal group, which are represented on a separate metal cast. One such metal image is of Vāgīśvara seated in *lalitāsana* on a lion back which has lotus motif on it. In his left hand he is carrying a manuscript on the blue lotus and the right hand is in the *vitarkamudra*. Throne at the back has leogryphs on the sides, scroll motif around the halo, and *chattra* at the top. The Vāgīśvara has silver inlay in his eyes, head and copper in the lower lips. It seems the donor must have had financial capital to offer silver and copper for the image. At the proper right, a figure knelling in *añjalimudrā*, with long hair and armlet is casted. The inscription at the back of the pedestal identifies this man as *Vanika- Māṇekasya Jānūsūta*, meaning, "Of the merchant Māṇeka, the son of Jānū."⁶³ Indeed a rich merchant commissioned this image and also got himself incorporated in the composition. (4.19 a, b, c)

There are few images of Buddha from the donors of Kāñchī who also got represented on a separate metal cast. A metal sculpture of Buddha seated on a lotus seat, two lions carved in profile in the niche of the pedestal. The halo at the back of the Buddha is elaborate with a head of a *kīrttimukha* at top. Peppal leaves with branches on top of the *prabhāmaṇḍala*, an ornate throne with articulate pillar design, elephants, leogryphs and gargoyle oozing out beads, all present on the throne. *Ūrṇā* and eyes are inlaid with silver. A headless devotee sits in *añjalimudrā*, an inscription at the back identifies this figure as "*devadharmmo=yam Kāñchī Nāgēndravarmmaṇah*", "this is the gift of Nāgēndravarmman of Kāñchī."⁶⁴ (Fig 4.20 a, b, c)

A crowned Buddha has a crude devotee carved on the foot of the pedestal; no separate cast has been made for this figure. No silver inlay. The figure has been identified by the inscription at the back of the pedestal. It reads, *Prabhākarsimha* of Kāñchī. Comparing the donated image of *Nāgēndravarmmaṇah* and *Prabhākarsimha* of Kāñchī, we find that the gift of Nāgēndravarmman is stylistically a fine specimen while that of *Prabhākarsimham* is of a coarse quality. (Fig 4.21) Did the difference in the quality of the image depend on the artist's execution or the socio-

⁶² Jinah Kim, "Unheard Voices", 224.

⁶³ Patna Museum Catalogue, 194.

⁶⁴ Patna Museum Catalogue, 181.

economic background of the donor? We can see the distinction in the quality of the images by the donor based on their socio-economic background in the following two examples.

A metal image of God Viṣṇu is donated by a blacksmith who identify himself as Maṅgane. The image of Viṣṇu is meager in style and but is executed finely (see fig 4.22).⁶⁵ In contrast, an image of Prajñāpāramitā donated by a goldsmith Kesava is rich in decoration. The high *pancharatha* pedestal is finely decorated, it has three niches, the middle one has flower motifs and the niches on each side has a hollow leaf shaped crevasse for the gems to be set in (Fig 4.23). If one compares the image donated by blacksmith Maṅgane and goldsmith Kesava one sees the difference in the quality of the images produced. One can also observe that the image donated by merchant Māṇeka had generous use of silver and copper with imposing metallic luster. Therefore, to state that the quality of images produced in the early medieval period also reveal the socio-economic background of the donor would not be an inaccurate statement.

Women too commissioned metal images and they too got themselves portrayed on the metal sculptures from Kurkihar. One such example is of donor named Vāṭuka she donated an image of Goddess Vasudhārā to the Āpānaka monastery in the 32nd year of king Rājyapāla.⁶⁶ Interestingly, the name of the artist (Gopāla-Hino) is also mentioned in this inscription. In the metal image, Vāṭuka is seated on one knee holding her hands in *añjalimudra*. It is a very crude portrayal of the donor, the hands are proportionally larger than the body and she is depicted with hardly any ornaments (Fig 4.24).

A fragmented stone image of a donor was found during my field trip to the site. The donor is sitting in the typical posture, kneeling and folding her hands in *añjalimusdrā*. She is ornamented, has round ear-lobbed earring, and necklace with top chignon. This could be a fragmented piece from the pedestal of a sculpture. In the Revant panel found at Kurkihar, at the left corner of the pedestal two devotees with offerings such as garland and food appear. (Fig 4.32 & Fig 4.33)

Women's identification and a conscious attempt to make them visible as a donor, seems to have been a new practice in the Buddhist iconography in the region of Magadh. In the sculptures mentioned above where the female Mahayana devotees, Gaṅgākā donated an image of Buddha, Umadūkā and Sīdekayā donated an image of Tāra, and Vāṭuka donated an image of Vāsudhara hints that these women had the resources to make donations and to commission skilled artists.

Object of Offerings

The rules of composition in Buddhist sculpture follow a strict pattern, bottom is where the material world exists and thus there lies the material objects. These material objects are either held by the donors or it is carved on the lower part of the pedestal. The objects found are: garlands, flowers, food offerings, lamps, incense burners, vases, conchs and manuscripts. The

⁶⁵ Execution was based on the skill of the artists and resources were provided by the donors.

⁶⁶ Patna Museum Catalogue, 201. Sridham śrī-Rājyapāladeva-rājye samvachhare (samvatsre)32. śrīmad-āpānaka-mahā-vima hareavastavya-Gopālahino-bhāryā Vāṭukāyā-devadharma kritam Gopālahorā-stha patipātitam.()

Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa contains list of variety of offerings made by the devotee, one of the object that it mentions is *pūrṇakalasa*, full of precious or semi precious materials like gold and silver. A large number of food offerings were also made. Food grains like rice were also offered, followed by offering of different flowers to the gods and then the priest offered incense of various perfumes to the family of the Tathāgatas.⁶⁷

These offerings were made to Buddha or to the other deities and to the saṅgha. On the pedestals from Kurkihar, one does find elements of a few of the religious offerings. Figures holding a garland are common, also in some sculptures incense burners with a conical object appear. In a stone sculpture of Buddha from Nawada museum, Bihar, Buddha is represented in earth touching gesture. At the back of the stele his seven life events are narrated. The pedestal has pillared niches, decorated with playing lions, and elephants. Bhūdevi and Māra are also present. On the lower projection of the pedestal two figures can be seen seated, one folds hands in veneration while the other one carries a garland. In between these two figures a conical shape object and an incense burner with flower motif are depicted (See fig 4.25). The shape of the incense burner is similar to a lotus and lotus shaped incense burner is commonly reported from the panels of the sculptures that depict scenes of offering. A lotus shaped incense burner was found during excavation from the Nālanda mahāvihāra (Fig 4.26). The conical object kept on a cup with a stand, represents the food cake offered during a ritual, their shape is similar to the Tibetan Torma.⁶⁸(Fig 4.27)

In the *Dānapāramitā-sūtra*, the first chapter from the Great Vehicle Discourse named *The Array of Ornamentation, Decoration, and Adornment of All the Characteristics of an Awakened One*, Buddha answers to the Aspirant who wants to be awaken, “When one gives gifts of food, Which are given by one possessing wisdom, There are five [things] as a result: A [healthy or long] life, a [good] complexion, strength, ease, and inspired eloquence. “By giving food, they become joyous, Have a long life and strength, and come to be at ease and well. They, well and stable, Become endowed with unrestricted eloquence. “Having riches, much wealth, and fortune, A man possesses gentleness and intelligence, Is endowed with merit, and is learned and serene. So it is by giving food.”⁶⁹

In regards to giving flowers and garlands, Buddha says in *Dānapāramitā* “By giving flowers and flower garlands, May one quickly and in every way Ornament all living creatures, With the flowers of the branches of awakening. “By giving flowers and flower garlands, Wherever one has been born, Let kings, ministers, and petty kings Always pay him homage and exalt him there”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Picron, *Small motif's in the Buddhist art of eastern India*, p.75, footnote.36.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁹ Jason Matthew McCombs, *Mahāyāna and the Gift: Theories and Practices*, 142-143.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 149-150.

Other objects of ritual reported from Kurkihar are one bronze mirror, eight bronze bells, one bronze stand and also one skull cap. The mirror was used in the initiation of a disciple in the Buddhist order. The mirror or water initiation was one of the five consecrations or *pañcābhiṣeka* given by the master to the disciple. A sculptural representation of a mirror is found on the pedestal from Betagi. (Fig 4.28, 4.29)

The bell or *ghaṇṭā* was used at Buddhist monasteries for ritualistic purposes. The collections of eight bells from Kurkihar which are stylistically similar to each other are decorated with lotus petals at the top with beads hanging around. One of the bells from Kurkihar is a *Vajraghaṇṭā*. The motif of Vajra is found on four sides of this bell. There are only few *Vajraghaṇṭā* reported from India.⁷¹ The four Vajrā on the four sides of the bell is a pattern seen on the bells from the Tantrik Buddhist monasteries from the Indo-Himalayan plain.⁷² Five of the bells from Kurkihar are inscribed with the donor's name, given as Buddhavarman of Kāñchī. In the *Dānapāramitā*, *the aspirant awakener by giving a bell will become aware of their former lives*.⁷³ The act of obtaining memory of former lives is called *jātiāmara* and *jātiāmara* can be attained by praising the awakened One, preserving names, copying a text, and other activities like giving bells.⁷⁴ Additionally, in the *Hevajrasekaprakriyā*, a Sanskrit *sādhana* manuscript, the consecration of the disciple is complete when the master gives his disciple the *ghaṇṭā* and the *vajra* and envisions that the newly initiated one will be the Tathāgata Vajrasattva, the sixth Dhyāni Buddha. (Fig 4.30, 4.31)

A bronze tripod stand has been found from Kurkihar, the tripod was used to hold objects of devotion while the ritual was being performed. A sculptural representation of a similar tripod stand is found from Itkhori.⁷⁵ The Tārā image from Itkhori which is argued by Picron was made at Kurkihar workshop has on its pedestal three tripod stand, one holding a conch, the second holding a round object, a *pūrṇakalāśa*? and the third holding the food offering. The archaeological evidence of exactly similar tripod stands as represented on the Itkhori pedestal solidifies the argument that this Tārā sculpture was made at Kurkihar. (Fig 4.34, 4.35) A conch shell and a skull cup were also found in the bronze hoard. Presence of Skull cup could be a Vajrayāna influence.

The people who were involved in the production of images like the monks, lay men, women, and artisans were made part of the composition of the sculpture. It was not only a way to show the

⁷¹ Picron, *Small motifs in the Buddhist art of eastern India*, p.76, footnote 66. The first example is from Achutarajpur, Orissa; the second is from Kurkihar, Bihar.

⁷² Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Eastern Indian Bronzes*. 64.

⁷³ McCombs, *Mahāyāna and the Gift: Theories and Practices* 178.

⁷⁴ Ibid, footnote 256.

⁷⁵ Picron in *Small motifs in the Buddhist art of eastern India, an interpretation, in Functions and Meaning in Buddhist Art*, observes that streamers were carved for the offerings made on the pedestal, was she referring to the tripod which can be confused with streamer or a flag carved on the pedestal?

connection between the human and the divine world but it was also a way for the donor to be memorialized and to gain merit for their material benefits and spiritual awakening.

Chapter 4: Architectural Remains at Kurkihar

In this chapter I have discussed architectural remains found at Kurkihar. The site awaits archaeological excavation, to unveil its ruins; until then only fragmentary archaeological materials can be studied. These fragmentary materials can be connected to a larger paradigm of monastic establishment at Kurkihar. For this, I have started the chapter with the exploration reports of the nineteenth and the twentieth century and then discussed evidence of monastic establishments through inscriptional evidences. This is followed by the second section which discusses the architectural element, *Gandhakuṭī* (the perfume chamber) of Buddha at Kurkihar. A Buddhist monastic site has to have votive stūpas, thus votive stūpas from Kurkihar is discussed in the next section. In the fourth section temple remains and architectural slabs are elaborated upon. The chapter ends with the fifth section on water management, establishing Kurkihar as a domesticated *saṃgha*.

I

The architectural remains at Kurkihar are a sight of dismay. The fragments of pillars and broken chaityas are found everywhere in the village. These fragments are found on the roads, in the fields and inside resident's houses. They are anywhere and everywhere. These broken pillars are reused by villagers in different ways. The fragmented pillars cover the drains, they are used in wells as pulleys, used as door lintels, used on the floors as thresholds and are also used as stairs. The original mounds in the village were used by the locals for quarrying of the bricks and to construct their own houses. During my survey of the site, I could see houses built on the base of the monastic walls. This is clearly visible as the exposed monastic walls run across the village. The village is settled on the monastic remains, so to clearly demarcate the running axis of these walls becomes difficult. But as one enters the village, the dwindling monastic walls lay unattended. (Fig 5.1-5.6)

The main mound at Kurkihar measures 600 feet and now is marked by a modern temple located on the top of the mound. This mound is popularly known as the '*gaḍh*,' by the villagers, it is the *in situ* of stone sculpture and the bronze hoard. According to the exploration reports of Cunningham, 1861, a solid brick-work of a Buddhist stupa on the west side of this mound was revealed. He mentions "here numerous Buddhist statues and other remains were dug up by Major Kittoe and myself and at a later date by Mr Broadley".¹ The reported brick size from this mound is 16 ¾" X 10 ¼" X 2 ½" (42.5 X 26 X 6.35 cm) which according to Sarkar and Saraswati is also the size of the bricks of the Gupta period found at Sravasti.² The brick size reported from the Murali hill of Kurkihar by Cunningham is 17"X10"X3" (43.18X 25.4 X 7.62 cm) and 12"X10"X3" (30.48X 25.4 X 7.62 cm). The LBT (LengthX BreathX Thickness) ratios of these bricks are 5.6:3:1 and 4:3:1. During the Pāla period the statistical study of the monastic bricks

¹ Alexander Cunningham, *Report of A Tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879-80 from Patna to Sunargaon*, ASI, Vol XV, p.6.

² S.K Saraswati & K.C Sarkar, *Kurkihar, Gaya and Bodh Gaya*, Rajshahi, 1936.,p.5.

shows LBT ratios of 6:4:1, 5:4:1, 4:3:1.³ The bricks from Kurkihar follow the LBT ratio mentioned above. Thus it can be asserted that the structural ruins lying at the Murali hill could be dated to the Pāla period. But until excavation is carried out nothing can be said about the size of the bricks found from the site, most of the bricks have been quarried from the mound, half of them are in rubbles whatever is left can be conserved for further research. Marc Stein on his archeological tour of Bihar in 1899 observed, '[Kurkihar] must have been a place of considerable importance... judging from the extent of its ruined mounds and the remarkable amount of old sculptures, carved building stones and ancient bricks, which have been and are still being extracted from them.'⁴

A question that needs to be answered in relation to brick production is, whether the monasteries in early medieval eastern India followed a standard brick size? A detailed documentation and comparative study of brick works from the early medieval monuments from Bihar is required.

The evidence of monastery at Kurkihar

The archaeological remains of the walls at Kurkihar and several mounds within the village indicate that there must have been a monastery standing here. There is epigraphical evidence to support the argument of a monastic establishment. The bronze hoard discovered from one of the mounds at Kurkihar mention a monastery named "*Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra*". The name *Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra* is found on four bronze images, one stone image, and one manuscript from Kurkihar. Each of these shall be discussed below.

The earliest reference to the monastery comes from the ninth century bronze image of Viṣṇu. The Viṣṇu image was dedicated by a man named Tiyaśache of Thisavi in the 12th regnal year of the king Sūrapāla. This image was dedicated at the *Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra*.⁵ Sūrapāla (850-58 C.E) was one of the earliest ruling kings of the Pāla dynasty.

The other bronze images unearthed from Kurkihar that refers to the donation made to the *Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra* in the tenth century C.E. are two icons of Vasudhārā and one icon of Umā-Maheshvera. These three bronze donations to *mahāvihāra* are carried out by females. The inscription on the image of Vasudhārā reads, "Records the gift of the image by Gāuka, wife of Gopāla-Hino, in the *Āpāṇaka* monastery, in the 32nd year of the king Rājyapāla."⁶ The other image of Vasudhārā records the same, except the wife is named Vāṭukā. I have earlier established that the man Gopāla-Hino was a lay follower of Mahāyāna as he uses the title '*paramopaska*' in the donation of a Buddha image in the eleventh century C.E. The inscription on the Uma-

³Rajat Sanyal, "Decorative and Non-Decorative Bricks". *Excavation at Moghalmari: An Interim Report* (Kolkata, The Asiatic Society, 2008): 36. A recent monastic excavation carried out at Lal Pahari, Lakhisarai district of Bihar has reported the average size of decorated brick as 7"X7"X 2" (18X18X6.5-7 cm), smaller in size than Kurkihar.

⁴Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 6.

⁵Pratapaditya Pal, *A Forgotten Monastery of Ancient Bihar*, 84.

⁶Patna Museum Catalogue, 201. *sidhhaṁ Śrī-Rājyapāladeva-rāj[y*] saṁvatsare, 32 srimad Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra vāstavya-Gopālahino-bhārya Gāukāyā deva-dharmaṁ..horā-śṭha(stha) pati-pātitaṁ.*

Mahesvara reads, “It records the image by Mūlūkā, the wife of Gopāla- Mahiaru, a resident of the Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra, in the 32nd year of the king Rājyapāla.”⁷ The term ‘vāstavya’ is used in these inscriptions, denoting to a resident or an inhabitant. Thus, the word implies that the donors were resident of the Āpāṇaka monastery, (*Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra vāstavya*). The similarities between these images are striking. All the three women Gāuka, Vātukā, Mūlūkā has husband name Gopāla, they all donated the image in the 32nd regnal year of king Rājyapāla (917-952 C.E).

The fifth reference of Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra comes from a two page palm-leaf manuscript. This manuscript is kept at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Only one leaf has been uploaded in their online collection. The manuscript is catalogued under the South and Southeast Asian Art. The manuscript is *Ashṭasāharsrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and it has painting of Maitreya and life scenes of Buddha. The inscription on the manuscript reads, “*This is the pious gift of an elderly Buddhist monk Trailokyachandrasya, a follower of the excellent Mahāyāna and a disciple of elderly Buddhist monk Pūrṇachandra who hailed from Malayadeśa. Whatever merit there be in it, let it be for the knowledge of all living beings, having parents, teacher and preceptor in front of the rank, dedicated in 18th year of king Rāmapāla. The last line says that the manuscript was copied by a Jayakumāra, a scribe who was stationed at Āpanaka-mahāvihāra.*”⁸ (Fig 5.7)

This manuscript can be dated to the reigning year of Rāmapāla (1072-1126 C.E) and was donated by a Mahayānā monk Trailokyachandrasya. The scribe, Jayakumāra whose occupation is described as a *vamatānaka*, probably a word signifying an official designation for a lay person in a monastery, copied the *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript at Āpanaka monastery.⁹ This could probably mean that Āpanaka monastery at Kurkihar was carrying out production of manuscripts, not at par with other monastic sites like Nālanda and Vikramasīlā but definitely with a significant presence. I would also like to point out that the largest donative inscriptions of artisanal class from Kurkihar are of scribes and oil millers. Thus, suggesting that Āpanaka monastery must have had a well established artisanal network of scribes who would have illuminated the manuscripts and would have inscribed on the metal and the stone images.

One stone image of a six armed Avlokitesvara records the gift of a son Vāṇi to the Āpanaka monastery.¹⁰

One can discern that Āpanaka monastery appears in the inscriptions of Kurkihar from the ninth century C.E to twelfth century C.E. This is in continuation with the artistic activities that was carried out at this site. There are few earlier references to *Āpanaka vihara* elsewhere. The words

⁷Ibid.,206 , sidhham Śrī-Rājyapāladeva-rāj[y*] saṁvatsare, 32 srimad Āpāṇaka-mahāvihāra vāstavya-Gopāla-Mahiaru bhārya Mūlūkāya devadharma kṛitaṁ.

⁸Pal, *A Forgotten Monastery of Ancient Bihar*, 83. Last line reads “śrīmadāpanaka mahāvihārāvasthita vamatānaka jayakumāreṇa likhita iti.”

⁹Ibid.,84.

¹⁰Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 216. The word maddhūcaulika appears in the inscription. Caulika ? Referring to the Cholas?

apanage vihare appears in the Manikiala inscription of the eighteenth regnal year of Kaṇishka I in the second century C.E.¹¹ Another inscription, from Mathura, carved on the pedestal of a Buddha image reads *āpanaka-vihāre mahāsāṃghīyanām parigahe*. Pratapaditya Pal in relation to these inscriptions have argued that Mathura Āpanaka monastery of the Kushana period would have been abandoned and in the eight century monks might have migrated to the region of Bodh Gaya where Buddhism was thriving; therefore a new monastery in the region of Magadha prospered in continuation as Āpanaka *mahāvihāra*.¹²

II

Evidence of *Gandhakuṭi* at Kurkihar

Gregory Schopen has established that the word '*Gandhakuṭi*' suggests residence of Buddha. The literal translation of the word '*Gandhakuṭi*' is 'The Perfume Chamber'. In the medieval Buddhist monasteries of India 'The Perfume Chamber' was supposed to be the central cell reserved for the Buddha to reside. This dwelling was not a place for the physical presence of Buddha but a separate chamber/cell where the image of Buddha was installed. Schopen mentions that the earliest epigraphical evidence to the *Gandhakuṭi* appears at Bhārhut. The *Gandhakuṭi* at Bhārhut implied original chamber of Buddha at Śrāvastī. Śrāvastī was the place where Buddha resided after his enlightenment. From the fourth to twelfth century C.E inscriptional evidence of *Gandhakuṭi* appears in almost all the Buddhist sites. References are found from Ajaṇṭa, Kānheri, Kasusāmbī, Sārnāth, Bodh Gaya and Nālanda and also from the Viṣṇukundi dynasty of Andhra.

There are textual evidences that explicitly state that the monasteries were constructing a separate quarter for Buddha. In the *Sayanāsana-vastu* text, a story goes, where a householder was trying to raise a structure. Buddha guides the householder Kalyāṇabhadra and says "If you have three cells made, the Perfume Chamber is to be made in the middle, the two other cells on each side; likewise if there are nine cells in three wings, in a quadrangular (*vihāra*) the perfume Chamber is to be placed in the middle of the back wall facing the main entrance, two cells on each side of the entrance."¹³ Schopen points out that the model of the *vihāra* after the fifth century was based on the exact same plan as mentioned in the *Vastu*.

¹¹Pal, *A Forgotten Monastery of Ancient Bihar*, 87. It seems like a plausible connection.

¹²Pal quoted Debala Mitra who expressed the relation between Kurkihar and Mathura Āpanaka. He quotes Mitra, "The possibility of this *vihāra* developing into a prosperous *mahāvihāra* under the name of Āpanaka-*mahāvihāra* cannot be ruled out".

The word *Āpana* means market, commerce, or trade. But we have only one reference of the merchant community from Kurkihar. The word also means 'reaching out or coming to'. This meaning of the word makes more sense as the monastery had to be reached out by the pilgrims because of its closer proximity to Bodh Gaya. However, the word *Āpana* was also associated with the Aṅga, ancient name of north-eastern Bihar. (p.87) The meaning of the word *Āpanak* cannot be used to understand why and how the monastery was named.

¹³Gregory Schopen, "The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries" in *Bones, Stones and Buddhist monks: Collected papers on the archeology, epigraphy and texts of monastic Buddhism in India*. University of Hawai'i Press (1997) p.276

In the Valabhī grants of Śīlāditya III there are references to worship of Buddha in the Perfume Chamber with baths, incense, flowers and other objects; in another Valabhī grant of Dharasena IV, the grant was made by the king to repair the cracks and breaks in the Perfume Chamber”¹⁴ An official title *gandhakuṭi-vārika*, “in charge of the Perfume Chamber” is found on the inscriptions from sites such as Kānheri, Nālanda and Andhra. Thus suggesting, it required special care and assistance. These references indicate that the *Gandhakuṭi* became an important structural element in the monasteries of medieval India

At Kurkihar, there are several instances where one finds inscriptional evidence of Gandhakuṭi. Cunningham collected some inscriptions during his visit at Kurkihar in 1871; he mentions an inscription that identified the donor from the Kerela-dakṣiṇadesā. The donor belonged to the lineage of Abhyachandramaṇi and is described as *tribhuvanaguru* (teacher of the three worlds).¹⁵ The donor from Kerela-dakṣiṇadesā, commissioned a stone architrave to *sugatagandhakuṭi*.¹⁶ Another reference to the word *Gandhakuṭi* comes from two rectangular stone slabs. The first one mention that a stone *Gandhakuṭi*, was made by the daughter of the scribe Parvavadatta, named Hārūka for the increase of merit.¹⁷ The second slab dedicates *Gandhakuṭi* to the Bodhisattva Avlokiteśvara. This one was constructed by Kanakaśribhadra, a disciple of a *bhikṣu* Vijayabhadra who hailed from the Andra-viṣaya.¹⁸

These two inscriptions embarks on the question whether at one monastic site, there were multiple perfume chambers? Was the term *Gandhakuṭi* only specifically used for Buddha’s chamber? or the term was interchangeable with ‘temples’ built for the other gods within a monastic establishment? Like here at Kurkihar, one of the *Gandhakuṭi* is dedicated to the Bodhisattva Avlokiteśvara.

Giving objects of devotion to a *Gandhakuṭi* has been reported from many monastic sites, I have already referred this in the Valabhī grants of Śīlāditya III where the *Gandhakuṭi* received flowers and incense. At Sārnāth an inscription records that a gift of lamp was presented to Buddha in the

¹⁴ Ibid., 263.

¹⁵ Pal, *A Forgotten Monastery of Ancient Bihar*, 85

¹⁶ The prefix ‘*sugata*’ to the word *Gandhakuṭi*, makes me wonder whether the reference was to the *Gandhakuṭi* at Sujatagadh. The Sujatagadh stupa is approximately 4 km from Bodh Gaya temple. The stupa was dedicated to Sujata, a daughter of the landowner of the village, who offered milk rice to Gautam Buddha just before his enlightenment. In the Pāli cannon, every Buddha had a maiden give him milk rice before his enlightenment. For example, Vipassi Buddha accepted the milk rice from Daughter of Sudassana Setthi, Vessabhu Buddha accepted the milk rice from a Brahmin girl Vajirindha and so on. For the full list, See: ignca.gov.in.

Or was the prefix ‘*sugata*’ just an epithet used to refer to Gautam Buddha in the region of Bodh Gaya?

¹⁷ Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, p. 209. The inscription reads “siddham (symbol) kāyashta-Parvva?dattasya duhitrā Hārūka khyayā eṣā Gandhakuṭi śailī kārītā puṇya-vṛddhaye//.”

¹⁸ Gandhakuṭi appears on the 2nd line of the inscription. It reads-ten-eyai Gandhakuṭi sīlāmayi kārīt=ātiramanyā himagiri-śkhara-śriyam=abhibhaviti ghaṭit+aiva viśvasrjā// Ibid.p.208.

Perfume Chamber by a laywoman Sulakṣmaṇā.¹⁹ At Kurkihar, apart from the stone architrave commissioned to the perfume chamber there are eight metal bells offered to the *Gandhakuṭi*.

These metal bells are donated by the elder monk Buddhavarman. Out of the eight bells found from Kurkihar, four of them are inscribed. Amongst the four, one inscription reads, *Kāñchi Buddhavarmana Gandhakuṭya*, recording that the bell at the Gandhakuṭi was given by *Buddhavarmana* from *Kāñchi*; the other two inscriptions reads *Kāñchi stha- Buddhavarmana Gandhakuṭya*, the addition of word *stha* (sthavira) identifies Buddhavarmana as a elder monk from Kāñchi. There is a fourth inscribed bell which too reads *Kāñchi Buddhavarman* but the word ‘Gandhakuṭi’ does not appear as the bell is broken. It can be said with certainty looking at the pattern of inscription on the bells that this too was given to the Gandhakuṭi at Kurkihar by Buddhavarman. It also needs to be pointed out that the word “*deva/deyadharmmo*” “this is the religious gift” is present in most of the inscriptions from Kurkihar but is absent in these four inscriptions. If these bells were not meant to be a gift to the Perfume Chamber, can it then mean that the monk Buddhavarman made these bells to demonstrate that he was the chief sponsor of this *Gandhakuṭi*? To assume this would be inapt as there is no official title like ‘*vārika*’ which would mean Buddhavarmana was in-charge or chief sponsor to the Perfume Chamber. Lack of space on objects sometimes leads to an abridged inscription, maybe this is the reason that the word “*deva/deyadharmmo*” is absent from these bells.

The relation of monk Buddhavarmana to the *Gandhakuṭi* remains unsettled. Sthavir Buddhavarmana was also the one who donated a metal image of Buddha where one can find him seated on a separate metal cast along with the elder monk Dharmavarman. The *Gandhakuṭi* referred in the epigraphical sources from Kurkihar hint that within the monastic architecture of Āpāṇaka monastery a *Gandhakuṭi* would have been made, where a donor from Kerela-dakṣiṇadeśa would have commissioned an architrave and where the devout monk Buddhavarman from Kāñchi offered four metal bells.

III

Votive Stūpas at Kurkihar

Stūpas are stylized representations of the burial mound. In Buddhism, stūpa started as a marker of the funerary mound for Buddha and his disciples, it contained cremated relics of the awakened beings. Stūpa was seen as a symbol of *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment) and it expressed Buddhist cosmic order.²⁰ The stūpas are dome-shaped, solid mound structures that are meant to be circumambulated by the worshippers.

The monumentality of the structure of the stūpa asserted authority over the Buddhist laity, and for the monks the stūpa became a space for ritual foci. It became a site where both laity and

¹⁹ Schopen, “The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries,” 271.

²⁰ Anagarika B. Govinda, Some aspects of Stūpa symbolism, Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Vol II, No 1, Dec 1934, 88.

monks worshipped the symbol of Buddha.²¹ One of the important objects of worships for monks and laity near the stūpa was the ‘votive stūpas’ which were also regarded as the embodiment of the Buddha. The votive stūpas are three –dimensional miniature representations of the architectural stūpas. These miniature stūpas were offered by the laity for the fulfillment of their vows, and for the monks it was an object of devotion for paying homage to the relics of Buddha or the monastic dead. At some of the monastic complexes there is evidence of stūpas of different sizes carrying relics of local monastic dead.²² For example at Bhāja in Deccan, the Stupa no 2 at Sāñchī and the Mahabodi temple at Bodh Gaya have numerous votive Stūpas, commemorating the monastic dead.

The word *stūpa* and *cetiya* mean the same, Pāli canon uses *stūpa* and later adopts *chetiya* as equivalent of the word *stūpa*.²³ Gregory Schopen has suggested that the word ‘chetiya’ in the Pāli cannon was an influence that seems to have come from Nāgarjuna, where stūpa is referred as *chetiya*.

At Kurkihar, textual references of *chaityas* are more in number than the present exploratory findings. Based on the report of Major Kittoe who visited the site in 1847 writes about the outer and inner exposed walls of the mound, there he mentions “the inner enclosure appears to have been filled for ages with chaityas or Buddha temples of every dimension from 10 inches to perhaps 40-50 feet”.²⁴ In 1871 Cunningham visited the site and he writes “The remains at Kurkihar consists of several ruined mounds, in which numerous statues and small votive topes of dark blue stone have been found”²⁵ Anderson Broadley in 1872 collected twenty five varieties of chaityas from Kurkihar.²⁶

A votive stūpa has three parts: a raised base, the dome (*aṇḍa*) and the pointed tapering *chattra*, sometimes accompanied by rectangular *harmikā*. Presently at Kurkihar only fragmented chaityas and its part survive in the village. There are some plain round chaityas made of granite found near the Rai Prasad Kutchery while some are found inside the village houses. These are stylistically plain and bigger in size. A 2 feet granite chaitya was found upside down during my field trip. This chaitya has large lotus petals carved on the base and has a *Gavāṣikā* on one side, imitating the style of the Mahabohdi temple. Another two feet granite chaitya is found at the house of the monument attendant. It is relatively plain than the first one, only two tubular rings are made around the dome. In both these chaityas, the *chattra* is missing. (Fig 5.8 a, b, c)

Another kind of votive stūpa found from Kurkihar is with the figure of Buddha in the stūpa’s niche. These kinds are eight in number. Two are kept at the Devasthan mandir, one at the

²¹Lars Fogelin, *Material Practice and the Metamorphosis of a Sign: Early Buddhist Stupas and the Origin of Mahayana Buddhism*, Asian Perspective, Vol 51, University of Hawai’i Press (2012), 297.

²² Gregory Schopen, “Stūpa Cult and the Extant Pāli Vinaya”, in *Bones Stones and Buddhist Monks*, 92.

²³ Ibid.,p.90.

²⁴ D.R Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, 222.

²⁵Alexander Cunningham, *Four reports made during the years 1862-63-64-65*, p.14.

²⁶ Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, 222.

Thakurbadi mandir, two outside a resident's house and two inside the courtyard of a house and one fixed in a modern pillared wall. These stūpas are made from black phyllite stone, they are smooth and polished. They show Buddha in a shrine on the four sides of the dome. The four Dhayāni Buddhas are represented on the four sides of the stūpa, facing the four cardinal directions; it is a symbol of the Buddhist Universe.²⁷ Independent shrines are dedicated to each Buddha in these kinds of Stūpas. The fifth Dhayāni Buddha, Vairocana, remains unrepresented as he is considered to reside in the inner shrine of the stūpa. (Fig 5.9-5.11)

The shrines are stylized: it has two bulbous pillars, with tapering pointed triangular roof; it has motifs of flowers, scrolls and sometimes *kīrtimukha*. These stūpas have five horizontal rims at the base. In some stūpas these rims are left plain while in some they are decorated. The first rim at the base is mostly left undecorated. The second rim has the geometrical and foliated pattern or else has Bodhisattva at four corners set up in a triangular niche. The third and the fourth rim, if decorated, have hanging looped beads (also a common motif in the decoration of bells at Kurkihar). The fifth rim has to be decorated with a double petal lotus. These rims are also replaced by small meditating Buddhas like seen at the votive stupa at Thakurbadi mandir. (Fig 5.12-5.13)

Here, I would like to discuss two phyllite stupas from Kurkihar, one found in the courtyard of a resident and another kept at the Devasthan mandir. The one found at the resident's house remains unreported. The stūpa stands on an upside plinth in the corner of the courtyard. Including the plinth, this stūpa measures more than a foot. Stylistically, it is different from the rest of the stūpas found at Kurkihar. Four Dhayāni Buddhas are represented, each in their own temple shrine. The temple shrine has a *greeva*, an *amalaka* and a *kalasha* at the top. The shrine where these Buddha sit has a tri-fold arch with a round bulbous pillar. The temple shrine has four tiers roof which could indicate the four planes of existence in Buddhism. The lowest tier would indicate the Apāya loka (plane for spirits and ghosts), the second from below would indicate the third realm, Kamaloka (Realm of Desire), the third tiered roof would indicate the Rupaloka (realm for the devas) and the topmost tier would indicate the *Arupaloka* (Realm of formlessness, a place of infinite consciousness, space, no perception and a realm of nothingness). There are five rims around the stūpa, four of the rims remain undecorated while the fifth rim has double petal lotus. The round cupola of the stūpa at the top is missing the *chattra*. Based on the temple shrine found in this stūpa I stipulate that this stūpa might have been kept at one of the temples shrines dedicated to Buddha at Kurkihar, perhaps it could also have been a dedication to Buddha's Gandhakuṭi. (Fig 5.14 a ,b, c)

The next stūpa that I would like to discuss is the one kept at the Devasthan mandir. This stūpa has four Dhayāni Buddhas. Two are in teaching mudra, opposite to each other while the one at the back is in the meditating gesture. The fourth or the front of the stūpa has Buddha seated in *Bhūmisparśa mudra* in a rectangular façade. Around the second rim, at the bottom there are

²⁷ Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 48.

standing Bodhisattvas carved at the four corners of the stūpa. The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas in the corner have water scrolls below their seat except Buddha in the rectangular façade sits on a lotus seat. The Buddha in *Bhūmisparśa mudra* is seated in a projecting window with a crown decorated at the top of his niche. On either side of the niche two standing Buddha display the *abhayamudrā* and the *varadamudrā*. Beside these, two makaras swallow the bead and make an arch. In the niche below the window five Tathāgats are carved separated by plain geometrical patterns on the pillars. Above the façade loops of beads hang and at top of these two fragmented lions with a round object (*ratna?*). (Fig 5.15 a, b, c, d,)

A similar style of stūpa is found at the Bodh Gaya Maṭha. The façade of this stupa is more decorated than Kurkihar. There are three empty niches at the top of the façade; possibly it had images of Buddha in it. If one compares the stūpa from Bodh Gaya to a stūpa façade from Kurkihar kept at the British museum, one can see the similarity in the decorating pattern and the three niches at the top with Buddha in it. The gesture of three Buddhas found in the British museum stūpa arch, has the one Buddha in the middle in the *Bhumisparśa mudra*, he has an elevated seat than the rest of the two. The one in the proper left is in *varadamudrā* and the one in the proper right is in *abhayamudrā*. (Fig 5.16- 5.17)

The exact gesture of Buddhas also appears in the Devasthan stūpa façade. On the basis of this one can speculate that the central Buddha at Bodh Gaya stūpa arch must be in *Bhūmisparśamudra*, flanked by Buddha (seated or standing) on the right in the *abhayamudrā* and on the left in *varadamudrā*. In the Bodh Gaya stūpa the makaras are shown swallowing the bead and making an arch exactly like the Kurkihar stūpa kept at the Devistan mandir. At the top of the Bodh Gaya stūpa six beaded loop hangs, but these beads are more ornate. At top of the façade, two seated lions, an object in the middle partially broken, is laid out in the same fashion as found at Kurkihar. At the bottom five Tathāgats sit in an arcade. The Tathāgats have incised robes unlike those found at Kurkihar and the arcade has decorated almost circular pillars. On a protruded projection which divides the Tathāgats and the Dhyanī Buddha has a neat legible inscription. The middle arch of this stūpa has ornate bulbous pillars typical to Bodh Gaya style but the element to highlight here is the ornate jeweled crown above the arch. (Fig 5.16 b)

Studying and analysing these kinds of votive stūpas makes one think about the significance of these? The crown on the top of the niche is a new element for the votive chaityas. Was this element influenced by the iconography of crown Buddha? By the early medieval period there was a well developed iconography of crown Buddha from Kurkihar and Bodh Gaya. A Stūpa from Kurkihar kept at the Baroda Museum, has a crown Buddha in the niche. Therefore, the crown could represent the fifth Dhyāni Buddha, Vairocana, which remained iconographically absent from the earlier votive stūpas. It might have later appeared on the votive stūpa probably because of the presence of the cult of crown Buddha in these two regions.

In most of the stone stūpas from Kurkihar the *chattrā* and the base are missing. I only found fragmented bases and finials around the village. In fact, none of the stone chaityas at Kurkihar

has an intact chattra but one can find the hollow indentation on top of each chaitya indicating that they were once fixed to the top of the stūpa. There is one chaitya which remains unfinished. A displaced, 2 feet chattra, was found during my field visit. It is stylistically similar to the drawing made by Kittoe, but not exactly the same. This chattra has more rings and is bigger in size than the one drawn by Kittoe. A comparison can be drawn between the sketch and the object found. This can help to understand the kind of votive chaitya these chattras could have crowned. There is also a stūpa found in the village similar to the drawing made by Kittoe. (5.18-5.21)

Apart from stone, there are about six bronze stūpa from Kurkihar, all completely intact. These bronze stūpas have different varieties of finial and plinth, some have one ring on the shaft, and some have three rings, while others have more than ten rings on the shaft. (5.18-5.19) Does the number of rings on the shaft of the stūpa have a soteriological meaning? The structural composition of stūpas remains the same, a rectangular base supports the round cupola and the cupola is ascended by a rectangular harmika from where a long shaft with rings tapers to the top. The spire ends on the top with a pointed motif of flame. Maybe the stereological meaning of the stūpa lies in the five *dhātū* (elements) in Buddhism. The rectangular base could signify earth, the round lotus dome, water, the harmika where the relic is kept could be the fire, the shaft and chattra, wind, and the pointed apex could be void (nothingness).²⁸

At Kurkihar the votive chaityas are not hundred in numbers like those found at the temple of Bodh Gaya complex, but the surveyors reports of the nineteenth century testify to abundant chaityas found from Kurkihar. Due to rapid settlement in the area whatever survives is enough to indicate that these votive chaityas would have been part of the monastic complex of Kurkihar.

IV

Temple remains

There are few modern temples in the village of Kurkihar that have secured the fragmentary pillars, stupas and architectural slabs inside its premises. A temple commonly known as *Thākurbādi mandir* is located on the entrance of the village. It is built on the top of the main mound. As envisioned from the architectural style the temple seems relatively modern. On the walls, at the four corners of this temple fragmented pillared remains of *kirtimukha* are found. *Kirtimukha*, “Face of glory” is a predominant architectural motif in all the religions of South Asia, therefore to identify these pillars from the *Thakurbadi mandir* to a Buddhist or a Brahmanical establishment becomes difficult. Because predominantly one finds Buddhist sculptures from this site, it would not be inaccurate to assume that these *kirtimukhas* belonged to a Buddhist temple. A *kirtimukha* on the pillar of the temples suggests earthly depiction of the

²⁸ The comparison of the structure of a stūpa to dhātū is done by Iain Sinclair. He compares the initiate mantra of Vairocānābhisaṃbodhi-tanātra to the shape of a chaitya found at Java.

heavenly entrance of the temples and thus this entrance is called *mukha*.²⁹ This motif also appears on some of the chaityas and stele from Kurkihar. A *kirtimukha* pillar is also found in one of the village alleys. (Fig 5.20-5.21)

Another temple to the north of the village is *Devasthan Mandir*, presided by goddess Mahiṣāsurmardinī. (Fig 5.22) The goddess is life size, is eight armed and can be dated to ninth century C.E. She is represented in the motion of slaying Mahiṣāsura, the demon, who has anthropomorphic form; he is half buffalo half man. She carries weapons such as a shield, a sword, a bow and a disc. She is accompanied by two female warrior attendants on either side. The temple in which she resides has two structures, the outside is made with bricks and has a conical roof at the top, a modern architecture. Another structure lies inside, which is made out of stone. This stone temple inside has rectangular pillared hall with stone walls on both the sides. Presently, these stone walls are tiled with different sizes of tiles. In the niche of this temple are installed sculptures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The roof of the temple is made of huge stone beams. The floor of the temple is now covered with tiles, whether the floor was made of stone, brick or just left bare is not clear. At the centre of the hall two stairs are fringed with a relief door jamb that leads to the square sanctum where the goddess resides.

This temple is also reported by Cunningham in his 1861 report, he writes “At the north-east corner of the village there is a small rude Hindu temple of brick where large statues have been collected. The temple is dedicated to Bhāgheswari Devi the principal figure inside is a life-size statue of the eight-armed Durgā conquering the Maheshāsura or Demon Buffalo demon. The figure pointed to me as that of a Bāgheswari was a four-armed female seated on a lion with a child in her lap, but I believe that this figure represents either Indrāni with her son the infant Jayanta or Shasti, the goddess of fecundity, a form of Durgā.....” in the later paragraph he discusses the Buddhist sculptures kept in this temple.³⁰

For the architectural analysis of this stone temple I will look at a few of the temple components.

Pillars of the temples

The temple has twenty pillars, sixteen present in the pillared maṇḍapa and four inside the inner sanctum. These pillars are not placed at an equal distance to each other. The pillars are not of uniform design, but they do have similar structural patterns. The base of the pillar is square, followed by an octagonal shaft. The shaft tapers upwards and has a square frame topped with a circular structure in some, while in others the square top leads to a circular block which extends to the capital of the pillar. In some pillars, the capital projects out on four sides, while in others projections are just on two sides. There are only a few pillars installed in the temple that are without a capital. Pillars of this style, plain, square base with octagonal shaft are found in greater

²⁹ Alka Jain, Significance of Kirtimukha Symbol in South Asia, South-East Asia, Artistic Narration 2018, Vol. IX, No.2, p.30.

³⁰ Cunningham, *Four reports made during the years 1862-63-64-6*, p.15.

numbers across the village. The pillars at the temple have incongruence design, therefore it can be stipulated that these pillars must have been collected and placed in the temple strategically so that it supports the stone roof and walls. (Fig 5.23-5.29)

The doorframe

The doorframe of the temple is made out of black basalt. It is fixed on the entrance of the *garbhagriha*. The door frame in a temple has been an important component since Gupta period. The mouldings of a door jamb constitutes of number of branches which is called ‘*sakha*’. A temple door frame can have *trisakha* (three branches), *catusakha* (four branches), *pancasakha* (five branches), *saptasakha* (seven branches) or *navasakha* (nine branches).³¹ The carvings on one side of the *sakha* are replicated on the other side of the *sakha*. At Kurkihar, on the right side of the door jamb four branches are visible and on the left only two branches stand. The door jambs have similar designs on both the sides. The motifs are hardly noticeable because of the vermillion pasted on the entire door. There are few motifs like the foliate scrolls, the rosettes which are discernable. A female figure stands at the bottom, on both the sides of the branch. These female figures are Ganga and Yamuna. The *vāhana* on which they stand is not very clear. Usually, Ganga rides a makara and Yamuna a crocodile. The figure of river goddesses on the temple door frame were placed to purify those who entered the most sacred part of the temple i.e the sanctum, it was considered similar to taking a holy dip. (Fig 5.30-5.31)

The lintel or the *latabimba* above the doorframe has few figures carved on it but the religious articles pasted on it have concealed their identity. Generally, the lintel at its centre has the sculpture of the deity to whom the temple was devoted. Other than the image of presiding deity, figure of goddess Lakshmi, celestial musicians (*vidyadharas*), kirtimukhas or goblins (*bharvahakas*), lion heads are commonly found on the temple lintel.³²

The Navagraha panel

A separate space is designated for the worship of the nine planets in Indian temples. A *navagraha panel* can be made to be on rectangular slabs or on the lentils. The nine planets are given anthropomorphic forms. The sequence followed by nine planetary deities are based on their temporal order in the seven-day week, which was adopted from the Greco-Roman traditions at the beginning of 4th C.E.³³ The sequence starts from the left with sun god Sūrya, succeeded by Chandra/Soma (moon god), Maṅgala (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Br̥haspati (Jupiter), Śukra

³¹ Surabhi Sharma, Door Frame Designs on Nagara Temples, Overview, June 2018. Sahapedia.org.

³² Ibid. The goblins holding the structure can be found in some of the pedestals from Kurkihar. It is an example of how architectural styles were adopted in sculptures.

³³ Gerd Mevissen, “A Neglected Universe: Navagraha Stone Panels at Gaya and Related Sculptures from Other Parts of Bihar,” *Arts in Context. Essays Presented to Doris Meth Srinivasan in Admiration of Her Scholarly Research*. (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2019): 399. He points out a number of panels from Gaya that follow the reverse order. He connects this reversal of representation to the śrāddha rites performed at Vishnupada temple where during the funerary rites sacred thread had to be worn over the right shoulder and not left and some sacred places have to be circumambulated in a counterclockwise manner.

(Venus), Śani (Saturn) and Rahu (he is the personification of the eclipses) and ends on right with Ketu (personification of comets).³⁴

In the black-polished stone panel of *Navagraha* from Kurkihar the same sequence is followed. All the planets are depicted standing. Sūrya holds two lotus flowers and wears boots, Candra holds *kamandala* (vase) in his left hand, Maṅgala holds a long staff in his left hand, Budha holds an arrow obliquely across the chest; Bṛhaspat is pot bellied, he holds a vase in the left, Śukra is similar to Chandra; Śani appears limping, holding a staff with a globular top in his left hand; Rahu appears with his big head and two palms opened and Ketu is depicted as a female folding hands in *añjalimudrā* with a snake-tailed body. (Fig 5.32a&b) Gerd Mevissen has dated majority panels of *navagrahas* found from Gaya and nearby places between the beginnings of eighth century C.E to the end of tenth century C.E. Thus, the panel from Kurkihar would fit into this chronological frame. The function of *navagrahas* panel could be cultic or it could be customary to depict planets in the temples because temples were considered a celestial abode.

The Sanctum

The sanctum at the *Devasthan mandir* is square with four pillars supporting the enclosed stone walls. The goddess sits on a decorated throne with flowers and clothes. The walls and the floors of the temple are tiled.

Analysis

The temple structure at *Devasthan mandir* is made by interlocking different kinds of stone pillars. Looking at the asymmetric grid pattern of the pillar in the maṇḍapa and the unequal branch of doorframe, the temple appears to have been reconstructed. The older temple could have collapsed over the period of time and whatever remains must have been preserved. The other possibility is that scattered temple remains from the site must have been re-used as building material for this temple. The temple follows the basic conception of Gupta period: a square sanctum where the image of main deity presides followed by a small pillared *mukhamāṇḍapa* (hallway). The structure is simple, the pillars are plain, except two pillars at the back corner which have engraved motifs on it.

In relation to the pillars found at the *Devasthan mandir*, I would like to point out that the style of the pillar with elongated square base and octagonal shaft is also found at the hallway of Mucalinda Lake in the Mahabohdi temple complex. Similar pillars are also found in the maṇḍapa of older temples inside the Viṣṇupada complex in Gaya. The door frames at Vishnupada mandir are also made out of the black basalt like at the Kurkihar. On the basis of stylistic study of the doorframe and pillars found at Kurkihar I would like to suggest that the temple (*Devasthan*) might have been built in the later Gupta period.

³⁴ Ibid., 400.

Architectural slabs at Kurkihar

Thakurbadi mandir has few architectural slabs fixed to the outside walls of the temple. A miniature Jambhala is installed along with a slab that has an image of Cūnda. There are two other slabs reliefs that show tiny Buddha images in series.³⁵ One of those has a triangular scroll motif in the middle with a series of small Buddha. This triangular motif also appears on the top of the throne and on the crown of Buddha. Apart from the Thakurbadi mandir, there are two stone slabs found in the village that show rows of meditating Buddha. What does this row of meditating Buddha signify? What is the origin of this pattern? A votive stupa kept at Thakurbadi mandir also shows a series of Buddha in meditation. (Fig 5.33- 5.34)

An inscribed panchtathāgatha slab from Kurkihar

A granite stone slab which has been painted over and white washed depicts five Dhyāni Buddhas. An inscription runs at the top of the slab which has not been brought to attention yet. The five Dhyāni Buddhas are seated on a half-lotus, carved at the bottom of the slab. From the left, Ratnasambhava is in *varadamudra*, followed by Akṣobhya in the earth touching gesture, followed by Amitābha in *dhyānamudra* and Amoghasiddhi in *abhayamudra*. They all wear monk's robes, which are marked by incised lines. The robe covers only the left shoulder. At the centre of the slab is seated Vairocana. He is wearing a crown; he is ornamented and unlike the other Dhyāni Buddha he is not wearing a robe. Here, the iconography of Vairocana seems to be an early depiction of the deity maybe around the eighth century C.E. He is depicted wearing a single *ekavali* around his neck, the crown is unostentatious without any ribbons flying at the back and he wears armlets and looped round earrings (Fig 3.36). A clear effort is made by the artist to show Vairocana as iconographically different from other Dhyani Buddhas. Why is Vairocana depicted ornamented and what does it signify?

Ādi Buddha or primordial Buddha in Mahāyana and Vajrayana Buddhism is the embodiment of Dharma. *Dharmakāya* is a non-representational body, in order to visually depict Ādi Buddha; the Sambhogakāya (enjoyment body) of Vairocana is borrowed. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, Vairocana “the Intensely Luminescent One” symbolizes the embodiment of all Dhayāni Buddhas and thus is referred as Ādi Buddha (The Primordial one).³⁶ Vairocana in his Sambhogakāya form can be discerned by his elaborate silk items and jeweled ornaments.³⁷

Another trait to identify Vairocana is through the symbolism of the *Mudrā*. Ādi Buddha, Mahāvairocana, can be distinguished from other Buddha by performing the *bodhyāgrīmmudrā* (fist of wisdom) that symbolizes supreme wisdom and immediate enlightenment. This mudrā is also called the *bodhāgrī* and *jñānamuṣṭimudrā*. The *bodhyāgrīmmudrā* is formed by the index finger of the right hand pointing upwards, while the thumb and remaining fingers of the right hand make a

³⁵ A series of Buddha in a stone slab from Kurkihar is also preserved at the British museum.

³⁶ There are two other Ādi Buddha, they are Vajrasattva, and Vajradhatu, they are different forms of Vairocana.

³⁷ Twist. “Images of the Crowned Buddha along the Silk Road: Iconography and Ideology”, 21.

fist.³⁸ Ādi Buddha Vairocana in the Kurkihar slab is depicted forming the *bodhyāgrīmadrā* (fist of wisdom), perhaps the earliest representation of the crowned Buddha from Kurkihar.

The Saptaratna jewel slab from Kurkihar

The rectangular slabs found from the region of Magadha has group of seven jewels often depicted on them. The *saptaratna* are the seven emblems of the royalty. In the Vajrayana Buddhism the seven jewels are *cakraratna* (the precious golden wheel), the *maṇiratna* (the precious wish fulfilling jewel), the *strīratna* (the precious queen), *puruṣa/pariṇāyakarātna* (the precious minister), *hastiratna* (the precious elephant), *asvarātna* (the precious horse) and the *khaḍga/senāpatiratna* (the precious general).³⁹ There are slabs from Bodh Gaya that show these seven ratnas. Generally, in the *saptaratna* slabs, a devotee sits at the corner to pay oblation to these divine riches. In some rectangular slabs the seven jewels are accompanied by the objects used during the ritual. These objects of devotion can be an incense burner, a vase, a lamp, a manuscript and food offerings. (Fig 5.37)

During my field survey I came across a fragmentary stone slab from Kurkihar that depicts five jewels, the rest two jewels are missing because the slab was broken. A wide stone slab on the upper part has a niche that has the *saptaratna* carved on it. The niche starts with a flower motif on the left; this four petal flower motif is also found in the *saptaratna* slab from the Mahabohdi temple complex.⁴⁰ Usually these slabs are found unadorned.⁴¹ The flower motif is followed by an elephant (*hastiratna*), followed by the chief of army with a sword (*senāpatiratna*), then comes the wheel (*cakraratna*); followed by a pot bellied figure whose right hand is in the front of the breast and the left hand hold some object across the thigh, he can be a minister of wealth (*puruṣa/pariṇāyakarātna*) or Jambhala; the slab ends with the depiction of the precious wish fulfilling gem (*maṇiratna*). The *asvarātna* (horse) and the *strīratna* (queen) are missing. (Fig 5.38-5.40)

Typically these rectangular slabs also have images of devotees with objects of devotion. A drawing by Markhom Kittoe who visited Kurkihar in 1940 drew a slab which depicts objects used during the rituals. On this stone slab a devotee sits on the left with folded hands. Objects carved on this slab are: a lamp, an incense burner and a manuscript kept on a bulbous stand with ribbons to pay respect to the text. Texts were read during the rituals as known from the Mañjusrīmūlakalpa.⁴² Two cones below the manuscript represent food offered during the ritual.

³⁸ Ibid., 21

³⁹ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/saptaratna#buddhism>

⁴⁰ At Kurkihar the petal is drawn inside the niche while at Bodh Gaya these are drawn at the base of the slab compartmentalized by the pillars. The style of flower motif found in the slab of Bodh Gaya is quite similar to the flower motifs carved in the bronze pedestal from Kurkihar. An example of exchange of motifs between the sites.

⁴¹ See Picron, *Small motifs in the Buddhist art of eastern India*, fig 2-12.

⁴² Picron, *Small motifs in the Buddhist art of eastern India*, 65.

This is followed by a vase which has the mark of lotus petals on it.⁴³ The slab ends with a figure of priest, the one who conducts the rituals. Was this slab part of the above mentioned broken slab? Or was it an independent slab?

The purpose of this kind of slab was to attribute riches to the deities who in return would increase and protect devotee's wealth. These slabs also provide a visual representation of the increasingly ritualistic aspects of Buddhism. The rectangular stone slabs could have been attached to the fringes of the temples or the monastic walls but the exact architectural purpose of these slabs are not known.

V

Evidence of water management

Monasteries needed water resources near in its vicinity for its sustenance. Recent scholarships on the relationship between Buddhist monastic sites and its landscape have demonstrated how hydraulic management was one of the important activities carried out by Buddhist saṅgha. Julia Shaw has argued that the group of sixteen dams found near Sanchi, coincided with the rise of urbanization and the establishment of Buddhism in central India between 3rd to 2nd centuries B.C.E.⁴⁴ These dams in Sanchi were constructed as artificial water barriers with channels that supported wet rice cultivation in the region of Sanchi. The construction of dams near the Buddhist monastic site of Sanchi is proposed by Shaw was the result of complex relationship between Buddhist Saṅgha and local community. She suggests that the villages near Sanchi would have provided laborers to the monastery for building dams. These dams would have impacted agricultural surplus that would have supported the population growth near the growing Buddhist monastery of Sanchi. Shaw has drawn comparison of Sanchi irrigation system with Sri Lanka, where saṅgha supported construction of dams is attested through inscriptions of second century C.E. She also drew comparison between irrigation technologies of Sanchi with eastern India, *āhar* reservoir system, a traditional irrigation method used in southern Bihar for rice cultivation.

The region of Magadha had different types of traditional irrigation systems. These irrigation systems were designed according to the topography of the region, which comprises plains and sporadic low-lying hills. Locally the irrigation systems are termed as '*āhar*', '*pynes*' and *tāl* (tanks). *Āhar*' is a three-sided embanked basin and *pynes* are artificial channels that carry river

⁴³ Ibid.,64. Kalaśa is a major object in rituals. In the Hevajrasekaprakriya, different jars, of various shapes and colours are used, full of various elements like flowers, precious stones and metals, corns, perfumed waters. In the ritual of the maṇḍala described in the Mañjuśrīmūkalpa, they are accompanied by other flowers, adorned by ribbons, standing on kuśa grass; eight pūrṇakalaśas contain precious materials.

⁴⁴ Julia Shaw and J Sutcliffe, "Ancient Dams and Buddhist landscapes in the Sanchi area: New evidence on Irrigation, land use and Monasticism in Central India." *South Asian Studies*, (2005):1.

water or water from tanks to the Āhar. The water supply in the āhar either comes from rainfall or through the pynes carrying river water. References of tanks and ahar-pyne system are found in Megasthenes Indika and the Arthasāstra, thus, proving the historicity of these irrigation techniques.⁴⁵

Abhishek Amar has argued that the region of Bodh Gaya and its nearby monastic establishments gained agricultural surplus because of the dependency on the ahar-pyne irrigation system. He developed the idea that the agricultural prosperity in the region of Bodh Gaya was facilitated by the monastic establishments. According to him, the Buddhist saṅgha introduced the irrigation mechanisms and played a key role in the development of the hinterland region. He conducted a survey of the Buddhist monastic sites in the region of Gaya and found that almost all the sites had tanks and ahar-pyne system. At Buddhist sites of Jethian and Guneri, two tanks were observed in close proximity to each other.⁴⁶ At other sites like Tika-Bigha, Mira-bigha, Hasra-Kol and Amethi, smaller tanks near the monastic establishment were found possibly for domestic purposes.⁴⁷

In relation to Kurkihar, Amar has surveyed the region and has reported a plastered tank on the northern side of the village, two hundred meters from the Murali hill. He suggests that this tank was possibly a monastic tank used for agricultural purposes. Near the Murli hill, where ruins of chaityas and brick rubbles are found, an āhar exists on the southern base of the hill and a tank can be seen on northern base of the hill, catching all the runoff water from the hilltop. He also noticed pynes on the two smaller hills that lie next to the main hill. These pynes brought the runoff water from other hills to the tank on the northern side.⁴⁸ Hasra-Kol, a monastic site, 3 km from Kurkihar has an āhar pyne system on the western side which collects runoff water from hills.⁴⁹ Punawa, another monastic site near Kurkihar (4.8 km), a site situated between two granite hills has two tanks, one on north and one on east called Budhokar Tāl and Karamār Tāl.⁵⁰ These evidences of tanks and āhar not only shows that the monastic site of Kurkihar had a water management system supporting the agricultural produce in the region but also the neighboring monastic site had their own independent water management facility. This in a way show how the distribution of resources between two monastic sites worked, and these tanks and āhar also operated as boundaries between two sites.⁵¹

The presence of tanks around Kurkihar has also been reported by Markham Kittoe during his visit to the site in 1848. He writes, “There were isolated buildings and tanks in every direction

⁴⁵ Ambhishek Amar, 176.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 168

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cunningham, *Four reports made during the years 1862-63-64-65*, p.13. Cunningham does not make it clear whether these tanks were built north or east of the hill or of the village.

⁵¹ Amar, 181, footnote 55.

for a mile or more around”.⁵² Aural Stein, who visited the site in 1899 as part of his archeological tour to south Bihar, saw votive stūpas of various sizes in abundance on the edge of the tank. The same tank has been reported by Sarkar and Saraswati who visited the site in 1931, they report that this tank was encroached on the southern side by the public road and the votive stūpas as mentioned by Stein is not to be found.⁵³

Does the distribution of tanks and irrigation system at Kurkihar confirm the link between the saṅgha and the local settlement? There is no inscriptional evidence to support this assertion. But the analysis of the irrigation system carried out by Abhishek Amar in the monastic region of Bodh Gaya does suggest that saṅghas that were strategically located on the boundary of the villages created a way for managing their water resources. Who were regulating these resources, local landlords, the agriculturalists or the saṅgha? It cannot be a mere coincidence that all the tank sites had Buddhist shrines attached to it in the early medieval period. Thus, a collaborative effort of sharing water resources between the saṅgha and the village units must have led to an active construction and maintenance of the irrigation in the region. Scientific approaches to date these traditional irrigation methods, like the pollen analysis of the reservoir, thermo-luminescent for dating of sediments from dams and reservoir, use of archaeo- botanical analysis can lead to test the hypothesis that these tanks and ahar-pyne were created during the expansion of the monastic settlements in the region of Magadha in the early medieval times.

Conclusion

Based on the sculpture schema and the inscriptions found from Kurkihar, the site can be labeled a Mahāyāna site. Monks from different parts of the subcontinent declare themselves in the inscriptions as *pravara-mahāyāna anuyāyinaḥ* (follower of excellent Mahāyāna). Kurkihar also witnessed equal popularity amongst the lay folk, and especially women. The women patron at the site does suggest some kind of economic independence enjoyed by women during this period. Kurkihar being close to Bodh Gaya experienced similar religious syncretism between Buddhism and Hinduism as experienced by Gaya in the early medieval centuries. The majority of sculptures found at Kurkihar are Buddhist in affiliation but it has also produced sculptures of

⁵² Picron, *The Forgotten Place*, 4.

⁵³ Sarkar and Saraswati, *Kurkihar, Gaya and Bodh Gaya*, 4.

Hindu deities like the sculpture of Sūrya, Śiva, Pārvatī, Mahishasurmardini, Ganesha, Skanda and Revanta. The varieties of Hindu deities at the site show that Hindu devotees were visiting Buddhist sites and their religious subscription was accepted in a Buddhist dominated landscape. Apart from the crowned images of Buddha, the largest sculptural collection at Kurkihar is of Buddha in the *Bhūmisparśmudrā*, an iconographic theme influenced by Bodhi Gaya. Another recurring theme found at the site was the descent of Buddha from the Trayastriṃśa heaven. The other prominent deity at Kurkihar was the six-armed Avlokiteśvara i.e. Amoghapāśa Lokēśvara. Historians like De Mallmann, J. Leoshko and Claudine Picron have emphasized that Kurkihar was the centre of Amoghapāśa's worship. In the stone collection, after Avlokiteśvara, the other popular bodhisattva at the site was Tāra. The site has more wisdom and compassion deities than the wrathful ones. Only a few wrathful deities are found from the site in stone, there is one sculpture of Heruka and one of Ekajaṭā found at the site. The stray sculptural appearance of Cūṇḍa, Vajrapāṇi and Revanta show that the site had an abundance of sculptural remains. If the site is excavated it can provide a richer understanding of the religious composition of the region of Magadha.

Unlike the stone collection of Kurkihar where Sakyamuni's enlightenment was the dominant theme, in the bronze collection there are an equal number of Buddha in the abhaya mudrā and Buddha in the *Bhūmisparśha Mudra*. There are three icons of Buddha in the *varādamudrā* and two in the dharmachakramudrā. There are a few large metal images of Buddha found at Kurkihar and they measure between 2ft-5ft. These larger icons might have been placed in the temple of the monastic compound for the monks and the layfolks to worship. The smaller ones measuring 2 ft or less could have been used for the monks for their personal meditation, and spiritual development. The smaller icons were easy to carry and move around, quite compatible with the lifestyle of a monk.

In the bronze collection, the compositions of deities at Kurkihar are mostly worldly in nature but we also find some wrathful tantric deities. Tāra and Avlokiteśvara are leading in the bronze pantheon. They were evoked to save devotees from 'the eight great fear'; listed as lions, elephants, fire, snakes, robbers, imprisonment, water, and the man-eating demons called *piśācas*. The goddess Parṇasāvārī was evoked, as she was the savior from illness and diseases. In one of the bronze icons from Kurkihar she is shown trampling Ganesha, a *vighna* (obstacles) under her feet. The only gold gilded image from Kurkihar is of the Parṇasāvārī. Vāsudhara and Jambhala were worshiped for material wealth. Mañjuśrī and Prajñāpāramitā would impart knowledge. Mahāprastisara is a *Rakṣā* (demon) and her worship was also associated with the well being. She would protect kingdoms, meadows, villages, and she granted long life. Only two deities present in the bronze icons are wrathful and terrible in this collection, they are: Hayagrīva (a fierce attending deity to Avlokiteśvara) and Trailokavijaya. (Trailokavijaya's function was to tame the Hindu Gods).

The Hindu Gods present are also *laukika* (worldly), they are Balrāma who is associated with agricultural prosperity, Viṣṇu the preserver and the protector, and three donative images of Viṣṇu

is comprehensible as Kurkihar is in closer to the medieval Viṣṇu temple, ‘Vishnupada’ at Gaya. Sūrya and Mārīcī were prayed as they were the destroyer of darkness, and Uma-Mahesvara was venerated for the marital bliss.

Formally and stylistically metal images at Kurkihar followed the style and iconography of the stone sculptures. The continuity of metal production for four centuries from Kurkihar show how active the site was in the stone and metal production during the early medieval period. It also suggests a stable patronage that would have supported the site for four centuries. Over these four centuries a clear path of innovation was followed. The artists improved and updated their technique of production. The silver inlay in the eyes to enhance the meditative experience, the execution of different types of iconographic forms of the Bodhisattvas, and the introduction of new iconographic elements like the crown Buddha that had travelled from the region of Kashmir was remarkably achieved by the atelier group of Kurkihar. The artists at Kurkihar had rich repository of physiognomical types, decorative patterns and designs to choose from. Irrespective of different cults present at Kurkihar, in these four centuries Kurkihar show coherence in style and form.

The trikaya doctrine supported by the Dhraṇi inscription, the sambhogakaya form of Buddha in the form of the crowned Buddha and Vairocana, and the evidence of Vajrayāna elements like *Vajraghaṇṭā* and skull cup, presents Kurkihar as an eclectic monastic center.

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Sanskrit words with Meanings

Arhat- A person who has attained enlightenment and is worthy of worship.

Abhiṣeka- Coronation of a King or a Bodhisattva/Buddha.

Ācārya- Teacher that has disciples.

Āmalaka- The round ridged shaped dome on a Hindu temple.

Ardhaparyāṅka āsana- A sitting posture with one leg lifted from the ground and the other remains folded.

Abhayamudrā- One of the hand postures where the palm points outwards indicating fearlessness and protection.

Ālīḍha- It is a standing posture in the iconography where the legs are stretched and bent.

Aṅkuśa- It is also known as elephant goad. It has a metal hook attached to its handle.

Aṣṭabhuja- Eight armed deities.

Aṣṭavasū- They are group of gods associated with natural phenomena. They are eight in number: water, moon, pole star, earth, wind, fire, dawn and light.

Antarāvāsaka- A garment worn on the lower part with a waist girdle to hold it.

Bhūmisparśmudra- The earth touching gesture linked to Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gaya

Chivara- The robe worn by monks and nuns.

Chakravartin- A “Wheel-turner” or Universal Monarch is an ideal monarch who possesses the Seven Jewels (*saptaratna*) and uses these to administer his empire in the most righteous and lawful manner. Buddha has been identified with these seven royal treasures based on the Jātaka stories and few Buddhist texts.

Dharmakāya- It is a form of Buddha's mind which is impalpable and ethereal. This form could only be perceived by the other Buddha. The essence of teaching of Buddha cannot be grasped through veneration of his physical body (*rūpakāya*) but through a body which manifests Dhamma (*Dharmakāya*).

Dharmacakraparvartanamudrā- The hand gesture associated with Buddha, his first sermon at Sarnatha.

Dhyanamudrā- A hand gesture associated with meditation. Both the palms adjoins at the lap.

Deya dharmmoyam- Literal translation, “This is the meritorious gift”, All the donative inscription at Kurkihar starts with this phrase

Dhāraṇī- According to R.M Davidson, “Dhāraṇīs are revealed in Mahāyānist sūtras as the coded systems of the Buddhas' speech, for the protection of beings, for the liberation of bodhisattvas, for the eloquence of the preachers, for the intuitive realization of the scriptures, for the mnemonics of the four truths, and for a hundred other purposes”.

Dhavaja- A flag.

Ekāvali- A beaded ornamented popular in the Iconography of Gupta and post Gupta period.

Gaḍh- A mound.

Gavākṣa- Architectural element, looped round windows.

Gajāsura- An elephant demon who attacked Śiva for seducing wives of sages in the forest as Bhikṣātaṇa. Śiva slayed the demon and danced wearing his hide.

Garbhadhātumaṇḍala- It also known as the ‘Womb Realm’. It is associated with Vajrayāna Buddhism and it is one of the geometric configurations that represent a metaphysical space where the Five Buddha reside. Buddha ‘Vairocana’ is at the centre of this configuration.

Guṇa- ‘Quality or attribute.’ It is an idea in Indic philosophy, which is associated with Universal nature. These qualities are also associated to describe Gods and Goddesses. *Sattva-guṇa* is for goodness, creation. *Rajas-guṇa* is for preservation, passion and *Tamas-guṇa* is destruction, darkness.

Gandharvas- They are celestial beings associated with magic and assisting Gods in the heavenly realms.

Hamsas- Goose, they appear as part of decoration on sculptures.

Jaṭamukuta- The tuft of hair arranged vertically on top a deity.

Jaṅghavedi- The middle part of a votive stūpa.

Kukkuṭaārāma- The term means ‘the bird grove’.

Kirtimukha- Face of a monster a swallowing monster, associated to glory and fame. It is a common motif for temple architecture in India.

Kāṣāya- A robe worn by monks, usually ochre in colour.

Laṭitāsana- It is also called ‘royal pose’ for its relaxed gesture in the Indian art.

Makaras- A water creature, it is one of the important motif for the temples as well and sculptures. It is also vehicle of goddess Ganga.

Māras-These are demonic forces that hinders enlightenment of Buddha or those that hinders spiritual path.

Mahāparinirvān- The death of Buddha

Meru- According to the Buddhist world system it is the centre of the universe known to have risen from the center of the great ocean. It is Mount Meru. This mountain has four terraces. The first terrace is the home of the pitchers of water; the second one is the home of the bearers of

flower garland; the third one is the home of those always intoxicated; and the fourth, or the highest one, is the home of four guardian kings of the four cardinal directions. Mount Meru is not only depiction of a physical structure. It suggests a sacred place in one's own heart-mind.

Nāgās – Anthropomorphic creature, associated with the lower world.

Nirmankāya- It is a body of a Buddha which can manifest in human form at various place and time for the benefit of suffering of living being. It is used in the spread of enlightenment to the worldly beings, it help end suffering of ordinary people for example Gautama Buddha was born in the earthly realm. He saved men from their suffering through his compassion.

Padma- Lotus.

Pandya desh- Older name for the region of Madhurai, Tamil Nadu

Pralambapādāsana- A sitting gesture with legs hanging on the ground. 'European posture'.

Prabhāmaṇḍala- The stele supporting the back of a 3D bronze icon.

Pañcharatha- Five Projection from the base of an object or a temple.

Pañcamukha- Five faces.

Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya- A manuscript from Nepal, dated 1174 C.E, illustrates the Hindu pantheon.

Sādhana- It is a spiritual meditative practice for the transcendental experience.

Saṅghāṭī- A long cloak worn by ascetics.

Saumya- Associated with mood or quality of a being, or state of mind. It means, mild, cool, soft, gentle.

Sambhogakāya- The enjoyment body of Buddha in the form of Five Buddhas.

Sūtra- These are Indian literary tradition that can be composed for canonical teachings, ritual, philosophy or grammar.

Trayastrimsha Heaven- It is one of the heavenly realms in the Buddhist cosmology. It is a realm where bodhisattvas and Gods reside.

Trikāya- Three bodies of Buddha in Buddhism. The doctrine of Trikāya in Buddhism is a Mahāyāna development.

Triratha- Three projections from the base of an object. It can be a temple, a chariot or a pedestal.

Upavitā- A sacred thread worn on the chest by men. Although a sacred marker for men, it became a piece of decorative ornament found on both male and female deities.

Utpala/Nilotpala- Blue lotus, generally an attribute of gods and goddesses.

Ūrṇā- A circular dot in between the eyebrows of Buddha. It is one of the great markers of a super human.

Uttarāsaṅga- It is an upper garment.

Vajra- a type of jewel or object held by Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

Vajrāsana- The seat of Buddha at Bodh Gaya.

Varadamudra- The hand gesture, with palm outwards but pointing down. It is a gesture of blessing and granting boons.

Vidyādhara- They are the air spirits associated with knowledge and usually their iconography show them holding a garland.

Vajrāsana- The seat of enlightenment, Bodh Gaya.

Yakṣa- A varied class of spirits, they are connected with nature, forest and are renowned in the Hindu mythology for their mischievous but benevolent nature.

Yab-yub- In the Vajrayāna Buddhism, this form of iconography show union of male and female deity.

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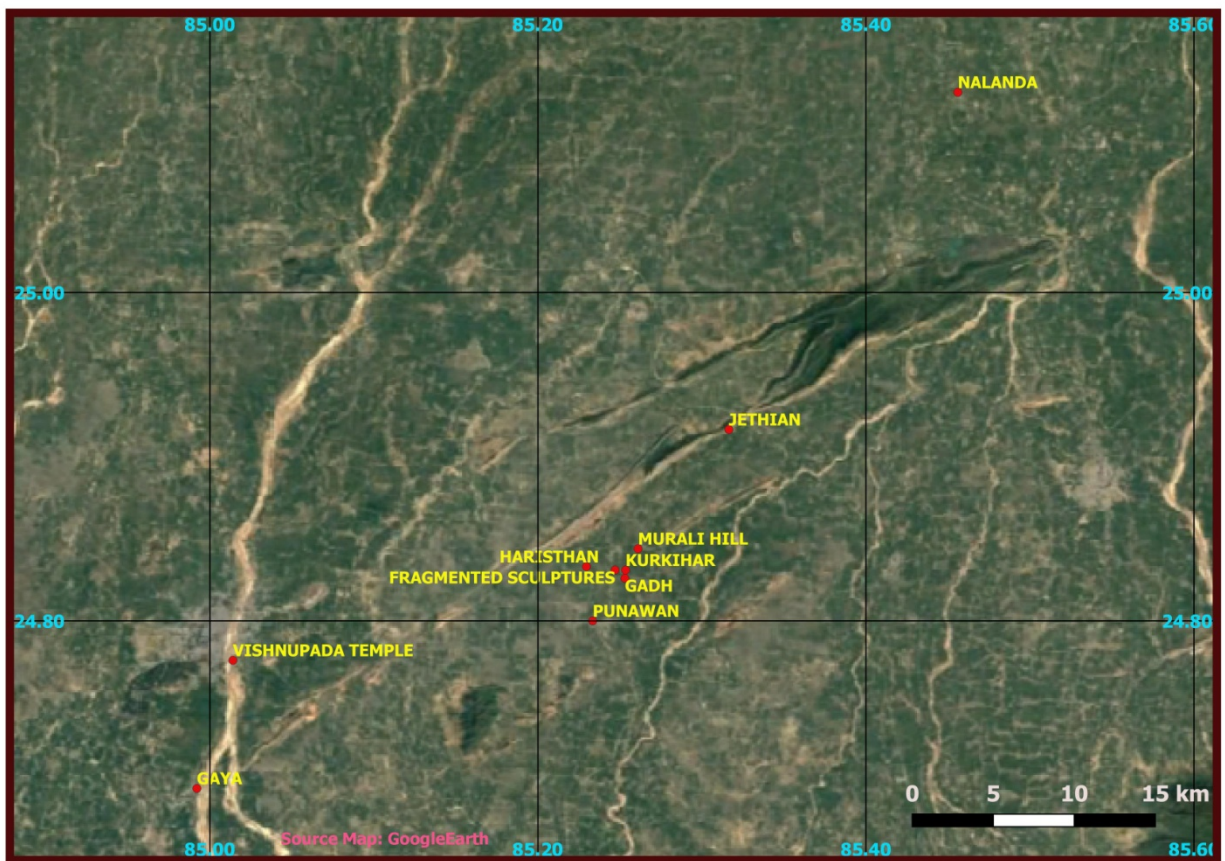
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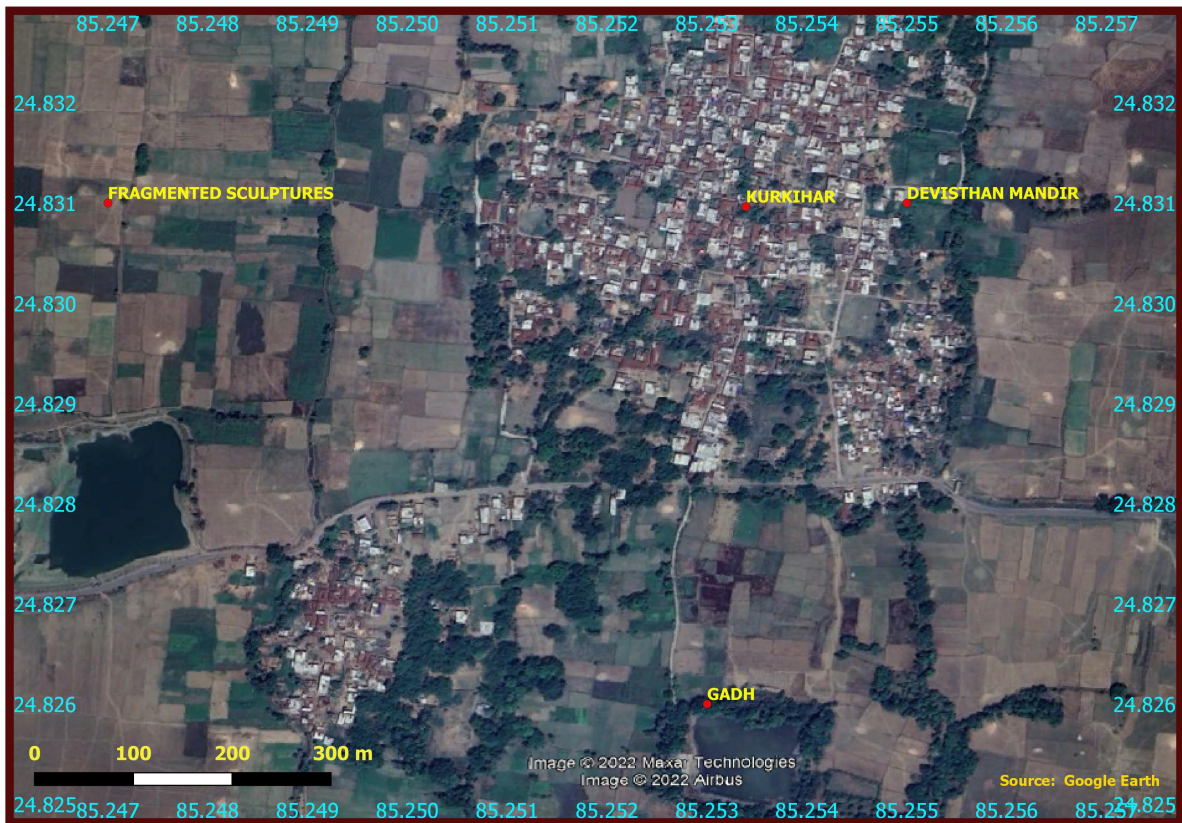
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