

Interaction between Brahmanical and Buddhist Art

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Interaction is a natural phenomenon, particularly between man and man, community and community, races and races, civilization and civilization or between one stock of people and the other stock. Those who know or want to know each other, the interaction is sure and frequent, but even between the unknown people the interaction takes place and it depends on numerous factors. The process and progress of interaction may be unfolded through multiple layers.

Coming closer or together is the fundamental principle of interaction. This may be through conversation, exchange of thoughts or philosophy, exchange of goods, different types of alliances including the matrimonial ones. All these are friendly interactions. But there are some other or critical circumstances when the interaction is activated or the two groups are forced to interact. There is some type of interaction in war and battlefield between the two armies nowadays; the network of communication plays a vital role to decide the fate of an event such as war.

Thus, the interaction is of willing and unwilling nature. The willing interaction leads to harmony and the unwilling or forced interaction ends into the disharmony. Annihilation, destruction, surrender, submission, animosity, imposition continue to widen a gap despite a visible interaction at the surface level and the conflict erupts like a volcano.

If we consider these different channels of interaction, we find that the case of Brahmanical and Buddhist art, iconography and architecture mainly projects the mutual goodwill and harmony, although the rigid and sectarian champions in both the camps have been undermining this cordiality from time to time. There are more than one reasons that an inbuilt consentience is the basic characteristics of Brahmanism and Buddhism. Both evolved in the same land, both have almost the same background, both have the same society or people, both had the same audience, both believed in the same social order basically following the theory of *karma*, both followed the similar methodology and both used almost the same language. This may be submitted here that beside Pāli, Prākṛta or Māgadhī, there exists a large number of important Buddhist texts are in Sanskrit. The other uniting force has been the adoption of image worship, which reflects a great deal of harmony at thought and its implemental level. At the same time, the occasional rivalry and sectarian competition can also not be overlooked.

If one cares to go into depth, the differences seen between the two at the surface vanish soon. Both Brahmanism and Buddhism are progenies of the same mother culture. In the case of other religions, the distinction may be clear and sharp,

but in these two such a dividing line cannot be incised. The same can be said about Jainism and Sikhism. All these are the branches of the great banyan tree, which we call religion or culture. These are not contradictory to each other, but essentially supplementary.

Since the Medieval Age, the Buddha has been called as *Nāstika* because he did not accept the Vedas as authority and supposed to have denounced them. This presumption is not wholly correct. The fact is that the Master did not discuss God as creator and the later Buddhist exponents just discarded the idea. There are some schools of thought in the Brahmanic or Hindu tradition, which do not depend on God who plays almost nil or scanty role. These are *Mīmāṃsā*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Sāṃkhya*, etc. yet these are not branded as *nāstika*.

With regard to the rejection of the Vedas, this may be pointed out here that the Buddha denounced only the rituals of Vedas, and particularly those portions, which advocated for the sacrifice of animals. Poet Jayadeva, in his famous lyric **Gītagovinda**, puts the fact convincingly

‘निन्दसि यज्ञविधेरहह श्रुतिजातं सद्य हृदय दर्शित पशुघातम् केशव धृत बुद्ध शरीर। 1.13

O Lord! After seeing the slaughter of animals your heart was filled with compassion and you had denounced such Vedic sacrifices and rituals. (For this reason) Keśava assumed the body of the Buddha.

In another verse, the Buddha has been called as embodiment of compassion कारुण्यमातन्वते। (1.16) This means that the criticism of Vedas was confined to the ritual part *karmakāṇḍa* only and the other two vital parts, i.e., *jñāna* (knowledge) and *upāsana* (devotion) were not attacked. The *Brāhmaṇadhammīya-sutta* of **Suttanipāta** informs that the Buddha was shocked to watch the killing of animals but at the same place he pays respect to the Brahmanic traditions and also the Vedic *yajñas*, which are devoid of animal killing.

The views of Jayadeva have been upheld and further elaborated by the 19th century Buddhist poet Sambudhāgama Cakravartī Rāmacandra in his **Buddhaśataka-stotra**:

यत्रच्छाग तुरङ्ग मारण विधिर्वेदेऽपि तं निन्दसि
 प्रेम्णा प्राणभृतामतः सकरुणस्त्वत्तो महान् नापरः।
 एवं ते गुणसम्पदो न विषया बुद्धेरसूयात्मनां
 ते मूढाः प्रलपन्ति हन्त सुगतो मद्देद निन्दीत्ययम्॥

Buddhabhaktiśataka, 96

You condemn only those parts of the Vedas, which narrate the process of killing of goat and horse. You are full of mercy and none can surpass you in compassion. The wealth of your virtues is beyond the grasp of those who feel envious of you and such foolish fellows absurdly say that Sugata (Buddha) opposes Vedas.

Ofcourse, there are some occasions (*Canki* of **Majjhimanikāya** and *Tebijjasutta* of **Dīghanikāya**, etc.) when the Vedic conventions have been criticized,

but such statements do not aim at humiliating the Vedas. We come across a number of passages in the highly esteemed Brahmanic literature where the sacrificial Vedic rituals have been rejected but the other parts have been respected. The verses of the **Gītā** are well known in this regard:

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्य विपश्चितः।
वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः॥
कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम्।
क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यं गतिं प्रति॥ 2.42.43

'Only the unwise persons, who cling to the multiple rituals of the Vedas, speak the flowering language that there is nothing more meritorious than the gaining of wealth, worldly pleasures and heaven.' But such practices result in the bondage of birth and rebirth. Like **Gītā**, the *Upaniṣadic* wisdom did not favour the Vedic sacrifices, which have been seen with disfavour and termed as a weak boat:

‘प्लवा ह्येते ह्यदृढा यज्ञरूपाः अष्टादशोक्तमवरं येषुकर्म।’ मुण्डक. 1.2.7

This *yajña* boat is weak and eighteen forms of their deeds are of lower nature.

There were some contemporary philosophers, such as Ajita Keśakambalin, who did not believe either in this world nor the other, birth or rebirth and also negated the merits and vices of deeds. They are known as *ucchedavādins* and are the *nāstikas* in the true sense. The **Majjhimanikāya** explains their line of thought, but the Buddha never agreed with them.

In the *Doṇasutta* of **Āṅguttaranikāya**, the Buddha refers to the four categories of Brāhmaṇas, viz. Brahma, Devasama, Maryāda and Sambhinna-maryāda or Brāhmaṇa-cāṇḍāla. This *sūtra* also suggests his respect to the good conduct and criticism of the low character Brāhmaṇas. Aśoka held Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas in equal regard—ब्राह्मण समणानं साधु दाने...'. Numerous references of Buddhist literature suggest the birth of Buddha either in Brāhmaṇa or in the Kṣatriya family and not in the lower cast—बुद्धो लोको उप्पज्जन्ता खलियकुलेवा ब्राह्मणकुले (सुत्तनिपात)

It was on the foundation of his philosophical thought that the castle of Brahmanical and Buddhist art and iconography evolved, developed and flourished for more than a millennium of years. In the beginning, the important gods, like Brahmā, Indra and his companion Pañcaśikha Gandharva and a few nymphs appear to request the Buddha to preach the Law to gods in heaven. This was an amicable interaction and the request was granted. Earlier, before *Bodhi*, the gods had a hostile attitude and deputed Kāma (cupid) to disturb the penance of Bodhisattva Siddhārtha, who took the vow not to leave the seat until the Enlightenment was obtained. The episode of *Māravijaya* (victory over cupid) provided a high pedestal to the Prince emerging into the Buddha, and the artists in the early sculptural schools, like Mathurā, Amarāvati, Nāgārjunikoṇḍā and especially of Gandhāra, illustrated this event vividly and repeatedly. The glory of the Master through

Jātaka narrations and preachings specially spread and a good number of folk deities became the part of the pantheon of Buddhism. These include Kubera, sometimes known as Jambhala, *yakṣas*, *yakṣīs*, *nāgas*, *nāgīs*, etc. Some came willingly and others, like Apalāla, were forced to surrender. Their position remained inferior or subordinate. The future Buddha Maitreya supports the theory of incarnation in the early Kuṣāṇa age.

The conflict with Devadatta or with some *yakṣas* and *nāgas*, probably necessitated for providing an escort and Vajrapāṇī holding the thunderbolt, like Indra, appears on scene. In the Gupta period, the attending figures or the subordinate deities almost disappear and the Bodhisattva in the form Avalokiteśvara wearing a crown resembles Viṣṇu with distinction of a *dhyānī* Buddha on the forehead. This was a process of subtle interaction. The Gupta period witnessed the aesthetic zenith, although the number of production was restricted.

With the passage of time, new horizons of interaction were explored through art. Tārā combined at least two aspects, e.g., Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī symbolizing learning and prosperity. Similarly, the goddess of dawn Uṣā was transformed into the Mārīcī, who was provided a chariot of pigs instead of horses. The process of interaction is conspicuously reflected in the sculptures of Kārttikeya as Manjuśrī, Sūryalokeśvara, Śivalokeśvara, Viṣṇulokeśvara, Umāmaheśvara, Akṣobhya with Gaṇeśa below. We do notice sometimes, the warring deities, like Aparājitā, trampling Brahmanical deities. On the other hand, Simhanādalokeśvara represents a complete and harmonious fusion between Brahmanical and Buddhist art. At the thought process, the Buddha was ultimately conceived as one of the incarnations and the artists soon gave him the place in a panel above or on the side of the Viṣṇu images.

We hope, the scholars assembled here will highlight these and other relevant aspects in detail during the course of three-day deliberations.

Please permit me to conclude with a verse of Mānatuṅgācārya:

बुद्धस्त्वमेव विबुधार्चित! बुद्धि बोधात्
त्वं शङ्करोऽसि भुवनत्रय शंकरत्वात् ।
धातासि धीर! शिव मार्ग विधेर्विधानात्
व्यक्तं त्वमेव भगवन्! पुरुषोत्तमोऽसि॥

भक्तामर स्तोत्र 25

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