

## Some Classic Examples of Medieval Kalacuri-Cedi Sculptures

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‘Dhoomketu’, the author of a series of novels using Solañki period in Gujarat as background, if I have recalled accurately, had dismissed the Haihayas (or Kalacuri-Cedis of Dāhala) as a dynasty of low standing and their region as inferior in culture in the medieval period in northern India. How wrong and biased he was can be judged from the Cedi sculptural art remains, demonstrated through some of the pieces and fragments discussed in this paper. In point of fact, they represent the finest sculptural lore of the medieval epoch in northern India. This observation is valid for those pieces that were carved during the first quarter of the tenth century. Those fashioned after that date in the Dāhaladeśa/Cedideśa are qualitatively comparable with those in other (neighbouring) regions of the period around CE 950-60, as a rule not included, with a single exception (Fig.10), here.

The distinctive characteristics of the sculptures of the Phase I of the tenth century (900-925 CE), when Śaṅkaragaṇa II and his son Yuvarājadeva I had ruled, are five and they help to identify and separate them from the bulk of the material of the subsequent phases in the Cedi region, as also of other contemporaneous regions such as Khajuraho of the Candellas, Madhya Pradesh.

These distinguishing characteristics are: (1) the presence of the last fading shades of transcendence (visibly present earlier in north Indian art from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century), and serene and placid facial appearance as also physical elegance of the figures; next (2) the presence of the *ratnaprabhā* or diamond aureole behind the head of a deity, a feature restricted to these early years<sup>1</sup> indeed not to be noticed in contemporaneous art; moreover, (3) the lateral turning, toward the deity, by the *cāmaradhara*s (or *pratihāras*) standing near the deity’s feet, particularly in Jina images (Fig.9), though this feature admittedly is a general characteristic of the Cedi Jina images even of the subsequent decades also; (4) the exquisitely rendered ornaments of the principal deity figures and (5) the excellence in carving of the subsidiary decorative elements, wherever present, in the total composition of the sculpture.

The available sculptures of the early tenth century of Cedideśa, I may repeat, are qualitatively of a visibly higher order. In fact, not much has survived of the early tenth century of cognate and neighbouring areas of central and western India, but whatever is there in those regions is, from the standpoint of quality, slightly inferior



Fig.1 : Parikara-pediment of a Viṣṇu image, Singhpur (Shahdol, M.P.), Cedi, c.900-925 CE

to the contemporaneous art of the Dāhala, or Cedideśa. The art of that period, then, exonerates the Haihayas/Kalacuris of Tripurī from the blame that culturally they and the region they ruled were of the lower category.<sup>2</sup>

To be convinced about what has been claimed in the foregoing paras about the Cedi art, we may select a few pieces which exhibit freshness of conception of the image formation if not its iconographic/iconographic concept. Fig.1 plausibly shows a



Fig.2 : Same pediment as last-noted; left side, enlarged detail.

pediment of a frame of a Viṣṇu image. The central portion here, unusually, is semicircular with a border showing a formal but finely carved creeper followed below by a circular *ratnapatṭī* – jewel-band – and then an *ardha-padma* or half lotus against the background of which is shown a prominently carved Viṣṇu image seated in *yoganudrā* (*padmāsana*).<sup>3</sup> *Śaṅkha* and *cakra* are held in image's upper two arms. The *kirīṭa-mukūṭa*, *ekāvalī*-necklace, *upavīta* and *channavīra*, all of which simply rendered, decorate his torso, the face shining with resplendent meditative expression. In lieu of an umbrella, an architectural member known as '*ghaṅṭikā*' (ribbed bell member) is shown above the image's head, an unusual feature. Viṣṇu is seated on a full-blown *padma* (lotus) uplifted by a *mālādhara*.

On both sides of the lotus is shown a trio of figures – a *mālādhara* and two *mālādhāriṇīs* and next to them stand a taller figure of a *cāmaradhāriṇī* and by its side a small attendant female figure, each one of them holding a *kalaśa* and each figure clearly delineated. At either end of *parikara*'s central composition just described, are the figures, of Brahmā (right) and of Śiva (left end). The *parikara*, enframing probably a fair dimensioned standing (?) Viṣṇu figure, and having lateral *śākhās* (arms), presumably depicting the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, would have completed an impressive, indeed a gorgeous, composition. Fig.2 illustrates an enlarged form of the *mālādhara* group on the left side of the above-described *parikara*, together with the *cāmaradhāriṇī* to illustrate how elegant and thoughtfully as well as gracefully they were accommodated in the total composition of the *parikara*'s pedimental portion.

Fig.3 illustrates Śiva and Pārvatī seated in a tenderly loving posture of a husband and wife. Śiva's *triśūla* is very shapely, indeed of beautifully ornate workmanship,<sup>4</sup> held by his upper right hand. The lower right hand touches the chin of Pārvatī/Umā with delicately but over-curved fingers not possible in nature.<sup>5</sup> Śiva wears a *jaṭā-mukuṭa*, strangely of a pointed type. The upper left arm of Umā holds a *darpaṇa* (mirror). An arm holding a lotus bud in a blooming state touches a small *padmapaphā*, shared by both of the deities. The Cedi sculptor seems fond not only of introducing several subsidiary figures but also skillfully determine their relative positions also, with clarity of shapes in the overall composition: for instance, just above the artfully rendered coiffure of Umā, on the left upper side, is a large and handsome *mālādhara* juxtaposed by two female figures and below them a *mālādhāriṇī*, all without jostling for space. With small differences in detail, the figures at the right side are now partly gone due to mutilation. All in all, it is a very adroitly fashioned image of Śiva with the consort Pārvatī.

In Cediśa, in Brahmanical faith, the cult of Devī, too, was very powerfully represented. For example, the fiercesome images of venerable dimensions of Cāmuṇḍā are fairly abundantly met with.<sup>6</sup> Here is illustrated (Fig.4) a seated image of Durgā with right four arms mutilated, the left ones carry *ghaṅṭā* (bell?), shield (?), the lowermost arm carrying a severed head. The goddess's face, however, seems very serene, the calm, contemplative expression manifestly



Fig.3 : Seated Śiva and Pārvatī, legs mutilated, Tewar (Jabalpur, M.P.), Rani Durgavati Museum, Cedi, c.900-925 CE

highlighted by a graceful *jaṭā* and the *ratnaprabhā*. The subservient female figures, shown both on the upper and lower sides are what should be appropriate for the goddess, which has contradictory features, compassionate face and an arm carrying an *asura*'s severed head. The lion mount below bears terrifying visage.

The worship of Śiva, too, equally was widespread. The Mattamayūra sect/branch of Śaivism was prominently represented in that period by the *maṭhas* (monasteries) and the shrines attached to them.<sup>7</sup> Fig.5 shows an impressive figure of Bhairava holding a *khaṭvāṅga* having an almost life-size *daṇḍa* carried by the lower left arm, the upper carrying a *ghaṇṭā* (bell). The upper right hand



Fig.4 : A seated eight-armed Caṇḍikā(?), inscribed, Shahdol, M.P., Cedi, c.900-925 CE

possibly holds a *pātra*. While the other ornaments are like those noticeable with any male deity, it is the presence of skull in the *paṭṭabandha* which is emblematic of the deity's 'Bhairava' character. Behind the head is a *ratnaprabhā* bordered by a decorative *valli*. Near the feet, stands a pair of female and a male figure and below them sits a pair of other female figures, all in various manners of exhibiting adoration to the principal deity's image. Above the standing figures occur the conventional *vyāla* and *makara* figures on both sides.

Fig.5 :  
Four-armed  
Bhairava,  
Singh-  
pur, Cedi,  
c.900-925  
CE, Thak-  
ur Sahib's  
collection

Next we may notice the lowermost part of a multijambed (*ṣaḍśākhā*?) doorway from Arjulā. It's right side (Fig.6) shows a standing *dvāra*-



Fig.6 : Detail of the lower part of a door-frame, right side, Singhpur (now in Arjulā), Cedi, c.900-925 CE

*pāla*, and next to him, in a slightly depressed portion, there is a figure carrying bow and arrow and attended by an adorer. Next figure is a dancing figure holding a snake in his left hand and *varadākṣa* in right. Next to it is a large standing figure of the riverine goddess Yamunā, turning towards left and holding a *kalāśa*-jar, her mount, tortoise, clearly recognizable. A female figure stands near her right leg, holding as she does a *kalāśa*. Fig. 7 shows the corresponding left side of the doorframe, revealing the shapely figures of Gaṅgā, Kāma-deva(?) and Vaiśravaṇa(?).

Jainism, too, is well represented in the Cedi eṣa, particularly in the tenth century. The Digambara

Jaina temple at Jabalpur (Tripurī, Kalacuri's capital) enshrines one of the most gorgeously composed Jina image (Figs. 8, 9) whose face, alas, has been retooled.

The upper half of the icon (Fig.8), behind the head, shows the *ratnaprabhā* rendered in conspicuously high relief and, is crowned by a very ornate *trichatra* or triple umbrella touched by the fronts of a pair of decorated elephants. Beside the Jina's head, on either side, is an elegantly



Fig.7 : Left side detail of Fig.6

fashioned *mālādhara* wearing fine ornaments and the two *mālādhariṇīs* each side – the upper one turning in the opposite direction, the other below it faces the observer. Fig.9 shows the image in full, but its right side alone to be precise, with an *ārādhikā* (female adorer) and a large, handsome *cāmaradhara* or *cauri*-bearer standing beside the Jina's legs and turning toward the Jina's figure. Also manifestly visible in this illustration is the nicely carved decorative and stylized *valli-paṭṭa* bordering the *ratnaprabhā* behind Jina's head.



Fig.8 : Upper portion of a Digambara Jina image (seated in padmāsana), Digambara Jain temple, Jabalpur, M.P., Cedi, c.900-925 CE

Fig.10 illustrates a larger part of the fragment of a *parikara*-pediment of a Jina image, bordered by a semi-circular *valli-paṭṭa*. The central-most part of the pediment shows a seated Jina figure in *padmāsana*, enshrined within a *tilaka*-shaped shrine. In a countersunk panel is shown a Jina trio, the central figure seated in *padmāsana*, the adjoining ones to the right and left stand in a *kāyotsarga* posture and, each of these two showing a *chatra* and *caitya-tree*. At the left extremity of the pediment is a *tilaka* enshrining a single seated Jina image surrounded by tiny figures of an attendant, the *mālādharas* and the elephants. The corresponding *tilaka* at the right end is gone. Stylistically, the piece seems a few decades later than the pieces discussed in the foregoing. In any case, all of these pieces unambiguously demonstrate the Cedi sculptors' high competence as not only craftsmen but the artists of skill capable of creating greater art as well in their times in north India.



Fig.9 : Right side detail of Fig. 8



Fig.10 : Jina images, Fragment of Parikarapadma, Tewar, Jabalpur, M.P., Rani Durgavati Museum, Cedi, c.925 CE

## Endnotes

1. Earlier, *padmaprabhā*, *candraprabhā* and *sūryaprabhā* were known; but *ratnaprabhā* is peculiar to Cedi deity sculptures of the early tenth century.
2. Not only art, but literature (Sanskrit), too, of those years is of a superior class as pointed out by V. V. Mirashi. Cf. V. V. Mirashi, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.IV, Part 1: *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*, Ed. V. V. Mirashi, Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1955 (Parul Pandya Dhar had called my attention to this source).
3. H. Goetz, in his writings used to call such a Viṣṇu image as *Yogāsana Viṣṇu*.
4. Cf. my paper, "The Morphology of the 'Trident Emblem'," *Journal of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta*, Vol.19, Nos.1-2, 1977: Also reprinted in the *Sambodhi*, Vol.XXXIV, Ahmedabad 2011, pp.5-16. (See there Fig.1 for comparison).h
5. In the Vimala-vasahi temple in Delvaḍā (Dilwara), Mt. Ābu, in the northern *bhramantikā* (colonnaded corridor) in a ceiling showing the Jaina Vidyādevī Vajraśṛṅkhālā with fingers artistically but unnaturally carved. (Cf. J. M. Nanavati and M. A. Dhaky, "The Ceilings in the Temples of Gujarat," *Bulletin, Museum & Picture Gallery, Baroda*, Vol. XVI-XVII, Baroda (Vadodara) 1963, Fig.14. Also cf. *Adbhuta Śilpa-maṇḍita Delvāḍānām Jinamandiro* (Gujarati), Madhusudan Dhanki (Dhaky), Ahmedabad 2002, Fig.30, some *vidyādevī* or *yakṣī*).
6. I faintly remember to have seen such images at Pañcamaḍhi, Kalitarai and a few other sites about fifty years ago.
7. Gurgi, Bilhari, *et cetera*.

## Postscript

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