

A Nonpareil Tīrthaṅkara Image in the Reserve Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Maruti Nandan Pd. Tiwari

Some years back I had the privilege of visiting different museums in UK including the reserve collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.¹ The reserve collection of Victoria and Albert Museum (Battersea Reserve Collection) preserves a unique seven-headed stone image of Tīrthaṅkara or Jina (Acc.No.453–(IS)), seated in *dhyāna-mudrā* with both the hands in the lap (Fig.1 and line-drawing). Stylistically the provenance of this image should be western India. The image bearing *śrīvatsa* mark in the centre of the chest has an inscription on the pedestal, dated in *saiiroat* 1526 (=1469 CE). Surprisingly the Tīrthaṅkara sits simply on a low pedestal without *siṅhāsana* (lion-throne), *trichatra* (three-tiered parasol), *prabhāmaṇḍala* or any other *prātihārya* (associated attending feature) which were the invariable features of Jina images from Gupta period onwards.

Actually what makes this image unique is its seven faces, three on each side of the central face. The seven faces are obviously suggestive of the renderings of seven Tīrthaṅkaras (Jina) which would be from the first (Ādinātha) to Supārśvanātha (seventh) Tīrthaṅkara. But what is more surprising is the rendering of crescent cognizance (*lāñchana* of Candraprabha) on the pedestal and the mention of the name of Candraprabha (8th Jina) in pedestal inscription.² It means that the principal Tīrthaṅkara in the image is Candraprabha while six other flanking faces represent six other Tīrthaṅkaras. Who are these Tīrthaṅkaras? These could not be identified in the absence of any indication or cognizance. All the seven faces with serene appearance have curly hair with protuberance.

The present image apparently is a composite (*saṅghāṭa*) Tīrthaṅkara image representing seven Tīrthaṅkaras together wherein Candraprabha, carved in the centre with cognizance, is the principal Tīrthaṅkara. Although no Jaina text refers to any form of Tīrthaṅkara image having more than one face yet it is very likely that in the spirit of Brahmanical composite images showing two or more deities (Ardhanārīśvara, Harihara, Hariharapitāmaha, Hariharahiraṇyagarbha)³ carved together, the Jainas also attempted at making such composite images wherein more than one Tīrthaṅkaras are represented.



Fig.1 : Candraprabha, sarnvat 1526 = 1469 CE, seven-headed, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

It would be relevant to mention here that right from the Kushan period composite Jina images were carved.⁴ The Jina *caumukhī* (or *pratimā-sarvatobhadrikā*) images of the Kushan period represent the figures of four different Tirthaṅkaras, standing in *kāyotsarga-mudrā* on four sides, two of them are distinctly identifiable with Ādinātha (1st Tirthaṅkara - with hanging hair locks) and Pārśvanātha (23rd Tirthaṅkara - with seven-hooded snake canopy).⁵ Further from about seventh century CE onwards such *dvitīrthī* and *tritīrthī* Tirthaṅkara images were also carved, which show two or three Tirthaṅkaras together (mostly standing) in one image. Such composite images are found from Mathura, Deogarh, Chāndpur, Chandherī, Siron Khurd, Āranṅ, Khajurāho and many other places.

In other form of composite Tirthaṅkara images, found from Mathura (in UP) and Sonbhandar cave and Rajgir (in Bihar), the cognizance on the pedestal is of one Tirthaṅkara while *yakṣa-yakṣī* like Kubera-Ambikā or figures of Balarāma and Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa or even seven-hooded snake canopy represent some other Tirthaṅkara in the selfsame image. In such composite images mostly Ādinātha-Neminātha, Sambhavanātha-Supārśvanātha, Ajitanātha-Pārśvanātha, Munisuvrata-Neminātha Tirthaṅkaras are shown.⁶ Such Jina images are found at Sonbhandar Cave and Rajgir in Bihar from 5th century CE onwards.

Hence the present seven-headed Tirthaṅkara image in the reserve collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London represents continuation of the practice of rendering of composite Tirthaṅkara images in Jaina art during medieval period, on which however Jaina texts are completely silent. Such composite Tirthaṅkara images suggest that all the Tirthaṅkaras are virtually one in the spirit of *ekam sat viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti* (*R̥gveda*, I.164.46 - Truth or Supreme God is one who is visualized in or known by different names). Therefore they should be worshipped with equal reverence and devotion with *advaita bhāva* (feeling of non-duality). The rendering of composite Tirthaṅkara images were a purposeful innovation on the part of the Jaina *ācāryas*, and the present image is thus an outstanding rare example of the same.

Endnotes

1. M.N.P. Tiwari, 'Jaina Sculptures and Painting in the United Kingdom', *Kala* (Journal of Indian Art History Congress), Vol.III, 1996-97, pp.40-48.
2. 1. *saiṅvat 1526 vai su śaṣṭhi, Candraprabha dhātu*
2. *suvāstu saṅyutta helā dhyānammuṣṭhitam*
3. *anujñāpitam*

The image of Candraprabha was installed in temple in *saiṅvat 1526* (=1469 CE) on bright 6th day of the month of *Vaiśākha*.

The reading is the courtesy of Prof. Sita Ram Dubey, Dept. of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.
3. J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, pp.540-63.
4. Maruti Nandan Pd. Tiwari, 'Jaina Iconography in Kushāṇa Age', *Jaina Vidyā*, Lucknow, No.1, 1998, pp.106-116.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.110-114.
6. Maruti Nandan Pd. Tiwari and Shanti Swaroop Sinha, *Jaina Art and Aesthetics*, New Delhi, 2011, pp.82-85.