

A Note on the Rendering of Pādakuśalamāṇava Jātaka from Mathura

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The present article discusses a Kuṣāṇa period relief showing *Pādakuśalamāṇava* Jātaka from Mathura. Although V.S. Agrawala has taken note of this example, yet there are some such points which require detailed study and hence this paper. The fragmentary relief (housed in the Reserve Collection of Government Museum, Mathura Acc.No.12.191) is a part of a railing pillar which shows an interesting landscape. A male figure is seated inside a cave and a peacock is carved below the cave and in the corner a male figure is seated in *utkuṭkāsana* posture. Further to the left side there is a sylvan background in which appear a male and a horse-headed female figure. The horse-headed female figure remind us of the *Aśva-mukhī Yakṣī* of the *Pādakuśalamāṇava* Jātaka, (fig.1). The close study of entire relief and the evidence of another example from Mathura (now in Government Museum, Mathura Acc.No.18) inspire us to probe into the possible identification of this relief. Apparently the panel having small figures on such large composition refers to the *Pādakuśalamāṇava* Jātaka and most probably the *Yakṣī* is here represented merely as a forest goblin.¹ *Aśva-mukhī Yakṣī* however appears in different schools of early Buddhist narrative art. In all these depictions horse-headed female is related to *Jātaka* story popularly known as *Pādakuśalamāṇava* Jātaka. A brief summary of the tale would be helpful to understand the context of the said panel. The *Jātaka* story² runs as follows :-

Brahmadatta, king of Kāśī (Varanasi), questioned the queen for her sin. Taking an oath she said, if I had sinned against you, I should become a female *Yakṣī* with the face of a horse. After her death she became a horse-faced *Yakṣī* and dwelt in a rock cave and used to catch and devour the man. After serving Vssavana for three years she got permission to eat people in a space of thirty leagues long by five leagues broad. One day a rich, wealthy and handsome



17.1: *Pādakuśalamāṇava Jātaka*, Mathura, Kuṣāṇa period, Government Museum, Mathura



17.2: *Pādakuśalamāṇava Jātaka*, Mathura, 2nd century CE, Government Museum, Mathura

Brāhmaṇa accompanied by attendants entered that area. The *Yakṣī* rushed to seize the Brāhmaṇa and threw him on her back but instead of devouring him she accepted him as her husband and lived harmoniously. And whenever she went out, for fear of his escaping, she used to arrest him in a cave covered with a huge stone. After some time she gave birth to a son who was also kept inside the cave with his father.

On the basis of above description, we have identified the relief under discussion with the Jātaka of *Pādakuśalamāṇava* Jātaka. Though the figures of panel are badly eroded yet the animation of the *Yakṣī* and other animal and bird figures can be discerned. In this panel Brāhmaṇa is seen as placing his left hand on the shoulder of *Yakṣī* in a friendly manner. The attitude of *Yakṣī* suggests that she is engaged in an affectionate conversation with the man while in such depiction at Sanchi, *Yakṣī* is shown placing her left hand on the shoulder of a good looking man instead of Brāhmaṇa.³ The same Jātaka has been depicted on one of the railing pillars of the Bodhgaya temple of 1st cent BCE which is presently preserved in Indian Museum, Kolkata. In Bodhgaya example entire family is shown wherein the *Yakṣī* is in the middle and her husband stands on her right, while the son appear on her lap⁴. But in the panel under discussion, the sequence of the events concur with texts. The events are arranged in the following manner; first is the meeting of the *Aśvamukhī Yakṣī* with the Brāhmaṇa. After becoming overpowered with love for him she is seizing the Brāhmaṇa to make him her husband and then she is persuading him to accompany her to cave dwelling. The scene on the left side may be identified as the *Yakṣī* keeping her husband arrested in a cave.

Unlike other places, like Sanchi⁵ and Bharhut⁶, the artists of Mathura executed the fables in a summary form yet fully illustrative of the events as found in the text. Mathura artists were cognizant to the special characteristics and way of presenting stories. It may be seen in the depiction of some other *Jātaka* stories like *Ulūka* Jātaka⁷ and *Kacchapa* Jātaka.⁸ They have their special marks there i.e. owl and tortoise respectively, to help us to identify them. In the present panel the most significant feature for our consideration is entirely naked horse-headed standing figure having a feminine look, she is evidently *Aśvamukhī Yakṣī* who is holding fruits like mangoes. It is narrated in the story that *Yakṣī* herself ate man's flesh but she managed and served dainty food to her husband and child.

Above the *Yakṣī* various animals like lion and pig are to be seen in the forest. Two-armed men are appointed for watching the man, her husband seated inside the cave. The story says that one day husband and son of *Yakṣī* fled away but they were caught again by *Yakṣī* who subsequently kept both under strict vigil. The seated figure in *utkuṭkāsana* may be identified as that of Sūrya. The association of Sūrya with Buddhism⁹ and his depiction in Buddhist art becomes more relevant for his presence on the slab from Mathura wherein important event of Buddha's life are shown¹⁰. Upper end of the panel contains a *nāga* figure with his head canopied by serpent hood.

Another example of the same version hails from Mathura and is datable towards the close of the second century CE (fig.2). The relief is now housed in the Government Museum, Mathura. As compared to the first relief, the artist here has opted more for condensed way of representation but the suggestion is distinct. Like previous relief, here also, horse-faced *Yakṣī* is shown standing and touching the shoulder of a young man.

It may be recalled that in the example from Bharhut four scenes of this episode are illustrated in proper perspective. (a) The *Yakṣī* seizing the Brāhmaṇa (b) *Yakṣī* and her husband are shown seated in a cave (c) The *Yakṣī* holding mangoes and carrying her child on her waist (d) last scene shows the stage when the *Yakṣī* caught her husband and son at the time of their fleeing from captivity. The depiction of *Pādakuślamāṇava* Jātaka was however popular for a few more centuries. Even in the cave no. xvii of Ajanta, the theme is being painted. Thus this relief from Mathura is important not only from the viewpoint of the depiction of *Jātaka* story but also for its composition which is very communicative. It is also important that rendering of this Jātaka is portrayed separately.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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