

Buddhism During the age of Kalachuri's: A study of Tara Sculptures of Jabalpur

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Abstract-

The Kalachuris of Tripuri were a prominent dynasty in central India, emerging in the 7th century CE in their kingdom of Tripuri (Tewar), Jabalpur. Although the dynasty was secular from its inception, it was predominantly influenced by Brahmanism and Jainism, with Buddhism receiving comparatively less scholarly attention. This disparity underscores the importance of highlighting Buddhist contributions within this historical context. Notable archaeological findings in Jabalpur, including Gopalpur, Tewar, Kudhan, and Bheraghat, have uncovered numerous Tara, Buddha, Avalokiteshwara, and Yakshis sculptures. Recent excavations at by archaeological Survey of India, Jabalpur Circle, Under the directorship of Dr. Sujit Nayan at Tewar have revealed three previously unpublished Tara sculptures, as reported by media sources. An important Tara sculpture is preserved in the Gauri Shanker Temple at Chausath Yogini Bheraghat, and the author has identified and published two additional Tara sculptures from Gopalpur in 2023. This study aims to analyze these Tara sculptures and explore their association with the Kalachuris of Tripuri.

Introduction-

Kalachuri of Tripuri was an important dynasty of central India, their historicity goes back to 3rd century CE at Mahismati. Various scholars have different opinions with the ancient city of Mahismati, according to H.C. Ray the ancient Mahismati was Mandhata (Omkareshwar, Khandwa) while Dr. H.D. Sankalia has stated that the ancient Mahismati was Maheshwar (Khargone) of Madhya Pradesh¹. They have migrated from Mahismati and arrived at Kalanjar². From Kalanjar the Kalachuri's have migrated and reached at Dahal or Chedi Desha³. They have started their rule from Tripuri (Tewar) from the middle of 6th century CE⁴, after their settled at Tripuri they have divided into three branches in all of them the Kalachuri of Tripuri were the most powerful and they have ruled till circa 13th century CE⁵.

The Kalachuris had produced many important rulers who have not only contributed in the political history of central India but also in religion and architecture also. They have followed Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism. They are one of the few dynasties of the country who have

built most number of Yogini sculptures i.e. Bheraghat, Shahdol, Gurgi etc. It shows their recline towards the famine worshipping. Till now a large number of Brahmanical and Buddhist sculptures have been found from the region of Kalachuri's but according to the Rahman Ali only a few Buddhist images have been found from the Kalachuri territory⁶, but the scenario has been changed now and in past few decades a number of Buddhist images including the Stupa's have been found. The Stupa of Kuthulia, Umaria district of Madhya Pradesh gives a powerful evidence that the Kalachuri's had also given an important space to the Buddhism also⁷. Jabalpur has been an important place for Buddhism during Kalachuri's of Tripuri, A large number of Buddhist sculptures have been found from Gopalpur and Tripuri. Most of the sculptures found from here are displayed in the Rani Durgawati Museum Jabalpur. Recently during the excavation at Tripuri three major Tara sculptures were found which are one of the most elaborated Tara sculptures found from the region. The author have also discovered two Tara sculptures from Gopalpur⁸.

Tara is one of the most important goddess of Buddhism, according to the Hirananda Shastri, Tara holds the same place in Buddhism which Goddess Durga in Sanatism. Tara is accepted as the Sakti of Avalokiteshwara. In the Mahayana pantheon of Buddhism Tara is accepted as the mother of Buddha's and of Bodhisattva's⁹. Dr. Gupte has given an elaborative study of Tara in his book Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains¹⁰. The cult Tara was emerged sometime around fourth fifth century CE in Mahayana sect of Buddhism. In early days Buddhism has male principals and the emergence of Tara became very crucial as in Sanatanism Vishnu and Lakshmi, Shiva and Shakti. Emergence of Tara made notable changes or transformation with the influence of Tantricism in Mahayana Buddhism. A huge number of Tara sculptures came in light after 5th-6th century CE. Some notable sculptures are- Tara sculpture of Kanheri, Ellora, Aurangabad cave, another sculpture of Tara was found from Sirpur of 7th century CE. All these sculptures gives a powerful evidence of emergence of Tara during these centuries¹¹. B. Bhattacharya has identified and made a complete list of 24 forms of Tara and S.K. Saraswati has made a list of 100 varieties of Tara. It was 8th to 12th century CE when Tara gained a monumental popularity in Buddhism and a huge number of sculptures of Tara got introduced in country. From Rashtrakuta, Pala, to kalachuri's Tara worshipping became very popular.

Tara in Jabalpur

The Kalachuris' arrival in Tripuri (modern-day Tewar village, Jabalpur) signified a pivotal point in the region's political and cultural development. Their rule contributed to establishing a stable governance system and fostered progress in art and architecture. Tripuri (Tewar) became a key hub for artistic and craft pursuits. Excavations have uncovered numerous

artifacts, highlighting the Kalachuris' important role in shaping central India's artistic legacy. Significant monuments, such as the monolithic sculptures at Bandhavgarh, Rewa, and Dviayatana, and Triayatana temples in Amarkantak, demonstrate their innovative architectural and iconographic techniques. Temples with circular Garbhagrihas at Chandrehe and Mahsun showcase their experimental approach to religious structures and artistic design.

Regarding art, architecture, and iconography, the Chausath Yogini temple remains the sole existing structure that offers limited insights into Kalachuri art within the region. To date, over nine Tara sculptures have been documented in the area extending approximately 12 kilometers from Jabalpur, indicating the prominence of the Tara cult in this locale. These sculptures are characterized by elaborate ornamentation and are of two main types: one featuring a chaitya-like canopy (Chhatra) atop, and the other being plain. The Tara sculptures from Tewar are intricately detailed, with fine carvings visible upon them. The smallest Tara sculpture discovered in this region is housed within the Garbhagriha of the Shiva temple at Chausath Yogini in Bheraghat. Additionally, two recently unearthed Tara sculptures, although broken, exemplify the fine craftsmanship of Kalachuri art.

Identification of Tara

Tara is recognized as one of the most sacred and powerful deities within Buddhism. The identification of Tara in the region of Jabalpur is of particular interest, with several Tara sculptures having been recovered. Notably, two sculptures, which are in excellent condition and exhibit complete iconographical features, are housed in the Rani Durgawati State Archaeological Museum in Jabalpur. These sculptures were discovered near Tewar village, approximately 12 kilometers from Gopalpur. During a survey, an additional Tara sculpture was uncovered, now preserved in the Gauri Shanker Temple of Chausath Yogini in Jabalpur (**Plate 1**). This particular sculpture, documented by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1956, is smaller in size compared to other Tara sculptures from the region. During a visit to the Rewa Palace Museum, a Tara sculpture dated to the 11th century of the Kalachuri period was examined (**Plate 2**). This artifact shares similar iconographical features with the other sculptures from Jabalpur, with the primary difference being the absence of a chaitya-like chhatra on top.

During the Tewar excavation 3 Tara sculptures came in light during the exploration in Kudhan village which is near Tewar site^{12, 13}. These sculptures are in the custody of Archaeological Survey of India, Jabalpur Circle. In one of the sculpture on the top of hollow a sculpture of Buddha in Bhumisparsha is depicted. The found sculptures in Tewar excavation are highly ornamented and inscribed. These sculptures are iconographically very much identical to

the Tara sculptures of Rani Durgawati Museum. Various sculpture of Buddha is also found from Tewar and Gopalpur which is kept in Rani Durgawati Museum¹⁴. In Tewar excavation a head of Buddha is also found which indicates that this region was not only known for its Hindu Temples and Jain Temples but was also for Buddhism.

Iconography of Tara of Jabalpur

The Tara sculptures of this region provides elaborated iconographical features of Tara the sculpture displayed in Rani Durgawati Museum (Acc.3268) is in red sandstone. On the top of the sculpture and on Parikara 5 dhyanī Buddhas are carved including two cylindrical votive stupa's. Two male Gandharvas are also depicted on the top of this sculpture. The goddess is shown seating on a lotus pedestal in Ardhaparyanka posture. The halo behind the head of the goddess is ornamented and an two faced crocodile is carved on the top of the halo like an garland. The Goddess is shown wearing a crown, Kundala, Necklace, long beaded necklace, Kati bandha, Anklet, decorated Adhovastra, and Bajuband. Both the hands of the goddess are broken from elbow. The right leg of the goddess is shown resting on a lotus bud. Her right leg is broken between thigh and foot. On the both side of the sculpture two vyala's are also located. On the pedestal of the sculpture Kubera is carved holding the citrus fruit and a bag, on the either side of Kubera two devotees are also carved. A halo is also carved behind the head of Kubera. Two lions on either side, an horse and an headless elephant is also carved on pedestal. Two male devotee and an demigod and two goddesses are also carved on the pedestal. The Sculpture is engraved and carries Nagari Inscription of 11th 12th century CE and made of Sandstone. **(Plate-3)**. Another sculpture of Tara (Acc. E164) contains panch dhyanī Buddha's on the top of it. On either side of Parikara Gandharvas are depicted holding garland. This Tara sculpture is less ornamented than other found Tara sculptures of this region. Deity is shown seating on a lotus pedestal in Ardhaparyanka posture. The right leg of the deity is broken in between thigh and foot, while the knee of left leg is also broken. This sculpture projects the early iconographical features. On the Both side of the deity two female attendants are depicted in Tribhanga. Two male devotees are placed on the pedestal in Anjali mudra. The deity is shown wearing crown her Juda is visible very dominantly behind the head, Kundala, Necklace, Katibandha, adhovastra and Anklet. Both the hands of the deity are broken from the elbow. The Sculpture is made of sand stone and looks of 10th 11th Century CE and made of sandstone. **(Plate 4)**. Another Tara sculpture have been discovered by the author from Lakshmi Narayan Temple, Gopalpur, Jabalpur *Lat. 23.11573° Long. 79.824176°* Height- 37.5 Cm, Width- 32 Cm and Thickness- 14.5 Cm. made of sand stone. This is an inscribed Sculpture of Goddess Tara whose upper part is badly broken including head. On the left Parikara of the Sculpture broken Buddha sculpture is placed on a lotus pedestal.

The Buddha sculpture is broken above waist. On the both side of the sculpture two Vyalas are depicted. On the pedestal at right a female devotee is shown in Anjali Mudra and on the left side Dhyani Buddha is depicted whose face is chipped out. Two lions are also depicted on the pedestal below which two lined Nagari Inscription is engraved which is badly decayed. The Goddess Tara is shown seating on Padmasana her head is chopped off while her breasts are also chopped. Both hands of the goddess is also broken from the elbow near which the stream of lily flower is visible. The goddess is highly ornamented and she is shown wearing necklace, Bajuband, Kati Bandha, Anklet and ornamented Adhovastra. Both the side pillars of the sculpture is decorated with intensive floral designs. This sculpture is made of Sandstone and can be dated back to 11th-12th Century CE. **(Plate-5)**. One more Tara sculpture was found by the author from the same site of Gopalpur, 34x40x14, This sculpture of deity Tara is in Tribhanga posture which is broken below waist. The sculpture is highly deteriorated and the ornamentation and a number of attributes are lost. The goddess is shown wearing a crown and Kundala. She is shown with two hands, in her left hand she is shown holding lily flower. On the both side of the deity two attendants are visible but due to the rock quality it is not very clear to identify the ornamentation and type. On the basis of found Tara sculpture from this region the very sculpture is claimed as the sculpture of Tara. All three Tara Sculpture found from Tewar projects similar iconography type, which gives an idea that this sculpture is of Tara **(Plate 6)**. The Tara sculptures found from Tewar are still unpublished and much information regarding this not available, but from the photographs found from the region it is clear that these are more carved and elaborated than the found sculpture of this region.

Conclusion:-

Rani Durgawati museum, Jabalpur houses a collection of Buddha sculptures sourced from Tewar and the nearby areas of Gopalpur and Lamheta. These sculptures, dating back to the Kalachuri period (10th-12th Century CE), shed light on an important aspect of history. Contrary to the prevailing notion of the Kalachuris being predominantly patrons of Hinduism and Jainism, the discovery of numerous Buddha and Tara sculptures in Jabalpur and the mentioned region underscores their significant support for Buddhism. This unearths a compelling narrative, showcasing the Kalachuris as substantial patrons who played a vital role in preserving Buddhism in the region following the decline of the religion.

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Plates:-



Plate-1, Tara kept in Gauri Shankar Temple Bheraghat



Plate-2, Tara Sculpture kept in Rewa Palace Museum



Plate-3, Tara Sculpture Kept In Rani Durgawati Museum,



Plate-4, Tara Sculpture Kept In Rani Durgawati Museum



Plate- 5:- Tara 1, of Laksminarayana Temple



Plate- 6:- Tara 2, of Laksminarayana Temple

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