Chapter -9

THE BUDDHIST NARRATIVES

After the Satavahana period the importance of Buddhism in Karnataka seems to have declined considerably. During early Kadambas, not even a handful of evidence is forthcoming in respect Buddhism in this state. The Rajaghatta excavations however seem to indicate that as late as the 5th Century a few pockets of Buddhism prevailed. Under the Chalukyas of Badami the situation is still more disappointing. Fortunately, there are traces of Buddhist activity both in Badami and Aihole. In a natural cave between the Cave II and Cave III (Vaishnava) there is a bas relief of Bodhisattva Padmapani along with the *astabhayas*. But these are extremely damaged. Half way up the Meguti hill at Aihole, there is a storied structure facing north which is identified as a Buddhist *chaitya cum vihara*. The Buddhist affinity of this structure is established not only by the sanctum images of Buddha and depictions of *Dure-nidanas* and *Avidure-nidanas* (episodes connected with life of Buddha) (episodes connected with previous births of Buddha) in the door frames, but also by a two line inscription referring to a Buddhist monk named Mahendra who was the disciple of Anandasthavira. In this chapter we will consider the Buddhist themes appearing as narratives in the Aihole *chaitya cum vihara*.

**Selected Avidure-nidanas**

**Mahabhinishkramana of Gautama Buddha**

At dead of night Gautama left Kapilavastu on his horse *Kanthaka*, accompanied by Chhandaka to obtain enlightenment. After crossing the river
Anoma, he sent Chhandaka back along with the horse. This theme has been dealt with in considerable detail in the *Buddhacharita* of Asvaghosa it is explained that while the horse Kanthaka moved its hoofs were supported by the *Devas* in order not to make sound. Similarly when Gautama asked Chhandaka and Kanthaka to return, both were filled with grief and were reluctant to go back. Similarly when Gautama asked Chhandaka and Kanthaka to return, both were filled with grief and were reluctant to go back.\(^3\)

**Devadatta attacking on Buddha**

Devadatta, the cousin of Buddha grew envious day by day with the popularity of Buddha. Accordingly, he wanted to do away with the life of Buddha and was waiting for an opportunity. Once Buddha was resting Devadatta attempted on his life by throwing rocks at him (Fig. 9.4). But nothing happened to Buddha. Devadatta fled the place.\(^4\)

**Nalagiri Episode**

Devadatta had a deal with a elephant keeper to inebriate an elephant called Nalagiri by feeding it with sixteen pots of fiery liquor (Fig. 9.5) and enraged it with spikes to attack on Buddha when he moved about harming the people in the street of Rajagriha (Fig. 9.6). But when the elephant approached Buddha, it kneeled down before him in supplication Buddha platted and cajoled it and compassion\(^5\) (Fig. 9.7).

**Dure-nidanas**

**Aramadusa Jataka**

There was a gardener looking after the garden which belonged to a king. The gardener was feeding water to the plants daily. Once a big fair was held in the town. The gardener intended to go to the fair when a monkey assured him that it would perform watering duty with his friends while he is away. The gardener was happy and went to town. Then monkey called his friends and told them that the gardener had gone out to attend the fair. He would come in the evening. By that time we have to water all the plants. Then all the monkeys
brought mugs and started to fill water. One of the monkeys wanted to know how much water was to be put to each plant. Then the monkey leader told all the monkeys to pluck each plant and see to what depth the root has gone and put water according to the size of the root (Fig. 9.8). All the monkeys followed the suggestion. By the evening all the plants in the garden were lying unearthed on the ground.6

**Chulla Hamsa Jataka**

This is a story connected with geese whose king was named Dhatarattha. His commander in chief was Sumukha. One day some golden geese having browsed abundantly near the lake Manusiya came to Chitrakuta mountain. They informed Dhatarattha about the abundance of food near lake Manasiya. The king warned about the impending danger to his flock. But they were interested in going to Manasiya lake. Therefore the king himself went to the place along with his flock and was caught in a net laid by a flower. But in spite of his sufferings, he would not cry aloud because his folk were browsing to feed to their satisfaction. Once they were satisfied he made his flock alert. Together with the commander Sumukha the birds flew away to Chitrakuta. But Sumukha having found his king was not in the flock, returned to the spot and attempted to release the king at the cost of his own life. However the king attempts to test Sumukha through a dialogue. Meanwhile the fowler heard the dialogue and full of compassion, he protected and praised the Bodhisattva.7

**Surapanā Jataka**

When Brahmadatta was ruling Varanasi, the Bodhisatva was born in Brahmin family. When he grew up, he renounced worldly pleasures and left for the Himalayas. He attained higher knowledge and five hundred pupils were getting spiritual lessons under him. One day they expressed their desire to visit Varanasi during rainy season. The Bodhisatva permitted them to go. When they were in Varanasi, they were treated greatly by the ruler. But soon they lost their austerity. They enjoyed the best drink offered by the king and in the drunken mood, they danced and sang only to realize their mistakes in the morning. They
immediately ran back to the master in the Himalayas. Rebuking the ascetics Bodhisatva told that it happened to those who do not live under a master’s care, and told them not repeat the mistake.

**Sculptural Representations**

**Buddhist Chaityalaya-cum-Vihara, Aihole (Fig. 9.1)**

This is a storeyed structure. In the ground storey, it consists of a pillared verandah, an inner oblong vestibule and three cells arranged in a line parallel to the vestibule. The upper storey consists only of a verandah and a central cell partially cut into the rock. The stories connected with the *Jatakas* and the Buddha are found on the door frames of the vestibule and the central sanctum. *Binjadi-Ovaja* was craftsman of this monument.

**Mahabhinishkramana of Gautama Buddha (Fig. 9.2)**

The *garbhagriha* door frame of the Buddhist *Vihara* depicts two episodes of the great departure of Buddha. In the first Buddha is seated on a horse. *Chhatri* is shown over his head. The movement in the horse is skillfully rendered by its raised right leg, suggesting that the horse is coming out of the palace.

The related second panel (Fig. 9.3) shows horse without anybody mounted on it. The horse stands in a grieved posture, not ready to move.

**Devadatta attacking on Buddha (Fig. 9.4)**

The leftside doorway of the Buddhist *Vihara* depicts Devadatta’s attack on Buddha. Buddha is reclining below a tree. Devadatta is throwing a rock at Buddha.

**Nalagiri Episode (Fig. 9.5)**

The episode is depicted in two panels. In the lower panel elephant Nalagiri is rushing towards the people disturbing the people in the streets of city of Rajagriha.
In the upper panel the elephant is kneeling down (Fig. 9.7). It suggests the elephant’s surrender to Buddha. Buddha is treating the elephant with compassion. Behind him two monks stand and watch the incident in astonishment.

**Aramadusajataka (Fig.9.8)**

The panel represents the episode from the *Aramadusajataka*. A monkey is trying to lift up a tree to know the size of its root.

**Chulla-Hamsa Jataka (Fig. 9.9)**

The panel depicts two *hamsa* birds one above other separated by compartment. In front of these a person is seated with his hands in *anajali-mudra*. The two *hamsa* birds seem to be bird-king Dahatarattha and his commander Sumukha. The person who is saluting them is apparently the fowler attentively hearing to their dialogue on account of which the fowler’s mind is filled with compassion.

**Probably Surapanajataka (Fig. 9.10)**

The story is depicted in two panels. In the lower panel the followers of Bodhisatva are receiving a pot containing wine from king (?). In the upper panel two men are holding a bowl in their hands probably suggesting the followers of Bodhisatva. The small figure above is probably Bodhisatva. It seems that the followers of Bodhisatva are confessing their sin before him.

**Observations Depicted on Buddhist Narratives**

The narrative representations connected with the Buddhist chaitya-cum-vihara at Aihole are on the *sakhas* of the doorframes of the verandah and the sanctum cell. The door-frame comprises of thin bands or *sakhas*. It is in these *sakhas* that the narratives are noticed. Not surprisingly they are very small in size. The space available for the artist in such small panels was too limited to show the details. The relief is also not high. In view of this the identifications become difficult. Certainly the themes are numerous but only a few of them
can be identified with certainty. The descriptions of the themes in the previous paragraphs shows that the cave is essentially *Mahayanist* in affiliation.

In the case of *Nalagiri* episode and Gautama’s *Abhinishkramana* the artist has chosen to use sequential compartmentalization of the events in the episode. On the other hand, in the *Chulla-Hamsa Jataka* and *Aramadusaka Jataka* it is mono-scenic. All these narratives show good acquaintance of the artist with the Buddhist themes which may be the result of discourses of the Buddhist monks in the premises of the monument. One may add that the narratives also include what are probably *Asthabhayas*, Padmapani Bhodisattva etc. These need further examination for proper identification.
Notes and References


List of illustrations

9.1 Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.2 The great departure of Gautama Buddha, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.3 The great departure of Gautama Buddha, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.4 Devadatta attacks on Gautama Buddha, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.5 The elephant named Nalagiri drinking wine, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.6 The elephant named Nalagiri moving towards Buddha, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.7 Bodhisatva trying to lifts up Nalagiri, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.8 Aramadusajataka, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.9 Chuula-Hamsa Jataka, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.

9.10 Surapana Jataka, on the door frame, Buddhist *Chaitya-cum-Vihara*, Aihole.