ROYAL INSIGNIA

Royal insignia which is usually referred to as *parichchada* is what covers or surrounds a person i.e., paraphernalia in general; external appendages of royalty, insignia. The principal emblems of royalty which were supposed to represent the royal authority have been enumerated by Kalidasa. They comprise of throne, umbrella, a pair of fly-whisks, a crown with a central gem, sceptre, canopy of state, golden foot-stool, flags and banners etc. All these occur in the Ajanta paintings and some of them have already been dealt with under respective heads such as furniture, head-dresses etc. Only the following are discussed below.

1. Umbrella (Chhatra)

Chhatra was perhaps the most important symbol of sovereignty and, along with fly-whisk (*chāmara*), was

held in greater estimation than even the crown. Hence the king is **par excellence** the chhatrapati or the 'Lord of the umbrella'. Ancient works frequently mention the chhatra as the mark of royalty.

There are innumerable illustrations of chhatra at Ajanta. They are as follows.

1. **Chhatra with a flattish top.**

Many royal umbrellas have a flat top supported by a rod, probably wooden, and joined to the top by means of a cup-shaped neck. The chhatra (Pl. XXVII,1) in the Chāmpēya Jātaka (I) is fringed with pearl tassels. Another chhatra of this variety (Pl. XXVII,2) is decorated with broad, concentric bands (Mahājanaka Jātaka, I). It is akin to a stone parasol of the Kuahāna period which has similar concentric bands.

The chhatra with a flat top (Pl. XXVII,3) gives us a fair idea of the spokes that supported the top (Mahājanaka Jātaka, I). A banner is also tied to this chhatra.

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Pl. VIII.
Similar flat-topped umbrellas are depicted on 
Gupta coins.

2. Chhatra with a semi-circular top

There are many representations of this variety which include elaborately ornamented specimens as well. The one in the Mahājānaka Jātaka (I) is richly ornamented with pearl festoons across the top from which is also suspended a cluster of pearl strings (Pl. XXV,4). Another chhatra (Hamsa Jātaka XVII) is fringed with a network of pearl-strings and the interior of its top is decorated with a running frieze of geese (Pl.XXV,5).

A very similar chhatra was presented to Harṣa by Bhaṭkaravarmān.

This elaborate chhatra can be identified as the navadanda variety of the Yuktikalpataru which is said to be made of pure gold, cloth and strings of choice colour and decorated with golden knobs, figures of ducks etc. and fringed with pendants of

2. Agrawala, op.cit., p.167 (māuktika jāla parikara sitam)
of pearl clusters. It is recommended for all important state occasions such as coronation, royal marriages etc.

Simpler examples of this variety occur in many panels. Sometimes banners are tied to them (Siṅhale Avadāna, XVII). Parasols with banners tied to them are to be noticed on the Ghhatra type of Gupta coins.

For the materials used in the fashioning of parasols we have to resort to literary evidence. Some of the ancient works such as the Brhatsamhitā (Ch. 72) and the Yuktikalpataru (Ch. 43) deal the topic very exhaustively. According to the former "the white umbrella of the following description brings all round happiness and victory to a king. It is to be made of feathers of swans, cocks, peacocks or cranes; it must be covered all round with a fresh white silken cloth. It must be adorned with pearls and have garlands of pearls all around from its edges; its handle is made of crystal; the rod of a single wood is 6 cubits in

length, covered with pure gold and seven or nine joints. The extent or diameter is 6 cubits. It should be well-knit all over and adorned with 1 gems." The Yuktikalpataru in addition, prescribes that the umbrella should also be decorated with figures of ducks etc. and fringed with miniature fly-whisks. It further recommends such an umbrella 2 for all state occasions.

It cannot be said whether the umbrellas illustrated at Ajanta could be closed and opened at will. Some texts, however, make a mention of such umbrellas 3.

One of the most important factors that deserves special attention is that umbrellas were not used exclusively by the royalty as was the case with ancient Egyptians and Romans among whom only distinguished personalities were allowed to use it. In India even a common man used an umbrella which, however, was very simple and modest as against the

1. Vol. II, Ch.72, pp.589 ff.
3. Ibid.
rich royal parasola. At Ajanta even the monks are shown carrying an umbrella (Pl. XXVII, 6) which usually has a squarish top, probably of cloth, supported by a framework of spokes mounted on a rod. The most noteworthy feature of the umbrellas, used by common people at Ajanta is that they all have a squarish top, in contradistinction with the round-topped royal umbrellas. The shape, at first, appears rather odd. But that they were commonly used by ordinary people is confirmed by the Br̄hāhaśīśita which prescribes that "the umbrella of an ordinary person should be of a square form, capable of warding cold and heat".

I-Ts'ing gives a very accurate description of the umbrella used by commoners. He states that the umbrella was woven with bamboo sticks and was made up as thin as possible. It was about two or three feet in diameter. Sometimes it was woven with reeds instead of bamboo products; paper (probably palm leaves) was inserted in the weaving.

1. Vol. II, Ch.73, p.591. Dikshitar in his comment says that the rod of the umbrella should be square. But Varāhamihira mentions the square top in unmistakable terms and the same is amply borne out by the illustrations at Ajanta.
and the whole was varnished with lacquer. It is interesting to note that a very similar umbrella was in use till very recently in the Konkan.

2. **Fly-whisks (chāmara)**

A pair of fly-whisks (chāmara) was reckoned next in importance to chhatra as an emblem of sovereignty and along with the latter could, on no account, be given away. There are innumerable illustrations of fly-whisks at Ajanta. They all have a long handle with knobbed (Pl. XXVII,7) or gadrooned end (Pl. XXVII,8). The handle was also sometimes segmented (Pl. XXVII,9). They generally have a cup-shaped top in which a whisk is set. The fly-whisks were usually made of yak-tails imported from the Sub-Himalayan regions.

The handle, in many cases, might have been of wood. The *Arhatasamhitā* lays down that it "must measure one cubit or one and half, or even smaller cubit (with the fist closed). One made of auspicious

wood decked with gold or silver and set with all kinds of gems is favourable to kings." The Smritis also describe various kinds of chāmaras and speak of presenting them to the Brāhmaṇas on certain occasions to acquire merit. Fly-whisks, black and white in colour, were presented to Harsa by Bhāskaravarman.

3. Banners (dhvaja)

The banner is of great importance in a battle as the rallying point for soldiers in action, or for the assemblage of troops, who have a feeling of patriotic devotion to it. It is cherished as a point of military honour and the standard of a general is the upholder of the whole army.

There are many illustrations of banners at Ajanta; there is, however, no variety. They usually consist of a long staff probably wooden, to which the banner, a long strip of cloth, is tied. A banner in the Siṁhala Avadāna (XVII) bears vertical stripes.

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1. Vol. II, Ch.72, p.583.
and is adorned with a chāmara at the top (Pl. XXVII, 10). Another banner in the same panel is crowned with a set of three fly-whisks and a gem-set crest (Pl. XXVII, 11). A very similar banner (Pl. XXVII, 12) is depicted in the Sutasoma Jātaka (XVII). A banner (Pl. XXVII, 13) was sometimes fastened to a staff with a spmar-head at the top (Sutasoma Jātaka, XVII).

The banners are depicted in war scenes or processions or royal hunts and also in a scene showing the sermon of the Buddha wherein a large number of kings and princes are seen (XVII). They can, therefore, be taken to be individual rather than national. This is supported by references to them in literature which mention of individual standards by symbols, which were those of animal or birds such as the ‘ape-standard’ (vānara-dhwaja) of Arjuna.

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Sceptre

The sceptre was an important royal emblem which was used on state occasions. There is an excellent illustration of a sceptre at Ajanta (Happy Pair, I). It consists of a thick wooden staff decorated with beaded bands. On the staff is mounted a small rod, possibly of metal, which is crowned by jewel-studded, oval crest (Pl. XXVII,14).