CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The growth and development of Buddhist Iconography and Buddhist culture in India and other three neighbouring countries have been described in the preceding chapters. Now an attempt is being made to trace how far Buddhism influenced the art and iconography of India as well as to what extent Buddhism contributed to the development of the religious art in other three countries, e.g. China, Korea and Japan, already dealt with in preceding chapters.

Before the advent of Buddhist culture the sculptural art of India was yet to take a refined form. Some amount of crudity and roughness characterised the art forms and a primitive feature was prominent in the art object of the olden days. During the Harappan age the representation of trees, the animals and the human figures were found to have depicted a crude form. Nevertheless, an attempt to give a naturalistic form was not wanting in Indian art.

Buddhism created a great necessity of artistic activities or rather Buddhism had been instrumental in providing ample scope for the expression of creative mind of the artists of various periods beginning from the age of the primitive art of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The decorative panels in the Buddhist temples and various monuments, the images of icons installed in the temples and preserved in
the museums give us a clear impression about the Buddhist influence on the Indian sculptural art. The Buddhist art of India flourished under the patronage of different kings or Emperors of the various ruling dynasties both Buddhists and Hindus.

Asoka, the Mauryan Emperor was a great patron of Buddhism. Thus the art movement which flourished during his reign can broadly be called as the beginning of Buddhist art of India. In the second century B.C., when the Sunnas were the ruling family of India there appeared a large number of art objects in sculptures. But the next important period in the history of Indian art, i.e. the Kuşana period produced for the first time the image of the Buddha, in the form of human figure. Later, in the Gandhara period we find the evolution of the images of the Buddha. The Gandhara artists followed the style of art that was prevalent in Greece during the period under discussion. Thus an Indo-Hellenic art form came into existence. Moreover, this Gandhara artists, while making images, laid stress on the anatomical details and also on physical beauty; The artists, belonged to the Mathura School of art also laid much emphasis on the anthropomorphic representations of different Buddhist deities.

1. AAQI, p. 7.
2. The opinion of scholars, however, are divided on the actual date of appearance of the Buddha image.
The next important phase in the history of Indian art can be discerned from the examples of art of the Gupta period. This period witnessed a culmination of the earlier trends and tendencies. The classical concept in Indian sculpture reaches its supreme expression in what is described as the golden age of the Guptas.  

Thus important five schools of art, viz. the Mauryan School of Art (c. 320 B.C. to 185 B.C.), Surya School of Art (c. 185 B.C. to 320 A.D.), Gandhara School of Art (c. 150 B.C. to 450 A.D.), Mathura School of Art (c. 200 B.C. to 600 A.D.), and the Gupta School of Art (c. 320 A.D. to 650 A.D.), helped the Indian art tradition to reach a great height.

For our purpose of indicating the spread of Buddhist influence beyond the geographical boundary of Indian peninsula, the spiritual motherland of Buddhism, a precise discussion on pre-Buddhist art of the neighbouring countries would be immensely helpful.

In China from the T'ang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) to Ching dynasty (1644-1912 A.D.) a huge amount of art works were produced. All of these works prove the quantum of Buddhist influence on Chinese art. Much before the T'ang, Shang (1600-1100 B.C.), Cho (1100-256 B.C.) and the Han (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) dynasties also witnessed a great variety of works of art produced during these periods.

1. SIS, p. 134.
But the pre-Buddhist art of China was also not of a very refined nature as compared to the art objects of the Buddhist period. With the advent of Buddhism new art tradition evolved in China. During the reign of T’ang rulers the new influence is clearly revealed. The periods from the early times to the T’ang era witnessed a long process of evolution, changes and development. These changes occurred not only in art but also in social and political ideas. The T’ang dynasty can be regarded both as a climax and a new beginning in the history of China. It was already mentioned in this work (p.no. 56) that the Gupta style of sculptures (evolved during c. 320-650 A.D.) exercised considerable influence on the sculptures of the T’ang dynasty (c. 618-960 A.D.). The earliest Buddhist art found in China consists of representations of the Buddha, Buddhist trinities etc. One of the important bronze Buddha figures from Hopei is a strong reminiscent of the Gandhara style of Indian sculpture (c. 150 B.C. - c. 450 A.D.)

But an analytical study of Buddhist art in China proves that immediately after the advancement of Buddhism in China, the Buddhist art objects did not yet give up the outer coating of the traditional look. Both in doctrine and in form of art Indian Buddhist had to adjust itself to the Chinese tastes and ideas. But the descriptions of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist divinities
given in the Buddhist texts, provided the guide line of iconographic features.

It may not be irrelevant here to mention that Buddhist art of image making had its beginning in China at a period much later than that of India. On the other hand it may be said that when Buddhist art of China began to take its shape, Indian religious art reached its zenith.

The Buddhist art in Japan marked a gradual and steady development both in style and in form through different periods. The pre-Buddhist art of Japan belonging to the Jōmon, Yayoi and the Kofun periods (c.3000 B.C. to 700 A.D. or c.10,000 B.C. to 700 A.D.) did not exhibit artistic skill of a high grade. The Buddhist period of Japan had its beginning from 538 A.D. and it was broadly extended upto a period prior to the Meiji rule (1868 A.D. to 1912 A.D.). From the Asuka period (538 A.D. to 545 A.D.) the Buddhist art underwent interesting changes for the betterment through the various periods e.g. the Nara period (645 A.D. to 794 A.D.), the Heian period (794 A.D. to 1185 A.D.), the Kamakura period (1185 A.D. to 1333 A.D.), the Muromachi period (1333 A.D. to 1573 A.D.), the Momoyama period (1573 A.D. to 1615 A.D.) and the Edo period (1615 A.D. to 1867 A.D.)

With the gradual acceptance of Buddhism the art and culture of Japan developed through the strong influence of the Buddhist thoughts, ideas and beliefs. The art of the
Buddhist art period of Japan was overcrowded with marvellous sculptures as well as paintings of different Buddhist deities and also with the depiction of stories taken from the life of Śākyamuni. Moreover, various line drawings for use in esoteric rituals and religious paintings on temple walls, doors, pillars etc. bear the testimony to the excellent artistic activities of the Japanese Buddhists.

The art of the Asuka period witnessed the influence of the Chinese and Korean artistic activities. The next important period i.e. the Nara period is regarded as the golden period of Buddhist art in Japan. The world famous paintings on the walls of the Horyu-ji temple was done during this period. These paintings show close artistic affinity with the paintings of the T'ang dynasty of China and Ajanta cave paintings of India. Heian period of Japanese Buddhism marked a revolutionary changes with the introduction of two new doctrines e.g. Tendai and Shingon. These two new sects laid stress on the image worship. The Mandala paintings are important features of this art tradition. The Mandala paintings were used for ritualistic purposes. This Mandala paintings had an abiding influence on the similar art of the Buddhist countries, especially of China and Japan, the countries of our study. Next our attention is strongly drawn towards the forms and
features of different religious sculptures and paintings of the Kamakura period. From the sculptural point of view the Buddha figures did not deviate much in features from those of the earlier periods. But the remarkable changes are the vigorous expression of the figures and realistic nature of the sculptures.

In the later periods of Muromachi, Monoyama, Edo and Meiji are witnessed a development of new art traditions. In the Muromachi period a new form of art was characterised which was known as Sumi-e or Suiloku ga (Indian ink paintings). We should also mention here that when the art of image making began in Japan, the Indian religious art reached its peak. As it is already mentioned, the Buddhist religious art of China also originated much later as compared to the origin of Indian Buddhist art. It can, therefore, be said that Indian art and culture for natural reasons strongly influenced China and Chinese art cast an influence on Japan. Chinese art of the pre-Buddhist periods were not of refined nature and the features of primitive art were prominent. Yet the Chinese art of the pre-Buddhist period possess a beauty of its own. The Japanese art of pre-Buddhist periods contained primitive features. Thus the advent of Buddhism laid greater emphasis on art and culture of China, Korea and

1. EWA, VIII, pp. 523.
Japan, the countries of our study.

In our humble observation, it has been seen that the pre-Buddhist art of China, Korea or Japan had not developed into Buddhist art, nor the style and theme of the pre-Buddhist art had any continuity in the Buddhist period.

Anyway, while dealing with our main subjects of Japanese and Chinese iconography what becomes prominent is that the Buddhist artists of China and Japan reached an applauding state of perfection in the field of sculptural art and art of painting. It should be noted here that in many cases the Japanese artist surpassed the Chinese masters and they created a beauty that became essentially Japanese in character especially from the Heian period.

Other important features are that the image makers did not hesitate to add their own ideas in giving shape and form of the images. Thus in many of images a great deviation can easily be noticed when they are compared with Indian Buddhist images.

It is also interesting to note that many deities whose images are rare in India, Chinese and Japanese temples are preserving a good number of images of those deities. Moreover, the deities concerned are greatly revered by the common people whereas they are almost forgotten in India, the land of their origin.