chapter IV

analysis of the reliefs

(i) thematic evolution
(ii) analysis of the style
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE RELIEFS

An examination of the reliefs reveals several variations in the themes and a marked evolutionary pattern in the style of presentation of the details. A preliminary scan shows that in different reliefs, depiction of the same story on different monuments, as well as on different architectural members of the same monument, were not only sculpted at different periods of time but also by different artists. Many theories have been forwarded regarding these aspects by scholars, all hypothetical. Their discussion is outside the scope of this study. However, the more significant among the reasons, only by virtue of their possessing an element of logic, are mentioned briefly here.

The three monuments, and therefore the carvings on them, have been proved, on the basis of the contents of the inscriptions
as also on palaeographic grounds, to belong to three different periods, mentioned in the Introduction to this work. Secondly, different parts of particular monuments are similarly proved to have been constructed at different periods, as for instance, the four gateways of the Stūpa I at Sāñchi, and the different layers of casings around the Amarāvati Stūpa. It follows as a natural corollary that the reliefs in these cases will show different methods of delineation of the same legend. In cases where different styles are apparent on a monument that was entirely constructed and embellished during the reign of one dynasty only, as those on the Bhārhit stūpa during the rule of the Śuṅgas, one can only make certain assumptions: that the different reliefs may have been carved by artists possessing different degrees of skill in carving; some may have been carved by artists from other regions who had already acquired a mastery of sculpting in stone and shared their ideas with the local artists; or, simply, the native artists developed their skill as their work progressed. The thrust of the present work deals with the development noticed in the theme of the different representations and the style of execution of the reliefs. These two areas have been discussed under two separate headings:

a) Variations in the themes
b) Analysis of style

In elaborating these two aspects I have referred to some more reliefs other than those described in the preceding pages when it has been necessary to refer to them in order to emphasize a point.
SECTION: 4.1

VARIATIONS IN THE THEMES

The discussion has been undertaken independently of the chronological factor, both as regards the different monuments as well as the different reliefs on some of these monuments which are known to have been constructed at different points of time.

Although the monuments selected for the study have a chronological hierarchy, it is not possible to trace an evolutionary process in the themes on these monuments. For evolution, in substance or in form, implies that there is a development. Usually, this development is signified by various stages, an advanced one succeeding a less advanced one. Such a development presupposes a chronological sequence. If, however, one comes across such a phenomenon on the same monument in a single period of time, in other words, if there are representations of the same theme embodying lesser and more developed forms, then the question of a connection between evolution and chronology needs to be investigated.

The answer is to be found in the process of artistic creation. The painter or the sculptor first visualizes the work that he intends to execute, and in the process toys with several variations in the forms and modes of expression, some simple, others complex (evolved), to all of which he might not give concrete expression, but select only a few. The choice would be subjective. This gives rise to variety and evolution in a limited sense.
In a much broader sense, the same or another artist might attempt to improve upon the previous handiwork, at a different place and at a later time. Here it is not the mental process alone that is involved but the actual experience of executing the visualization that becomes more important. The artist takes a step further on the basis of his experience. Also involved is the reaction of the onlooker — indicating the success or otherwise of the artist's attempt. This gives the artist a chance to improve upon his own work or those of the others.

In the depiction of the four major events from the final life of the Buddha, the first group consists of those that illustrate the event very simply by depicting the symbol of the event and only a few additional details. Thus, the Birth is depicted by the Gajalakshmi symbol comprising the figure of Lakshmi and two elephants, and a few lotuses around them, as on a circular medallion at Bharhut (fig. 1) and on a pillar of the ground balustrade of Stupa II at Sanchi (fig. 2). The lotus of Lakshmi in the Bharhut scene issues out of a decorated jar. In all these Lakshmi stands erect, her hands close against the body.

In the next group, the number of surrounding lotuses have increased and, at the same time, some other emblems, like umbrellas, banners, and garlands have been added at different places within the relief. Umbrellas occur above the head of Lakshmi (figs. 3, 4), or above the backs of the elephants (fig. 5), lotuses and buds above the elephants and on the
corners (figs. 3, 4), while small garlands hang from pegs above the elephants (figs. 6, 7). Further, Lakshmi is now shown in two postures, standing and seated. In both types, the right hand is raised and holds a lotus flower, except in the examples at Bhārhut and Stūpa II at Sāncchī where it is placed on the left breast (figs. 1, 2). The left hand usually rests on the hip in the standing types (figs. 3, 8), while in the seated one it is placed on the thigh (figs. 4, 6, 7, 9), and holds a lotus in some examples (figs. 4, 7). In two specimen of this second class, the goddess's lotus seat issues out of a vase, one plain (fig. 9), and the other decorated (fig. 7).

In the standing varieties, the posture of those in the Sāncchī reliefs is in the traditional tribhanga pose, but in the context of Buddhist art this posture conforms to the mode of birth of Siddhārtha described in the legends, that is, from his mother's right side; hence the goddess here has a projecting right hip (figs. 3, 4).

In the seated type, one leg is drawn up onto the lotus seat, the other hangs down and rests on another lotus serving as a stool (figs. 4, 6, 7, 8). In a few cases the elephant stands on a platform placed over the lotus pedestal (figs. 1, 2, 9).

In another group we see the artist experimenting with a very different type of idea; the lustrating elephants have been eliminated and only Lakshmi is shown standing or seated on a full-blown lotus surrounded by other lotuses. Two examples of this variety are, one inside a circular format on a pillar of
Stūpa II (fig. 10), and the other on a square end-block of the South Gate of Stūpa I (fig. 11), both at Sānci.

The crystallization of this last theme occurs on a panel each of the Stupas at Amarāvati (fig. 12), and Nāgarjunakonda (fig. 13), in which Lakshmi is given her true identity, that is, Māyadevī, and is seen standing in the posture of giving birth in the manner described in the legends. Both reliefs also show the footprints on the roll of cloth held by the guardians of the four quarters who received the infant who, legend says, walked seven steps immediately on birth.

In many depictions, the miraculous nature of the birth itself is emphasized; in these, both Lakshmi and the elephants have been dispensed with and replaced by a bunch of lotuses, the traditional symbol of miraculous birth of divinities, springing out of a water vase. The symbol is termed Pūrṇāghaṭa. The depictions occur on all the monuments, at Bharhut inside half and full circles (figs. 14, 15), on pillars of Stūpa II (figs. 16, 17), some square end-blocks of the gateways of Stūpa I (18, 19), and on several casing slabs of the Amarāvati Stūpa (20).

The numerous roundels on all the monuments depicting only a full-blown lotus may also be placed in this category (figs. 21, 22a, 22b, 23).

The general scheme of the Pūrṇāghaṭa depictions is uniform on all the monuments. Where there are variations they occur in
the form of insertions within the bunch of flowers, and in the shape of the vase holding it. In some swans are perched on the central (fig. 15) or the side lotuses (figs. 24a, 24b, 25); in another a pair of prancing lions are ranged on either side of the centre lotus (fig. 26a). In yet another a śrīvatsa occurs on top of the centre lotus (fig. 26b).

Most vases are shaped like the conventional water pot, though those at Amaravati are exaggeratedly globular. In this standard variety the bodies of some vases are plain (figs. 17), but many are elaborately decorated with necklaces made of lotus petals around the neck and a bead-and-reel design encircling the body (figs. 15, 18, 19). In the Amaravati vase there is an intricate leafy design at the base and it extends upwards till the middle of the body of the pot (fig. 20).

Among those having different shapes, one is in the form of a fanned-out leaf (fig. 24a), another like a half-lotus (fig. 27), yet another is not shaped as a vase at all but like a tortoise (fig. 28), while one is shaped like a half-śrīvatsa (fig. 29).

In the depictions of the other three legends of this group, namely, Enlightenment, First Sermon and Mahāparinirvāna, a very simple variety is not noticed, the symbols being surrounded by several of the emblems mentioned in the Birth depictions.
In the Enlightenment illustrations, the tree of enlightenment is in some cases enclosed by a railing, as on a pillar of Stūpa II (fig. 30), on some narrow uprights on Stūpa I (fig. 31), and on a pillar of the stūpa at Amarāvatī (fig. 32). In the Sānchī examples are a pair of umbrellas around the tree, an umbrella also atop the tree in the Stūpa I relief, while in the Amarāvatī depiction we find a pair of lotuses on long slender stalks. In a half-circle at Bodhgaya, the umbrellas are fixed outside the railing of the tree (fig. 33). In all these, garlands hang from the shields of the umbrellas.

Then there are types in which there is no railing and beneath the tree is a seat. This variety occurs on all the monuments, specially on the Great Stūpa at Sānchī which shows several depictions. But except that which occurs on an upright of the East Gate (fig. 34a), in the others a different type of element has been introduced, namely, worshippers of several kinds. These reliefs have been discussed separately. In many of both types garlands are inserted within the foliage of the tree and also hang from the ends of the shield of the umbrellas.

In the depiction of the First Sermon, the wheel generally forms the crowning element of a pillar. It rests on the heads of four lions standing back-to-back on an abacus which in turn is fixed on the base of an inverted vase that caps the top of the pillar. The same type of emblems as in the bodhi-tree
reliefs is found here also, arranged to suit the changed shape of the symbol. Thus garlands encircle the rim of the wheel and are suspended from its rim, as in the pillar reliefs of Stūpa II (figs. 34b, 35), and on a medallion relief at Bhārhut (fig. 36). In a few depictions on Stūpa I, banners are fixed on pegs on either side of the shaft of the pillar (fig. 37). In one example on Stūpa I (fig. 38a), and another at Amaravati (fig. 38b), instead of lions there are elephants. The shaft of the pillar is sometimes very short (figs. 36, 39a), but mostly it is tall (figs. 34, 35, 37). A prominent flute is noticed at the centre of the shaft in some of the taller types (figs. 35, 37). The space between the pillar shaft and the side edges of the frame is free in a depiction on Stūpa I (fig. 39b), but generally it is filled up with many types of insertions. In some there is a row of lotuses (fig. 35), in others a wavy floral scroll (fig. 40), but more often the inclusions are human worshippers (figs. 35, 38, 39). Again, some variations are observed in the placing of the four crowning animals; sometimes they are close to each other (figs. 34b, 37), in others they stand comfortably (figs. 35, 38a); in both, the side ones sometimes hold garlands in their mouths.

In some specimens the wheel rests on a throne, as on a pillar depiction of Stūpa II (fig. 41), and on several end-blocks of Stūpa I (figs. 42, 43), and in a pillar relief on Stūpa III (fig. 44), in most cases surrounded by worshippers. On the throne of the Stūpa II relief and on that of another depiction
on Stūpa III (fig. 45) there is a tri-ratna on a lotus wheel. In one example on Stūpa I the wheel rests directly on the ground (fig. 46). In a roundel from Mathurā, the throne is very high and is composed of many tiers (fig. 47).

The number of spokes in the wheels appears to be arbitrary with no particular significance to it in different reliefs. However, the Amarāvati wheels are closely packed with spokes whose number cannot be counted easily (fig. 48).

The last episode of this group, Maha-parinirvāna is represented by a stupa. In the simple types it is composed of only a plain dome with a railing at the base as on a pillar depiction on Stūpa III (fig. 49). On an example on a pillar of Stūpa II, the drum is very elongated and is decorated closely with vertical rows of rosettes and Śrīvatsas as well as two railings (fig. 50). In most specimens on Stūpa I the stupa is surrounded by worshippers, details of which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The worshippers around the symbols of the last three episodes constitute humans, animals and semi-divine beings. The number of these devotees varies from relief to relief, ranging from two to numerous, with many varieties in the scheme, but the number is always even. Thus in some reliefs both are male (fig. 51), or one male and one female (fig. 52); four male (fig. 42), or two male and two female (figs. 36a); or two male and two semi-divine worshippers (figs. 53, 54, 55); a couple
and two semi-divine figures (fig. 56); if the number is six, four are male and two female (fig. 39a), or two couples and two semi-divine figures (figs. 57, 58). Similarly, when the number of male and female devotees is numerous, then also they are divided equally on both sides (fig. 59).

Two specimens depicting this episode suggest the locale where it took place by a herd of deer, in one example at the foot of the pillar (fig. 59), and in the other on a separate panel below the scene of the event (fig. 60).

Sometimes, however, there is an unequal division of the types of devotees. On a relief depicting Parinirvana at Bharhut, the actual number of male devotees is five but they have been dispersed in such a manner that they appear to be six, because one of them is shown twice with back and front views performing circumambulation (fig. 61). But on the Amaravati relief of Enlightenment the number of male devotees is five and only five are seen, along with two semi-divine figures so that the total number is seven (fig. 62). Another depiction on this second monument shows a single female devotee near a stupa (fig. 63).

As evident from the above discussion, while the number of human devotees varies, those of the semi-divine ones remains a constant at two.

In the types showing devotees, the symbols have been made conspicuous by additions to the elaborations on them. Thus the
tree of enlightenment is surrounded by a large-sized chaitya variously decorated. At Bharhut it has a bodhi-chaitya around it (fig. 64). On two specimens at Sānc̣hi showing similar chaityas, one has three arched-windows on the roof (fig. 65), while another is two-storeyed, the lower storey having six pillars on vase-bases around a throne on which are three trinātras (fig. 66). In the last relief there are no devotees.

In the dharmachakra depictions, the capital of the pillar-support of the wheel is very elaborate, being comprised of a decorated vase capital crowned by an abacus, which in the Stūpa I depictions consists of a flat slab of stone (figs. 37, 39), while in depictions on Stūpas II and III it is terraced (figs. 34, 38, 52, 60), all surmounted by winged animals seated back-to-back. In a depiction at Bodhgaya, the wheel is enshrined within a chaitya (fig. 67).

The relief-stūpas are shown with a drum, of short height in some (figs. 56), and elongated in others with one or two railings forming a divider of the two parts (figs. 51, 55, 61). In some the dome is plain (fig. 58), while in others it is decorated with garlands, ranging from a single one (figs. 50, 55, 56), to several that form an interlaced pattern (figs. 51, 61, 63, 68).

The animal devotees are generally elephants. In a Bharhut panel elephants are seen worshipping the bodhi tree of Sakyamuni (fig. 69), while in a Bodhgaya half-roundel three elephants are seen approaching the tree with offering of
garlands (fig. 70). Elephants worshipping the bodhi tree or a stūpa also occur on gateway architraves at Sānchi (fig. 71) and on slabs at Amarāvatī (fig. 72).

In one architrave of the Great Stūpa at Sānchi different kinds of animals worship the bodhi tree of Śākyamuni (fig. 73).

Some First Sermon and Parinīvāṇa reliefs at Amarāvatī are very elaborate. The pillar shaft is made up of a vertical series of four animals seated back-to-back alternating with water jars, and on either side riders on prancing horses moving away from the wheel. At the foot of the pillar is an elaborate high-backed throne on which are placed two round cushions, while below the throne, on a slab, are carved a pair of footprints (fig. 74). In another specimen the portions with animals alternate with dwarfs (fig. 48).

The relief-stūpas on the casing slabs at Amarāvatī introduce the figure of the Buddha who is seen at the centre of the drum seated or standing, in abhaya-mudra (fig. 75, 76). In some specimens the entire stūpa is lavishly decorated with various kinds of motifs, lions, nagas, scenes from Jātakas, and at the centre of the drum, a nimbate Buddha in abhaya-mudra (fig. 77), or a figure of the Nāga Muchalinda (fig. 78), or, in a few cases, the symbolical representation of First Sermon with a throne at the foot of the pillar and devotees (fig. 79).
The discussion of these four events shows clearly that at Bharhut the event itself was important, hence it has been shown simply, surrounded by a few devotees. At Sanchi, the devotional aspect begins to get priority so that the number of worshippers increases appreciably. Sometimes this aspect was more important as shown in some specimens in which the size of the symbol has been made very small in order to accommodate several devotees (figs. 46, 59). At Amarāvati, the Buddha is used more as a decorative device, considering his numerous figures which are inserted at every possible place.

In the reliefs belonging to the second category of reliefs those that have a central character as the pivot of the legend, as in the Dream episode, or some Jātakas like Shaddanta, or Mahākapi, there is an increase in the number of the human figures around this pivot from Bharhut to Amarāvati. Thus, the number of attendants around Maya are three in the Bharhut relief (fig. 80), and several in the Amaravati one (fig. 81). Similarly, in the Shaddanta, Vessantara and Mahākapi depictions, the Bharhut reliefs show only few additional figures besides the chief one; whereas the at Sāncchi and Amarāvati crowds of people are gathered around all the events. Further, in the case of the Jatakas, the Bharhut depictions bring into focus the particular virtue (pāramitā) that a Jātaka emphasizes. Thus, in the representation of the Mahākapi Jātaka, the focus is on the sacrifice of the Bodhisattva to save his subjects, and on the obedience of the king who listens to the Great One’s discourse.
on the right actions of a leader. At Sānchī the issue has become clouded by the greater prominence given to the king and his retinue approaching the tree to kill the monkeys. The leader is so high up in the frame that he cannot be easily picked out. In a painted depiction on Cave X at Ajanta, the Bodhisattva's heroism has been given the same importance as that of the grief of the queen who, now remorseful, faints at the sight of the tusks. In fact it is this scene which is more in the limelight (figs. 82 - 90).

In the remaining reliefs from the final-life events, one perceives a shift in the emphasis of the themes. Whereas in the reliefs so far discussed there has been in all cases a particular focus, with variety in the type and volume of the secondary elements around it, in the present instances there is no such focus.

The representations reveal a different line of thinking on the part of the artists of the different regions. From a particular legend, reliefs on the different monuments emphasize different incidents. In the Temptation of Māra episode, for instance, the Bhārhat relief depicts the defeat of Māra in the battle waged by him against Siddhārtha. Further, gods were said to have celebrated the event. Hence the relief shows Māra seated dejectedly on the bottom left corner surrounded by the jubilating gods (fig. 91 lower panel).

At Sānchī many depictions of this incident occur on gateway architraves and pillar panels of Stupa I; the emphasis is
mostly on the battle of Māra (fig. 92). Inserted into this theme are other associated events, one relief depicting the six years’ austerities practised by Siddharta (fig. 93), and another the abandoning of this penance when he accepts food in the form of milk-rice offered by Sujāta (fig. 94). This relief also shows the daughters of Māra, first trying to tempt the meditating Bodhisattva, and then paying him homage along with their father.

The Amaravati representations depict all the main segments of the episode: the battle, its end and, Siddharta’s achievement of his goal (fig. 95).

Māra’s acceptance of defeat and his gracious farewell to Siddhārtha appear to have appealed specially to the artists in this region as it forms the theme of reliefs at Goli (fig. 96) and Nagārjunakondā (fig. 97).

A Mathura relief shows only the daughters of Mara trying to charm Siddharta (fig. 98).

From the Kāsyapa legend, a single episode, that of the Kasyapas doing obeisance to the Buddha, is depicted on a fragment at Amarāvatī (fig. 99). The same episode is depicted at Sānchi with a great deal of detail, along with other related incidents of this story, namely, the Buddha’s victory over the black serpent (fig. 100), and the miracle of his walking over the river Niranjana (fig. 101).
A Bharhut relief depicts only a single scene from the legend of the *War of Relics*, that of one of the rival claimants returning with the relic (fig. 102). Depictions on Stūpa I show both the war and the peaceful outcome, with all the seven rival chiefs being represented (fig. 103). At Amarāvati, the theme is expanded, for we observe not only the incidents of the Sānchī reliefs but also the scenes of celebration by the Mallas of Kusinagar in one relief (fig. 104), and in another all these as well as the that of Drona in the act of division of the relics (fig. 105). In none of the Amarāvati reliefs are all the seven claimants represented.

Three depictions of the *Visit of Asoka* occur on Stūpa I, each having a different focus. On an architrave and a pillar panel the emphasis is on the emperor proceeding towards the sacred tree which is, however, invisible in the pillar relief. While in the pillar relief the emperor is accompanied by a few figures (fig. 106a), the architrave relief is very elaborate, the royal party comprising numerous people (fig. 106b). In another pillar panel here it is the emperor’s sorrow on learning that the sacred tree was withering that has been highlighted (fig. 107). The relief shows the emperor going forth, apparently towards the tree which cannot be seen, being supported by two female figures.

Of the Nalaqiri episode several depictions occur at Amaravati in all of which the elephant is seen to be the most important actor since he is shown in a central position, the Buddha
being placed at one end of the frame, as in the reliefs inside a roundel (fig. 108), on the drums of relief-stūpas on casing slabs (fig. 109a), and inside small panels on the railings around domes of relief-stūpas of other casing slabs (fig. 109b). In the casing slab reliefs only the final gesture of the elephant is shown, viz., kneeling before the Buddha, who in all depictions is nimbate and stands with his right hand in abhaya-mudrā. One example of this event of the Amarāvati type occurs at Goli (fig. 110).

In a lintel relief at Amarāvati, both the Buddha and the elephant are obviously equally important, therefore they are both centrally placed (fig. 111).

In all depictions of the miracle of the Rise/Walk in Air, the event itself was regarded as important and is suitably emphasized in various manner. At Bharhut one relief depicts the preaching to the people by the Buddha after he had risen up, shown by an enshrined dharmachakra suspended in space being worshipped by devotees, and, below it, King Prasenajit in a chariot, for the miracle is said to have been witnessed by him (fig. 112), and in another the walk across the skies shown by means of four thrones placed horizontally one against the other (fig. 113).

At various places on the Stupa I at Sānchi, the rise in air is shown by a slab of stone placed above the the bodhi tree and heads of figures (figs. 114, 115). A pillar panel does
not show the tree, but the seat is in the form of a thin slab which cuts the panel across its middle, the amazed people arranged in a horizontal row below it (fig. 116).

Whatever the reason, in all representations of the Jetavana incident there is a lack of proper focus. In the depictions at Bharhut and Amaravati the covering of the ground by coins and the buildings constructed on the garden later are more important. The depiction of the core incident, that of gifting the garden to the Buddha by the merchant Anathapindika, shown at Bharhut by a tree-in-railing, and the merchant pouring water on it from a pot, is more of an apology, overlapped as it is by the adjacent elements (fig. 117). At Sanchi and Amaravati the buildings were more important, hence they are shown prominently (figs. 118, 119).

In the depictions of the Visit of Indra at Indrasala Guha the emphasis is on Indra and his retinue of gods who are centrally placed and are in great numbers generally, the meditating Buddha inside the cave being slightly removed from focus. (figs. 121, 122, 123). In a Mathura slab, although the figure of the Buddha in the cave is big enough so that it cannot miss the eye, it is again the visiting gods who are at the eye-level of the panel (fig. 124).

Suñja Episode: At Sanchi it is a minor event compared to the main subject matter of the relief, namely the attack perpetrated by Mara, therefore it occurs at one end of the panel, virtually squeezed against that end (fig. 94). But in
a medallion at Amaravati it is a significant episode and forms the major theme of the relief (fig. 125).

In the depiction of the **Offering of Honey by a Monkey**, the scene on Stupa I at Sāñchi has been construed as one emphasizing veneration of the Buddha so that we see not only the monkey but also several devotees around the tree-and-throne (fig. 126). At Amaravati, where two depictions are found, it is the part played by the monkey which has been given significance, hence no other types of worshippers are present (fig. 127).

The Buddha's **Descent at Sankissa** is represented at Bhārhut and Sāñchi. The Bhārhut relief depicts not only the ladder by which the Buddha descended but also those of Indra and Brahma, as also the Buddha's subsequent preaching to the people by a tree-and-throne motif (fig. 128). To the Sāñchi artists only the Buddha's descent was of significance, hence only one ladder is seen, the preaching to the people represented by the tree-and-throne on the bottom step. Combined with this event is the immediately preceding one, that of the Buddha's preaching to the gods in Tushita heaven, being depicted by a tree-and-throne on the top step of the ladder (fig. 129). A Mathurā relief shows three ladders and three figures on the bottom of each, the Buddha being distinguished by his taller figure (fig. 130).

On the Amaravati stupa certain incidents are given importance that are not found elsewhere, or are shown as a minor event.

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To the latter class belongs the depiction of the incident of Siddharta having a bath in the Niranjana river prior to his proceeding to the pipal tree on its bank and seating down to meditate, which culminated in his achievement of Enlightenment. It occurs on the space above the Sujata depiction, and is shown by a series of footprints moving across the river (fig. 125 top section).

Some depictions at Mathura also show scenes not portrayed elsewhere, like that of a kneeling female figure at the bottom of the middle of three ladders in the depiction of the Descent at Sankissa; the figure has been identified with the nun Utpalavarna paying homage to the Buddha (fig. 131).

The entire subject matter was sometimes condensed to representation of a single scene that emphasized the presence of the Buddha. In a Nagarajunakonda relief of the Relic legend, it is the person of the Buddha embodied in the relic which is emphasized (fig. 132). The relief shows a relic placed prominently at the centre, being carried on the heads of several devotees, and the most important of the rival kings, Ajatasatru, shown transporting it away with great pomp and ceremony as recorded in a text (Davids, 1886: 609).

With regard to certain legends, different compositional schemes sometimes occurs at different places on the same monument, as in the depiction of the Great Departure on the stupa at Amaravati. Some are very simple showing only a
riderless horse being led by the groom (fig. 133). Others show gods celebrating the event, first only two (fig. 134), and then many (fig. 135), along with four dwarfs holding on to the horse's hoofs. Depictions which show these latter features are those that also show the figure of Siddhārtha mounted on the horse. In all examples of this event, an umbrella with a very tall shaft is held above the horse.

In the figural stage of depiction of this event, other incidents from the legend are also shown, such as Siddhārtha taking leave of the groom and the horse. One example occurs in the fluted area between two roundels of a pillar (fig. 136). The associated events of this legend have been given greater importance in some reliefs on other monuments also, such as that in two Nagarjunakonda reliefs, one depicting the leave-taking incident referred to above (fig. 137), and another, the lamentation at the palace of Siddhārtha's father, Suddhodana, when the groom Chandaka returns accompanied only by the horse Kanthaka (fig. 138).

On two examples at Sānchi also it is one of the associated events of this episode that form the central theme of the depictions, namely, the Four Drives. The theme shows two different compositions in two reliefs of the Great Stūpa. While on a panel relief of a pillar of the North Gate the Four Drives have been telescoped into one, shown by a horse-driven chariot coming out of a palace (fig. 139), in an architrave relief, all the four drives are shown by four horses, one
behind the other (fig. 140). In this scene, the Buddha's return to his native place after obtaining Enlightenment is also depicted by a pair of footprints at the extreme right end of the panel. The scene below this footprint showing a horse led by a groom probably signifies that Siddharta has commenced on his journey.

Apart from the shapes mentioned in the above discussions, the legends, both from the final and previous lives of the Buddha, are carved on long horizontal panels, namely, the copings, at Bharhut and Amaravati. But, on these, the theme of the composition is different. The stories are no longer the main subject of the depictions but form a part of the decorative schemes. At both places, the main emphasis is on a lotus stalk or a thick garland that issues out of the mouth of an elephant or a makara or a dwarf at one end of the coping, then meanders along its length in a wavy manner forming alternate loops. The legends, frequently only a single incident, occurs in some loops on the Bharhut copings, like the scene of the gifting of the royal elephant by Prince Vessantara from the Vessantara Jataka, (fig. 141), or that showing one of the rival chiefs returning with his share in the War of Relics legend (fig. 102), the other loops being filled with various kinds of motifs such as flowers, plants, fruit-laden trees, and many kinds of ornaments hanging from a bough (fig. 142). When the story is of a short length, the different parts of it are juxtaposed within the space of one loop, like the
depictions of Jātakas Asilakhana (fig. 143), or Biḍāla-Kukkūṭa (fig. 144). Only occasionally were all the loops utilised to depict a whole story as that of the War of Relics on a coping (fig. 145).

In the loops of the Amarāvatī copings the fillers are generally a scene of worship of one of the symbols from the four major life events, of a greatly elaborate variety, different symbols being placed in the different loops of the same coping (fig. 146). However, on this monument many copings have been devoted entirely to depictions of legends comprised of innumerable episodes, like the Temptation of Mara (fig. 95), the story of Vidhurapandita Jataka (fig. 147), and so on.

A parallel to the themes of the copings occur on the balustrade pillars of Stūpa II, and some architraves of the Great Stūpa at Sāncchī. In the pillar reliefs, in some the greater portion of the space is covered with congested floral motifs, except a portion at the top on which occur depictions of one of four major final-life events (fig. 148a). Others show full and half roundels inserted within a floral pattern, and in which the filler is generally one or other kind of the Purnaghāta motif (figs. 146a, 148b). The architrave decorations are like the dwarfs-spouting-lotus stalk variety with the difference that in the loops also are seen more dwarfs holding garlands or lotuses in their mouths (fig. 148c)
Finally, some remarks may be made regarding the type of elements used on the three monuments to elaborate the theme. At Bhārhut they are mostly of a vegetative nature; flowers, creepers, fruits, and plants. At Sāñchī, these are represented sparingly, and the human element dominates. At Amarāvatī it is only the human figures, particularly of royalty, and their entourage which is the sole content of the expansions. Many reliefs from here, further, emphasize the female element. Thus, there are several reliefs where the crowd of figures around the symbol or the figure of Buddha comprise only ladies, such as the Sujata episode mentioned above (fig. 125), and several depicting "Sleep of Women" (fig. 149), and worship of the Buddha by various symbols such as a turban, throne or as a flaming pillar or palace scenes (figs. 150a, 150b).
SECTION: 4.2

ANALYSIS OF STYLE OF THE RELIEFS

Style in pictorial representation of a narrative is related to the mode of presentation of the subjects delineated, and that of the individual sculptures to their formal aspects. In so far as the illustrated reliefs of the present study are concerned, they belong to three different monuments that were decorated at three different periods. But, the subjects are drawn from a common source, viz., the legends from the previous and final lives of the Buddha. The question of style, therefore, presupposes a comparative analysis of the different approaches perceived in individual reliefs and the visual effect obtained of these. As in the discussion on the themes of these reliefs, the analysis of style too has been undertaken by taking together both the final life events as well as those in his previous incarnations.

The Discussion takes into consideration the following points:

1. Composition

a) Whether the shape and size of the frame of the relief was a controlling factor both regarding the manner of arrangement of the different elements constituting the main symbol and the inclusions where present, their respective sizes, as well as the number of the inclusions.
b) do the number of inclusions, that is the elaborations, increase as one proceeds from the earlier to the later monuments, or are they individual to the portrayal of a particular symbol?

c) The spatial treatment of the working surface; whether it is crowded or whether the space has been sparingly used; is the central theme concentrated at one point or does it involve the medium as a whole? Does the relief consist only of the theme or is there suggestion of a background? If there is a background, is it a part of the subject matter or a separate entity?

d) whether the composition is balanced

2. Inter-relatedness of the dimensions of the figures and objects to the subject-matter - in this context it has been examined whether importance has been given to one or a group of figures; whether there was a particular criterion which regulated the relative proportions of the different elements; whether figures are repeated and, if so, does it follow a certain method? Further, are the figures dispersed at random within the body of the relief or do they occur in groups, and if so, how are these groups arranged? Are the different approaches individual to a monument or are they adopted in all the monuments? Are the different approaches related to particular time-periods or do they remain constant in all the periods to which the reliefs belong?
3) Is a definite development noticed in the plasticity of the figures from the earlier to later monuments?

4) Location of the relief on a monument: was there a purpose in the method that has been adopted?

5) The technical skill of the artists reflected in modelling of the objects and figures, as also the quality of the relief. This factor takes into account the following aspects of a relief -

(i) **Perspective** - Overlapping, Foreshortening, depth of field, that is, whether the relief has shows different planes

(ii) **Formal aspect** of the figures and objects - are the figures normally disposed? Do the objects have a definite outline or are they vague?

(iii) Whether the **texture of the stone** was in any way responsible for the quality of the sculptures, namely, whether the cutting is shallow or relieved from the matrix.

(iv) **Movement** - whether the figures are suggestive movement or are they static?
Arrangement of the figures and objects in a relief

The shapes of the reliefs under discussion fall into three broad categories:

1. Circular - In this category are the medallions and the half-medallions at Bhārhat, on Stūpa II at Sāñchī and at Amaravatī.

2. Square or rectangular - the end-blocks between the gateway architraves, and the pillar panels of Stūpas I and III at Sāñchī, and the casing slabs of the Amāravatī stupas.

3. Vertical or horizontal formats - the narrow pillars between architraves of Stūpa I at Sāñchī and the chaitya pillars at Amaravatī, and the copings at Bhārhat and Amaravatī.

Irrespective of the shape of the frames, in the case of the four major events from the final life of the Buddha, certain constants are observed in their depiction on all the monuments. First, the symbol of the event occurs at the centre of the relief. Secondly, the type of details around it are generally of an even number which are arranged symmetrically, and are distributed in an identical manner around these symbols. Thus the lotuses around the tree in the Amaravatī relief (fig. 32), and the umbrellas, banners and garlands around the tree, or the wheel, or the stupa, and from the sides of these emblems themselves at Sāñchī on Stūpas I and II are always in pairs and tilted at the same angle on
either side (figs. 30, 31, 37, 39a, 51). Likewise, in the Pūrṇaṇghaṭa depictions, the side lotuses are similarly disposed (figs. 18, 19, 25).

In reliefs which show human worshippers, their number and type are equally divided on either side of the symbol. Like the emblems, their postures also are almost always identical on both sides, giving the impression of rigid symmetry, as for instance, the devotees who kneel in front of the symbol in some reliefs of Stūpas I and III at Sāṇchi (figs. 60, 151a, 151b, 152). When there are male and female worshippers, the males generally stand behind the females in an adoring attitude, their hands lifted to the same height against their bodies while the females in a similar manner hold offerings (figs. 36, 39a, 45).

Only occasionally is there a deviation from the standard version. Thus in the enlightenment relief on the Prasenajit Pillar at Bhārhat, four worshippers, two male and two female, stand around the throne but the males are in front kneeling over the throne while the females stand behind, that on the right in adoring attitude while that on the right holds an offering in her right hand (fig. 64). Similarly, in a relief on Stūpa I showing worship of the stūpa, one female devotee holds offering, another a garland (fig. 153). Further, the females stand behind the males.

The rule about symmetrical arrangement applies only when the inclusions are distributed on either side of the symbol.
Where they occur in other regions of the relief their number and placement are arbitrary. For instance, in the large number of depictions showing the stupa symbol, the umbrellas fixed on the harmika are of varying numbers: on some there is only one (figs. 51, 56, 153), in some two (fig. 78), in some five (figs. 58, 154), while in some numerous (fig. 63). Several garlands are inserted among the foliage of the tree in some Enlightenment reliefs (fig. 62, 64, 65, 66).

The number of inclusions in the reliefs provides a pointer to the mentality of the artists' mind; it is very clear that these artists were averse to leaving any blank space within the body of the relief so that various kinds of space-fillers are used to cover up as much space as possible. The type of these fillers and also their adjustment to the frame depended largely on the shape of the frame.

In the round formats of small size like the medallions and half-medallions at Bharhut and Stupa II at Sānci, the additional insertions comprise a few more lotuses and buds other than those related to the symbol in the Gajalakshmi reliefs, and four devotees in the depictions of the last three of the major final life events. In the Bharhut depiction of Conception, Lakshmi stands at a level about the middle of the frame while her lotus issues out of decorated water pot resting on the ground. From this vase also issue an additional pair each of full-blown lotuses and buds. The stems of the former rise up and then curve downwards nearly touching the bottom of the frame while their open surfaces fan out to brush
closely against the corresponding inner surface of the roundels; the buds lie limply against these sides. The upper part of the head of the elephants touches the frame while their backs describe a gradual arc that fits inside the round shape of the frame. Because the elephants are thus in a raised position their trunks are lifted to the level of the goddess's head. The result is that the mouths of the water pitchers appear to touch the top of her head (fig. 1).

This phenomenon is observed also in the Jataka reliefs here, such as in the depictions of Shaddanta (fig. 82), Ruru (fig. 155), or the Kakkata Jatakas (fig. 156). In the first and last examples, the elephants have a rounded form that covers up much of the space, the back of the elephant in the Kakkata legend having the same shape as those in the Gajalakshmi reliefs here. Again, in the last two a considerable portion of the bottom part is cut up, and so covered up, by a river, the trees in the Ruru legend lying close to each other and to the inner edge of the frame.

In a relief inside a circular format on Stūpa II at Sāñcchī, the stalks of the bunch of lotuses and buds around Lakshmi issue from the lotus of Lakshmi and curve gracefully around the figure, covering up much of the free space on either sides of the goddess (fig. 10).

The frames with other shapes required different types of fillers. They have corners that must be reckoned with. Further, their edges are straight while the outer surfaces of
the inclusions are rounded. In reliefs which do not show devotees, the corners have been filled generally by a small lotus bud pushed into them (figs. 3, 7, 18, 19); sometimes a full lotus is used whose open surface faces the corner (fig. 11); in one specimen garlands flow out of pegs above the elephants' heads and point at the corners (fig. 5).

The rigidity of the straight sides of these frames have been softened by decorations. On the bottom edge there is always a rail-pattern or, which is more frequent, a horizontal series of stepped terraces (figs. 5, 31, 37, 56). On the sides of the square frames only are a floral scroll issuing out of a jar (figs. 46, 56), or a pillar on a water-pot capped by an inverted vase which is surmounted by an abacus and crowned by a pair of winged animals, generally horses, seated back-to-back (figs. 4, 18, 58). These decorations are found also on a few pillar panels (figs. 60, 116). Exceptions to these standard varieties occur at Bharhut where the horizontal copings have a series of merlons on the top border as in the Sānci reliefs, but spaces between them are filled with blue lotuses; the bottom border consists of a lacy design having diamond shapes with bells suspended from lower corners of the diamonds (figs. 22a, 143).

In these frames at Sānci, the figures are taller. Since in the Gajalakṣmī reliefs here, except in two examples (figs. 7, 9), the goddess's lotus stands directly on the ground, the elephants, who here are smaller, stand high up so
that the pitchers held in their trunks are also high up above Lakṣmī’s head (figs. 3, 4, 5, 6). Similarly, the bodhi tree and the dharmachakra have spreading upper parts and narrow lower parts. This change in the attributes of the symbols left considerably more free space in the lower registers than in the roundel reliefs. Many more elements therefore could be inserted into the intervening spaces around the symbol, lotuses in case of Birth symbols and devotees in other cases, the broader the frame the greater their number.

In the square and rectangular shapes, again, while the side decorations have imparted a visually pleasing effect to the relief, they have at the same time reduced the available working space of the frame. Hence, even when there are the same number of elements as on the rounded formats, they appear to be in cramped positions. For example, in the Sanchi reliefs showing seated Gaṇalakṣmī and the Enlightenment and First Sermon events inside square frames there are the same number of elements as at Bharhut roundels, namely, a few lotuses in the former and four devotees in the latter. But while those in the Bharhut depictions have a comfortable stance (figs. 1, 36), in the latter cases they appear to impinge on each other (figs. 9, 42, 55).

Now, only by increasing the number but also by adjustment of the anatomical parts of the figures were blank spaces filled up. In the roundel reliefs at Bharhut and inside most square and rectangular frames at Sānci, this was achieved by giving
larger volume to the bodies of the devotees. In some specimens on the latter monument the figures are slimmer but their limbs are so arranged that they cover up empty spaces that arose inevitably in certain types of depictions. Thus, in the Gajalakshmi reliefs, the space created between the elephants who stand at a distance from the goddess and the narrow curved waist of the goddess are closed up by her hands which push out from the body, one raised up holding a lotus, the other on hip or on the thigh (figs. 3, 9). In the latter types her lotus seat is larger. In the reliefs showing dharmachakra and stūpa, the hands of the figures are stretched forward in a manner so as to cover the spaces around these symbols (figs. 43, 54, 55).

Some depictions show the two streams of water which, according to legend (Mitra, 1881: 124), illustrated Lakṣmi and Siddhārta at the moment of latter's birth. While in one sense they may be regarded as faithful depiction of the legend, in another they serve to cover up the space between the head of the goddess and the top edge of the frame (figs. 4, 9). In specimens which do not show this feature, the trunks of the elephants bend down and come close below the uplifted pitchers (figs. 3, 5).

The Enlightenment reliefs showing the tree surrounded by shrines, discussed in the previous section, may also be regarded as fulfilling the same purpose (figs. 64, 65, 66). The composite symbol of the tree and shrine with its elaborate decorations take up nearly the entire space of the panels.
Regarding the devotees around the symbols (those inside round and a few square formats are all human). In most reliefs in square or rectangular shapes there are semi-divine worshippers also, their number and posture being a constant factor in all. Their number is two, while they are poised in an oblique fashion across the corner of the frame, and hold an offering in one of their hands, and a garland in the other which is extended in front (figs. 56, 64, 66). In these depictions, therefore, these figures cover up the corners appropriately.

As pointed out in the earlier section, there is no definite focus in the events of the other category of legends. Hence the arrangement of the constituent parts of a story is different from that adopted in the first types. The placement of the different details obeyed a different set of rules. It depended primarily on which of the episodes were regarded as important by the artists of the different regions. Since these events are mostly composed of several episodes, the choice and arrangement of the details were dictated by the amount of available space.

**The Spatial Factor**

The question of availability of space was the most important issue before the artists and one that needed to be tackled before they began carving. The reliefs under study show that space was always insufficient compared to the quantity of details that needed to be put in. Hence, the first consideration before the artist was how many of the details
should he choose, for it was patent from the outset that all
details could not be put in the amount of space at their
disposal. The decision that was made, and which was the most
logical in the circumstances, was to select only those that
would serve the purpose which was the main intention behind
the sculptures, namely, to draw the people towards the faith.
Hence along with space the place where the significant
sculptures were put was also important.

There appears to be a particular method in the location of the
sculptures on the monuments. No specimens of very early
stupas have come down to us. The earliest remains that give a
clear idea are those from Bharhut. It seems that by this time
some convention in respect of decorating the monuments had
already crystallised. In all probability, the main body of
the stupa, that is, the dome (apāda) was considered to be too
sacred to be used as recipient of sculptures. Therefore,
garlands of flowers or leaves were the only items that were
put around it. However, the need to have the pictorial/plastic
representations of events from the life of the Enlightened One
was strongly felt; the railings (vedikās) and gateways
(torāṇa) offered a convenient base for illustrating them. The
timber origins of the vedikās, however, put a limit to the
space available for sculpting. The upper-most beam (coping
stone) alone presented a flat surface of some size (in terms
of length). The lower horizontals were concave in shape to
suit the needs of construction. The pillars were faceted
(again following timber originals) and so the artist could use
only the point where these two crossed. The surface presented was thus very small restricting the area available to the artist for carving.

The toranas offered a larger space which was utilised by the Bharhut artists.

The remains of stupas at Bhuteswar in Mathura and at contemporary Sanghol indicate that instead of faceting, the verticles were left as square blocks and adorned with full-size figures of female yakṣīs. But this did not satisfy sectarian requirements, hence the experiment has not been repeated on any major monument.

At Sāñchi, the vedikās, on account of their restricted surface, were considered unsuitable by the artists who opted for the spacious toranas, the verticles and the horizontals offering a fairly large continuous surface on which many more episodes could be carved, though not all that were required to be represented, therefore hampering the artist from giving a sequential-representation of the themes.

By the time work was started at Amarāvatī, a change had come about in the attitude of the monks and at the same time the artist had realised the short-comings in the Bharhut-Sāñchi manner of locating the sculptures - too small depictions at too great a height, which defeated their purpose. Further, the idea of the sanctity of the dome (āṇja) had lost its relevance so that the monks were not against putting sculptures on it.
These were located on one face of the raised circumambulatory path (pradakṣhiṇā-patha) thus turning them into a veritable 'art gallery'. Hence both larger frames were made available, and at the same time, the sculptures were brought to the eye-level of the viewer. Here too, as at Sāñcchi, the need for representing too many themes, as well as the tradition of uni-local representation prevented the artist from arranging them sequentially.

In frames with very confined areas, as in the roundels at Bhārhat, the narrow pillars of Stūpas II and III at Sāñcchi and the small rectangular panels on the drums of the relief-stūpas on the casing slabs at Amarāvatī, the details shown depict only one incident of the story. Hence that episode has been shown which is the most significant, such as the scene of the hunter about to saw off the elephant's tusks in the Shaddanta Jātaka relief (fig. 82), or the crab holding to the elephant's leg (fig. 156) in the Kakkaṭa Jātaka depiction at Bhārhat, and the depictions of the last event only from the Nalagiri story, (figs. 109a, 109b) and one episode each from Departure (fig. 136) legends on the relief-stūpas on the casing slabs at Amarāvatī, to name only a few.

The pillar panels and the copings at Bhārhat, and the pillars and gateway architraves of Stūpa I at Sāñcchi offered more space due to their larger size. Hence, several more details could be added. The medallions and casing slabs at Amarāvatī on which the bulk of the stories are carved, are even broader.
In dimension, therefore allowing insertion of not only the relevant details but several more of a decorative nature in order to fill up the spaces.

It is obvious that when the number of inclusions increases while the size of the frame remains constant, it is bound to give a crowded appearance to the representation. Thus while in the Gajalakshmi relief on a pillar of Stūpa II at Sānchī the space of the narrow panel has been used judiciously (fig. 2), in the First Sermon relief on a pillar of Stūpa III the composition is cramped because there are six devotees standing in a squeezed manner around the chakra symbol (fig. 157). Again, many reliefs look congested because of too many additional elements, particularly those showing devotees. The result is that they appear to jostle with each other for space (figs. 43, 58, 66).

Sometimes the composition is so full of these extraneous elements that the real focus of the legend is lost among them. One of the best examples is the Gajalakshmi relief on the South Gateway of Stūpa I at Sānchī. In this illustration, around the symbol is a thick mass of details comprising lotuses, buds and leaves and two pairs of swans, from amongst which the symbol can be picked out only with great effort (fig. 158a). Another example is that of the depiction of the mango-tree miracle on the same monument in which the two drums in the upper part of the panel obscure the real theme (fig. 158b). Similarly, too many details have made the
recognition of the subject matter difficult in the Jetavana relief at Bharhut (117).

The compositional scheme discussed in the preceding paragraph is closely allied to another important factor, that of *balance* of the different elements in a relief.

The reliefs depicting the four major events and a few others from the Buddha's final existence, as well as some of his previous life stories, show a fine regard for balance. This has been achieved in two ways:

1. By an even distribution of the different components of the subject matter around a nucleus. It has already been shown how the different elements are arranged in a symmetrical manner around the pivots formed by the symbols of the four major events. Amongst the other category of events, those in which too there is central focus but around which the number of elements is not of an even number, as in the Dream relief at Bharhut (fig. 79), the depiction of Descent at Sankissa at Sānchi (fig. 129) and in the Departure reliefs at Amaravati depicting the figure of Buddha astride the horse (figs. 135, 159), the arrangement of the several elements around the focus are such that all appear to carry equal weight.

Among the reliefs that do not have a particular focus but are yet balanced are the two illustrations of the Four Drives from the Departure episode on Stupa 1, one on a pillar panel (fig. 139), and the other on an architrave (fig. 140). In the
pillar relief the horse-drawn chariot, the towns-people looking at the scene, and the palace buildings, are so arranged that they share among them the weight of the relief. In the architrave depiction, the balance is maintained by the different scenes: the four horses on the upper register, the palace buildings at one end and the footprints in the other and in between, in the lower register, the tree-in-railing and the horse led by the groom.

Balance of a composition does not relate only to the arrangement of the different components in it but also to its visual effect as a whole. The subject matter of the reliefs being events which were a combination of different emotions, it is the method of presentation of these different emotions that designates a composition as being balanced or unbalanced.

In the depiction of the Descent at Sankissa on Stūpa I the milling crowd among whom the air is charged with a mixture of devotion and surprise is counter-poised by the stability of the ladder (fig. 129). In the depiction of the Mango-tree miracle at Bhārhut the tree has been given a large dimension so as to balance the crowd of devotees around it (fig. 160). In the scene of the attack of Mara on Stūpa I at Sānci the violence of Mara and his hosts is offset by the celebrating gods, both groups placed on either side of an enshrined bodhi-tree, which has a stabilizing effect on the whole composition (fig. 92). On the same stupa, the violent and peaceful moods of the warring chiefs clamouring for a share of
the Buddha's relics are separated by the town of the
Kusinagar Mallas on which the war is in full swing (fig. 103).
In the Nalagiri episode illustrated on the roundel at
Amarāvati, the rushing movements of the elephant and the panic
among the people is balanced by the serene Buddha
(fig. 108). In the casing slab depiction here of the Descent of
Buddha from the Tushita heaven prior to his birth as
Siddhārtha, the sedate elephant in the palanquin counterpoises
the buoyancy of the gods who are transporting him (fig. 161).

In both the depictions on this monument of the War of Relics
the different episodes have been put in different segments and
given equal importance (figs. 104, 105). The Deer in the
scene of Ruru Jātaka at Bhārhatu provides a stable pivot around
which the other elements appear to move in a state of
equilibrium (fig. 155).

Some reliefs are, of course, obviously not balanced, both
regarding the disposition of the elements as well as the
arrangement of the scenes, for the details are placed
apparently at random. In the illustrations of the Gift of
Jetavana at Bhārhatu and Amarāvati there is no proper co-
ordination between the different elements. In the former case
there is a kind of central focus but it is not placed
centrally, the weight of the relief being unequally divided
among the elements surrounding it: the figure of the merchant
looms large in the centre while the main subject of the
depiction, viz., the scene of covering the ground with coins
has been shifted to one end thereby reducing its importance;
the two structures and the group of devotees at the other end of the frame together manage to draw the beholder's attention towards them at a first glance (fig. 117).

The Amaravati scene does not even have the merit of the Bharhut depiction which emphasizes certain details. It is just a jumble of scenes in which there are many superfluous details like the steps going upwards from the upper middle part. Further, the structures in the lower register have shifted the emphasis from the main issue (fig. 119). In the relief on Dream on a panel here the whole weight of the scene resides on the figures inside the panel, around the reclining Maya and the attendants. The elephant, who is the real purpose of the depiction, is so minute that it seems to have been pushed up by the greater weight of the scene inside the panel (fig. 81).

In some reliefs, as at Sāñchi, the question of balance does not arise because the whole relief is like a surging mass with no focus on any scene. In the depiction of the Buddha's Return to Kapilavastu there are many different elements vying with each other for importance without any regard to the chronology of their occurrence, like the procession of the Buddha's father, Suddhodana with his retinue, the gifting of the banyan grove by Shuddodana to the Buddha, the latter's performance of the miracle of rising in air shown by the seat above the heads of the people and finally the scene of Maya's Dream on the top edge of the panel (fig. 114). Similarly, in the representation of the Vessantara Jātaka on Stūpa I (fig. 87) the whole scene is full of details of all kinds
arranged not with an eye to maintaining balance but to meet some other requirement; this point has been discussed in a subsequent paragraph.

Although the limiting confines of the frames in which the reliefs have been carved were a restraining factor regarding the freedom with which the details could be presented sometimes the artists have been able to circumvent this problem by ingenious methods and succeeded in giving the impression of larger space. Two examples will suffice to prove the point. In the Sāñchi depiction of Departure on an architrave relief of Stūpa I, the scene of the people looking from the balconies of the buildings onto the street brings into focus the whole length of the street along which the horses are moving (fig. 140). A more specific example is that of the Nalagiri episode in a roundel at Amarāvati showing two women peering out of the window. It suggests increased space for the entire street which stretches out in front has been brought into close focus (fig. 108).

While the number of figures in a relief depended more or less on the size of the work area, the relative sizes of the figures and the objects was determined by the importance of each one in the story.

By this principle, the Buddha is always the most important actor, hence his stature is larger, whether he is depicted symbolically or bodily, or even suggested as by the elephant in the Dream sequence.
In the Gajalakshmi motifs, the lotus pedestals of the elephants are both of equal size but generally smaller than that of Lakshmi who is the principal actor. By the same logic the lotus of Lakshmi derives added importance. Hence in the depictions at Bharhut and on the pillars of Sanchi Stupa II the lotus is fully shown and has a bird's eye view (figs. 1, 2). On the other hand, if another actor was equally important as the principal one both were of same size, like the depiction of the Dream sequence and that of the Vessantara Jataka at Bharhut, in both of which the elephant is of the same size as the chief actors, Maudgalya and Prince Vessantara (figs. 30, 141).

In many reliefs showing both gods and humans witnessing an event, the figures of gods can be recognised by their larger size as compared to the human beings, as in the Sanchi depiction of the Descent at Sankissa. The comparatively tiny figures at the foot of the ladder are obviously those of humans (fig. 129).

In the half-roundel relief of Enlightenment from Bodhgaya, both the event as well as its veneration were considered equally important, hence the bodhi tree and the emblems of devotion around it, viz., the garlands and the umbrellas are of equal proportions (fig. 33). A similar idea is put forth by the depictions of the same event on the pillar panels at Bharhut and on Stupa 1 showing the tree surrounded by a shrine, both equally large (figs. 64, 65, 66).
When many figures are shown, whether of humans (figs. 39a, 59c, or gods (91, 92, 122), they are seen to be all of the same size, irrespective of whether they stand nearer or at a distance from the viewer. This is because they play the same role, that of a devotee, none more important than the others. The artist just wished to give the idea of devotees around the symbol.

But if one person had a significant role in a story his figure was magnified as in the depiction of the Donation of the Jetavana grove on all the monuments, the figure of the donor Anathapindaka is larger than all the other figures and objects (figs. 117, 118, 119). In the depiction of the Maha-Umagga Jataka at Bharhut, the queen's figure is larger than all the others to emphasize her fidelity (fig. 162).

The above example shows also that sometimes a different but related theme served only as a complement to the subject depicted. The depictions of the Dream of Maya at Sanchi and Amaravati support this view. At Sanchi the Dream theme forms a link to the main subject on the panel, the Return of the Buddha, both of which have the same locale as the centre, namely, Kapilavastu (fig. 114). In the Amaravati relief, more than the Dream it is the impending birth which is highlighted in the posture of Mayadevi, whose right hip is extended and the left hand cups the right breast (fig. 81). This argument is substantiated by two depictions of the same incident here,
in one of which there is no elephant and Maya's posture is identical except that both her hands are raised above the head (figs. 163, 164).

In the depiction of the Kasyapa legend at Sanchi, the discomfiture of the Kasyapas was obviously a more relevant issue to be depicted for in the depiction of two of the episodes the Buddha's presence is not shown at all (fig. 100, 165a).

To emphasize the importance a figure or a group of figures, another approach was adopted, that of repeating them in the relief to show him taking part in different episodes of the story. For instance, in the Jatakas of Mahakapi (fig. 89), Ruru Deer (fig. 155), Shaddanta (fig. 82), at Bharhut, the legend of the Monkey Offering Honey at Sanchi on Stupa I (fig. 126), the Nalagiri episode at Amaravati (fig. 108), chief character is shown twice. On the other hand, in the scene of the Four Drives on the architrave relief of Stupa I (fig. 140), the Shaddanta (fig. 83) and Vessantara Jataka (fig. 87) either one or a group of figures is depicted several times.

To this category may also be ascribed several repetitions of the symbols of the four events scattered throughout the monuments which emphasize the fact that the Buddha is the centre of all the actions taking place in adjacent frames.
The purpose of this method was also to link the different parts of a story in all of which the same actor or a group of actors took part.

Although the compositions appear static, certain reliefs display an effort by the artist to suggest movement, like the Parinirvana depiction at Bhārhūt suggesting that flowers are falling over the stūpa, suggested by the corner devotees holding flowers in their outstretched hands to indicate them showering them over the stūpa (fig. 15); the prominent waves on the river in a scene from the Kāśyapa legend on Stūpa 1 which is supposed to indicate the river in spate (fig. 101); the footprints on the roll of cloth in the Birth relief at Amarāvatī and Nāgārajunkonda indicating the infant Siddhārtha taking seven steps (figs. 12, 13), and those on the surface of the river in the space of the pillar above the Sujātā relief at Amarāvatī which move towards the bank of the river (fig. 125 top register).

Movement is also suggested in the gestures of some figures, as for instance, by the drawn up legs of the elephant in the Dream relief at Bhārhūt indicating him as swimming in space towards the sleeping form of Māyādevī (fig. 80), or in the postures of the running herd of deer in the Kuru Jātaka here (fig. 155). Most reliefs at Sāṇchī and Amarāvatī showing battle scenes appear to imply movement, as for instance in the figures gearing up to fight in their attitude of aiming their darts at the enemy as in the War of Relics depictions, or in
their violent bearing as displayed by the armies of Mara in the Temptation of Mara reliefs (figs. 94, 95, 103, 106b), or simply in the way they sit on their animal mounts which have a prancing attitude. The four horses in a line in the scene of the Four Drives on Stupa I (fig. 140), too suggest movement as does the two attitudes of the mad elephant in the Nalagiri legend depictions at Amaravati (fig. 108).

An important feature of the sculptures under study is their perspective which is different from what is normally meant by the term. The dictionary meanings of perspective are the technique of depicting volumes and spatial relationships on a flat surface and a visible plane, especially one extending to a distance. In other words, the accepted concept of the term represents the relationships between the various objects as the eye sees them, that is to say, perspective obeys the law of optics. When this factor is represented pictorially, objects that are at a distance appear smaller than those nearer to the eye. In the sculptures under discussion, the relationships between the various items conforms not to the law of optics but to that of actuality, that is, they are shown as they exist. Since the artists wished to show that the objects exist he had to invent various methods of depicting them. One of the most commonly used methods is that of vertical perspective, which has been discussed in the following paragraphs. The logic underlying this method is that all items should be shown fully in order to show that they
at a distance are hidden partially by those nearer. The
conflict is thus of reality as it is perceived by the eye and
reality as it exists.

The perspective adopted by the artists subscribes to a
particular method of arrangement of the figures and objects in
a relief; once this method is known, the recognition of the
subject matter not only becomes comprehensible, one even
marvels at the ingenuity of the artists who could so
skillfully represent subjects some of which have several
details that involve several individuals and are separated by
long time gaps.

Dimension or depth of field expressed in a work of art is the
most important component of perspective. The artists who
carved these reliefs did not lack the sense of dimension; this
is evident from the ingenious ways in which they have sought
to obtain satisfactory results in this regard. Coordination of
the different planes was achieved by a novel method - that of
placing the distant figures above those in front and, in a few
cases, by making only a part of the former visible. There is
no overlapping to suggest different planes so that the farther
figures appear to be standing or sitting on the heads of the
nearer ones, a most apt example being that provided by the
depiction of the Descent at Sankissa at Bharhut (fig. 128),
and on Stūpa I (figs. 129). Of persons standing very far, who
cannot logically be visible, only heads are shown - these
appear as masks pasted on a wall. The female figure seated on
the far side of Maya's cot in the Dream relief at Bharhut (fig. 79) appears to be cut along the waist, the under edge pressing against that edge of the cot.

Sometimes, however, the disregard of law of optics has been carried to extremes: in the relief depicting the Descent at Sanchisa at Bharhut, mentioned above, the figures standing on the right are obviously on a plane farther than those seated with their backs to us and who overlap the former, nevertheless the feet of some of the standing figures project beyond this surface.

Sometimes a very peculiar form of logic prevailed. Thus in the depiction of the Dabbhapuppha Jataka at Bharhut (fig. 166), in which all the characters are animals, the wife of the jackal has a human form, and her figure is the largest and placed in the 'foreground' even though her participation in the story is a subsidiary issue.

The principle adopted regarding the figures was applied to portrayals of objects also. To depict two structures that stand one behind the other only a fragment of the farther one was shown, its under-surface against the top edge of the front one, as at Sānchī (fig. 167), or in the scene of the Jetavana episode at Amarāvatī (fig. 119). Similarly, in the Enlightenment scene on a pillar of Stūpa I at Sānchī, the trunk of the tree looks as though its length is cut and that it is stuck to the roof of the shrine (fig. 65). On the other hand, depiction of this story on another pillar shows an
evolved phase in the manner in which the branches issue out of
the three windows of the shrine realistically to give the idea
of a shrine surrounding the tree (fig. 66).

All details, whether of objects or figures, have been shown
minutely leaving nothing to the imagination of the viewer. For
example, if it is a throne or a cot that is depicted, it must
be shown in such a way that the viewer has no doubt that what
he sees is nothing but a throne or cot. This is the reason why
all the four legs of these objects are visible; further, they
are tilted vertically so that they should not be
confused with any other object that has a similar appearance;
therefore the throne is shown with the flowers strewn on it,
while the outline of the cot in both the Dream reliefs,
Bharhut and Amarāvati, are clearly shown, that in
the later depiction with suggestion of a back-rest. For the
same reason, the undersides of the umbrellas (fig. 33), or
the insides of the railings enclosing the bodhi-trees are
open to view (figs. 32, 33). When trees are depicted, every
branch and the distinct shape of each leaf has been cut
clearly, so that not only should the object be recognised as a
tree but also its type. Again, to indicate that a winding
shape which cuts across a relief is a river and not a road,
fish and ducks are shown swimming in it (figs. 89, 90).

Thus we see that the apparently unintelligible portrayals
become meaningful once the methods behind their delineation
have been grasped. It is essential to understand the methods in
order to segregate the different events that make up reliefs depicting several incidents which appear to be scattered at random in the body of the relief.

When the depictions are examined carefully, some links between groups of incidents become evident. One type of link that has been used most often is that of connecting the various episodes by a common locale. Incidents which took place in the same locality, even if separated by time, are grouped at one point, or shown in close proximity, for the concept of time being an intangible quantity, it was sacrificed for something that was tangible and solid, and which could therefore be shown.

In the depiction of the Vessantara Jātaka on Stūpa I at Sānci, the hermitage of Prince Vessantara in the forest provides the link to two episodes, viz., the Prince seating himself after having sold his children and, a much later one, that of his wife Mādrī returning there after having collected food from the forest (fig. 87). The Departure and the Return of the Buddha to his home town are likewise linked in a depiction on an architrave of the same monument. On the extreme right of the panel is a pair of footprints pointing in the direction of the palace on the extreme left while below this is seen a figure leading a riderless horse again directed towards the palace suggesting that Siddhārtha has departed on his mission (fig. 140). On a panel depiction of the Return incident, the linking scene is that of Dream of Māya since
both incidents took place at Kapilavastu (fig. 114). In the
depiction of the Assault of Mara on an architrave of the same
monument, the tree of Enlightenment is the locale for the
three events, the event itself, that of Sujata offering food
and the attack by Mara, which are therefore grouped together
even though they are separated by long time gaps (fig. 94).

Sometimes, an entire architectural member serves as the
locale, with the different incidents which took place there
divided into different compartments on it. Thus the three
incidents that are linked by the same locale, Sravasti, are
arranged on the three panels of the Ajatisatru Pillar at
Bharhut (fig. 168). Again, at Amaravati, the Sujata episode
and a much earlier one, that of Siddhartha bathing in the river
Niranjana before beginning his meditation, occur on two
portions of the same pillar, the former inside a full roundel
and the latter above it in the intervening space between it
and the top half roundel (fig. 125).

By the same reasoning, events which have a different locale
are not shown, knowledge of these events being presumed to be
known to the viewer, like the discussion in the court of the
king to whom the hunter reports about the location of the
golden deer Ruru in the Ruru Jataka, or the bargaining which
takes place in the palace of Prince Jeta between him and the
merchant Anathapindaka in the episode of the gifting of the
Jetavana Garden. On the other hand, if the event itself was
important it was shown but in a separate place as in the
Vidhurapangita Jataka where the incidents in the Naga king's palace are depicted in a panel (fig. 169a) separated from the other events which have continuous linking among the panels (fig. 169b, 169c).

Many depictions assume coherence when the beholder with knowledge of Buddhist mythology is able to recognise some of the scenes as being analogous with its depiction elsewhere either because it is labelled or shown with greater lucidity, or recognise a group of figures which appear in another illustration also. For instance, on the lowest panel of a pillar of North Gate of Sānci Stūpa I is a scene showing some figures around an object on a platter that looks like a cushion (fig. 170a). But when a similar scene at Bhārhat comes into mind which, further, is inscribed one recognises the Sānci scene as depicting the worship of the Buddha's turban in the heaven of the thirty-three gods (fig. 170b). The identification may be doubtful but it acquires credibility only because of want of a more plausible explanation. Thus we see that the laws framed by him are not necessarily logical from the standpoint of modern concepts but to the artist they were consistent with his ideas.

When an idea needed to be emphasized, it was done by a method that to the modern eye seems out of proportion. Taking the idea of worship as an example, at Bhārhat both hands of the devotee rest flat on the chest, one hidden completely by the other (figs. 51, 91). This was a consistent trend, one that was not obviously dictated by limitations of space, for the
several figures of yakshas and a couple of yakshis which adorn pillars that allowed movement of the limbs, too have their hands disposed thus (figs. 171a, 171b). In other words, foreshortening was a concept with which these artists were not familiar. This argument is supported by other features also, as for example, by the feet which are splayed to the sides although the bodies are frontal, both of the figures in the reliefs (fig. 1), as well as those who are carved on the pillars (fig. 172).

At Sānci the same idea, that is, of devotion, is expressed by increasing the number of devotees, all of whom stand like (automatons fulfilling a task, their hands folded in prayer (figs. 66, 129); the artists have by now learnt the concept of foreshortening so that the folded hands are projected out.

At Amarāvati, in the early phase depictions this idea is expressed by the abnormally long hands in praying attitude which are held up at face level in a show of intense devotion (fig. 62).

Taking up some examples that express other ideas, the first is the Dream relief at Bhārhut. To emphasize that it is night time, and that the female attendants are sleeping, their bodies are steeply inclined towards the right, yet they do not fall off but remain poised against gravity (fig. 60). In another specimen from here depicting First Sermon, that the basket in front of the left female figure contains flowers is shown by the flowers carved on top of the basket (fig. 36).
Similarly, in the depiction of the Maha-Umagga Jataka here, the heads of the men who had tried to tempt the queen are carved on top of the baskets inside which they were brought (fig. 162).

The legends make it clear that every action of the Buddha, both before and after Enlightenment, was celebrated by the gods. This aspect is emphasized in many reliefs on all the monuments, generally by means of a crowd of divine beings gathered at the spot. To cite an example from each: the panel below that depicting Enlightenment on the Prasenajit Pillar at Bharhut shows a crowd of gods celebrating the Buddha’s achievement (fig. 91); in the depiction of the Mango-tree Miracle at Sanchi, two divine beings are seen beating on two large drums on the top section of the panel (fig. 158b). Again, in a Amaravati relief, gods are shown celebrating an event that is supposed to have taken place in a situation when no one was present, viz., Departure of Siddharta, which, according to legend, took place in the silence of the night (figs. 134, 135).

It has been shown that a sequential lay-out of the events of a story was not the strongpoint of the depictions. However, some kind of continuity is observed in some instances. A possible reason may be that the patrons who commissioned these works wished to have all the details at one place. Thus, we see that at Bharhut, episodes that took place within a short time-index, are carved on a single architectural member with
the different episodes separated from each other by some kind of a divider: on the Ajātaśatru Pillar three events that took place with Śrāvasti as the centre are shown on the three panels from bottom to top (fig. 168). It is on the Amarāvatī stupa, however, that different events are arranged in a sequential manner, on the chaitya pillars. The approach is same as at Bhārhat, that is, the sequence is from bottom to top, the pillars being divided into four panels which depict four sequential events, starting with Departure and ending with Death (fig. 173). A lintel depiction of Departure here shows the three successive episodes of the legend arranged horizontally in a continuous sequence in discrete compartments, separated from one another by pillars (fig. 174).

While a consistency of pattern is evident in the compositions of the three regions, the formal aspect both of the scenes as also the figures places them at different levels of development. Beginning with the depictions of Birth, the Bhārhat Lakṣmī is of heavy build with rough contours and solid arms and legs. Her body is covered with many layers of ornaments which are also large and heavy. At Sānci an immediate contrast is noticeable. Lakṣmī's body has curvatures at all possible places, her clothes and ornaments have become reduced and there is a smoothness in the outline of her body, while her arms and legs are rounded in form. A further improvement is seen at Amarāvatī, where Mayādevī's body shows deep flexions as though it has no bones; there is gliding smoothness in the contours of her body.
In the depiction of Enlightenment, the foliage in general spreads out with no definite outline. Some specimens are however unique. The foliage of the tree carved on the narrow uprights between the architraves of Stūpa I and on the ground balustrade pillars of Stūpa III, both at Sāñchi, appear like round balls although there is no definite outline (fig. 175). But in a depiction at Amarāvati on a slab, the foliage is gathered into bunches which are encased inside well-defined outlines (fig. 62).

In the Fūrṇāgāha motifs, the centre lotus has different appearance on the different monuments. Those at Bhārhat are generally partially folded (fig. 15); on the square blocks at Sāñchi the petals have a drooping appearance (fig. 18), while the flower at Amarāvati looks like a round cushion (fig. 20).

The society of the period to which Bhārhat belongs was largely rural with agriculture as the source of wealth of the people. The people had a strong bond with Nature, their aspirations were simple, and their life style was bound by traditional beliefs, fear of apparently incomprehensible natural phenomena, worship of folk deities like the yakṣas, nāgas, gandharvas, tree-spirits (vrikṣha-devatās) and so on. These exercised a dominant hold over the minds of the people. To them these factors were very real and governed every aspect of their lives. The compositions are full of these schemes: numerous figures of these deities, semi-divine beings distributed all over the monument, the abundance of vegetative
motifs, animals of various types embedded within floral scrolls, makaras spouting lotus stalks and so on.

Regarding the physiognomy of the figures depicted on this monument, the face is full with blown up cheeks, round protruding eyes without eyelids and fleshy lips. The whole impression of the figures is one of solidity, as though they are firmly fixed to the background in which they stand. That this was a trend here is proved by the figures of the yakshas or yakshis who too stand rigidly fixed to the pillars in which they are carved. All the figures are content to remain within the spatial limits allotted to them.

The Bharhut era belonged to the common man; the ordinary people were its patrons, hence the sculptures are simple with no superfluous details to mar this simplicity.

An entirely different social milieu prevailed during the period when the stupas at Sānchī were erected and decorated. The mercantile community had come to the fore and wielded considerable power in the society by virtue of their increased wealth. It is they who form the donors of the bulk of the reliefs here which therefore give a very different kind of sculptural effect from those at Bharhut.

No more are the depictions simple portrayals of a divine event. The compositions are studded with details that give the impression of pomp and ceremony so that the wealthy status of the patrons becomes evident. Everywhere emphasis is on the
Whatever the event, it is surrounded by a great throng of people in a lively mood even when they are participating in obviously sombre situations like worshipping the symbols of the four events. It is to display the opulence that the events selected for illustrating are mostly those that required the presence of crowds of people and action-packed scenes, and had an element of drama in them. Hence it is that there are so many representations of the Departure, Māra's Attack, War of Relics, Descent at Sankissa, and Vessantara and Shaddanta Jātaka, worship of the symbols and so on, all of which gave scope for putting in numerous figures. In general, the compositions here present a panorama of people bustling with life in whatever activity they are engaged in: daily life activities, performing dance and music, worship, participating in battle. The compositions are full of a vital force for which the confining limits of the frames were stifling. The figures therefore appear to strain to break away from these binding limits.

The figures here appear well-fed and happy; the bodies are rounded, display softer moulding and show some curvatures in the contours. In some depictions, however, the figures display the same rigidity of posture as at Bhārhut, like the gods who stand like stiff sticks on the left of the bodhi-tree in the scene of Māra's attack on Siddhārtha (fig. 92).

Although the kind of dress is same as at Bhārhut, it is now somewhat diaphanous with the folds of the lower garment less
The headgear is smaller while the number of ornaments on the female figures is much reduced.

The society at Amaravati was completely different from those in the other two regions. It too was wealthy as at Sāñchi, but the patrons are now the elite in society, and the royalty, especially the ladies of the court. Palace scenes abound here. Several reliefs concentrate on scenes of king holding court, or royal ladies performing worship or dance and music (figs. 176, 177). When the canvas was extensive as that offered by the casing slabs, a great gathering of people surround the royal figures. Many of such scenes are secular in content but a few are directly connected to the Buddha's life, like a good many depictions of the legend about palace women trying to tempt Siddharta so as to divert his mind from the thought of leaving home (fig. 178).

It is perhaps due to the sophistication of the subject matter that the bearing of the figures are dignified. Even when there is a crowd of people, they do not display their emotions in an aggressive manner. Scenes showing a joyous mood among the figures have a subdued quality, like the one showing the Buddha-to-be being carried in a palanquin (fig. 161). Battle scenes too do not exhibit the violence of Sanchi. Mara scowls at the meditating Bodhisattava but neither he nor does his army pronounce on him.

The figures have lean and elongated bodies which in some cases appear disproportionate, like the figures of Māyādevī.
in the Dream reliefs (figs. 81, 164). In most however, despite the exaggerated length there is proper coordination between the limbs. The body is delicately moulded and the roundness is more pronounced than at Sanchi.

While the slender forms no doubt look cultured and graceful, they appear to lack the vitality and strength that is the hallmark of the figures at Bharhut and to some extent at Sanchi. There is absence of solidity. For, the curvatures of the Amaravati figures are too deep which appears to deprive them of the life-force. The figure of Siddharta seated on horse lacks the drive which forced him to renounce his home. The seated or sleeping female figures have a languid attitude as if they do not possess sufficient energy.

The peculiar logic observed at Bharhut about the postures of figures, namely a frontal position irrespective of the position of the body, survive in some reliefs here. The five male figures grouped around the tree of enlightenment all face front although they should logically be in profile (fig. 62). Similarly, the two female figures prostrating in front of a throne do not kneel in the logical manner with their back sides visible, but are turned on their back in a twisted manner so that their entire front can be seen; they touch the throne not with the front of their palms but with the outer side of the tips of the fingers (fig. 176).

The texture of the working medium was to a great extent responsible for the quality of the reliefs at the three
The hard *sandstone* at Bhārhat did not permit deep cutting and giving fine contours to the forms. They therefore appear crudely cut and lacking in depth. The reliefs thus seem more like engravings or incisions rather than carving.

The relatively softer sandstone at Sānchī gave more freedom for finer chiselling; the figures are now bolder and are released slightly from the background. Although the compositions are still flat, the higher relief to the figures has led to formation of enveloping shadows around them giving an illusion of depth.

The highly pliable limestone at Āmaravati removed all impediments towards refined carving. The artist could give free reign to his imagination; the figures thus look soft, supple and flexible. While the Lakṣmī figures in the Sānchī Gajalakṣmī motifs too have tri-flexions, like that in the reclining form of the sleeping Māya in the Dream depictions here, in the latter case they appear so pliable as if they were carved as a straight figure and then just twisted to give the flexions. The extreme grace of the figures in the reliefs are also to be attributed to this aspect.

That expression of a satisfactory *plastic quality* which was attempted at Bhārhat by the uncompromising nature of the stone could be experimented at Sānchī with greater success and reached its zenith at Āmaravati. The art has now reached a culminating point which was applied to other styles in the later periods.
Concluding the remarks on the formal aspect, it may be said that the Bharhut depictions are static and the different elements are arranged as isolated entities. The Sānci compositions breathe life into whatever scenes they show, while the scheme at Amarāvatī is concerned with depiction of the life styles of the wealthy elite in society and the emancipated status of the women whose activities too could be displayed so openly. The different entities in the depictions on the latter two monuments, whether comprised of few or several episodes, are organised into a harmonious whole.