chapter IX
The Śuṅga period introduced a new age in the domain of art. It represented the tradition of the people to whom it belonged. The common people also took part in the art-activities and they did not hesitate to donate liberally for the service of the Lord. It assumed a democratic shape. The human forms played an important part in the art of the Śuṅga period. The desire for a permanent habitation was felt, so the carpenters were replaced by the sculptors. Though, the wood was not completely abandoned as Patanjali refers to Rājatakshan employed specially by the king, but the stone came in more use. On the whole the Śuṅga art is rich in social contents, national in outlook and popular in character.

The art of ancient India has always been a religious one, its sculptures as well as the architecture was never and nowhere employed for secular purposes. The rise of the new religious sect Buddhism gave a great impetus to art of the Śuṅga period. According to Rawson, the art of the world, especially that of the eastern world, owes a great debt to India and Buddhism was the chief vehicle for this artistic influence. Mathurā was a centre of art during the Śuṅga period. The famous stūpas at Bharhut and sāñchī, the BodhGaya raițing and the Garuḍa column are the products of this period. The Śuṅga period was also notable for its terracotta figurines.

In the Śuṅga period, Mathurā produced varied works of art which earned for her a great fame. Many yaksha statues with their
protuberant belly, long tied dhotī with a belt and of a special posture have been found. A dancing Yakshiṇī wearing a conspicuous head dress and elaborate ornaments carved on a pillar has been discovered in Mathurā. The yakshiṇī is shown with protruding eyes. The Mathurā sculptors also carved out Brahmanical deities. A standing image of Balarāma with the distinguishing symbols—a club in the right hand and a plough in the left is in the Lucknow museum. It certainly belonged to the Śuṅga period as Patañjali refers to the temples of Balarāma and Keśava, with the playing of the musical instruments.

There are a few sculptures carved on railing figures or cross bars showing scenes from the Buddha's life both through symbols and in human forms. Another railing pillar obtained from the Yamuna near the saptari Tilā-ghanṭ is important for the scene of the Jātaka of the worst evil. As regards the Jain art, there was a Jain stūpa of suparsvā at Mathurā which could be dated about hundred B.C. according to Smith. It looks that there were ancient monuments of the three principal religions—Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism at Mathurā. During excavation at Mathurā, Cunningham found several pillars, those are probably of later period than that of Bharhut. The pillars, however are four and a half feet high and each pillar is adorned with a figure of nude female richly adorned with necklaces and bangles.

The earliest finds from Mathurā are closely related to the art of Bharhut. A certain heaviness of the form can be traced from the very beginning though it is partly relieved by a
relaxation of the flesh and an open eyed smiling countenance. According to Chanda, these Mathura sculptures are the crudest product of early Indian school but they do not lack certain aesthetic features.

One of the most notable monuments of the Sāṅga period is the Buddhist stūpa at Bharhut, which was possibly a halting place on the pilgrims route to the Buddhist holy land. The stūpa had entirely disappeared but about one half of the rail had been preserved in the Indian Museum calcutta. According to Percy Brown the brick stūpa was not enlarged as it retained its original dimensions of some sixty eight feet in diameter but the railing around it was reconstructed. It was divided into four quadrants by the four enterances each of which was guarded by the statues of Yakshas and Yakshinīs. The eastern gateway is known to have been adorned with a torana like those at sāñchī. The railings and the gateways of the Bharhut stūpa are nearly all inscribed, not only with the names of the principal persons represented but with the title of the Jātaka, so they are easily recognized in the Jātaka, so they are easily recognized in the books now current in the Buddhist countries. It is the only monument in India that is so inscribed which is of great value for the history not only of art but of Buddhist mythology.

The railings and the gateways of the Bharhut stūpa are richly carved in bas-reliefs portraying incidents in the Jātakas or scenes connected with the life of the Buddha. There are few of the scenes which are represented very clearly as the relief
on the inner side of the right pillar of the eastern gateway. It represents the dream of Māyā devī, the mother of the Buddha. Above the sleeping woman is seen descending the white elephant, in the form of which, according to the legend, Buddha came down to his mother. The sasā- Jātaka story is represented on a rail pillar of the Bharhut stūpa. In the right, there is a spouted jar with two baskets filled with mangoes and in the middle is a fire altar. A hare is seen facing it and ready to jump into the fire. Behind him another animal whose head and half body are cut off, is seated in the left corner. A lizard is in between the hare and the half cut animal. This scene represents the story of sasā-Jātaka, where the hare sacrificed himself by jumping into the fire when food was demanded from him by sakra in disguise. Here the hare's nobility is related in the course of giving thanks to a land owner of sāvatthi who had entertained the Buddha and his monks for seven days.

There are scenes representing the royal procession of Ajātaśatru or Prasenjit visiting the Buddha. Besides the Jātaka scenes, the acrobatic scenes on the pillar post are very interesting. The stone has circular panels at the top and at the bottom. In the middle there is a group of nine hanging men who hold firmly the feet of one another with both the hands. The dress is, as usual, a loin cloth tied by a scarf, empridered turban, necklace and bracelets and a long scarf thrown round the shoulder. The inscription on the sculpture records it as the gift of the nun Pushyadattā of Nāgarika. According to Barua, this scene seems to represent a melā held in connection with the celebration of the stūpa festival. Patañjali also refers to festival
gatherings and it was common to have entertainments.

The hindu gods and goddesses, Yakshas and Yakshiṇīs, nāgas and Gandharvas also figure prominently at Bharhut. Among the goddesses is Siri, who is represented seated or standing on a lotus flower, two of her hands are empty, the others two are raised each holding a water lily while two white elephants holding water-pots in their trunks water the flowers in her hand. At Bharhut Yakshas appear as the guardians or dvārapālas at the gateways. Yakshiṇīs are also figured on the pillars at the entrances as chanda and sudasava yakshiṇīs. Nāga people and their kings with their five headed serpent hoods are common in the Bharhut sculptures. The chakravaka nāga is figured on a pillar at Bharhut. The nāgas are represented as human usually many hooded in the case of a male but single hooded for a nāgi. The gandharvas appear flying from both sides towards the holy places on the reliefs of the Bharhut. The lower part of the body is that of a bird on which the hips of human form are set and the bushy tail is treated decoratively. The form occurring at Bharhut is of importance because its wings are really used so that they are not simply attributes of speed. The wealth of floral and animal designs is also infinite. Fergusson remarks that "some animals such as elephants, deer and monkeys are better represented here than in any sculpture known in any part of the world, so too are some trees."

The sculptures of Bharhut are so sharp and every detail is so well expressed in the hard sandstone which tells that the
carvers were perfectly familiar with the material they were using. In the art of Bharhut females are not represented nude. They are decently clothed from the waist downwards at least which is visible over the ankles and between the legs. The best specimens of the women's costume are exhibited in the life size busts of two queens on the bosses of the rail and in the nearly life size figures of Yakshinis and Devatâs on no less than seven of the pillars. In six of these examples, the upper part of the body appears to be quite naked but in the seventh that of yakshiṇī chandā there are very perceptible marks of the folds or creases of a light muslin wrapper under the right breast. It looks probable, therefore, that an upper garment of a light material is intended to be shown by the sculptor but for the sake of displaying the different necklaces, collars and girdles, he has purposely omitted the folds and traces of the muslin wrapper. The sculptures of Bharhut present a long head with full round face, large eyes and thick lips. Though, the figures are shown in full roundness but their heaviness of the form still persists. According to Grundwedel they are somewhat harsher in form and this is most apparent where women are represented.

In the art of Bharhut, Buddha does not appear either as a heavenly person to be worshipped or even as an ascetic. Though in the art of this age everything is Buddhist, but it is Buddhism without Buddha. The nearest indication of his presence is in a scene, where Ajātaśatru kneels before an altar in front of which are impressions of his feet. It shows that the Buddha is represented
in the form of symbols. He is represented in the same way as in ancient Christian art, Christ was represented in the forms of fish and lamb etc.

The art of Bharhut is very sober and modest. The Jātaka stories, depicting the life of Buddha in his previous birth, represent a great dignity which is essential to create a deep impression on the mind of the devotees. The stories are told with scrupulous exhaustiveness and no single detail is left out. Moreover, the artists of Bharhut adopted the method of continuous narration. The story and the happenings of the different times are portrayed in one and the same relief. It shows, that the stūpa was set up at one time and not by stages. The most important thing is, that the art of Bharhut is purely indigenous. There is absolutely no trace of Egyptian influence. According to Fergusson, it is, indeed in every detail antagonistic to that art, nor is there any trace of classical art. The capitals of the pillars do resemble somewhat with those at Persepolis but especially the figure sculpture, belonging to the rail, seems an art elaborated on the spot by Indians only.

At another site more intimately associated with the Buddha is the great shrine at Bodh-Gayā. The great railing at Bodh-Gayā is one of the finest of its kind on which the early Buddhist architects lavished all the resources of their art. According to Cunningham, it can not be much later than Aśoka. The railing roughly dates about the first century B.C. this date has been substantiated by inscriptions on two of the rail pillars which appears to connect its erection with the Śuṅga period. In fact, it is
later than Bharhut and earlier than Sāñchī. It is of the same style in size as Bharhut railing but slightly smaller as it is only six feet and eight inches high and its general dimensions are less massive.

According to Cunningham, there is considerable variety in the subjects depicted on the rail pillars and few of them are the kalpadruma, Indra sālā-guha and the Jetavana vihārascenes. Some portions of the coping of the rail have been recovered, the inner faces of which are ornamented with long lines of animals—elephants, winged horses, makaras, centaurs etc, and the outer faces are carved with bands of flowers. The intermediate rails between the pillars are sculptured with circular lotus flowers on both sides, some of them containing busts or animals. In Bodh-Gayā the stories are narrated in short but in a suggestive manner and descriptive labels disappear. It was probably due to this reason, that the stories had already become well-known and there was no need for labelling them.

Bodh-Gayā is a step forward from Bharhut in the handling of the human figures. In Bharhut the parts of the body are not always linked integrally but in Bodh-Gaya, the parts reach an integration and the body moves more freely and becomes a living entity. Reliefs are less crowded and there is no attempt to distort figures by putting them in the available space in any corner and at any angle as we notice at Bharhut. Percy Brown mentions that there is a considerable variation in the quality of the carving, some of it showing the rather crude ingenuousness of the Bharhut style while other parts denote the beginning of a fluency in line and
composition particularly noticeable in the borders of animals on the coping. This is due perhaps more to the varying skill of the carvers than to any differences in style or date.

According to Marshall, there is a marked influence of Hellenistic or western Asiatic origin on the sculptures of Bodh-Gaya such as centaurs, winged and fishtailed monsters and most significant of all, the sun-God in his four horse chariot. No doubt that the Indian sculptors borrowed few objects of arts but the subject matter was Indian in origin. According to Smith, both the conceptions and executions are purely Indian. As regards the sun-worship, it was very common in India. Patañjali refers to this deity several times.

The great stūpa of Sāñchī is in Bāilsā, the ancient vidisā. The place was first seen by colonel Taylor in 1818. Soon after, Moddock got permission from the native government to dig into the stūpa and in December 1822 Captain Johnson had dug to its foundations. This carelessly conducted research did great damage to the stūpa and hastened dilapidation of its enclosure. While no new discovery compensated in any way for the destruction. It was again opened up by cunnigham in 1851 when several relic caskets were found.

Some idea of the size of the Sāñchī Stūpa may be obtained by its railings with the dimensions of stonehenge. The stūpa is surrounded by a massive stone railing. According to Percy Brown, the diameter of the outer railing at Sāñchī is one hundred and twenty
feet while the outer circle of Stonehenge is one hundred and six feet. In height the former is eleven feet, whereas the outer sarsens of the latter are thirteen and a half feet. The gateways of Sāñchi are four which form the entrance to the main stūpa. In design and dimension these four gateways are almost similar to one another. Fergusson mentions that northern is somewhat larger than the others. Its total height to the top of the embleem is thirty-five feet while the height of the eastern is only thirty-three feet. The others two have been re-constructed by the government so we can not be sure about their exact original dimensions.

The southern gateway judging from the style, is certainly the oldest. There is an inscription on the southern gateway which states that it was erected during the reign of king Sātakarṇī who reigned about 155 B.C. The next to be erected was the northern, which may have been followed by the eastern and the last erected was perhaps the western. The style and details of all these show a succession and a progress that could hardly have taken place in much less than a century. So it enables us that the four gateways were added to the rail of the great top during the second century B.C.

All the toṣṇas of Sāñchi which provide an important part of the whole structure, are really decorative additions not, as essential part of the structure. Because the framework of each gateway was utilized entirely for accommodation of the sculptures. According to Percy Brown, these toṣṇas recall the doorways of Romanesque and cathotic which Ruskin has remarked depict the Bible in stone. The Buddhist example displays in the same graphic manner much of the philosophy and inspiration of the creed it served.
The rails of the great stūpa at Sāñchi are also of special interests. Though they are fashioned out of stone but each is a copy, in many respects of the wooden originals. It looks the work of carpenter rather than mason. The shapes and more particularly the joints of the railings are those usually employed by the carpenters. It appears that the craftsman who made them was still thinking of wood but his hands were working in stone.

All the four gateways of great stūpa are carved with the most elaborate sculptures both in front and rear. Generally, they represent the scene from the life of the Buddha. The scenes are from Jātakas or legends narrating events that took place during the five hundred births through which Śākyamuni had passed to reach the perfect Buddhahood. The Vessantara Jātaka occupies the whole of the lower beam of northern gateway and reproduces all the events of that wonderful tale exactly as it is narrated in the Pāli books of the present day. The worship of trees is represented at least seventy six times. The popular goddess Śrī is represented in Sāñchi sculptures more than ten times. The triratna or trident which crowns the northern gateway represent the Buddhist creed.

On the east gateway at Sāñchi (on the front of the right pillar) a large palace of gods is represented, on the different terraces at which persons in royal costume are represented sitting and waited on women who dance and play. They hold a small bottle in their left hands and in the right an object which probably resembles with the later thunder---bolts. They are probably gods who are drinking
and making love. On the same gateway (from the third architrave) two figures are represented riding on horned lions. One of the heads with wooly negro like hair is clearly not of the Āryan type. This figure also holds a bunch of grapes in his hand. In India even at the present day, grapes are mostly brought from Kābul. So it is clear that the rider is not an Indian and probably has a connection with the representations of Silenus that have been found at Mathura\textsuperscript{29}.

Besides the human figures, the hybrid creatures with human busts, Indian head dress and ornaments are represented very frequently. On the eastgateway of Sāñcẖī the animal kingdom is represented adoring the holy fig tree. In the corner, beside a five headed snake, stands a large bird with big bushy tuft looking like a parrot. This is probably the Garuḍa. Now on the same relief there are Indian buffalos depicted with a touch of humour and lions with griffin like heads.

There is one isolated gate in front of another adjacent stūpa. It is only about half the size of those of the great top. It is only seventeen feet to the top of the upper beam and thirteen feet across its lower beam. It was added some what later because its sculptures have references to the acts of Sāriputra and Moggaṭāna whose relics were deposited init.

The art of Sāñcẖī is in the continuous line of evolution from Bharhut. Though, in the handling of the human figures, the attempt is full of effort at Bharhut but it is endowed with a new form at Sāñcẖī. It is no more shy, hesistating and in its movements, but as a whole free and happy. The animal world, the lotus creepers and a host of trees are portrayed in a very nice manner. A galaxy
of hybrid creatures, fish-tailed makaras, winged human heads, stags with elephant heads and fish tails, cobra headed nāgas with human bodies find a naturalistic expression at the hands of the Sāñchī artists. It looks that the combining of the human body with animal elements seems to have been in connection with the doctrine of reincarnation. According to Grunwedel, it is possible that these types, introduced from western Asia, were explained fully in Indian fashion because in the existence of each animal was hidden a human one which would be attained by good works. The Indian feeling for nature animated afresh even the fantastic forms of the western Asiatic hybrid style. The animals have been decorated in such a way that they look like living animals and show humourous disposition of Indians.

The art of Sāñchī displays disparity in the quality of workmanship and lacks in uniformity. It was natural, because each rail was the gift of a different individual as shown by the inscriptions on it. They were donated by different persons and carved by different artists. The design depended on the resources of donor and talents of the carver. Probably this may have been the reason that the principal designs are repeated again and again, such as the worship of trees, the goddess Śrī, the wheel of law etc. It is possible that they have been repeated with slight differences but those differences are not perceptible.

In the human figure sculptures of Sāñchī nudity plays an important part. There is no instance at Bharhut of any figure entirely nude. But at Sāñchī nudity among the females is rather the rule than the exception. According to Grunwedel, the naked
body, as such, was never an object of representation in the Buddhist art. Therefore, it looks that loin cloth of the sculptures was transparent, and the sculptor lacked the means of expressing his idea, so the folds of the garments are not visible. The Mathurā sculptures may suggest that the Digambara jains regarded female as well as male nudity as a mark of sanctity. The upper part of the body was always uncovered. It is still found in the south of India.

The art of the goldsmith found an important place in the sculptures of Śāñchī. The ornaments are uncommonly rich and tastefully arranged. But they had a fatal effect on the modelling of human figure. The shoulders loaded with broad chains, the arms and legs covered with metal rings, the bodies encircled with richly linked girdles, could never have attained an automatically correct form. Everywhere the carrying out of a clear outline was interfered with by broad ornamental lines disturbing the natural position of the human form. The rich head dresses also causes the heads disproportionately large.

The art of Śāñchī is national in outlook. It reflects for the first time the results of the ethical, social and religious fusion and integration that had been evolved through centuries on the Indian soil. It is quite possible that artists from the northwest worked side by side with artists at Śāñchī. It is also possible that certain west Asiatic forms and motifs were represented in Śāñchī and Marshall traced the western Asiatic influence in such motifs as centaurs, human headed lions etc. But all such forms and motifs have been so completely fused and integrated into focal forms that the foreign originals are only vague memories. The
sculptures of Śāńchī are the results of entirely Indian tradition and genius.

The Besnagar was the capital of the western dominions of the Śuṅgas with a considerable Hindu population. Here was a Brahmanical shrine dedicated to the divinity Vāsudeva but only a few fragments of which have survived. There is an inscription on one pillar which states that it was a Garuḍa pillar raised in honour of the god Vāsudeva by Heliodorus who had come to the court of Bhāgabhadrā as an envoy from the Indo Bactrian king Antialkidas. This inscription is very important because it fixes the date of its erection around 140 B.C. and also tells that a Greek had adopted an Indian faith.

The pillar has eight angles. It is furnished with an ornamentation consisting of half-lotus flowers, and above it is divided into sixteen panels and finally the shaft continues towards the summit with a surface divided into thirty-two panels and the capital exhibits the well-known Indian bell shape. Ornamentation of the shaft, there may be seen the beginnings of a method of enriching this part of the pillar which was developed with notable effect in the columns of later styles. Other carvings on this pillar consist of festoon designs, a border with geese in pair and such Hellenic motifs as the bead moulding and the honey suckle. The other pillars at Besnagar of which only fragments now survive were provided with palm leaf capitals of singularly graceful designs. It does not show any foreign influence despite its being dedicated by a foreigner. According to Percy Brown the shape and fluting of the companion form capital are of Persepotitan extraction but at the same time bear a
marked resemblance to the capitals of the Bharhut torana with which it was contemporary. Marshall says that persepolitian columns and winged lions may well have been a legacy from Mauryan times when Yavana artists were employed by Asoka. No doubt, that the few foreign objects of art had strayed into the workshop of central India but there is no direct yavana influence on central Indian art. Any stone carving of the Garuḍa column have not been found in Taxila which was the important centre of their settlements.

The most ancient and original form of expression of plastic art was through the medium of terracottas. It was the material for artistic expression of the humbler people. The burnt clay was the common medium for cult figurines before the use of stone became common. This cheap and popular medium continued to be used for cult worship long after stone came into common use. They have a long history behind them. The earliest specimens of the terracotta illustrate the cult of a nude Goddess with prominent breasts and broad hips. They are modelled by hand. In the Śuṅga period, the mould makes its appearance. With the discovery of the mould, the objects of the true art began to be produced in the Śuṅga period. In this period a great revolution took place in the sense that the religious figurines were being gradually replaced by secular figurines. Numerous specimens of Śuṅga terracottas have been unearthed in the excavations of historical sites such as Mathurā, Basarh, Śita, Pāṭaliputra and Mahasthān.

Mathurā was an important centre of Śuṅga terracotta art. There are beautiful specimens of terracottas specially of a female dancer engaged in her toilet, a woman dancing pose and a wind
pipe playing yaksha. There are also other specimens showing male and female figurines in pair illustrating procreation. A pair engaged in joy ride is an excellent piece of Śuṅga terracotta art. In religious figurines the Goddess Gajā-Lakshmī with two elephants holding inverted jars and standing on uprising stalks of lotuses is a beautiful specimen of Śuṅga terracotta art.

The Śuṅga terracottas found in kosam are of high perfection. The female figure from that place representing probably the goddess of beauty Śrī is one of the most charming figures equally in facial features and its ornamentation. Another important and interesting is the Vāsavadattā-Udayana in three plaques which is now in the Bhārata kalābhavana in Kāśi. There is a Mithunā plaque showing an enormous scene with male on the right and female on the left. The male bears a turban with a knot on the left and small circular rings. The hair of the female is arranged in braids falling at the back. She has large lotus shaped ear-rings. The borders are decorated with rosaces. It is of single mould and of red clay with bright red slip. The small clay cart from kosam showing a picnic party is a unique specimen of its kind.

The terracottas of the Śuṅga period were found at Bhita also in the course of excavations. The most notable is the meeting scene of Dushyanta and Śakunthā which has been identified by Vogel. The exquisite figurines of laughing boy and girl are typical instances. One of the most notable specimens found at Buxar is a female figurine which is at present in the Indian Institute Museum at Oxford. Johnston had suggested that the figurine represented Māyā who was worshipped in Gaṅgā valley as Mother Goddess associated with
fertility. Some terracotta figurines of the Śuṅga period were found at Mahasthān in the Bogra district in the recent excavations which was performed in 1929-30. A very interesting find from Mahasthān is a terracotta plaque depicting the dream of Māyā devī very skillfully as shown in plaque 1.

These interesting terracottas reveal that the ancient part of Tāmralipti was once a centre of great cultural activity since the days of the Mauryas and the Śuṅga emperors. A number of yakṣiṇī figures discovered at Tāmulk may be confidently assigned to the Śuṅga period on the basis of their stylistic idioms. The notable characteristics of the yakṣiṇīs of Tāmralipti are their graceful expression and sensitive form. There is a very interesting terracotta rectangular plaque depicting four figures, one elderly lady caressing a pretty girl by touching her cheek, the girl who is the central figure in the composition points with endearment to an erect male figure at extreme right hand corner, carrying something like a broom-stick. Above these three figures is a beautifully shaped turbaned head who may be possibly a passer by. Most probably this four figure composition illustrates the Bodhisattwa Matanga Jātaka. The ladies depicted on this plaque wear elaborate coiffures and cross garlands. The general stylistic treatment of this plaque is closely related to the stone reliefs of Bharhut. According to Gupta, several Yakṣiṇīs discovered at Tāmulk are of moulded type and their features, particularly the flattened model possibly take them anterior to the Śuṅga period. Some of the jewelleries and costumes are found on the terracottas and clay female figurines of
Terracotta plaque, Mayadevi's dream, Mahasthan, Dist. Bogra, East Bengal.
Tamulk are exactly similar to those of the Bharhut representations of yaksha and yakshini. The same elaborate coiffures, the circular and tringular ear-rings, double garlands and girdles, are found again and again on both the examples of Tamralipti and the Bharhut railings. A terracotta piece found at Tamulk is of great interest as it represents a miniature gateway almost similar to the famous railing and carved gateway at the Sāñchī stūpa. This piece is unique as it established a close link between vaṅga and vaḍīśa. There are series of dolls and toys recovered from Tamulk of which the most interesting is the toy chariot with the head of a ram.

According to Goswami, toys for boys are referred to in some of the jataka stories. The pāli texts make it clear that toy elephants and horses were often given to juveniles as presents.

On the whole the art of the Suṅga period represent the first organized art activity of Indian people. It illustrates beyond doubt that it had a vast experience of ancient practice behind it. The human figures of Bharhut, Bodh-Gayā and Sāñchī as well as a number of terracottas usually assigned to the Suṅga period, show elegance and sophistication not only through their drapery, jewellery and coiffure but also through their poses and attitudes. According to Niharranjan Ray, the art of the Suṅga period reflects a stage when an art of the folk and tribal origin and affiliation came to attain recognition in the hands of an expanding religious brotherhood patronized mostly by the commercial middle classes and partly by the nobility and the rich merchantile of the Madhyadesa.
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