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## **Decoding of the Story Superimposed of Buddhist Sculpture unearth from Bharja and testifying its relation to this Silk-route area of Sirohi District, India**

**Priyank Talesara**

Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology – Madhav University  
TheLostWorld.in@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1733-7761>

**Aniruddh Bahuguna**

Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology – APS University  
Aniruddhbahuguna91@gmail.com

**Abstract** *Rohida* police station recovered an old sculpture, accidentally discovered from the cemetery of Bharja/Bhaja village. It is a broken bronze Buddhist Idol and very rare sculpture. It has exquisite Antique beauty with rust in red and corrosion in green. Sculpture of Buddha seated in *Padma Asana* (lotus posture) and his hand in *Dhyan Mudra* (meditation posture). Buddha is wearing the robe; the robe is decorated with the scene of *Buddhacharita* story, superimposed on the visible crust. This Sirohi district has the history of Jainism and Hinduism only, till the date there is no evidence regarding Buddhism practices in Sirohi district of Rajasthan. Sirohi is famous from its silk route in the valley, ancient *Chandrawati* city and Mount Abu, where thousands of temples of Jainism and Shivanism were built. **Objective:** what were the technique and technology used to manufacture sculpture? Where this artefact came from? What are the main characteristics & features of this sculpture? What carving scene depicted in this sculpture? **Research analysis:** For analysis of this sculpture we carefully look sculpture and magnify scene to compare with the stories of *Buddhacharita*. Moreover, check out that this sculpture is indigenous work of ancestral craftsmen or not. Also compare superimposed stories of *Buddha* and his life. **Scientific method:** Buddha sculpture is hollow in nature but very heavy in weight; Craftsman used the lost wax method to manufacture it. In ancient time the science behind manufacturing sculpture is very time consuming, first sculptors need to imagine about the subject, draft and then mould through melting, condensing, chiselling, hammering and exquisite carving. One of the oldest methods of metal casting according to Archaeo-metallurgy is bee wax method; this technique is now termed as the lost wax method. **Conclusion:** In the end, we like to conclude that in the history of Sirohi exploration, first time unearths the Buddhist sculpture but we have certain doubts that it mustn't belong to Sirohi district. This idol is required for further critical research like dating and detailed mould-casting technique used in the manufacturing of this sculpture.

**Keywords.** Buddhist Bronze Sculpture, Mount Abu, Metal Casting, Superimposed Stories.

### **I. Introduction**

According to the police, reported sculpture was found accidentally from Islamic graveyard of *Bharja* Village in Sirohi District. In the short pit from where the sculpture was found, having no evidence of other settlement complexes or antiquity. Possibly it was buried here by any traveller or robbers for security hide in the land of the graveyard. Also, there is one more possibility that it came through trafficking which is common in India especially Buddha sculptures in grey-market. Smuggling of Indian sculptures is in demand in the International

grey-market and with the help of dark-web; it's very easy to sell antiquities without any restrictions. In the world, Buddhist sculpture also has global demand especially about the head of Buddhist sculpture. Whereas trafficking is defined as the cultural property represents a source of enormous illicit profits for organized criminal groups [1]. The problem of robbery of cultural artefacts has grown so much that several International registers now exist where stolen items can be reported and displayed.

This hollow Buddhist sculpture without the head is a very rare one. It has exquisite beauty engraved or super-imposed over its visible crust. This bronze alloy sculpture is made up of metals like copper, tin, iron, lead etc. The crust has corrosion of green colour and rust of red colour in blend. Superimposed stories are related to the *Buddhacharita* and *Jatak Tales*. From the backside, the sculpture has a dent with a crack in the lower middle, a small crack in the right-hand elbow joint, and the head is missing, a small hit mark near neck shows that there is a possibility of intentionally removing of head or victim of vandalism. On the contrary, the sculpture is hollow from inside but it is very strong and heavy in weight.



**Figure 1: Front and Backside of unearthed Buddha Sculpture**

### A. Important scenes of Buddha

According to the *Buddhacharita*, there is a scene that is a reflection of Siddharth/Buddha's birth; he gets heavenly blessings from Lord *Indra* & Lord *Brahma*. Another story developed when Buddha got spiritual liberation and Salvation he reaches heaven where god *Sakra/Indra* and *Brahma* welcome him with drummers and musician. These scenes are superimposed depicted on the robe of Buddha sculpture.

### B. History of Sirohi

It is very difficult to prove the existence of the Buddhism here because in the history of the Mount Abu, descriptions of only two sects' mentioned in the ancient literature i.e. *Jainism* and *Hinduism*. Moreover, in our earlier explorations in this region, we only found Jain shrines and Hindu temple of *Shivanism* & *Vaishnavism*, especially in the village of *Bharja* we found ancient fortress building which is located near ancient Jain temple [2, p. 15].

Whereas a pillar inscription of Buddhist site in *Sarnath* (Uttar-Pradesh State), mentioned donation ‘*Borayasikhas Goshthi*’ (committee) from *Aboda* which is identified as *Abu* [3, p. 7]. But the point should be noted that gateway of *Sanchi*, was built in *Satvahana* time and they were followers of *Vaishnavism*, in that contemporary time the tradition of donation to Buddhist sites by Hindu Brahmins or followers are very common. Even we never found the description of the Mount Abu region in any Buddhist literature like *Buddhacharita* and travel documents of Buddhist pilgrimage *Huien Tsang*, but he visited *Bhilmala/Bhinmal*, which is not more than 100 km far from Mount Abu, visited by *Huien Tsang* in 640 CE. He saw “decline of the Buddhist monastery of hundred brother monks belonging to Hinyana of Sarvasti sect” [4, p. 231]. Both *Shivanism* and *Jainism* developed here side by side in our earlier finding we found many inscriptions explaining the value of this region.

1. **Chandrawati** ancient city was flourished on the bank of the river West-Banas was a sacred centre of the Hinduism (especially Shivanism) and Jainism religion. It is the ancient fortress city which is dated from Gupta time to decline phase of Parmar rule [5, p. 36]. The historian *Acharya Jinaprabhasuri* of 1389 A.D. describes Chandrawati sacred pilgrimage ‘*Vividha Tirtha Kalpa*’, also mention ‘the city as full of wealth and existence of temple *Chandraprabhu* [6, p. 345]. In 1443 A.D. historian *Megha* in his text *Tirthmala*, describe the prosperity and richness in comparison to *Ravan’s Lanka* [6, p. 345]. This area was also remaining centre of pilgrimage for both of the Hindu and Jain *Sarvakas*. Jain historian *Acharya Siddhasen Suri* of twelfth-century refers Chandrawati in *Sakala Tirtha Stotra* [6, pp. 344-345]. According to *Megha* Chandrawati was home of about 1800 Jain temples, and the most prominent was the temple of first *Tirthankar Rishabha* [6, p. 345]. In 1446 A.D. historian *Somadharma*, writes in *Upadesaptatika* that, in Chandrawati, there were 999 Shiva temples and 444 Jain temples [6, p. 345]. Whereas historian *Silavijaya* mentioned in his text *Tirthamala* that ‘Chandrawati has 1800 beautiful Jain temple at the time of *Vimala* [6, p. 345].
2. **Mount Abu** is also known for of *Dilwara* Jain temples, is one of the most sacred hills of the Jainism. In 1032 A.D., Jain text *Brihatkalpsutra* of *Arya Bhadrabahusvami* mentioned Mount Abu as a pilgrimage site for Jain *Sarvakas* [7, p. 8] In earlier tradition, it is recorded in the *Viviehatirthmala* and *Upadesaptatika* also has been described as a place of pilgrimage [7, p. 8]. An inscription of 1369 A.D. found on the door of the chief shrine in *Jivantasvami Sri Mahavira* Jain temple [3, p. 8]. The inscription stated that ‘*Mahavira* visited the Abu (*Arbudhabhumi*) region during his travel as a monk’. Site of *Dilwara* has been a centre of Hindu and lots of Jain temples from the centuries [7, p. 8]. In ancient time this region was called *Devakulapataka* or *Devalapataka* means the centre of temples [7, p. 8]. Some other pilgrimage sites like *Achaleshwar*, *Lotana*, *Akhi*, *Vastanji*, *Oriya*, *Gharkav Mata Ji*, *Shergaon* [8]. Here we also found ruins of the fortified city belonging to *Paramara* kingdom. The origin of *Paramara* related to site *Gomukh* where guru *Vashistha* had performed *Yajna* in *Gomukha*. In this sacred ritual (*yajna*) even gods got to assemble and from *Agnikund* (fire-alter ) given birth of four clans of *Agnikul Kshatriyas* “*Parmars*” by Lord *Indra*, “*Chaluky*” by *Brahma*, “*Parihars*” by *Shiva* and “*Chauhans*” by *Vishnu* [9, p. 9].

## II. Description of Buddha Sculpture

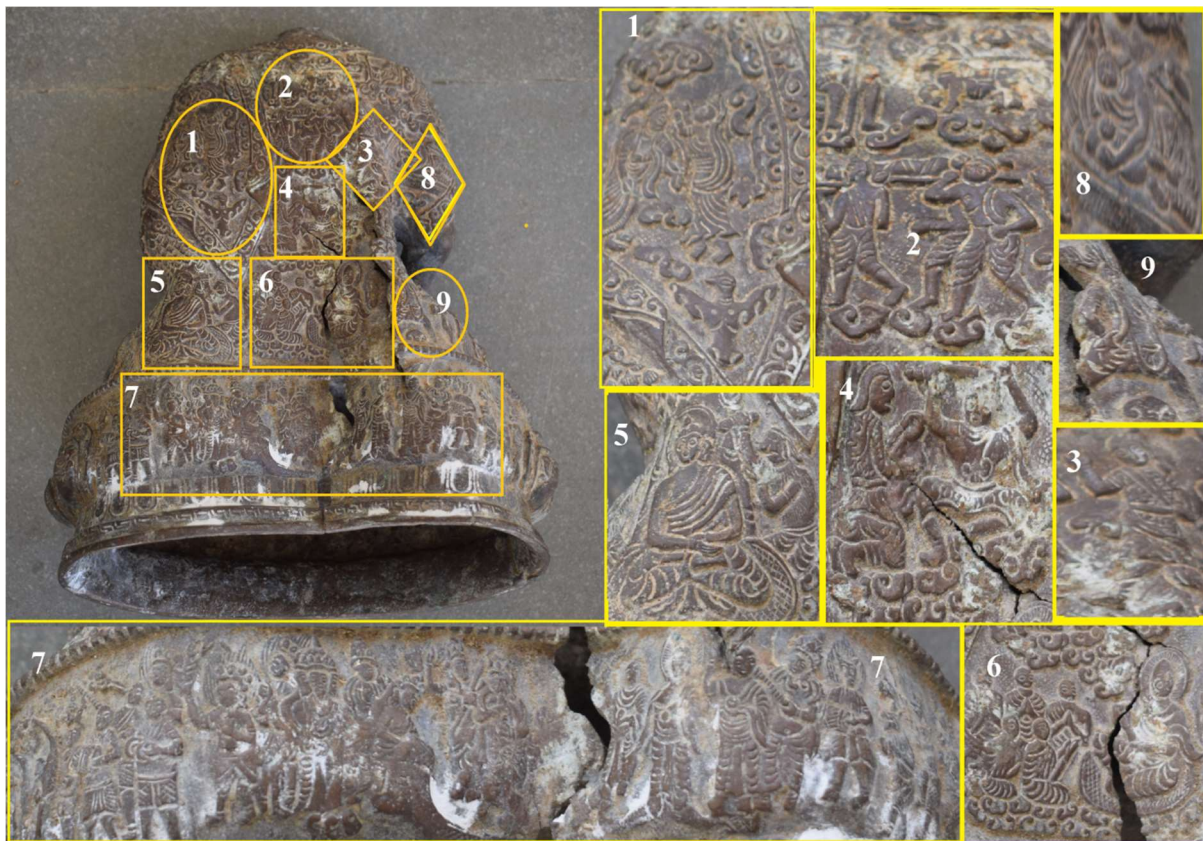
### A. Few visible features of the Buddha Sculpture are as follows: -

- Height and width of the sculpture is 24.4 CM (survived) x 21.9 CM.
- Approximate Survived weight is 4 Kilograms.
- Head of Buddha is missing.
- Buddha is seated in lotus posture on moon disk placed over Lotus. This meditative posture is also called *Dhyan Mudra*.
- The most of the body part of the Buddha is covered with the carved robe, only half part of the right chest and partial part of the right hand is visible.
- In the backside, the sculpture has a dent with two large cracks in the centre of the lower middle part.
- Small crack in the right-hand elbow joint.
- Bleed marks at joining hands position, and both of the thumbs are missing, possibly the missing alms-bowl was stacked over the joining hands and having bonds with the thumbs.
- Small crack below the left-hand area on the robe.
- The sculpture has an exquisite carving of Buddhist stories. Whereas stories seem to beautifully highlighted on robe and backside of lotus.

### B. Front side scene depicted in sculpture

Most of the scenes of the story can't be identified because sculpture has corrosion on mostly surface, only four scenes depicted are as follows:-

- Upward scene: the only appearance of Buddha.
- Near shoulder: Buddha seated in the lotus posture.
- Right leg scene of queen *Maya* in sleeping posture. *Maya* is dreaming about auspicious signs, before giving birth to Siddhartha (Buddha).
- Left leg: Buddha telling lesson to his one student who looks like *Aananda*. Whereas again seen queen *Maya* sleeping.



**Figure 2: Backside Stories Highlighted by Numbers which explained below**

**C. Backside scene depicted in sculpture (Numbering according to figure no. 2)**

1. This scene is related to *Jataka* Tales; the brave little grey parrot represents the past incarnation of Buddha called Bodhisattva, Parrot is spying the ceremony of *Rajtilak* (Coronation) of the contemporary king.
2. Four sights: when prince *Siddhartha* for the first time plans an excursion in his kingdom accompanied with his royal charioteer named *Channa*. On this excursion he saw one old person holding the stick for his support, one dead body corpse for the funeral procession, one stick person and one sage in ascetic posture these pains of human being distract prince and let him on the path of renunciation to become Buddha.
3. Scene of king *Bimbsara* of *Magadha* met with Buddha.
4. Scene of king *Ajatsatru* son of *Bimbsara* came under the asylum of Buddha.
5. God of desire, *Mara* tried to attack Buddha.
6. Buddha visited the deer forest of *Sarnath*, where Buddha met his five old monk friends.
7. There is a scene of Buddha achieving enlightened and proceed for heaven, where *Brahma & Indra/Sakra* (Divine man) with divine halo welcoming Buddha, drummer drumming and happy monks walking towards Buddha for welcoming. Moreover strangely one monk standing just behind the monk-like *das* (servant), who is giving a shade of umbrella (*Chatra Chaya*) to the monk. *Indra's* clothes look like Chinese silk.
8. *Yashoda*, the wife of Prince *Siddhartha*, is sleeping with her son *Rahul* and that time prince *Siddhartha* planning to leave his family and kingdom.

9. Tribal bandit *Unglimar* facing Buddha while wandering.

### III. Scientific Technique

*Buddha* sculpture is hollow in nature but very heavy in weight; Craftsman used the lost wax method to manufacture it. In ancient time the science behind manufacturing sculpture is very time consuming, first sculptors need to imagine about the subject, draft and then mould through melting, condensing, chiselling, hammering and exquisite carving. One of the oldest methods of metal casting according to Archaeo-metallurgy is bee wax method; this technique is now termed as the lost wax method. In lost wax method three steps involve:

- Molten metal
- Mould
- Cooling

Earliest lost wax method developed during the time of Harappan civilization, that time mould was used to make through clay but later on, a single metal mould was used in Mauryan time which was durable and provide strong and solid finishing to sculpture. The clay cover mould was baked in sunlight and then those object baked in the kiln with a specific temperature [10, p. 32]. Through this method, heating makes the wax got melted and simultaneous comes out in one direction and from other molten metal is poured to transfer in holes; it replaces metal from the wax [10, p. 32]. After that mould was broken if it was made from mud (terracotta) but not in the case of metal mould (durable), when clay mould was broken then molten metal started coming into shaped after cooling [10, p. 32]. Whereas in Indian culture different type of tradition used in a different type of metals science of *Panch & Asthdhatu* but the basic metal was copper and alloy like brass and bronze. In lost wax casting, initially developed solid casting, but soon also developed joined hollow casting [11, p. 57]. Especially literature of *Manasara* of Gupta time described the solid or possibly hollow technical lost wax casting, which became very common in the Indian art in the later period [11, p. 61]. Hollow technique & solid techniques details are mentions in text *Silparatna* (16<sup>th</sup> century). According to the *Silpratana*, hollow casting techniques include preparation of clay bodies needed for various components of core, mould and crucible [11, p. 61]. Finest clay and colours were to be procured from tanks and gardens even sometime from anthills. Other instructions were to be tempered with fillers such as brick dust, crushed pottery, charred rice husk, cotton fabric and cow-dung. Clay for crucibles was use to tempered with charred rice husk, crushed pottery and shredded cotton cloth [11, p. 62]. The core was to be of hard clay over which was spread with a thin layer of good quality of the clay, three parts of the clay to one of the crushed pot with cow dung [11, p. 62]. Giving the core an outer layer of fine clay might seem unnecessary but extensive study of cores suggests they were often built up of successive layers [11, p. 62]. The wax sheets were then applied to the core and modelled [11, p. 62]. The completed wax on its core was then invested with a very soft clay described as being made up of three parts clay tempered with one part crushed pot, under which chaplets are put to hold the core in place [11, p. 62]. Alternatively, the wax was moulded with a lump of wet, soft clay, of one part clay tempered with four parts crushed pot with cow dung [11, p. 62]. This was followed, after drying, by soft clay of one part, clay to four parts crushed pot, followed by a hard clay, containing clay, brick dust and nut juice [11, p. 62]. The outer layer of hard clay was to be bound with black iron strap and after that more hard clay added until the mould was too be strong for heating and the casting process. In the next step, the iron

strap should pass through waste parts of the image [11, p. 62]. From the sequence of building up the mould, it sounds like iron wire reinforcement in moulds commonly still follow in India [11, p. 62].

#### IV. Observation

The most of the archaeological sites in Sirohi district use to have smelting industry of Jainism art school especially at site *Vasantgarh/Basantgarh* known for smelting industry from here early reports tells that 240 idols of Jainism reported [12, p. 159]. In our observation from this site, we had collected large pieces of slags. In Sirohi district, we have explored many sites having *Jainism* metallic idols like in *Ore, Bamawarji*, and even in *Bandiyagarh* [2]. Primarily this Buddhist sculpture is not having features of Indian culture, some observations in the sculpture are like the style of wearing a robe is different, Moreover in the pedestal noticed that *Brahma, Indra*, divine man, a monk has servant(das) whom his holding umbrella for his master. Another thing observed is an anthropomorphic man behind the servant, which we have never seen in Indian Buddhist culture. This type of art and culture is still following in east Himalayan, Tibet and Chinese region. Moreover, an anthropomorphic man looks identical to the Himalayan festival of Buddh-Purnima: a man with a dragon mask. The observed features are identical to Chinese tradition or culture.

#### V. Possibility

The divine man may be Chinese king *Jade* or linked with Sakra mythology. There is no inscription attached on sculpture, so it is difficult to estimate its dates unless the use of thermo-luminescence dating but we could assume that this type of art was popular during silk route because sculpture represents the link with Himalayan silk route and approximately age between 350-400 years. The head of the sculpture is not found so it may be possible that it is *Bodhisativa Amitabh*. Another possibility we estimate that this Buddhist sculpture has alms-bowl in joining hands because it is a very popular art in Himalayan pass in Tibet. We have searched the internet to find the identical idol for more details, with the help of Google Lens technology, identified some similar antiquities in the auction and one best match identical idol is found in replica section of [Exoticindiaart.com](http://Exoticindiaart.com) also got some information that this art is very popular in Silk Road of Himalayan pass based on that idol it may be a possibility that smuggled from Tibetan art school. When comparing the replica its looks like the exact match even similar height and width, but having some visible differences are that first the design of the border of the robe is different, Second the size of the parrot in story no 1 from figure no 2 is different, third the replica have some metal appliqué on some subjects, fourth the finishing or the work quality of the subjects are much better in original then in replica. Fifth Replica is painted but original is not.



Figure 3: (A) Chinese Buddha gilt copper sculpture of the 19th century [13, p. 88]. VS (B) Bharja Sculpture



Figure 4: Replica of Tibetan Art statue Buddha sculpture [14]

## VI. Acknowledgement

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## VII. Conclusion

In the end, we like to conclude that in history & exploration of Sirohi, It is the first time that any Buddhist sculpture has appeared, but we doubt that it didn't belong to Sirohi. Also need further excavation and exploration in the *Bharja* Village for evidence related to Buddhist culture. Importantly we need this idol for further critical research especially related to dating and mould -casting technique used in the manufacturing of sculpture done by craftsmen.

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