



The Emergence and Spread of the Buddhist Tārā Cult in India between 7th Century CE and 11th Century CE with Special Reference to the Sirpur Tārā Bronzes

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ABSTRACT

Sirpur (Lat. 21° 25'N, Long. 82° 11'E) is a small village on the right bank of Mahanadi in the Mahasamund District of Chhattisgarh. It is an important archaeological site and archaeological excavations at Sirpur revealed that it was an important centre of Mahayana Buddhism in Central India. Numerous bronze images of the Buddha and Buddhist deities such as Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Tara etc. were found from Sirpur. In this paper, an attempt has been given to discuss the sculptural and iconographic bronze images of Tara from Sirpur. A comparative study of these Tara images with the Tara bronze images found in other Buddhist sites of India has been carried out. The article will highlight the iconographic features of the Buddhist goddess Tārā and her importance in the contemporary religious settings during the 5th–6th centuries CE.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Vajrayāna Buddhist pantheon, several Buddhist deities were being worshipped. According to the Vajrayāna faith, the god was answerable to his *śakti*. It was believed that the male gods could be approached through their respective *śaktis*. The establishment of a female deity and its iconography is found in *Sādhnamālā* and *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, the important Buddhist texts associated with the Buddhist iconography (Misra 1992: 96–97). Vajrayāna marked not only the beginning of tantric rituals but also set a new trend in art and iconography around the 6th century CE (Getty 1928: 120). *Tāntrism* and *sāktism* can be seen in the worship of ten different knowledge called *Daśamahāvidyā*. Among these deities or *śaktis*, Tārā was the second important *mahāvidyā* or deity (Gupte 1972: 117). She was recognised as the *śakti* of Avalokiteśvara. She was also the *śakti* of the Dhyani Buddha, Amoghasiddhi. She was worshipped through her two distinct forms, viz. Śveta (white) Tārā and Nīla (Blue) Tārā in the 6th–7th century CE. According to Bhattacharya (1958), Tārā can be divided into five groups, viz. Green Tārā, White Tārā, Yellow Tārā, Blue Tārā and Red Tārā.

The earliest images of Tārā belonging to the 6th–7th Cent. CE were introduced in the Buddhist caves of Western India. Her worship was popular at Kanheri, Ellora and Aurangabad (Sengupta 1955–57; Dhavalikar 1963–64). Over time the worship of Tārā became popular and thence many images of hers which can be dated to c. 7th/8th centuries CE onwards have been discovered in many parts of the Indian subcontinent. It appears that her worship continued till c. 12th–13th centuries CE as testified by her sculptures, panel's paintings and associated religious objects.

SIRPUR

Sirpur (21° 25'N, 82° 11'E) is a small village on the right bank of Mahanadi river in the Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh. It is an important archaeological site and is well-known for its brick-built Lakshmana temple of the 8th century CE. It was the capital of Śarabhapuriyas and Pāṇḍuvamṣis of Dakshina Kosala during the fifth and eighth centuries CE. The ancient name of Sirpur was 'Śrīpūra' (Mirashi 1947: 47), (Srivastava 1984: 2), (Deva 1988: 219). The archaeological excavations at Sirpur revealed that it was an important centre of Mahayana and early Vajrayāna Buddhism.

DISCOVERY OF THE SIRPUR BRONZES AND SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH

In the year of 1939, Bhikhamdas Goswami, the priest of the Gandheswara temple in the Sirpur temple complex, accidentally found a hoard of around 60 bronze sculptures during some construction work. (Srivastava 1984: 50). These sculptures included several images of the Buddha and two images of Tārā. However, most of the images were smuggled and several images fell into the hands of different persons. Fortunately, some of them were collected by a Jaina monk, Muni Kantisagara (Kantisagara 1959). He published a few articles on these images including the Tārā pantheon image.¹ The bronze sculptures from the find were further dispersed; but the efforts of the Nagpur State Museum and the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh in 1952 and 1956 resulted in the acquisition of twelve images (Chandra 1985: 126) which included four Buddha images in the bhūmisparśamudrā, four images of Avalokiteśvara, two images of Mañjuśrī, one image of Vajrapāṇi and one image of Tārā (Dikshit 1955–57). Eleven of them were sent to the Mahant Ghasidas Memorial Museum, Raipur. One was recovered by the curator of the Central Museum, Nagpur.

After the discovery of these images, excavations were conducted at the complex of *Ānandaprabhū Kūṭī Vihāra*, at Sirpur in 1954–56 by the University of Sagar under the supervision of M.G. Dikshit (IAR 1953–54, 1954–55, 1955–56). One bronze image of the Buddha was discovered from the complex (Srivastava 1984: 32). After that, from 1999–2000 to 2003–04, A.K. Sharma carried out excavations at the site of Sirpur on behalf of the *Bodhisattva Nagarjuna Sanstha Va Anusandhan Kendra*, Nagpur. From 2004–08 the site was excavated by him on behalf of the Department of Culture and Archaeology, Government of Chhattisgarh. On 13th January 2008, a

1 This image subsequently passed into the possession of Muni Jainavijaya and finally to the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art where it is situated today.

This article presents the results of studying the bronze images of the goddess Tārā, from Sirpur and locating them in the context of other contemporary centres of Vajrayāna faith in India that have yielded bronze images of Tārā. The basis of the present study is art history and salient features of images have been subjected for comparison to analyse the similarity or dissimilarity observed in these images. The images of Tārā from Sirpur include one image from a cache of images discovered and subsequently kept in the Ghasidas museum, Raipur; and five bronzes found in Sirpur excavations by Dr. A.K. Sharma (Sharma 2007).

TĀRĀ IMAGES FROM SIRPUR

TĀRĀ (FIG. 12A) (TABLE 1) (REG. NO. 783)

The sculptures excavated by A.K. Sharma (2010) found in Sirpur belong to the 7th to 8th century CE as claimed by the excavator. The present image of Tārā is under a good state of preservation. The halo of the image is comprised of four types of mouldings. The innermost moulding is plain and is semi-circular in section. The next moulding is also plain and is flat in section. The third moulding is a thick band having two distinct ridges on both the sides with a row of beaded pattern in the centre. The outermost moulding essentially depicts a circle of emanating flames. However, this depiction is manifested in the form of conch shells arranged in an oval pattern. A larger bead can be seen at the centre between the third and the outermost moulding. A cylindrical shaft that emerges from the back of the image can be seen attached to the halo.

As regards the iconography of Tārā, she is shown seated in *lalitāsana* over the *viśvapadmapiṭha*.² She is covered with folded drapery, shown hanging near right leg. Her right leg is shown resting on a separate projection which is connected to the lower pedestal and her left leg is shown folded on the upper pedestal. Her right palm is displayed in *varadamudrā* while the left palm is slightly raised and is shown holding the stalk of an *Utpala*. The stalk of the lotus is shown wrapped around the palm and further going down to the pedestal from behind the left leg. Another flower

Table 1 Presents the features of these images.

S. NO.	HALO	ATTRIBUTES	POSTURE	JEWELLERY	CLOTHES	PEDESTAL
Fig.12a	Oval halo with flat and beaded mouldings, ornate bead, long leaves, four-petaled flower and conch shell-type flames.	<i>Utpala</i> .	<i>lalitāsana</i> , <i>Varadamudrā</i> , with circular mark, <i>dvibhaṅga mudrā</i> .	<i>Padavalayas</i> , <i>valayas</i> , <i>keyūra</i> , <i>ekāvalī</i> , <i>Śaṅkhavalaya</i> , <i>karṇakuṇḍalas</i> , <i>tilaka</i> , <i>mukuṭa</i> and <i>cūḍā</i> .	<i>Uttariya</i> and <i>dhotr</i> .	<i>Viśvapadmapiṭha</i> with Beaded edge.
Fig.12b	Oval halo with semi-circular, close flower and beaded mouldings, ornate bead, long leaves, four-petaled flower and tongues of flames.	<i>Utpala</i> .	<i>Varadamudrā</i> with circular mark and <i>Padmāsana</i> .	<i>Valayas</i> , <i>keyūra</i> , <i>Śaṅkhavalaya</i> , <i>mekhalā</i> , <i>ekāvalī</i> with pendent, different <i>karṇakuṇḍalas</i> , <i>ūrṇā</i> and <i>cūḍā</i> .	<i>Uttariya</i> and <i>dhotr</i> .	<i>Padmapiṭha</i> with Beaded edge and plain circular band.
Fig.12c	Oval halo with flat and broken beaded mouldings, ornate bead and long leaves, four-petaled flower and tongues of flames.	<i>Utpala</i> .	<i>Varadamudrā</i> with circular mark and <i>Padmāsana</i> .	<i>Valayas</i> , <i>keyūra</i> , <i>mekhalā</i> , <i>ekāvalī</i> , <i>Śaṅkhavalaya</i> , <i>karṇakuṇḍalas</i> , and <i>cūḍā</i> .	<i>Uttariya</i> and <i>dhotr</i> .	<i>Padmapiṭha</i> with Beaded edge.
Fig.12d	Oval halo with flat and broken beaded mouldings, ornate bead and tongues of flames.	<i>Utpala</i> .	<i>Varadamudrā</i> with circular mark and <i>Padmāsana</i> .	<i>Valayas</i> , <i>keyūra</i> , <i>mekhalā</i> , <i>ekāvalī</i> , <i>Śaṅkhavalaya</i> , <i>karṇakuṇḍalas</i> , and <i>cūḍā</i> .	<i>Uttariya</i> and <i>dhotr</i> .	<i>Padmapiṭha</i> with Beaded edge.
Fig.13a	Broken	Broken	Broken	<i>ekāvalī</i> , <i>Śaṅkhavalaya</i> , <i>karṇakuṇḍalas</i> , <i>ūrṇā</i> and <i>cūḍā</i> with centre ornate bead.	<i>uttariya</i> .	Broken
Fig.13b	Oval halo with flat and broken beaded mouldings, ornate bead, long leaves, four-petaled flower and conch shell-type flames.	<i>Utpala</i> and lotus bud.	<i>Varadamudrā</i> with circular mark and <i>lalitāsana</i> .	Beaded <i>padavalayas</i> , <i>valayas</i> , <i>mekhalā</i> , <i>keyūra</i> , two <i>ekāvalī</i> , <i>Śaṅkhavalaya</i> , <i>hāra</i> , <i>karṇakuṇḍalas</i> , <i>tilaka</i> , <i>mukuṭa</i> and <i>cūḍā</i> .	<i>Uttariya</i> and <i>dhotr</i> .	<i>Viśvapadmapiṭha</i> with Beaded edge and the rectangular flat base.

2 This is a double-petaled lotus pedestal. It has two platforms, one made of lower row of petals (also called as lower pedestal) and an upper pedestal made of the upper row of petals.

depicted on the right side of the deity's face. It appears that it is essentially shown to hide a lateral bar that can be seen from behind. This bar is probably an outcome of the manufacturing technique. Another bar that can be seen directly emerging from behind the deity's face and going vertically, is decorated with a four-petaled flower and two lateral long leaves.

Her body is shown in *dvibhaṅga mudrā*. The face is slightly round in shape with half-closed eyes, prominent nose and thin lips. She is bejewelled with *padavalayas*, *valayas*, *keyūra*, *ekāvalī*, *karṇakuṇḍalas*, *Śaṅkhalaya*, *tilaka* on the forehead, triangular beaded *mukuṭa* is visible on the head, her hair is arranged in a *cūḍā* with a couple of coiled curly long strands falling on the shoulders.

The deity is placed over the double petals lotus (*viśvapadmapiṭha*). The lower set of petals gracefully dropping down and upper petals pointing upwards. The beaded edged pericarp visible on the pedestal (Sharma 2010: 92).

TĀRĀ (FIG. 12B) (TABLE 1) (REG. NO. 765)

This sculpture is corroded. The halo of the image is oval. It consists of six mouldings. The innermost moulding is plain and circular in section. The next moulding is made up of a closely carved floral design, followed by another band of a plain moulding. This, in turn, is followed by two plain, one thin and the next thick, mouldings. The sixth moulding is comprised of two parts; the inner beaded band and the outer depicting tongues of flames at regular interval. An ornate bead is visible on the top of halo in the centre. Two lateral and one vertical bar support the image from behind. The vertical bar is covered with a four-petaled flower and two long leaves flanking it.

Tārā is shown seated in the *padmāsana* and the upper and lower portions of her body are covered with different clothes viz. *uttariya* and *adhovastra* respectively. Her both hands are resting on the knees. Right palm is displayed in *varadamudrā* with circular mark, while the left palm holds a long stalk of an *Utpala* which is attached to the halo at the shoulder level (Sharma 2010: 90).

She is bejewelled with many ornaments such as *valaya*, *keyūra*, *mekhalā*, a beaded necklace with pendant, *Śaṅkhalaya*, a long heavy stud in the right ear and a circular earplug in the left ear. The *ūrṇā* mark can be seen on her forehead. Her hair is styled in a *cūḍā* and is fastened with a decorated hairband. Locks of long curly hair are visible on both the shoulders. Her eyes are shown to be *ardhonmīlita*. She has thin lips. The nose of the image is broken.

She is shown seated on a single-petaled lotus pedestal or a *padmapiṭha* having a beaded line on the upper edge. The lower edge of the pedestal is attached to the plain moulding.

TĀRĀ (FIG. 12C) (TABLE 1) (REG. NO. 781)

The sculpture is weathered and hence all the details are not properly visible. The halo of the image is oval with three plain mouldings the outermost moulding being shown with tongues of flames at regular intervals, a few of them broken. Two lateral and one vertical bar are attached to the image. Both lateral and vertical bars are covered with a four-petaled flower flanked by long leaves. One ornate bead is attached to the top of halo in the centre.

The goddess is shown seated in *padmāsana* and is dressed in *uttariya* for upper body portion and *adhovastra* for the lower. Her right palm is shown resting on the knee in *varadamudrā*. A circular mark is visible on it. The left hand is raised and is shown holding the stalk of an *Utpala*. According to Sharma (2010: 91), the posture of the hand exhibits *jnānamudrā* or *vyākhyānamudrā*.

The image is shown decorated with *valayas*, *keyūra*, *mekhalā*, *ekāvalī*, *Śaṅkhalaya* and a *tilaka* mark on the right foot. Her hair is styled in a *cūḍā*. Her long curly hair locks are shown resting on both her shoulders. Her eyes are shown to be *ardhonmīlita*. She has a prominent nose and thin lips.

She is seated on a *padmapiṭha* that has a beaded line on the edge.

TĀRĀ (FIG. 12D) (TABLE 1) (REG. NO. 821) (SHARMA 2010: 92)

This sculpture is also corroded like the previous one. As in the case of other images, the halo of the image is also oval. However, it has only three plain mouldings with the outermost depicting

tongues of flames interspersed with beads at regular intervals. Some of these 'tongues' are broken. Two lateral and one vertical bar are attached to the image. A central ornate bead can be seen at the top of the halo.

She is seated in *padmāsana* and is dressed in *uttariya* and *adhovastra*. Her both hands are resting on the knees. The right hand is in *Varadamudrā* with *tilaka* mark while the left hand is shown holding a long stalk of an *Utpala* which is attached to the halo.

The deity is ornamented with *valayas*, *keyūra*, *mekhalā*, *ekāvali*, *Śaṅkhavalaya* and *karṇakuṇḍalas*. Her hair is styled in a *cūdā*. Her long curly hair locks are shown resting on her shoulders. Her eyes are shown to be *ardhonmilita*. She has a prominent nose and thin lips.

The deity is placed over a *padmapīṭha* that has a beaded line on the edge. A female devotee sitting on her knees with hands in *namaskāramudrā* is attached to the right side of the pedestal over one of the petals.

TĀRĀ (FIG. 13A) (TABLE 1) (REG. NO. 828)

This particular image is broken and only its bust is available for the study. However, according to Sharma (2010: 92), her features give an idea that it is an image of Tārā. She is decorated with many ornaments such as *keyūra*, *ekāvali*, *Śaṅkhavalaya* round and heavy *karṇakuṇḍalas*. Her hair is styled in a *cūdā*, tied with a diadem on the forehead. She draped in an *uttariya* which has covered her breasts. A small portion of the lateral bar is visible on the right side which means it has an elaborated halo (Sharma 2010: 92).

TĀRĀ (FIG. 13B) (TABLE 1)

This particular image belongs to the 1939 hoard which was rescued by M.G. Dikshit in 1956 (Dikshit 1955–57: 7). According to him, the deity dates back to the 10th–11th century CE.

The halo of the image is comprised of three types of mouldings. The innermost moulding is plain and is flat in section. The next moulding is a thick band having two distinct ridges on both the sides with a row of beaded pattern in the centre. The outermost moulding essentially depicts a circle of emanating flames. However, this depiction is manifested in the form of conch shells arranged in an oval pattern. A larger bead can be seen at the centre on the outermost moulding.

The deity is shown seated in *lalitāsana* over the *viśvapadmapīṭha*. Her right leg is shown resting on a separate projection attached to the lower rectangular pedestal while the left leg is placed over the pedestal. Her right palm is displaying the *varadamudrā* while the left palm is resting behind the left leg and holding a stalk of an *Utpala*. The lateral bars are covered individually with a small flower and a lotus. The vertical bar over the head bears a small four-petaled flower with two leaves on both sides. Her body features are prominent. She is posed in *dvibhaṅga*.

She has a roundish face and apart from a prominent nose nothing is visible. She is decorated with beaded *padavalayas*, *mekhalā* with a central pendant, *valayas*, beaded *keyūra* having a central ornament, *ekāvali*, *Śaṅkhavalaya* and *hāra*, elongated *karṇakuṇḍalas* and a *tilaka* on the forehead. A *mukuṭa* is visible on her head, her hair is arranged in a *cūḍa* and couple of coiled curly long hair locks are shown resting on her shoulders.

She is seated in *vāmalalitāsana* over the *viśvapadmapīṭha*. Beaded edged pericarp visible on the upper petal lotus. Double petaled lotus attached above the rectangular flat base with plain mouldings followed by four legs in the corner.

According to A.K. Sharma, the bronze images which were found in Sirpur during his excavation period belong to the 7th–8th century CE (Sharma 2010: 31). The images that belong to the 1939 hoard rescued by M.G. Dikshit in 1956 (Dikshit 1955–57: 7) date back to the 7th–11th century CE. Images one to five in this article were recovered by Sharma who dates them to ca. 7th–8th century CE. *Fig. 6* in the article belongs to the cache recovered by Dikshit, which he dates to ca. 10th–11th Century CE.

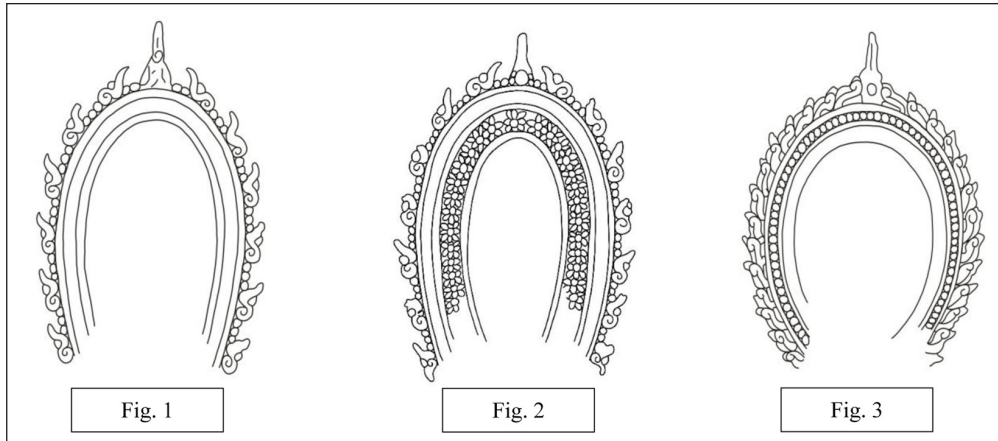
A close study of these images reveals that these images can be analysed and compared with each other based on five criteria viz. halo, pedestal, lotus, hand postures and sitting postures. The picture that emerges through such a comparative analysis is as follows.

1. Halo: The basic feature of halo appears to be of the multi-moulded type. However, it can be further classified into –

Type 1 (**Fig. 1**): Plain semi-circular mouldings, cylindrical shaft and tongues of flames at regular intervals.

Type 2 (**Fig. 2**): Closely carved floral design, semi-circular mouldings, tongues of flames at regular intervals and cylindrical shaft.

Type 3 (**Fig. 3**): Single beaded band, flat and broad moulding, close tongues of flames and cylindrical shaft.



Figs. 1, 2 and 3 Showing different Halos.

According to this classification, the halos of **Figs. 12(a)** and **13 (b)** of Sirpur belong to **Fig. 3** type; that of **Fig. 12 (b)** belongs to **Fig. 2** type and those of **Fig. 12 (c)** and **(d)** are of **Fig. 1** type. Same type of Halo can be seen in images found from Achutrajpur, Nalanda and Jhewari (**Table 2**).

HALO	TYPE 1 (FIG. 1)	TYPE 2 (FIG. 2)	TYPE 3 (FIG. 3)
Achutrajpur Images	Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Mittra 1978: 101–108, Plates 86, 90, 92, 93, 96, 98) Though the images 1 to 4 have a solid halo, their mouldings and features are comparable with the Type 1 halo from Sirpur.		Achutrajpur images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 (Mittra 1978: 102–107, Plates 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 100, 103, 109).
Nalanda Images	Images 1, 2, 3 (Misra 1998: 94–103, Plates 126, 132, 140).	Images 1, 2 (Misra 1998: 99–101, Plates 133, 136).	Images 1, 2 (Misra 1998: 94–175 Plates 125, 129).
Jhewari (Bangladesh) Image	Image 1 ³ (Mittra 1982: 109, Plate 89).		

Table 2 Types of Halo.

Pedestal: The pedestal is classified into three types based on its essential characteristic features-

Type 1 (**Fig. 4**): *Padmapīṭha* or single petaled lotus.

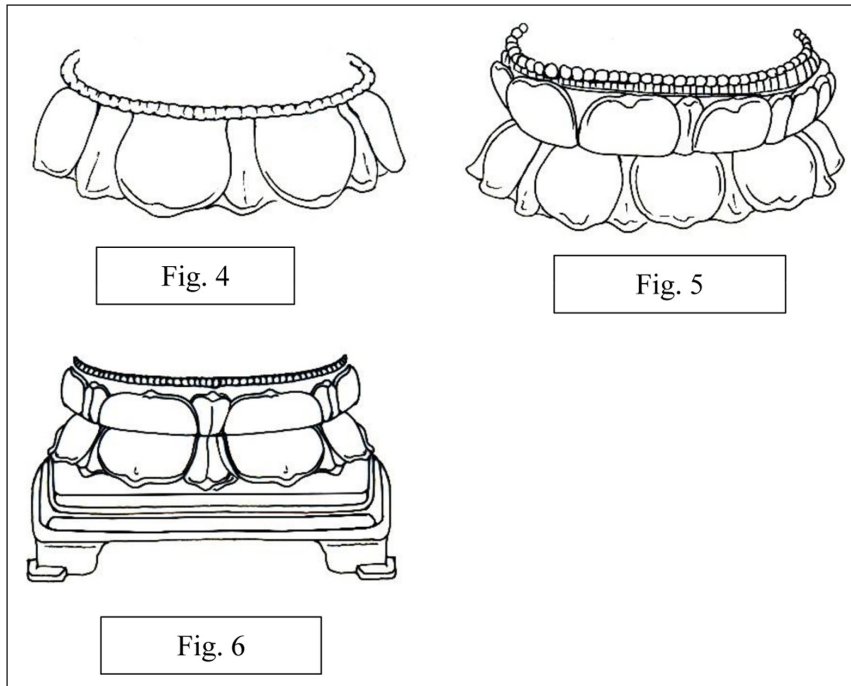
Type 2 (**Fig. 5**): *Viśvapadmapīṭha* or double petaled lotus.

Type 3 (**Fig. 6**): *Padmapīṭha* or *Viśvapadmapīṭha* with a flat rectangular base, plain moulding and four legs.

According to this classification, the pedestal of **Fig. 12 (a)** of Sirpur belongs to **Fig. 5** type; those of **Fig. 12 (b, c & d)** belong to **Fig. 4** type and that of **Fig. 13 (b)** is of **Fig. 6** type. Same type of pedestal can be seen in images found from Achutrajpur, Nalanda, Kashmir, Kurkihar, Nagapattiam, Antichak, Fatehpur, Ratnagiri and Jhewari (**Table 3**).

Lotus (*Utpala*): The *Utpala* is one of the essential elements in Tārā images and there are two different types –

Type 1: Full-bloom *Utpala*.



Figs. 4, 5 and 6 Showing different Pedestals.

PEDESTAL	TYPE 1 (FIG. 4)	TYPE 2 (FIG. 5)	TYPE 3 (FIG. 6)
Achutrajpur Images	Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (Mitra 1978: 104-08, Plates 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 99).	Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (Mitra 1978: 102-110, Plates 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92 101, 102, 104).	Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 (Mitra 1978: 102-109, Plates 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 99, 100, 101, 102).
Nalanda Images	Images 1, 2, 3, 4 (Misra 1998: 94-103, Plates 125, 126, 133, 140).	Images 1, 2, 3 (Misra 1998: 94-101, Plates 127A, 132, 136).	Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Misra 1998: 94-103, Plates 125-a, 126, 129, 136, 140).
Kashmir Images	Image 1 (Pal 1975: 184, Plate 69).		Image 1 (Pal 1975: 182, Plate 68).
Jhewari (Bangladesh) Image	Images 1, 2 (Bandyopadhyay 1981: 30-31, 109 Plates 16, 89).		Image 1 (Bandyopadhyay 1981: 30-31, Plate 16).
Kurkihar Images		Image 1 (Sinha 1983: 102, Plate 42).	Images 1, 2, 3 (Sinha 1983: 100-102, Plates 40, 41, 42).
Nagapattiam Images	Early Chola image 1 (Ramachandran 1965: 58, Plate X-2).	Late Chola image 1 (Ramachandran 1965: 57-58, Plate XI-3).	
Antichak Image		Image 1 (Verma 1971-1981: 341, Plate CXL-A).	
Fatehpur Images		Images 1, 2 (Sinha 1983: 102, Plates 43, 44).	
Ratnagiri Image		Image 1 (Mitra 1958-61 362, Plate CCLXXXIV-B).	

Table 3 Types of Pedestal.

Type 2: Full-bloom *Utpala* along with a bud.

According to the above classification, the *Utpalas* of Fig. 12 belong to Type 1 and the Fig. 13 (b) belongs to Type 2. Same type of *Utpala* can be seen in images found from Achutrajpur, Nalanda, Kashmir, Kurkihar, Nagapattiam, Antichak, Fatehpur, Ratnagiri and Jhewari (Table 4).

Hand postures: The hand postures are classified into three types-

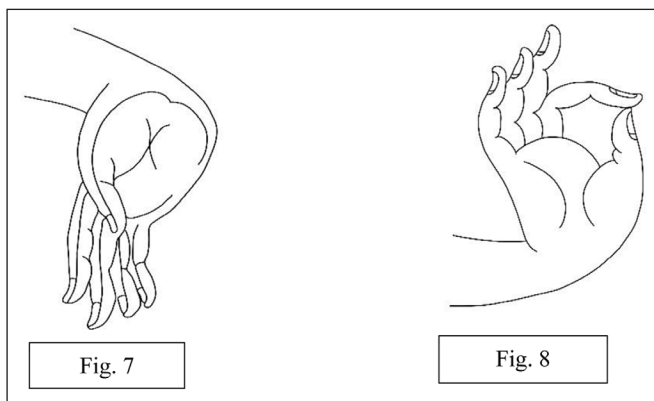
Type 1: *Varadamudrā* (Fig. 7) along with *Abhayamudrā* (Fig. 8).

Type 2: *Varadamudrā* (Fig. 7) and other hand resting on her knees.

Type 3: *Varadamudrā* (Fig. 7) and other hand placed behind the leg.

UTPALA	TYPE 1	TYPE 2
Achutrajpur Images	Image 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 (Mitra 1978: 101–109, Plates 86, 87, 89, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 102).	Image 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (Mitra 1978: 102–109, Plates 88, 90, 92, 95, 101).
Nalanda Images	Image 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (Misra 1998: 94–103, Plates 126, 127-A, 132, 133, 140).	Image 1 (Misra 1998: 94, Plate 125).
Kurkihar Images	Image 1 (Sinha 1983: 100, Plate 40).	Images 1, 2 (Sinha 1983: 101–102, Plates 41–42).
Kashmir Images	Image 1 (Pal 1975: 182, Plate 68).	Kashmir image 1 (Pal 1975: 184, Plate 69).
Ratnagiri Image	Image 1 (Mitra 1958–61 362, Plate CCLXXXIV-A, B).	
Antichak Image	Image 1 (Verma 1971–1981: 341, Plate CXL-A).	
Nagapattiam Images		Early Chola image 1 (Ramachandran 1965: 58, Plate X-2).
Jhewari (Bangladesh) Image	Image 1 ³ (Mitra 1982: 109, Plate 89).	

Table 4 Types of *Utpala*.



Figs. 7 and 8 Showing hand Postures.

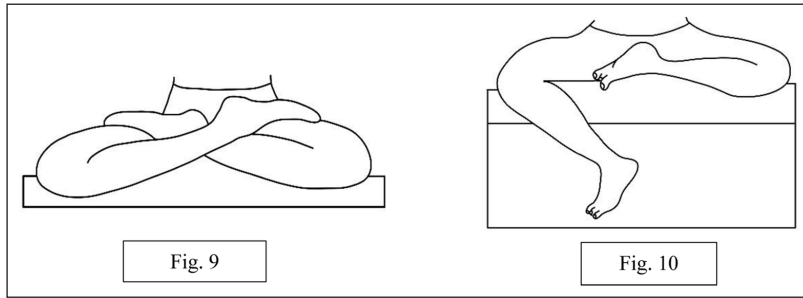
According to this classification, the hand postures of *Fig. 12 (a & c)* are of *Fig. 7* type; those of *Fig. 12 (b & d)* belong to *Fig. 7* type and that of *Fig. 13 (b)* is of *Fig. 7* type. Same type of hand postures can be seen in images found from Achutrajpur, Nalanda, Kashmir, Kurkihar, Nagapattiam, Antichak, Fatehpur, Ratnagiri and Jhewari (*Table 5*).

HAND POSTURE	TYPE 1 (FIGS. 7 & 8)	TYPE 2 (FIG. 7)	TYPE 3 (FIG. 7)
Achutrajpur Images	Image 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Mitra 1978: 101–108, Plates 86, 90, 92, 93, 98, 99).	Image 1 (Mitra 1978: 109, Plate 100).	Image 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, (Mitra 1978: 102–107, Plates 87, 88, 89, 91, 94, 95, 96, 100).
Nalanda Images	Images 1, 2, 3 (Misra 1998: 94–101, Plates 125, 133, 136).		Images 1 (Misra 1998: 103, Plate 140).
Ratnagiri Images	Image 1 (Mitra 1958–61 362, Plate CCLXXXIV-B).		Image 1 (Mitra 1958–61 362, Plate CCLXXXIV-A).
Jhewari (Bangladesh) Image	Image 1 (Bandyopadhyay 1981: 30–31, Plate 16).		Image 1 (Mitra 1982: 109, Plate 89).
Kurkihar Image	Image 1, 2, 3 (Sinha 1983: 100–102, Plates 40, 40, 42).		
Antichak Image	Image 1 (Verma 1971–1981: 341, Plate CXL-A).		
Nagapattiam Images	Early Chola image 1 (Ramachandran 1965: 58, Plate X-2). Late Chola image 2 (Ramachandran 1965: 57–58, Plate XI-3).		
Kashmir Image		Image 1 (Pal 1975: 184, Plate 69).	

Table 5 Types of Hand posture.

Type 1 (*Fig. 9*): *Padmāsana*.

Type 2 (*Fig. 10*): *Lalitāsana*.



Figs. 9 and 10 Showing Sitting Postures.

According to this classification, the sitting postures of *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (b)* of Sirpur belong to *Fig. 10*; that of *Fig. 12 (b, c & d)* belong to *Fig. 9* type. Same type of sitting posture can be seen in images found from Achutrajpur, Nalanda, Kashmir, Kurkihar, Nagapattiam, Antichak, Fatehpur, Ratnagiri and Jhewari (*Table 6*).

SITTING POSTURE	TYPE 1 (<i>FIG. 9</i>)	TYPE 2 (<i>FIG. 10</i>)
Achutrajpur Image	Image 1 (Mitra 1978: 109, Plate 101).	Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 (Mitra 1978: 102–108, Plate 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 99, 100).
Nalanda Images	Images 1, 2 (Misra 1998: 99–101, Plate 133, 136).	Images 1, 2 (Misra 1998: 94–103, Plate 127A, 140).
Kashmir Image	Images 1 (Pal 1975: 184, Plate 69).	
Jhewari (Bangladesh) Image	Image 1 (Mitra 1982: 109, Plate 89).	
Kurkihar Image		Image 1 (Sinha 1983: 102, Plate 42).
Ratnagiri Images		Image 1 (Mitra 1958–61: 361–62, Plates CCLXXXIV-A, B).
Antichak Image		Image 1 (Verma 1971–1981: 341, Plate CXL-A).
Fatehpur Images		Image 1, 2 (Sinha 1983: 102, Plates 43–44).
Nagapattiam Images		Late Chola image 1 (Ramachandran 1965: 57–58, Plate XI-3).

Table 6 Types of sitting posture.

Overall Aesthetic Appearance: *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (b)* show similarity as regards the narrow waist and broad hips. *Fig. 12 (b, c & d)* though have narrow waists, their hips are not as broad as that of the *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (b)*. Secondly, *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (a & b)* have broad shoulders, because of which they also have heavy busts. When compared these features with *Fig. 12 (b, c & d)* these figures appear to be having narrower shoulders and not so heavy breasts. Besides, as regards the ornaments, *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (a & b)* are shown with more elaborate ornaments such as keyūra, padavalaya, valaya, mekhala, ekāvali etc.; whereas *Fig. 12 (b, c & d)* are shown wearing valaya, mekhalā and ekāvali.

Based on the above discussion we can classify these images as regards their chronology. *Fig. 12 (b, c & d)* share the common less developed artistic features and hence can be dated to c. 7th–8th century CE. The *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (a & b)* show more elaborate features as discussed above and can satisfactorily be placed to c. 10–11 centuries CE. As mentioned above, all these images have been dated by Sharma (2010) (*Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (a)*) to 7th/8th centuries CE. Dikshit (1955–57) has dated *Fig. 13 (b)* to c. 10th/11th centuries. Considering the similarities among *Figs. 12 (a)* and *13 (a & b)* the present author is of the opinion that all the three figures are contemporary and belong to c. 10th/11th centuries.

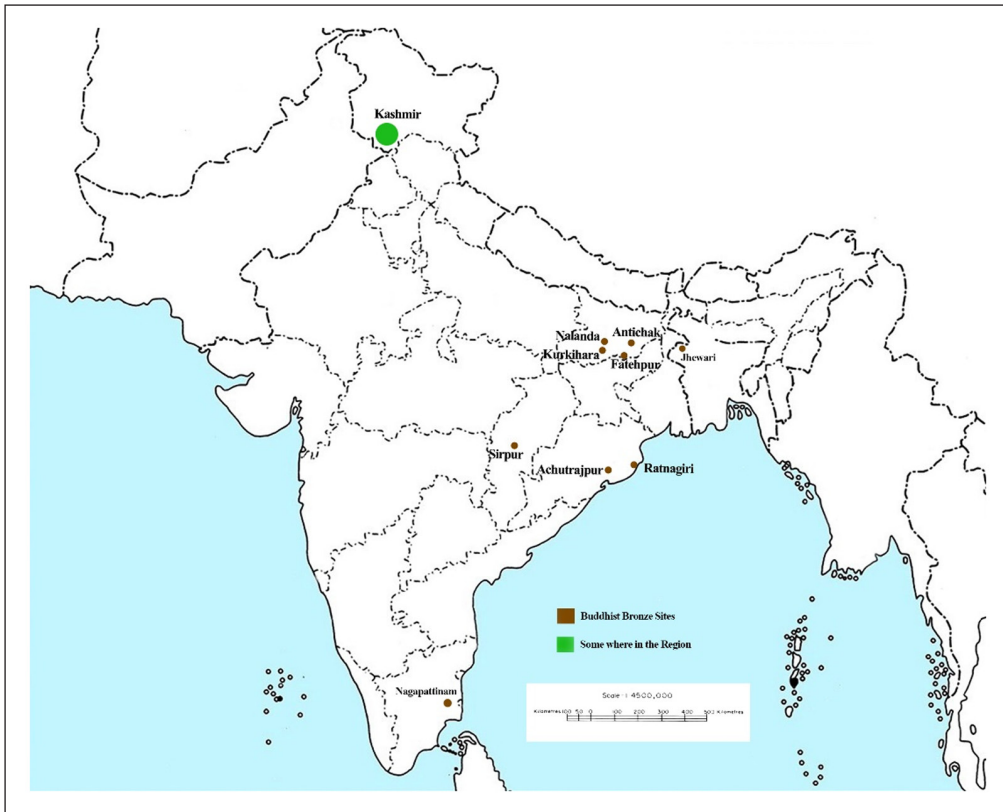


Fig. 11 Contemporary Bronzes of Tārā.



Fig. 12 a, b, c, d- Various images of Tārā.



Fig. 13 a, b- Various images of Tārā.

The criteria used for the analysis and classification of the Sirpur Tārā bronzes were also used to analyse the Tārā bronzes recovered from other sites in India. These sites include Achutrajpur and Ratnagiri (Odisha), Nalanda, Kurkihar, Antichak and Fatehpur (Bihar), Kashmir valley (exact provenance not known) and Tamil Nadu (Nagapattinam). Besides, bronzes recovered from Jhewari (Bangladesh) were also considered for the present analysis. The main purpose of this comparative study was to check the veracity of the methodology adopted for the classification of the Sirpur Tārā bronzes. It was observed that all these bronzes from other sites show some amount of commonality when it comes to their basic features and attributes, but also vary in their executions and expressions. These bronzes were subjected to the comparative analysis employing the same criteria. The results are as follows.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the above analysis that the images from Achutrajpur and Nalanda show similarity with the images found from Sirpur. The images (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14) from Achutrajpur and images (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) from Nalanda show affinity with image nos. 1, 5 and 6 from Sirpur. Similarly, the images (image nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) from Achutrajpur and images (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) from Nalanda show affinity with image nos. 2, 3 and 4 from Sirpur. In other words, it means that these three centres of Buddhism shared a common art tradition. It is not possible to determine the exact source and direction of this tradition at this juncture.

Secondly, the images from (nos. 1, 2, 3) Kurkihar image, (nos.) Fatehpur image, (nos. 1, 2) Kashmir images, (no. 1) Antichak image, (nos. 1, 2) Ratnagiri images, (nos. 1, 2) Jhewari (Bangladesh) images, (nos. 1, 2) and Nagapattinam images also show similarity with the Sirpur bronzes in terms of halo and pedestal. This means that though not directly, these centres were also connected in some way or the other.

The overall picture that emerges from this study suggests that within 110 years of its inception as a deity of importance, the popularity of Tārā spread in most of the regions of the subcontinent. Though various centres of the Vajrayāna Buddhism emerged in different regions they were somehow connected.

The concept of saviour goddess was introduced into the religious behaviour in the popular religious tradition by around 5th/6th centuries CE. In Buddhism, in particular, the notion of a goddess saving from danger and protecting the followers seems to have emerged by around the same time as testified by the early images of Tārā in Western India. Templeman (1981) discusses stories of Tārā where she is depicted as the saviour of her devotees from many dangers or fears, at times eight or even sixteen. This must have facilitated the spread of the popularity of Tārā as a saviour deity. She very quickly transcended from being a mere śakti of

3 This particular image of Tara is with Avalokiteśvara. It bears a solid halo added with plain semi-circular mouldings. It is comparable to the Sirpur type 1.

Avalokiteśvara to an independent deity offering various kinds of boons to her worshippers and saving them from all sorts of calamities. As a result, one finds so many independent stone as well as bronze images of Tārā which confirm her status a cult deity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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