Gaja-Laxmi, c. 2nd-3rd century, Chyasal Hiti, Patan

An Analytical Study of Ornaments of Images of the Early Licchavi Period (1st-4th century CE) Sculptures

Poonam R. L. Rana, PhD

Abstract

This paper looks at different types of ornaments belonging to the selected images of the early Licchavi period while identifying, comparing, and analyzing them. It also attempts to find out ancient and local names if they have any. The images that are selected and illustrated for analytical description are excavated ones comprising a few Nepali sculptures. The majority images are devoid of head ornamentations and are shown with heavy earrings and doughnut-shaped feet ornaments.

Keywords: early Licchavi period, ornamentations, sculptures

Background

This paper aims to analyze, compare and identify different types of ornaments of some chosen images of the early Licchavi period and also to find out ancient and local names, if they have any. The images selected for analytical description are excavated ones and a few Nepali sculptures.

The early Licchavi period dates from the 1st to the 4th century CE (Vajracharya 2030 BS: 547-551). From time immemorial Nepal has been the shelter to the refugees from India who poured into this peaceful land, as the conflict arose there. Besides, there had also been continuous inflow and outflow of both Nepali and Indian artisans. The result was a mosaic of cultural assimilation that resulted in the Indian influence on Nepali art. In the very beginning, images were depicted with ornaments of that period. However, in the later period, it could be noted that the iconographic rules and regulations were utilized in presentation of the images of deities.

This period was the contemporary of the Gandhara School in India that flourished during the 1st-5th century CE. The best example of Gandhara image is the icon...
of Bodhisattva, which can be regarded as a good influence (Alkazi 1983: 114).

The Gandhara School was influenced from the Greco-Roman style of art. It was a hybrid in nature and inspired by the Greek deities. Consequently, the physiognomy of Buddha image was identical to that of Apollo, the Greek deity. Muscular body, hair with wavy curls, body covered with a full *toga* (long dress) and *urna* (a spiral or circular dot placed on the forehead of Buddhist images) were the features of the Gandhara Bodhisattva images. The Gandhara images lacked spiritual appearance and laid emphasis on the folds of the garments devoid of ornaments.

The Nepali images, prior to the 5th century were influenced from the Gandhara and Mathura style. Lama Taranath views, "The earlier style of Nepalese art had Mathura/Gandhara influence; however, later it was opted for their own indigenous style."

These discovered artifacts, images, objects and monuments provide authenticity to produce history. Thus, has helped in throwing light into the ornaments depicted in art during that particular period.

**Ornaments (1st-4th century CE)**

The origin and evolution of ornaments are buried in antiquity. In the beginning of the civilization, men, women and children had desired to look pretty, beautiful, charming and handsome (Bhusan 1953: 1-3). The primitive people had no means to satisfy their inherent desire for personal adornment. They therefore turned to his surrounding for materials. They adorned themselves with ornaments fashioned from dried grass stalks of creeping plants, seeds, dried fruits, bones, ivory, flower, cowries and seashells.

As the civilization advanced they started the woodcarving and then later began bronze, lead, gold, and silver castings. Personal adornments and adornment techniques advanced and changed as the civilization developed. Ornaments vary from society to society. The ornaments are worn not only for adornment, but some of them have certain religious and superstitious reasons behind wearing them. Sometimes people also wore ornaments for the customs and social beliefs. The wearing of elegant ornaments also signifies social status, wealth and prestige in the society. Gold has been regarded economic securities in times of need.

**Different types of Shirābhushana (headdress)**

*Mukuṭa (crown):* The Greek word ‘coronal’ denotes a crown. It began as an elaborate method of dressing up the hair as found among the Polynesian and African tribes (Hasting 1954: 337).

Diadems or crowns had been in fashion since time immemorial. The wearing of crowns or distinctive headdresses during festive occasions by particular class of people such as king, queen, chieftains, merchants, medicine men and other members of different society depended upon their status and position. The shape
and sizes of the mukuṭas vary and so are their designs. Some of the mukuṭa are as follows:

**Kirīṭa-mukuṭa:** There were different types of crowns, most commonly seen were the Kirīṭa and Mahākirīṭa-mukuṭa. The Kirīṭa-mukuṭa are made of gold. Some of them are decorated with precious and semi-precious stones. They are further categorized into Kirīṭa and Mahākirīṭa (Mishra 1987:143). This mukuṭa is mostly seen with the Viṣṇu images. The kirīṭa-mukuṭa seems to be the popular amongst of the Nepali artists and artisans. Majority of Viṣṇu images of Nepal are depicted with kirīṭa-mukuṭa. In the Mānasāra Shilpaśāstra, it has been mentioned as ‘Kirīṭa Sarvabhaumasaya chadhirajasyayajyakrama’ (Shivarammurti 1963: 26). It is said that Lord Viṣṇu who resides with other deities is shown wearing a kirīṭa.

**Māhakirīṭa-mukuṭa:** It is a part of the kirīṭa-mukuṭa. If it is over-decorated with precious stones, it is known as mahākirīṭa-mukuṭa. The image of Viṣṇu Vikrānta (467 CE) from Tilganga, Pashupatinath wears a kirīṭa mukuṭa. The kirīṭa, engraved on Bhairava image is known as Kirtimukha. Such kirtimukha-kirīṭa can be seen on Jalaśayana Viṣṇu (Viṣṇu reclining on Śesha Nāga) in Budhanilkantha.
Karaṇḍa-mukuṭa: It is made of precious and semi-precious stones (Shivarammurti 1963: 25). The karaṇḍa-mukuṭa tapers towards the top. In the earlier period, the karaṇḍa-mukuṭas used to be smaller in size. Later on size of the karaṇḍa-mukuṭa seem to increase. The karaṇḍa-mukuṭa is seen with lesser known deities such as gandharvas, kinnaras, nāgas, etc.

Ratnamukuṭa: Ratna refers to precious stones, and mukuṭa refers to a crown. The ratnamukuṭa hence is a crown decorated with precious and semi-precious stones. The ratnamukuṭa varies in shape and size. It is made of numerous precious and semi-precious stones. This is popular among the sculptors of Nepal.

Tri-mukuṭa: Tri signifies the word three. Thus, it comprises of three pinnacles decorated with precious stones. It is believed to have the power to shun away sadness. The three pinnacles of the crown signifies – sattva guna, raja guna and tamas guna. While the Buddhists interpret them as – Buddha, Dharma and Sanga. This type of crown can be seen on the Nepali images of the later phase. It is used in both the Hindu and the Buddhist images though the three pinnacles signify different meanings respectively.

Paṇca-mukuṭa: The early crowns are not seen with pancha-mukuṭas, but they gained popularity among in the later period. Paṇca means five and mukuṭa means a crown. Hence, it has been depicted with five raised peaks that denote or symbolize the Paṇca Dhyani Buddhas. This type of crown is mostly worn by Pancha Dahayni Buddha,
Dhyani Buddha and Bodhisattvas. In the Kathmandu valley, Vajracharaya priests put on *Paṅca-mukūṭa* during the special rituals.

**Jaṭā-mukūṭa:** Jaṭā signifies long hair, usually associated with sages, saints and hermits (Shivarammurti 1963: 25). They grow long matted hair and shape it in form of a raised hairdress. The *jaṭā-mukūṭa* is not a separate crown but it is a raised headdress made up of matted hair. As mentioned in (Mānasāra 43/30) that *jaṭā-mukūṭa* was the headdress that is seen on the head of Rudra or Mahādeva.

Pārvati is also occasionally shown wearing *jaṭā-mukūṭa* (Shivarammurti 1963: 24-25). The *jaṭā-mukūṭa* is usually decorated with a crescent moon, skull, or flower. On the *Jaṭā-mukūṭa* of Shiva, one can see a crescent moon on it. It signifies glory. *Jaṭā* or the matted hair of Shiva also signifies all the medicines (Aryal 2000: 131–135). If the *Jaṭā* is tied by rudraksha mālā, it is considered as *Rudraksha Kāla* or period. 'Pitamahsaya rudrasha *Jaṭā-mukūṭa* yojyakarma' meaning rudraksha beads worn around *Jatā mukūṭa* (Aryal 2000: 131–136).

There are different types of *jaṭā-mukūṭa* such as – rudraksha *jaṭā-mukūṭa*, māga *jatā-mukūṭa*, and tulsi *jatā-mukūṭa*.

The images belonging to the 1st to the 4th century CE comprise mainly of mother goddesses but very few images of male deities. All these goddesses have been shown without any headdress, while their hair-style differs from one another.

**Description of male/female Shirābhushana (headdress)**

Early images are mostly of mother goddesses devoid of head ornaments or
headdresses.

i. Mother goddess, Koltole
ii. Hariti from Balaju, 2nd/3rd-century CE
iii. Vaishnavi from Subalhiti, 3rd-century CE
iv. Mother goddess, Haugal Bahal, Patan, 2nd/3rd-century CE
v. Kumari, Balku, 2nd/3rd-century CE.
vi. Vaishnavi from Kirtipur, 2nd/3rd-century CE
vii. Shakti, Rastriya Nachghar, 3rd century CE.
viii. Mahismardani, Hadigaon, 3rd century CE.
ix. Parvati, Shiva Parvati panal, Kirtipur, 4th century CE
x. Mahesavari, Ganesh Temple, Kirtipur, 3rd century CE
xi. Female attendant, Solar Divinity, Kumbhesavara, Patan

Although the Viṣṇu image at Handiguan and the Chaturmurti image at Rastriya Nachghar are badly eroded, elongated conical-shaped crowns can be seen. The image of Chaturmurti image of the 3rd century is depicted with a raised crown like kirīṭa-mukuṭa (Fig. 6c). The other images of the Chaturmurti are also eroded beyond identification except the head ornaments.

The image of Viṣvarūpa at Kutubahal (3rd century CE) is eroded but the shape of kirīṭa-mukuṭa can be identified.

Karnabhusana (Earring)

Earrings of different varieties are worn by both males and females. The different earrings are termed as mukuṭakantaka, dwirajik, (Bihari 2018 BS, 12/11/11, Vol. 2) trijik, bajragava, karnakundala, karnaphur, karnika, karnaphool, trikantak (Giri, 1987, pp. 256).

Different religious texts mention different types of karnakundala. Some of which are – patrakundala, makarakundala, samkhakundala, ratnakundala, bakrakundala, pushpakundala, and sarpakundala.

Viṣṇu is mentioned with makarakundala and kamalapushakundala (Giri, 1987, pp. 843). Shiva is also depicted with kundalas, among which the most common one is sarpa-kundala (Kumar, 1980, pp. 70). Some of the Hindu religious texts mention goddess Kāli wearing preta-kundala.

Some of the Buddha images also are shown wearing simple kundala on his long earlobes. Bodhisattava on the other hand are shown wearing different
types of ornamented earrings of various designs.

The image of Chaysalhiti Gagalaxmi is depicted with a very heavy karnabhushana falling on the shoulders. Likewise the Chaturmurti image at Rastriyanachghar has kundala reaching down to the shoulders. The images of mother goddess of Haugal Bahal, Vashanabi Kirtipur; Maheshwari, Kiritipur; Brahmani, Kirtipur; Kumari, Handiguan; Harati, Balaju; Maheshwari, Deo Patan; Varahi, Balkhu; Kumari, Balku; Vashanabi; Patan are depicted with heavy karnabhushana reaching down to the shoulders.

**Kanthābhushana (necklace)**

During the primitive period, both the males and females used to adorn themselves with various available materials such as shells, flowers, coloured stones, feathers, flowers, etc. as a kanthabhusana or necklace.

**Banamālā**: A banamālā is made of different types of flowers. Usually it has a flower known as kādambaripuspa in the center. Lord Viṣṇu is said to have worn a banamālā that reached down to his knees. Srimad Bhagavata mentions Viṣṇu wearing kumudapuspha and white lotus necklace (Bihari 2018 BS: 262-297).

**Tulsimālā**: It is associated with Viṣṇu. The belief persists that those who wear it are cured of any diseases. Hence, it has both religious and medicinal values. Viṣṇu worshippers wear Tulsimālā (Bihari, 2018 BS, 12/11/11, Vol. I, pp. 237).

**Shree Banamālā**: It is a necklace or mala worn on the neck. Brihatsamhita, Shreemadbhagwat (Bihari 2018 BS: 207-297). Viṣṇudhramottara (Aryal: 2000: 130-137) mentions Viṣṇu wearing Shreevatsa mālā and banamālā.

**Rudrākṣamālā**: It is associated with Shiva. Legend has it that when Shiva cried his tear drops fell to the earth and they turned into rudrākṣa. It is believed to have both religious and medication values (Bihari 2018 BS: 783).

**Sarpamālā**: It is associated with Shiva who is shown wearing a serpent on his neck. However, other deities like Bhairava, Garuda, Nāgarāja, Nāgin are shown with sarpamālā.

**Mundamālā**: It is made from human skulls. The deities associated with the mundamālā are Kāli, Bhairava and other tantric deities. In Nepal, Vajrayāni tantric deities wear mundamālā. Also, there are other numerous kanthābhushana such as pralambika,
ursutrikā, devachandra, nakchatryamālā, barnasir, sārikā, padak, guchhā, nilalavanik, shriabtsa kantha, banmālā, puspamāla, rudrakshyamālā, sarpamālā, shreebatsa kantha, etc.

Yajnopabita: Yajnopabita also may be considered as an ornament. However, it has been regarded as a sacred thread worn by the Brahmans and Kshaytrias. It was worn by the Hindu deities, but the Buddhist deities as well. It comprises of cotton, silk, nāg, skull, leather, and some ornamented with beads too. However, its length differs. In Srimad Bhagavat, Viṣṇu is said to wear Yajnopabita falling down to his navel (Bihari: 2018 BS: 834). Shiva wears yajnopabita with a garland of snakes, while Chāmundā, Bhairavi and Kāli wear yajnopabita with a garland of human skulls.

Yajnopabita has not been noted amongst the images belonging to the 1st to 4th century in Nepal. Whereas the earlier images from the neighboring state of India are found depicted with elongated yajnopabita. In Nepal, we come across with yajnopabita, simply ornamented with beads. A few images have been depicted with deer skin yajnopabita, or ajna-yajnapabita with animal head on it.

The male images of this period, the kanthabhushanas seem to be very simple. Shiva at Rastrya Nachghar of the 3rd century CE is badly eroded but one can identify single beaded kanthabhushanas. Likewise Viṣṇu from Hadigoan, 2nd/3rd century and Viśvarūpa Viṣṇu, Kutubahal, 3rd century CE, and Solar Divinity, Kumbeshvara, Patan, 4th century CE, all are depicted with single elongated beaded necklace, very much similar to the necklaces discovered at Harrappa and Mohenjadaro. The image of Vasuki, Kumbeshvara, Patan 4th century CE, however, is shown with a broad collar-like hasuli.

The images belonging to the 1st to 4th century CE are depicted with very few kanthabhushanas. The oldest image of mother-goddess Gaja-Laxmi from Chayahiti is seen wearing a very short kanthabhushana with a single bead. Whereas the Indian image of Gaja-Laxmi, 1st century CE (Banaras Hindu Museum) is depicted without kanthabhushana.

At Mathura Museum, we come across an image of Vasundharā of the 1st century CE depicted with a double beaded necklace (Bangdel 1982: p1. 16, 19).

The early images like mother goddess, 1st- to 2nd century, Haugal Bahal (Fig. 4); Maheshvari, Kirtipur; Brahmani, Kirtipur; Kumari, Kirtipur; Kaumari, Balku; Shakti image of the Chaturmurti, 3rd century, Rastriyanchghar are depicted with small beaded kanthabhushana. It is very much similar to the beaded necklace worn by Ekanamsa, Patna Museum, 1st century CE. Precisely, female figurines of this phase were adorned with simple and short kanthabhushanas.

Male Kanthābhushanas

Both the male and female images from the 1st to 4th century are seen wearing simple kanthabhushanas. Some of these necklaces are very much similar to those images, discovered from the excavation
Bracelets and armlets worn by the images from the 1st to 4th-century look very simple. Vaishnav Purana mentions that the deities are depicted wearing two types of hastabhushanas. Those worn on the arms are: keyur, panchak, katak, amgad, bajubandh, etc. Lord Viṣṇu wore amgad, keyur and bajubandh.

Lord Shiva is depicted wearing rudrakshyamālā on his arm. Those worn on the wrist are: duhirak, bair, wabhimandal, nandayaryarta, navaratna, baikhesta, trihirak, shukti, muduka, mudra.

**Analysis**

Most of the early 1st century images are seen with large and heavy doughnut-shaped wristlets on each wrist. Likewise, a few images are also depicted with various shaped armlets. Images from the 4th century are seen with many bangles or bracelets. However, during the later phase, hastabhushana underwent changes from heavy doughnut-shaped to more decorative, small and exquisite. Ornamentation and decoration with both precious and semi-precious stones seem to be in use.

Through the analytical study one can conclude that both males and females used to wear hastabhushana to adorn themselves during this phase, and continued wearing of hastabhushana with different shape, size and design.

**Kamarbandh (waist ornaments)**

Kamarbandh or waist ornament were popular amongst both males and females. In Lumbini Kapilvastu numerous manko or beads were used to make mekhla or waist ornaments. Deities are depicted with different ornamented cloth and precious metals to adorn waist. Some of the decorative waist ornamentations used during this period are as follows:
**Kachabandh:** It is comprised of a strip of cloth adorned with precious and semi-precious stones. It used to be worn on the waist. This is worn by both males and females to adorn themselves.

**Chinnabhir:** This is a kind of cross-belt. It is also made from precious metals, and sometimes from rudrakashya. Images from Amravati, India are depicted with chinnabhir.

**Uddharbandh:** *Uddhar* refers to stomach and *bandh* means to tie. Uddharbandh is a kind of belt. An ordinary uddharbandh is tied around the upper portion of stomach. Some of them are also ornamented. Although today people use a belt to tie their stomach, the name uddharbandh is no more in use.

**Suvarna Baikachik:** It is similar to chinnabhir. It is a cross-belt. This belt is made up of suvarna or gold. It was worn only by goddesses.

**Patukā:** It is usually worn to hold *dhori*, *sari*, or *antariya*. It is comprised of soft material, with more than 15 to 20 hand-length. It was used as a decorative piece. The use of *patukā* continues to this day amongst many women in Nepal.

**Kattisutra:** It has been in vogue since times unknown. The images are depicted with different forms of *kattisutra*. *Kati* separates between lower and upper body, and a *kattisutra* is worn underneath. In *kattisutra*, importance is given to tying of the knot. In order to make it more ornamental, symbols like lions, makara, flowers, etc. are used. Since a lion signifies gallantry, the majority of male deities wear *kattisutra* with the symbol.
of lion, whereas female deities wear it adorned with makara and flowers. In some cases, they are further decorated with gold and frills. Numerous religious texts mention it as mekhala but there is difference between a mekhala and kattisutra.

Generally during the 1st and the 4th century, the images were not depicted with kuchhabandh, chinabhir and suvarna baiskshak. However, wearing of kattisutra was common among both males and females during that period.

The image of Yakshya of 1st century (National Museum, Chhavani) is depicted with a broad geometrical shaped hip-belt. Such type of hip-belt was common among the contemporary Indian images. The tying of kayabandh in a circular fashion continued to the later period. Gaja-Laxmi, 2nd-3rd century of Chyasaltole, Patan and many other images of this period are found to be adorned in similar fashion.

The image of the seated Surya of 4th century at Aryaghat is depicted with ornamented kattisutra or mekhla with frilled out pleats falling between the legs in a fanned out fashion. Wearing of mekhla was in great fashion during the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE in Lumbini and Kapilavastu. They were made up of manko which is completely lacking among images discovered within the valley belonging to the 1st-4th century CE.

Solar divinity at the National Museum of Kathmandu is depicted with highly ornamented broad hip belt tied to hold his antariya. Seated Surya at Aryaghat, Pashupati of the 4th century CE, has a rolled kayabandh falling in a in a circular fashion with frilled out knot on either side. Wearing of kattisutra and kayabandh or hip-belt continued, only designs differed as time and centuries passed.

**Padsukhadi (feet ornaments)**

Beside adorning of different parts of human body, adornment of feet had also gained favour since a long time. Among different types of feet ornaments the most important ones are – nupur, kalli, kar, char, marthi, heeranumakara, balkanakar, etc. Shreemad Bhagwat mentions that Lord Viṣṇu wore nupur. (Shreemad Bhagwat: 834.)

Viṣṇupurana mentions of Lord Viṣṇu wearing kalli (Viṣṇupurana, 5/4/13). Likewise other deities are also mentioned of wearing feet ornaments.

It is interesting to note that between the 1st to 4th century the majority of male figurines is devoid of feet ornamentations. Generally padsukhadi or feet ornaments are worn by both males and females.

It can be concluded that figurines belonging to the 1st to 4th-century figurines are devoid of head ornamentation. The majority of female figurines with bare upper torso were very simple. A few ornaments they wore were very heavy earrings and heavy doughnut-shaped feet ornament, which cannot be seen later.

It can be noted that images in India belonging to the 1st-4th century are also
Royal personage or unidentified Hindu deity, c. 4th century. National Museum, Chhauni, Kathmandu.

depicted with similar ornamentation, however with slight differentiation. It is noteworthy that despite Indian influences the artisans of Nepal yet maintained their own unique style.

References


