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# A Study of the Sanghol Sculptures with Reference to the Female Figures

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**Abstract:** Sanghol, consisting of a group of high ancient mounds, locally known as Ucha Pind, is located in the tehsil Khamanon, district Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab. The excavations revealed a major group of one hundred and seventeen sculptures in a pit area between the discovery point of stupa and the monastery into the fine clay deposit of the virgin soil. These sculptures were basically covered with loose earth and found placed one over the other. When the sculptures were removed and reconstructed, found with a low railing, one time running round the stūpa on the high platform. All the sculptures are made of red spotted sand stone which is available in the Mathura region and belong to Mathura school of art during the Kushana period. The art of Sanghol is broadly based on feminine beauty. The present paper is an attempt to study the feminine form of the sculptures in the Kushana Art.

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**Keywords:** Kushana, Art, Sculpture, Mathura, Woman, Stone, Beauty

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## Introduction

Sanghol (30°47'N, 76° 23'E) locally called *Ucha Pind* because of the group of high ancient mounds. Excavations at Sanghol Excavation at Sanghol has been carried out in different periods of time and the cultural sequence has not been much altered as there has been consistence in diggings without much deviation in the chronology of the site. The earliest Period 1 is Bara Chalcolithic Culture otherwise the late Harappan Culture. From Period 3 we see the Pre Kushana phase and Period 4 is Kushana period (Handa 2010).

Sanghol was an ancient center for cultural and religious belief along the way of *Uttarapatha*, which once connected Mathura with Taxila. Sanghol flourished as a Buddhist center remains such as Viharas (Monasteries), religious estate (Stupa & Chatiya) for the traders & travelers. Moreover, Buddhism came to *Pancanada* (Punjab) by this way through Buddha Himself. After *Mahaparinirvana*, Buddhism had attained an agreeable command at Sanghol, through Buddhist monks, scholars, saints and philosophers. The social, cultural and political history of *Pancanada* revealed the further expansion of Buddhism in north and this history was dedicated to Sanghol center and

names of the rulers were primarily, Aśoka,<sup>5</sup> Milinda, Kanishka and Harsha as Buddhist patrons (Ray 2014). Sanghol witnessed the prevalence of Kushana art much earlier than third century BCE and its artistic development are associated with Kushana rulers like Vima Kadphises, Kanishka, Huviśka and Vasudeva (Ray 2014).

The critical analysis of Sanghol is studied on the basis of art and architecture of marvelous socio-religious importance. Sanghol is full of red sandstone sculptural art, which is delineated with thoughtful imagery and full of indigenous ideas and expression.

The sculptural beauty and the dignity, is attained in buff quality to express Kushana classic idealization in stone. The physical grace and dignified expressions make the sculptures beautiful examples of artistic attractiveness and mainly concerned with the cultivation of beauty, both in spiritual and physical. The physical objectivity of Sanghol art becomes symbolic by virtue, which brings out an aesthetic pleasure in the Indian ideology. Here spiritual as well as physical world is transformed into the living peerless magnificence that leads towards an endless experience of Rasa. Therefore, the images of Sanghol are cultured beauty as a supreme social and religious cult (Ray 2014).

The subject matter of these sculptures is represented on the Vedika (Railing pillars), which depict royal devotee, Bodhisattva or Buddhist monks, *Śalabhanjikas*, *Dohada* scenes, mother & child (Figure 1), women in various mood, *yakshini*, *prasadhikas*, Bacchanal scenes, women with garland & bouquet, *Nayikas* etc. These sculptural forms are symbolic conceptions and abridged version of Jataka tales. Many of the concepts, are present in the literature which are well-illustrated with multifaceted physical and spiritual female beauty at Sanghol (Asthana 2006).

The majority of the sculptural figures are female. The basic characteristic of the images are the various postures, moods, attributes and ornamentation which are mastered by the sculptors. Generally, the images are associated with trees and depict *Salabhanjikas*, *Yakshini*, *Asoka Dohadas* etc. which are regarded as auspicious symbols of fertility (Asthana 2006).

The concept of *Salabhanjika* motif is expressed with serene openness along with physical expression and dress transparency is perhaps attained from the early terracotta images. *Yakshini* concept was once worshipped throughout the northwest India-Pancanada. It is the concept of abundance of nature that expresses the basic purity of perfect female and its form. Moreover, it is evident that the concept & cult of *Yakshi* (*Yakshini*) and *Salabhanjika* continued to flourish in the Kushana period and received highest honor as the spiritual imagery at Sanghol. (Varadpande 2006)

The dating of Sanghol Vedika sculptures is not a matter of uncertainty, because all these images have been dated to Kushan era. Buddhist art of Kanishka (Kushana) period which is about 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. with artistic manifesto of

Mathura. It exemplifies a direct development of the early Indian art of Bharhut and Sanchi. Its own peculiar features as compared to Mauryan art characterize the Kushan art of Sanghol. Art of Mauryan and Sunga period was larger & interpreted in sandstone with relief carving outlook, though it was well decorated with matchless shining polish. But at Sanghol all the sculptures are of high relief and carved out of spotted Red Sikri sandstone. All images are well rendered & finished without any polish. The rendering of the images is so fine that each image interprets its beauty in itself (Bhattacharya 1987).



Figure 1: Mother playing with Child,  
Sanghol Museum



Figure 2: Lady with Flute and Flask,  
Sanghol Museum

## Sculptural Art: An Analysis

The carving of the sculptures was possibly done in the Mathura workshop, because the raw material used in making the sculptures; all of these sculptures were carved out of red mottled sandstone of Agra-Mathura region which includes sixty-nine railing pillars, thirteen coping-stones and thirty-five cross-bars. Most of these pillars have been found ornamented with beautiful female figures, sitting and standing in various voluptuous poses and different moods (Asthana 2006).



Figure 3: *Salabhanjika*, Sanghol Museum



Figure 4: *Asoka Dohada*, Sanghol Museum

The railing pillars and brackets were acted as the platforms of the depiction of *Rāyapaseṇīyasutta*, a Jain chronicle. The composition of the front sides of these pillars are divided into three different sections. The central panel represents a male or female figure, several times standing on a crouching dwarf, sometimes it is called *Varṇayakṣa* or *Guhya*. Above this section another panel shows a railed balcony where many a time one or two human beings, sometimes couples, are shown gazing at and rejoicing the scene below with have a facial expression depicting a certain amount of curiosity and admiration in their eyes. They are seen overlooking the Yakshi from behind a curtain, hung between two pillars with almost a similar sense of joy in some instances. These Yakshi have been normally dressed up in sheer dhotis tied around their hip and hanging down gracefully along the sides and in front. But generally it exhibits nudity, warmth of flesh and voluptuousness; the bosom is invariably bear with prominent breasts but not disproportional. The Yakshi are adorned with selected jewellery and ornaments such as bangles, necklaces, ear-rings, etc. But the most important and loveliest part is the multistring girdle with biconvex short flat beads and pieces. The hair-do consists for a large variety of styles (Ray 2016).

The *Salabhanjika* (Figures 2 and 3) were very popular amongst the Mathura artists as is attested by a large number of railing pillars decorated with their very images found in the Mathura region and beyond. The *Nayika* images too are prominently found on the Sanghol railing pillars where they are shown standing in various graceful postures. Significantly, the postures of their appearance on a number of pillars are closely related same in which the *Yakshi* appear at Mathura. However, a number of scenes found at Sanghol have not so far been found or depicted at Mathura by the artists. The most common postures of the *Yakshi* at Sanghol is the *tribhanga* posture, plucking or holding gently a branch of a flowering tree like that of the *Asoka*, *Champaka* and *Kadamba* (Figure 4). This subject is repeatedly represented in Indian art right from the Sunga period. The artists might have taken up the concept from the *Salabhanjika* (Figure 3) festival of outdoor games mentioned in the early Buddhist literature. These *Yakshi's* are regarded not only as the personified forms of nature (they are basically shown with trees, water, animals, etc.) but also as the mothers and other-goddesses busy in *suka-kṛīdā*, *jala-kṛīdā*, etc. about which considerable literature exists (Varadpande 2006).

There also exist two other railing pillars presenting a picture of a damsel standing under a *champaka* tree, and a parrot perching on her shoulder. At Mathura, the correspondent of this scene can be also witnessed. A delightful stunning woman is engraved in another pillar in a scene in which she is bathing naked under the fleetly falling waters of a spring the water is accumulated below in the form of a pool which also occurs at Mathura. In another illustration she is seen tenderly drying and squeezing her long beautiful hair. Next to her side a swan is shown who, is ready to quench its insatiable thirst with the water, which was dropping down of the *Yakshi's* hair, has instantly taken the tip of her wet tresses in its beak, so as not to allow even a single drop of water fall on the floor which it has mistaken for a pearl (*Sadyasnata*) (figure 5). This motif also known as Rajasekhara's *Karpuramanjari* motif of a maiden

just bathed (*Sadyasnata*), wringing her wet hair with a *hamsa* or goose drinking the falling drops of water, goes back to 2nd century CE sculptures of Mathura and Sanghol. However, *Kavyamimamsa* of Rajasekhara mentions *kelihamsas* drinking water dripping from the wet hair of women (Parashar 2000).



Figure 5: *Sadya- Snata*, Sanghol Museum

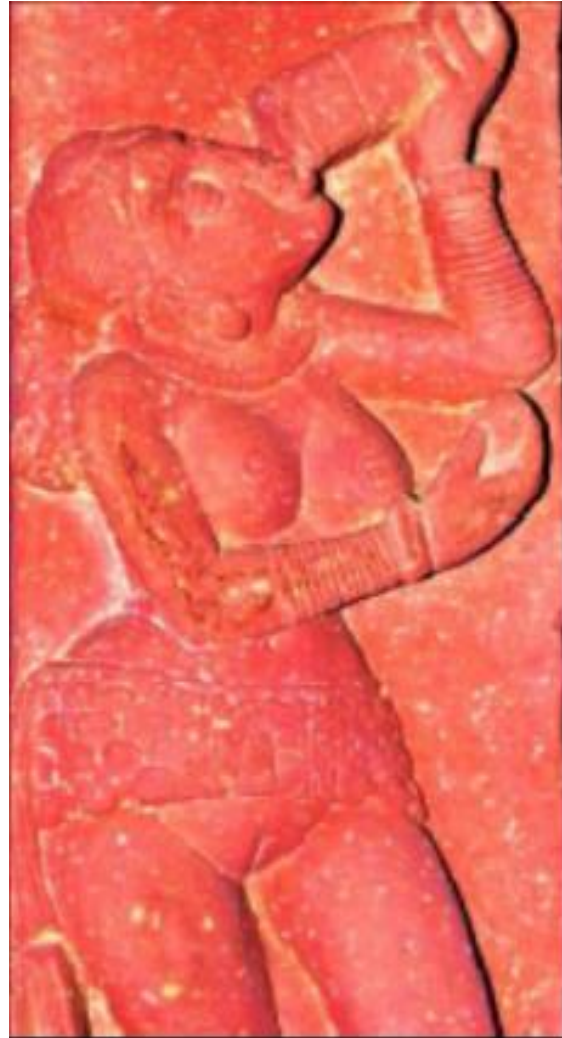


Figure 6: *Madhu-Pana*, Sanghol Museum

The next most favorite theme of the Kushāṇa artists was '*Asoka dohada*' (Figure 4), in which a charming and young *woman* is shown delightfully kicking the *Asoka* tree, is an act, in which, according to traditions, caused the tree blossom. It has been mentioned to the tradition as *Asoka dohada* by Kalidasa in his *Malavikagnimitram* and *Raghuvamsam*. A bunch of three sculptures demonstrating the aforesaid theme have been reported from Sanghol, as well as the same theme is also existed on Mathura railing pillars. In two scenes a beautiful young lass is noticed performing the act of *dohada* with her feet holding a bow of Kama in her hand. In the third scene of the sculpture, she is doing the act of *dohada* holding a wine cup in her hand. This recalls minding that part of the ritual in which, while acting the *dohada*, the heroine spits a mouth-full, sprinkles of some drops of wine on the stem of a tree as mentioned in *Meghaduta*.



Figure 7: Prasadhika,  
Sanghol Museum



Figure 8: Darpana Dharini,  
Sanghol Museum

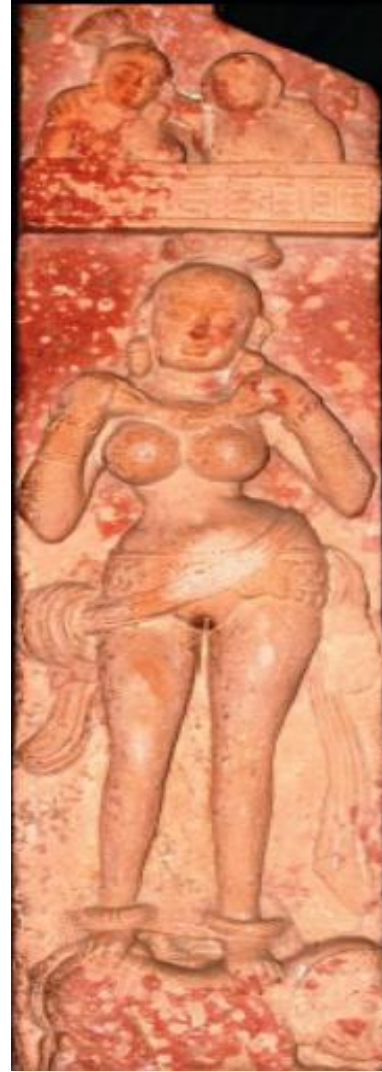


Figure 9: Lady wearing  
necklace, Sanghol Museum

However, for the first time at Sanghol the artist attempted to present a youthful woman busy in taking the last drop of wine from a tall tumbler (*Madhupana*,) (Figure 6). At both Mathura and Sanghol several pillars have been noticed through the lights which are carved with lady attendants who are carrying beautiful globular wine pots for their mistresses, along with the *amramanjari* or grapes, flute, etc. are found. These attendants sometimes known as *prasadhikās* (Figure 7) in ancient literature are portrayed as carrying a toilet tray for their mistresses. And both at Sanghol and Mathura, on some pillars, the mistresses are seen busy ornamenting themselves with beautiful floral garlands, earrings, etc. Very often they are shown looking into mirrors adjusting the necklace or the locks of hair (Figures 8 and 9). But sometimes the mirror performs in total dissimilar role, where the heroine or the *nayika* is exposed, herself shyly fondling the teeth or nail marks of her lover left behind on her cheeks. It is sometimes called *paribhogadarshini* (Figure 10) (Ray 2014). As many as three sculptures representing this theme have been found at Sanghol.

Figure 10: *Paribhogdarshini*, Sanghol MuseumFigure 11: *Nati*, Sanghol Museum

Sanghol images have another beautiful interpretation of female warrior with the image of *Nati* (Figure 11) which depicts female with sword at the same shows a playful mood of a sword player i.e., fencing of that era. Panini mentioned such female characters as *Saktiki*, who gained excellence in the wielding of lance (sword). The image of *Nati*, who is playing with a pot over her elbow. Thought is simple in expression but by virtue of its form, physical expression of *Nati* is more rhythmic & playful and at the same time her total concentration is in the play & balance. She is also known as *isnika*. Such expressive play of body can be seen in the images of dreamy lady, lady playing harmonica along with Lotus bearer Yakshi. These images are assumed as portraits of contemporary folks because these images are fashioned not only by their styled

individuality but also by the expression of their iconographic significance (Ray 2014). Furthermore, among social imagery we can enjoy the form of Bacchanal scene with sensuous expression of a lady image. She enjoyed the *Mareya* or *Kapisayan* (Drink), usually was prohibited among Buddhist folk. Such images over here interpreting the contemporary society as well as to keep the folk away from such playful life. Another group of male & female images can also be seen, holding well-knitted scented garland and Lotus bouquet in their right hand, while they keep their left hand over their hip. Such examples are of early period, traced from Mathura Kushana era.

## Conclusion

The women figure from Sanghol bearing the high social aesthetics senses, clearly indicates that they belong to Mathura school of art. The advance technique used in the production of these sculptures gives us an idea of the aesthetic sense of the artists' as well as the world they lived in. The Kushāṇa artists and their art tradition had tried to highlight the female beauty in various postures. All the sculptures adorned with heavily ornaments such as ear-ring, necklace, bangle, garland and their hair styles also marks a special attention. The lower parts from the broad waist with heavy hips and thighs covered by heavy folds of *dhoti* (drapery) and looks like nude even when wear a *dhoti*. Upper parts of the body completely uncovered in all the sculptures with heavily globular breasts, close to each other, equal and hard, emphasize physical charm and sensuous appeal but not at all looking vulgar even when these are semi-nude in nature. The Kushāṇa art of Mathura, to which the Sanghol sculptures belong, is admired for the charming facial features, proportionate bodies, sensuousness and voluptuousness noticeable in female figures. Their bulging eyes and protruding lips added in the female beauty of Sanghol (Ray 2014).

For these amazing sculptural arts, Sanghol, find as a famous place for world history of art. The exuberant, lavish and accurate women figures embodied in the stone speaks of the culture in which these were made. Hence in Sanghol art a picturesque panorama of worldly life is represented with all multitudes. The sculpturing is remarkably beautiful; the attraction of the Sanghol imagery is represented with physical delight and expressed in contrasting effect well contoured soft flesh with the firmness of ornamentation. It is a beautiful and remarkable expression of Kushana art, carved with delicate forms and graceful baroque charm with extraordinary sensitive impression of fascinating female forms. Thus, the Sanghol art's reliefs mark the culmination of a sinuous expression the culmination of a sinuous expression that shows relation with the spiritual one in the imagery of the beautiful women.

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