Buddha’s Miracles at Śrāvasti:
Representation in Gandhara Sculpture, Socio-Religious Background and
Iconographic Symbolism

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Buddha Śākyamuni (Siddhārtha), after having received the fruit of Bodhi (enlightenment), started propagating the doctrine of liberation from the karmic cycle. He normally used to propagate his message through his convincing discourses but whenever and wherever needed he performed prodigious happenings to convince people and convert them to his doctrine. Following is the description of an important occasion when he performed a series of miracles at Śrāvasti after having been challenged by heretic teachers of the time while in audience rulers and other nobles were present. This event has been beautifully represented in the Gandhāra sculpture. In this paper a pertinent series of successive events are mentioned as they occurred originally in the light of text and narrative sculpture and then its socio-religious background and iconographic symbolism has been discussed at the end.

**Keywords**: Buddha, Miracles, Śrāvasti, Text, Gandhara Sculpture.

The Story as related in the text

Having paid visit to the Kapilavāstu, the city of his birth, and converted his father and many others the Buddha proceeded to Śrāvasti ruled by Prasenajit.

After his arrival in Jetavāna Park the king paid him a visit and after a long conversation he was converted to the Good Law. Like a few other kings Prasenajit of Kośala (where Śrāvasti is located) was also converted from Brahmanism to the Doctrine of Buddhism. He not only became a follower of the doctrine but also a powerful supporter of the order of the Buddhist monks (Sāṅgha).

The Blessed Buddha was dwelling in Rājagrha at the bamboo grove of kalandaka-nivāpa. Kings ministers and the wealthy merchants were honoring him with bountiful offerings. Upon seeing this Māra, the devil, made a great plan. He went to the six teachers one by wearing a disguise and convinced them to challenge the ascetic Gautama to a marvelous display of superhuman powers (Fiordalis, 2014). Thus the six teachers Purāṇa Kāśyapa and the rest after knowing that the king had also been converted by Buddha, challenged him of the Ten Forces to a display of magic powers; and when the king requested him to do so, Buddha accepted the challenge and defeated them all like a sun outshining the stars (Asvaghosa, 1936).

With the rise of Buddhism the spiritual friction increased in the society. There were already great teachers propagating different doctrines and they used to challenge each other to assert their power. Six famous heretical teachers have been mentioned during the times of Buddha Śākyamuni. Śākyamuni who was challenged by the heretics and he overwhelmed everyone by performing different miracles using his divine power in front of the king and people from other religious sects. On the day which was assigned for the wondrous display, the legend has it that a great assembly of believers and non-believers along with rival holy-men was present. Some gods and deities were also there to see the ‘great miracle’.

The most famous of the miracles performed at Śrāvasti are: the miracle under the Mango tree and walking in the air shooting water from his feet and fire from his shoulders; and lastly the miracle of his transformation

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into images. The *Divyavadāna* gives it expressly as one of the ten acts of which every perfect Buddha must necessarily acquit himself before dying.

**The Miracle of the mango tree:**

On this spectacular occasion, the Buddha performed the Miracle of raising a mango tree. He caused to raise a full-grown mango tree, covered with fruits. And under its spreading branches he took his seat. But since this miracle was not performed by Buddha directly but two of his disciples Pieces the Grove-Keeper, and Luhasudatta the head of household, there was a need for a miracle to be performed only by Buddha himself. The north gate of the great stūpa at Śāñcī carried such a sculptural representation as early as the first century B.C.

**The miracle of Walking in the Air and Emanating Flames and Water Streams: “The Twin Miracles”**

“The Twin Miracles” according to Foucher “were called in, consisting of the Blessed One’s gyrating in the air, causing streams of water or shooting flames to surge forth from his body”, fire blazed from lower half of his body and water flowed from upper half, and then fire blazed from the upper half of his body and water flowed from the lower half. “The Gandhāra School made representations of these extravagances, but the old Indian school refrained for the simple reasons that the figure of the Buddha could not be represented. Possibly that is the reason why the Southern tradition has shown more restraint in the use of fabulous fiction. On the other hand, the Northern tradition, in both its imagery and its canonical texts, knew no limits. Having used the “Twin Miracles” before, to something new had to be invented for this occasion and it had to be done by the Buddha alone. This led to both the literary and the figured representation of a phantasmagoric multiplication of Buddhas who, assuming the four consecrated poses—standing, walking, sitting, and lying down—filled the firmament and covered all surfaces (Asvaghosa, 1936: 211).”

**The Miracle of the Transformation of himself in to numerous images: The “Great Miracle” of Multiplication.**

Right after the twin miracle it was time for the Blessed one to present another miracle. He touched the earth with his hands and a colossal lotus flower appeared, Buddha sat on the centre of that lotus flower and many, many lotus flowers appeared with magically created Buddha sitting on them. The multiple-Buddha all demonstration different magical tricks, some were blazing fire while others were asking questions to audience. This powerful appearance of multiple-Buddha could be seen even by the children in audience. After seeing all this, Prasenajit, his assembled kings and queens together with many deities in the sky bowed down before Buddha and the rival holy men after embracing defeat ran away (Fiordalis, 2014).

**Representation of the Episodes in Gandhāra Sculpture**

**The Miracle of the Mango Tree.**

We often find images which conflicts with the mango tree miracle and the great miracle or maybe both, but we hardly find a clear representation of just the mango tree miracle. The reason behind this could be because according to some early Tibetan texts this miracle was not performed by Buddha himself but by his followers although everything happened by his consent.

In Gandhāran tale the Buddha has been represented on an enormous lotus flower with thousand petals which is said to have been brought by two aquatic spirits (nāga-s). He sat on the flower in the teaching posture- a pose that has remained characteristic of all Gandhāran representations of the Great Miracle (Foucher, 2003).

Fig. no. 1 seems to be the miracle of Buddha’s teaching under the miraculous grown mango tree. Although the tree has not been represented but the shape of the piece seems like a tree and as it has already been mention he sat on a lotus flower, the base of this architectural piece has been made of an enormous lotus flower. This example might also be the representation of the multiplication because we see the same Buddha several times beside other Bodhisattva images. The interesting point to be noted is that that are several triads in the example. On the upper level Buddha has been represented flanked by other individuals who might be two Bodhisattva-s, the two famous gods, Śākra and Brahma or the same Buddha thrice. On the lower part the
enormous seated teaching Buddha has been represented flanked by two Bodhisattva-s, perhaps Avalokitesvara on his left while Maitreya on his right. On the base of the piece yāksas or other heavenly beings have been depicted holding garlands. In the two terraces a few heads can be seen who might be some heavenly beings. On the upper part there can also be seen four seated figures among them the middle two seems to be the images of the same Buddha while on both the sides two individuals are either paying there reverence or they are conversing with the Buddhas.

Fig. no. 2 is another example which represents the miracle of the mango tree. Buddha has been represented with the gesture of teaching (dharma-cakra mūdra) under the mango tree on a seat while he is flanked by Bodhisattva on his left while another Bodhisattva on his right. A few individuals have been represented kneeling on the ground and with joined hands.

In fig. no. 3 Buddha has again been represented with the gesture of teaching but this time not on a seat but on a lotus flower. Three tiny figures are present at the ground in different positions. The Buddha is flanked by two Bodhisattva-s.

In the lower part of fig. no. 4, Buddha seems to be sitting under the mango tree in his teaching posture on a lotus flower while other heretic teachers and others are present in surprise hearing his words. Fig. no. 5 is another almost similar example in which Buddha is seated on a lotus flower under a mango tree in the posture of teaching and he is flanked by the two Bodhisattva-s. Two small figures are present with joined hands.

Fig. No. 6 is a simpler representation of the scene of the Miracle under the mango tree. The mango tree has been indicated by the leaves and fruits over the parasol of the Buddha. Two figures of the seated Buddhas have been represented on the upper part beside the tree representation. This example seems to be an incomplete sculpture. It might have been left incomplete in some workshop after any defect or breaking.

The Miracle of Walking in the Air and Emanating Flames and Water Streams: The “Twin Miracles”

This miracle of the episode of the miracles in Śrāvasti is the most widely represented scene in Gandhāra Sculpture. This miracle is also called the twin miracle because this miracle is comprised of two sub-miracles. Performing this miracle Buddha walked in the air and at the same time emanated fire from his shoulders and water streams from his feet. This miracle is sometimes misled by the miracle Buddha performed at the start of his journey at Kapilavastu, he walked in the air impressing his father.

Fig. No. 7 is one of the examples depicting this scene. This is a damaged part of an architectural piece. Buddha, with his prominent mark āśnīsa, the halo, the drapery covering both of his shoulders and making the gesture of assurance or abhāya mūdra, can be seen in the air performing the twin miracle while an individual is looking at him in surprise. The water streams have been given more importance than the flames of fire because the flames have been represented shorter than the streams of water from the feet. It does not mean that the artist was interested more in the representation of water streams than the flames. It seems to be the space and the architectural space that have played a part in the decision of the sculptor. The flames in this example are also intended to support the upper terrace where a seated Buddha in abhāya mūdra has been depicted. The shorter carved flames would have been a stronger support than the longer. Now as we have established the idea that the shorter flames were of the architectural use we can establish the idea that the remaining space in the lower part was filled with the longer streams of water.

Fig. No. 8 is another example of the twin miracles in which Buddha has been represented in a gigantic manner in the centre performing the miracle while the individuals present on the occasion are looking in surprise towards him. He, as usual, is represented with the marks of a great man (mahā pūrusa) i.e. A halo behind his head, the āśnīsa, ārṇa, a drapery covering both of his shoulders and he is making the gesture of abhāya mūdra. The flames emanating from his shoulders are longer than the streams of water emanating from his feet. Here the flames have been freely depicted which are engulfing the halo and thus completing the disc or halo as the symbol of the sun. Two kneeling monks with joined hands are present in the feet of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Two noble men with turbans, who can be the kings Bimbisāra and Prasenajit, are represented in the extreme right
while another noble man is represented in the extreme left. The two bearded individuals can be two among the heretic teachers who challenged Buddha to show his divine power. Buddha’s āsniśa is prominent and represented in the manner of kingly turban which suggest the aspect of his being a universal monarch beside a spiritual teacher. Almost all the individuals are looking towards the upper part of the Buddha Śākyamuni and thus indicate if they are marvelled with the emanating flames while one of the noble on the right is looking down ward which indicate that all of them would have been looking alternatively upward and down ward to observe the spectacular happenings.

It also provides us idea of another aspect and that is the sculptors’ giving importance to the emanating of flames and this also can suggest his reliability on the version of the emanation of the flames than the water streams.

Fig. No. 9 present another example in which the flames have engulfed the halo behind his head and are depicted in a manner that these seem as if emanating from the same halo than the shoulders of Buddha Śākyamuni. The halo here presents the true symbol of the sun and thus also indicates the idea of the Buddha being the sun and thus the true knowledge. The right side of the sculpture is damaged and only on the left part individuals can be seen with joined hands to revere the great happening. The individuals include three turbaned noble men another layman in the background while in the upper extreme left can be seen the bearded Vajrapāni with his vajra to the extreme let side stands the rival holy men. It is beautifully artistically made as it divides good and evil holy men through a pillar. Furthermore the men not facing the blessed one show their defeat or humility.

Fig. No. 10 represents the same scene in a different manner. The halo is not only engulfed by the emanating flames but is so fully circled by these flames that it present a more clearer and a good example of the sun. The water streams are also properly structured and well executed as these are flowing in the two opposite directions after emanation from the feet and thus present a more realistic presence of the water streams. In this example the individuals seem to include two noblemen on the lower right while other six individuals two on the upper right and on the lower and upper left can be the representation of the teachers of other sects and their followers. They are all represented with joined hands to revere Buddha after seeing his divine power.

According to Kurita, this example which is numbered as Plate 383 in his book, the twin miracles of Śākyamuni are represented by his walking in the air and emanating fire flames from his shoulders and water from his feet (Divyāvadāna). But another Buddhist scripture (Mahāvastu) describes “water from the upper body, flames from the lower body, flames from upper body, water from lower body.” “In other words, miracles were performed alternately thus it is called the twin miracles (Kurita, 2003).”

In fig. no. 11, the flames look more like wings than flame and thus reminds us the representation of angels in the western art. The water streams are also depicted in a very different manner which seem like a tumulus or a raised seat on which he is standing than the flowing water emanating from the feet. Three individuals kneeling in the foreground and three standing in the background are represented with joined hands.

In fig. no.12, the scene is again different from the previous examples. In this scene the flames are represented emanating not only from his shoulders but from the upper body, including the part up to whips, as well. This represents a clearer indication of wings than the previous example. Water streams have been represented with less importance as a tiny space has been allotted to it. Another important representation in this example is the depiction of two individuals prostrating one from the right side while the other from the left in the same manner of the Dipāmkara Jātaka where only Sumedha was represented prostrating in this manner. These individuals might be the representation of the heads of other sects to represent there defeat. Other four individuals are present two on both the side with joined hands towards the gigantic Buddha representation.

Fig. no. 13 seems to be the simplest representation of the twin miracle in which Buddha is represented emanating flames and water streams while the individuals in the surrounding have been eliminated.
The Miracle of the transformation of himself into numerous images: The “Great Miracle” of Multiplication.

The other most important episode was the multiplication of the Buddha himself in thousand Buddhas up to the heaven and in all directions instantaneously which is called the “Great Miracle” (mahā pratihārya) of Śrāvasti. This Miracle is a popular theme of the Gandhara Sculpture. Rhi categorises this episode in to two main groups.one features the “preaching Buddha” these are the scenes of the preaching Buddha (Rhi, 1991), fine examples of this category are from fig. no.17 to 23. The other is called the “multiplication” it represents the meditating Buddha with multiple images radiating from his sides (Rhi, 1991). From fig. no. 14 to 16 an adequate amount of evidence is provided to support this hypothesis.

Fig. no. 14 seems to be a simplistic representation of the Buddha’s multiplication himself into images. Buddha is sitting in dhayāna mūdra while eight standing images are present around him in manner as if issuing from him.

Fig. no. 15 is a more complete example as compare to the previous one which is damaged. In this example too there have been represented eight images are issuing, four from each side. In the lower level two Bodhisattva-s are seated while beside Buddha again two Bodhisattva-s are present standing. Over Buddha has been represented a parasol beside which two seated Buddha images while on the higher part three other seated Buddhas have been represented. They are all in different postures. For example the two beside the parasol are seated in dhayāna mūdra; the upper right and left seems to be in abhāya mūdra while the one in the centre is in the teaching posture (dharma-cakra-mūdra).

Fig. no. 16 : like the previous examples images are issuing from the lotus seated Buddha in dhayāna mudra on the lower part he was flanked by two Bodhisattvas while on the upper level two Buddhas have been depicted in dhayāna mūdra. Two flying heavenly beings are holding a parasol over Buddha while the leaves of a tree represent a tree, or perhaps, the miraculously grown mango tree. On the base the seven Buddhas have been represented including the Buddha Śākyamuni.

Fig. no. 17 is one of the most beautiful reliefs among the Gandhāra sculpture. It represents the miracle of Buddha’s transformation into images and perhaps, also the miracle of the mango tree. He is sitting on an enormous lotus flower in the centre of the whole complex representation making the gesture of teaching (dharma-cakra mūdra). The lotus flower has a long stalk which is rising from the earth. All the images have been represented in rows which will be taken horizontally for explanation. In the lowest row four tiny figures, represented at the lowest part, are looking upward who seems to be some of the heretic teachers or other humans including one or two kings who were present at the occasion. In the second row from below there have been represented heavenly beings, sitting or standing on smaller lotus flowers. The same row seems to have included Bodhisattva-s as well. In the third row the nearest images on both sides are concentrated towards Buddha while the other two on both sides are conversed with each other. In the third row at the extreme ends two sitting images have been represented in the gesture of dharma-cakra mūdra while two standing images on both side of both the images have been represented with joined hands. In the same row two other images on both side of the Buddha have been represented sitting while other two standing with garlands. In the fifth row two Buddhas have been represented inside the hallowed space, facing towards the central Buddha. They are in the gesture of contemplation (dhayāna mūdra) representing “multiplication “and it has also been observed that this piece is somewhat comparable to fig. no 14. In the same row sitting and standing Bodhisattva-s and on the right a Buddha image has been represented conversing with another image on his left. In the last sixth row at the extreme ends two Buddhas have been represented from whom other images are issuing in a manner already discussed above. Over both of them, Parasols have been represented. Beside these two other two images on both sides have been represented sitting on a stool. In the centre above flying heavenly beings are holding an enormous crown and a decorated parasol over the central Buddha image. The decorated upper part of the parasol seems like the branches of the tree and thus might symbolise the presence of the mango tree which was raised by Buddha miraculously and under which he sat on a seat to teach the doctrine.
Fig. no. 18 is another example of the multiplication scene. On the base of the sculpture fifteen images have been represented. The seven more prominent images in the front row represent the seven Buddhas of the past including Buddha Śākyamuni and the other eight, four on each end, might represent Bodhisattva-s and other gods. Buddha, making the gesture of dharma-cakra-mūdra, is sitting on an enormous lotus flower flanked by two Bodhisattva-s. The pillars enclosing the central Buddha and the Bodhisattva-s on the sides are supported by two spirits either the subjects of earth goddess or, if the pillars symbolise trees, they are yāksa-s. There are other two contemplating Buddhas each above each standing Bodhisattva. In the two terraces beside the head of Buddha seems to be gods represented in the heaven. Above on both the ends are Bodhisattva-s flanked by two standing figures on each side with joined hands. Above the head of the Buddha the terrace has been constructed in a manner which not only becomes a terrace but also makes a parasol over him.

Fig. no. 19 presents us with another example of the episode of the miracles at Śravasti. The architectural piece has been constructed in a manner which might represent a tree thus it also becomes an example of the miracle of the mango tree. The other Buddha and Bodhisattva images in the scene represent the miracle of the Buddhas creating many images around him. On the base of the sculpture has been represented yāksa-s with garlands. Buddha is sitting on a lotus flower making the gesture of teaching (dharma-cakra-mūdra). He is flanked by two sitting Bodhisattva-s. In the terraces heads are seen which might represent heavens. There are two other contemplating sitting Buddhas on the upper extreme ends. In the centre over the head of the central Buddha are sitting two Buddhas beside each of them with joined hands. On the upper part are three standing images. Buddha standing in the centre is flanked by two gods in the same manner as can be seen in the episode of the descent from the Trāyastrimsa heaven. The projecting part on the top represent another sitting Buddha on a lotus. The projecting part seems to either be representing the top of the tree and might also symbolise the top of mount meru.

Fig. no. 20 is another example of multiplication and perhaps also of the mango tree. Buddha is sitting on a lotus in his teaching mode and the whole scene is populated like most of the examples described above. There are several Buddha-s and Bodhisattva-s in different postures. This example is almost identical with Fig. No. 251, the most important difference is that in this example there has been represented the Bodisattva Maitreyā in a gigantic manner as the central Buddha figure. Maitreya is surrounded by gods in the heaven. This scene indicates the importance of the idea of a future Buddha and it also indicates how much profound were the roots of the Mahayanists in this region.

Fig. no. 21 is another example which represents Buddha centrally seated on a lotus flanked by the two Bodhisattva-s and there are several terraces upward which reside Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other heavenly beings.

Fig. no. 22 is a simpler example of the multiplication episode. On the base of the sculpture has been represented a seated Buddha in dhayāna mūdra posture and he is flanked by two Bodhisattva-s. Two figures are present behind Buddha. The crowned one bears also a vajra and thus provides a valid reason to be considered Śākra. The other one is clad in the robe of a brahmana and thus the Brahma god. In the upper part several contemplating Buddhas have been represented. The tree branches and fruits suggest the presence of a tree and thus might symbolise the miracle of raising the mango tree and teaching under it.

Fig. no.23 represents a centrally seated Buddha in teaching posture flanked by Maitreya on his left and another Bodhisattva, perhaps Avalokiteśvara, on his right. The crowned Śākra with his vajra and the Brahma like Brahma are present behind Buddha. A tree is suggested by the tree branches over the scene.

Socio-religious background and Iconographic Symbolism of the episode narrated in Gandhāra Sculpture:
Miracle in Buddhist Sense:
According to Foucher:
“[…] we should know what is meant by a “miracle.” For us Occidentals the word implies not only an act in contradiction with natural laws but also very frequently an unhoped-for cure. Because of this, many of the Occidental pilgrimages have a therapeutic as well as a religious aim. With its basic fatalism, India shares none of this concept. It would be fruitless to look in the Buddhist Scriptures for
anything resembling the cure of the one suffering from haemorrhoids or the resurrection of Lazarus. Never have the early texts cited a deliberate intervention by the Buddha in the normal course of the law which regulates all destinies- namely, *karma*. What then are the miracles that his religion has chosen to commemorate? Two of them would hardly have been thought of as miracles- his birth and his death. Still, we already know that the Nativity, the Final Decease, the Enlightenment, and the First Sermon rank at the very top in the list of prodigious events (Foucher, 2003: 201-202).”

“Now we shall see that the secondary miraculous occurrences were also more or less exceptional episodes in the Buddha’s life. It is true that these incidents forced him to exert, whether he wished it or not, his magical powers, and one of them is even called the “Great Magical Feat.” But many of his disciples and even some of the heterodox masters were also capable of such magic. Therefore, since, in accord with Indian Ideas, supernatural powers were not beyond nature, it might well be said that early Buddhism was not a religion exacting from its faithful a belief in miracles. We can not then use the term “miracle” in its full sense, but may simply understand it as a manifestation that is out of the ordinary. This being understood, everything took place much as it does right under our eyes today (Foucher, 2003: 202).”

Buddha did recognise that the miracles could be performed but held that they should not be performed. Once, while sending Ananda away for a missionary activity instructed him that although the dharma path is difficult but more difficult is that path of dharma. It meant that preaching by reasoning was difficult but preaching through miracles was more difficult and that he should refrain from performing Miracles. It seems if Ananda had not understood it in a real sense. He at first was successful in his mission and had converted hundreds of the people and even the king and Queen were included in the converts. But one day the only child of the Queen died. Moved by the queen’s grief for her dead child he made him arise and walk. And then every one wanted there dead to be resurrected which Ananda refused and the people were so angry that he had to escape from there. And it was then that he could understand the real message of the Blessed one (Mittal, 1993).

What the Buddha did when he faced a very identical situation? Once a woman brought her dead child to the Buddha and pleaded to restore his life. The Buddha asked her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from any household in which no one had ever died. She went from door to door begging for the mustard seeds but at the end she could not found any household who had not ever had any one died. The result was miraculous with out a miracle. The women had discovered the truth of the universal phenomenon of death. She came back recollected and calm. Her grief had gone and its place was taken by reflection of the wisdom and compassion (Mittal, 1993).

**The Socio-Philosophical Set-Up:**

The presence of different great teachers and discussions among them shows the intellectual ferment in the society of the age of the Buddha. It shows the great philosophical development on the soil of the Indian sub-continent. Several schools had come into being to address the socio-religious problems of the society.

The Schools can be divided into two main branches: The Orthodox schools which in some way or other accepted the authority of the Rig Veda and the Heterodox schools which in some way or other challenged the authority of Rig Veda. Buddhism is considered one of the later groupings of schools.

This second kind of movement shows a notable deviation or innovation in the already established socio-religious set up. It also shows the long discontent of the society divided in an unjust way by the established Rig Vedic code.

A. Foucher takes the event in a very different way: “What we do discover under all the artificial ornamentation is the unquestionable rivalries between the Buddha and the leaders of other existing sects. The episodes given particular importance are part of a cycle surrounding the inevitable competition for alms. Legend never tired of blackening the reputation of the heterodox sects by showing how they tried to ruin the Buddha’s reputation in the
eyes of the population and thus starve him as well as his Order. In all fairness to them it must be added that in so doing his adversaries were fighting for their own lives (Foucher, 2003: 207-208).”

“Good faith has never been the guiding principle of polemics! Wordy battles are an Indian trait, since the most ancient antiquity and the Brahman as well as the Buddhist annals resound with the echoes of formidable public discussions. These were often held on the initiative of a king and even in his royal presence (Foucher, 2003: 208-209).”

“To begin with, we might try to broadly restore the legend and to try justifying within reason the basis for it. We need no longer go over the origins, either material or doctrinal, of the conflict. Concerning the heterodox scholars, there is always the favourable impression that their number remains at six. Not only is this very reasonable, but it means that the names, once established, remain the same. As the last one on the list has been identified as the founder of the flourishing sect of the Jains, his historical identity confers on his colleagues a sufficient stamp of reality. On the other hand, the choice of Śrāvastī is explained in the most plausible fashion. Leery of the friendship between Śākyamuni and Bimbisāra, king of the Magadha, the heterodox counted upon the impartiality of Prasenajit, king of Kośāla. Later it was said that the occasion of the great intellectual tournament was known. It was remembered (quite naively) that, following a brash demonstration by Pindola Bharadhvāja, the Buddha had forbidden his monks to engage in any supernatural public display. This rule would have placed the Master in a position of inferiority, had it included him, and the heterodox immediately took advantage of it in hope that it did. So they challenged him to a public competition. But just as a royal edict does not apply to the king himself, a prohibition concerning disciples is not binding upon their leader, and thus are the false prophets caught in their own snares (Foucher 2003).”

Another important thing to be noted is that the Kings, even if not followers of a holy man, used to ask advice. This can be proved from the Mahāparinibbāna Sūtta (Maurice, 1987), in which it is related that King Ajātasattu wanted to ask about the outcome if he attacks Vajjian. Buddha had advised him not to attack because of the superiority of the Vaijians

Buddha’s Walk in the Air

The Buddha’s walk in the air symbolises his having the authority on this element. This symbolises his liberation from every kind of bonds. If his disciples like Maudgalyayana used to walk to different heavens, then how could it be difficult for his Master just to walk in the air? It is not the only occasion narrated in Buddhist texts are sculpture. We know that Buddha once went to the Trayastrimsa heaven. He walked on the flood water while residing with the ascetic Kaśyapa. In this episode he walked in the air and then transformed himself into images in the air.

Emanating Flames from his Shoulders and Streams of Water from his Feet

In this miraculous walk in the air he also performed other two miraculous actions. He, from his body, emanated not only water but also fire. The emanation of the two most opposite elements from the same Buddha body is a message that the Buddha had a full divine power over the most opposite elements.

The element of fire might symbolise energy in action and thus action which in many cases have been symbolised by the king of the Trayastrimsa heaven (Śākra). Thus the water element might symbolise the Brahman ascetic like Brahma as the potential energy. And thus both together symbolise not only the two energies united in Buddha but also indicate the presence of the two gods in a symbolic way.

Transformation of Himself in to numerous images

The Buddha’s multiplication of himself into many images which included Buddhas and Bodhisattvas suggest the development with in the Buddhist order. It clearly indicates the progress of the Mahāyāṇa sect which had almost reconciled itself with Brahmanism. It is the character of the Hindu gods particularly Visnu who is
famous for created illusion (Māyā). The written texts and sculpture of Buddhism is a very late development and we know that Buddhism, with the passage of time, has incorporated many things from Brahmanism.

**Symbolism of the Bodhisattva-s**

In many of the sculptural examples included in this work we have seen that Buddha is flanked by the two Bodhisattva-s: Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara. This also indicates the later development because we see two Bodhisattva-s instead of the two Brahmanic gods. Buddhism, on this point, had established itself on a broader basis. It was no more in need of the two gods but had altered them with their own alteranatives for the two gods. Among the two Bodhisattva-s one might be the counter part of Brahmā while the other that of the Śākra. Maitreya has always been represented as a Brahman ascetic and thus might symbolise the alternative for Brahmā while Avalokiteśvara might symbolise the alternative of Śākra because he has been represented with a crown.

**Teaching Poses (dharma-cākra-mūdra)**

The main objective of the Gautama Buddha was to teach the way explored by him after a Six-year long period of meditation and austerities. He was the teacher of gods and human alike and on the occasion of the great miracle or the great illusion he displayed his multiplied images in teaching poses to assert his real mission.

A Sketched Buddha with the gesture of dharmacakramudra (Iyer, K. Bharata, Arte Indiana, tr. Grazia Lanzillo, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1964, Fig. No. 4); as depicted in Fig. 1,2,3,4,5,17,18,19,20,21,22 and 23.

**The Contemplation Pose (dhayāna-mūdra):**

In this episode the Buddha has been represented with his contemplation posture sitting on the lotus throne and thus besides communicating the idea of his being a great teacher, through his representation, the idea of the importance of contemplation is communicated.

Contemplating Buddha with the gesture of dhayanamudra (Arte Indiana, tr. Grazia Lanzillo, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1964, Fig.No.2); as depicted in Fig. 6, 14, 15 and 16.
The lotus Flower
In the multiplication episode Buddha is seated on a big lotus flower which, according to Buddhist texts, contains thousand petals. In the above selected Gandhāra narrative sculpture mostly Buddha is sculptured on a simple quadruple seat covered with a piece of cloth or with grass. In this scene where Buddha had created this illusion to confound his opponents he is shown on the Lotus flower.

“The padma or lotus is the most important symbol in Indian art. It symbolises the earth. Its eight petals are the eight quarters. A thousand-petalled lotus is the symbol of hiranyagarbha, ‘the womb of gold’, which is the point of origin of the Brahman. Thus, the lotus is the cause of creation and it symbolises universal motherhood. It also symbolises a miraculous birth since it comes into being out of water, and is svayambhū, self-born. The padma blossoms at the rise of the sun. The sun symbolises Brahma, and as such the lotus seems to be the bestower of life (Srivastava, 1983: 140).”

Lotus flower has a very important place in Hindu-Buddhist cosmos.

“When the divine life substance is about to put forth the universe, the cosmic waters grow a thousand-petalled lotus of pure gold, radiant as the sun. This is the door or gate, the opening or mouth, of the womb of the universe. It is the first product of the creative principle, gold in token of its incorruptible nature. It opens to give birth to the demiurge-creator, Brahmā. From its pericarp then issue the hosts of the created world. According to the Hindu conception, the waters are female; they are the maternal, procreative aspect of the absolute, and the cosmic lotus is their generative organ. The cosmic lotus is called “The highest form or aspect of Earth,” also “The Goddess Moisture,” The Goddess Earth.” It is personified as the Mother Goddess through whom the Absolute moves into creation (Zimmer, 1990: 9).

“In Buddhist tradition, Padmapāni, or Avalokīteśvara, is of an ambivalent or polyvalent character. He is, like Vishnu, the master of Māyā, and is possessed of the divine power of assuming forms at will. According to the needs of the situation, he may appear as man or woman, or as animal; he may appear as a fabulous winged horse named “Cloud” (valāhaka), or as an insect. His manner of manifestation depends upon the particular group of living beings he may wish to assist on the path of salvation through enlightenment (Zimmer, 1990: 97).”

“Perhaps the most surprising of the new assignments is that to Prajñā-Pāramitā, the highest feminine personification in Mahāyāna Buddhism (Zimmer 1990: 97).”

“The wisdom (prajñā) that leads to nirvāṇa is the highest virtue (pāramitā): it is the very essence of the Buddhas, the holy enlightened ones, and the Buddha-in-the-making, the Bodhisattva, must bring it to perfection (Zimmer 1990: 98).”

“Prajñā-Pāramitā is “The culmination of the Virtue (pāramitā) of Enlightening Transcendental Wisdom (prajñā).” Or, according to another etymological explanation sanctioned by the sacred commentaries, she is “Enlightening Wisdom (prajñā) now gone to and abiding upon (itā) the Other Shore (pāra).” That other shore, or Farther Bank, is the realm of ultimate truth and transcendental reality in contradistinction to This Shore- the bank on which we are standing, moving, and talking, fettered by desire, subject to suffering, steeped in ignorance- the realm of unenlightened beings. Thus our goddess Lotus, the ageless Mother Earth, the Magna Mater of Antiquity, procreative energy and fortune on the physical plane, now transfigured under the aspect of Prajñā-Pāramitā, has become the queen of the spiritual kingdom attained through enlightenment (bodhi), representing the extinction (nirvāṇā) of both individualized consciousness and the cosmic manifold of biological, human, and godly being (Zimmer 1990: 98-99).”

“The lotus of the world supports the symbol of the enlightenment that dispels the darkness of the naïve ignorance inherent in all living beings. The lotus symbol, which originally gave birth to beings and existences in unending succession, now carries the powerful wisdom of Nirvāṇa: The
Word that puts an end to all individualized existence, whether in heaven or on earth (Zimmer 1990: 100)."

The map showing city of Shravasti (Śrāvastī) and its surrounding areas (Ling, T. The Buddha: Civilization in India and Ceylon. London. 1974)

The city of Śrāvastī
The above mentioned miracles of Buddha are apprehended by many scholars but whether or not they are connected to the city of Śrāvastī has been a debate in scholarship. There are not much evidences found in the Gandhara sculptures but one cannot ignore the importance of this capital of Kohsala in Pali canon.

“From the evidence of these contextual notes it is possible to see that the Buddha lived more in the city of Shravasti (śrāvasti) than anywhere else (Ling, 1974: 100).”
It "was the most important city of the Gangetic plains, commercially and politically.the Buddha first went there at the invitation of a rich merchant named Anathapindika ............(Ling, 1974: 100)”

Anathapindika even bought a land and built vihara for Buddha and his compainans.” Twenty-five rainy seasons were spent there by the Buddha (Ling 1974: 100)”

“Of the discourses of Buddha which go to make up the Sutta-Pitaka, 871 are said to have been delivered in Shravasti. Of 498 canonical Jataka stories, the telling of which is attributed to the Buddha, 416 are said to have been told in Shravasti (Ling, 1974: 100).”

Moreover some evidence can also be found in Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya which supports this dogma of Śrāvastī miracles. “Now, there are five actions that the Buddhas, the blessed ones, must perform (Fiordalis, 2014: 12)” first is the attainment of Bodhi, second is the prediction of future Buddha, third is to convert his family a believer of the good law, forth “ to display the great miracle in Śrāvastī; and fifth, to train in the discipline all those ready to be so trained by the Buddha (Fiordalis, 2014: 12).” Not truly in iconographic sence but in prognostication city of Śrāvastī has existed in symbolism.
Conclusion
Because the documentation for the Buddha’s miracles at Śravasti comes from manuscripts written 400-500 years after he lived, we may consider them as legends, but one cannot ignore the existence of these stories in Buddhism.

This famous and very important episode of the life of Buddha have been described beautifully in both the medium of text and sculpture. Gandhara sculpture above all, has proved itself as an effective tool of recording the life of Buddha and propagating his doctrine.

Though the stance of Buddhism is not based on demonstrating miracles. As Dieter Schlingloff said:” the main motive for the conception of a Buddha's life was not, however, to give the sermon an attractive colour, but to support the dogma that the appearance of a Buddha as the climax and the turning point of the world affairs was a miraculous event, unlike any other earthly life (Fiordalis 2014: 1-2). Buddha believed in wisdom and he who has wisdom does not need miracles.

Figure 1: Miracle at Śravāsti, H. 108 cm, W. 36 cm, Provenance Unknown, (Foucher, A., The Beginnings of Buddhist Art, Revised by the author and tr, by L.A. Thomas, Indological Book House, Varanasy and Delhi, 1972, Fig. No. 1, Pl. XXV)
Figure 2: Miracles at Śrāvasti, Stone, H. 112 cm, W. 106 cm, Provenance Unknown, (Foucher, A., *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, 1972, Fig No. 2, Pl. XXIV)

Figure 3: Miracles at Śravāsti, Stone, H. 58 cm, L. 68 cm, Provenance Unknown, (Foucher, A., *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, 1972, Fig. No. 2, Pl. XXV)
Figure 4: Miracles at Śravāsti, Stone, H. 108 cm, W. 32 cm, Provenance Unknown, (Foucher, A., The Beginnings of Buddhist Art, 1972, Fig.No.2, Pl.XXVI)

Figure 5: Miracles at Śravāsti, Stone, H. 106 cm, 42 cm, Provenance Unknown, (Photo from Foucher, A., The Beginnings of Buddhist Art, 1972, Fig. No. 1, Pl. XXIV)
Figure 6: Buddha’s Miracle of Growing a Mango tree instantly at Śravāsti, Grey schist, H. 119.4 cm, Takht-i-Bahai Monastery, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 394)

Figure 7: Buddha’s Miracle of emanating Fire and Streams of water, Grey Schist, H. 52 cm, Provenance Unknow, Peshawar Museum, (Sehrai, F., The Buddha’s life Story, 1988, Fig. No. 40)
Figure 8: Buddha’s Miracle of emanating fire and streams of water, Grey schist, H. 23.8 cm, W. 29.2 cm, From Peshawar, The Cleveland Museum of Art, CM A75. 102, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhara Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 381)

Figure 9: Buddha’s Miracle of emanating fire and water streams, Grey schist, H. 37 cm, W. 50 cm, From Swat, Victoria & Albert Museum, FE 2481, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhara Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 382)
Figure 10: Buddha’s Miracle of Emanating Fire and Water Streams, Grey schist, H. 20 cm, W. 18 cm, Provenance Unknown, Calcutta Museum, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 383)

Figure 11: Buddha’s Miracle of Emanating Fire and Water streams at Śravāsti, Grey schist, H. 23.5 cm, W. 28.5 cm, Provenance Unknwon, Private Collection Japan, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 384)
Figure 12: Buddha’s Miracle of Emanating Fire and Water streams, Grey schist, Private Collection Japan, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 386)

Figure 13: Buddha’s Miracle of Emanating Fire and Water streams, Grey schist, H. 38 cm, Provenance Unknown, Private Collection Japan, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 388)
Figure 14: Buddha’s Miracle of Multiplicating himself by Buddha Śākyamuni, Grey schist, H. 20 cm, Provenance Unknown, Peshawar Museum, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhara Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 390)

Figure 15: Buddha’s Miracle of Multiplicating himself at Śravasti, Grey schist, H. 28 cm, W. 16 cm, Provenance Unknown, Formerly Peshawar Museum, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhara Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 391)
Figure 16: Buddha’s Miracle of Multiplicating himself at Śravasti, Grey schist, H. 83 cm, W. 54 cm, Probably from Malakand, K.M. © Mr. Gakuji Tanaka, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 393)
Figure 17: Buddha’s Miracle of Multiplicating himself at Śravasti, Grey schist, H. 116.8 cm, W. 76 cm, From Mohammad Nari, Lahore Museum, (Photo by the author)

Figure 18: Buddha’s Miracle of Multiplicating himself, Grey schist, H. 104 cm, From Mohammad Nari, Lahore Museum, No. 1134, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 397)
Figure 19: At Śravasti, Grey schist, H. 100 cm, Provenance Unknown, Calcutta Museum, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 398)

Figure 20: Miracles at Śravasti, Grey schist, H. 85 cm, Provenance Unknown, Lahore Museum, No. 572, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 399)
Figure 21: Miracles at Sravasti, Grey schist, H. 133 cm, probably from near Sahri Bahlol, Matsuoka Museum of Art, Tokyo, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 400)

Figure 22: Miracles at Sravasti, Grey schist, H. 59 cm, W. 49 cm, From Sahri Bahlol, Peshawar Museum, © Mr. M. Taeda, (Kurita, Isao, Gandhara Art, 2003, Fig. No. 403)
Figure 23: Miracles at Sravasti, Grey schist, H. 54.5 cm, W. 59.5 cm, From Sahri Bahlol, Peshawar Museum, No. 1527, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhara Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 404)

**References**


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