

The Socio-Religious Dimensions of Dedicatory Inscriptions on Sculptures Donated to a Buddhist Establishment in Early Medieval Magadha: Kurkihar, c.800-1200 CE

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In this paper, an attempt has been made to trace the evolving social bases of patronage to the Buddhist monastic establishment of Kurkihar in early medieval Magadha through the prism of dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures donated to the same. I have argued that this monastic establishment attracted patronage from diverse sections of society till the end of the eleventh century CE. The twelfth century witnessed a shrinking of its patronage base.

Introduction

Over the years, one may witness an increasing emphasis on the use of archaeological and epigraphic data in exploring the social history of Indian monastic Buddhism.¹ The general emphasis has been on tracing the evolution of the patronage base of Buddhist religious institutions.² In other cases, we see the interesting use of dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures to reconstruct religious affiliations, identities and expectations of donors of sculptures.³ We also find the use

Keywords: Magadha, Buddhist sculptures, Brahmanical sculptures, Buddhist-Brahmanical encounters, decline of Indian Buddhism

¹For a historiographical review, see Prasad 2008.

²Dehejia 1992; Thapar 1992; Singh 1996; Roy Chowdhury 2008; Basu 2006; Bhattacharya 2008; Prasad 2010; 2010a; 2010b; 2013a.

³Schopen 1984; 1988-1989; Kim 2012.

of dedicatory inscriptions to trace the evolution of a particular cult or tradition within Buddhism.⁴ The general emphasis has been on early historic northern and northwestern India, but important beginnings have been made in tracing the patterns of social patronage to Buddhist institutions in early medieval (c.600-1200 CE) Bihar and Bengal, arguably the last strongholds of Indian Buddhism.⁵ In this paper, an attempt will be made to understand the evolving social bases of patronage for the site of Kurkihar in the Gaya district of Bihar against the backdrop of contemporary developments in Indian Buddhism.

Barring some early explorations by colonial explorers (Major Kittoe and Alexander Cunningham), this site has not been subject to systematic archaeological study. During his second visit to the site in 1847, Major Kittoe spent four days collecting “ten cart-loads of idols, all Buddhist and many of the Tantric period.”⁶ He also saw a “vast mound of bricks and rubbish – undoubtedly the site of a great monastery and town.” The site was “studded with Chaityas or Buddhist temples of every dimension from ten inches to perhaps forty to fifty feet, and built one upon the other.” It is apparent that he was referring to votive stupas dedicated to some Buddhist establishment at this site by many pilgrims. When Cunningham surveyed the site, he found numerous Buddhist images, remains of a big stupa and monastery, and innumerable votive stupas, which were “rather characteristic of this place.” In his times, there were “rows after rows of Chaityas extending north and south for several hundred feet.” Though neither Kittoe nor Cunningham provided the number and typology of votive stupas at the site, it is apparent that in sheer number of votive stupas, the site matches Bodh Gaya. These votive stupas were undoubtedly indicators of sustained pilgrimage to this site. That prompted Cunningham to associate this site with the famous Kukkuṭapādāgīrivihāra, where Mahākāśyapa, an important disciple of the Buddha, was believed to have retired to await the arrival of Maitreya, the future Buddha, to whom he would hand over the charge of the Dharma as well as the robe of a monk. This identification has been contested by some later scholars.⁷

Plundering of the site for bricks by local villagers continued even after the exploration by Cunningham. This led to the accidental discovery of a remarkably large hoard of 226 bronze items (including sculptures, bells, etc.) in 1930. All

⁴Schopen 1979; Schopen 1987; Schopen 1988-89; Schopen 2010a; Prasad 2013; 2013b; 2013c; 2014a.

⁵Prasad 2010; 2010a; 2010b; 2013; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014a; Kim 2012.

⁶For a summary of explorations by Kittoe and Cunningham see Patil 1963: 222-226.

⁷See particularly Pandey 1963: 47-48, 133.

bronze items were found at a single location, where they were probably deliberately buried in the face of an emergency. In this hoard, 93 inscribed sculptures were also found.⁸ These sculptures have been studied mostly from art historical perspectives.⁹ But, as has been rightly remarked, the sociology of the dedicatory inscriptions on them is yet to be traced.¹⁰ In the paragraphs that follow, we shall explore the socio-religious dimensions of dedicatory inscriptions on the sculptures of Kurkihar. Our primary emphasis will be on the dedicatory inscriptions on bronze sculptures, though we shall also look into the reported dedicatory inscriptions on stone sculptures. We shall be mainly looking into those inscriptions which record the name of the donor. We shall not look into those inscriptions which record the Buddhist Creed Formula (*ye dharmā hetu-prabhavā hetun teṣān Tathāgato hy avadat teṣāñ ca yo nirodha evamvādi mahāśramaṇaḥ*) only. Our primary concern will be to trace the evolving patronage base of this monastic establishment. We shall undertake a century-wise analysis.

Our endeavour has some obvious limitations, mainly due to the nature of our database. Out of the sixty inscriptions analysed in this paper, only eight (one in the ninth century, three in the tenth century and four in the eleventh century) have recorded the regnal year of the king ruling when the donation was made. Only these inscriptions can be dated on a surer footing. An overwhelming majority of inscriptions come in a very short dedicatory format, just recording that the image was the *deyadharmā* of a particular donor. In many cases, only the name of the donor is recorded. For these two types of inscriptions, epigraphists have attempted dating on the basis of paleographic features. In such cases, only some broad (i.e., century-wise) dating could be attributed. So when we deal with such inscriptions from a particular century, we do not know if these inscriptions were spaced by days, months, years or decades. Therefore, it is generally very difficult to trace transitions taking place within a particular century. Wherever our database allows, we will make an attempt in that direction. We shall be on a surer footing when tracking the transitions taking place across centuries.

⁸Most of them have been transferred to the Patna Museum. Inscriptions on them were initially published by A. Banerji-Sastri (1940), and, later, by P.L. Gupta (1965). Their readings are identical in most cases. In this paper, I have utilised both versions.

⁹Huntington 1984; Bautze-Picron 1991.

¹⁰Paul 1996-97: 34.

Cultic affiliation of donors of Buddhist images in epigraphic records: some methodological considerations

In the poly-religious landscape of early medieval India, Magadha being no exception, it was natural that a vast section of the population had fluid religious identities: one could continue worshipping the Buddha or other Buddhist deities, and donating their images to a Buddhist establishment, without ever formally becoming 'Buddhist.' That should not, however, lead us to believe that Buddhism as a marker of social and religious identity of some persons was totally non-existent. Some chose to declare their association with Buddhism more formally through dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures donated by them. In full agreement with Schopen (1979), we may state that the adoption of a particular form of dedicatory formula in votive inscriptions on Buddhist sculptures was generally not an eclectic choice on the part of the donor, but a conscious adherence to a particular tradition of Buddhism (Prasad 2013: 186). Thus in the dedicatory formulas on the sculptures donated by donors who opted to identify themselves as followers of the Mahāyāna, there are recorded some characteristic technical, and definitive, words. In many inscriptions, they recorded themselves as *pravara-mahāyāna-anuyāyinaḥ* (follower of the excellent Mahāyāna). In many cases, the donor did not categorically identify himself/herself as such, but other words indicated that the donor wished to be identified as a follower of the Mahāyāna. Schopen noted that in dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures, the words *paramopāsaka* and *paramopāsikā* respectively signified a man or woman who was a Mahāyāna lay worshipper. Similarly *Śākyabhikṣu* and *Śākyabhikṣuṇī* signified a Mahāyāna monk or nun respectively.¹¹ Similarly, the expression of the aim of attainment of *anuttara jñāna* by all sentient beings, the donor's parents, or the donor him/herself was almost exclusive to the Mahāyāna dedicatory formula on sculptures (Schopen 1979: 3-5). The same applies to the formula *yad atra puṇyama*, which was 'virtually the exclusive property of Mahāyāna' (Schopen 1979: 12).

It may also be noted that in dedicatory inscriptions on Buddhist sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, whenever a donor wished to identify himself/herself with any tradition of Buddhism, that tradition was the Mahāyāna. That

¹¹For a different perspective on the significance of these terms, see Cousins (2003). For a critique of Cousins' thesis, and an explanation of the validity of Schopen's arguments for the Pāla-Sena period (c.750-1200 CE) Bihar and Bengal, see Prasad 2013: 187.

remained the case until the very end of this period (Prasad 2013: 187).¹²

Keeping these issues in mind, we will classify the donors of images into six broad categories: Buddhist monks; Buddhist nuns; male Mahāyāna lay followers; female Mahāyāna lay followers; male donors without any expressed Buddhist affiliation; and female donors without any expressed Buddhist affiliation. One additional category will be used in this paper: ‘unknown donors.’ It comprises those donors whose social or religious background could not be ascertained because their inscriptions are damaged.

Deities and donors: the ninth century CE pattern

Fourteen inscribed images have been reported from the ninth century, of which twelve are Buddhist and two are Brahmanical. They are summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Ninth-century votive inscriptions on sculptures

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
1	Buddha in BSM ¹³	Sthavira Nadradeva	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
2	Buddha in BSM	Buddhavarmana	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
3	Buddha in BSM	<i>paramopāsakī</i> Manju	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
4	Buddha in BSM	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ¹⁴
5	Buddha in DCPM ¹⁵	Vīryavarmana	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
6	Buddha in BSM	Nāgendra-varmana	Not mentioned; probably a monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
7	Buddha in BSM	Tāka-Dharmadeva	Male w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed

Continued on next page

¹²This remained the case even in dedicatory inscriptions on overtly Vajrayanist images (Aparājītā, etc.). The word ‘Vajrayāna’ does not occur even once in the corpus of dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, nor did a Vajrayāna dedicatory formula ever evolve (Prasad 2013: 187). This creates conceptual problems in understanding the nature of the relationship between Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna in this period, which may be analysed more thoroughly in future studies. My only observation on the basis of my ongoing cataloguing of dedicatory inscriptions on Buddhist sculptures of Bihar and Bengal is that barring Mahāyāna, we find no dedicatory formula peculiar to any other Buddhist tradition.

THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF DEDICATORY INSCRIPTIONS ON SCULPTURES

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
8	Buddha in BSM	Vīryavarmana	Monk	Apparently from Kāñci	None expressed
9	Siddhaikavīra	Saha	Male w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
10	Vāgīśvara	Vaṇika (merchant) Māṇeka, son of Jānu	Male w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation; from mercantile background	Not mentioned	None expressed
11	Tārā	Śākya-Bhikṣuṇī – Guṇamati	Mahāyāna nun	Not mentioned	None expressed
12	Tārā	Umādukā, wife of Iddāka	Female w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
13	Balarāma	Ajhuka	Female w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation; part of rural aristocracy (wife of a village chief)	Madhugrāma in Vāhiravana	None expressed
14	Viṣṇu	Cobbler (<i>carmakāra</i>) Thisavī	Male w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation; from untouchable background	Not mentioned	None expressed

We see a significant presence (58.3 percent of the reported inscribed images) of the images of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā in this century. We shall analyse its significance in the last section of the paper.

None of the votive inscriptions are long. Most of them come in a very short dedicatory formula, just recording that the image was the *deyadharmma* of the donor. Barring *carmakāra* Thisavī, none of the donors have referred to his/her *varṇa/jāti* status, indicating that the monastery marginalised *varṇa/jāti*-based identities. Only one donor – Māṇeka, son of the Jānu who donated an image of Vāgīśvara (no. 10) – recorded that he was a *vaṇika* (merchant).¹⁶ *Vaṇika*

¹³ BSM stands for Bhūmisparśamudrā.

¹⁴ Inscription on the image: just four indistinct letters, hence analysis not possible.

¹⁵ DCPM stands for Dharmacakrapravartanamudrā.

¹⁶ Gupta 1965: 142, inscription no. 90.

may not necessarily indicate that he belonged to the *vaiśya varṇa*. None of the donors mentioned any particular motive (attainment of *anuttara jñāna*, welfare of parents, teachers or preceptors, etc.). Barring the dedicatory inscriptions on two Brahmanical images – Balarāma (no. 13) and Viṣṇu (no. 14), which were installed respectively at Mallapore and Āpanaka Mahāvihāra – none of the inscriptions record the name of the particular religious centre where the image was installed. This is quite strange given the fact during the ninth century at least four donors came from distant Kāñcī (Tamil Nadu). Travel from Kāñcī to Kurkihar must have been arduous. In fact, if we analyse the entire gamut of votive inscriptions on the sculptures of Kurkihar, an interesting pattern emerges. Including the two inscriptions referred to above, only four inscriptions record the name of the religious centre where the images were donated by donors. We see this in the donation of two images of Vasudhārā by the two wives of Gopālahīno (nos. 27 & 28, both datable to the tenth century). In all four cases the donors have vernacular names, which may indicate that they were locals with no monastic affiliation.

Out of the fourteen inscribed images from this century, at least five (nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6) were donated by donors from Kāñcī, representing 35.7 percent of donors. As a defined group, donors from Kāñcī formed the single largest group at Kurkihar. Apart from them, we have only one example of the recording of the place from which the donors came; i.e., the donation of an image of Balarāma (no. 13) by Ajhuka, wife of Singeka, who was probably a village chief.¹⁷ This inscription records not only the name of the place where the donor came from – Madhugrāma in Vāhiravana – but also the name of the religious centre (Mallapore) where the image was donated.¹⁸

Returning to the donors from Kāñcī of ninth century Kurkihar, we see the donation of five images by them, with three donors categorically stating that they came from Kāñcī. Within this category, we may cite the names of Sthavira Nadradeva, who donated an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 1);¹⁹ Sthavira Vīryavarmana, who donated an image of the Buddha in Dharmacakra-pravartanamudrā (no. 5);²⁰ and Nagendrarvarmana, who donated an image of

¹⁷ Gupta 1965: 152-153, inscription no. 149.

¹⁸ Gupta 1965: 152-53, inscription no. 149.

¹⁹ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 9.

²⁰ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 14. Bhikṣu Vīryavarmana from Kāñcī (Bhikṣu Vīryavarmana Kāñcī Vinirgata) appears as the donor of a bronze image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, now kept in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Pal 1988: 86). Both denote, apparently, the name of the same person.

the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 6).²¹ Buddhavarmana, who donated an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 2), did not mention the place of origin or his social background in the dedicatory inscription.²² But in a tenth century dedicatory inscription, we see one Buddhavarmana and Dharmavarmana jointly donating an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 15), and both have been referred to as monks (*sthavira*) from Kāñcī.²³ So we may assume that the Buddhavarmana mentioned in this inscription was the same person discussed in the previous inscription, with a Kāñcī origin and monk status reasonably attributed to him. Similarly, Vīryavarmana, who donated an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā²⁴ (no. 8) appears as the donor of an image of the Buddha in Dharmacakrapravartanamudrā (no. 5), with the categorical references to Kāñcī as the place of his origin and Sthavira as his title.²⁵ So we may reasonably assume that he too was a monk from Kāñcī.

The donation of so many bronze images by monks from Kāñcī at Kurkihar raises some interesting questions. Given that Kāñcī remained an important centre for Buddhism until as late as the early fourteenth century, attracting a monk from Magadha,²⁶ the flow of monks from Kāñcī should not come as any surprise. In fact, as we shall later see, pilgrimage from Kāñcī to Kurkihar continued right until the end of the eleventh century. The donation of so many bronze images by Kāñcī monks must have involved a considerable mobilisation of resources. We have no indication whatsoever to suggest that these monks were donating these images on behalf of some lay devotees. In fact, votive inscriptions on all these images categorically record that these images were the *deyadharmma* of the respective monk-donors. From where did they mobilise resources to get these images constructed and enshrined in a Gandhakuṭī at Kurkihar? In fact, we have some indirect references to the effect that some Kāñcī monks constructed some Gandhakuṭī at Kurkihar. P.L. Gupta has catalogued at least four bells from Kurkihar which are inscribed with the legend *Kāñcī – Stha[vira] Buddhavarmana Gandhakuṭya*.²⁷ Gupta has taken it to mean ‘probably recording the gift of the

²¹ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 15.

²² Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 11.

²³ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 241, inscription no. 6.

²⁴ Gupta 1965: 129, inscription no. 17.

²⁵ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 14.

²⁶ Prasad 2008: 77; Prasad 2014b: 88.

²⁷ Gupta 1965: 159, inscription nos. 205, 206, 207 & 208.

bell at the Gandhakuṭi by Buddhavarmana of Kāñcī,²⁸ but it may very well represent the construction of a Gandhakuṭi on the orders of Sthavira Buddhavarmana. From where did he mobilise resources for this costly endeavour? Did he mobilise his own resources or did his Magadhan devotees provide the resources?

From the ninth century, we have at least one example of the donation of an image by a Mahāyāna nun. The dedicatory inscription on an image of Tārā (no. 11) records that this image was the *deyadharmma* of Śākya-Bhikṣuṇi Guṇamati.²⁹

We have two more examples of the donation of Buddhist images by women donors during this century. The votive inscription on an image of the Buddha in Bhūmiśparśamudrā (no. 3) records that it was the *deyadharmma* of *paramopāsakī* (i.e., Mahāyāna lay follower) Mañju.³⁰ Other details of her social background are not known. She was probably an unmarried woman, otherwise she would have mentioned the name of her husband. That is what we see in the case of the donation of an image of a standing Tārā (no. 12), now kept in a museum in Switzerland. The provenance of this image has been attributed to Kurkihar on stylistic grounds.³¹ The votive inscription on this image records that it was the *deyadharmma* of Umadūkā, wife of Iddāka.³² One will agree with Bhattacharya that 'both the names of Umadūkā and Iddāka are vernacular.'³³ Compared to *paramopāsakī* Mañju, whose Mahāyāna identity is well defined, Buddhist influence is much less visible in the names of Umadūkā and Iddāka. Umadūkā has not mentioned other details of her social background, but we may infer that she could have been from a non-aristocratic and non-monastic background, by contrasting the votive inscription on an image of Balarāma (no. 13) donated by Ajhuka, the wife of Singeka, who has been referred to as a village chief.³⁴ We may assume that anyone with the vaguest of links to the aristocracy would generally mention details of their social background. In the absence of this in the case of Umadūkā, we may argue that she was from a non-aristocratic background. Similarly, nothing suggests that she had any kind of monastic background. The case with Saha, the donor of an image of Siddhaikavira (no. 9), appears to be similar. The votive inscription on this image records that it was his *deyadharmma* without mentioning

²⁸ Gupta 1965: 159.

²⁹ Bhattacharya 2000a: 463.

³⁰ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 12.

³¹ Bhattacharya 2000a: 464.

³² Bhattacharya 2000a: 465.

³³ Bhattacharya 2000a: 465.

³⁴ Gupta 1965: 152-153, inscription no. 149.

details of his social background.³⁵ We may infer a similar pattern in the donation of an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 7) by Tākadharmadeva, who has merely mentioned that this image was his *deyadharmma*.³⁶

In this century we also see the flow of mercantile patronage towards Buddhism; for example, via the donation of an image of Vāgīśvara (no. 10) as the *deyadharmma* of *vaṇika* Māṇeka, son of Jānu.³⁷ This is the only example of a donation of an image by a person from a mercantile background during this century.

On the whole, a broad cross-section of society – monks from distant Tamil Nadu, a nun, male and female Mahāyāna lay followers, merchants, rural elites, as well as persons from less distinct social backgrounds – donated images. The vibrant presence of Buddhism and its widespread social base is clearly discernible. This vibrancy is also reflected in the confident attempts of the Saṅgha at Kurkihar to induce an integration of brahmanical cults into Buddhism in a subordinate position by accepting the donation of inscribed brahmanical sculptures.³⁸ There are two such examples from ninth century Kurkihar and they represent donations by the rural aristocracy (Ajhuka, wife of a village chief) and a person from an untouchable background: *carmakāra* Thisavī.³⁹ It has rightly been pointed out that despite suffering untouchability, *carmakāra* Thisavī was a man of considerable wealth, probably not just an ordinary cobbler but a prosperous tanner, who employed several other *carmakāras* to collect and prepare the hides.⁴⁰

³⁵ Gupta 1965: 142, inscription no. 89.

³⁶ Gupta 1965: 129, inscription no. 16.

³⁷ Gupta 1965: 142, inscription no. 90.

³⁸ The patterns of cultic relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism as discernible in dedicatory inscriptions on brahmanical images donated to different Buddhist establishments in early medieval Magadha has been analysed elsewhere (Prasad 2013). Within Pāla period Magadha, Kurkihar shows the most consistent pattern of findings of inscribed Brahmanical sculptures donated to a Buddhist religious centre, with at least one example from every century. All such inscribed sculptures from Kurkihar have been covered in Prasad 2013. Thus, we shall generally ignore such examples in this paper.

³⁹ Analysing literary sources, Jha (2014: 115-116) has argued that there is no direct evidence of the untouchability of the *carmakāra* until the Gupta period, although his profession was considered to be a low-ranking one. In Brahmanical law texts of the early medieval period, the leather worker slowly became a distinctly untouchable caste, even for a *śūdra*. For similar observations, also see Patra 2009-10: 124.

⁴⁰ Pal (1988: 86) also argued that the un-Sanskritic name of *carmakāra* Thisavī may indicate that he was of tribal origin. This argument is not tenable. Barring the monks of Kāñcī, almost all

Royalty are conspicuous by their absence. In fact, we do not find a single example of donations of images by persons of royal background in subsequent centuries. According to our database, the monastic complex of Kurkihar seems to have survived mainly on the patronage provided by local and non-local donors from non-royal backgrounds throughout its known history.

We here summarise, in tabular form, the segments of society which made donations, as well as the types and numbers of images donated, during this century.

Table 1a

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Nun	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Total
Buddha in BSM	4+1(?)			1	1		7
Buddha in DCPM	1						1
Siddhaikavīra					1		1
Vāgīśvara					1		1
Tārā		1				1	2
Balarāma					1		1
Viṣṇu					1		1
Total	6	1		1	5	1	14

Donations of inscribed sculptures at Kurkihar: the tenth century pattern

In the tenth century, twenty-one inscribed sculptures have been reported, out of which one image (Umāmaheśvara) is brahmanical.

donors of Kurkihar sculptures have un-Sanskritic names. Nothing suggests that they were all of tribal origin.

Table 2: Tenth-century votive inscriptions on sculptures

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
15	Buddha in BSM	Sthavira Buddha-varmana and Sthavira Dharmavarmana	Monks	Kāñcī	None expressed
16	Buddha in BSM	Candra-varmana	Not mentioned; probably a monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
17	Crowned Buddha	Rāhula-varmana	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
18	Crowned Buddha	Prabhākara-siṃha	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
19	Avalokiteśvara	Bhadevī (?), a lady	Female w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
20	Tārā	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁴¹
21	Tārā	<i>upāsakī</i> Gopāli-Sāuka	Female Mahāyāna lay follower	Not mentioned	None expressed
22	Tārā	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁴²
23	Tārā	Dūtasimha	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
24	Tārā	Prabhākara-siṃha	Monk	Kāñcī	None expressed
25	Tārā	<i>upāsakī</i> Duva-jha	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
26	Tārā	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁴³
27	Vasudhārā	Vāṭukā, wife of Gopālahino	Female w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
28	Vasudhārā	Gāukā, another wife of Gopālahino	Female, w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
29	Parṇaśavarī	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁴⁴
30	Group of deities on pedestal: Hārīti, two other goddesses, Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known

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No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
31	Prabhāmaṇḍala, probably a Buddhist image	Khamgaka	Person associated with Mahāyāna	Not mentioned	<i>anuttara jñāna</i> for all sentient beings, keeping his parents, teacher and preceptor in the front
32	Naga pedestal of large broken Buddhist image	Prajñāsīmha	Mahāyāna monk, from Brahmin background	Kāñcī	Transferring merit of donation to his parents, teacher, preceptor and all sentient beings
33	Triratha pedestal of an image, probably Buddhist	Sthavira Avalokitasīmha	Mahāyāna monk	Kāñcī, but originally hailing from Keraladeśa (i.e., Kerala)	None expressed
34	Rectangular pedestal, probably a Buddhist image	Sthavira Bud-dhajñāna	Mahāyāna monk	Kāñcī	<i>anuttara jñāna</i> for all sentient beings, keeping his parents, teacher and preceptor in the front
35	Umāmaheśvara	Mulūka, wife of Gopāla Mahiaru, a resident of the Āpanaka Mahāvihāra	Female w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	Not mentioned

Tārā seems to be the preferred deity. Donors from Kāñcī formed the single largest group. Compared to the five instances of donation of images by donors from Kāñcī in the previous century, we find nine examples in this century, indicating increasing pilgrimage from Kāñcī. We also see the donation of six images by women donors, out of which two have referred to themselves as *upāsakī*,⁴⁵ which proves that they were Mahāyāna lay donors. Interestingly, both *upāsakī* donors donated the images of Tārā (nos. 21 & 25). One lady, who donated an im-

⁴¹ In the inscription: Buddhist Creed Formula followed by about 10 much obliterated letters, hence, historical analysis is not possible.

⁴² In the inscription: just a few indistinct letters, hence historical analysis is not possible.

⁴³ In the inscription: just a few indistinct letters, hence historical analysis is not possible.

⁴⁴ In the inscription: just two indistinct letters, hence analysis is not possible.

⁴⁵ Gupta 1965: 145, inscription no. 107; Gupta 1965: 146, inscription no. 116.

age of Avalokiteśvara (no. 19) has simply referred to her name (Bhadevī) without providing details of her social background.⁴⁶ We also see two wives of a gentleman named Gopālahīno donating images of Vasudhārā (nos. 27 & 28) around c. 965 CE.⁴⁷ Barring one monk from Kāñcī – Sthavira Prajñāsīnha, who was ‘born in a family of brāhmaṇas well-versed in Vedas and Vedāngas’⁴⁸ – none of the donors mentioned his/her *varṇa/jāti* status. Also, aside from the two wives of Gopālahīno, who categorically recorded that they had donated images of Vasudhārā to the Āpanaka Mahāvihāra, none of the donors cared to record the name of the religious centre where they installed the image. This presents a dilemma for us: why would donors, who undertook an arduous pilgrimage from distant Tamil Nadu, or from within Magadha, not attempt to record the name of the religious centre where they made their donations?. On the whole, instances of the recording of the religious centre where the image was donated/installed by the Magadha and non-Magadha donors at Kurkihar are quite rare. Given their vernacular (un-Sanskritic) names and the lack of details regarding the social and occupational status of their husband or parents, it is apparent that the two wives of Gopālahīno were from a non-aristocratic background. That they were not from a monastic background is self-evident.

Turning our attention to the donors from Kāñcī at Kurkihar, what was the nature of their presence? As a group, Kāñcī donors were of great importance at Kurkihar. Were donors from Kāñcī all monks or were lay donors also present? Did they come simply to make pilgrimages, then return immediately afterwards? Or did some reside in a monastery of Kurkihar for a longer period? How did they mobilise resources to undertake the installation of bronze images, and, arguably, construction of Gandhakuṭīs at Kurkihar? Mobilising resources so far from their place of origin must have been a challenge and, to date, we do not find any examples in which they donate images on behalf of some lay patron. Independent donations were made through mobilisation of resources on their own behalf.

Let us first explore an important question: whether all donors from Kāñcī were monks, as proposed by G. Bhattacharya.⁴⁹ Bhattacharya did not offer any reasons to support this notion. If we analyse the dedicatory inscriptions on sculp-

⁴⁶ Gupta 1965: 137, inscription no. 64.

⁴⁷ Gupta 1965: 150, inscription no. 134-135. Gupta has dated these inscriptions to c.935 CE, but taking into account the revised chronology of the Pāla dynasty by S.C.Mukherji, we have applied the date of c.965 CE to these pieces.

⁴⁸ Gupta 1965: 155, inscription no. 164.

⁴⁹ Bhattacharya: 2000a.

tures donated by donors from Kāñcī, we see that only some donors have recorded that they were monks: *Sthavira* Buddhavarmana and *Sthavira* Dharmavarmana, who jointly donated an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 50); Prajñāsiṃha, whose name survives on the Nāga pedestal of a big broken image⁵⁰ (no. 32); Avalokitasīṃha, whose name survives on the *triratha* pedestal of a broken image⁵¹ (no. 33); and Buddhajñāna, whose name appears in a Mahāyāna dedicatory inscription formula on the rectangular pedestal of a broken image⁵² (no. 34). This type of reference to the monk status of other donors from Kāñcī is absent in this century.

Contrasting this pattern with the same in votive inscriptions on images donated by Kāñcī monks during the ninth century may offer some clues. During the ninth century, *Sthavira* Nadravarmana, who donated an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā;⁵³ and *Bhikṣu* Vīryavarmana, who donated an image of the Buddha in Dharmacakrapravartanamudrā,⁵⁴ alongside another image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā;⁵⁵ have categorically referred to themselves as monks from Kāñcī. Two other donors – Buddhavarmana, who donated an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā;⁵⁶ and Nagendravarmana, who donated a similar image⁵⁷ – despite recording that they came to Kurkihar from Kāñcī, did not categorically state in any votive inscription whether they were monks. Buddhavarmana, however, appears as a *sthavira* in three inscriptions on bells, in which he appears to have had at least one Gandhakuṭī constructed in a monastery at Kurkihar.⁵⁸ In another inscription on a bell, he appears without the qualifying term *stha* or *sthavira*.⁵⁹ Thus, it is apparent that this monk was not particular about recording his monk status in all inscriptions. We are not sure if this observation can be applied to all donors from Kāñcī who did not categorically indicate whether or not they were monks. The possibility that some were lay pilgrims from Kāñcī cannot be ruled out. That at least one donor from Kāñcī remained in Kurkihar for an extended period instead of returning immediately after making the pilgrimage is

⁵⁰ Gupta 1965: 155, inscription no. 164.

⁵¹ Gupta 1965: 155, inscription no. 165.

⁵² Gupta 1965: 156, inscription no. 166.

⁵³ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 9.

⁵⁴ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 14.

⁵⁵ Gupta 1965: 129, inscription no. 17.

⁵⁶ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 9.

⁵⁷ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 15.

⁵⁸ Gupta 1965: 159, inscription nos. 206, 207 & 208.

⁵⁹ Gupta 1965: 159, inscription no. 205.

illustrated by the example of *Sthavira* Buddhavarmana. *Sthavira* Buddhavarmana appears as the donor of an image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā during the ninth century.⁶⁰ During the tenth century, we see *Sthavira* Buddhavarmana and *Sthavira* Dharmavarmana jointly donating another image of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (no. 15).⁶¹ As both Buddhavarmanas hailed from Kāñcī, we may reasonably assume that they were one and the same. So we can deduce that a monk, Buddhavarmana, made a pilgrimage to Kurkihar, spent a considerable time there, donated at least two images and had at least one Gandhakuṭī constructed. These activities spanned many years, if not decades, and either his local patrons paid for the undertakings or he had to mobilise his own resources.

Why, then, would a person from distant Kāñcī come to Kurkihar and undertake such acts? What did it mean for a person to renounce his former faith and become a follower of Buddhism, especially one from a prestigious brahmin background? The dedicatory inscription on the broken pedestal of a large Buddhist stone image (no. 32) – large enough to entail the mobilisation of considerable expenditure on the part of the donor⁶² – sheds some light on this issue. Here we see a brahmin embracing Buddhism, celebrating it by making a pilgrimage to Kurkihar, and announcing it prominently by having a large image constructed. We are informed that the donor, whose original name was Narasiṃha Caturvedī, was born in a village of Kāñcī to a family of brahmins well-versed in Vedas and Vedāngas.⁶³ Later he became a disciple of *Sthavira* Vairocanasiṃha.⁶⁴ That involved a change in his name, and arguably, his social and religious identities. Narasiṃha Caturvedī became Prajñāsiṃha, a name indicating Mahāyāna influence.⁶⁵ We are not told where – in Magadha or at Kāñcī itself – Narasiṃha Caturvedī met

⁶⁰ Gupta 1965: 128, inscription no. 11.

⁶¹ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 241, inscription no. 6; Gupta 1965: 130, inscription no. 17.

⁶² Huntington (1984: 52) noted that ‘since the pedestal alone measures 33 cm in height, the complete image must have comprised a significant contribution on the part of the donor.’

⁶³ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 246-247, inscription no. 52; Gupta 1965: 155, inscription no. 164.

⁶⁴ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 246-247, inscription no. 52; Gupta 1965: 155, inscription no. 164.

⁶⁵ In Magadha, this is not the only example of a person changing their name after acceptance of a particular form of Buddhism. See, for example, the case of Dhyānabhadra, a monk who received his early training in Buddhism at the Nālandā Mahāvihāra during the latter half of the thirteenth century. Later, he went to Sri Lanka for more specialised training in Mahāyāna, where he was given a new Mahayanist name, Śūnyādiśya, by his *ācārya* (Prasad 2014b: 88). After receiving higher training in Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka, he returned to India. He provided graphic descriptions of the survival of Mahāyāna across India in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Later, he travelled to China, via Tibet, and died in Korea. For details of his life and career, see Waley 1931-32; Prasad 2014b.

Vairocanasimha, or when he assumed a new name. He had a large image installed in a Gandhakuṭī at Kurkihar. Unlike most other donors from Kāñcī, he recorded the regnal year (twenty-eighth) of the ruling king (Rājyapāla) when he donated this image (c.958 CE), which may have been an indication of his greater familiarity with the political situation in Magadha. The image was donated with the aim of transferring religious merit to his *ācārya*, his *upādhyāya*, his parents and all living creatures;⁶⁶ an aim which, true to his new Mahāyāna identity, shows the influence of the Mahāyāna dedicatory formula. In sum, one may accept Bhattacharya's analysis that 'the importance of this inscription lies in the fact that even in the tenth century, learned brahmins of Kāñcīpurama became Buddhist and went to Magadha, the holy spot of Buddhism, to teach or study at some monastery there.'⁶⁷ This is another indication of the vibrancy of Buddhism in tenth-century Kurkihar. Within this context, one more thing of note is that even when Narasimha Caturvedī became a Mahāyāna monk, he proudly remembered his brahmin ancestry. In fact, viewing the entire spectrum of donors at Kurkihar, we see only two persons recording their *jāti* in their dedicatory inscriptions: brahmin Narasimha Caturvedī and *carmakāra* Thisavī, who suffered untouchability, yet whose donation was accepted by the Buddhist Saṅgha. Represent two extremes of the social hierarchy, these two remembered their *jāti* for different reasons: Narasimha Caturvedī due to his pride in his brahmin lineage, even after becoming a Buddhist monk, as well as to announce his conversion to Buddhism emphatically and dramatically;⁶⁸ and *carmakāra* Thisavī due to the untouchability that his *jāti* entailed. For all other donors, the monastic site of Kurkihar provided an avenue for the marginalisation of *varṇa/jāti*-based identities: they were not considered important enough to be recorded in dedicatory inscriptions. In the tenth century, we do not observe examples of donations by nuns, indicating that the Bhikṣuṇīsaṅgha at

⁶⁶ Gupta 1965: 155, inscription no. 164; Banerji-Shastri 1940: 246-247, inscription no. 52; Bhattacharya 2000a: 95.

⁶⁷ Bhattacharya 2000a: 95.

⁶⁸ Brahmin monks formed a large portion of the early Buddhist Saṅgha. 'Nearly half of all the senior Buddhist monks and nuns mentioned in the Pāli Tripiṭaka came from Brahmin families and carried with them Brahmanical notions into the very core of Buddhism' (Sarao 2012: 272). It has been argued that 'the infiltration in huge numbers of such elements, most of whom were never fully converted to the ideals set forth by the Buddha, contributed greatly towards sabotaging the Saṅgha from within' (Sarao 2012: 272). The sociology of Buddhist monks, particularly their *varṇa/jāti* background, and its impact on the decline of Buddhism in early medieval India has yet to be worked out. Narasimha Caturvedī does not look like a scheming brahmin hell-bent upon sabotaging the Saṅgha from within.

this time and location was probably in decline. Ronald Davidson underlined the implications of this decline for the overall waning of Indian Buddhism.⁶⁹ We may safely assume that this must have had implications for Buddhism in Magadha as well.

Despite the apparent vanishing of the order of nuns in the tenth century, we do not see a fall in the donation of images by female donors. Compared to four examples during the ninth century, we find six such examples in the tenth century. Barring the case of Malūka, who donated an image of Umāmaheśvara (no. 35), none of the female donors recorded the place from where she hailed. On the whole, the range of woman donors in Kurkihar appears diverse. We have at least one example of a female donor – Bhadevī, who donated an image of Avalokiteśvara (no. 19) in the late tenth century⁷⁰ – but left no details regarding her social status, indicating that she was from a non-distinctive background. Two donors of the images of Tārā (nos. 21 & 25) – Gopāli Sāuka⁷¹ and Duvajha⁷² – categorically recorded that they were *upāsakī*, that is, Mahāyāna lay followers. They did not leave details of their social background, such as *varṇa/jāti* status of themselves or their parents, or occupational and marital status. We may assume that they were from non-aristocratic backgrounds and probably unmarried, since they would otherwise have mentioned the names of their husbands. Compared to *upāsakī* Gopāli Sāuka, *upāsakī* Duvajha seems to have had a longer association with Kurkihar. We find *upāsakī* Duvajha donating an image of Avalokiteśvara (no. 46) in the eleventh century,⁷³ and while a considerable period may have elapsed since her first donation, she remained an *upāsakī* and opted not to become a nun over the years. In a phase when the Bhikṣuṇīsaṅgha was in decline in Magadha and elsewhere, it may not have been an attractive proposition, even to a committed, *upāsakī* to become a nun.

We have at least one example in which a male donor consciously adopted a Mahāyāna identity for himself in the latter part of his life, and his family continued to support Buddhism for a long time. We arrive at this conclusion by an analysis of votive inscriptions on the images donated by the family of a person named Gopālahīno. Two images were donated by his two wives and one by himself. In c.

⁶⁹ Davidson 2002: 77; 91-98.

⁷⁰ Gupta 1965: 137, inscription no. 64.

⁷¹ Gupta 1965: 145, inscription no. 107.

⁷² Gupta 1965: 146, inscription no. 116.

⁷³ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 242, inscription no. 20; Gupta 1965: 139, inscription no. 73.

965 CE, the regnal year thirty-two of the Pāla king Rājyapāla (i.e., c.964 CE),⁷⁴ we see his two wives, Vātukā⁷⁵ and Gāukā,⁷⁶ donating images of Vasudhārā (nos. 27 & 28) to the Āpanaka Mahāvihāra as their *deyadharmma*.⁷⁷ Given the fame of Vasudhārā as a bestower of wealth, it was natural that she attracted the patronage of housewives. In the dedicatory inscriptions on the images donated by them, their husband Gopālahīno was simply referred to by his name. In the eleventh century, thirty-five years after the donations by his wives, Gopālahīno donated an image of the Buddha in Vajraparyankāsana (no. 38).⁷⁸ This time, Gopālahīno flaunted his Mahāyāna identity by recording himself as *paramopāsaka* Gopālahīno.⁷⁹ Buddhism was not yet on the wane, and despite a general brahmanical ascendancy in early medieval Magadha, it held its turf and attracted sustained patronage from committed lay followers.

At Kurkihar, this century witnessed an important development which had significant sectarian implications: the beginning of the cult of the Crowned Buddha, which lasted into the twelfth century. We will explore the socio-religious dimensions of votive inscriptions on the images of the Crowned Buddha in a separate section.

A summary of the segments of society which donated, and the types and numbers of images donated, is presented in the following table.

⁷⁴Both P.L. Gupta and Adris Banerji-Sastri have proposed c.935 CE as the date of these inscriptions. We have followed the revised chronology of the Pāla dynasty given by Ronald Davidson (2002: 52).

⁷⁵Banerji-Shastri 1940: 248, inscription no. 58; Gupta 1965: 150, inscription no. 134.

⁷⁶Banerji-Shastri 1940: 248, inscription no. 59; Gupta 1965: 150, inscription no. 135. The sculptor – Sopālahorā – was the same person in both examples.

⁷⁷It has been rightly pointed out that these two inscriptions display the prevalence of polygamy in society. They also attest to the fact that women had the right to make religious donations and visit the Buddhist *vihāras* (Sharma 2004: 47).

⁷⁸Banerji-Shastri 1940: 249-50, inscription no. 83; Gupta 1965: 130-131, inscription no. 25.

⁷⁹Banerji-Shastri 1940: 249-50, inscription no. 83; Gupta 1965: 130-131, inscription no. 25.

Table 2a

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Unknown donors	Total
Buddha in BSM	1+1(?)						2
Crowned Buddha	2						2
Tārā	2		2			3	7
Avalokiteśvara					1		1
Vasudhārā					2		2
Parṇaśavarī						1	1
Group of deities on pedestal: Hārīti, etc.						1	1
Broken Buddhist images	3	1(?)					4
Umā-maheśvara					1		1
Total	9	1	2		4	5	21

Donation of inscribed sculptures at Kurkihar: the eleventh century CE pattern

An analysis of eleventh century votive inscriptions on sculptures offers some interesting inferences.

Table 3: Eleventh century votive inscriptions on sculptures

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
36	Standing Buddha in Abhayamudrā	Bhikṣu Amṛtavarma	Monk	Village near Kāñci	None expressed
37	Buddha in Bhūmisparśa mudrā	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned ⁸⁰
38	Buddha in Vajraparyankāsana	<i>paramopāsaka</i> Gopāla – Hīno	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed

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THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF DEDICATORY INSCRIPTIONS ON SCULPTURES

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
39	Crowned Buddha	Tiku	Son of Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
40	Crowned Buddha	Yekhoḱā, wife of Mahattama Dūlapa	Wife of Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
41	Crowned Buddha	Utimāraka, son of Mahattama Dūlapa	Son of Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
42	Crowned Buddha	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Only <i>dhāraṇī</i> mantra engraved
43	Crowned Buddha	Pule	Male donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
44	Avalokiteśvara	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned ⁸¹
45	Avalokiteśvara	Gari	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	None expressed
46	Avalokiteśvara	<i>upāsakī</i> Duva-jha	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
47	Lokaṇātha	Sthavira Mañjusri-varmana	Monk	Kāncī	None expressed
48	Siddhaikavīra	Nānokara	Female/ male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Not mentioned	None expressed
49	Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned ⁸²
50	Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta	Jākyā	Probably female donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
51	Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁸³
52	Jambhala	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁸⁴
53	Tārā	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁸⁵
54	Śyāmatārā	Kālitāru	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	Not mentioned ⁸⁶
55	Śyāmatārā	Rājokasa	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
56	Śyāmatārā	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁸⁷

Continued on next page

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
57	Prajñāpāramitā	Son of Suvarṇakāra Keśava	Male donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation; from mercantile/ artisanal background	Not mentioned	None expressed
58	Vasudhārā	Rāno	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	None expressed
59	Sūrya	Padaka, son of Bhaṭa	Male donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
60	Viṣṇu	Subalamati	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed

In this century, we see an important trend which must have had a negative influence on the fate of Buddhism at Kurkihar: that of decreasing pilgrimage from Kāñcī, which stopped altogether in the twelfth century. In the eleventh century, we see two monks from Kāñcī donating images (nos. 36 & 47), but neither Bhikṣu Amṛtavarmana, ‘born in the village with the name beginning with Akkila, famous as the chief treasure of Avadāta Nāga in the country of Kāñcī;’⁸⁸ nor Sthavira Mañjuśrīvarmana, who donated an image of Lokanātha,⁸⁹ recorded the motives behind their donations.

In the eleventh century, we see diminishing participation by women in the donation of images. We do not find a single example in which the donor has clearly stated that she is a woman. On the basis of their names, it may be as-

⁸⁰Inscription on this image: three indistinct letters, so little analysis possible.

⁸¹Inscription on this image: four indistinct letters, so little analysis possible.

⁸²Inscription on this image: 4 lines containing 12 indistinct letter, so little analysis possible.

⁸³Inscription on the image: 5 indistinct letters, so little analysis possible.

⁸⁴Inscription on the image: 2 indistinct letters, so little analysis possible.

⁸⁵Inscription on the image: fragmented, just recording that it was *deyadharmma* of *** (name missing).

⁸⁶Just the name of the donor is recorded.

⁸⁷Inscription on the image: 2 indistinct letters, so little analysis possible.

⁸⁸Banerji-Shastri 1940: 239, inscription no. 2; Gupta 1965: 127, inscription no. 6.

⁸⁹Banerji-Shastri 1940: 242, inscription no. 18; Gupta 1965: 140, inscription no. 79.

sumed that Jākhyā, donor of an image of Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta⁹⁰ (no. 50), was probably a woman. But evidence of mercantile/artisanal patronage to this monastery in this century comes from the dedicatory inscription on an image of Prajñāpāramitā (no. 57), recording that the image was the Deyadharmma of the son of Suvarṇakāra Keśava in the thirty-first regnal year of the Pāla king Mahipāla, c.1023 CE.⁹¹ Donors of other eleventh century images have neither provided details on the motives behind their donations nor their social backgrounds; nonetheless, we may reasonably assume that they were from non-monastic and non-aristocratic backgrounds.

In terms of cultic preferences, the Crowned Buddha appears to be the most preferred deity (five images), followed by Tārā (four sculptures, including a sculpture of Śyāmatārā), then Avalokiteśvara and Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta (three sculptures each).

Again, we summarise the segments of society which donated, alongside the type and number of images, in this century, in tabular form.

Table 3a

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Unknown donors	Total
Buddha in Abhayamudrā	1						1
Buddha in BSM						1	1
Buddha in Vajraparyankāsana		1					1
Crowned Buddha		2	1	1		1	5
Avalokiteśvara			1			2	3
Lokanātha	1						1
Siddhaikavira					1(?)		1
Manjuśrī Kumārabhūta					1(?)	2	3
Jambhala						1	1
Tārā						1	
Śyāmatārā				1(?)	1(?)	1	3

Continued on next page

⁹⁰ Gupta 1965: 143, inscription no. 95.

⁹¹ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 245, inscription no. 49; Gupta 1965: 149, inscription no, 133.

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Unknown donors	Total
Prajñāpāramitā				1			1
Vasudhārā				1(?)			1
Sūrya				1			1
Viṣṇu				1			1
Total	2	3	2	4+2(?)=6	1+3(?)=4	9	26

Donation of inscribed sculptures at Kurkihar: the twelfth century pattern

At Kurkihar, the twelfth century heralded some ominous portents, which pointed to the challenges that Buddhism was facing.

Table 4: Twelfth century votive inscriptions

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
61	Crowned Buddha	Jayata	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
62	Crowned Buddha	Gopālīncaro	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
63	Tārā	Rāo Aupanisita	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation; probably from aristocratic background	Not mentioned	None expressed
64	Tārā	Yekhākāyā(?)	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
65	Tārā	Māgo	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
66	Hārīti	Nāga	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
67	Vasudhārā	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁹²
68	Paṇṣavari	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known ⁹³

Continued on next page

No.	Cultic identity of the image	Donor(s)	Socio-religious background of donor(s)	Place(s) where donor(s) came from	Expressed motive behind donation (as recorded in the inscription)
69	Umāmaheśvara	Kalāṇḍa	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed
70	Viṣṇu	Karmakāra Mangane	Donor w/ out expressed Buddhist affiliation	Not mentioned	None expressed

There was a visible decline in the number of inscribed sculptures: only ten examples are available to date, of which two were Brahmanical. The only example of mercantile/artisanal patronage in this century was the donation of the image of Viṣṇu (no. 70) by a blacksmith (Karmakāra) Mangane.⁹⁴ Pilgrimage from Kāñcī stopped altogether. We are unaware of donations by women, although Yekhākāyā, who donated an image of Tārā,⁹⁵ (no. 64) may have been female.

In terms of cultic preference, Tārā seems to have been the preferred deity (three inscribed sculptures), followed by the Crowned Buddha (two inscribed sculptures). Donors did not leave details of their socio-religious backgrounds, although we may assume that they were non-aristocratic and non-monastic.

The following table summarises the overall religious affiliations of donors in this phase.

Table 4a

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Unknown donors	Total
Crowned Buddha				2			2
Tārā				1	2(?)		3
Hārītī				1			1
Vasudhārā						1	1
Parṇaśavarī						1	1
Umāmaheśvara				1			

Continued on next page

⁹² Inscription on the image: just two indistinct letters, so analysis not possible.

⁹³ Inscription on the image: just two indistinct letters, so analysis not possible.

⁹⁴ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 251, inscription no. 32; Gupta 1965: 153, inscription no. 152.

⁹⁵ Gupta 1965: 145, inscription no. 111.

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Unknown donors	Total
Viṣṇu				1			
Total				6	2	2	10

It is apparent that not only monks and nuns, but even male and female donors with expressed Buddhist affiliation, are no longer discernible. At this point, Buddhism as a form of social and religious identity has faded.

In the thirteenth century, we do not find any examples of inscribed sculptures, indicating that the monastery has been in decline.

Votive inscriptions on sculptures of the Crowned Buddha

Before analysing the socio-religious dimensions of votive inscriptions on sculptures of the Crowned Buddha, let us first view the sectarian developments in Buddhism to which the rise of this new imagery was strongly linked. The cult of this deity seems to have started at ‘some point in the tenth century, but its real proliferation in Magadha took place in the twelfth century’.⁹⁶ It has been claimed that ‘development of the cult of Crowned Buddha must in some way have been related with the rise of initiation ceremonies in which monks were crowned’.⁹⁷ Woodward, on the basis of Tibetan Tantric texts, has tried to show that as per the legends in some of these texts, Siddhārtha could become a Manifest Complete Buddha (Abhisambuddha), when he, having failed to attain this status through *samādhi* alone, was given *vastra-abhiṣeka* (garment initiation) and *mukūṭa-abhiṣeka* by Jina Buddhas (Buddhas of all the ten directions), after which he became an Abhisambuddha as Mahāvairocana, the Sambhogakāya.⁹⁸ But ‘it is an event having a significance that goes beyond the life of the historical Buddha – it is an event that occurs in the life of all Buddhas, including the followers of the Tantric way’.⁹⁹ One will largely agree with Woodward that the spread of the image and cult of the Crowned Buddha surely had Tantric connections and a sectarian significance.¹⁰⁰ Its main attraction could have been among the Vajrayāna

⁹⁶Woodward 1990: 19.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Woodward 1990: 20.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Woodward 1990: 23.

monks who might have aspired to attain the Abhisambuddha status through the worship of this image, or through undergoing the *mukūṭa-abhiṣeka* ceremony. It may also have simply been a tool for meditation by monks. Whatever the real reason, the earliest known donors of this image at Kurkihar (in the tenth century) – Rāhulavarmana and Prabhākarasiṃha¹⁰¹ (nos. 17 & 18) – were from Kāñcī. Both were probably monks. One wonders if this cult was initiated at Kurkihar by monks from Kāñcī.

If monk donors from Kāñcī were the earliest known donors of images of the Crowned Buddha at Kurkihar, we see some changes in this pattern during the eleventh century in which we do not find a single example of donations of this image by monks. Instead, all inscribed images of this deity, containing information of any kind about the donor, were donated by non-monastic members. Out of the four available examples, at least three were donated by members of a single family over a span of not less than sixteen years. The votive inscription on an image of the Crowned Buddha (no. 39) records that this image was the *deyadharmma* of Tiku, son of *pravara-mahāyāna-anuyāyina paramopāsaka* Dūlapa in the third regnal year (c.1061 CE) of Vighrahapāladeva, identifiable with the Pāla ruler Vighrahapāla III.¹⁰²

Here two things must be taken into account: the ‘vernacular’ names of the father and the son; and the proud use of *paramopāsaka* (a great lay follower) of *pravara-mahāyāna* for the father of the donor. The donor son has, notably, not used any such title for himself, and has donated an overt Vajrayāna image. What sort of cultic equation did this represent between Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna?

The cult of the Crowned Buddha seems to have attracted sustained patronage from the family of Dūlapa. In c.1074 CE, we see lady Yekhokā, wife or daughter-in-law of Dūlapa, donating an image of the Crowned Buddha (no. 40).¹⁰³ By this time, Dūlapa’s family seems to have enjoyed upward social mobility, for he was now *mahattama* Dūlapa.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, his other son – Utīmāraka – do-

¹⁰¹ Banerji-Shastri 1940: 248, inscription no. 63; Banerji-Shastri 1940: 243, inscription no. 25; Gupta 1965: 135, inscription no. 50.

¹⁰² Banerji-Shastri 1940: 240, inscription no. 65; Gupta 1965: 131, inscription no. 30. The approximate dates of the Pāla kings given in this paper are in accordance with the table supplied by Davidson (2002: 52), which includes the two newly found Pāla rulers Mahendrapāla and Gopāla (II).

¹⁰³ Gupta 1965: 133, inscription no. 33. The word used in the inscription is Dūlapavadhu; and vadhu can be used in the sense of either wife or daughter-in-law.

¹⁰⁴ Gupta 1965: 133, inscription no. 33; Banerji-Shastri 1940: 240, inscription no. 4.

nated another image of the Crowned Buddha, where he was once again referred to as *mahattama* Dūlapa.¹⁰⁵ The *mahattamas*, identical with the *mahattaras* mentioned in the copper plate inscriptions of early medieval Bengal, represented an upper stratum of peasantry. They were leaders of village society, and enjoyed high social status.¹⁰⁶ To sum up, the cult of the Crowned Buddha received sustained patronage from an upwardly mobile peasant family. The head of this family remained a committed *paramopāsaka* (Mahāyāna lay follower), yet the family saw no problem in being committed worshippers of an overtly Vajrayāna cult.

As far as eleventh and twelfth century dedicatory inscriptions on images of the Crowned Buddha are concerned, there is little useful material for our analysis. An eleventh century dedicatory inscription on the image of this deity (no. 43) simply records the name of the donor – Pule – without providing details on his social background or motive behind the donation, etc.¹⁰⁷ During the twelfth century, two images of the Crowned Buddha were donated by two individuals – Jayata (no. 61)¹⁰⁸ and Gopālīñcaro (no. 62).¹⁰⁹ Neither has provided details of social background or religious expectations. We may assume, however, that donors who have not mentioned such detail are likely of non-aristocratic and non-monastic backgrounds. We have no clear references to donations by monks in this or previous centuries, which is surprising given that the development of this cult was probably related to the rise of initiation ceremonies in which monks were crowned.

Concluding observations

(a) Onomasticism and the nature of Buddhist penetration in society

Let us first analyse the significance of the ‘vernacular’ names of many of the donors. Gregory Schopen, in the context of the significance of the names of the donors at early historical Sāñcī, noted that the degree of imbibement of Buddhist influence by a donor may be analysed through an onomastic analysis of the name of the donor:

¹⁰⁵ Gupta 1965: 133, inscription no. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Sayantani Pal 2012: 281.

¹⁰⁷ Gupta 1965: 134, inscription no. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Gupta 1965: 134, inscription no. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Gupta 1965: 136, inscription no. 58; Banerji-Shastri 1940: 249, inscription no. 67.

The appearance of Arabic names in what has been a Persian onomasticon in medieval Iran has been used to a good effect to track the spread and penetration of Islam there; like ‘onomastic change’, the appearance of Christian names in early Byzantine Egypt has been used to determine the degree and depth of ‘conversion’ to Christianity that was occurring at that time. Though they remain to be systematically pursued, many of the same methods may hold considerable promise for determining something about the local history and the degree of penetration of Buddhism in various part of early India.¹¹⁰

Following this methodology, he calculated the number and percentage of distinct Buddhist names among the donors whose names are inscribed in the donative inscriptions at Sāñcī Stūpa 2, to arrive at the conclusion that:

The number of distinctly Buddhist names – only about one fifth of the total at Sāñcī Stūpa 2 – is comparatively small and may indicate that the Buddhist presence in central India at the time of these records was neither old nor extensively rooted, although it must have already been a presence for at least a generation. Such a study may also show that a significant number of individuals might have made donations to Buddhist establishments without, however, ever being ‘Buddhist’ to the degree that they had been given or took Buddhist names: Buddhism, in other words, may never have been a significant component of these individuals’ self-identity.¹¹¹

This approach may not be fully applicable to the names of donors at Kurkihar, where, barring the names of the monks and nuns, practically no donor had a ‘Buddhist’ name, although many had donated images for a considerable period of time. Many *upāsakīs* and *paramopāsakas* also did not have ‘Buddhist’ names. However, Mahāyāna Buddhism was very much part of the self-identity of many donors with overtly vernacular names: *upāsakī* Gopāli-Sāuka, *upāsakī* Duvajha (tenth and eleventh century), *pravara-mahāyāna-yāyinaḥ* – Tiku and *paramopāsaka* Dūlapa (eleventh century), etc. *pravara-mahāyāna-anuyāyina paramopāsaka* Dūlapa himself did not take a Buddhist name nor did he give one to his son. Clearly, the issue is more complex than what a purely onomastic analysis may suggest.

¹¹⁰Schopen 2010: 384.

¹¹¹Ibid.

**(b) Donation of Buddhist images at Kurkihar:
dominated by monks and nuns?**

Schopen's recent research has highlighted the role of Buddhist monks as donors of images. Per his analysis, monks (including nuns) remained the single largest group of donors in the early historic period, their role increasing over time.¹¹² His analysis of eighty Mahāyāna inscriptions yielded similar results. Amongst these inscriptions, donors were monks or nuns (mostly the former) in over 70 percent of the cases.¹¹³ This led him to conclude that the Mahāyāna was a monk-dominated movement and that it continued to be so until the thirteenth century.¹¹⁴

Our analysis of dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures of Kurkihar offers a different picture, as summarised in the following table.

Table 5: Century-wise breakdown in patterns of donation at Kurkihar by different social groups

Cultic identity of the image	Monk	Nun	Male Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Female Mahāyāna lay worshipper	Male donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Female donor without expressed Buddhist affiliation	Unknown donors	Total
Ninth	6	1	0	1	5	2	1	15
Tenth	9	0	1	2	0	4	5	21
Eleventh	2	0	3	2	6	4	9	26
Twelfth	0	0	0	0	6	2	2	10
Total	17	1	4	5	17	12	17	72
Overall percentage	23.6	1.3	5.5	6.9	23.6	16.6	23.6	100

As indicated in the table above, monks were not the dominant donors. In each century, male and female donors without any expressed Buddhist affiliation comprised the largest segment of donors. As far as nuns were concerned, we see their total disappearance after the ninth century. Donations from male Mahāyāna lay worshippers (*paramopāsaka* or *mahāyāna-anuyāyina* donors) fluctuated (ranging from zero percent in the ninth and twelfth centuries to 4.7 percent and 11.5 percent in the tenth and eleventh centuries, respectively). The proportion of fe-

¹¹²Schopen 2010a: 31.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

male Mahāyāna lay worshippers (*paramopāsikā* or *upāsakī* donors) was similar (6.6 percent in the ninth century, then 9.5 percent in the tenth, 7.6 percent in the eleventh and zero in the twelfth centuries).

The twelfth century held some ominous portents for Buddhism at this site. Not to speak of monks and nuns, we do not even find donations by *paramopāsakas* or *paramopāsikā/upāsakī*. Mahāyāna Buddhism as a social and cultic identity was gradually fading.

**(c) The practice of Buddhism at Kurkihar:
futuristic and dominated by the cult of the cosmic Buddhas?**

Jacob Kinnard, on the basis of the predominance of the images of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā and Dharmacakrapravartanamudrā, and the paucity of the images of the Pañcatathāgatas, in general, and Akṣobhya, in particular, in early Pāla period Magadha, has noted that Buddhists did not emphasise the future, coming of Maitreya. Nor did they emphasise the transcendent cosmic present of the pure lands occupied by Akṣobhya and other Pañcatathāgatas.¹¹⁵ They remained focused on the cult of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā, which signified the Enlightenment of the Buddha and represented a continuation of Mahāyāna. All this forced him to conclude that Mahāyāna, not Vajrayāna, was the most commonly practised form of Buddhism in Magadha during the early Pāla period.¹¹⁶

If the Kurkihar pattern is contrasted with his generalisation, we get some interesting inferences. We see a progressive decrease in the number of inscribed images of the Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā (seven in the ninth century, two in the tenth, one in the eleventh and none in the twelfth) and Dharmacakrapravartanamudrā (one in the ninth century and none subsequently). This visible decline in the donation of such images at Kurkihar did not result in a corresponding increase in the donation of images of the Pañcatathāgatas and Maitreya. To date, we have not found a single inscribed image of any of the Pañcatathāgatas or Maitreya at Kurkihar. While images of the Crowned Buddha could have been regarded as a manifestation of Mahāvairocana, this cult could never become the predominant cult at Kurkihar (two inscribed images in the tenth century, five in the eleventh and two in the twelfth), despite its increasing social base. Most probably initiated by monks in the tenth century, this cult witnessed the diversification

¹¹⁵Kinnard 1996: 292-294.

¹¹⁶Kinnard 1996: 297.

of donors in subsequent centuries. Even in the eleventh century, which witnessed the highest number of donations of inscribed images of the Crowned Buddha, traditional Mahāyāna deities (Buddha in Abhayamudrā, Buddha in Bhūmisparśamudrā, Buddha in Vajraparyankāsana, Tārā, etc.) remained dominant.¹¹⁷ Nor do we have donations of ferocious Vajrayāna deities (Trailokyavijaya, Aparājita, Heruka, etc.) or of deities associated with extreme aspects of Vajrayāna (Yab-yum deities, etc.). What we see is the continued donation of some of the instrumental deities;¹¹⁸ i.e., deities worshipped for fulfilling some *laukika* (worldly) needs – Siddhaikavīra, Vāgīśvara, Parṇaśabar, Vasudhārā, Hārīti – by a cross section of society for most of the period under study.

Finally, the total absence of inscribed sculptures of Maitreya makes us question the identification of Kurkihar with the Kukkuṭapādagirivihāra, where the Buddha was supposed to reappear as Maitreya and take over charge of the Dharma from Mahākāśyapa. This site remained a great pilgrimage centre during the Pāla period, but this was probably not due to any supposed identification with the Kukkuṭapādagirivihāra.

(d) Decline of Buddhism at Kurkihar

The decline of Buddhism in Magadha has been a debatable issue: explanations range from a protracted conflict with, and persecution by, Brahmanism (Verardi 2011) to its slow metamorphosis after the Turkic destruction of its monasteries (Prasad, et al 2009; Prasad 2013). Explanations concerned with the functional aspects of decline have also been provided: decline of the order of nuns, decreasing participation by women, dwindling mercantile patronage, thus rendering it entirely dependent on royal patronage (Davidson 2002). Recently, it has also been proposed that one of the fundamental factors in this decline was a near total lack of support of Buddhism by the peasantry (Sarao 2012: 208).

One of the most dominant explanations has been provided by N.N. Bhat-tacharya. Let me quote him fully:

If Buddhism declined after Pala period... what was the real condition of Buddhism? Was it not a bundle of popular cults and superstitions,

¹¹⁷ A similar pattern has been observed during a village-to-village archaeological survey in the ten kilometre radius of the Nālanda Mahāvihāra (Prasad 2010c; 2011: 81-83; 2013a; 2014).

¹¹⁸ We have borrowed the term from Umakant Mishra (2011: 149).

which could be called in any name? True there were few monasteries, patronised by kings and landlords and also monkish culture proclaiming the world as void entity. But the Buddhist monks were parasites living on the financial support of kings and landlords, and as soon as this financial support was withdrawn, monks of the great monasteries at once turned into beggars for whom none was to shed tears. *Had Buddhism in its later forms been an organised religion with followers among the people it could not perish all of a sudden.* (Bhattacharya 1987: 15) (emphasis added)

Our analysis of dedicatory inscriptions on the sculptures of Kurkihar offers an altogether different picture. We have seen that we do not find a single donation of an inscribed sculpture to Kurkihar by any donor from a royal background. We also do not see donations by members of the royal bureaucracy. We have seen that the monastic establishment at Kurkihar depended solely on patronage provided by local and non-local pilgrims, peasants, merchants/artisans, women from not distinctive families, women from the rural aristocracy, and monks and nuns. It was certainly an organised religion, drawing patronage from diverse sections of society. A crisis seems to have set in only in the twelfth century in terms of social bases of patronage. Before we conclude, one more thing may be added. We have seen that both male and female Mahāyāna lay followers always formed a small percentage of donors. Among persons with expressed Buddhist identities, monks formed the highest contingent. Generally male and female donors without any expressed Buddhist affiliation formed the highest percentage in every century under discussion. Buddhism at Kurkihar was considerably dependent on male and female donors without any expressed Buddhist affiliation. This was probably but natural in the early medieval phase, when Brahmanical cults were experiencing sustained expansion throughout Magadha. Yet, among all Buddhist religious centres of Magadha, Kurkihar consistently took the most active part in attempting a subordinate integration of Brahmanical cults to Buddhism by accepting inscribed Brahmanical sculptures from persons without any expressed Buddhist affiliation. This risky adventurism was bound to hasten a gradual assimilation of Buddhism into Brahmanism after the Turkic destruction of its monastic centres.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹A fuller analysis of this process has been attempted in Prasad 2013. Also see Prasad et al. 2009.

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