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Bronze Sculpture of Mara Vijaya of National Museum, Nepal: A Study of Iconographic Perspective

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Abstract

In Buddhism the images display the story and event of temptation of Mara to disturb and misguide devotion during the process of enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautam. The art which reflects this is called the icon of Mara Vijaya. The legend regarding the story of temptation of evil Mara over the good Sidhhartha Gautam can be found in several Buddhist texts. Due to the iconographic features and themes of the Buddha Jataka stories of temptation of Mara, the bronze sculpture of national museum is considered as an important specimen. The figures of Lord Buddha, demon Mara, his daughters, army troops, Ganesh and other animal's figures have been sculptured in very attractive ways in this bronze relief. This paper explores the major iconographic features and to examine its importance as the bronze art heritage of Nepal. It employs qualitative approach and primary data and secondary information have been used. Required secondary information has been generated from journals, books and electronic versions of different sources while primary data have been collected by doing field study in national museum with in-depth observation of such relief.

Keywords: bronze sculpture of Mara Vijaya, iconographic features, Lord Buddha, myths and legends of Jatakas texts, temptation of Mara

Bronze Sculpture of Mara Vijaya of National Museum, Nepal: A Study of Iconographic Perspective

There are some noteworthy illustrations of sculptures and paintings in different museums and archaeological sites of India and Nepal. The relief of Ajanta Cave, India, the tympanum carving of Itumbahal, Kathmandu, wooden sculpture of wooden work museum, Bhaktapur, sculpture of Bhinchhebahal, stone image of national museum and the bronze relief of national museum are known as the representative images of Mara Vijaya.

Most of the early works of Indian art are Buddhist. The earliest architectural remains in India are the *stupas* and Buddhist cave cut in rock. The *stupas* or cupolas of brick and stone masonry enshrine the relics of the Buddha or his disciples and those at *Sanchi* are fine examples of art (Bapat, 1983). Buddhist art that there existed before the image of Buddha was created. A wealth of art creation, sculptures, reliefs, paintings, all created by artists, in the service of Buddhism and treasured by millions of Buddhists in the countries of Asia as part of their national art and as part of their religious devotion (Mode, 1983). In this circumstance Joshi (1983) highlights:

One of the enduring and visible fruits of the spread and growth of Buddhism can be seen in its wealth of art. The experience of Buddhist art is a profound experience for us all. The richness and verity, the depth and beauty of Buddhist art when studied in the light of its great mass are simply enormous and astonishing. In all field in architecture, sculpture, painting, and handicraft Buddhism has produced works of art which stand in the front rank of the highest creations of world's art (p. 162).

Naturally, from the very earlier the places associated with the events and miracles in life of the Buddha become places of pilgrimage for Buddhists who put up commemorative monuments there. On the basis of this theme several monuments and art objects constructed especially in *Sanchi* (150 BC to 50 BC),

Bodhgaya (75 BC), *Karle* (150 BC), *Bhaja* (2nd century BC), Earlier *Ajanta* (2nd to 1st century BC), *Saranath* (1st to 6th century AD), *Nalanda* (6th to 12th century AD), Later *Ajanta* (5th to 7th century AD), *Ellora* (7th century AD), *Bahrut* and *Amarawati* in India (Krishna, 1983).

Like in the Indian territories, in Nepal too different places associated with the Lord Buddha and his religion, from the very earlier they were developed as the important pilgrimage sites and constructed different types of monuments and art treasures through the ages. Among the places, *Lumbini*, *Kapilvastu*, *Niglihawa*, *Gotihawa*, *Debadaha*, *Ramagram* and the valley of Kathmandu are quite noteworthy pilgrimage sites where we can find numerous treasures of Buddhist art and architecture from 3rd century BC to later period.

During the preliminary stage i.e. before 2nd century BC, the major events concerning with the life of Lord Buddha like birth, enlightenment, first sermon and death were practiced to present through the symbols. Later in *Kushana* period about 1st century AD, the tradition of depicting the events by symbols were replaced through the sculptures concerning with the particular events (Upadhyaya, 1960, p. 54). The trend radically change in the Buddhist art antiquities found at Mathura, *Ganthara*, now in Pakistan and later *Amarawati* (150 AD to 200 AD) and at *Saranath* and later *Ajanta*. In fact the sculptures of Mathura and *Gandhara* 1st to 6th century CE reveal to execution of three dimensional Buddha images in the round or of almost in round (Krishna, 1983).

Later on, gradually the sculptures and paintings associated with the four major events of Buddha's lifelike birth, enlightenment or *Mara Vijaya*, first sermon and death and four minor miracles such as monkey offering honey, subjugation to *Nalagiri* elephant, descending from heaven and walks on river in flood and subdues the serpent in fire temple have been created in as the forms of panel and as an individual events in India and Nepal as well.

The sculptures and paintings which are represented through the four major events and four minor miracles are known as the panel of *Astamahapratihar*. This tradition was existed in Gupta period. Still during the regime of Pal dynasty putting on the middle to the image of temptation of Mara, the tradition of sculpturing *Astamahapratihar* brought into the practices in India (Parimo, 1982). This doctrine of sculpturing the Mara Vijaya in the middle on the *Astamahapratihar* panel can be observed from 12th century CE in Nepal as well. The sculpture of *Mayurvarna Mahavihara (Bhinchhebahal)* of *Astamahapratihar* with *Mara* temptation is known as one of the best illustration (Gurung, 2047).

Now, in Nepal there are very few images regarding on *Mara* temptation can be observed specially in the museums and monasteries as well. They were constructed by stone, bronze and wood. Among them, this paper entitled '*Bronze Sculpture of Mara Vijaya of National Museum, Nepal: A Study of Iconographic Perspective*' only deals with the bronze relief sculptures of Lord Buddha on the theme of temptation of the national museum.

Research Problems and Gaps

Concerning on the sculpture arts of Nepal, there are several studies have been carried out from the different scholars of Nepal and abroad as well. Although, specific studies on bronze relief sculpture of *Mara Vijaya* of national museum, has still not been adequately conducted. Due to lacking of proper researches, several aspects of such sculpture still remain unexplored that is considered as the huge problem and research gaps in the field of academia. Specially, what are the myths, legends and themes of temptation of *Mara* in Buddhism? And what are the major iconographic features of the sculpture? These are the major problems and research gaps which inspire to the researcher to prepare this paper.

Research Objectives

Obviously, this paper provides the philosophy of *Mara Vijaya* described

by the Buddha *Jatakas*, brief survey of sculptures of *Mara Vijaya*, trace out the short history of bronze art in Nepal as the general objectives. For fulfilling and addressing the above mentioned research problems and gaps, researcher has prepared this research paper with the specific objectives such as to explore the myths, legends and themes of temptation of demon Mara in Buddhism and analyze the major iconographic features of bronze relief of *Mara Vijaya* of the national museum.

Review of Literatures

The theoretical foundation is an important tool and lens through which a researcher evaluates the research problem and research questions as well. Reviewing the literature is only one approach of constructing solid theoretical foundation. On the basis of above mentioned doctrine the following literatures such as Sharma, Bhattarai's (BS 2022) translated form of 'Buddha *Charita*', written by great poet Ashwaghosh, Chopra's (1983) edited book entitled Contribution of Buddhism to the World Civilization and Culture, Bapat's (1983) Contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture, Mode's (1983) the message of Buddhist art (Reflection on art and religion), Joshi's (1983) Buddhist Contribution to art and architecture, Krishna's (1983) The Buddhist art of India, Majumuria & Majumuria,s (1993) Holy Places of Buddhism in Nepal & India, Ambedkar's (1997) The Buddha and his Dharma, Gurung's (BS 2047) Purbamadyakalin Nepali Baudhhamurtiharu: ekvivachana, Slusser's (1998) Nepal Manadala, Vol. I & II, Chhetri & Rayamajhi's (BS 2056) Nepali Kala, Vastukalara Pratimalakshana, Dahal & Khatiwada's (BS 2058) Nepalako Kala ra Vastukala, and National Museum's (2019) Art Heritage of National Museum Part II have been reviewed in this paper.

Finally, the previous literatures mentioned above are quite useful for this research work. Although, among them, only a very few have studied about the bronze relief sculpture of *Mara Vijaya* of national museum while many have been

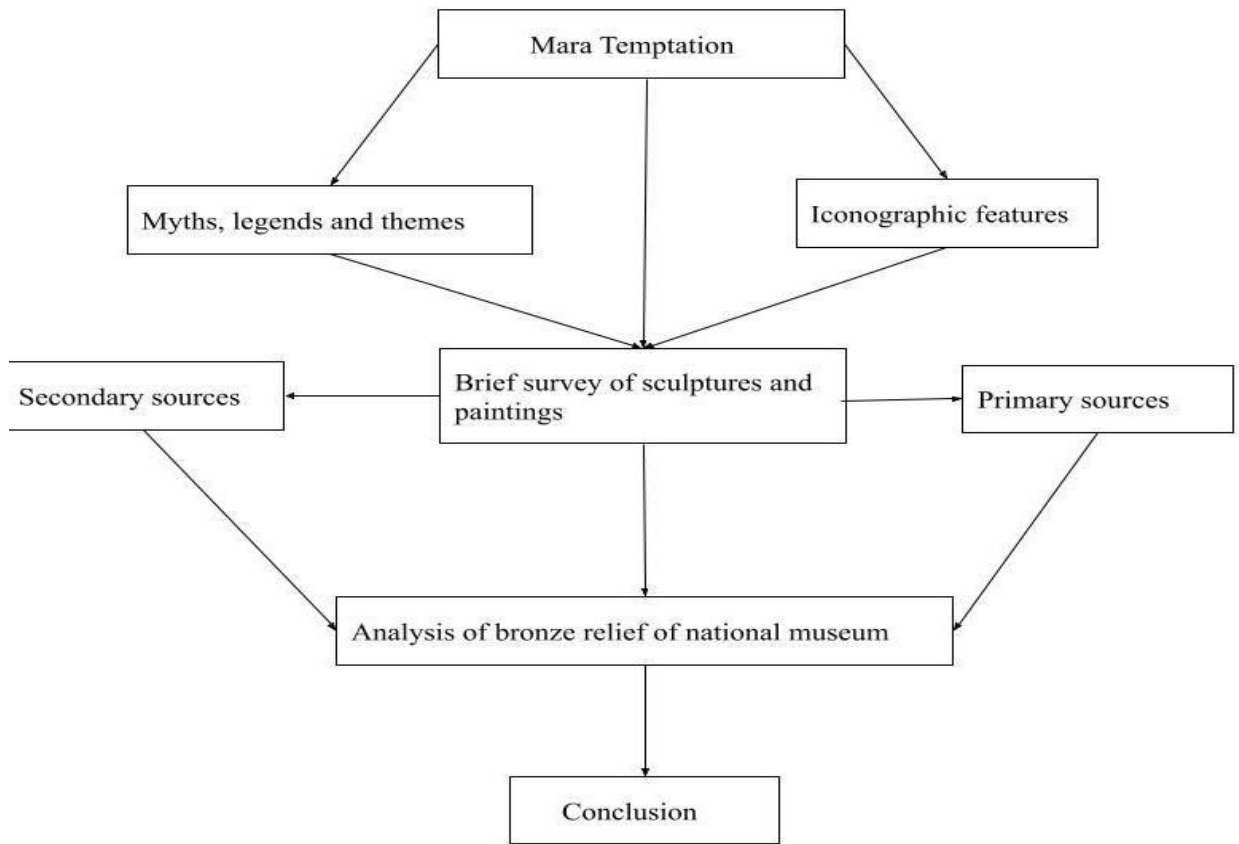
unable to explore and highlight it. Such literatures that have not been able to explore to the issues, they are also quite helpful to generate the conceptual ideas and theoretical knowledge regarding the origin and historicity, philosophy of *Mara Vijaya*, traditions and practices of casting bronze images in the world and Nepal as well.

Methods and Materials

For this study qualitative data have been used more than the quantitative one. Hence, this study is based on qualitative research approach. In this research both primary data and secondary information have been collected and analyzed to explore its objectives and to generate valid information. Field work is the main source for primary data through which the iconographic features of *Mara Vijaya* have been identified. During the field survey researcher has applied in- depth observation over the sculpture and conducted interview with concerned authorities of the museum. Likewise, the required secondary information regarding on the philosophical aspects of *Mara Vijaya* and sculptures findings from other else have been collected by reviewing the relevant literatures.

Conceptual Framework

Along with the identification of *Mara Vijaya*, this paper helps to explore the myths, legends and themes and iconographic features of the same sculpture. In this study both the primary and secondary data have been collected and analyzed. For addressing the above-mentioned research gaps and problems as well as fulfilling the determine objectives this paper has been prepared by applying the following conceptual framework:



Findings, Discussions and Results

In this study the data of primary and secondary sources and nature have been applied in accordance with the requirement of the issues. Researcher has applied observation method for gathering primary data especially iconographic features of *Mara Vijaya* during the field survey. Likewise, literature review method has been used for generating secondary information such as the concept, origin and development and the philosophical aspects of *Mara Vijaya*. After collecting data and information they were coded, classified and analyzed on the basis of research problems and objectives. Finally, the findings, discussion, result and conclusion of the study have been presented after analyzing and examining myths, legends and themes of Philosophy of Mara, brief surveying of sculptures of *Mara Vijaya* in India and Nepal, in-depth study of Bronze sculpture of national

museum, and exploring major features of such sculpture as the main issues of the paper in chronological order.

Myths, Legends and Themes of Mara

The origin of the legend of Mara is first noticeable in the *Padhana Sutta*, Samyutta Nikaya vs.425-49 (Varma, 1985). The meaning of the word *Mara Vijaya* is victory on *Kamadeva*, the god of worldly attraction (Chaudhary, 2021). According to Hindu mythology *Kamadeva* is known as the god of love. *Atharvaved* is the scripture that mentioned the name of *Kamadeva* for the first time as the mighty god of love and perfection. Later, *Harivamsa Puran* and *Taitariya Samhita* mention to the *Kamadeva* as the son of *Laxmi* and *Shradha* respectively (Sharma, 1999). *Rati* is the consort of *Kamadeva* while the nymphs of the heaven are the sources of fulfillment of the desires (Khatiwada, BS 2074).

Mara in the Buddhist tradition can be best understood as Satan, who always tried to dissuade the Buddha or any one from the righteous path. He is also called '*Namuchi*' as none can escape him and '*Vasavatti*' as he rules all. Whenever, he finds some on treading the path of virtuosity, he creates obstacles and hindrance (Varma, 1985). Mara is known Sanskrit: *māra*; Chinese: *pinyin: mó*; Tibetan *Wylie: bdud*; in Buddhism, is the demon that tempted Gautama Buddha by trying to seduce him with the vision of beautiful women who, in various legends, are often said to be Mara's daughters. In Buddhist cosmology, Mara personifies unwholesome impulses, unskillfulness, and the "death" of the spiritual life. He is a tempter, distracting humans from practicing the Buddhist Dharma and spiritual life by through making mundane things alluring, or the negative seem positive (Trainor, 2004).

As mentioned by the Buddha *Charita*, a famous scripture of Buddhism, *Kamadeva*, *Chitradhanawa* and *Punyavana* are the other names, sometimes these are used to identify to the demon king Mara. He is the enemy of final liberation (*Mokksha*) of life and known as the almighty king of sexual desire. *Bibhram*,

Harsa and *Darpa* are his three sons and *Tanha*, *Arati* and *Raga* are the three daughters (Sharma Bhattarai, BS 2025). He has got demon army troops as well. His ten-fold army troops are Lust; Aversion; Hunger; Thirst; Craving; Stoth and Torpor; Cowardice; Doubt; Hypocrisy and Stupidity; False Glory; and Conceit. The army troops and daughters were employed to tempt the Buddha after his Enlightenment; and they could assume numerous forms of varying age and charm (Varma, 1985).

As per the descriptions mentioned by the Buddhist scriptures Mara is the demon who tries to miss lead to the *Prince Siddhartha Gautama from the path of meditation for attaining enlightenment. He is the demonic celestial king who tempted Buddha. He sends beautiful women who, in various legends, are often said to be his daughters, army troops, elephants, dangerous wild animals, wind and strum other celestial mighty power to seduce him from the enlightenment and wisdom.* while Buddha pays no heed to the entire episode. In this regards, Pal (1974) mentions that:

The temptation image of evil Mara is known as the sculpture of *Mara Vijaya* in Buddhist religion. According to Buddhist literatures during the time of enlightenment of Lord Buddha, evil Mara had sent his daughter, sways, and a horde of demons and other for breaking his attention and misguiding him from the path of enlightenment. In this process they were accompanied by a hoard of demons militantly attacking *Sakyamuni*. Curiously one of the demons is portrayed as *Ganesh*, the *Brahmanical* deity of benevolence, thereby reflecting a distinct sectarian bias. Creatures of delightful fantasy, the demons seem almost convincing in their sinister expressions and aggressiveness (p. 111).

When *Gotama* renounced the world and passed through the city gates on his horse *Kanthaka*, Mara appeared before him and tempted him by the offer to make him a universal monarch in seven days, if he was to change his mind.

Siddhattha, however, did not pay any attention to him (Varma, 1985). *Mara*, the destroyer, Evil One: according to Buddhist legend, the tempter and enemy of Buddha and his religion who, by appealing to Sidhartha Gautam's sensual and material instincts, tried to dissuade him from renouncing the world (Chopra, 1983). In this context Varma (1985) says:

The Buddhavamsa Commentary and *Nidanakatha* of the *Jataka* commentary, particularly in the Singhalese versions, unfold a very lively and detailed account of the Mara's visit to the Buddha just before his Enlightenment, when he was sitting under the *Bodhi* tree. Seeing *Gotama* seated with a firm resolve to become a Buddha, he summoned all his forces to attack *Sakyamuni*. The forces extended twelve leagues in front and back; and nine leagues on right and left. Mara himself with thousand arms riding on his elephant *Girimekhala*, attacked *Gotama*. His followers armed with deadly weapons and assuming various frightening forms joined him in his attack. The *Devas*, *Nagas*, and others who had gathered round *Gotama* to pay him homage and sing his praises then fled at the sight of the frightening army of Mara. The *Bodhisatta* then called the ten *paramis*, which he had perfected in various births, for his defense. Each of the ten divisions of Mara's army was then defeated and routed by one *parami*. Eventually, Mara's army had to flee. Vanquished Mara then hurled his last weapon – the *chakkavudha* (disc), which stood over the Bodhisatta's head like a canopy of flowers. Still Mara tried to dissuade *Gotama* from the path of the Buddhahood by falsely claiming the *Gotama*'s seat as his own; and by asking him to prove his right to the seat on which he was sitting. All the Mara's followers then testified Mara's claim by shouting that the seat actually belonged to Mara. As the Bodhisatta had no other witness to bear testimony on his behalf he asked the Earth to speak for him by touching the ground with his middle finger.

The Earth then roared in response and bore the testimony for the Bodhisatta by thundering, "I stand his witness". Thus, the Mara's defeat was final; and he and his followers had to flee. The Devas and other celestial beings then besieged him and celebrated his victory.

Mara temptation during the meditation for getting enlightenment at *Boddhagaya*, Mara the celestial demon king assailed to the *Shidhartha Gautam* (Saraswati, 1957). In the processes of attaining wisdom *Gautam* was disturbed by Mara, the demon of evils and his personal enemy. Mara tried to allure to the Buddha to three virgins and several women. However, *Gautam* came out victorious (Majupuria & Majupuria, 1993). Mara is the demon, those who are caught in Mara net, entangled in negative views, be caused to gain correct views, thus practices the Boddhisattva way (Blofeld, 1980).

In traditional Buddhism four senses of the word "*mara*" are given. *Klesa-mara*, or Mara as the embodiment of all unskillful emotions. *Mrtyu-mara*, or Mara as death, in the sense of the ceaseless round of birth and death. *Skandha-mara*, or Mara as metaphor for the entirety of conditioned existence. *Devaputra-mara*, or Mara the son of a *deva* (god) that is, Mara as an objectively existent being rather than as a metaphor (Buswell & Lopez, 2013).

Early Buddhists, as well as later Buddhists, acknowledged both a literal and "psychological" interpretation of Mara. Mara can be interpreted either as a real external demon or as internal vices that one faces on the pathway to enlightenment. From the psychological perspective, Mara is a manifestation of one's own mind. No external demon exists since it emerges from our own deluded thoughts. Those who see Mara as a personification of our human ego interpret the stories associated with him in a symbolic way. Mara becomes a representation for internal vices. His attack on the Buddha represents internal impulses towards violence and rage that can be overcome by following the Buddha's teachings of cultivating compassion, detachment and gentleness (Williams, 2005).

The daughters of Mara represent lust and desire, which the Buddha overcame by recognizing their true nature as emptiness. *Mara's* own attack on the Buddha's pride was defeated by the Buddha's denial of the self since there was no "I" (ego) left to feel pride. Thus, the story of Mara's temptation can be interpreted symbolically, whereby the Buddha's own emotions, desires, and sense of self were represented by demons. Regardless of how Mara is understood, it is agreed that Mara has power only to the extent that our minds give it to him, and he must be overcome to proceed further into the Buddhist understanding of reality (Keown, 2004).

Brief Survey of the Sculptures and Paintings

According to Buddhist religious texts the tempting image of evil *Mara* is affiliated with the religion and philosophy of Buddhism. The tradition of sculpturing the images of temptation of Mara seems to be in existence since the reign of Sung dynasty in India during 2nd century BC, the artists of Indian School of Art gave the priority for the creation of these kinds of art objects in different parts of India (Upadhyaya, 1960). In this respect (Majupuria & Majupuria, 1993) rightly mention that:

There is a relief of *Mara Vijaya* in the western gateway of *Sanchi Stupa*. It is oldest and quite noteworthy finding from India. The lowest architrave of the gateway depicts a legend about *Bodhisatta* for attaining truth and enlightenment. The back portion of the lowest gateway architrave shows Mara's temptation of Buddha. In the center is depicted the shrine of *Boddhagaya* with the *Bodhi* tree or *peepal* and the throne. On one side are shown Mara's evil forces being vanquished while on the other side depicted Buddha's victory and rejoicing of angels (p. 316).

The fresco of *Mara Vijay* discovered from the cave No. 1 from Ajanta Cave is another significant finding of such art object. Ajanta is an important archaeological site for wall paintings. There are two important incidents from

Buddha's life. They are Mara temptation and the miracle of *Sarawasti*. The walls of the hall are painted with the scenes of *Sibi*, *Samkhapala*, *Mahajanaka*, *Mahaummagga*, and *Chapeyya Jatakas* (Majupuria & Majupuria, 1993). There are 30 Buddhist caves at Ajanta, which were probably executed between 200 BC to 650 Christian Era. The earliest cave is 2nd century BC, while the latest is of 7th century A.D. In April 1819, they were discovered by a young British Indian army. Among the caves, No. 1 is famous for the fresco paintings and No. 26 for the relief sculpture of Mara temptation. Mara Vijay stone relief sculpture of 5th century A.D. carved on the right wall of Ajanta cave No. 26 (Majupuria & Majupuria, 1993). While *Saraswati* estimated the date of this relief is about 7th century CE (Saraswati, 1957). In this sculpture Mara and his daughters disturbed to the Buddha from attaining enlightenment. In this sculpture 'Kinara' is depicted as sitting on an elephant. This is the only sculpture based on *Jataka* Tales (Majupuria & Majupuria, 1993).

The size of the relief is 12' x 10' which indicates that it is a large size relief and famous sculpture where Lord Buddha is shown in the center and practicing austerity. His facial expression is full of divine peace and bliss. *Mara (Kamadeva)* is depicted on an elephant along with his demon army, ugly and beautiful faces women which surround Lord Buddha. The loveliest women tempting Buddha by dance and music are shown in this foreground of the sculpture. Finally, the failure of Mara and his army has been depicted by artists who have portrayed successfully the expression of peace and self realization on the face of Lord Buddha (Chaudhary, 2021). The practice of constructing sculptures related to the events of the life of Lord Buddha also began quite earlier in Nepal. Near about 7th to 8th century CE few relief sculptures of *Mara Vijaya* have been discovered especially from Kathmandu Valley. In this context, an unfinished *Lichchhavi* relief of the national museum, the sculpture of *Mayuravarna Mahavihar (BhinchheBahal)*, Patan, Bronze sculpture of the

national museum, temptation of Mara engraved tympanum of the *Itumbahal*, wooden sculpture of the national wooden work museum *Bhaktapur* can be taken as the best illustrations.

An unfinished *Lichchhavi* relief of the national museum of depicting the Buddha's temptation by Mara presented by Slusser in Plate No. 422 is known as one of the oldest specimens of such types (Slusser, 1998). It might be the panel of the 6th century AD (Majupuria & Majupuria, 1993), while Amatya dated it as an image of 9th century CE (Amatya, BS 2068). This oldest panel of temptation of Mara collected from *Yangaltol* Kathmandu (National Museum, 2075). There is another image found in *Mayuravarna Mahavihar Bhinchhe Bahal, Patan* (Gurung, BS 2047). Shakya identified it as the sculpture of *Mahaparinirvana* of 12th century AD (Shakya, NS, 1097). But on the basis of its iconographic features Gurung recognized it as the relief of *Astamahapratihar* along with the image of *Mara Vijaya*. In this panel Buddha seated on the double lotus pedestal with the *Vajraprayankasana* posture. It is presenting *Bhusparsamudra* (Land Touching) posture (Gurung, BS 2047). Therefore, the finding attributes of the image and the perception of Gurung suggest that this might be the relief sculpture of temptation of demon *Mara* of 12th century CE.

The Bronze sculpture of the national museum which is studied in this paper in detail is another noteworthy example of relief of *MaraVijaya*. Along with the stone and bronze panels, such types of carvings can be found in tympanums and in the forms of paintings as well. In the tympanum of *Parawata Mahavihar*, one of the oldest monasteries of Nepal the events regarding the temptation of *Mara* engraved very beautifully can be found. Though the tympanum, *i.e. torana* is undated it is surly 16th century CE or earlier (Locke, 1985). The wooden tympanum *i.e. torana* of *Itumbahal*, with carving the story of Mara's assault belongs to 17th century CE. There is another very fine and fantastic wooden sculpture of *Mara Vijaya* in the wooden work Museum in *Bhaktapur*. According

to Pandey (1968), it is also considered an excellent illustration of wood work. This is full phase's image of spiritual feeling which presents the real picture of the temptation of Mara. It might be the sculpture of late medieval period.

Bronze Relief of Mara Vijaya of National Museum



Source: Mara Vijaya of National Museum, Nepal (National Museum, 2019).

The image depicting the temptation of *Sakyamuni* now preserved in the national museum was returned from the United State America, as one of the important metal sculptures of Nepal. According to the record of the museum it

was collected in 16 July 2017. The dimension of the image is 12 cm and 9 cm in length and breadth respectively (National Museum, 2019). This metal sculpture seems slightly different in its carving than others found in Nepal.

The bronze relief sculpture of *Mara Vijaya* of this museum is one of the glorious specimens not only for the temptation of Mara but from the overall bronze art heritage of Nepal. It is sculptured through using the lost wax method; hence it seems quite solid in the structure. Altogether, there are eight layers of carving. The first or bottom layer is the pedestal one. In front of it can be observed an image of Lord *Ganesh* with two hands. There are an infinite number of legends that purport to explain *Ganesh* unusual form and attributes (Rao, 1985). In early Nepali imagery, elephant like imps frequently appear especially in the Hindu and Buddhist art. One is engraved in Mara's assault on the meditating Buddha (Slusser, 1998).

In the second layer there can be observed a *Vajra* or thunderbolt above the image of Lord Buddha. There are two giants' male figures on each side who are trying to carry and throw the *Vajra*. They might be the army troops of evil Mara. In the third layer of the panel, altogether, there are six necked figures of monkeys and human beings on the right and left, who are performing dance and trying to misguide the Buddha from his goal and path. The fourth layer looks similar with the third one. Each side there is human and animal figures including *Ganesh* and monkey who playing musical instrument near the ears of the Buddha.

In the fifth layer there are three female figures on each side and one figure above the head of Buddha, exactly in the middle who is carrying fruits. They might be the *apsaras* or nymphs presenting beautiful and attractive dance continuously. The sixth layer has been surrounded with two human figures on each side and a figure of *stupa* in the middle. Among the human figures, two are riding on the elephant. They might be the demon Mara and his consort and remaining two are their personal guards. The seventh layer its nimbus, which is

decorated with beautiful carving of flame. Finally, in the eighth layer there is a glorious canopy with the shape of lotus flower, which might be the ultimate weapon the *chakkavudha* (disc) of Mara seated on the head of the Buddha as the flower.

The main attraction of this panel is the sculpture of Buddha seated in devotional mood in the middle. In front of it is a figure of little *Vajra*. Therefore, it is known as *Vajraprayankasana* posture. In this figure Buddha has got two hands with land touching posture of right and carrying a donation pot on the left. *Bhumisparsa Mudra* the Earth Touching pose, recalls the event when the Buddha stood steadfast remained undeflected from his resolve to attain enlightenment against the attack of Mara, the Evil, one, at *Bodhagaya*: the earth was witness to the episode (Krishna, 1983). *Bhoomisparsa* is an attitude of touching the earth with one's hands. It is used to symbolize the Buddha's calling of the earth to witness his purity and chastity despite the temptation of Mara. In this the left hand completely opens and touches the earth (Chopra, 1983).

In this figure there is small holy thread on the shoulder of Buddha. Typical hair dress and round nimbus with flame can be observed in the figure of Buddha. Altogether, there are more than twenty-five human figures in the panel, including daughters, nymphs and army troops of the demon Mara. The unnecessary portions seem to have been eliminated from the panel. It is the main feature and style of Pal School of Art. Finally, style of casting and finding iconographic features suggests that this sculpture might be the creation of 14th century CE.

Iconographic Features

Among the many endowments with which Nepal *Mandala* blessed, few are significant as Buddhist heritage. The closely packed *viharas* distinguish the townscapes, the glittering *stupas* add luster, and glory of stone sculptures everywhere. Bronzes, paintings, and manuscripts of Buddhist themes have spread the valley's fame far afield (Slusser, 1998). The Nepalese images in gilt copper of

bronze are worth studying as excellent specimens of art works of the medieval age (Regmi, 1966).

In Buddhist iconography, Mara is most often presented as a hideous demon, although sometimes he is depicted as an enormous elephant, cobra or bull. When shown in an anthropomorphic (human) form he is usually represented riding an elephant with additional tusks. Other popular scenes of Mara show his demon army attacking the Buddha, his daughters tempting the Buddha, or the flood that washes away those under Mara's command. In iconographic form, a standing cloaked figure was preferred, ponderous and in the Gupta tradition, although there are a number of seated Buddha images. Narrative reliefs depict scenes of worship or refer to specific events of the Buddha's life Mara assault (Slusser, 1998).

There are very few numbers of sculptures of temptation of *Mara* have been discovered from Nepal and India as well. Among them, the bronze sculpture of *Mara Vijaya* of national museum is based on *Jataka* Tales. In this sculptural panel Lord Buddha has been shown seated in '*Dhayan Mudra*'. In the surrounding there is the demon *Mara* his warrior army troops, beautiful daughters and nymphs and consisting of various kinds of people including some with animal faces in the panel. The composition of this relief is very complex and highly dynamic which generates considerable movement. This is probably the first bronze sculpture of the myths, legends and themes of temptation of Mara in Nepal which preserve and conserve in the national museum has revealed and examined the following features:

- Altogether, there are more than twenty five human figures in the panel including daughters, nymphs and army troops of the demon Mara and some figures from animal kingdom.
- Lord Buddha seated *Vajraprayankasana* posture and presenting *Bhumisparsa Mudra*

- The human beings and animals figures depicting on the seven layers with overlapping or superimposing each others. In this relief there are some dancing figures most probably of Mara's daughters with musicians and contemplating how to disturb Siddhartha through his goal and path.
- Artists gave high priority to make it look more beautiful to obverse side than the reverse one which makes the sculptures facial oriented.
- The panel and the image of Buddha have decorated nimbus and head crown which helps to add the aesthetic aspect of the sculpture.
- The images reveal that artists' select high quality of technology such as lost wax method during the casting of the sculpture.
- The sculpture suggest that there is adequate application and proper attention towards the myths, legends and themes of Buddha *Jataka* tales and the rules of iconographic sciences while creating the relief.
- It is a well representative specimen of religious and mythological legends especially the philosophy of temptation of evil Mara over the Buddha.
- This work of art represents the transformation of bronze craftsmanship through the ages.
- Artists provide in depth artistic features while casting the sculpture.
- The unnecessary portions seem to have been eliminated from the panel which suggests slight influence of Pal School of Art on the relief.
- The artistic appeal and aesthetic emotions of the sculpture suggest that these are the master pieces and illustrative bronze objects of 14th century CE of Nepal.
- As whole without any doubt, the sculptures prove the fact of high and skillful quality, knowledge, technology and excellent metal workmanship of the artists of Early Medieval period.

During the period of searching of truth knowledge *Sidhartha Gautam* traveled to different hermitages of sages. But, the sages could not answer his questions regarding the life, birth, rebirth, sorrow, salvation and so on with full satisfactory ways. Then he decided to the depth meditation for generating and searching new knowledge about aforementioned issues.

But, the demon Mara could not feel pleasure to attaining enlightenment by the *Sidhartha Gautam*. Therefore, he started to tempt him and misguide from his processes of enlightenment. Meanwhile, very first demon Mara tempted him with false news about his kingdom. And he still asked *Sidhartha* for the desire and path of getting new knowledge and said “join with me I will establish you as the Universal Empire within seven days”. But *Sidhartha* did not accept the proposal of demon Mara. After it he called his army troops to attack him with whirlwind, tempest, flood, and earthquake and called to the daughters for playing music, dancing and singing to seduce the *Sidhartha Gautam*. Because of the ferocious behaviors of Mara army troops and his daughters other gods and goddesses who were there with the meditation spot, started to leave the place. Then *Bodhisatta* called the ten *paramis* such as *Dana, Shila, Santi, Biryā, Dhyana, Pragnya, Tathastha, Klesa, Maitri* and *Dridha Paramita* which he had perfected in various births, for his defense. Due to the efforts of *Paramitas*, eventually, Mara’s army had to flee and he used his last weapon the *chakkavudha* (disc), which set up as a canopy or *Chhatra* of flower over the head of *Bodhisatta*. Still Mara tried to dissuade the *Bodhisatta* and asked to show evidence of his goodness and benevolence. With no other witness to bear testimony on his behalf he asked the Earth to speak for him by touching the ground with his middle finger. The Earth then roared in response and bore the testimony for the *Bodhisatta* by thundering, “I stand his witness”. After this evidence the Mara’s defeat was final and he and his followers had to flee. At the 49th day, *Bodhisattva* knew the ultimate truth. After the defeat of the demon Mara and armies the Divine power and other

celestial beings returned to the Lord Buddha and then besieged him and started to celebrate the victory.

Conclusion

The Buddha *Jatakas* are known as the main sources of Buddhism, which deals with different aspects of Buddha and his religion and philosophy. Among the several issues, the demon Mara and its temptation over Buddha is related with the attaining of enlightenment and wisdom. The event of *Mara* temptation to the Buddha and victory over him is one of the events of the life of Buddha. Therefore, on the basis of myths, legends and themes, the tradition of presenting the event *Mara* temptation through the sculptures and paintings had begun in Buddhism in Indian sub-continent.

The relief of *Mara Vijaya* in the western gateway of *Sanchi Stupa*, the fresco of *Mara Vijay* discovered from the cave No 1 from *Ajanta Cave* and *Mara Vijay* stone relief sculpture of 5th century A.D. of *Ajanta cave No. 26* are the important sculptures and painting findings from India. Likewise, an unfinished *Lichchhavi* relief of the national museum, the sculpture of *Mayuravarna Mahavihar (Bhinchhe Bahal), Patan*, Bronze sculpture of the national museum, temptation of *Mara* engraved tympanum of the *Itumbahal*, wooden sculpture of the national wooden work museum *Bhaktapur* can be known as the significant illustrations findings from Nepal.

Likewise, the Bronze sculpture of the national museum which is studied in this paper in detail is another noteworthy example of relief of *Mara Vijaya*. On the basis of adopting and presenting the myths, legends, themes, constructing style and technology and iconographic traits this sculpture can be judged and measured as the wonderful, illustrative and representative bronze work of 14th century CE of Nepal.

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