

Visual Communication and Applied Arts in Buddhism and Its Significance in India

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Abstract: India is a very religious country. In our country art and religion are mingled together. Art and religion are wedded together by identities of origin subject matter and inner experience. Buddhism is one among the key religions of the Globe that teaches beautiful way of spiritual developments, meditation and philosophy. This study discuss about visual communication through Buddhism and Buddhist art that plays significant role in India. Visual communication that starts with SmrathAshoka and adopted by Indian constitute as an emblem is a form of applied art. Buddhist artform like stupa, Sthambh, temple, monasteries and even cave paintings plays an important role and contributes in Indian Communication. This study tries to create awareness of graphicrepresentation and constitutional consciousness among the citizen of Incredible India. The study discusses upon the exclusive Indian history of Buddhist applied art and visual communication that depict and also communicated the Ideals of constitution of India through its visual imagery.

Keywords: Visual communication, Visual Imagery, Constitution, Buddhism, Buddhist art.

INTRODUCTION: Art is the major part and also a very power medium of communication. The Human mind expresses its emotions through art, both sensual and the abstract life emotions. Therefore, art whether visible or invisible, benevolent or malicious, is the language of images and signs & symbols for human to expresses the perception of the world. In prehistoric times paintings are painted on rock walls and ceilings, these are the form of communication as they communicate about their culture and religion. Visual communication is everywhere in our built environment to the mobile screen. With the development of civilization the forms of communication also developed. In India it was the Buddhist who probably realized the importance of visual communication in spreading religion in order to communicate the teaching of Buddha and his ideals to the population at large. Emperor Ashoka sets rock and pillar edicts all over the country. On some of these engraved in stone are the commandments of religion. These rock and pillar edicts can be termed as the forerunners of posters of today. They are examples of the effective use of pictorial art in the propagation and popularization of religion and it can be found in the art treasures of Sanchi, Ajanta and Amaravati.

Communication starts when the early man starts drawing through stick on the walls of rock of caves. And as the development of human societies it expanded and include many things like ideograms, alphabet etc. Fundamentally any image either signs, typography drawing photograph animation

used to communicate or to inform some kind of message or idea came in the field of visual communication. It is one of the oldest disciplines in the humanities. Visual communication is all around; it can be seen from ancient cave painting to the modern Computer graphics.

Buddhism in India:

“Buddhism starts in India over 2,600 years ago as a way life that had a potential of transforming a person. It is one of the important religions of south and south-eastern Asian countries. The religion is based upon the teachings, life experiences of its founder SiddharthGautam born in circa 563 BCE. He was born into royal family of Sakya Clan who ruled from Kapilvastu, in Lumbini which is situated near the Indo-Nepal Border. At the age of 29, Gautama left home and rejected his life of riches and embraced a lifestyle of asceticism, or extreme self-discipline.(Drishti)

After 49 consecutive days of meditation, Gautam attained Bodhi (enlightenment) under a peepal tree at Bodhgaya a village in Bihar. Buddha gave his first sermon in the village of Sarnath, near the city of Banaras in Uttar Pradesh. This event is known as Dharma- Chakra Pravartana. He died at the age of 80 in 483 BCE at place called Kushinagar a town in Uttar Pradesh. The event is known as Mahaparinibban.”(Drishti)

Buddhism in India as a Soft Power is different from the conventional sense of the term. From ancient times India has faith in sharing cultural and development of humanity instead of export of culture. The values of peace, accommodation, inclusiveness, and compassion that are part of our societies can be attributed to the influence of the teachings of Lord Buddha and Buddhism. The ideals of Buddhism continue to intersect with the political and economic contexts of many Asian nations of the world’s population. Buddhism is growing emotional bonding and connectivity in Asian as it is embedded into their “nationalistic” thinking and actions. Buddhism is not restricted to Asia and has been able to generate a spiritual awakening elsewhere in the world and influenced a stream of philosophical traditions world over. In India Buddhism is in abundance of resources of pilgrimage sites, the presence of the Dalai Lama, and international goodwill. (Drishti)

Visual Communication Campaign in SmrathAshoka dynasty:

In India it was SmrathAshoka who realized the Importance of Visual Communication and advertising for the promotion of Buddhism.

“Emperor Ashoka (born 304 B.C.,ruled 274-236 B.C.) was

arguably the greatest ruler in Indian history and was the man who ensured Buddhism success as a world religion. After Ashoka conquered the kingdom of Kalinga, in one of most important battles in the history of the world, near the Brubaneswar airport in the state of Orissa, he was so horrified by the number of people that were massacred (perhaps 100,000 or more) he converted himself and his kingdom to Buddhism and sent Buddhist missionaries to the four corners of Asia to spread the religion. The wheel Asoka used to symbolize his conversion to Buddhism is the same one pictured on India's flag today. H.G. Wells, a noted historian as well as science fiction writer, wrote: "Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history ... the name of Ashoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star."(Facts_and_Details, 2019)

Visual communication Sites of Buddhist: Ashoka otherwise called "Ashoka the incredible" was probably the best ruler of India. He was the third leader of the distinguished Maurya line and was perhaps the most remarkable lord of the Indian subcontinent in antiquated time. His rule between 273 BC and B.C. was perhaps the most prosperous period throughout the entire existence of Indium. Ashoka took the Mauryan Empire to its most noteworthy geological degree and its full tallness of force. To promote the religion Ashoka built architecture, sculptures and pillars. King Ashoka predominantly used stone architecture with less or little usage of woods. The entirety of his contributions to ancient architecture is irreplaceable. Some of the monuments he built. Are:

- Lion capital of Ashoka:

"The lion Capital of Ashoka is sculpture of four Asiatic lions (which is a Pantheraleo population surviving today only in India.) standing back to back, on an elaborate base that includes other animals. It is adopted as an official emblem of India in 1950. It is placed on the top of the Ashoka pillar at the important Buddhist site of Sarnath, in about 250 BCE during his rule over the Maurya Empire. It is also known as Ashoka Column, the lion capital is now in sarnath Museum but the pillar is still in its original location."(Wikipedia, 2022)



The original Lion Capital. Minus the bell-shaped lotus flower, this has been adopted as the National Emblem of India.

- Sanchi stupa in MP:

"The town of Sanchi is synonymous with Buddhist Stupas-hemispherical structures typically containing relics of the Buddha or his followers. The Stupas or Sanchi were constructed on the orders of emperor Ashoka to preserve and spread the Buddhist philosophy. It is known as Great Stupa, on a hill top at Sanchi town in Raisen District of the State of Madhya Pradesh, India. It was built in 3rd century BC by Emperor Ashoka as the Great Stupa at Sanchi has been the focal point of the Buddhist faith in the region."(tourism, 2020)



The Great Stupa at Sanchi

- Dhamek stupa in UP:

Dhamek Stupa is the most important sights in Sarnath and it's mostly because of its antiquity and significance of being the precise spot of Buddha's sermon. It is said that he revealed the eight fold path leading to nirvana. Dhamek Stupa originally constructed in 249 BCE later replaced in 500 CE, it was built by Emperor Ashoka of Maurya Dynasty at Sarnath, Varnasi, in Uttar Pradesh, India. This solid cylindrical shaped Stupa made of red bricks and stone in its present position stands at a height of 43.6 m with diameter of 28 m. the significance of the sacred place is that it marks the spot where Lord Buddha perched the first sermon to his five disciples after attaining enlightenment in Bodh Gaya. ("Dhamek Stupa", 2012)



Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath

- Ashokastambha in Lumbini, Nepal:

"Ashoka Pillar in Lumbini is one of the 3rd Century stone pillars built under the reign of Emperor Ashoka. It was created as a mark of respect by Ashoka after he visited Lord Buddha's place of birth and decided to accept Buddhism. The Lumbini Pillar inscription, also called the Paderia inscription, is in the ancient Brahmi script, discovered in December 1896 in Lumbini, modern Nepal by Gen Khadga Shameshar under

the authority of Nepal government and assisted by Alois Anton Fuhrer.”(Holidify, 2013)



Ashoka Pillar in Lumbini

- Mahabodhi temple, Bihar:

“The Mahabodhi Temple or the MahaBodhiMahavihar, also known as “Great awakening Temple” is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an ancient, Buddhist temple in Bodh Gaya, marking the location where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. The temple stands in the east to the Mahabodhi tree. Its architectural effect is superb.” (Wikipedia., 2022)



Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, Bihar

- Barabar caves, Bihar:

“ The Barabar Hill caves are the oldest surviving rock-cut caves in India, dating from the Maurya Empire(322-185 BCE), woke with Ashokan inscriptions, located in the Makhdumpur region of Jehanabad district, Bihar, India, 24 km(15mi) north of Gaya. Barabbar caves are a set of 7 rock-cut caves dating back to the third century BC. These are located on the twin hills of Barabar and Nagarjuni. These are also known as Lomas Rishi Cave, Sudama Cave and Vishwamitra Cave among the locals. The inscription in the cave informs that the four caves on Barabar hill were assigned by King Ashoka to Ajivika monks in 261 BC.”(Wikipedia, “Barabar Cave”)



The famous Lomas Rishi Cave, dated to approximately 250 BC Jehanabad district, Bihar, India

- Bharhut stupa, MP:

“Bharhut stupa is a site of historical significance in India. It is situated between Jabalpur and Allahabad in the erstwhile Nagod state of Madhya Pradesh. It was built in 3rd century BCE and in 1873 the place was discovered by Sir Alexander Cunningham. The remains no longer exist in the site now and some of the remains of the stupa are preserved in the Indian Museum in Kolkata. They contain numerous birth stories of the Buddha’s previous lives or Jataka tales.” (IndiaNetzone)



The Bharhut Stupa East Gateway and Railing, Res Sandstone, Bharhut Stupa, 125-75 BCE and Bharhut Pillar Capital

Visual communication and Buddhist art in Modern age in India:

“If we study the Indian art history from the point of view of applied arts and visual communication, we find the treasure of visual communication examples throughout the ages that represents social, religious, political, art and historical India. In the present day, we the modern India’ through our Indian Constitution have adopted the democracy based on the universal values of liberty, justice, Equality and fraternity. Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar, the Chief Architect of Indian Constitution, the chairman of drafting committee and flag committee, clearly mentions in his speech on 26 Nov 1949 that he has borrowed these universal and democratic values from the Buddha and also visually represented it in form of our national symbols.

SamrathAshoka was one of the greatest disciple of Buddha, he made Buddhism his state religion and propagated, preached and publicized it within his domain and worldwide from about 260-64 BC. In India there are such many site and symbols adopted by government of India.” (Prabhakar, 2019)

1. National Emblem of India: “The National Emblem of India is adaptation of the Lion Capital ofAshoka, a statue from 280BCE. The emblem is employed by the union government, state government and government agencies all over India. The original Lion capital. Minus the inverted bell-shaped lotus flower, this has been adopted as the National Emblem of India, seen form another angle, showing the horse on the left and the bull on the right of the Ashoka Chakra in the circular base on which the four Indian lions are standing back to back. On the side there are bull and elephant, a lion and a horse occupies the other place.” (Wikipedia, “State Emblem of India”, 2022)



National Emblem of India



The wheel “Ashoka Chakra”: “The wheel Asoka used to symbolize his conversion to Buddhism is the same one pictured on India's flag today. H.G. Wells, a noted historian as well as science fiction writer, wrote: "Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history ... the name of Ashoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star. The Wheel “Ashoka Chakra” is adopted from Capital Ashoka Pillar’s base and has been placed on to the center of the National Flag.”(Facts_and_Details, 2019)



The Ashoka Chakra, as depicted on the National flag of India.

2. National Flower “Lotus”: The Lotus is one of Buddhism’s most recognizable symbols of enlightenment. The famed Lotus Sutra is one of the most important texts of Mahayana Buddhism and is the foundation of the pure land schools. According to Buddhism, every person has the potential to become perfect and enlightened, and it is just matter of time until each human reaches the light. Buddhists believe that it’s necessary to be reborn thousands of times, polishing one’s being through many incarnations, until one reaches nirvana the highest state of consciousness that humans can access. The Buddha is sometimes depicted sitting on a Lotus flower, symbolizing the one who overcame the pain of that prevails in the material world and became enlightened, just like the lotus flower which starts to grow in the dirty and muddy water but manages to surpass the water and produce a perfect flower. Many Hindu gods are depicted sitting or standing on a Lotus flower for the same reason.

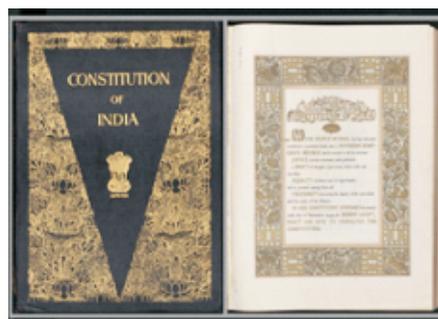


The Buddha figures here have a lotus throne. From Pala dynasty. Eastern India a.c 1000 and The boy Buddha rising up from a lotus. Vietnam, 14th -15th Century

Indian constitution accepts this Lotus Flower as the national flower. It is a sacred flow immemorial and occupies a unique position in the art and mythology of ancient India and has been an auspicious symbol of Indian culture since time.

3. Indian Constitution: “The Constitution of India is the supreme law of India. The document lays down the framework that defines fundamental political code, structure, procedure, powers and duties of government institutions and sets out fundamental rights, directive principles, and the duties of citizens.”(Wikipedia, “Constitution of India”)

If we see the cover page and the front page of this book we find the national emblem and there is lotus flower of in between as well as in the border of about 1 and half inch on the front page and in the cover page is also filled with lotus flower in triangle. “It was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India on 26 November 1949 and became effective on 26 January 1950. The constitution replaced the Government of India Act 1935 as the country's fundamental governing document, and the Dominion of India became the Republic of India.”(Wikipedia, “Constitution of India”)



The Book Cover and frontpage of Constitution of India

4. “Sanchi Stupa” on Indian Currency: The Sanchi Stupa which was made of bricks was built during Mauryan period. It flourished until the 11th century. The new currency that recently launched in 2016, there is new currency note of ₹ 200 in which the Sanchi Stupa is depicted on the reverse side of the Indian currency note that signify its Value to Indian cultural heritage. Sanchi is a Buddhist temple which is famous for its Great Stupa, located on a hill in the town of Sanchi situated in Raisen District of the State of Madhya Pradesh. The great Stupa of Sanchi is one of India’s the oldest structures, originally built in 3rd century BCE by the emperor Ashoka.



Sanchi Stupa ” on Indian Currency

5. Bharatan Ratana: the Bharat Ratana is India's highest civilian award which is conferred to people in recognition of their exceptional service in any field without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex. The physical award is designed in the shape of peepal leaf with 'Bharat Ratana' inscribed in Devanagari script under a sunburst figure. Peepal Leaf which is the most significant leaf in Buddhism. Lord Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment or Bodhi circa 500 BCE under it. The Bodhi Tree or 'Tree of awakening' was a large and ancient sacred fig tree located in Bodhi Gaya, Bihar. The reverse side of the award figurine features 'Satyameva Jayate' written in Hindi under an inscription of the state emblem. The emblem, the sun and rim of Bharat Ratana award are made of platinum while the inscriptions are in burnished bronze. It is approximately 59 mm long, 48 mm wide and 3.2 mm thick and has a white ribbon attached to it, so it can be worn as a medal.

The awards are created at Kolkata's Alipore Mint, along with the other prestigious national awards such as Padma Vibushan, Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, and Param Veer Chakra. (ratna)



An Image of the Sun along with words "Bharatratana" inscribed in Devanagari script, on a Peepal leaf

Conclusion: Buddhism is not only a peaceful religion it's also a way of living, it plays a significant role in the development of Indian Culture. Buddhism is originated in India gradually diminished and was replaced by approximately the 12th Century. Buddhism main concept is ahimsa and it became one of the cherished values for our country to become a great nation. Its contribution to the Indian art and architecture was remarkable. The stupas at Sanchi, Bharhut and Gaya are stunning buildings are wonderful pieces of art. Buddhism encouraged education through residential universities like Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramasila. Pali and some other local languages developed through the teachings of Buddhism. It also promoted the spread of Indian culture to other parts of Asia.

Ashoka was the first to realize the importance of visual communication in spreading religion. In order to communicate the teachings of Buddha and his ideals to the population at large Emperor Ashoka set up rock and pillar edicts all over the country. Later when Indian constitution is formed, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the chief Architect of Indian constitution, adopted the democratic culture based on the universal values of liberty, justice, equality and fraternity

publicize throughout the world 2500 years ago in the form of visual imagery of Modern India by Samrath Ashoka." (Prabhakar, 2019) As now we can see Buddhist symbols and ideals all around in our environment in the form of national Emblem of India, nation flag and Ashoka chakra, national flower, our Indian currency note and coin and many more. The study found that Buddhism is not only the way of living but also represent the Indian and its culture. It is deep rooted in Indian constitution and visual communication of India.

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