

Research article

Avalokiteśvara in Pala Art: An Iconographic study with special reference to *Sādhanamālā*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to trace the evolution of Avalokiteśvara from being an attendant deity to becoming one of the prominent deities of the Buddhist pantheon through the development of its imagery and its representation in various Buddhist textual sources. This paper particularly focuses on the iconographic and stylistic depiction of Avalokiteśvara images of the Pala period. During this period, the imagery of Avalokiteśvara became highly evolved and complex with the efflorescence of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Examples of its many forms have been highlighted to signify its various manifestations and its popularity as a Buddhist deity within the region of India as well as abroad in regions such as China, Nepal, Tibet and others.

Keywords: Buddha, Bodhisattva, Padmapani, Avalokiteśvara, Sadaksari Lokesvara, Simhanada, Khasarpaṇa, Lokanath, Dhyani Buddha, Amitābha, Sadhanamala, Mahāvastu, Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra

The present paper aims to discuss the iconographic representations of Avalokiteśvara during the Pala period by correlating them to a Buddhist text, the *Sādhanamālā*, a significant text on Vajrayana Buddhism. The text is a collection of short works called *sadhanas* which are the injunctions on rituals to be performed for worshipping the deity (*Sādhanamālā*, vol.1, 1925, pp. vi-vii). "Thirty seven Sadhanas (6-43) are devoted to his various manifestations, namely, Sadaksari Lokesvara, Lokanatha, Halahala, Vajradharma, Khasarpaṇa, Simhanada, Padmanarttesvara, Hariharivahanodbhava, Trailokyavasankara, Nilakantha, Mayajalakrama-Lokesvara Sugatisandarsana and Pretasantarpita" (*Sādhanamālā*, vol.1, 1925, p. vii). Of many forms of Avalokiteśvara, a few popular forms of the deity are considered here as case studies. Some early Buddhist texts and artworks have also been discussed to trace the evolution of Avalokiteśvara from an attendant figure to one of the most revered deities in the later Buddhist pantheon.

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In literature, the germination of the concept of Avalokiteśvara can be seen in the *Avalokita Sūtra*, a supplement of an early Buddhist text, the *Mahāvastu*, in which a bodhisattva takes a resolution to emancipate all of mankind after his bowl is accepted by Gautama Buddha who declares that he would be the saviour of the world and the future Buddhaⁱ (The *Mahāvastu*, 1976, p. 353). Though the text does not name this *bodhisattva*, he can be identified as the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. "Avalokiteśvara is famous in the Mahayana Pantheon as a Bodhisattva emanating from the Dhyāni Buddha, Amitābha and his Sakti, Pāṇḍarā. As Amitābha and Pāṇḍarā are the presiding Dhyāni Buddha and Buddhasakti of the present Kalpa (cycle), namely, the Bhadrakalpa, Avalokiteśvara is said to be the Bodhisattva who rules during the period between the disappearance of the Mortal Buddha, Sakyasimha, and the advent of the Future Buddha, Maitreya" (Bhattacharyya, 1958, p. 124). He is considered the embodiment of compassion and mercy. He decided to postpone his own Buddhahood in order to help every sentient being on their path of salvation. His worship became widespread across the Buddhist world and images of his different forms are found in abundance. Initially depicted as an attendant deity, the *bodhisattva* later acquired the position of the most important deity in the Buddhist Pantheon. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha* sutra records "Avalokiteśvara's transformation into the principal figure of the Buddhist pantheon, greater than all other buddhas, let alone bodhisattvas. In this sutra, Avalokiteśvara is a resident of Sukhavatī and acts as a messenger and gift bearer for Amitābha, even though he is also described as superior to all buddhas and therefore paradoxically has both a subservient and dominant status" (*Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, 2013, vii).

His role as the omnipotent savior who protects the devotee from all perils was well established by the 5th century CE and is attested by many sculptures in the caves of Ajanta, Ellora, Aurangabad and Kanheri as well as at other places. Some of these sculptures are discussed in great detail by Susan Huntington in her seminal work titled *The Art of Ancient India*.

The imagery of Avalokiteśvara became highly evolved and complex with the popularity of Vajrayāna (Tantric Buddhism) during the Pala period. Vajrayāna Buddhism appealed to the common people as it propounded that emancipation can be obtained in a short time without undergoing the severe austerities and bodily sufferings mandated by the Hinayana and Mahayana forms of Buddhism. (Guhyasamāja Tantra, 1931, p. xi)

Different forms of Avalokiteśvara came into being such as Sadaksari Lokeshvara, Simhanada, Khasarpaṇa, Lokanath etc. Various manifestations of Avalokiteśvara became popular in other countries too. For example, in China during the Tang dynasty (late 6th century CE to early 10th century CE), Avalokiteśvara was represented as Water-moon Kuan Yin, Guiding Kuan-Yin, eleven-faced Kuan-yin, thousand-armed Kuan-yin etc. From Nepal, we have representations of 108 forms of Avalokiteśvara. The ability of Avalokiteśvara to transform in numerous forms to extinguish all the suffering of the sentient being is recorded in chapter XXV of the *Lotus Sutra*, the translation of the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka*. In this chapter, Buddha speaks of how the *bodhisattva* appears to all according to their needs and can take forms of Buddha, pratyekabuddha, Brahmā, Śakra, Īśvara, Maheśvara, devas, male, female, elder, youth, wife, citizen, official etc. to save them from all kinds of serious and immediate dangers (The Lotus Sutra, 2007, pp. 295-302). From his discourse, one may infer that Buddha was probably hinting that any person who extends help in the hour of need assumes the form of Avalokiteśvara for the needy. In this context, the divinity lies within and not without. This concept was further elaborated in *sādhanas* (meditative practices) in the

Sādhanamālā in which the devotee is asked to perceive himself as Avalokiteśvara with all his paraphernalia while worshipping the deity.

Claudine Bautze-Picron points out that “since his compassion extends to all beings, his nature is universal: he becomes a “god” who encompasses the entire universe, and a “god” who creates” (Bautze-Picron, 2004, p. 225). In the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, dated to c. 5th century CE, one notices the transformation of Avalokiteśvara from an attendant deity to the principal deity in the Buddhist Pantheon. In this text, he supersedes all the Buddhas, including Sākyamuni, in merit and wisdom. The text asserts that from the pores of his body emanated everything that exists in the entire universe. In this context, Avalokiteśvara possesses qualities of Vishvarupa Viṣṇu although his iconography is derived from the iconography of Śiva. The text further emphasises the significance of Avalokiteśvara by asserting the emergence of Viṣṇu and Śiva, the most powerful deities in Hinduism, from Avalokiteśvara.

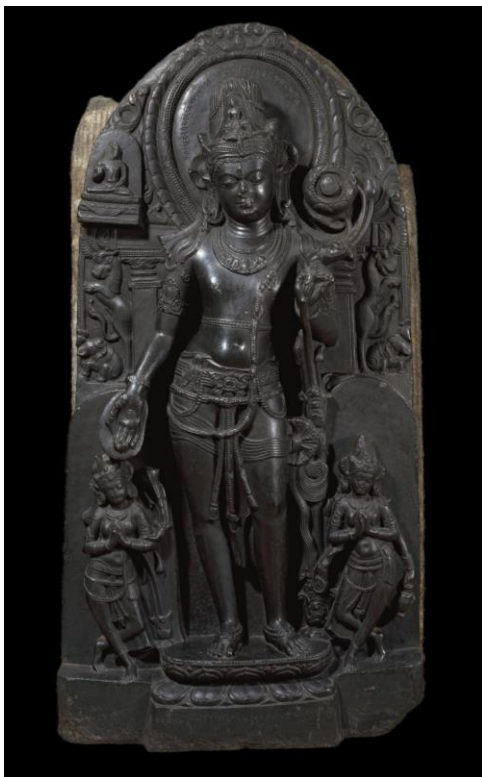


Figure 1: Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi, 9th - 10th Century CE, Pala Period, Basalt Stone, Eastern India, Asset No. 274498001. Image courtesy: The Trustees of British Museum.



Figure 2: Avalokiteśvara, 10th century, Vishnupur, Gaya, Accession No 1680, Bihar Museum. (Photo by author)

If one traces the development of the imagery of Avalokiteśvara, initially, during the Kushana period, the two-armed Avalokiteśvara can be seen in regal attire holding a lotus flower as Padmapāṇi, an attendant to Buddha. From the 5th century CE onwards, one notices representations of Padmapāṇi as an independent deity. The best example is from Ajanta cave- 1 where the *bodhisattva* is shown emanating grace and compassion. From the Pala period, we see his representation as Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi, with the image of Amitābha in his *jaṭāmukūṭa*

(matted locks) being the most distinctive feature. A standing image of Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi is in the collection of the British Museum (Figure 1). His right hand is in *varada mudrā* (boon-bestowing gesture) and with his left hand he holds the stalk of a lotus flower. He wears the effigy of Dhyani Buddha Amitābha in his *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted locks). His short-pleated *dhoti* (lower garment) is fastened by a belt. He stands on a lotus pedestal. The body of the bodhisattva is framed by pillars supporting a lintel, above which springs an oval halo beautifully surrounding his face. The central plain section of the halo has an inscription. A double border of pearl garland and lotus petals enhances the aesthetics of an otherwise plain halo. Avalokiteśvara is framed by goddesses Tara and Bhṛkuṭī.

A fine representation of two-armed Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi from the Pala period is from Vishnupur Gaya (Figure 2). In this sculpture, he is shown holding a lotus stalk in his left hand, and his right hand is in *abhaya mudrā* (protective gesture). He sits with royal ease on his cushion seat. His face is almost square. He has a pointed nose and clearly outlined lips. In the typical 10th-century Pala idiom, he is provided with half-closed eyes with heavy eyelids drooping in the middle. His bow-shaped eyebrows join the bridge of his nose. His torso is in the *gomukha* (cow face) shape. His shoulders are broad. He has a tall *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted locks) that bears an effigy of Amitābha identified by the *dhyāna mudrā* (meditative gesture). The Bodhisattva is heavily bejewelled.



Figure 3: Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, 5th Century CE, Stone, Sarnath, Accession No 49-113, National Museum, Delhi. Image courtesy: Museums of India



Figure 4: Lokanath, 7th century A.D., Nalanda, Accession No 6, Nalanda Museum, Bihar. (Photo by author)

In visual art, the representations of Avalokiteśvara as Lokanath are known from the Gupta period and in Buddhist literature, detailed iconographic prescription is available in *Sādhanamālā* (Bhattacharya, 1958, p. 130). The best example is from Sarnath, where Avalokiteśvara is shown as an ascetic with Dhyani Buddha Amitābha in his *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted locks) (Figure 3). He stands on a lotus pedestal below which on its right are shown two seated skeletal figures. Though the upper part is broken, they appear to be seeking emancipation with their raised hands from the saviour.

The Gupta idiom of the Sarnath style continues in the pre-Pala sculptures, as can be attested by the image of Lokanath from Nalanda in the collection of the Nalanda Museum, Bihar (Figure 4). Here, the bodhisattva is shown standing on a lotus. He is depicted with half-closed meditative eyes, a broad torso and tubular arms. His matted locks fall on his shoulders. He is adorned with a few ornaments. A sash around the clinging lower garment is tied in the fashion of the Sarnath image. This is one of the early images of Lokanath and the iconography is still evolving. Here, the bodhisattva is shown with the Dhyani Buddha Vairocana, identified by the *dharmacakra mudrā* (gesture of the turning of the wheel), in his *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted locks) instead of Amitābha, who is shown above the *uṣṇīṣa* (cranial protrusion) in *dhyāna mudrā* (meditative gesture). On either side of his *uṣṇīṣa* (cranial protrusion) are images of Akṣobhya in *bhūmisparśa mudrā* (earth touching gesture). The bodhisattva's right hand is in *varada mudrā* (boon-giving gesture), while in his upraised left hand, he holds a full-blown lotus stalk. He is flanked by Tārā with a lotus on his right and Bhr̥kūṭī with a rosary on his left. These two deities are from the pantheon of Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara. According to *Sādhanamālā*, Lokanath should be flanked by Tārā and Hayagrīva and not Bhr̥kūṭī as is the case with this image. However, there are several images where Lokanath is shown accompanied by Tārā and Bhr̥kūṭī. This suggests that the canonical injunctions were adapted to cater to the needs of the patrons.

Of the four *sādhanas* dedicated to Lokanatha, three *sādhanas* describe him as a solitary figure without accompanying deities. Both seated and standing sculptures of this form of Lokanath were common. When seated, he may be represented in *lalita* (one leg bent and one leg pendent), *paryānika* (seated pose with legs locked over seat) or *vajraparyānika* (cross-legged pose with feet crossed at the ankles and resting on the thigh of the opposite leg with soles facing upward, also called *padmāsana*) attitude.

The striking similarities between the two seated metal sculptures of Lokanath from the National Museum (Figure 5) and Bihar Museum (Figure 6) suggest a date of 12th century CE for both sculptures. Although the National Museum sculpture dates back to the 8th century CE, it may be from the same time period as that of the Kurkihar sculpture due to the stylized treatment of form. In both sculptures, Lokanath is shown seated in *lalitāsana* with the right leg pendent and resting on a lotus. In the first case, the lotus is attached to the pedestal, but in the latter, the footrest issues from under the lotus pedestal. In both sculptures, the upper body is inclined towards the left, but the head is slightly tilted to the right. In their left hands, the deities hold lotus stalks that rise above their shoulder levels and, thus, balance the flowers beside their heads. The stretched-out, fleshy and round right hand, in both images, rests on the knee. A cup-shaped face, broad forehead, rounded chin, narrow slit-like eyes set horizontally with the bridge of the nose and slanting towards the temples, tight lips rising upwards in a mannered smile, and third eye are the common denominators of both the sculptures. The body is tall and well-built, with broad shoulders and a narrow waist. The ornamentation and jewellery of the Bihar Museum sculpture is

profuse and intricate compared to that of the National Museum image. In the Bihar Museum image, one can also see the delineation of the sash with spots to represent a deer skin. Originally, the sculpture had an inlay of precious stones. The *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted locks) of this image is schematically arranged and refined compared to the other image where the hair is shown loosely interlocked to form the *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted locks). The lower garment is rendered with sharp and precise lines.



Figure 5: Avalokiteshvara, Bronze, 8th Century CE, Pala, Accession No. 74-80, National Museum, Delhi. Image courtesy: Museums of India.

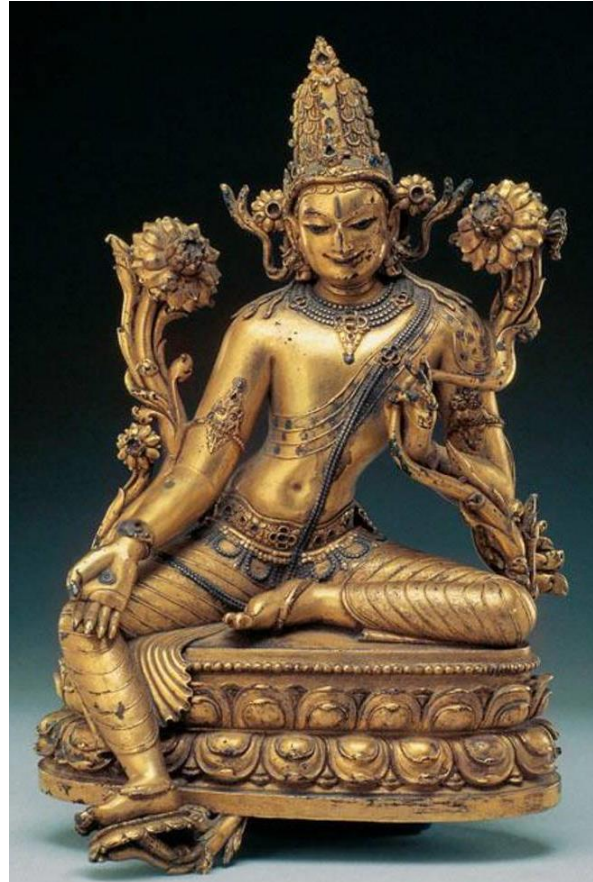


Figure 6: Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, Gilt-bronze, 12th century, Pala dynasty, Kurkihar, Bihar, Bihar Museum. Image courtesy: Ellen Kaufman.

In the standing sculpture (Figure 7) dated to the 11th century CE from Kurkihar in the collection of the Bihar Museum, Lokanath is shown framed by an elliptical *prabhāmaṇḍala* (halo) bordered by conventional flame designs and a crowning *chhatra* (umbrella). The Bodhisattva stands on a lotus pedestal. The tall and slender figure is graceful with fine proportions. The face has a youthful appearance. He holds the stalk of a lotus with his left hand and his right hand is in *varaḍa mudrā*. On the pedestal is carved a seated figure of a devotee in *āñjali mudrā* (folded hands).



Figure 7: Lokanath, 11th Century CE, Bronze alloy, Kurkihar, Gaya, Accession No. BM 2017.007.72, Bihar Museum. (Photo by author)



Figure 8: Sadakshari Mandala, c. 12th Century C.E., Pala period, Bhagalpur, Bihar, Bihar Museum. (Photo by author).

Yet another very significant form of Avalokiteśvara is Shaḍaksharī Lokeśvara that finds frequent manifestation in visual art during the Pala period and became popular in other countries as well. He is the presiding deity of the most sacred mantra in Tibetan Buddhism: *Om Mani Padme Hum*, which consists of six syllables. The mantra is given in *Kāraṇḍavyūha*. According to this text the mantra was known only to Avalokiteśvara (*Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, 2013, xx). The Buddhas of the past also failed to find this great *mantra* and it was only after Amitābha asked Avalokiteśvara to give the *mahāvidyā* (great knowledge) to the Buddha Padmottama that he revealed it to Padmottama and also taught him, "how to make the *maṇḍala* (ritual diagram) of the *mahāvidyā* (great knowledge) so that he may in the future give the *mahāvidyā* to others (*Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, 2013, xx)."

He could be unaccompanied or in a group with companions Maṇidhārā and Shaḍaksharī. He is usually depicted with four hands. His main hands are in *añjali mudrā* (folded hands) and in the other two he holds a rosary and lotus.

A fine image (Figure 8) is in the collection of the Bihar Museum in which Shaḍaksharī Lokeśvara is shown seated in *vajraparyankāsana* on a lotus pedestal. The main pair of hands of the four-armed deity was originally in *añjali mudrā* (folded hands). In his upper right hand, he probably held an *aksha sūtra* (rosary) and an *utpala* (blue lotus) in his upper left, as per the iconography. At present none of the attributes are there. He has a third eye and is adorned with

an elaborate crown in which the image of Dhyani Buddha no more exists. He wears an elaborate necklace, arm bands and other ornaments. He is flanked by Shaḍaksharī Maṇidhārā and Shaḍaksharī Mahāvidyā both of whom are four-armed and seated on lotus pedestals. Their main hands are in *āñjali mudrā* (folded hands), and in their other hands, they hold Raksha *sūtras* (rosaries) and *utpalas* (blue lotuses). The three figures are backed by an elaborate stele carved intricately with floriated patterns, *vyāla* (mythical creature) motifs, flying celestials and carved pillars. The head of the deity is framed by a horseshoe-shaped halo, which is plain at the center and, thus, highlights the elegant face against the overtly ornate background. The upper part of the stele is occupied by the five Dhyani Buddhas. In the typical 12th century CE idiom, the sculpture shows firm, sharp and precise outlines and excessive ornamentation.

A distinct image of Shaḍaksharī maṇḍala (Figure 9), now in the collection of the Sarnath museum, depicts Lokeśvara with companion deities almost on the same plane unlike the previous sculpture where Shaḍaksharī Lokeśvara's importance is highlighted by projecting him forward from the stele. Here, Shaḍaksharī Lokeśvara is in the middle. On his right is Maṇidhārā and on his left is Shaḍaksharī Mahāvidyā. All three deities sit on their separate lotus seats, interconnected through entwined lotus stalks. Under their lotus seats are shown four diminutive figures. These are the four guardians of the shaḍaksharī maṇḍala. In this sculpture, the ascetic idiom dominates the representation. All the three figures have four hands. The main hands are in *āñjali mudrā* (folded hands) and in the other two they hold rosaries and lotus flowers. They wear simple ornaments and their tall *jaṭāmukūṭas* (matted locks) have schematically arranged locks of hair.



Figure 9: Sadakshari Mandala, 11th-12th Century C.E., Sarnath Museum. (Photo by author)

A single sculpture of Shaḍaksharī Lokeśvara (Figure 10), now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the Pala Period dated to the 12th century CE, is shown seated on a double lotus pedestal with a beaded rim in *vajraparyankāsana*, highly bejeweled and

adhering to the iconography: *añjali mudrā* (folded hands), rosary and lotus. Numerous images of this form of Avalokiteśvara are also known from Nepal and Tibet. Such an example can be seen in a sculpture (Figure 11) from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.



Figure 10: Shadakshari Lokeshvara, 12th Century CE, Pala Period, Bronze with copper and silver inlay, Bihar, India, Accession No. 1982.457. Image Courtesy: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 11: Shadakshari Avalokitesvara, 14th – 15th Century CE, Gilt Bronze, possibly Tibet, Accession No. 2018.98. Image Courtesy: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

The popularity of yet another form of Avalokiteśvara known as Khasarpaṇa is attested by many highly evolved images of the deity known from the Pala period. To this form are dedicated several *sādhanas* in the *Sādhnamālā*. A typical feature of Khasarpaṇa Lokeshvara is that in this form, Avalokiteśvara is accompanied by the four attendant figures of Tārā, Sudhanakumara, Bhṛkuṭī and Hayagrīva. Two stylistically similar, seated sculptures are taken up to elaborate on this iconography: one from the collection of the Asia Society, New York (Figure 12) and the other from the National Museum, New Delhi (Figure 13).



Figure 12: Khasarpaṇa Lokeshvara, Late 11th - early 12th Century CE, Schist, Bengal, India, Accession No. 1979.40. Image courtesy: Asia Society Museum, New York.



Figure 13: Lokeshvara, 11th Century CE, Pala Period, Stone, Accession No. 66-46, National Museum, New Delhi. Image courtesy: Museums of India.

In both the images, the deity is shown seated in *lalitāsana* on a double lotus pedestal. The youthful face with a gentle smile adheres to the iconography given in the *Sādhanamālā*, which states that “he is aged about twice eight years” (Bhattacharyya, 1958, p. 129). Like Lokanath, Khasarpaṇa is also shown with his right hand in *varada mudrā* and his left hand holding the stalk of a lotus flower. Both sculptures have *jaṭāmukuta*s with the image of Amitābha and are decked with fine ornaments. The pantheon of Khasarpaṇa is more elaborately shown in the Asia Society image. He is flanked by the goddess Tārā on his right and Bhṛkuṭī on his left. Tārā holds the stem of a lotus flower with her left hand and her right hand is in *abhaya mudrā*. The four-armed Bhṛkuṭī has her main hands joined in *añjali mudrā*. She has a rosary in her raised left hand and a *kamaṇḍalu* (water pot) in her right hand. She wears a *jaṭāmukuta*. Both stand on lotus flowers with long stalks that connect to the stalk of the lotus pedestal of Khasarpaṇa Lokeshvara. Below the pedestal, on the right side of his pendent leg are shown Sudhanakumar and Suchimukh while two devotees in *añjali mudrā* along with the potbellied Hayagrīva are seen on the left. Sudhanakumar is shown with his hands joined in *añjali mudrā* holding a manuscript in the crook of his left arm. Sucimukha can be identified by his needle-nose and upturned face in the gesture of receiving the nectar of

grace from the god of compassion. Each of them is provided with a lotus seat; the two devotees share a single seat. The pointed stele of the National Museum image is more elaborate than that of the Asia Society image. It is provided with images of five Dhyani Buddhas compared to the four in the latter. Highly evolved standing images of Khasarpaṇa Lokeshvara with four companion deities were also very popular.



Figure 14: Lokeshvara, 12th Century CE, Stone, Pala, Accession No. 63.1061, National Museum, Delhi. Image courtesy: Museums of India.



Figure 15: Simhanada Avalokitesvara, 10th Century CE, Chilhor, Gaya, Accession No. 11396, Bihar Museum. (Photo by author).

Yet another popular form of Avalokitesvara is his four-armed form known as Jaṭāmukha Lokeshvara or Mahākaruṇa (Donaldson, 2001, pp. 193–199). It doesn't find mention in *Sādhanamālā* but many images are known from throughout the Pala period. In a stone sculpture (Figure 14) from the National Museum collection, the four-armed bejeweled Avalokitesvara stands in *samabhariga* (standing erect) on a lotus pedestal against an oval stele with decorated border. His principal right hand is in *varada mudrā*, and with his left hand, he holds a *kamaṇḍalu*. The *kamaṇḍalu* is beautifully decorated with lotus petal designs and has a spout. He holds an *akshamālā* in his raised right hand and in the corresponding left-hand stalk of a full-blown lotus. His *jaṭāmukha* has an effigy of Amitābha. The treatment of face and body appears somewhat hard and stiff. The ankle-length *dhoti* with a central pleat is fastened by a girdle and is patterned with parabolic lines in relief. He is flanked by Tāra and Bhṛkuṭī. Two-armed Tāra is shown standing in *tribhanga* (standing posture with three bends in the body) with her right hand in *abhaya* and left holding stalk of the lotus flower that in turn supports the hand of Jaṭāmukha Lokeshvara. Bhṛkuṭī is also standing in *tribhanga* and is four-armed. She carries staff and *kamaṇḍalu* in her two left hands. Her right lower hand is in *varada mudra* and in her upper right hand she possibly holds a lotus. In her right and left hand, she carries a rosary and water pot respectively. The lower

garments of Tārā and Bhṛkuṭī are similar to that of Lokeśvara. The attendant deities are consistent with Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara images.

In his form of Simhanada Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva is believed to be the curer of all diseases (Bhattacharyya, 1958, p. 127). In a sculpture (Figure 15) from the Bihar Museum, Simhanada Avalokiteśvara is shown in *mahārājalīāsana* (posture of royal ease) on a lotus seat mounted over a couchant lion. Beneath the *vāhana* (mount) is also a lotus seat. He wears a tall *jaṭāmukūṭa* with Amitābha in it. Four other Dhyani Buddhas are also depicted. He has a third eye on the forehead and wears a deer skin sash. His right hand, which was placed on his knee, is now broken. His left hand is firmly planted on the pedestal. As prescribed in the *Sādhanamālā*, he is provided with a *trīsūla* (trident) entwined by a snake in his right and a sword on a lotus in his left hand. Though the text prescribes no ornamentation for this form, here, the bodhisattva is shown with some ornaments, such as a bejewelled *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread) and an ornate girdle. This was yet another popular form and its representations are known in India, Nepal, Tibet and China.

With the insertion of Tantric elements in Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara began to be depicted in supernatural forms with multiple arms and heads; one such form is of Amoghapāśā. This form is elaborated in *Amoghapāśakalparāja*, Mahayanistic tantra literature containing twenty-six chapters. In this form, the bodhisattva protects all sentient beings with his rope of compassion. The *sūtras* (scriptures) relating to Amoghapāśā have been translated by several Chinese monks between the 6th and 7th centuries CE including Hsüan Tsang (Barua & Basilio, 2009, pp. 4–5). "Recitation of his mantras results in twenty blessings in this world and eight for those near death (Barua & Basilio, 2009, p. 5)."



Figure 16: Lokeshvara, 9th Century CE, Grey Stone, Kurkihar, Gaya, Accession No. BM 2017.007.50, Bihar Museum. (Photo by author).

A six-armed Amoghapāśā Lokeśvara from Kurkihar, Bihar (9th century CE) is in the collection of the Bihar Museum (Figure 16). In this image, the deity is shown seated in *lalitāsana*

on a pedestal with lions and a double inverted lotus cushion placed over it. He has three eyes and wears a deer skin. In his upper right hand, he holds a rosary, the other two right hands display *varada* and *abhaya mudrās*. He holds a *paśā* (lasso), book and lotus in his three left hands. The *paśā* is the most distinguishing feature of this deity. His *jaṭāmukūṭa* is provided with the image of Amitābha. He is decked in ornaments, wears the sacred thread and has a crown of matted hair. The attendant deities are squeezed into the pedestal to adhere to iconographic injunctions.

Though Amoghpaśā is missing in the *Sādhanamālā*, many sculptural representations are available from the Pala period. Images of this form of the bodhisattva are also known from China, Tibet, Nepal, Japan, and countries in Southeast Asia, emphasizing the significance of the deity. This was because as pointed by Susan Huntington, "During this period, Buddhist monks and pilgrims from near and distant part of Asia, including China, Southeast Asia, Nepal, and Tibet, came to Bihar and Bengal to study Buddhism and ultimately to transmit to their homelands much of the religious, cultural, and artistic heritage of this region. Indeed, the art of the so-called Pala-Sena period is as notable for its influence abroad as it is for its role as a major art school in the Indic sphere" (Huntington, 1999, p. 387).

To sum up, the Pala period saw the emergence of many forms of Avalokiteśvara with varied iconographies. The concepts which were in nascent stages during the Mahāyāna period evolved into complex iconographic programmes. The *Sādhanamālā* was a very important text of the period; other texts were also available to provide guidance in icon making. Despite constant warfare and the ever-expanding and shrinking boundaries of the Pala empire, artistic production continued unhampered, as did artistic exchanges with Far East and Southeast Asia countries.

Notes

i. "(396) May I set free beings who are in great misery. May I be an eye to the blind in all the world. Having won the light may I dispel the gloom and darkness. May I lead across the beings who have not crossed."

"May I in my emancipated state set free the unfree. Having attained the calm, the noble supreme enlightenment, may I fare without a tremor through the whole world. Having awakened to the knowledge may I release those in misery."

(397) "Aware of this vow, for what was in his heart was known to him, the Conqueror smiled, and proclaimed "Thou wilt become a Buddha, a saviour of the world."

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