

MUCHALINDA: THE SERPENT KING IN BUDDHIST MYTHOLOGY

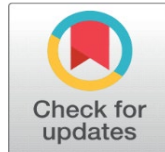
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ABSTRACT

Muchalinda, the serpent king, is a significant figure in Buddhist mythology, known for protecting Gautama Buddha from the evils after his enlightenment. This article explores the development of Muchalinda's character, his artistic representations, and the archaeological significance of the Muchalinda image discovered in Ganiapali, Odisha. The article highlights the importance of Muchalinda in Buddhist art and culture, and sheds light on the history and cultural heritage of Odisha.

Keywords: Muchalinda, Buddha, Nāga, Ganiapali

1. INTRODUCTION

Muchalinda, Mucalinda or Mucilinda a serpent king in Buddhist mythology, is revered for shielding Gautama Buddha from harsh weather conditions following his enlightenment [Agrawala \(1983\)](#). According to legend, six weeks into Buddha's meditation under the Bodhi Tree, a severe storm ensued, lasting seven days. Muchalinda, emerging from the earth, utilized his hood to safeguard the Buddha, exemplifying his role as a protector [Agrawala \(1983\)](#). Once the tempest subsided,

Muchalinda transformed into human form, paid homage to the Buddha, and happily returned to his abode.

2. DEVELOPMENT

Muchalinda's origins can be traced back to the Mucalinda Sutta, which narrates the serpent king's protection of Buddha from the elements. According to the sutta, Muchalinda encircled Buddha's body seven times with his coils and spread his hood above him [Cheesman \(2003\)](#). This iconic image has been depicted in various forms of art, including statues and carvings featuring seven-headed serpents, such as those found at the Ta Prohm temple in Cambodia [Dehejia \(1997\)](#). Following Buddha's meditation, Muchalinda transformed into a youthful form and paid homage to him [Directorate of Census Operations, Odisha. \(2011\)](#). The earliest known artwork featuring Muchalinda dates back to the 2nd century BC, found on a stupa in Pauni, Maharashtra [Fabri \(1961\)](#). Here, the naga is depicted with five heads, guarding Buddha's empty throne. Similarly, artwork from Sanchi portrays Muchalinda in a zoo-anthropomorphic form, accompanied by Nagini .

3. ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS

In Lao Buddhist art, a prevalent theme is Buddha meditating under Muchalinda's protection [Fabri \(1978\)](#). A notable example is the massive modern sculpture at Bunleua Sulilat's Sala Keoku sculpture park [Foucher \(1963\)](#). The depiction of Buddha with Muchalinda's hood may have been influenced by Jain art, particularly the representation of Parshvanatha with a cobra-like hood [Foucher \(1963\)](#).

4. MELCHHAMUNDA

Ganiapali, located near the confluence of the Ang and Magar rivers, has yielded significant Buddhist relics [Glover \(2009\)](#). This region, formerly part of the Melchhamunda assembly constituency in Bargarh district, is archaeologically rich [Goetz \(1959\)](#). Excavations have uncovered the ruins of an ancient stupa in Ganiapali, believed to be the site of ancient Muchalinda, a center of Buddhist learning [Jain & Fischer \(1978\)](#). Two Buddha images have been discovered here, with one featuring a hooded serpent, revered by locals as a deity [[Mishra \(2013\)](#),[Mohapatra \(2011\)](#)]. The Vinayapitaka text describes Muchalinda's protection of Buddha, and a similar image has been found in Ganiapali, worshipped by locals as Naga-Muni [[Odisha State Archaeology. \(2019\)](#)-[Panda \(2005\)](#)].

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Muchalinda image in Ganiapali was first identified by renowned art historian Charles Fabri in 1961 [Panda \(2008\)](#). Fabri noted the rarity of Muchalinda Buddha images in India [Post graduate Department of History, Sambalpur University. \(1978\)](#). He dated the image to the 5th-6th century AD [Panda \(2005\)](#). Ganiapali is one of the few sites in India featuring a Muchhalinda Buddha Vihar [Mishra \(2013\)](#). In 1978, the Postgraduate Department of History at Sambalpur University, Odisha, excavated the site, revealing a Gupta-period Muchalinda Buddha monastery [[Odisha State Archaeology. \(2019\)](#)-[Panda \(2005\)](#)]. The site spans approximately one and a half acres [Panda \(2008\)](#) The village name Melchhamunda may be a local pronunciation of Muchalinda [Post graduate Department of History, Sambalpur](#)

University. (1978). However, the exact date of abandonment remains uncertain due to limited information.

6. CONCLUSION

Muchalinda is a culturally and spiritually significant figure in Buddhism. Ongoing research and excavation efforts will uncover new insights into Melchhamunda's rich history.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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