



# Indian Museum, Kolkata

## Abstract

The enormous, in fact, rather unwieldy discoveries of small finds – terracotta, wood and ivory made into plaques, statuettes, toys and small utilitarian ornamental elements of furniture – found across the northern half of South Asia at sites and excavations variously dated between the Late- or Post-Mauryan (circa 200BC) and early Kusānā (circa 200 AD) period are inadequately understood by us. Why there are so many might be better answered if we knew what they were made for. Art historians have been equally baffled by who or what they depict. There are many different lines of interpretation that can be pursued from Brahmanical, Jain or Buddhist sources that may help interpret what their extensive (and consistent) iconography is concerned with. And the mere identification of a few Brahmanical deities in amongst them can tend to lean scholarship toward assuming that the imagery bespeaks evidence for a wider Hindu iconological worldview, the early emergence of theistic icons and quotidian worship of Hindu deities while the public monuments of the time at Bharhut, Amaravati, Sanchi, Mathura, or the many elaborately carved caves in Western India – are overwhelmingly Buddhist. There has not been adequate effort made to read these small objects from a Buddhist perspective despite the obvious Buddhist historical context for the period, and rich though it is with a variety of sources that illuminate it. In this paper the speaker analyse only some of these small-finds for the clues they present art historians to understand them from a perspective of early Buddhism. They lead us to question some of the most fundamental assumptions about the nature and development of Buddhist imagery in Early India by offering us new ways of thinking about what early Buddhists did with images as well as extending what we know of Buddhist narratives, deities and the regional variability of these.

## Prof. Naman P. Ahuja

Naman P. Ahuja is Professor at JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University), New Delhi and the co-editor of Marg Publications, Mumbai. He is a widely published authority on the history and aesthetics of Indian art and design. He has held curatorial charge of Indian sculpture at the British Museum apart from curating several exhibitions of both classical and modern Indian art in India and internationally. Previously, as Fellow at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, he authored a comprehensive catalogue of their ancient Indian collections and over successive Fellowships at the Getty Institute he has researched the art of Gandhara. He has been a Visiting Professor at the University of Zurich, the Kunsthistorisches Institute in Florence, the University of Alberta in Edmonton and at SOAS, his alma mater. Amongst his books, *The Making of the Modern Indian Artist-Craftsman: Devi Prasad* (Routledge, 2011), provided a case-study of the impact of the Arts and Crafts Movement on India, *Divine Presence: The Arts of India and the Himalayas* (Five continents editions, Milan, 2003, translated into Catalan and Spanish) is a succinct introduction to the forms and styles of Indian sculpture, and most recently, *The Body in Indian Art and Thought* (Ludion, Antwerp, 2013, also in French and Dutch) explores a variety of fundamental approaches to the aesthetics of anthropomorphic representation in India and what are the larger ideas that drive people to make images. He is currently involved in a number of projects. He is a mentor and co-editor of a volume on the Arts and interiors of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, which brings together leading world experts to study the transformations in the interior design of the President's House over the past 90 years. He is co-curating an exhibition on India and the World, which is a collaboration between the CSMVS (Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya) and the British Museum. And finally, he is invited this year to reconceptualise the permanent galleries of South Asia at the British Museum.



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Presents

# DO CHANDRAKETUGARH TERRACOTTAS REVEAL A VARIANT FORM OF BUDDHISM?

## Special Lecture

by

**Prof. Naman P. Ahuja**

Professor, Indian Art and Architecture  
Jawaharlal Nehru University



**Chairperson : Prof Gautam Sengupta**

Professor of Ancient Indian History Culture & Archaeology  
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