

Arm Jewelry depicted in the Panels of Gandhara Art: Classification, Comparison, Continuation in Modern Cultures

Dr. Kiran Shahid Siddiqui
Assistant Professor
Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations
Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Zahir Hussain
MPhil Scholar
Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations
Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Abstract

Gandhara Art is the Buddhist sculptural art which originated in Gandhara region in first century BCE and flourished in the region and beyond till sixth century CE. Known for its hybrid character, Gandhara art stands unique from the other ancient arts of South Asia. Naturalistic representation of characters, treatment of costumes in the most realistic style and a large variety of jewelry worn by the characters represented in the art makes it elegant. Male and females used to wear jewelry according to their statuses in the society in the ancient times. Gandhara art presents a lot of jewelry worn by various characters, both male and female. Arm jewelry including armlets, bangles, bracelets and finger-rings are prominent with a variety of interesting designs. The present paper focuses on the arm jewelry depicted in the Gandhara sculptural art. It aims to classify the variety of arm ornaments and also to find their parallels depicted in other ancient arts. It also attempts to trace the continuity of modern arm jewelry of the tribes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Afghanistan from the ancient trends prevalent in Gandhara region.

Introduction:

Among the most ancient and artistic creations, jewelry specifies human desire of ornamentation and also indicates that the skill of jewelers in the ancient world was often exceptionally advanced. In prehistoric times dead were often buried with their valuable possessions, mostly jewelry. In the ancient period, ornaments such as amulets were worn to ward off bad luck or for protection. However, it was used for entirely ornamental intention later on. Jewelry verified the influence and the social status of the individual wearing it. In classical Indian literature, jewelry portrayed and feelings of the characters communicating authority, affection, animosity, marriage and widowhood.

In South Asia, the implication of jewelry is far more than merely ornamental. It is a chief component of female outfit, indicative of her social status. Precious and semi-precious stones embedded in the ornaments reveal exceptional strength of the wearer. It is the most expensive and key part of the dowry.

A variety of materials, such as different metals, gems, ivory, bone, glass, shell, etc. were used in the making of various jewelry items since ancient times. Among them, gold enjoyed a special and considered valuable to make religious objects and sculptures and jewelry which displayed wealth and status.

Indians are known as the manufacturers of the most delicate and finest ornaments of jewelry since the earliest times which is verified by the ornaments



Plate 1: Dancing Girl Figurine, retrieved from <https://shorturl.at/hvPTY>

found from various sites of Indus Valley Civilization. The distinguished craftsmanship of the Indian workmen in the primitive times is confirmed by the discovery of an extensive range of jewelry made from beads of precious and semi-precious stones. The sculptures of male and female terracotta figurines were also bejeweled with earrings, bangles, bracelets and anklets indicating the extensive use of ornaments, both by males and females. The terracotta mother goddess figurines are adorned with plenty of jewelry such as girdles and necklaces.

There are insufficient references of jewelry and personal ornaments in ancient Indian literature.

Rig Veda mentions the jewelry worn by Rudra, a Vedic god, as “shining with brilliant gold ornaments” and bejeweled with “an adorable uniform necklace”. (Mukharji, 1888, p. 99) The skills of jewelry making in India were stated by Megasthenes and Arrian. Panini refers ‘*anguliya* (finger-rings), *karnika* (ear-rings), *lalatika* (ornament of the forehead), *graiveyaka* (torque around the neck) and *kumba* (a female ornament for hair decoration)’ as the jewelry items in his *Ashtadhyayi*. (Agrawala, 1953, p. 130)

In almost all the ancient sculptural arts of South Asia, females were mostly depicted semi-nude or nude just bedecked with jewelry from head to toe. ‘The bare minimum of clothing worn by most figures leaves a large area of the body to be decorated with ornaments ... highlighting the individual’s role in society.’ (Brijbhusan, 1979, p. 10).

The natives of Gandhara had a great fascination for jewelry attested from the representation of an extensive range of ornaments in Gandhara sculptures.

Items of jewelry discovered from Taxila show inspirations from the Greek and Roman models. Taxilan jewelry, including necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets, clasps, rings, hairpins and various items, signifies the mixture of Parthian, Greek and Roman influences which thrived in nearly all cultural aspect during the Kushan period. (Brijbhusan, 1979, p. 12).

Jewelry represented in Gandhara Sculptures not only confirm the Greek, Roman, Persian and Indian influences but also suggest prevailing fashions, likes and dislikes and the evolution of the adornments consumed by the ancient Gandhara citizens. Jewelry items were commonly worn by both male and female although a few were exclusively worn by females. The variety of jewelry unearthed from Taxila is inadequate which is equalized by the copiousness of jewelry presented in Gandhara sculpture. (Harmatta, Puri, & Etemadi, 1999).

Arm Jewelry

Arm jewelry was very common during the ancient times. Loads of arm ornaments were worn by the males and females all over South Asia which is confirmed by the paintings and sculptural arts of the specific region. “Dancing girl” (Plate 1) from Mohenjo-Daro, who wears a series of bangles and armlets nearly covering her left arm and fore arm, few armlets in her right arm too. The steatite King-Priest (Plate 2) is depicted wearing an armlet on his upper arm probably with an amulet. Armlets, bracelets



Plate 2: King Priest, retrieved from <http://shorturl.at/iKVZ0>

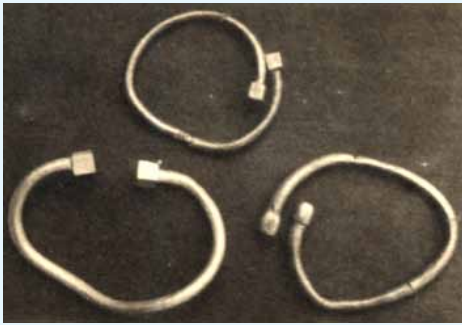


Plate 3: Gold Bangles made of heavy wire with protuberant ends from Sirkap, Taxila, (After Marshall, Reprint 2006, Pl. 195, no. 102, 103).

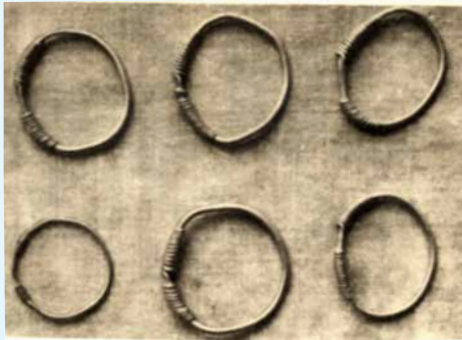


Plate 4: Gold Bangles with spirally twisted ends, from Sirkap, Taxila, (After Marshall, Reprint 2006, Pl. 195 no. 105-115).

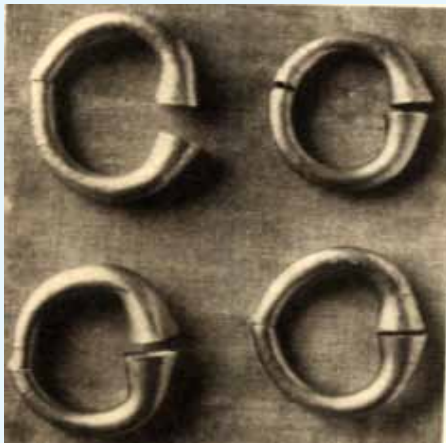


Plate 5: Hollow Bangles with expanded ends from Sirkap, Taxila, (Marshall, Reprint 2006, Pl. 195, no. 116-119).

and bangles made of metals, shells, stoneware, faience and terracotta are among the various ornaments found in abundance from Indus Valley Civilization. Finger-rings made of gold, silver, alabaster, marble and faience were also found. (Pruthi, 2004, pp. 62-63).

Arm jewelry found from Taxila and other centers of Gandhara include armlets, bracelets, bangles and finger-rings (Plates 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8) made of various materials. In Gandhara sculptures, the arm ornaments were usually worn by Bodhisattvas, Hariti, Panchika and males and females of royal status. The study of these sculptures reveals, that the more influential the person the more jewelry he wore. Arm jewelry comprise of armbands, bangles, wristlets or bracelets and finger rings.

1. Armbands or armlet (angadas)

An armband is a jewelry affixed on the upper arm by means of a chain or a beaded string. The armbands on the arms of Gandhara females are difficult to notice since they are hidden in the folds of the sleeves of their dress. Those which are noticeable are often plain circles devoid of any decoration. (Tissot, 1985). The arm bands of Bodhisattvas are mainly made of thin plates of circular, square or rectangular shapes or a combination of two shapes, decorated with stones and gems of different shapes. The stones and gems were used to create beautiful floral and geometric motifs. Armbands depicted in Gandhara sculptures can be classified as:

1.1: Plain unornamented armbands

This kind of armlets, devoid of any ornamentation, are very commonly depicted in Gandhara sculptures. It can be noticed as merely a projected ring on the upper arm of the person wearing it. Female deities from Taxila



Plate 6: Armlets with ends terminating in lion heads from Sirkap, Taxila. Photograph by the author.



Plate 7: Open work bracelet with square opening clasp from Sirkap Taxila. Photograph by the author.



Plate 8: Finger-ring from Sirkap, Taxila

Photograph by the author



*Plate 9 & 10: Female deities,
National Museum Pakistan,
Karachi. Photograph by the
author.*

displayed in National Museum Pakistan, Karachi are depicted wearing armbands, on both their upper arms, composed of two simple unornamented bands. (Plates 9 & 10). Similar armband is worn by Siddhartha in a relief "Siddhartha in Meditation" displayed in the Peshawar Museum. (Plate 11). Four-armed Hariti from Sahri Bahlol, displayed in Peshawar Museum, wears an armband which gives an impression of plain unornamented bangles worn on the upper arm. (Plate 12).

1.2: Beaded armband

A beaded armband can be noticed on the arm of Bodhisattva Siddhartha in a relief "the first meditation" from Sikri Stupa now in the Lahore Museum. His armband is composed of three bands the central one appears beaded while the outer ones are plain and unornamented. (Plate 13, figure 1). A royal female donor appears in a broad armlet on



*Plate 11: Life in the Palace (right), from
Peshawar Museum. Photograph by the
author.*

her left arm. Her armlet is composed of nine parallel bands or bangles. The outer flanking bangles or bands on both sides appear beaded while the rest are plain. (Plate 14, figure 2).



*Plate 12: Four armed Hariti
from Peshawar Museum.
Photograph by the author*

Beaded armbands were in fashion in South Asia even before they were depicted in Gandhara. Their depiction in Bharhut, Amaravati, Nagrjunakonda and Mathura confirms its popularity. Sudarśana Yakshi depicted on Bharhut Pillar relief is wearing a similar beaded armband. (Plate 15). A Yakshi from Mathura in LSM, Lucknow, India, is depicted in armbands resembling those worn by Bodhisattva Siddhartha. (Plate 16).



Plate 13: Panel showing "The First Meditation",
(After Lyons & Ingholt, Pl. 36, 1957)



Figure: 1



Figure: 2

Plate 14: Female Royal Donor from
Peshawar
Museum. Photograph by the author.



Plate 15: Sudarśana Yakshi,
Bharhut Pillar relief, (After
Zimmer, 1983, Pl. 33 c).



Plate 16: Yakshi from Mathura, now in
LSM, Lucknow, India, retrieved from
<http://shorturl.at/vBS26>

1.3: Circular bejeweled armband

Bodhisattvas were mostly depicted in elaborate armbands of various shapes and sizes. Circular bejeweled armbands are comparatively simpler than those worn by Bodhisattvas. This type of armband is usually worn by Panchika displayed in the Peshawar Museum. Interestingly, his armband is decorated with a pattern which matches his

torque. It appears to be an imitation of an armlet inlaid with precious and semi-precious stones. This armband constitutes of a circular gold plate fastened by a beaded band. (Plate 17, figure 3). Similar circular armband can be noticed on the image of a standing Maitreya now in Lahore Museum. His armband is embedded with the same floral motif which is present in the center of his torque. It is secure with the help of three beaded or pearl strings attached with each other. (Plate 18, figure 4).



Figure: 3



Figure: 4

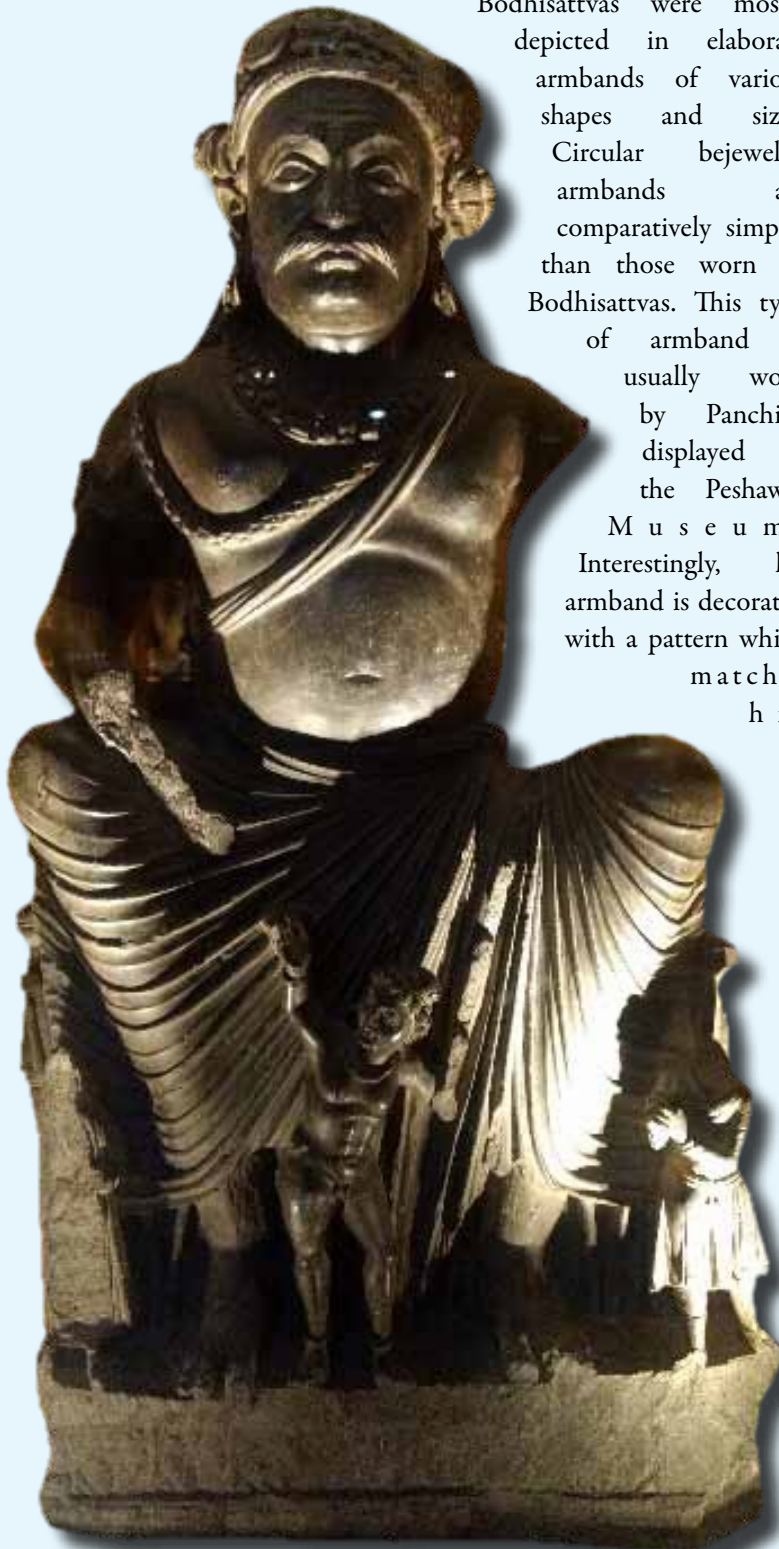


Plate 17: Panchika from Peshawar Museum.
Photograph by the author.



Plate 18: Standing Bodhisattava, retrieved from
<http://shorturl.at/ijoOS>

1.4: Four-sided Armband with a circular crest

A simpler of this kind is worn by a standing Bodhisattva from Sahri Bahlol, now in the Peshawar Museum. The arm band is decorated with a floral motif encircled in the center which is surrounded by geometrical patterns. (Plate 19, figure 5). A standing bodhisattva now in the Lahore Museum is depicted in an armband which resembles the preceding one. (Plate 20, figure 6). This type of armbands with slight variation in designs can be noticed on a large number of bodhisattva images.



Figure: 5



Figure: 6



Figure: 7

1.5: Two-piece armband with jeweled floral pattern

Few armbands appear delicate and more elaborate such as that which is worn by a seated bodhisattva in *dhyanamudra* from Sahri Bahlol, now in the Peshawar Museum. It appears to be made from two pieces a four-sided piece with upper circular one. Floral patterns are created by the arrangement of jewels. The ornament is outlined by beads. (Plate 21, figure 7). The armband on bodhisattva images are



Plate 19: Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya, from Peshawar Museum. Photograph by the author.



Plate 20: Standing Bodhisattva, from Lahore Museum Retrieved from <http://shorturl.at/jQRV4>



Plate 21: Seated Bodhisattva in *dhyanamudra*, from Peshawar Museum. Photograph by the author.

usually visible on the right arms as the left one is covered with *uttariya*. In some cases, the arm bands worn on the left arm can hardly be noticed due to the representation of fine fabric worn by the image. Numerous bodhisattva images are depicted wearing similar armbands with slight modification in designs. Armbands appear in other South Asian arts too. In Bharhut they are simple and less ornamented while those in Mathura are comparatively elaborate but not as ornamented as found on the images of Bodhisattvas. A devata from Bhutesar, Mathura appear in an armband which is thinner from the sides and protruded from the center. (Plate 22). A male *chauri* bearer from Mathura wears relatively decorated armband on his left arm. (Plate 23). Armbands depicted in Ajanta Cave paintings are opulent and highly bejeweled with gems, pearls and chains worn by males and females both.

Armlets or armbands were worn by the males and females since the earliest times all over the world. Their use in Bronze Age is confirmed by the discovery of bronze armlets from Bohemia and Moravia. (Plate 24).

Armlets are worn by the females all over the world in modern times as well. In South Asia this arm jewelry is popular among the females. Known by the name of *baju-band* are often worn by the females of India. They go well with sari and *ghagra-choli*. Rigid armbands as well as those fastened with *dori* or chain are in fashion.

2: Bangles

Bangles are known as *valayas* in ancient Indian literature. Bangles are inflexible and mostly circular in shape. They occupy an important place in the jewelry of South Asian females. It is indicative of their married status and hence considered as sacred. The fashion of wearing bangles is very old. Bangles made of shells, terracotta and various metals have been discovered from excavations all over South Asia.



Plate 22: Devata carrying a bird cage, Bhutesar, Mathura, (After Lee, 1964, Pl. 61 C)



Plate 23: Male figure, from Government Museum Mathura. Retrieved from Pl. 61 C) <http://shorturl.at/bmsN3>



Plate 24: Bronze armlet (1200-900 B.C.E.), from Slovak National Museum, Martin, (after Laver, 1964, p. 16, Pl. 4).

Bangles occupy an important position among the various jewelry finds of Taxila. Gold and silver bangles of varied shapes and sizes among which are: solid bangles made of heavy wire with open round protuberant ends (Plate 3), solid bangles with spirally twisted ends (Plate 4) and hollow bangles of thin metal with expanded ends (Plate 5). Copper and bronze bangles dated back to 3rd century B.C.E. to 5th century C.E. have been found mostly in shape of a plain circle made of wire with usually open ends, circle made by twisted wire and thin and flat with projected edges. A large number of glass and shell bangles are also unearthed. Few bangles made of bone or ivory are found from Bhirmound and Sirkap, Taxila.

In Gandhara reliefs, females are depicted wearing numerous bangles on their arms. Two female figures in the panel depicting "Buddha and the female worshippers" are wearing simple round bangles in their arms. (Plate 25). Likewise, majority of females in Gandhara sculptures are depicted wearing bangles without any design or ornamentation.

In the early arts of South Asia, female figures were rarely depicted without bangles. They are depicted in the arts of Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Mathura abundantly.

Bangles are considered as an essential jewelry item of the females of South Asia. Those made of precious and ordinary metals;

clay, plastic and glass are in fashion. Bangles with stone inlay work are mostly preferred. Matching glass bangles are popular among girls without them the Muslim festival of *Eid*, all over India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered incomplete. Gold bangles are usually worn by the married females indicating their marital status.



Plate 25: "Buddha with Female Worshippers" from Taxila Museum. Photograph by the Author.

3: Bracelet

Bracelets or *rucaka* are worn on the wrists both by males and females. They are worn all over the world in various materials and designs. The openwork bracelets with square opening clasp decorated with jewels dated back to 1st century C.E are remarkable as compared to the other jewelry discovered from Taxila. Made with a pair of gold sheet with hinged clasps, patterned with a repeat "S" design. The clasp is supplemented with an oval medallion in the center for a precious stone. (Plate 7). They are in various shapes and designs. They appear to be an imitation of Greek models.

In Gandhara sculptures, bracelets of varied sizes and designs are depicted to adorn the images of males and females. A female royal donor is depicted wearing a bracelet with elaborate lotus design. (Plate 14, figure 2). Bodhisattvas also appear with two or three or four bracelets worn in one or both wrists. The bracelets are sometimes

beaded or embossed with geometrical or floral patterns. Standing Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, from Sahri Bahlol, displayed in Peshawar Museum, is depicted wearing beaded bracelets in his left wrist.

(Plate 26). A seated bodhisattva from Sahri Bahlol, displayed in the Peshawar Museum wears highly decorative bracelets in both wrists. His bracelets appear to be a set of three, out of which the middle one is broader than the flanking two. The broader middle bracelet is decorated with floral and leafy designs while the flanking thinner bracelets give the appearance of diamond cut design. (Plate 21, figure 8). Diamond cut designs in jewelry are all time favorite and used all over the world.

Plate 26: Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, from Peshawar Museum. Photograph by the author.



Figure: 8

Hariti from Yusufzai displayed in the British Museum, London is depicted wearing a jeweled and pearl bracelet. (Plate 27, figure 9). The ornament is exceedingly decorated and compels the observer to acknowledge the skill of artist. The four-armed Hariti from Sahri Bahlol appears wearing two bracelets in each of her four wrists. One of the two is plain and the other is decorated with diamond cut. Besides bracelets numerous bangles can also be noticed in each of her four hands. (Plate 12, figure 10).



Plate 27: Hariti from British Museum.
(After Zwalf, 1996, Pl. 3).

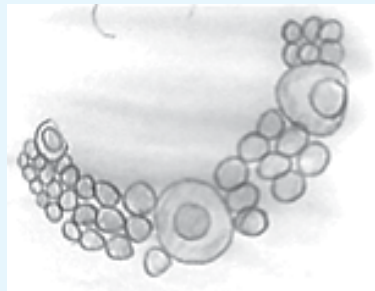


Figure: 9



Figure: 10

Male and female images wearing variety of bracelets were depicted in all the ancient arts of South Asia. Bracelets and bangles constitute essential items of jewelry without which the ornamentation was considered incomplete.

4: Finger Rings/ Vetika/ Angulimudra

Rings were worn since the earliest times by males and females in all the past cultures. In the earliest times, besides its ornamental function, ring was also used as signet to create impression over clay or wax. Ring was sometimes used with a purpose of carrying poison. Despite of the abundance of its reference in

ancient literature, its depiction is rather infrequent in the sculptures. They are unnoticeable due to their minuteness in already miniaturized scenes in the reliefs. If depicted, they appear to be simple tube without any ornamentation. (Ayyar, 1987).

The earliest evidence of ring in South Asia can be traced back to the Indus Valley Period. Rings of gold and carnelian have been found among the numerous jewelries finds from the sites of Indus Valley Civilization. A large number of rings have been discovered from Sirkap, Taxila. These rings are of gold, silver, bronze and ivory which are classified in to six types: plain wire rings with coiled ends, ornamental hoops without bezels, hoops with plain flat or raised bezels of the same metal, rings with engraved bezels, rings with plain or engraved stones or paste inset in bezels, rings with inscriptions. (Marshall, 2006). The rings found from Taxila are influenced by the Greek and Roman in designs and techniques. (Marshall, 2006).

Taxilan finger-rings are either of solid gold with oval bezel or are hoop shaped with almond shaped projections. A bronze ring with engraved lion and Kharosthi inscription, found from Sirkap, Taxila, probably served as a seal. (Plate 28). A solid gold ring with beaded pattern and fixed gold ornamentation is remarkable. (Plate 29).



Plate 28: Ring with
lion and Kharosthi
engraved, from Sirkap,
Taxila. Photograph by
the author.



Plate 29: Gold Ring,
from Sirkap, Taxila.
Photograph by the
author.

In Gandhara art it is hard to observe the presence of ring in the reliefs due to compressed details. However, in the individual sculpture's rings are very rarely noticeable. A seated Bodhisattva Maitreya from Sahri Bahlol, now in the Peshawar Museum appears wearing a ring in his right hand. (Plate 30, figure 11). A royal female donor from Sahri Bahlol, now in the Peshawar Museum is depicted wearing a coiled ring in thumb while a hoop with a flat bezel in the index ring of her left hand. (Plate 14, figure 2). Rings can be noticed on the fingers of images from other Indian arts too. Kubera Yaksha from Bharhut Stupa pillar relief is wearing a ring in his little finger of right hand. (Plate 31). Devata carrying a bird cage

from Bhutesar, Mathura is depicted with a ring in her little finger of left hand. (Plate 22).

A modern armlet (Plate 32), inlaid with colorful stones, worn in the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa closely resembles to those worn by Bodhisattvas in Gandhara Sculptures. This armlet can also serve as a long necklace and can be worn with a chain or string. Another armlet (Pl. 33), which consists of a square plate engraved with floral designs attached with an inflexible band also reminds us of the armbands of Bodhisattvas. Similarly, modern armlets from various ethnic groups of Afghanistan (Plate 36 & 37) resemble those worn by characters of Gandhara art.



Plate 30: Seated Bodhisattva, from Peshawar Museum. Photograph by the author.



Figure: 11



Plate 31: Kubera Yaksha, from Bharhut Stupa pillar relief. (After Zimmer, 1968, Pl. 34 a).



Plate 32: Modern Armlets from the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Photograph by author.



Plate 33: Modern Armlets from the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, photograph by author.



Plate 36: Modern armlets from Afghanistan, displayed in National Museum Afghanistan, Kabul. Photograph by the author.



Plate 34: Modern bracelets from the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Photograph by the author.



Plate 37: Modern Armlet from Afghanistan, displayed in National Museum Afghanistan, Kabul. Photograph by the author.



Plate 35: Modern Bracelets from Afghanistan, displayed in National Museum Afghanistan, Kabul. Photograph by the author.