

Chapter – II

Exotic Brahmonical Images :

A Composite

Composite is that form which is composed or recimilated with two or more distinct orders of philosophy and religion. In the plastic art we find the visual representation of the results of the exercised made in philosophy and religion. In the religions of medieval one may trace a phase of good relation and understanding and otherside hostility between sects or the order. The composite form can be found in the various groups of the same religion. For example Saiva and Sakta or Vaisnava and Soura to site only a few. Besides this composition or assimilation different religions or sects – Iconoc form emerged. As for instance between Brahmonical, Buddhist etc. Otherside composite images of deities showing supremacy of one cult over the other.

Composite forms in Brahmonical Order :

The five cult play an important part in the area of composite forms. They are Ganapatya, Soura, Ganapati, Sourya, Vaisnava, Saivism and Saktism¹ Composite forms of Brahmonical.

The vedic solar deity Surya is involved in every morning and evening through muttooming of the Gayatri hymn countless images of Surya have been discovered from different parts of Bengal. Large-scale extent of them is evident of their wide popularity among the volaries of Bengal.² In early medieval time Surya representing some syncretic forms. Such composite form of Surya and Bhairava (Siva) now preserved in the Rajshahi (Varendra) Museum : On the ground of these literacy data Kshitish Ch. Chatterjee inclined to identify these sculptures to be a syncretic form

Surya and Bhairava (Siva) giving it the name 'Marttundabhairava'³ Assimilation of some features belonging to Hindu cult gods Surya-Narayana type that acquired great circulation in medieval time. Fusion of these two gods seems not to be un-common on the fact that two divinities had originally the same common source of Vedic Vishnu. An inscribed of Surya-Narayana from Bihar is now collection of Indian Museum, Calcutta⁴ The composite image of the Surya-Vinayaka found in the Nepalamahatmya.⁵ Perhaps, the image was worshipped by some Nepalese votary of the god residing at Sonarang at that time.

In Sena period composite form of Hari-Hara emerged out and was popularised among the votaries of both Siva and Vishnu. The spirit of compromise was the central idea prevailing at the background of the Vaishnavism. In the family of Sena three distinct cults viz. Siva, Vishnu and Surya were followed by three generations. There is an episode in the Vamana-Purana which narrates the background story of this particular motif, Vishnu is said to have assumed the syncretic form Hari-Hara, viz half Vishnu, half Siva, to convince certain Rishi the ideology behind the religious fervor that the god is one but takes many form of fulfil certain end. So there is no distinction between Siva and Vishnu. The commemoration of a Pradyumnesvara temple along with the installation of a Hari Hara image in the main sanction came to be known from Deopara-Prasasti of Vijay Sena. The record has been recovered from the Deopara. This temple seems to be analogous with that erected by the Sena king. But unfortunately the image is missing. In the field of Hindu Iconography there is one more composite form, it is harmony between Vaisnavites and Saivites.

In Saivism to denote the cult of Siva. In early and medieval literature Siva is known as the god of gods. Pala-Sena period witnessed the same trend of Siva worship with much popularity of the phallic form of Siva.⁷ Following are the aspect of Siva represented in his composite image viz Ardhanarisvara, Hari-Hara, Marttandra-Bhairava.

Ardhanarisvara a composite form of Siva. The name Ardhanarisvara is a compound of three words – Ardha, Nari and Isvara meaning Isvara (that is Siva) with the Nari (i.e. Parvati) as his ardha (i.e. half). A form where the same body is shared by Siva and Parvati each of whom represent one half of the complete image. The Ardhanarisvara⁸ murti of Siva symbolize the syncretic as it apparently emphasizes the union of the principal cult deities or Saivism and Saktism. It is this ideological union of Siva and Saktism. It is this ideological union of Siva and Sakti which has been described⁹ by many early and late texts. The image of Ardhanarisvara¹⁰ coming from Purapara situated five miles off in Ramapala (now preserved in Varendra Museum in Bangladesh)¹¹

Sturdy vitality to the growth of Buddhism in Bengal was given by royal support of the staunch Buddhist dynasties like the Pala¹² who should be in the foremost place. The spirit of tolerance among the different sectaries gave then strength to stand side by side in reciprocal love and devotion to each other. Moreover, to put on and to the doctrinal controversies among the Hindu sects and heterodox churches, innovation for compromise was made and it is clear in the growing popularity of the composite images of Vishnu-Lokesvara Siva-Lokesvara, Bodhisattava-Manjusri and so on.¹³ We would like to discuss this still further in the next chapter. The spirit of Catholicity followed by the family of the Pala kings does not seem to have been retained out of deep respect for other religions only. In case of the Hindu rulers, the same spirit of tolerance was observed with regard to other religions. In spite of this the Sena period was marked by the current of overwhelming enthusiasm for the upliftment of the orthodox faith, which swept across the dwindled from Buddhism.¹⁴ Thus reciprocal blending of Buddhist and Vaisnava concepts was a remarkable phenomenon in the history of the Pala Bengal, Many Vishnu Lokesvara images from the region are valuable testimonies. Like the composite Lokesvara images from Ghiyasabad Sonarong (now in Bangladesh) another discovery of some Vishnu images comprising striking similarity with the said forms of the images reveals the tune of harmony in the religious growth

of early medieval Bengal. The famous Siva-Lokesvara image of the 10th Century from Kesarapur (now in Bangladesh, Barisal district). An another example from Rajshahi Museum a specimen of syncretic form of Vishnu showing some characteristics of Bodhisattva-Manjusri are worth noticing.¹⁵

Syncretism as found in some composite images of medieval period, is very suggestive in explaining a carving for the ideological compromise among the rival philosophy of different sects. The device became well definite in the iconography of the composite images of early medieval Bengal. An early mention has been made of the Hari Hara aspect that was innovated to end the long standing dispute between the Saiva and Vaishnava doctrines. The composite Lokesvara images of the early medieval time convey a purpose full requirement of a time when the period stopped at the road transition in the Buddhist world.

Attention may be drawn to one exotic image of the four-handed Vasudeva Vishnu engraved on a slab (13cm X 7.5cm) made of black basalt. The image, discovered from Gangarampur, is now preserved in Akshya Kumar Maitreya Museum of North Bengal University.¹⁶

In the 4th Century A.D. with the establishment of the Guptas who were devout Vaishnava, the Bhagavata cult¹⁷ went a long way in extending its influences in the different parts of India including the territories of undivided Bengal¹⁸ The popularity of the cult of Vishnu may be demonstrated by the discovery of numerous Vishnu images from all over Bengal. After the Gupta, the Varmans and the Senas are known to have become staunch followers of Vishnu. It is possible that the earlier Vishnu images were two handed images of Vishnu date back us to as early as the Kusana period.¹⁹ The upper hands of the present image arising from the main arms below the shoulders are raised upto the head of the figure as we generally come across in the Vishnu images of Kusana period. The modelling of the figure is roundish and it has a few ornaments. The high foliated mukuta and the drapery (consisting of a tight-fitted dhoti and the waist girdle) remained us of the early Yaksa images. The Mukuta is

interesting as it contains a leaf of peepal (Asvattha) tree in the centre. In the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter X) the god describes himself as the Asvattha i.e. peepal (Ficus religiosa) among the trees (cf...asvattah : Sarvavrksanan.).

The deity holds the mace (gada) and the disc (Cakra) in the upper right and left hands respectively. The lower raised right hand is in abhaya-mudra, and the lower left hand holding the conch is akimbo. The Vanamala is present. Though these are common to the early images of Vishnu, some of these features like the high foliated mukuta, the folds of the dhoti and a scarf tied round the waist as a girdle, the right hand in abhaya-mudra and the left arm akimbo and the representation of the conch shaped like a nectar flask have close resemblance to those of early Bodhisattva images. Among the sculptures showing²⁰

Among the sculptures showing some Kusana affinities mention may be made of the Vishnu image from Hankrail which is now preserved in the Rajshahi Museum (Bangladesh). These types of images though not made of Mathura red-sandstone, are the work of local artists who were distantly touched by the Mathura tradition.

The standing images of Vishnu ordinarily met within Bengal (belonging to the Eastern School of Art) stands, flanked by his two consorts, Sarasvati and Sri. But in the present sculpture Vishnu is flanked on his right by a female figure, bent to the left, holding in her right hand an indistinct object, while the left hand rests on her hip. This may be taken to be the representation of Sri. On the left is the image of Ganapati seated in astride posture and the folds of the dhoti are visible. The trunk of Ganapati turned to the left while ekavisana (one tooth) to right.²¹ Enamul Haque has drawn our attention to a number of deities including Ganapati to the either side of the images of Vishnu found in different parts of Bengal.²²

Ganesa in the present sculpture like those of the earliest Ganesa images, is endowed with two hands, although the objects holding by the hands are indistinct. The later texts like Amsubhedagama, Uttarakamikagama, Suprabhedagama, Visnudharmottara etc. endow Ganapati with four hands and also mention among other

things his consorts including Sri (Laksmi). Among the early sculptures one relief found from the Bhumara Siva Temple (6th Century A.D.) showing Ganesa with his consort.

It may, however, be mentioned here that the Goddess Sri or Laksmi is associated with the horn of plenty. Ganapati, the destroyer of obstacles (Vighna-Vinasana), fulfils the desires of his devotees and he is also associated with the horn as evidenced by both sculptural and textual evidences. Vishnu is the manifestation of all such qualities like Siddhi and Riddhi for which stand Ganapati and Laksmi respectively. Hence, the as pointed out by P.K.Bhattacharyya, the association of Vishnu and Ganapati and Laksmi may be considered as appropriate and natural.

The concepts of Siddhi and Riddhi which are most popular among the Indian business community of the present time, can thus be traced from as early as the time of the present image, if not from still an earlier period. In fact, the efficacy of worshipping Ganapati for success in business was well understood even in the ninth century A.D. and the Chatiyala Pillar inscription of V.S. 918 (861 A.D.) from Jodhpur (Rajasthan) which was issued Kakkuka for the success of the business enterprise of the local traders through the Ganapati, bears eloquent testimony to the fact.

Reference and Notes

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8. S.P. Tewari Hindu Iconography,
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10. Tewari, S.P. Op.cit., p. 210.
11. R.C. Majumder Bangladeser Itihas (in Bengali)
Calcutta, 1373 (B.S.), p. 148.
12. Chatterjee, R. Op.cit., p. 161.
13. Tewari, S.P. Op.cit., p. 68.
14. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya The Indian Buddhist Iconography,
Calcutta, 1968, pp. 82-100.

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15. Chatterjee, R. Op.cit., p. 370-377.
16. The Image was collected and presented to the Museum by Nirmal Chandra Chowdhury, Jalpaiguri.
17. The Mahabharata and Puranas usually identify Vasudeva-Krishna of the Salva clan as the founder of the religion characterised by bhakti and called Bhagavata and Salva or Vaishnava (Bhag. IX, 9.50 Maha. XII 34).
18. Majumder, R.C. Op.cit, p. 38.
19. Banerjee, J.N. Op.cit., p. 385
20. Enamul Hawk Journal of Bengal Art, Vol. 1, 1997, pp. 141-148.
21. P.K. Bhattacharyya Iconography of Sculptures, North Bengal University, 1983, p. 18.
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B. Ugra Murtis

The image of our discussion has been found at Falakata-Salbari, a few miles away from the Falakata town in the Coch Behar district (West Bengal)¹ This is a composite image of dancing Vishnu of Ganapati who is also represented in the dancing posture.

The image is made of black stone and the slab on which the principal deities stand is about 2 ½ ft. in height and 1 ½ ft in breath. The upper position of the slab is missing and the lower pedestal over which other divinities stood is also broken. The image of Vishnu is mutilate practically beyond recognition and its presence is only understood from the vanamala along with other ornamentations visible in the lower portion of the image, which, however, remains intact, while the portion of the upper right hand holding Sankha is also noticed, Vishnu is seen dancing which his left foot on the head of Ganapati.

The image of the Lakshmi² standing on the right side of Vishnu shown attached to the main slabs the lower pedestal is broken. In one arms she hold the club (Kaumodaki, the image club peruliar to Vishnu) and in the other an indistinct object.

Ganapati has also been dancing with viz. on a double-petaled lotus. In seated and standing types, Ganapati is generally represented as four-handed, but in the dancing one he is usually endowed with main hands³ In the present case, however, the god is four handed (one of the hand is broken); the front left hand is in the danda or Gajahasta pose, the other two carrying an axe and possible a rosary (aksasutra) accompanied by two dancing figures playing an musical instruments. A snake is possible serving as the sacred thred (Vyalayatriopaviti) of the deity. In Bengal the

Nitya-Ganapati is generally associated with a hanging bunch of mangoes in the top center of the Prabhavati, since Ganesa is known as best owner of success (Siddhidata) and the fruits are symbolical of the fruit or success in any enterprise. This fruit motif is however, absent in the present case. On the right side of the triratha pedestal of the principal deities the figure of Garuda seated with the hands in Kritanjali posture and just on its left that of Musika (i.e. mouse), the carriers of Vishnu and Ganapati respectively have been depicted. On the broken pedestal there is an inscription, though hardly legible, may be restored as ... cadhya, and it may stand for the name of the donor.

The rivalry and jealousy among the respective followers of the various cults were prevalent from ancient times.⁴ Sometimes, these sectarian hostilities found vent through the milder channel of fabrication of mythological stories and creation of interesting images by way of illustration. But the usual way of giving expression to sectarian ill-will is discernible in many other images. There are many such Brahmonical images which put emphasis on the superiority of one sect over the other. Some Vajrayana Buddhist icons of the mediaval period are blatant example of morbid sectarianism.

The present unique combination of images, which may conveniently be described as Ganapati-Vahanodbhava-Visnu is also an instance of the sectarian rancour and unmitigated hostility of the period with which it is concerned. The sculpture faithfully carries out the order of the ranking of sectarian Vaisnava-myth-maker. It may be noticed that though the influence of Ganapatya in Bengal was meagre⁵ quite a large number of Ganapati image have been found from the different parts of Bengal including the one found at Rampal (near Dhaka) and identified as Heramnba-Ganapati by Bhattasali.⁶ The popularity of the Ganapati cult in North Bengal can be understood from the discovery of a number of Ganapathi images of both metal and stone from the ruins of Bengal and Jalpaiguri.⁷ Against this backdrop the production of the present images assumes some significance. Here we find a deliberate

attempt to belittle the importance of the cult of Ganapati, and to establish the superiority of the cult of Vishnu.

It may be noted in this connection that a syncretistic attitude in religion – ‘a spirit of toleration and mutual give and take was developed and Sankaracharya is said to have initiated the Pancayatana Puja (i.e. worship of five gods – Visnu, Siva, Sakti, Surya, Ganesa, the principal deity of worshiper being placed in the middle and the other four corners of a square.’⁸ The five Gods respectively represent five distinct sects, viz. Vaisnava, Saiva, Sakta, Saura and Ganapatya. This idea went a long way toward the solution of the vexed problem of harmonising monotheism with polytheism and allaying sectarian rancour and communal ill feeling.⁹

Lastly, the present sculpture is a typical example of the eastern School of Art of the 12th Century A.D. This can be said not only on the basis of the paleographical evidence, but also on account of the absence of sensitive news of the facile expression of the extent image, i.e. Lakshmi and Ganesa and replacing the same by ‘serious naviness’. The modelling and volume of these images have also cost it plastic significance which may be noticed even in the six-armed dancing Ganapati of the 11th Century A.D. found from connected with the figures especially in the case of Lakshmi images. In comparing the present dancing Ganesa figure with that of the six armed Ganesa found in Mayurbhanj (Orissa) of an earlier date, it appears that the artist in the latter case is eminently successful in emphasising the whirling motion by the pose of the two legs, the three or more bends in the body and the disposition of the number of arms. Thus to put in the words of an art critic sensuousness and grace were properties of earlier period of Bengali art as well, but it was left to the Senas to allow and encourage them to degenerate into mere worldly lavishness.¹⁰

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(II) Ugra-Murtis

Sarabha-murti

Vaishnavism and Saivism were the two prominent sects of Brahmanism and the deities of both the sects were venerated by the followers of each other. But there are examples from which the rivalry of both the sects become evident. The Sarbhesa-murti or the Sarabha-murti form of Siva is one of such instance, in which Siva has been depicted in conflict with Vishnu in the form of Narasimha.

The story of Vishnu's incarnation as Narasimha to kill Hiranyakasipu is too well known to be repeated here. But the story of Siva having incarnated himself as Saraba for the chastisement of Narasimha is comparatively less known. Hiranyakasipu, the ardent devotee of Siva, was killed by Vishnu in his hybrid form, on account of his bitter denunciation and cruel persecution of his own son, who was an exclusive worshipper of Vishnu. This theme was illustrated in a peculiar image of Sarabha, since none other than Siva himself in the composite form of a man, bird and the beast, could accomplish the killing of Narasimha with his claws. In the image of Sarabhamurti. Narasimha, an incarnation of Vishnu, is shown underneath Siva in composite form. An image of Sarabhamurti of Siva from Darasuram has been illustrated by Banerjee.¹¹ Gopinath Rao has also illustrated a similar bronze image¹² preserved in Siva temple at Tribhuvanam in Tanjore district. In this piece of sculpture Saraba is represented as having three legs, the body and face of a lion, a tail and four human arms, the right upper hand holds a Parasu, the lower right one a pasa, the upper left one a mriga and the lower left one agni. With the front legs, Sarbha has pinpointed Narasimha, who is struggling against his adversary with eight arms. According to Kamikagama the body of two wings, which should be uplifted. The figure should have two red eyes, four legs resembling those of the lion, resting upon the ground and four others with sharp claws

lifted upwards and an animal tail. The body above the lion should be that of a human being but having the face of a lion, which should be wearing a Kirta-mukuta over his head. There should also be side tusks and with a terrific appearance on the whole, Sarabha is to be shown as carrying Narasimha with two of his legs. The figure of Narasimha should be in ordinary human form with the hands held in Anjali pose.

(2) Siva as Destroyer of Matsuavatara

The rivalry between Saiva and Vaishnava cult is projected in an interesting bas-relief in the gopuram pillar of Ekamaresvanatha temple at Kanchi. In this case, Siva in the form of a mythological bird, is shown as swallowing the Matsuavatara¹³ of Vishnu with a human bust and the lower part of a fish. The bird has four arms and two legs and part of his body is human and the other part is that of a bird. The bust, except the neck is human with four hands. The right hand carries an ankusa and an indistinct object, while one of the left hands hold a gazelle (antelope), and the other projects vara-mudra. The legs resemble those of a bird. The neck and head are also of a bird and in its beak the Matsuavatara of Vishnu, is held in the act of swallowing. The Matsuavatara on the other hand has his upper half as human and the lower half as that of a fish, holding a club in his right hand. The fish part of the god is slightly curved projecting the pressure of the bird's beak. The Matsuavatara wears a kirta-mukuta. A human devotee with hands folded against the chest stands to the left. This indeed is a unique image and such depictions are rarely to be found not only in the north, but also in the south.

(3) Brahmasiraschhedana-murti

The foregoing account amply projects the conflict between the Saivism and Vaishnavism, establishing the superiority of Siva in both the legends. Such type of conflicts were not at all restricted to the Vaishnavism alone, but there are instances

when Siva came in conflict with otherwise non-warrior class of the deities like Brahma, who in art as well as literature is represented usually as a grey bearded god. A detailed account of the legend relating to the severing of the fifth head of Brahma by Siva is found in Varaha Purana. Brahma created Rudra and addressing him as a Kapali asked him to protect the universe. The use of the word Kapali for him enraged Siva, who cut off the fifth head of Brahma with his left thumb nail. But his head stuck to Siva's hand and would not fall. Rudra was absolved of Brahmahatya sin ultimately by bathing in the Ganga at Kashi. Kurna Purana narrates the same legend in a somewhat different way. According to this legend once Rishis asked Brahma as to who was the originator of the universe. Brahma arrogated it to himself. Just then Siva appeared on the scene and claimed to be the originator of the universe. This ensued into a dispute between Brahma and Siva. Even though Vedas came to declare that Siva was the greatest of all the gods, Brahma would not accept their verdict. Then appeared in space a huge illumination in which the figure of Siva was discernible. Siva then ordered Bhairava to cut off the fifth head of Brahma, which spoke to him with haughtiness and disrespect. By power of yoga, Brahma escaped death and he also came to realise the superiority of Siva at the cost of one of his heads.

According to Srittattva-nidhi the figure of Siva in Brahmasiraschhedana-murti should be of white complexion. With three eyes, four arms and a jatamukuta on the head and patra-kundala in the right ear and makara-kundala in the left one. In the right hands should be vajra and Parasu, while in the left, there should be skull of Brahma besides a trident. It should be draped in a garment made of tiger's skin.¹⁴

(4) **Kalarimurti**

Whatever may be religious significance of the subjugation of Narasimha, Matsyavatara, or of the severing of the head of Brahma by Siva, the essential feature that emerges out of these legends is the continued conflict between Saivism and Vaishnavism, for long, in which the superiority of Siva was ultimately established.

There are references in which Siva comes also in conflict with the Yama – the god of death and is known as Kalarimurti. His exploit in this form describe the defeat of Yama at his hands of Siva establishing his superiority over Yama as well. According to the texts the sage Mrikundu was for long without a son. He prayed to god to be blessed with sons. God appeared before him and asked him if he would like to have a large number of useless sons or only one remarkably intelligent, one with his life limited to sixteen years. The rishi opted for the second alternative and in due time his wife Manasvini, bore him a son who was called Markandeya. The child grew up to be a very intelligent boy : even as his intelligence and behaviour began to be more and more remarkable, the hearts of the parents began to be weighed with sorrow, for at the sixteenth year of his age he was destined to die. The news of the short duration of his life, reached Markandeya's ears. He resolved to offer pujas to all gods at important places of pilgrimage. He, therefore, reached Tirukkadavur and was instantly absorbed in adoration of the linga enshrined in its temple. Then the call from lord of death-Yama, came. The emmissaries of Yama approached Markandeya to carry his soul to the Master. Not finding it possible because of Markandeya's devotion to Siva, they reported back the fact to Yama, who proceeded in person to conduct the operation against the life of Markendaya, which was not destined to continue beyond sixteen years. At the time when Yama tried to bind Markandeya, Siva burst out of the linga and in great anger kicked Yama on his chest, almost killing him. Yama then realised his folly an retreated.

Siva then blessed Markandeya, ever to be sixteen years of age, preventing him from the future death. Siva, therefore, in the act of chastising Yama is known as Kalari-murti. Various Agamas describe the kalari form of Siva according to which Kala or Yama should be represented with two arms and two legs, with side tusks and with karanda-mukuta over his head. One of his hands should carry a pasa and with both his hands he should be attending Siva in Anjali pose. The earliest representation of Kalari-murti is found at the Dasavatara cave at Ellora. In this panel, Siva is

represented as issuing out of a linga in front of which is seen the sage boy Markandeya, kneeling with his arms folded on his bent knees. One of the right hands and one of the left hands of Siva, grasp a stout-handled sharp trident which is aimed at the abdomen of Yama. The remaining right hand rests on the hip and the other left hand is held in Vismaya pose. The right leg of Siva is buried upto the knee in the linga and the left leg is represented as kicking the Yama. Siva wears all the ornaments. Yama has apparently fallen down in his miserable plight. He praises Siva with his right hand uplifted and in the left hand he still grips the pasa with which he had bound the neck of Markandeya.¹⁷

References and Notes

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Vol. I, 1997, pp. 140-148.
2. Gopinath Rao Elements of Hindu Iconography,
Vol. II, p. 374.
The figure of Laksmi should have only two hands
when she is by the side of Vishnu. But when she is
worshipped in a separate temple she should have
four hands.
3. R.C. Majumder (ed.) History of Bengal.
Vol. I., Dacca, 1943, p. 447.
4. Ibid, p. 448.
5. It is true that this cult was never of such an importance as some of the other
major cults. But as remover of obstacles and bestower of success Ganesa was
highly venerated by the Hindus and the followers of some heterodox creeds.
6. N.K. Bhattashali This is in accordance with the dhyana given in the
Saradatilaka Tantra;
Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmonical
Sculptures
in the Dacca Museum, p. 146-147
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1-4, Madras, 1917, p. 14, 175-76.
13. Alce Fredric **Indian Temple and Sculptures,**
p. 245.
14. Rao, Gopinath **Op.cit., p. 175-176.**
15. **Ibid, p. 161**

Chapter II

(C) Some Other Exotic Images :

The half-bird Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu is represented kneeling beneath his lotus seat. The story of Garuda is given in detail in the first book of the Mahabharata. He was the son of Kasyapa by Vinata, daughter of Daksa. Vinata had fortified her liberty to Kadru, another wife of Kasyapa and mother of the serpents, in a wager and was serving as the slave of Kadru when Garuda was born. The serpents promised her freedom if Garuda could obtain ambrosia for them from heaven. In achieving this feat, Garuda had, on one occasion, to fly with a great load which gave him his name Guru=hearg, uda = flying. When after a severe fight with the gods, he was carrying away the ambrosia, he met Vishnu. On the way, who was highly pleased with Garuda for his self restraint in not testing the ambrosia, now within his grasp. Mutual boons followed. Garuda received eternal life even without testing ambrosia, and a place above Vishnu by being placed on standards; and Vishnu obtained him as his vehicle. Garutmat and Suparna, the other two well known names of Garuda, already appear in Rigveda and the story of the capture of amarta or ambrosia by Garuda is also derived from Vaidic sources. A very beautiful and double sided images of Garuda in black stone, about 30" high. A remarkably vigorous piece of sculpture. It was found in Dalbazar, Dacca, now preserved in Dacca Museum.¹

Nataraja :

Bengal seems to have evolved a peculiar ten or twelve-hundred type of Siva Nataraja dancing on the back of his mount. Though it will be to expose to risk to say that this type is only to me met with in Bengal and nowhere else, it can still be confidently remarked that it is the principal Nrityamurti of Siva in this region. Such

images enclosed with ten hands closely follow the description of the dancing Siva given in the Matsya Purana which lays down that Khadga, Sakti, Danda and Trisula should be placed in the right hands, while Khebbaka, Kapala, Naga and Khatvanga in the left hands of the god shown on the back of his bull, (Vaisakha-rthanaka), one of the two remaining hands being in the Varada pose and the other holding a rosary. The sculpture found in the Tippera districts now preserved in the Dacca Museum.²

Revanta-Navagraha :

Revanta and Navagrahas are intimately associated with the solar cult and several reliefs representing them have been discovered from different parts of Bengal. Revanta according to the puranic mythology, was the son of Surya, and iconographic texts lay down that he should be depicted as hunting on horse-back accompanied by followers. The late mediaeval Ghatnagar (Dinajpur) basalt image of Revanta, now in the Rajshahi Museum, presents the god in a novel manner. The booklet deity no doubt appears on horse-back, with a lash in the right hand and the reins of the horse in his left with an attendant holding an umbrella over his head but he is shown here in the midst of two robbers, one ready to attack him from the front, the other on a tree-top from behind. The pedestal shows a woman standing, a devotee and a man with a sword and shield about to assault a woman cutting a fish with a fish-knife, and just above the horse's head on the right corner of the partially broken stela is a dwelling house with a couple within it.³

Ganapati :

The image of Ganapati ought to be studied along with the Saiva icons, because these god had intimate mythological associations with Siva. The former had no doubt a special class of worshippers of his own in India known by the name of Ganapatyas, but there is very little evidence that this sect ever prevailed in Bengal. The extreme frequency of the Ganapati images here, however, can be explained by the fact that as

he was regarded as the remover of all obstacles and bestower of success, he had an assured position not only among the various Brahmonical sectaries but also to a lesser extent, even among the followers of some heterodox creeds. There are various types of Ganapati such as seated, standing and dancing. One of the two seated stone images Ganesa is of great iconographic interest. It is a four-armed grey-sandstone image and a rosary, a small radish with plenty of leaves, trisula, and the end of snake coiled round its four hands. On the pedestal is a crude linear representation of a mouse, his peculiar mount and the third eye of the deity is suggested by the logenze-shaped mark on the middle of his forehead. Various types of Ganapati images such are quite common in Bengal. But there is one unique five-faced and ten-handed image of Ganesa seated on a roaring lion, dug up from among the ruins of Rampal and now being worshipped at a Vaishnava monastery of Munshiganj. Two handed figure of Ganesa found in Gangarampur now preserved in the Akshya Kumar Maitreya Museum (North Bengal University). The ornamented figure of Ganesa has been shown as standing in alidha pose by the right side of the principal image, possibly, a goddess (Durga). Though the images of Ganesa are endowed generally with four or even more hands, two-armed Ganesa are not unknown, and comparatively rare.⁴

Devi:

Seated varieties of Devi images endowed with four or more hands, are comparatively rare in Bengal. The beautifully carved four armed figure of such a type found in Bogra and now preserved in the Indian Museum.

The unique composite sculpture discovered at Kagajipura among the ruins of ancient Vikrampur, depicts a stone linga out of which emerges the half length figure of a four armed goddess with her front hands in the dhyana-mudra, and the back right and left hands holding a rosary and a manuscript respectively. The goddess has been identified as the Mahamaya or Tripura-Bhairavi.⁵

Kartikeya:

Single stone image of Kartikeya are very rare in Bengal. The elaborate stone sculpture depicting this god, found in North Bengal and now in the Indian Museum. The god sits in the Maharajatila or Sukhasana pose, on the back of his Vahana peacock. Two female figures with Chowries stand in graceful pose, on his two sides. The back right hand holds his characteristic emblem, the Sakti (spear), and the front right one, a Vijapuraka; the pedestal and the stela are tartefully decorated with ornamental carvings usual in sculptural of this period it is assignable on grounds of style to the 12 Century A.D.⁶

Uma-Mahesvara:

Uma-Mahesvara (Uma-Alingana) Images is one of the commonest form of images associated with the Saiva cult found in eastern India. The worship of this type of images can be traced from as early as the line of the Mrechaktika. A few Sena inscription also open with an invocation of Siva with Gouri seated on his lap, like lightning on the autumn clouds. It may be mentioned in this connection that one of the threefold vows undertaken by Tantrik worshippers of Tripurasundari is to concentrate on the form of Devi sitting on the lap of Siva in the Mahapadmavana. The Matsya Purana contains a very detailed information about these images. But the images discovered so far generally conform to other Puranic version noticed by Pandit Bipin Chandra Kavyaratna, according to which 'the upper left hand (of the god) should hold the trident, the lower one should be placed on the bosom of the goddess. The upper right hand should hold the Nagapasa or Khatvanga and the other right hand should sportively touch the chain of the goddess.

But one of the unusual image of Siva-Sakti found in Mathabhanga (Cooch Behar) now preserved in Akshaya Kumar Maitreya Museum. The god is shown in Yab-Yum attitude with his Sakti. The four armed deity wears Jatamukuta with a circular halo behind and holds a kettle-drum (damaru) in upper right hand and a trident (Trisula) in upper left. The lower right hand of the deity touches the shoulder of the

goddess, while the lower left hand is placed on her breast. Ganesa is shown scaled in front against the back of the goddess and Kartikeya is shown seated to the left side of the god, facing with folded hands. The god places his left leg on his mount Vasabha. This is a well preserved image which stands upon a tastefully decorated side.

In the Buddhist pantheon figures of Hevajra is often found (in Yab Yum attitude). It is suggested that this form evolved during the latest phase of Tantrik, Buddhism and it occupied a very significant position in Tibetan Buddhist Pantheon. The present image discovered from North Bengal appears to have derived its imagination from the same source of Tantrik ideals which had been so well pronounced in Tibet. This figure may be assigned to the late 12th Century A.D.⁷

Chamundā:

The origin of Chamundā is described in the third episode of Devimahatmayam of the Markandeya-Purāna. The two demon brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha grew powerful and ousted the gods from their possessions. The gods repaired to the Supreme Goddess and invoked Her assistance against the demons. There upon, the goddess Kausiki sprang from the body of the Supreme Goddess and assumed a dazzlingly beautiful form. Chanda and Munda, two servants of Sumbha and Nisumbha, reported to their masters about the beautiful manifestation. Sumbha, struck with the story of the beauty of the goddess, resolved to possess her and sent emissaries to the goddess to persuade her to become his mistress. The goddess, thus approached, scoffingly replied that she would accept only him as her husband who would be a match for her in strength and would conquer her in battle. Sumbha, there upon ordered a servant of his to seize the goddess by force, but he was speedily reduced by her to ashes. On this, Chanda and Munda were ordered to go and seize the goddess.

The sight of Chanda and Munda greatly increased the goddess 'From her brow contracted by frowns suddenly sprang forth a goddess, black and scowling, with drawn sword and lasso, holding a mace (Khatvariga), wearing a necklace of skulls, clothed in

a tiger-skin, grim with emaciation, mouth hideously distorted and the tongue protruding out. Her eyes were red and sunken and she started a terrible uproar that filled the quarters. This grim goddess began to swallow elephants with riders and all, chariots with horses and occupants, and Chanda and Munda were quickly worsted. The goddess picked up the heads of Chanda and Munda and presented them to her originator Kausiki, who bestowed on her the epithet Chamunda in recognition of her achievements. Images of Chamunda are fairly common in Bengal. She should be like a skeleton in appearance. The ordinary image of Chamunda has four hands.⁸

The Agni-Purana enumerates the following eight varieties of the forms of Chamunda, Dantura one of them. Dantura she should be represented as squatting on the ground with a hand on her knee. An image of this class discovered at Attahasa, in the Burdwan district, is now in the Museum of Vangiya Sahitya Parishad. It is a marvellously well-executed piece of sculpture.

References and Notes

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