

Unique Figure of Govardhanadhara Kṛṣṇa

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Pre-Gupta sculptures of Kṛṣṇa are quite rare. However, a few figures of Kṛṣṇa-*līlā* scenes of the Kuṣāṇa period are exception to it. These include bringing the newly born baby Kṛṣṇa from Mathura to Gokula by Vasudeva on his head crossing the river Yamunā and Kṛṣṇa's venturous deeds of killing the demon Keśī and lifting the mount Govardhana, etc.¹

Kṛṣṇa lifted the Govardhana mountain in order to protect the residents and animals of Gokula from the fury of Indra in the form of torrential rain. It so happened that once young Kṛṣṇa forbade Gopas to offer regular worship to the rain-god Indra. Instead, he suggested worshipping the Govardhana, which throughout the year provides sustenance of green grass and leaves to there kine, who thereby, give us delicious milk which is the main source of livelihood. The implementation of this advice of Kṛṣṇa invited the anger of the rain-god Indra.² This episode has been very popular among the masses as well as the artists.

One of the earliest figures of Govardhanadhara Kṛṣṇa is a terracotta plaque discovered from Rangmahal, (old Suratgarh fort, Rajasthan) and preserved in the Gaṅgā Golden Jubilee Museum, Bikaner (acc.no. B 229).³ Measuring 35 x 22 cm and belonging to the 4th century A.D. the plaque represents Kṛṣṇa lifting the mount Govardhana with his left hand and placing the right hand on his thigh. The two-handed Kṛṣṇa is adorned with a high crown (*kirīṭa-mukuta*), ear-rings (*kuṇḍalas*), a short necklace (*graiveyaka or kaṇṭhā*), another necklace (*hāra*), a long garland (*Vanamālā*) hanging down to the knees, bracelets (*kaṅkaṇas*), etc. The mount above his head is marked with round rocks. Below surrounding Kṛṣṇa are seen cattle. Long moustaches and the modelling of the face of Kṛṣṇa make the Gandhāra impact very clear. The figure of Kṛṣṇa appears as a grown up person and not that of a young Kṛṣṇa (fig. 1).

But what makes the figure unique is the sign or the mark of a Great Person (*Mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*) on his breast. The *vakṣa-lakṣaṇa* of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, as well as of the Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras is well known as Śrīvatsa. But here on the middle of the chest of Kṛṣṇa, in

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between the short and long necklaces, the symbol is not Śrīvatsa⁴. The shapes and designs of the Śrīvatsa symbol are, no doubt, numerous but none of them looks like Svastika. In the present case it is distinctly the right-handed (*dakṣiṇāvarta*) Svastika. As far as our knowledge goes, none of the *śilpa* texts prescribes Svastika to be made on the breast of any divinity of any sect, nor is it found on any Indian divine image - Jaina, Buddhist or Brahmanical. The symbol of the Svastika, ordained to be shown on the palms and soles of feet⁵, are found in the images.⁶

However, the only other example of the Svastika symbol on the breast is found on a Buddha painting from China which is also corroborated by a literary evidence of the same country. A Buddhist priest of the Tang Dynasty (7th - 8th century A.D.), Tao Shih by name, describes the 'original Buddha' in his work having the  mark on his breast (fig. 2)⁷. But what was the source of the statement of Tao Shih is not known to us.

Perhaps it will not be out of context to mention another example of the Svastika symbol being placed on the cheek, which is also unusual. A few female terracotta figures found at Buxar, (Bihar) and housed in the local museum have a Svastika mark on their cheek. One of them is a female head (5.2 x 5.3 x 3 cm) of c. 2nd century B.C. which has the head-dress in Śuṅga style, and left-handed (*vāmāvarta*) Svastika on her right cheek (fig. 3).⁸ The head is identified as Lakṣmī figure.⁹

Thus, the Govardhanadhara figure of Kṛṣṇa from Rangmahal is unique in more than one sense. As far as our knowledge goes, it is the one and only Indian divine figure bearing Svastika mark on chest and that too without any canonical support for it. The Chinese evidence cannot help us as it is posterior to our figure. Therefore, the placement of the Svastika on the breast of a divine figure (in place of Śrīvatsa) in India as well as in China needs careful investigation.

References

1. Some of the Kuṣāṇa panels representing these episodes of Kṛṣṇa's exploits or Kṛṣṇa-lilāa have been found from Mathura and adjoining areas. A panel showing Vasudava crossing the river Yamunā with baby Kṛṣṇa on his head is in the Mathura Museum, No. GMM 17.1344 (N.P. Joshi, *Mathura Sculptures, Mathura*, 1966, p. 68, Pl. 64). As regards the killing of the demon Keśī by Kṛṣṇa, Dr. Joshi reports three athletic weights of Kuṣāṇa period representing this feat from Mathura, one in Mathura Museum, no. GMM 58.4476 and two discovered in Pakistan; one specimen of Gandhāra art in Zurich vide Stanislaw J. Czuma, *Kuṣāṇa Sculpture : Images from Early India*, No. 81, p. 164, Cleveland, 1985-86 and another, which is to be reckoned as the earlier one, 1st - 2nd century A.D. from Musanagar, (Kanpur Dehat U.P.) (N.P. Joshi, "Some Unique and Rare Sculptures for Further appraisal", *Kalā*, XI, 2004-05, pp. 3-4, LD 3). A plaque representing Gandhāra Kṛṣṇa belonging to the 4th century A.D. and discovered from Khotan, Central Asia is now housed in the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad (R.C.

- Agrawal, "Kṛṣṇa-līlā plaque from Central Asia", *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Calcutta, NS, Vol.II, 1967-68, p. 69 ff, Fig. 1).
2. *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, Viṣṇu parva, ch. 16-18, Gita Press Gorakhpur, edn. 2063 vs, pp. 317-330.
 3. V.S. Srivastava, *Catalogue & Guide to the Gaṅgā Golden Jubilee Museum, Bikaner*. 1960-61 p. 7, Pl. II.
 4. V. S. Srivastava, 'Rajasthan kī Vaiṣṇava Mūrti-kalā-Udbhava, Vikāsa evaṃ Yogadāna'; (Hindi), *Pathways to Literature, Art and Archaeology* (Pt. G.N. Bahura Felicitation Volume), Jaipur, 1991, p. 296, fig. 84. Other scholars who have discussed this plaque, according to V. S. Srivastava (*Catalogue & Guide to Ganga Golden Jubilee Museum, Bikaner*, p. 4, fn 9) are-
 Goetz, *Art and Architecture of Bikaner State*, oxford, 1950, fig. 5; Dr. Satya Prakash, *Journal Rajasthan Bharati*, Bikaner, Hindi, vol. IV, parts 2-3, pp. 11-14 and plates;
 R. C. Agrawala, *Dharmayuga weekly*, Bombay (Hindi), vol. IV, part 35, dated 30th August, 1953, pp. 1-2, pl. 1; *Art Treasures: Bikaner Museum*, Jaipur, 1960, pl. XXIV;
 Ballabh Saran, *Rangmahal Excavation Report* (1952-54).
 Lund (Sweden), pp. 203-206, pl. 2, etc.
 Also see *ASIAR*, 1917-18, part-1, pl. XIII, fig.1.
 5. *Mahāvastu*, II. 304, lines 16-17 (P.V. Bapat, "Four Auspicious Things of the Buddhist Śrīvatsa, Svastika, Nandyāvarta and Vardhamāna", *INDICA*, Journal of Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, Vol. XVIII, 1953, p. 39) : *Hyeṣṭhā pādatalā jātā svastikaiḥ upaśobhitā / Pādāṅguliṣu sarvatra nandyāvarta uddhatā // Arthaviniścaya-sūtranibandhana*, Sūtra XXVII. 27: *Śrīvatsa-svastika-nandyāvarta-cakra-padma-matsyādi lāñchana pāñipādatalāśca Buddha bhagavanto bhavanti / Imānyaṣīta Anuvyañjanāni /*
Ibid., XXVII. 63 : *Tatra hṛdaye śrīvatsalakṣaṇam / Pārṣṇitale svastikaḥ /*
 6. Kuṣāṇa image, no. GMM. 188, on extant fingers of palm; another, no. A. 24, on finger ends (N.P. Joshi, "Use of Auspicious Symbols in the Kuṣāṇa Art of Mathura", *Dr. V. V. Mirashi Felicitation Volume*, Nagpur, 1965, pp. 312-313); The 6th century Buddha image in *dhyānamudrā* in Sanchi Museum, no. 2771 had the mark of svastika (卐) on palms (B.N. Misra, *Sanchi*, Bhopal, 1982, p. 57); Buddhapadas from Kauśāmbi, Amarāvati, Kesnapallī, Ghaṇṭaśāla and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (A.L. Srivastava, *Nandyāvarta*, Allahabad, 1991, Fig. 23.3, 24.1-6; and *Svastika*, Patna Museum, Patna, 2005, Figs. 70, 71, 73-77).
 7. Thomas Wilson, *The Swastika*, First Indian Edition, ed. Jamna Das Akhtar, Delhi, 1973, p. 38, Pl. 1.
 8. Madhuri Agrawal and Parashuram Pandey, "A Unique Terracotta Female Head form Buxar", *Art & Archaeology of Eastern India*, ed. Naseem Akhtar, Patna Museum, Patna, 2001, pp. 95-96, fig. on p. 96.
 9. *Ibid.*





Fig. 1, Govardhanadhara Kṛṣṇa Terracotta, Rangmahal, Rajasthan, 4th cent A.D.



Fig. 2, Buddha in Chinese painting, C. 7th-8th century A.D.



Fig. 3, Female Head, Terracotta, Buxar (Bihar), Śūnga period