

## Kinnarā Dvividhāḥ Proktā

### With Special Reference to a Terracotta Plaque from Rajghat

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#### I

Various fabulous or fanciful creatures with different composite bodies known under a general term *ihāmṛga* find their frequent mention in ancient Indian literature. These composite figures found since the Harappan times are differently called according to their body-combinations. One such *ihāmṛga* group found in Indian art having half-human and half-equine body is of two types – one, a horse head on a human body and the other, a human face and torso on a horse body. In Śuṅga art such composite figures with a normal man or woman as its companion have been found from many places, both in terracotta and stone. Rajghat, Varanasi also yielded a terracotta plaque in which a normal man is shown riding a mare having beautiful woman face and torso.

Such *turaga-nara* type of creatures has been known as *kinnara-kinnarīs*. But the first type i.e. the horse head on a human body, male or female, is also called *aśva-mukha* or *aśva-mukhī* as the case may be. The second type, i.e. the human face and torso, male or female, on a horse body, as is on the Rajghat plaque, which was also called *kinnara* or *kinnarī* by scholars, Shri Rai Krishnadas raised a pertinent question against this identification because this name pertains to the first type.

As early as in 1975-76, on the basis of H. Jacobi (*Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics*) we have named these two types as *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* in our Ph.D. Thesis, which was later published in 1983. We have also discussed these two types in a paper published in the *Graeco-Indica* by Prof. U.P. Arora (Ed.), Head, AIHC & Archaeology, Rohilkhand University, Bareilly, U.P. in 1991. Recently, on the basis of the *Medinīkośa* and *Vācaspatyam*, Dr. Deena Bandhu Pandey has similarly but a bit cautiously identified the second type with *kimpuruṣa* in order to answer the question of Shri Rai Krishnadas.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kumārasambhava*, etc. both these terms *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* have been found applied to one and the same composite creature. Linguistically also these two words are synonymous, and therefore, how can these indicate the two different body-combinations?

The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, a 6<sup>th</sup> century *śilpa* treatise, knows these two types of combinations but calls both of them as only *kinnaras* – **Kinnarāḥ dvidhāḥ proktā**. Under these facts how the opinion of the *Medinīkośa* and *Vācaspatyam* without any basis or source can be accepted. If not, the question of Shri Rai Krishnadas still stands unanswered, which is brought to the notice of scholars. It is to be analyzed and a convincing nomenclature to the second type as on the Rajghat plaque is to be suggested.

## II

From the large number of terracottas discovered in 1940 from Rajghat, an ancient site quite adjacent to the Kashi Railway Station, we describe and discuss here only one round terracotta plaque, preserved in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi (No.4746).<sup>1</sup> It represents a man riding a well-caparisoned mare having beautifully decked face and torso of a woman.

A horn-like projection, probably made of her braid and a bulbous coiffure are seen in her head-dress. She wears a short and round necklace, earrings, bracelets and a broad *mekhalā*. The rider with a tiara on his head also wears similar ornaments except the *mekhalā* and holds a twig in his right hand and with his left he tries to embrace his spouse who is in *namaskāra-mudrā* (Fig.1).



Fig.1. Rajghat Terracotta plaque, Gupta period.

V.S. Agrawala,<sup>2</sup> Motichandra,<sup>3</sup> Rai Krishnadas<sup>4</sup> and many others are reported to have studied the terracotta plaque and all of them have identified the composite figure of the mare with *kinnarī* and the couple with the *kinnara-mithuna*.

Before we take up the issue of its identification and nomenclature, we like to present in brief its tradition in ancient Indian art, both in terracotta and

in stone sculpture. We are here simply enumerating the two main types of this fabulous motif, half-human and half-equine. Other aspects like dating, etc. of the representation are not the subject of this paper.

**A. Horse-head on human**

**body.** In this combination of the early art belonging to the Śuṅga period, the human body with horse-head is mostly of a woman in the company of a normal man. Such combinations are found from Bhājā (Fig.2), Sanchi (Figs.3-4), Mathura (Fig.5), Bodhgaya (Fig.6) and Patna (all in stone bas-reliefs) and in terracotta in the Baroda Museum (Fig.7).<sup>5</sup> This type of combination has been identified with *kinnarī* and also specified with the term *aśvamukhī*. This combination in art is corroborated by many ancient literary evidences, to name a few, the *Rāmāyaṇa* (II.69.12-16); *Pada-kusala-māṇava Jātaka* (No.432); *Mahāvamśa* (X.53-61),<sup>6</sup> etc.



Fig.2. Bhājā, stone, Śuṅga period.



Fig.3. Sanchi, Stūpa 2, Śuṅga period.



Fig.4. Sanchi, Stūpa 3, Śuṅga-Sātavāhana period.

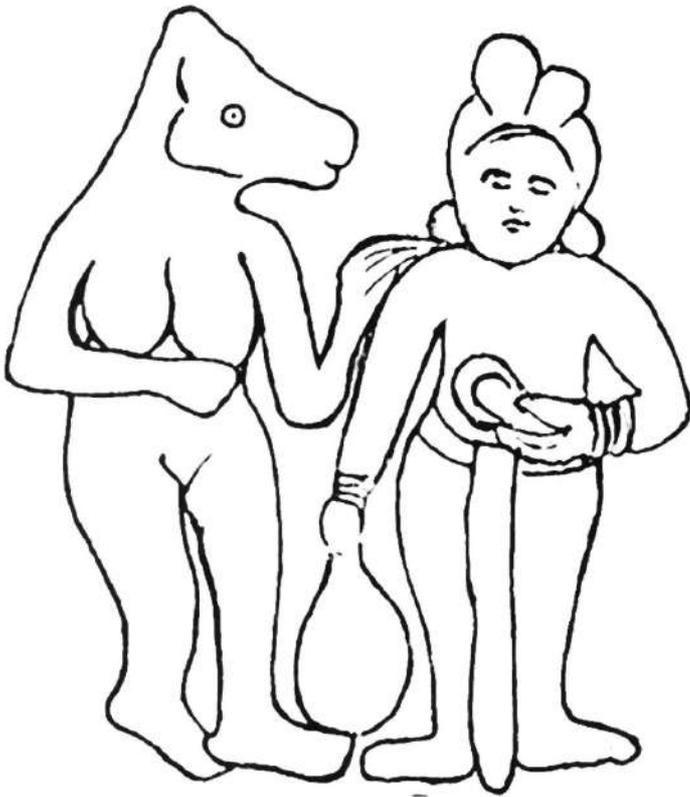


Fig.5. Mathura Museum, stone, Śuṅga period.



Fig.6. Bodhgayā, stone, Śuṅga period.



Fig.7. Baroda Museum, Terracotta, Śuṅga period.

Here we are not discussing this type.

**B. Human head and torso on the equine body.** In the following examples the human head and torso are mostly of a woman and the rider on its back is a normal man. This combination in round terracotta plaques serial nos. 1-5 and stone sculptures serial nos. 6-11 below have been found from the following places:

1. Kauśāmbī, National Museum, New Delhi, Acc.no.67.142 (Fig.8).



Fig.8. Kauśāmbī (National Museum, New Delhi), Śuṅga period.

2. Government Museum, Mathura, Acc.no.33.2350. It is the only example in which Human-headed mare and its rider both are female (Fig.9).<sup>7</sup>
3. Madhya Pradesh, now in the National Museum of Oriental Art, Rome (Fig.10).<sup>8</sup>



Fig.9. Mathura Museum, Terracotta plaque, Śuṅga period.



Fig.10. Madhya Pradesh (National Museum of Oriental Art, Rome), Śuṅga period.

4. Rajghat, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, Acc.no. 4746. This is under our review (Fig.1).
5. Ahicchatrā, Group IX, type 28, No.303. It is the only square plaque and also the largest one (67x67cm) (Fig.11).<sup>9</sup>

All the above noted terracottas are dated to the Śuṅga period except the fifth from Ahicchatrā, which is assigned to the Gupta period.

The other examples are in stone and found from the following places:

6. Jamalpur, formerly housed in the Public Library, Allahabad till December 1907 and then shifted to the Mathura Museum (Fig.12).<sup>10</sup> It is the only example wherein the motif is carved on both the sides of the stone.
7. Nasik (Maharashtra), Cave No.14, carved on the eastern end of the architrave, the other end represents an owl (fig.13).<sup>11</sup>



Fig.11. Ahicchatrā (National Museum, New Delhi) Gupta period.

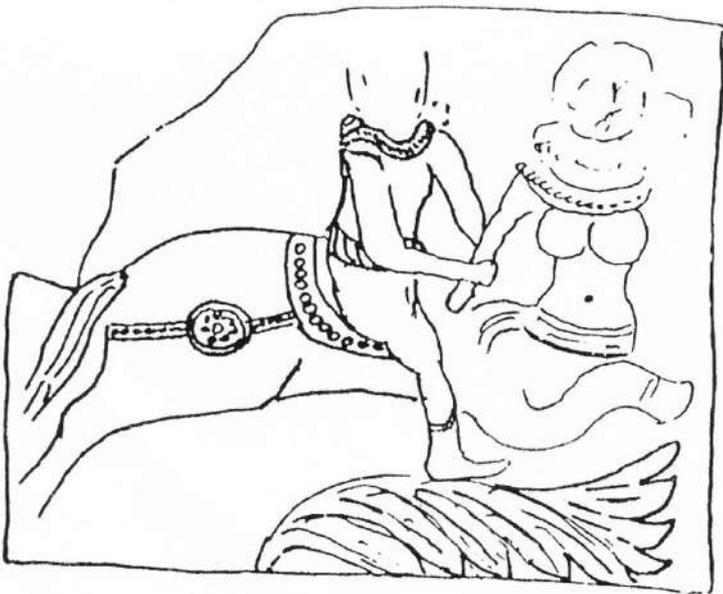


Fig.12. Jamalpur (Mathura Museum), stone, Śuṅga period.

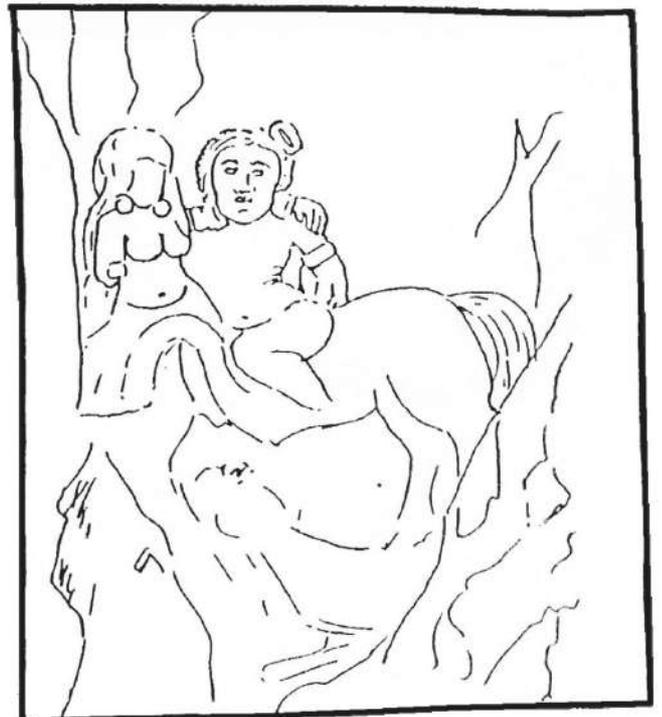


Fig.13. Nasik, Cave No.14, stone, Śuṅga period.

8-11. Sanchi, M.P., all are in round panels, three on the ground railing pillars nos.7b, 81b and 82a of the Stūpa 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) (Figs.14-16) and one in a medallion of the *sopāna-vedikā*-pillar of the Great Stūpa (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) (Fig.17).<sup>12</sup>



Fig.14. Sanchi, Stūpa 2, Śuṅga period.



Fig.15. Sanchi, Stūpa 2, Śuṅga period.



Fig.16. Sanchi, Stūpa 2, Śuṅga period.



Fig.17. Sanchi, Stūpa 1 (Great Stūpa), Śuṅga-Sātavāhana period.

Of these four examples, one of the Stūpa 2, pillar no.81b and the other from the *sopāna-vedikā*-pillar of the Great Stūpa (Figs.15 and 17) are similar to the above described plaques. But the remaining two from Stūpa 2, pillar nos.7b and 82a are exceptionally opposite to the above; the rider is a normal woman on the back of a horse having the face of a man.

The Rajghat terracotta plaque represents the *mithuna* of the B type.

During the studies of Sanchi sculptures in 70s of the last century, we came across with these two types of the so-called *kinnara-kinnarīs*. After going through the opinions of Marshall, Alfred Foucher, E.A. Gardiner, H. Jacobi, V.S. Agrawala, C. Sivaramamurti, A.K. Coomaraswamy and the references in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Kumārasambhava*, *Mahāvaiśā*, etc. we discussed them as an ancient Indian tradition of *ihāmṛgas* in a paper, in which we have observed that *ihāmṛga* is a general term for mythical, fabulous, composite and fanciful creatures. Each different combination of a *ihāmṛga* has its specific name. Similarly, some specific names pertaining to the half-horse and half-human beings are also there like *turaga-nara*, *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa*.<sup>13</sup>

Frankly speaking, we were then quite unaware of the question of Rai Krishnadas about the identification of the figures in the Rajghat plaque. But on the basis of H. Jacobi's opinion in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics* (Vol.11, p.810a), we have identified the human head and equine body combination with *kimpuruṣa* and the horse-head and human body combination with *kinnara* in my Ph.D. Thesis, 'Life in Sanchi Sculpture' approved in 1976, which was later published in 1983.<sup>14</sup> According to H. Jacobi, "*Kinnaras* have a human body and the head of a horse while *kimpuruṣas* have body of a horse and a human head; **and they are frequently identified with one another.**"

Dr. Deena Bandhu Pandey<sup>15</sup> has recently discussed the opinion of almost all the scholars who have studied the Rajghat plaque and also their probable basis for this identification being provided by some previous scholars. All of them named this composite figure as *kinnarī* and the couple as the *kinnara-mithuna*. This identification was questioned by Rai Krishnadas. According to him, "The explanation of this motif is still a desideratum and has to be sought and given. One wonders how far it would be correct to call it a *kinnara* when the latter as described in literature has only the face of a horse and not its trunks."<sup>16</sup> This question of Rai Krishnadas rose in connection with the *mithuna* represented in the Rajghat terracotta plaque is equally pertaining to all other similar representations in terracotta and stone enumerated above. None of the scholars cared to this question of the proper identification before Dr. Pandey who for the first time replied the question of Rai Krishnadas after more than fifty years and suggested "to call this composite figure in a general sense as

*kinnara* but in a more specific sense it should be called as *kimpuruṣa*” on the basis of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (III.42.13-14) which, as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, mentions these two different types of the composite figures but calls both of them as *kinnaras* – *kinnarā dvividhāḥ proktā*; *Medinīkośa* (169/52) which only names these two different types as *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* and the *Vācaspatyam* (III, p.2050) which describes both the different forms and suggests their different specific names.

Presently, however, we are not satisfied with the modern lexicons; may it be *Medinīkara*, *Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati*, *H. Jacobi* or *V.S. Apte* for the nomenclature of the art evidence which is older more than two thousand years and which also goes against the literary evidence, particularly that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

As far as our knowledge goes, mythical beings of both these terms *kinnara-kinnarī* and *kimpuruṣa-kimpuruṣī* find their mention in our literature as early as the Śuṅga period itself and even a bit earlier too, if the original date of the epics, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* is accepted earlier than Śuṅga period. The terms *kinnara* and *kinnarī* are frequently found in literature whereas references to *kimpuruṣas* and *kimpuruṣī* are, no doubt, quite a few. But both of them have been mentioned therein as one and the same. A couple of examples are given here in support of this view. In the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi parva), some of the *īhāmṛgas* have been mentioned together in a verse including *kimpuruṣas* – *siṃhāḥ kimpuruṣāḥ vyāghrāḥ yakṣāḥ īhāmṛgastathā*.<sup>17</sup> It is to be noted that *kinnaras* have not been mentioned here, probably because they are the same as *kimpuruṣas*.

An episode of *Ila*, the King of *Vāhlīka* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (VII.88.22-23) leaves no doubt in showing the synonymous character of both the words, *kimpuruṣī* and *kinnarī*. Once Śiva turned all the inhabitants of *Kailāśa* mountain including himself into female form and engaged in love-sports with his consort *Pārvatī*. The King *Ila* with his army men unknowingly entered into the limits of *Kailāśa*, and surprisingly got himself as well all his army men turned into female form. The prayer for regaining the masculine form was not granted by Śiva to *Ila*. Hopeless *Ila* in female form along with the hoard of women while wandering came to a nearby *tapovana* where *Ṛṣi Budha* was practicing religious austerities. After coming out of the limits of *Kailāśa*, *Ila* forgot about the change

of his gender. Looking beautiful damsel, Budha fell in love with her and asked her if she would like to live in his *āśrama* with him. On receiving her consent, Budha asked her fellow women to become *kimpuruṣīs* and settle down by the side of the mountain where they would soon have their *kimpuruṣa* husbands :

अत्र किम्पुरुषीर्भूत्वा शैलरोधसि वत्स्यथ ।

आवासस्तु गिरावस्मिञ्शीघ्रमेव विधीयताम् ॥

मूलपत्रफलैः सर्वा वर्तयिस्थ नित्यदा ।

स्त्रियः किम्पुरुषन्नाम भर्तृन् समुपलप्स्यथ ॥ - *Rāmā.*, VII.88.22-23

Then all the women turned into *kimpuruṣīs* went to the side of the mountain, away from the *āśrama*. Seen all the *kinnarīs* gone away, Ṛṣi Budha told in pleasing tone to the beautiful lady (Ila) :

सर्वास्ता विहता दृष्ट्वा किन्नरीर्ऋषिसत्तमः ।

उवाच रूपसम्पन्नां तां स्त्रियं प्रहसन्निव ॥ - *Rāmā.*, VII.89.3

Now see, Ṛṣi Budha calls *kinnarīs* to those women whom he has just turned into *kimpuruṣīs*. It leaves no doubt that during the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the terms *kinnarī* and *kimpuruṣī* were synonymous, otherwise Vālmīki would not have used these two terms to one and the same being.

Kālidāsa also seems to have taken both these *ihāmṛgas* as one and the same. In the *Kumārasambhava*, he describes the enchanting beauty of the Himalayan valleys haunted by some semi-divine beings including *kinnaras* in couples and enjoying love-sports. Here, he names their wives once with the term *aśvamukhīs* (I.11) and again with *kimpuruṣīs* (I.14).<sup>18</sup>

It will not be totally irrelevant to examine these two terms linguistically. The Sanskrit terms *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* are actually interrogative compound words – *kim+naraḥ* = *kinnaraḥ* and *kim+puruṣaḥ* = *kimpuruṣaḥ*, both mean – Is it a man? It is like saying *padma* or *kamala* to the lotus. As such these words are synonyms conveying the same meaning or the single entity.

It appears that during the past, when the art evidences were created, both the types of the composite couples under our review were taken as one and the same having some human form in both the combinations and that is why called *kinnaraḥ* or *kimpuruṣaḥ*. We know that the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇakāra* during the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE was well aware of these two combinations of half-human and half-equine form in Indian art. Only therefore, he described

both the combinations very clearly but still he did not suggest their different names :

किन्नरा द्विविधाः प्रोक्ता नृवक्त्राहयविग्रहाः ।

नृदेहाश्चाश्ववक्त्राश्च तथाऽन्ये परिकीर्तिताः ॥<sup>19</sup> - *Viṣṇudha.*, III.42.13-14

Moreover, most of the Sanskrit lexicons including *Amarakośa* and *Halāyudhakośa* mention *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* as synonyms. Even lexicons like H. Jacobi and V.S. Apte, after describing the two forms of *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* differently, add “**and they are frequently identified with one another.**”

**However**, *Medinīkāra* mentions the two terms *kimpuruṣa* and *kinnara* as being taken different in the society (*Athakimpuruṣo lokabhedakinnarayoh pumān, Medinīkośa, Śāntavarga, 169.52*)<sup>20</sup> and *Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati* very clearly describes the two combinations and their specific names in the *Vācaspatyam*, III :

किम्पुरुषः स च अश्वाकारजघनः नराकारमुखः ।

किन्नरस्तु अश्वाकारवदनः नराकार जघन इति तयोर्भेदः ॥<sup>21</sup> - *Vācaspatyam*, III, p.2050

While replying the question of Sri Rai Krishnadas, we are giving room to another question and that is, 'If the words *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* are synonymous conveying one and the same meaning, how these can be taken justified as indicators of two different forms?' The riddle, now before scholars, is to be seriously analyzed and a convincing nomenclature to be suggested to the fabulous creature having a human head and torso on an equine body.

However, we may humbly suggest a name to solve this linguistic riddle. It is very clear that both the terms *kinnara* and *kimpuruṣa* indicate some specific human part in the combination of forms of an *ihāmṛga*. The most important part for recognition is the face and torso; and only for this reason the horse-headed human figure was already given another appropriate name of *aśva-mukha* or *aśva-mukhī*, as the case may be. The other form having human face and torso on a horse body should also be given similar another appropriate name like *mānava-mukha* or *mānava-mukhī*, and thus they should be called *kinnara-aśvamukha* and *kinnara-mānavamukha*. Similarly, these may also be called *kimpuruṣa-aśvamukha* and *kimpuruṣa-mānavamukha*. Then there will neither be a problem of synonymous words being used for these two forms nor any problem of their identification.

## References & Notes

1. R.C. Singh, *Rajghat kī Mr̥ṇa-mūrtiyān* (H), Department of Archaeology, U.P. State, Lucknow, 1978, p.44, fig.78; Rai Krishnadas, 'Kashi-Rajghat kī khudāi', *Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Patrikā*, NS, Vol.45, no.3, 1997 vs, pp.209-214.
2. V.S. Agrawala, 'Rajghat ke Khilaunon kā eka Adhyayana', *Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Patrikā*, pp.215-226; id. 'Rajghat Terracottas', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art (JISOA)*, Vol.IX, 1941, p.10, fig.4; *Journal of UP. Historical Society (JUPHS)*, Vol.XIV, Pt.1, July 1941, pp.1-8.
3. Motichandra, 'Terracottas in Bharat Kala Bhavan', *Chhavi-1* (Golden Jubilee Volume), BHU, 1971, p.13.
4. Rai Krishnadas (Eng. tr. B.S. Upadhyaya), 'A Kinnara-mithuna Terracotta Case from Rajghat, Benares', *JUPHS*, Vol.XV, Pt.1, July 1942, pp.43-44, Pl.III, fig.5.
5. A.L. Srivastava, *Life in Sanchi Sculpture*, New Delhi, 1983, p.127. f.n.171; *Māṅgalika Pratīka*, B.J. Institute of Learning & Research, Ahmedabad, 1999, pp.58-59.
6. A.L.Srivastava, *Māṅgalika Pratīka*, pp.54-57.
7. It is the only example in which the human-headed mare and its rider both are female. The line-drawing published by Deen Bandhu Pandey ('Identification of the Horse-bodied and Human-faced Figures', *Kalā*, II, 1995-96, fig.24) shows the rider as a normal man in place of a woman. V.S. Agrawala also could not point out this fact who described it as *kinnara-mithuna*, pair of centaurs (*Handbook of the Sculptures in the Curzon Museum of Archaeology, Muttra*, Allahabad, 1939, p.21). For photograph of this (9.3cm ht.) terracotta see *Terracotta Catalogue of Mathura Museum*, 2000, cata. no. Dwarfs-7, p.39, Pl.48. For the identification of the female rider see A.L. Srivastava, 'A Note on the So-called Kinnara-mithuna Terracotta Plaque,' *Jñāna-Pravāha Research Journal*, Vol.XII (2008-09), pp.54-56, Pl.8.1.
8. Maurizio Taddei, *Monuments of Civilization: India*, London, 1977, fig.11.
9. V.S Agrawala, 'Terracotta Figurines of Ahichchhatrā, District Bareilly, U.P.,' *Ancient India* (ASI, New Delhi), No.4, July 1947 – January 1948, p.162, Type 28, item no.303.
10. J.Ph. Vogel, *Catalogue of the Archaeological Museum, Mathura*, 1910, p.111. See photo in *Chhavi-2*, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, 1981, p.26, Pl.567.
11. M.K. Dhavalikar, 'Nasik: A Yavan Centre', paper submitted to the International Seminar on 'Influences & Interactions in Ancient Indian Art' held at Lucknow University on Dec.31, 1982 - Jan.2, 1983, mss, p.7; later published in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay* (Dr. Bhagwanlal Indraji Memorial Volume), NS, Vol.56-59, 1981-1984, Bombay, 1986, Pl.XXI.
12. A.L. Srivastava, *Life in Sanchi Sculpture*, p.127, fig.42/1-2, 4-5.
13. A.L. Srivastava, 'Īhāmṛgas : The Mythical and Fabulous Creatures in Sanchi Sculpture', *Bulletin of the Assam State Museum, Gauhati*, No.2, 1976, pp.5-17, figs.1-16.
14. A.L. Srivastava, *Life in Sanchi Sculpture*, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, 1983.

15. Deen Bandhu Pandey, *op.cit.*, p.55, figs.22-28.
16. Rai Krishnadas, *op.cit.*, (Eng. tr.), p.44 (vide Deen Bandhu Pandey, *op.cit.*, p.53).
17. *Śabdakalpadruma*, Vol.1, Varanasi, 1961.
18. *Kālidāsa Granthāvalī*, Ed. & tr. by Pt. Sitaram Chaturvedi (Aligarh, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vs 2019), Abhidhānakośa, p.141.
19. *Viñēudharmottara Purāṇa* (III.42.13-14), Ed. By Priya Bala Shah, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1994.
20. *Medinīkośa* (Kashi Sanskrit Granthamālā-41, Kośa Vibhāga, Prathama Puṣpa), Ed. Pt. Jagannath Shastri, Hosinga, published by Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1968 (Its first edition was published in vs 1997 = CE 1940. The Preface (*Upoddhāta*) of the editor mentions that the *Medinīkośa* was previously published at Calcutta and Kashi).
21. *Vācaspatyam*, Vol.III, p.2050 (Reprint, Varanasi, 1962).