

## Some Sculptures Awaiting Proper Identification

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We have come across a few unique and unusual representations of various deities whose identity is obscure because their attributes and composition do not fit in well with any deity described to be made in various *śilpa* texts. We know, ancient artists were well acquainted with mythological stories related to different gods and goddesses, and these ambiguous images may have some borrowings from them. Here in this short paper we are bringing out three such figures to the notice of scholars of Indian mythological literature in general and Indian Iconography in particular for drawing their attention to help corroborate these sculptures with literary evidence and identify them. Before the details of these sculptures are described, it would be necessary on our part to declare that personally we have not examined any of these figures.

### A Male Deity in Standing Posture (Fig.1)

A team of archaeologists led by Dr. Rakesh Tewari, the Director of the U.P. State Archaeology Department, Lucknow, during the exploration work discovered this figure (168 x 85 cms) enshrined in the newly built



Fig.1: Standing Male Deity, Sanicara, c. 8th-9th century CE

Thakur Baba Mandir at the village Sanichara in Sultanpur district. Its size is the testimony to its being a cult image ascribed to c. 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>1</sup>

The two-handed (both broken out) image stands in *tribhaṅga* posture and decked with high *jaṭā-mukuṭa*, *karṇa-kunḍalas* (ear-ornament), *grāiveyaka* (short necklace), *sarpa-keyūra* or *nāga-valaya* (armlet), *upavīta* (sacred thread) hanging from the left shoulder, *dhotī* (undergarment), *mekhalā* (waist-band), *kaṭi-sūtra* (waist-thread) and *nūpura* (foot-ornament). The raised and mutilated right hand might have been in *abhayamudrā*, the gesture of reassurance. The left hand is also broken from elbow. It hangs towards the male attendant standing in *tribhaṅga* on that side whose face and hands are also mutilated. The face and the right hand of the female attendant, also in *tribhaṅga* on the opposite side is also mutilated, but her raised left hand holds what looks like a scarf being raised above. In front of these attendants there were two smaller figures on either side, one standing and the other seated on the knees. All of them are badly mutilated and beyond recognition. Above these groups of attendants near the feet of the main image there is a *siṃhavyāla* parallel to the arms of the god. Still above is an oblong halo having a *stūpikā*-like crest flanked by Vidyādhara couples and slightly below them is a *cāmara-dhāriṇī* with a *vāmanikā* (short stature attendant) on either side of it.

There is no clear iconographic clue to identify the figure. However, Rakesh Tewari's assumption to associate it with Śiva cult appears to have been in correct direction. Although Tewari does not express any basis for this identification, the presence of *jaṭā-mukuṭa*, *nāga-valaya* and the *tribhaṅga* posture might have prompted him to draw this presumption. *Jaṭā-mukuṭa* and even *nāga-valaya* may be associated with some other divinities as well, but if clubbed with *tribhaṅga* posture, the Śaiva character of the figure is more obvious. Canonically Viṣṇu, Sūrya and Brahmā, when made standing, are always in *samapāda sthānaka* posture and never in *tribhaṅga*. Only Rudra or Śiva is prescribed to be made in *tribhaṅga* posture,<sup>2</sup> and so they have been represented accordingly. In some Umā-Maheśvara sculptures, the top of the panel represents a crown held by the flanking Vidyādharas.<sup>3</sup> If the *stūpikā*-like crest of the present panel is taken as a crown, it will be another point to consider the figure as Śaivite one. May the name of the village, Sanicara (Śaniścara or the planet Śani) could have any relation with the figure still under worship. However, still, we are quite away from its proper identification.

## Gaja-Lakṣmī with Anointing Elephants Facing in Opposite Directions (Figs.2a,b)

In October 1998, the pictures of this image were published in an article on Lakṣmī without its any reference therein except the caption below the picture as 'Lakṣmī figure found from Hinglajgarh (Mandsaur).'<sup>14</sup> Since then, we



Figs.2a,b: Gaja-Lakṣmī with anointing elephants in unusual posture, Hinglajgarh, M.P. c. 10th century CE

have tried our best to know the details of this figure but could not succeed. However, Dr. K.C. Pandeya, Director, Śrī Daśapur Prāchya Śodha Saṁsthāna, Mandsaur (M.P.), when contacted, informed us through his letters dated 4<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2006 that in 2000 CE 83 sculptures including the one in question were shifted from the Hinglajgarh Fort to the Yashwant Rao Holkar Museum, Bhanpura (Mandsaur) for safety purpose. The Curator of the Museum on behest of Dr. K.C. Pandeya later sent me a photograph of the sculpture, which was the same as published in the daily newspaper of Raipur.

The sculpture in question is broken into two pieces diagonally from the right shoulder to the left hand holding pitcher, but it is still intact. In this beautifully carved Paramāra sculpture datable to c. 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, the four-armed goddess sits on an elegant lotus-seat and holds *varadākṣa* (the boon giving gesture with the rosary) and *kalaśa* (pitcher) in normal right and left hands, respectively, and stemmed lotus flowers in both of her extra upper

hands on which stand the elephants. The goddess is decked with a well-ornamented bulbous hairdo with a *kīrttimukha*-like decoration in front, *kuṇḍalas*, a wide *graiveyaka* or *kaṇṭhā* with the pendulum in the form of a long chain hanging between the round and large breasts and going down to the navel region on the left side, wide and ornamented armlets, bracelets, *nūpura* (the foot ornament) and *vanamālā*-like long *hāra* coming from shoulders, passing through arms and hanging down over her thighs. The serene countenance of the goddess is noteworthy. The modeling and composition of the goddess in this sculpture represents the master sculptural art of the Paramāras.

The panel appears to be an architectural piece representing the goddess between two ornamented pillars. The top of the panel including the capitals of these pillars is badly mutilated.

The most striking and puzzling feature of this sculpture lies in the posture of the damaged elephants that do not face and anoint the goddess; instead, they stand with their hind parts towards her. Their trunks are broken out but the water sprinkled by them appears going down in a slanting and circling way.<sup>5</sup> The heads of these elephants, particularly their trunks do not seem to be realistic due to their being joined in the lower jaws.

No doubt, the divine figure shows its affinity with the goddess Lakṣmī due to its attributes, lotus-seat and the two lotus buds with long stalks on her right side. But the peculiar depiction of the elephants puts question mark against its proper identity. The posture of elephants, quite opposite to the anointing ones, is unique and quite unusual, may be due to some *tāntric* influence. Explanation of elephants and proper identification of the goddess are still hidden in obscurity.

### A Goddess Holding a Man on Her Left Hand (Fig.3)

A large stone panel (49 x 31 x 16 cms) representing a seated two-armed goddess



Fig.3: A Goddess Holding a Man, Mandsaur (MP), c. 9th-10th century CE

against a plain back slab was discovered from the river Shivana at Mandsaur in 1994. It is now shifted to the local Mandsaur Museum (Acc. No. 307). The beautiful goddess with youthful body, smiling with serene face and half open eyes sits in *sukhāsana* (an easy posture) against a large and plain halo. She has an elaborate and ornate *jaṭājūṭa* (hairdo), large *sarpa-kunḍalas* (ear ornament of snake design), a double-stringed beaded short necklace with similar long pendulum hanging down through the large and round breasts and reaching the navel region on the right and the *nūpuras* (the foot ornament). A garland hangs from her right shoulder and goes down passing over her arms (visible only on the right side, the left being damaged). The waist-band also appears in similar shape. The front part of a couched bull peeps out behind her right leg. She holds in her right hand a large drawn sword with its upper part broken but its traces are still there. What she holds in her left hand is the most enigmatic part of this figure. On the raised fingers of her left hand she apparently holds a bowl-like object with flat surface serving as a seat on which there is a human male figure, obviously smaller in size, seated cross-legged with raised left knee supporting the elbow of his left uplifted hand. He raises his right hand also up to the armpit of the goddess. Except a necklet and possibly the loincloth, his body is bare without any other ornament or drapery. The face and the palm part of his left hand are badly damaged. The hand poses and the contours of the body give a hint that the man, having support of the goddess' arm behind, is in a singing mood with his hand gestures matching the tune.<sup>6</sup> The style of the modeling is quite different from that of the previous one and appears to be a fine product of the Pratihāra School of Art.

Now the question arises about the identification of the goddess. The only clue in this direction is provided by the presence of the bull. Being the mount of Śiva, the bull makes us identify the goddess with Māheśvarī. But both the attributes do not support it. The human figure in her left hand does not appear to be a child, but a grown up man. If the face of this man would have been intact, perhaps we might have been in a better position towards this venture. Once again we will have to turn towards the *tāntric* possibilities in identifying the goddess with a Yoginī. But with whom and how?

## References

1. Rakesh Tewari, 'Sultanpur men Purātāttvika Sarvekṣaṇa', *Prāgdhārā*, Vol.III (1992-93), p.158, Fig.115.
2. *Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra* of Bhoja, LXXX.2-10 vide D.N. Shukla, *Pratimā Vijñāna*, Lucknow, 1956, App.C, p.327.
3. See A.L. Srivastava, *Umā-Maheśvara : The Iconographic Study of the Divine Couple*, Kasganj (U.P.), Figs.7, 19, 50 and LD 52-55.
4. Bhupendra Narayan Singh, 'Bahurūpā Lakṣmī kī Manohārī Mūrtiyāñ' (Hindi), *Deshbandhu* (Hindi Daily), Raipur, Chattisgarh, Special Deepāvalī Issue, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1998, figure on p.1.
5. According to Dr. K.C. Pandeya, the slanting and circling lines are not water but a decorating design.
6. Manoj Sharma of Mandasaur published the photo of the goddess with news of its discovery and comments on the sculpture in *Naī Duniyā* (Hindi Daily), Indore, M.P., 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1994, p.1. In his comments Sharma describes the man sitting in a bowl (*caṣaka*), which does not sound correct, because the man is not inside the bowl but at the top surface of a bowl-like object.

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2. Dr. K.C. Pandeya for sending the cutting of *Naī Duniyā* and bringing to our notice this unique and enigmatic figure of the goddess for the benefit of scholars in the field.
3. Doth Dr. K.C. Pandeya and Shri Jagdish Sharma, the Curator of Bhanpura Museum for the photograph of the sculpture from Hinglajgarh illustrating Fig.2.